



Evaluation of the Tower Hamlets Community Play Programme

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Development commissioned by
Barnardo's Better Play and the Play
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1. Introduction

The Community Play Programme

1.1 This report concerns an evaluation of the Community Play Programme in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, which took place between April and December 2003. The Community Play Programme is run by Barnardo's Better Play in conjunction with the Play Association Tower Hamlets (PATH). The programme, previously known as the Children's Community Centre, programme is an £890,000 initiative promoting children's play in the borough. It is funded by the Tower Hamlets Children's Fund for a time limited period, 2002-2006¹, and is seeking to develop play opportunities for school aged children that can be accessed independently.

Community Play Programme Objectives

1.2 The Community Play Programme consists of ten² pilot projects, delivered by local community based groups and organisations working in the borough. The organisations delivering projects were expected to:

Actively involve children and young people in the development, delivery and evaluation of the projects. Organisations will be expected to show innovative and creative ways of involving children and young people.

Involve parents and the local community in the services provided by the organisation.

Promote the service to those who will most benefit, targeting both existing and new service users.

Demonstrate an understanding of the composition of the local communities and ensure that services are delivered to these communities.

Demonstrate that an active disability inclusive policy is in place or that the organisation is working towards inclusive practice.

1.3 As the primary objective of the programme is to extend play opportunities for children, all the organisations were expected to consider how they would work towards the seven play objectives as stated in 'Best Play: What Play Provision should do for Children' (National Playing Fields Association, 2000). In addition the

¹ The programme was extended from 2004 to 2006, with reduced funding from April 2004.

² The programme originally included 11 projects, but one withdrew in 2003.

projects were expected to work with 'Quality in Play: Quality assurance for children's play providers' (London Play, 2001).

Tower Hamlet's Children's Fund

1.4 Tower Hamlets was the part of the First Wave of the Children's Fund to be rolled out across the country in 2001. Selections for the First Wave were made from a list of areas with the highest child poverty levels.

The aim of the Fund is to address the gap in preventative services for vulnerable children and young people at risk of social exclusion. There is a focus on the early identification of vulnerable children and young people and providing them with access to support from the relevant community, faith and voluntary sector providers.

1.5 In Tower Hamlets, £5.1 million was allocated to the Children's Fund over three years. Funding for the Community Play programme comes from objective 1 of the Children's Fund, which is to promote a safe and creative environment for 5-13 year olds in Tower Hamlets by:

- Improving the availability of youth and leisure services to 5-13 year olds;
- Improving the quality and co-ordination of services for 5-13 year olds;
- Creating spaces that young people can 'own' and where they can feel confident and safe;
- Reducing the exposure of young people to criminal or anti-social behaviour;
- Increasing the availability of culturally appropriate youth and leisure services for children aged 5-13 years, with particular emphasis on the needs of girls and young people.

The Commissioners

1.6 Barnardo's is the UK's largest children's charity working with over 90,000 children, young people and their families in more than 300 projects across the country. This includes work with children affected by a wide range of issues, including poverty, homelessness, disability, bereavement and abuse.

1.7 Barnardo's and the Children's Play Council are working in partnership to deliver Better Play, a four-year £10.8 million England wide grant programme funded by the New Opportunities Fund with proceeds from the national lottery. The partnership is one of 11 award partners chosen by the new Opportunities Fund to deliver the £125 million 'Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities' Environment Initiative. Better Play aims to deliver the following objectives: to produce opportunities for children to play safely within their neighbourhoods;

to offer opportunities for community members to take part in providing good play opportunities for their children;

to enhance the health and safety of children in disadvantaged neighbourhoods;

to address the play needs of particular disadvantaged groups within neighbourhoods;

to share and disseminate the experience within the programme and externally.

To achieve these objectives the Better Play Programme offers grants throughout England to community organisations or organisations acting on behalf of communities, to deliver a range of play provision for children aged 5 - 16 years. The Better Play framework developed by Barnardo's was employed in the delivery of the Community Play Programme.

1.8 PATH was set up to support and promote the play and childcare needs of all school-aged children in Tower Hamlets. Children need safe and stimulating places to play, parents need high quality and affordable childcare. By working together for play PATH aims to make sure these needs are met. The Association disseminates important information affecting play and childcare, including quality issues, current developments and funding initiatives.

1.9 The evaluation was commissioned by Barnardo's and PATH and was expected to cover:

The extent to which organisations have addressed the programme criteria;

The outcomes and impact for each project for children, families and communities;

Potential of the funded projects to deliver on a medium and longer term basis;

The contribution made by PATH to the outcomes of the funded projects.

It was expected that the evaluation will identify the lessons learnt in respect of:

Effective ways of engaging and working with children and young people;

How play provision can promote social inclusion;

Effective ways of supporting local community based groups and organisations in the delivery of services.

1.10 Although no particular detailed methodology was stipulated, Barnardo's and PATH expressed an interest in methodologies that would provide some comparison/control data and before/after data. It was expected that the evaluation will actively involve children, families and communities. There was no intention to use the evaluation to make comparisons between projects.

Best Play and Quality in Play

1.10 The commissioners specified that the indicators to measure outcomes for children should be based on the seven objectives of children's play provision in 'Best Play - What Play Provision should do for Children' (National Playing Fields Association, 2000):

Objective 1 - The project extends the choice and control that children have over their play, the freedom they enjoy and the satisfaction they gain from it.

Objective 2 - The project recognises the child's need to test boundaries and responds positively to that need.

Objective 3 - The project manages the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children safe from harm.

Objective 4 - The project maximises the range of play opportunities.

*Objective 5 - **The project fosters independence and self-esteem.***

*Objective 6 - **The project fosters children's respect for others and offers opportunities for social interaction.***

Objective 7 - The project fosters the child's well-being, healthy growth and development, knowledge and understanding, creativity and capacity to learn.

Barnardo's and PATH expressed particular interest in evaluating impact in relation to Best Play Objectives 5, 6 and 7 (those that refer to developmental changes in children over time). However, it was recognised that these objectives present the greatest methodological challenges and are long term objectives.

1.11 It was envisaged that the indicators to measure outcomes for families and communities would be negotiated with the projects involved in the evaluation and would relate to their stated objectives. In addition it was anticipated that they would as far as appropriate take into account the standards set out in Quality in Play (London Play, 2001). These standards covered eighteen areas:

Physical and personal health and safety.

Opening times and days.

A warm and welcoming environment.

Choice and range of activities.

Children's involvement.

Play environment audit.

Equalities and inclusion.

Information, notice and displays.
Behavioural boundaries (for everyone).
Clear aims, objectives and values.
Working with the management committee.
Project management.
Managing the finances.
Managing physical resources.
Keeping on top of the administration.
Staff and volunteers.
Training, qualifications and professional development.
Working with families and the community.

2. Tower Hamlets Context

2.1 Tower Hamlets is an inner city urban authority which was ranked as the most deprived in England in 2000.³ Opportunities for children to play in urban areas can be restricted by a range of factors including a lack of appropriate play environments, pollution, poverty, discriminatory attitudes and parents' fears of crime. All these factors are present in Tower Hamlets.

2.2 Almost half of the borough's population is black and ethnic minority. The largest ethnic minority group is Bangladeshi residents who make up 34% of the borough's population.⁴ Approximately 23% of the population is under 16 years of age which compares with 20% for England and Wales.⁵ Another defining feature of the population is that more than half of those under 16 who are from black and minority ethnic groups. Ninety different languages are spoken and 69% of school pupils have English as an additional language.⁶

2.3 There is a shortage of open space in the borough, which limits opportunities for developing new leisure facilities and many existing play areas are dilapidated, vandalised and unsupervised. Environmental pollution is a concern of local residents, exacerbated by a high rate of development. Crime and fear of crime are major issues for local people⁷ who are concerned both to protect children and young people and provide more constructive opportunities for them.

