

STREETPLAY BRIEFING



Photo credit: Playing Out

What is streetplay?

Street play — sometimes known as ‘playing out sessions’ or ‘play streets’ — is a simple, effective and low-cost way of helping parents and residents reactivate a culture of children playing out in the streets where they live.

Local authorities can use their existing powers under road traffic legislation to allow temporary street closures at regular weekly or monthly intervals, typically for three hours at a time. Local parents and other residents act as marshals, allowing their neighbours to drive to and from their homes at walking pace, while through traffic is re-directed. The result is usually a significant increase in children playing out and making friends on their street. In turn, adult neighbours get to know each other and community spirit grows.

Play England and national partners Playing Out, London Play and the University of Bristol have been creating the evidence base to support local authority engagement with Street Play and integration into local policy. Currently 38 local authorities have regular Temporary Street Closure Orders (TPSO’s) or have trialled play streets. This has created an estimated 40,000 play opportunities for children and involved over 2,000 parents and local residents as voluntary stewards.

What is the issue?

‘For the current generation of children in England a number of factors can be seen as contributing to a decline in free play. These include parental as well as children’s own concerns over safety and a lack of appropriate green or urban spaces to play in, combined with a reduced general tolerance towards children playing on the streets.’ **The Chief Medical Officer’s report *Our Children Deserve Better – Prevention Pays***

This is supported by the 2013 Playday poll of 3,000 children, parents and adults which found that danger from traffic was the main barrier mentioned by children (35%) and adults (53%), with 28% of parents citing unfriendly neighbours as a barrier.

Benefits of street play

Street play supports local residents to create the conditions where children and young people can improve their confidence and resilience, and engage in physically active play. Playing outside their homes with their friends is the easiest way for children to get regular exercise. Bristol University used accelerometry and GPS data in the pilot Playing Out scheme to measure changes. Children were outside 70% of the time during the street closures compared to less than 20% on an average school day. 30% of their time was spent in moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) compared to 5% for children of a similar age.

The CMO's report *Our Children Deserve Better — Prevention Pays* specifically cites the Playing Out model as a case study: 'This simple, resident-led intervention has immediate and long-term benefits for children and the wider community. With widespread uptake, there is potential to change the culture towards outdoor neighbourhood play being a normal part of everyday life in the UK.'

The role of the local authority

No new structures or powers are needed, just an element of coordination between local public health, highways and transport functions. Local authorities all over England have used powers under a range of legislation to enable street play models that work best for them.

Bristol uses the Town Police Clauses Act 1847 to grant the TPSO. Here again the local parents and other residents initiate and manage the closures on the day, using simple kit such as PVC road closed sign, road cones and hi-visibility vests for stewards. The city council works closely with Playing Out – the organisation set up by two parents helping individuals in Bristol and now helping people across the UK to develop street play. iv The council has provided funding for road closure kits and other support to residents.

Adur and Worthing District Councils support play streets as 'an easy and manageable project for small communities to do' through their 'Get Up & Active' programme. As with Bristol, they make no charge to residents for the street closures.

These models build in sustainability from the beginning because each partner does what they do best while meeting their particular objectives. Local parents take responsibility for getting resident agreement, deciding when and how often the sessions run and marshalling the play street sessions. This enables the local authority to make the process simple and minimise bureaucracy so it does not need to charge residents a fee. Community or other organisations with interests ranging from play to public health to safer streets find it a great way to provide their expertise and support right where children and families live.

Making it happen

Ingredients for the success and sustainability of street play initiatives include:

- A coordinated local area policy across public health, transport, planning and children's services to make street play an easy option
- Local parents and residents are supported to take the lead — they know best what will work where they live
- Minimise bureaucracy to keep costs low for everyone concerned — local people and the local authority
- Work with locally-based voluntary organisations that can support resident-led street play
- Understand that the play resources are already there — children will bring them out of their homes



Photo credit: Play England

'I have very fond memories of playing out as a child, exploring my local neighbourhood and making firm friendships with other children on my street. Nowadays with traffic dominating our streets, it is much harder for children to play out and hopefully this initiative will be the start of changing that.'

Parent, North Tyneside

'To me, it made sense to provide free, active play on families' doorsteps. I could also see the wider health benefits of people getting to know their neighbours and children learning to cycle and scoot and then using these as ways of travelling to school.'

**Claire Lowman
Public Health Service Lead for
Bristol City Council**

Other initiatives

Play streets are one of a number of initiatives designed to encourage more children to play out more often.



The 20's Plenty campaign is calling for 20 mph as a national urban speed limit to help children to reach play places like parks, play areas or simply to go and meet their friends.

For more information visit:
<http://www.20splentyforum.org.uk/Briefings/20Playspaces.pdf>

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