2.3 Unemployment, at almost 12%, is 5% higher than the inner London average⁸ and the figure for ethnic minorities is higher still. Many people suffer poor health and live in overcrowded and unsatisfactory housing. The majority of children and young people under 16 in the borough are in low income families according to the Department for Environment, Transport and the Region's child poverty index. Deprivation and inequalities in health have a significant impact on the well being of the community overall. In educational terms, whilst the borough's schools have achieved rapid rates of improvement, the attainments of children and young people are still below the national average.

2.4 Understanding the economic and cultural context within which the Community Play Programme operates in Tower Hamlets is crucial to undertaking an effective and meaningful evaluation. However, each project also has its own distinct micro context and vary in their relationship with the local community:

³ DETR Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2000

⁴ Office for National Statistics, Census, 2001

⁵ Office for National Statistics, Census, 2001

⁶ London Borough of Tower Hamlets, Education Department, 2002

⁷ London Borough of Tower Hamlets, The Community Plan 2003/04

⁸ London Borough of Tower Hamlets, Ward Data Report, 2001

Al Huda ‘Mile End Road Playscheme’ – a play project run under the auspices of the Al Huda Cultural Centre and Mosque which provides services for the Somali community. The project is reliant on the use of other facilities such as a local sports centre. Whilst the project aims to provide services for all children, the majority of children attending the project are Somali and parents identified its cultural context as a key factor in their relationship with it.

Arts for All ‘Kaleidoscope’ – a play project run by a new community arts organisation currently based in the West of the borough, close to the border with Hackney. The project premises are located in a church building near in an area with a shortage of open space and close to a predominantly Bengali estate.

East London Tabernacle Baptist Church ‘Activity Club’ – a new project targeted at 10-13 year olds on one estate in the Mile End Area. The project is specifically targeted at some of the most disadvantaged children in the area who were identified through outreach work on the estate.

Glamis Adventure Playground – a project run on an adventure playground in Shadwell, where levels of drug misuse and vehicle crime are high. The play ground had previously been closed due to lack of funding. The project is run by a management committee made up predominantly of parents from the estate where it is based, some of whose children attend on a regular basis.

Mile End Children’s ‘Play in the Park’ – a new project based in purpose built premises located within a new playground in Mile End Park. The project is open access but a security guard is employed on the gates. It is used by children from the local area and borough wide on family fun days and during school holidays.

Mudchute Association ‘Fun on the Farm’ – a project based on a city farm in wide open space on the Isle of Dogs which has the highest child poverty index in the borough. The farm is an established play provider and is OFSTED registered. It sought to use programme funding to develop provision both on the farm and in a community centre on a nearby estate with a large Bengali population. A minibus is used to transport children between the two locations.

Spitalfields Farm Association ‘Young Farmer’s Club’ – a new project based on a local community farm in the West of the borough. The area is predominantly Bengali and although the farm is located adjacent to a small park, there is a shortage of open space.

South Poplar and Limehouse Association for Secure Housing (SPLASH) ‘The Dream Team in Blackwall’ – a new project targeted at six local estates in the East of the borough and run under the auspices of a consortium of local tenants and residents

associations. The estates are varied in their ethnic profile, some predominantly white and others predominantly Bengali. The project uses a local church and community premises and open spaces on the estates.

St. Hilda's East Community Centre 'Girls Project' – a new project run by and within a local community centre which provides a range of services targeted primarily at the Bengali community. The centre is based on a predominantly Bengali estate with severe overcrowding and a shortage of open space. It is aimed at all girls in the local area, but is primarily used by Bengali girls and like Al Huda, its cultural context is a key factor in parents' relationship of trust to the project.

Weavers Adventure Playground – an extension of a well established project in the West of the borough. The playground has a management committee which includes parent's representatives. Many local parents used the project themselves in the past. It sought to use programme funding to extend provision to the Bengali and Somali communities and to be more accessible to disabled children.

Four of the projects have indoor accommodation (one of which also has a small garden), one has outdoor accommodation (with a small portacabin) and the remaining five have a mixture of indoor and outdoor accommodation (two of which operates across several sites).

Two of the projects are dedicated play providers, whilst the remainder are run under the auspices of a variety of new and more established community projects.

Nine of the ten projects are mixed (two of which include girls only provision) and one is a girls only project. All projects are open to children of all ethnicities, though two are used by the Bengali and Somali communities respectively. Eight of the ten projects are aimed primarily at 8-13 year olds. Only one is OFSTED registered and therefore able to cater for 5-8 year olds unaccompanied. One project is specifically targeted at 10-13 year olds. In this report we have used the term 'older children' to refer to children aged 10 and over and the term 'younger children' to refer to those under 10.

3.Children's Play

The importance of play

3.1 Children's play is easy to recognise, but notoriously difficult to define. Play deals with feelings as varied as curiosity, pleasure, seriousness and creativity. Play can be physical or intellectual, social or solitary, but "in retrospect it is always remembered as fun" (Rennie 2003: 22). The literature on play highlights that play has a fundamental impact on children's healthy growth and development, as it allows them to discover, explore and test their environment and make sense of it. Playful behaviour promotes learning and concentration, in addition to encouraging the development of social skills and an ability to manage risk.

3.2 However, besides these benefits, it is generally accepted that children do not play to achieve an external reward or goal, but because they want to play (National Playing Fields Association, 2000). Play is self chosen, for the pleasure and interest of the player only. Play has, furthermore, been described as a frame of mind or an approach to action, rather than an activity or action itself (Bruner in National Playing Fields Association, 2000). While adults can enhance and facilitate children's play they are unable to force children to play. This explains why the same activity in one situation generates play and free play is absent in another situation. While stimulating play opportunities benefit children, an absence of such opportunities may also result in negative consequences for the affected child. A continuing lack of sensory stimulation is sometimes referred to as play deprivation (Hughes 2003). Although the literature on the subject of play deprivation is limited, it has been suggested that play deprived children show symptoms of withdrawal, impaired concentration, anti-social or aggressive behaviour and poor social skills (National Playing Fields Association, 2000; Hughes, 2003; Rennie 2003).

Defining play

3.3 The playwork definition of play as purposeless, intrinsically motivated and freely chosen often stands in stark contrast with the reality of children's lives, where adult agendas affect and direct children's play opportunities (Brown and Cheesman, 2003). Parents and other adults are often overly concerned with issues such as safety and educational learning, to the extent where free play becomes very limited. This is especially the case with outdoor play, where parents' fears about traffic accidents and strangers cause restrictions on the opportunities children have for exploring their local physical environment independently (McNeish and Roberts, 1995).

However, play allows children to make mistakes and fail tasks and it helps them to recognise their limitations, as well as discover their abilities. If play becomes too safe, it is not only predictable and boring, it also limits children's practical

experiences of risk management, and hence their ability to recognise and deal with risky situations.

“The outcome of a more rigidly controlled play environment will result in children being unable to deal with hazardous situations themselves in later life” (Play Wales, 2000: 7).

In a public atmosphere where children’s safety is valued over their freedom of mobility, such limitations may have adverse long-term impacts on children’s physical health, as well as emotional well-being (Gill, 1996).

Play in Tower Hamlets

However, adult worries are not the only restrictions to children’s play. Often the provision of public play facilities in urban areas is very constrained. The competition for open space reduces children’s opportunities for outdoor play. In the context of Tower Hamlets the leisure department provides only 32 fixed play areas serving a population of 43,000 children under 15 years old. Based on the assumption that they are accessible and appropriately located, this provides an average of one playground per 1300 children (Doyle 2001). In addition to limited and often outdated play facilities, the cultural and racial composition of Tower Hamlets also creates a challenge in terms of access and use of play facilities.

Research has shown that encouraging children from different backgrounds to use the same play provisions may not always be that simple (Kapasi, 2000; 2002). Kapasi highlights that staff as ‘the face’ of play projects plays an important role in attracting children from different background.

“In general, a culturally and racially diverse staff team is more likely to attract a culturally and racially diverse group of users” (Kapasi 2002: 12).

While playing together may not always be possible in a complex setting such as Tower Hamlets, it is vital that all children, regardless of their ability, age, gender, race and culture, have access to appropriate and accurate play facilities, as the consequences otherwise are too stark to appreciate.

4. Research strategy

Creating an evaluation framework

The first stage of our research strategy involved devising an evaluation framework. The framework was produced following an initial period of familiarisation and discussion with commissioners and research participants. It was informed by three key principles. First, it was based on a participatory approach, whereby those involved in the projects were consulted about the evaluation process, particularly in relation to the way data collection methods were employed in each project. Second, it emphasised the importance of a qualitative approach which recognised the way in which processes, as opposed to crude quantitative measures can enhance the evaluation of outcomes. Third, it stressed the importance of a responsive and developmental approach, which recognised the distinct nature and context of individual projects and the capacity for the process of evaluation to promote organisational learning.

Identifying evaluation objectives

Our evaluation framework included ten core objectives. These were designed in relation to the Best Play objectives, the programme criteria and the objectives set out by the commissioners. They were negotiated and agreed with the commissioning team. The ten objectives, which included play provision, service delivery and children's well being were:

Play Provision Objective 1 - To provide opportunities for creative, stimulating, age appropriate play

Play Provision Objective 2 - To enable children to exercise choice and control over their play

Play Provision Objective 3 - To enable children to test boundaries

Play Provision Objective 4 - To achieve an appropriate balance between risk and safety

Service Delivery Objective 1 - To promote and provide services to both new and existing users

Service Delivery Objective 2 - To promote and provide inclusive services which recognise diversity

Service Delivery Objective 3 - To actively involve children and parents in service planning and delivery

Children's Well-being Objective 1 - Children feel more confident and independent

Children's Well-being Objective 2 - Children have increased respect for others

Children's Well-being Objective 3 - Children's healthy growth and development are promoted

Developing outcome indicators

'Best Play: What play provision should do for children' (National Playing Fields Association, 2000) recommends an outcome focused approach to evaluating play using qualitative evidence and judgments. In order to develop this approach we devised a framework of indicators in relation to each of the ten objectives which included input, output and outcome indicators i.e. *inputs* are what each project has (e.g. resources, equipment; policies), *outputs* are what each project does (e.g. provide activities, monitor policies), and *outcomes* are what this does for the children and their families.

As no such existing framework of outcome indicators existed, we developed our framework in consultation with the commissioning team. This ensured that the exercise was informed by research, policy and practitioner perspectives at national and local level. The framework included multiple indicators in relation to each of the ten objectives, which ensured that our research would be based on the experiences and perspectives of children, parents and carers and play workers. These indicators formed the basis of a working document, which was made available to each of the projects participating in the evaluation. The documents also explained the data collection methods that we intended to use. The objectives and indicators were discussed with each project prior to collecting data in order to ensure that the evaluation was responsive to the nature and context of each project.

The development of the indicator framework became a major focus during the early stages of the evaluation. From the outset we were committed not only to testing it in relation to the Community Play Programme, but also to providing a model for future programme evaluations concerning children's play. During the analysis stage we refined and amended the indicators in relation to the data collected. This involved combining some indicators to create a single indicator, refining other indicators and in some cases developing new indicators. The evaluation findings are discussed in relation to each indicator in detail in order to make the use of the model explicit. We hope that this will assist with the task of

reflecting on the use of the model in future evaluations. A summary of the indicator framework is attached as Appendix 1.

Collecting data and creating evidence

Although our research strategy was primarily underpinned by a qualitative approach, in common with much programme evaluation it nevertheless involved a mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches. In part this was due to the development of the indicator framework. This resulted in a deductive approach to building evidence which would more commonly be associated with quantitative research i.e. the indicators became a hypothetical model against which evidence was judged. However, it was also because for practical reasons, our data collection methods included a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques.

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with play workers at each of the projects. In some cases these were with the senior play worker at the project, whilst in others they were group interviews with two or more of the play workers. In all but one instance where the senior play worker was interviewed on the telephone, they were conducted face to face at the projects.

The collection of data from parents was more complicated for practical reasons. The large number of projects involved, varying levels of engagement with parents at each of the projects and the fact that some parents spoke little English meant that a best fit approach had to be developed, i.e. methods were chosen which enabled data collection from as many parents as possible within the resources available, including the use of interpreters. This included individual face to face and telephone interviews, group interviews and the use of a short questionnaire that included both open and closed questions. Data was collected from a total of 50 parents from eight of the ten projects and whilst the overall sample cannot be said to be statistically representative, it was nevertheless diverse in terms of gender, ethnicity and age.

We developed a bespoke ethical protocol, which addressed the issues of access, confidentiality, voluntary informed consent and dissemination. Information leaflets were produced for children, parents and carers and play projects

Gathering children's views

The opinions and views of children and young people regarding their play scheme and facilities formed a central part of this evaluation. Adults, whether play workers or parents may have opinions about what children enjoy, or are supposed to enjoy. However, without direct input from the children themselves about what they

enjoyed and how and where they liked to play this evaluation would have been of limited value.

Gathering children's views can be done in numerous ways, the most common methods being focus-groups and individual interviews. However, because children in Tower Hamlets have few play opportunities, often limited to a few hours a week, the evaluators wanted to keep the interference of the evaluation to a minimum. Furthermore, it was decided that children's involvement in the evaluation process should be fun and methods were tailored to engage children in creative and innovative ways. During the evaluation children were therefore only asked to participate in activities that they would normally expect to find at their play project and no children were obliged to participate. For this reason the evaluators were flexible and prepared to cancel evaluation activities, if for example the children preferred to play outside, rather than draw inside.

While a range of creative methods were utilised overall, only a selection of methods were used to evaluate each individual project. Some methods such as those involving writing and drawing appeared to be more popular with girls than boys, whereas boys particularly liked guided tours. Evaluation with the children was conducted by two researchers, one female and one male. The male researcher often got involved with physical and sporting activities with boys such as football as a way of engaging with them. Besides participant observation, which was done at all projects, an average of four methods was selected depending on the type of play project, for example whether it had outdoor or indoor facilities. The remainder of this section describes the methods that were utilised.

- Map

Children were encouraged to draw a map of their playground/outdoor area. The aim of this activity was to find out how familiar children were with different parts of their playground and to demonstrate possible feelings of ownership over the available space. During the evaluation process the method was adapted from being a physically realistic map, to creating an illustrative map of children's favourite structures, activities and areas. This was done because the evaluators found it easier to engage children in drawing things they liked rather than areas of their playground they didn't know or care about.

Some children showed a high level of insecurity about drawing, to the extent where one girl claimed 'I would be too embarrassed to draw'. This was partly helped by providing materials that could be cut out and glued onto the map. However, in general the map method appealed more to girls than boys. It was particularly difficult to attract older boys. Although the finished product in itself was difficult to analyse (besides counting the number of times certain activities or structures emerged), the process offered rich opportunities to talk to children

about what they liked or didn't like so much and why. At big and busy playgrounds the map activity was a good means of approaching children, and it helped create an invaluable rapport with children who might otherwise be suspicious of adult evaluators.

- Guided tour of playground

As with the map method, the guided tour was used only where the play scheme had access to outdoor facilities. Pairs of children were asked if they wanted to give the evaluators a guided tour of their playground or outdoor area. The tour was recorded on tape with the 'tour guides' speaking into a microphone. The aim of this exercise was to view the playground from a user's perspective. Having the children holding the microphone allowed them to speak freely and with authority. In terms of the data generated, the guided tour resembled semi-structured interviews or focus groups. However, due to the interactive and impulsive nature of the tour the method was more child-centred, as the children decided what to show and talk about and in which order. This method worked better with older children as they were generally more familiar with the outdoor areas. It was also found to be successful in engaging both boys and girls.

- Diary

The diary method (a large blank sketch book) was introduced either as a diary, a comments book or scrap book depending on the type of play setting. The main aim of the diary exercise was to extend the data-gathering period to include times where the evaluators were not present, and hence find out what children thought about activities, games and trips over a longer period of time. The diary was primarily introduced directly to the children, but where this was not practical it was introduced to the play workers, who were then responsible for encouraging the children to use it.

The level of responses varied significantly, from a whole diary full of children's comments, drawings and pictures, to a completely empty comments book. The diary method worked best where play workers were highly involved and continued to encourage the children to use the diary, for example by writing specific questions relating to a trip or activity, or by gluing children's drawings in the diary. Overall, except for one empty diary, the diaries gave a good insight into what went on within the play settings when the evaluators were not present, and they furthermore generated invaluable comments about what children liked or didn't like about their play scheme.

- Questionnaires

It had not initially been intended to develop children's questionnaires, but the evaluators were encouraged to do so by one play scheme. Using a questionnaire specifically designed for children made it possible to reach a larger group of children than would otherwise have been possible. However, as the evaluators were unable to assist individual children filling in the questionnaire, responses were treated with caution. This was partly due to children replicating their friends' answers and partly due to uncertainties about children's level of literacy. One boy, for example, wrote his answers in the wrong spaces, so that something he would like to change about the play project appeared to be something he liked. Despite issues about accuracy, the questionnaires did generate useful data on certain issues, such as what children would do if they did not attend the play scheme.

- Write & draw

4.15 The 'write and draw' technique was inspired and adapted from 'Action for Sick Children's' research into health care. "The technique is an accepted way of discovering children's knowledge and views through inviting them to produce pictures with words and captions" (Action for Sick Children, no date: 62). Two standardised instructions for this evaluation were written on flip chart paper for the children to read and follow:

1. 'Draw a picture of someone your age playing. In a think bubble write down what they are feeling. Next to the picture write down the different places where children in your local area play'
2. 'Draw a picture of a play worker. In a speech bubble, write down what they are saying. Next to your picture write down what they are doing and where'

4.16 To do both activities took longer than the evaluators anticipated, so many children only did one or the other. Some children were unsure about the term 'play worker' and needed clarification, which might explain why fewer children drew a play worker than a child playing. This method was mainly used with indoor play schemes, where drawing was one of a number of arts and crafts activities offered to the children. As with the map method it was harder to involve boys than girls and some children quickly lost concentration and moved on to other play activities.

- Post-it note 'idea avalanche'

This method was taken from the book 'Participation – spice it up' (Dynamix 2002). The aim was to gather children's views on specific questions relating to their play scheme. On flip chart paper children were asked 'what makes a good play

project?’ and ‘what makes a good play worker?’ Their ideas were then recorded, either by themselves or by the evaluators (if they did not feel confident about writing) on coloured post-it notes and stuck on the flip chart. Prompts including ‘what do you like to do when you come here?’, ‘what about people?’ or ‘what should the place be like?’ were used in order to foster children’s input. The brightly coloured post-it notes generally raised children’s curiosity about the activity and they offered a few ideas before moving on to other activities.

This method worked particularly well in combination with the ‘write and draw’ technique, as children who felt uncomfortable about drawing could still be involved. Where children didn’t show an immediate interest, it was easy for the evaluators to move around the play scheme with the post-it notes and ask their opinions. This meant that the majority of children present were able to contribute their ideas.

- Disposable cameras

This method was the least successful of all the methods utilised in terms of response rate. The aim of the exercise was to find out, in more detail, the range of places where children play in their spare time (Cunningham and Jones, 1996). Participating children were divided into groups which were each given a disposable camera to share. All children received a card with clear instructions about the task, a children’s leaflet and a parents’ leaflet about the evaluation, as well as a consent form for their parents to fill out.

Of the twenty cameras that were given out only six were returned. Sharing a camera with other children whom they might not see outside the play setting might have had a negative influence on the response rate. Most children who did not return their camera offered little explanation as to why, although one girl said her older brother had taken the camera to take pictures of his girlfriend. A more structured setting, such as school might have encouraged a higher return rate. However, the cameras that were returned offered an excellent, although somewhat depressing insight into the places, other than play projects, where older children played.

- Participant observation

4.19 Participant observation was the only method that was carried out at all play schemes. The purpose of participant observation and the detailed field notes that this generated was to gather data about indicators that would otherwise be difficult to explore. Besides observing, the evaluators also got involved in children’s play. This proved to be a very useful way to initiate contact between children and evaluators, contacts which were developed further using other evaluation methods.

4.20 It was initially decided that the evaluators would spend a minimum of two sessions at each play scheme. However, because some projects had multiple sites, an average of three to four visits were made to individual projects while the children were there. The evaluators recognise that participant observation as a method is generally used over a longer period of time than was possible within this evaluation. The data generated is therefore a snapshot, rather than an in-depth analysis of the play schemes.

5. Research findings – Children and parents

5.1 Play Provision Objective One – To provide opportunities for creative, stimulating, age appropriate play

Indicator PP 1.1 Children feel motivated, enthusiastic, excited and stimulated

We found that in general children were motivated and enthusiastic at all but one of the projects. Children enjoyed physical activities like football, cricket and games which involve running about such as tag and East/West. Games involving pool and table tennis were extremely popular with the children (especially boys) and they appeared excited and stimulated when involved in such games.

Competitive and physical activities such as the above were popular at all the projects, mostly amongst boys. The evaluators observed that children often organised such physical activities themselves. Taking part in competitions also promoted children's enthusiasm.

Art activities were popular at all the projects in which they took place and clearly stimulated the children and young people. Generally the larger the variety of art and crafts activities available, the more inclined children were to become excited and stimulated. Novel activities such as sewing at one project were popular, including amongst boys.

Adventure playgrounds were seen as exciting and stimulating primarily for new users. Longer term users might claim they were bored with the spaces and appeared not to use the playground structures. However, children on the whole enjoyed using particular pieces of play equipment (e.g. swings or flying fox).

Data from interviews and questionnaires suggest that a range of activities was important in keeping children excited and stimulated. Offering physical activities, games, arts and crafts was important, as was a balance between time for free play and organised activities and games.

'I like the (place) because it's a cool place to hang out, we do plenty of stuff like play games, listen to music, draw, make things, face painting, eat, play rounders and my favourite, playing pool'.

Facilities activities like water slides, water fountains and bouncy castles were especially popular with the younger children at the projects at which they were available.

Motivation and enthusiasm was demonstrated by queues to play and onlookers. Conversely, children might come and go to check out what was happening but not be motivated or stimulated to stay.

Trips and special events were an important feature of many projects. There was evidence that they could be the reason many of the children used the project. For example, one child said:

'I only come if there is good entertaining stuff going on'.

However, trips could also be seen as boring (e.g. a trip to an art gallery).

When no activities were organised or choices made explicit, children could become less motivated and enthusiastic. Children might report being bored, wander round looking for things to do or play personal games consoles. In such situations they could become distracted and antagonise one another. Also when given little guidance on novel activities children could become less motivated and enthusiastic to continue with them.

Indicator PP 1.2 Children feel comfortable with the level of activities offered and there is plenty of choice for their age group

At the majority of projects children were either observed to feel, or said that they felt, comfortable with the level and choice of activities for their age group. However, the extent to which they were comfortable varied depending on the range of activities available and the preferences of individual children. The extent to which children were comfortable could also vary from session to session.

Children appeared most comfortable when there was a wide range of activities and games available. Children's comments in the diaries demonstrates this:

'I like playing with (the rabbit) and playing in the garden on the space hoppers. I also like holding the hamster and playing all the games and doing all the art things.'

'I like the project, I like the games they have, they do so many good things.'

'We play games, we play snooker or pool and we can chill out inside the clubhouse and listen to music, sometimes we do artistic things like make stuff or draw and everything.'

Projects providing open space, outdoor structures, and space for indoor games appeared to be successful at satisfying children. However, where the project did

not offer both outdoor and indoor space, extra input from play workers was sometimes necessary to engage with children.

Even when there was not a large range of activities on offer, children appeared comfortable with the level of activities if there was a change in focus within a play session. For example, to begin with they could be role playing indoors and then later play football outdoors.

When similar types of activities and games were conducted with very few children they were generally quite comfortable as their attention could be focused on the task at hand and they could easily communicate their feelings to the play workers.

The use of additional volunteers allowed for more activities to be offered at certain projects which gave greater choice and the children appreciated and took advantage of this.

Even when not taking part in activities, older children could be comfortable with having somewhere they feel they could relax, meet up with friends and hang out without too much adult input.

'I like club because it's a place to come and chill out.'

However, if this was all that was offered it could lead to boredom and aggression between children. At one project older children commented on being bored by activities on offer because they were more suited to younger children.

Children said they were happy and appeared most comfortable when they were in control of choosing what activities they wanted to take part in (e.g. children choosing to do painting and being supported by play workers).

Indicator PP 1.3 Children look forward to coming and want to come back

The extent to which children seemed to look forward to coming varied between projects. It was common for children to be waiting outside before projects were due to open, sometimes coming an hour early, or for projects to have trouble getting children to leave on time. Evidence that children looked forward to coming back was provided when consent forms needed to transport children to the project were hurriedly filled in and returned or by children commenting that they would be bored without the projects:

'We come here everyday and are bored without it.'

'It is a place to come and do things, rather than being bored at home.'

A continuous stream of children coming to use their facilities provided evidence that children looked forward to coming back, as did the presence of regular users who came whenever the project was running or had come over a long period of time.

'(I) come here all the time'.

'Can't wait for next six weeks to come because I have enjoyed it loads this year.'

'I have been coming (since I was) young.'

A less common experience was that children were more occasional users. They might pop in and out or come only when an activity interested them. Certain activities and one off events such as competitions generated excitement and anticipation. For example, at projects which organised trips there were users who looked forward to the trips, but who said they were less enthusiastic about the project itself.

There was observational evidence of more children using facilities in summer holidays and weekdays than during term times and weekends. However, attendance at some projects during summer holidays was also affected by other factors such as family holidays.

Few children from a particular age group attending projects suggested that children either did not want to come back or were otherwise occupied.

Evidence from parents showed that children talked about the projects at home and looked forward to coming back:

'Both my daughters come nearly every day. Once they see it open they are over here.' (White mother)

'She looks forward to coming and talks about it a lot. She won't miss a week.'
(White mother)

Indicator PP 1.4 Children trying out different things

Information based on observation and activity schedules suggests that children got to try out different things at most of the projects, either through the range of activities at the project itself or on trips and visits.

As previously indicated projects offered a wide range of activities from physical games like football to diverse arts and crafts (e.g. photography, pottery, felt making, cooking) and trips ranging from rock climbing and art galleries to poetry workshops. Most trips involved activities, such as swimming, bowling, ice skating and trips to theme parks. Fun days at one project provided a wide range of activities for children in the local area.

Indicator PP 1.5 Children focus on and become absorbed in activities

There was observational evidence that children became focused on and absorbed in activities at all the projects though for varying lengths of time. However, children could become bored quickly when involved in activities, even if they appeared very keen at first.

Children involved in art activities were generally very absorbed in what they were doing and would not leave to get involved in another activity until they had finished. Evidence that children were absorbed was provided when children were disappointed when it was break time and indicated that they couldn't wait to continue.

Competitive games like football, pool and table tennis were very popular and kept children engrossed for long periods of time. Boys were more likely to be involved in these activities and limitations had to be placed on time spent on certain games so that everyone who wanted to was able to have a turn (e.g. because there was only one table tennis table). For girls the dance mats and karaoke machines kept them absorbed at some projects.

Children could become absorbed in activities regardless of support from play workers. This could include creative activities like art and crafts or simple tasks related to making and building structures in a playground. However, support from play workers or interaction with friends could influence the amount of time they were absorbed in a particular activity. Generally children were focused and absorbed in activities along with their friends.

Indicator PP 1.6 Children are happy with the standard of resources

It was unclear at most projects how happy the children were with the standard of resources, as they didn't explicitly comment. Most projects had good resources with a reasonable amount of choice between and within activities. It appeared that children were generally happy with the equipment they used.

However, children occasionally commented that things needed to be cleaned and tidied up, repairs needed to be made or that resources needed to be expanded. For example, at one project with fewer resources, a child commented that they would like swings, table tennis and a snooker table. At others, children made suggestions for improving the project such as regular sand rather than builder's sand in the playground's sand pit or the provision of a television.

5.2 Play Provision Objective Two – To enable children to exercise choice and control over their play

Indicator PP 2.1 Children are aware of choices

Children appeared to be aware of choices in all of the projects. Choices were often obvious as the range of activities and games was evident. However, new users were not always aware of the full range of choices in some projects, because not all activities or games were on display. Where choices were less immediately obvious, children were told or informed of what activities were planned, through the use of signs or announcements by play workers.

Children could learn about the choices available to them through being involved in the preparation of sessions. For example, at one project the children wrote an activity schedule at the beginning of the session. At another, the play worker announced the choices of activities at the beginning of the day and asked the children to decide which they wanted to be involved in.

Indicator PP 2.2 Children feel they can make their own choices and feel supported in doing so

Children felt they could make their own choices at all of the projects. Observational evidence suggests that children felt supported in doing this at the majority of projects. This was demonstrated by the fact that children were involved in planning the activities or because schedules and timetables were flexible.

Children felt able to request new activities (or ones not currently on display) and were listened to and accommodated at the majority of projects. Where not immediately accommodated their requests were often included at a later date. The level of demand for particular activities, insufficient numbers of play workers or lack of space occasionally prevented children from exercising choice.

Indicator PP 2.3 Children move between play opportunities

Children moved between play opportunities at all of the projects, but the extent of their freedom to move was influenced by the organisation of the project. Projects

which were more structured (i.e. where activities were preplanned or timetabled), allowed for less movement between play opportunities. The extent to which children were involved in such scheduling either in advance or on the day varied between projects.

The most fluid movement between play opportunities was evident in projects where sessions were unstructured. At these projects children were able to play freely and choose from a range of activities were on offer with little direct intervention from play workers.

Space and resources were important factors in providing the opportunity for movement as well as keeping children engaged. For example, at one project there was a lot of space, but few organised activities, so children moved very quickly through the opportunities and rarely stayed for long. Though children moved between opportunities, they still appeared to have favourite activities which engaged them for longer (e.g. pool).

Indicator PP 2.4 Children can explain the choice of play activities

Children could explain the choice of play activities through their involvement with the planning of activities. However, most children did not explain their choice of activities beyond it being something they enjoyed doing (e.g. pool or art).

Evidence of limited choice was provided when children explained their choice of activities as those which had been organised by play workers or in relation to the structure of projects (e.g. where particular activities were provided on specific days).

Indicator PP 2.5 Children say there are enough choices

Comments in the diaries demonstrated children's pleasure with the variety of activities available:

'I like (the project), I like the games they have. They do so many good things'.

'(This) is a good playground with a lot of good and different games (e.g. dance mat and swings)'.

At a minority of projects children said that they were bored and unhappy with the level of choices.

Indicator PP 2.6 Children feel they are allowed to do what they want

Observation of children's play at the projects enabled us to consider interaction between children and adults. Children felt they could do what they wanted at all of the projects (except at one project, which was more structured, though even here children altered the timetable).

Children felt they had the freedom to choose what activities they wanted to take part in at all the projects. There was also evidence that children were happy just to hang out and muck around for some of the time. At projects that were less structured (i.e. where activities were not timetabled by play workers), there was more opportunity for children to just do whatever they wanted which they appeared to enjoy.

5.3 Play Provision Objective Three – To enable children to test boundaries

Indicator PP 3.1 Children do things they haven't done before, are not afraid to do so and feel supported

At most projects there was evidence that children were able to do things they hadn't done before. For example, children took part in a wide range of new activities (at the project or on trips), including working with animals, writing articles, using tools, sewing, participating in talent shows or pot holing. However, children were unable to do new things at projects where there were more limited resources or ranges of activities.

In general, children appeared to feel supported in trying new things, although this could depend on the level of encouragement from play workers. For example, children were given support from play workers in dealing with animals and overcoming their fears. Taking part in particular activities demonstrated that children felt comfortable with testing boundaries and being daring, for example role reversals, taking part in a talent show or soaking visiting businessmen on a water fight day.

Indicator PP 3.2 Children feel they have the freedom to do new things

Children felt they had the freedom to do new things when they were given less direction from the play workers and the activities were less structured. In some instances, children were free to do new things but still opted not to do so (e.g. children at one project chose not to go on theatre trips).

Children were less able to try new activities at more structured projects or where the activities on offer remained constant. Nevertheless, children might still be encouraged to try new activities that they might not otherwise choose to do (e.g. trip to art gallery or role plays).

Indicator PP 3.3 Children know and understand the rules

Children knew that rules were in place at the majority of the projects. Whilst rules might be shown on posters or walls, they could also be enforced through verbal interaction. Children demonstrated that they followed and accepted the rules in comments made to the evaluators. For example, one child said:

'(This place) is sometimes strict, but that is good.'

It appeared that clarifying and explaining rules to children could lead to increased adherence to them.

There was evidence of children having direct involvement in setting rules. For example, at one project, the rules were partially set by the children and the play workers in front of everyone at the beginning of the summer holiday scheme. They sat and agreed the rules and the play workers asked why have rules to get the children to think about the reasons for them. The rules included listening to what people say, informing the play worker of any disputes and that everyone should cover up in the sun.

Rules for particular games or activities were established by play workers and children. This might involve rules for the game itself or having a list for people wanting to play something, for example pool. At some projects, children created their own rules for particular games.

Rules were often broken. For example, at one project the children knew violence was not tolerated, but appeared to constantly break the rules. At another project children were not allowed on the roof of the building but went up there anyway. Older children constantly pushed the rules and tested boundaries.

When rules were broken there were sanctions. For example, children could be banned from using specific equipment, trips might not be organised or a choice of activities removed. At some projects children were banned for short periods such as a day or completely (though this was very rare).

Rules (and the consequences of breaking rules) were not always well understood. For example, adults used structures which they were not supposed to, children who were banned came back, and older children used projects when they were not supposed to:

'They shouldn't be allowed, cos it's only for people up to age 15.'

Moreover, knowing that rules existed did not mean the children knew exactly what the rules were:

‘Yes there’s about ten rules, no swearing, respect...that’s all I know.’

5.4 Play Provision Objective Four – To achieve an appropriate balance between risk and safety

Indicator PP 4.1 Children feel able to be daring and do things they may be nervous or scared about

Trips and activities could enable children to be daring or do things they may be scared or nervous about, for example climbing on a trip or jumping off structures at projects with outdoor facilities. At one outdoor project, children commented they would like more scary rides. Alternatively, children appeared to feel comfortable to do things they may be nervous about because the atmosphere was pleasant and conducive (e.g. girls drawing).

Indicator PP 4.2 Children can recognise physical hazards

Where there were obvious physical hazards children were generally able to recognise them, though at one project there was evidence that this was not always the case. Regular users were more aware of hazards than new users.

Evidence that children understood hazards at indoor projects was provided by children moving obstacles out of the way or not using areas deemed unsafe and by children suggesting that outdoor structures could be made safer. Children at one project recognised physical hazards through having experienced them (e.g. structures which might pose a danger because of their height):

‘There’s glass and rubbish on the floor and if you fall your gonna get hurt’.

Less commonly, evidence that children did not recognise physical hazards was provided by walking barefoot on ground covered in glass, by taking part in potentially dangerous activities without a full understanding of the hazards (e.g. clearing trees at a playground) or by testing boundaries (e.g. throwing pool balls at one another).

Rules helped make children aware of some of the physical hazards (e.g. children demonstrated that they had learnt which animals they could touch without getting bitten).

Indicator PP 4.3 Children can take steps to reduce the risk of serious injury

Children generally followed the rules in order to reduce the risk of serious injury, though there was one project where this was always the case. At some projects there was evidence that play workers needed to intervene to avoid injuries occurring. However, at others, children were rarely placed in situations where there was an obvious risk of injury.

Children demonstrated that they could use their initiative and experience to reduce risks (e.g. wearing shoes, not using certain structures at outdoor playgrounds). In one instance where there were outdoor structures this extended to not coming to a playground very often:

‘Yes it’s too dangerous that’s why we don’t come here that often.’

Indicator PP 4.4 Parents and carers know what their children are doing

In both interviews and questionnaire responses, parents indicated that they knew what their children were doing at the projects. They were able to describe different play activities, the play environment and the approach of the play workers.

A variety of factors enabled them to know about the projects. For example, it was common for parents to accompany their children to and from the project, though this depended on its proximity. Some projects were located on particular estates and attracted children exclusively or largely from those estates.

‘The fact that it is very local is very important, so that when we are busy they can just pop round. Other places are too far, especially when it’s cold.’ (White mother)

The age of children was also a factor. At one project which catered for 10-13 year old children, they all came unaccompanied.

Parents frequently commented that their children talked about the project at home. Though it was suggested that this was only when asked what they had been doing, many parents said that it was not prompted.

‘My children will often talk about new projects or activities. The children sort of advertise it, for example the trips, before we hear about them from the workers.’ (Somali father)

Parents were also aware of what was happening at the projects through attending family days and trips and through regular contact with play workers on

the phone or in person. Phone conversations at all projects were initiated by both play workers and parents.

Parents attended projects with their children for a range of reasons. For example they attended as volunteers or because they were members of its management committee. Attendance could be related to their own children, for example because of their age or because they had special needs:

'It's a safe place. If he didn't have communication difficulties I would leave him. But younger children and ones with special needs need someone here.' (Bengali father)

Children could also be accompanied because both they and their parents preferred it:

'She's an only child, clinging and likes her mum with her. It doesn't bother me to be here. I'm just one of those mums. I go on school trips.' (White mother)

Indicator PP 4.5 Parents and carers feel confident that their children are safe

Safety was consistently highlighted as a key issue by parents. In general parents commented on the safety of the project in a positive way. Confidence about the safety of projects was linked to a range of factors, including trust in the play workers and the security of the environment. Parents linked trust to the professionalism of play workers and confidence that their children would be looked after appropriately.

Trust was also linked to the fact that projects were long established and respected and because of their connection to the community. For example, at one project parents highlighted that they had used the project when younger. In the case of the projects which primarily served the Bengali and Somali communities the organisations hosting the play projects provided a range of other services which meant that workers were known to parents. At these projects the cultural identity of the workers was instrumental in parental confidence.

Though the majority of the projects were open access, parents from different projects indicated that they felt confident about the security of the environment in which they took place. For parents at both city farms and adventure playgrounds for example, this was linked to protection from strangers and the fact that children were off the street:

'Strangers are patrolled and prevented from coming in. It's very protective. If we weren't here it would be okay.' (White mother)

'They are off the streets. They are safe here. Once they are in they are in.' (White mother)

Parents rarely commented on the risk of accidents and those that did appeared confident that the risk was not serious. For example, one mother at an adventure playground commented:

'Kids do fall off things. If kids feel they want to do it they will. Kids are going to take risks. There is someone on hand to sort it. There have not been serious accidents'. (White mother)

However, perceived risk could also be associated with bullying. For example, a Bengali mother who accompanied her child to an adventure playground where we observed more aggressive behaviour amongst children commented that she would not feel confident about leaving her son at the project because she feared he would be bullied by older boys.

5.5 Service Delivery Objective One – To promote and provided services to both new and existing users

Indicator SD 1.1 Children feel welcome and included

Children were made to feel welcome and included by play workers at the majority of projects. However, there were instances of children not being made to feel included (e.g. if they were not referred to by name by play workers).

Factors which enabled children to feel welcome included a welcoming atmosphere in the group, active encouragement of children to take part in activities; group activities and children being made to feel welcome by other children.

Factors which prevented children from feeling welcome included an intimidating atmosphere which could affect new users; children not being made to feel welcome by other children; new people not being introduced to the group

Indicator SD 1.2 Parents and carers feel that their children are welcome and included

Parents commented on the approachability and friendliness of play workers in interviews and questionnaire responses. Play workers were said to be 'child-orientated' and 'child focused' and that their child(ren) felt comfortable with play workers. For example:

'(The) workers are really good with the kids. Dealing with their problems. Kids can talk to the play workers.' (White mother)

'They are good play workers. Really nice. She feels really comfortable here, like she really knows them.' (White mother)

Parents also highlighted that play workers were 'cheerful', 'patient', and 'pleasant and nice people to be around'.

5.6 Service Delivery Objective Two – To promote and provide services which recognise diversity

Indicator SD 2.1 Children play with children from other ethnic backgrounds

At the majority of projects children played with others from various ethnic backgrounds, though at two of the projects this was less relevant because the user base was predominantly Bengali or Somali children. Children occasionally articulated their pleasure at this. For example, at one project a child told us, 'I like the mix of cultures'.

The evaluators observed situations where children appeared to play in small groups which were not ethnically diverse and the groups did not necessarily mix. There was also evidence that the attendance of children could depend on the day, or time of day, e.g. for Bengali boys who had to attend prayers.

Indicator SD 2.2 Children are aware of equality and diversity issues

Some projects had information related to equality and diversity on the walls or materials which reflected diversity, such as people shaped sugar paper in different human shades.

Children demonstrated that they were aware of equality and diversity issues at most projects. This could be positive:

'What I like about (the project) is that everyone gets treated equally and there is lots of different things you can do.'

However, it could also be negative. For example, one white child commented that there were too many Asian children at local playgrounds. At another project, older children were rude to each other about religious and cultural traditions.

In other cases it could relate to what was considered to be culturally appropriate, for example girls not playing with boys or boys not being allowed access to girl's activities. Whilst most projects used English as the first language, children might still speak to each other in Bengali even in a mixed group.

Indicator SD 2.3 Non-disabled children play with disabled children

There was very little evidence of non-disabled children playing with disabled children at any of the projects, mainly because there were few disabled users. There were however isolated examples, mainly of deaf or hearing impaired children who used lip reading when playing with hearing children. This could require intervention and explanation from play workers and improvisation on the part of hearing children.

The inclusion of children with learning difficulties and special educational needs was more common, but the numbers of children involved were small at any given project.

Indicator SD 2.4 Parents and carers feel that projects recognise their children's needs

Interview and questionnaire responses indicated that parents and carers were generally satisfied that projects recognised their children's needs though few provided specific examples.

5.7 Service Delivery Objective Three – To actively involve children and parents in service delivery

Indicator SD 3.1 Children feel their views are listened to and acted upon

There was evidence that children felt their views were listened to and acted upon at all projects. However, at one project, some children did complain that they were not listened to.

Mechanisms for children to provide input and be involved included comment boxes and participation in a steering group. At two projects, children had been involved in recruiting play workers and this was considered to have been valuable and successful, despite initial reservations in one instance.

There was evidence of involvement in activity planning at several projects and of children being asked what they wanted to do on a weekly or sometimes a daily basis. For example, children made requests and altered planned activities depending on what they wanted to do on a particular day, or play workers noted activities which children had enjoyed and repeated them.

Indicator SD 3.2 Children have a level of ownership

At the majority of projects, children appeared very comfortable, though the extent to which they considered it their own varied. In some cases children show interest or concern at the presence of strangers including the evaluators.

At some projects it was evident that children had ownership over the physical space of the project (e.g. particular areas or structures) where they had helped in the design.

'That's where people go and play (the ramp), because they made it themselves.'

'They don't really care about this (den) Look they write all over it...but they are allowed. If you make a (den) it is yours.'

Indicator SD 3.3 Children understand why decisions are taken

At most projects children appeared to understand why decisions were made. This was often due to the fact that decisions affecting children such as the cancellation of a trip were discussed with them and they were given an input into them. They could also be involved in implementing solutions to problems:

'The table kept breaking and we don't have any tables to lean on so we thought why not build a big table.'

However, sometimes it appeared that children didn't understand why decisions were taken (e.g. children who had been banned for aggressive behaviour returning).

Indicator SD 3.4 Parents and carers know that they have the opportunity to be involved

Levels of parental involvement in the projects varied considerably. A minority of projects had parent representatives on their management committees. These parents, largely mothers, tended also to be involved in the project as volunteers:

'We get involved. We come over here with the kids in the summer and make sandwiches.' (White mother)

At one project mothers on the management committee were critical of other parents who were not involved, particularly those who visited it on a regular basis but were not seen to make a contribution.

There were examples of parents, mothers in particular, expressing an interest in more opportunities for involvement.

'It would be nice if the parents, especially the mothers could be more involved. It was nice when the mums got involved in trips during the summer holiday. They went places they had never been before.' (Somali mother)

Indicator SD 3.5 Parents and carers feel that their views are listened to and acted upon

All the parents who were interviewed or who completed questionnaires were satisfied that their views were listened to and acted upon where necessary, though a small minority indicated that they were not quite sure how to make their views known.

Some parents commented on specific issues they had raised with play workers including problems with other children and concerns about strangers hanging around. Play workers were said to have been responsive and were seen to act on information given to them:

'I can talk to the staff. I talked to them about problems with other boys and they responded'.

Play workers at most projects were also said to be proactive in communicating with parents and keeping them informed, for example by phoning them and by encouraging them to give their opinions when visiting the project.

Parents involved in management committees also felt that their views were listened to:

'Sometimes they talk above our heads, but we feel we get our say.' (White mother)

5.8 Well Being Objective One – Children feel more confident and independent

Indicator WB 1.1 Children feel able to make choices

Children felt able to make choices including what trips and activities they wanted to take part in at all projects. They also demonstrated that they were capable of choosing whether to stay or leave. In some instances it appeared that having a larger pool of play workers and volunteers allowed children to have greater choice over what they wanted to do through permitting a larger number of activities to be offered.

Indicator WB 1.2 Children are able to speak for themselves

Children were capable of speaking for themselves at all the projects. For example, at one project the children wanted a 'meet the group members' page in their diary and were quite open and frank in their comments about one another. At others there was evidence that they were able to make requests about what they wanted. Children were happy to engage with strangers including the evaluators when asked for their views about the project.

However, children might be capable of speaking for themselves but choose not to for their own reasons:

'I was going to complain, it didn't really matter anyway because I was going away for a week'.

In some cases children were less able to speak for themselves, for example younger children or those with personal problems (e.g. learning difficulties, shyness, experience of bullying).

Indicator WB 1.3 Children ask for help less frequently

Children were less likely to ask for help when engaged in self explanatory tasks such as painting or when they became more familiar with the play environment. Children demonstrated that they could use their initiative and did not require help and that they were prepared to help each other.

However, the picture varied in that some children required more support than others, including some who required a greater degree of attention due to personal problems like those highlighted above.. Children could require help with specific tasks, for example if they had hurt themselves or needed something they couldn't see.

Indicator WB 1.4 Children positively interact with adults

Children were capable of interacting positively with adults at all projects. However, the extent to which this happened varied. At most projects children interacted well with adults both through talking and playing, including commenting that they were 'very kind and helpful'. At some projects children were particularly respectful and helpful to adults, for example, by inviting play workers and adapting games rules to incorporate extra people.

However, at one project children did not interact with adults, or were capable of interaction but not used to playing with play workers. There were also instances of

children interacting negatively with adults. At others the children were rude and disrespectful to all play workers. For example, at one project older children resorted to aggression when communicating with play workers. At another project children seem to have a love/hate relationship with one particular play worker.

Indicator WB 1.5 Children organise their own play and activities

The extent to which children organised their own play varied both within and between projects. There were projects where the children appeared not to organise their own play because of the structured nature of the project or because the range of activities and support available meant that they had less opportunity to do so. At some projects there was time set aside for free play where children had the opportunity to organise their own games.

Children often adapted and invented games to suit the number and type of children they were playing with. However, some children did not organise their own play but did create situations in which they caused disruption within play which appeared to entertain them.

Indicator WB 1.6 Children are pleased with their achievements

Children's art work was on the wall at some projects. At others, activities children had been involved in had been photographed and posted on the wall. Children talked about what they had done in both a positive and negative manner. Children could be quite shy and didn't necessarily want to be in the spotlight during particular activities such as a talent show, while others revelled in the attention.

At some projects children demonstrated that they were proud of their drawings through showing them to the evaluators. At one project paintings were sold at an exhibition. At others children showed off other things they had made that they were proud of, for example a donkey lead and marbling paper. Children were also proud when they had achieved something new like picking up a duck at one of the city farms. Some children had won awards for their activities such as drawing and for taking part in contests both within and outside the project.

Indicator WB 1.7 Children approach others in a positive way

At some projects children approached others in a positive manner almost all the time and appeared very friendly and confident. This was especially the case at the two projects which were attended primarily by Bengali and Somali children, perhaps due to the shared language and culture.

Children sometimes came with friends and hung out mostly with the same group. There were also examples of friends being very positive towards one another. However, in some instances this could generate indifference between groups rather than friendly atmosphere.

At one project it was evident that there were small instances of tension between children though this did not prevent the group from having a positive atmosphere overall. At another project for older children, there was more of a culture of children approaching one another in a hostile manner, looking to cause trouble and get one up on each other.

Indicator WB 1.8 Children try out new things regularly

Though children did get to try new things at most projects they did not necessarily get the opportunity to do so regularly. Generally they were provided with a range of established activities and games which kept them interested for short periods of time.

Some projects enabled children to try out new things which they may not otherwise have access to through organising trips. Projects with a specialist focus, such as art and crafts, could provide the opportunity for children to try out new things regularly, albeit within that specific area.

Indicator WB 1.9 Children resolve differences and disagreements amongst themselves

Children were capable of resolving disagreements about certain things (e.g. the rules of a game) between themselves most of the time. Overall, very few serious arguments were observed during our visits. On several occasions evaluators observed that play workers had to get involved in resolving play fights or minor disagreements between children. At one project play workers had to get involved in physical confrontations between children. There was only one project where there appeared to be no arguments and this was one which was attended by children from one ethnic group.

Indicator WB 1.10 Parents and carers feel that their children are more confident and independent

Parents frequently commented that their children appeared more confident as a result of attending the projects. This was most commonly linked to the development of social skills and enjoyment in spending time with other children. Children were said to have made more friends.

'A great way to mix with others and develop social skills.' (White mother)

Other comments linked increased confidence to greater creativity, being comfortable with spending time outside the home and overcoming shyness:

'She was very shy. She has come out of her shell. She used not to talk to strangers coming into the house. Now she will start asking questions after ten minutes rather than two hours.' (White mother)

5.9 Well Being Objective Two – Children have increased respect for others

Indicator WB 2.1 Children are aware of different cultures

On the whole children did not display awareness of different cultures. A lack of understanding as to the meaning of culture and ethnicity was demonstrated in questionnaires completed by younger children.

However, there were examples of children demonstrating that they were explicitly aware of different cultures in both positive and negative ways. For example, a child at one project said he used the playground because it was inclusive as opposed to a scheme nearer to him which was full of Asian children. Negative examples included a lack of respect about others childrens' religions and speaking Bengali to another child who did not speak it on purpose.

At some projects, displays or montages on walls served to increase cultural awareness. At others children were involved in activities specific to certain other cultures (e.g. Salsa dancing). One project included a trip abroad for older children. There was also evidence of Bengali and Somali children appearing to be aware of different cultures through an understanding of their own complex religion/ethnicity within a culturally diverse borough. They recognized differences between cultures through an understanding of their own religion and what this entailed for themselves.

Indicator WB 2.2 Children are aware of different needs

Children were not generally aware of different needs unless it impacted upon an activity or it was made explicit (e.g. at two projects there were separate play sections for younger children). Sometimes activities involved taking the role of someone else, for example through role playing and imaginary play, which could serve to increase an understanding of others needs.

Children with specific needs were in a minority at all projects. However, interaction with children who had specific needs on a regular basis could lead to their needs

becoming more recognised by other children. For example, at one project attended by children with specific needs there appeared to be a distinct lack of bullying or intimidation amongst any of the children.

All girl groups involved more talking than other groups and often the girls were responsive to each others needs. For example, at one project the group sat and watched a video of a show they had been involved in and as they were all nervous about watching it they complimented each other and talked about it supportively.

Indicator WB 2.3 Children are enthusiastic about what others are doing

Children showed enthusiasm for what others were doing at all projects for a variety of different reasons. Children supported others during competitions or events or stayed to watch each others performances, for example cheering and clapping each other at a talent show. Children also admired the work of others and showed each other what they were doing. For example at one project a group of boys watched while one of their friends drew cartoons for nearly an hour.

Children were enthusiastic about what others were doing when they were going to take part as well, for example when making cakes. Children were encouraged to join in through seeing others enjoyment of an activity. Team games like football also generated shared enthusiasm. While in general children showed enthusiasm for the activities of others, at one project for older children, interest in the activities of others, rather than enthusiastic was disparaging of others' efforts. For example children watching a game of pool would continually jeer at the mistakes made by those playing.

Indicator WB 2.4 Children share things

Children appeared willing to share resources at most projects. Children demonstrated that they could share by the way in which they waited for turns. For example, at a project where the space to play football was small, one team had to wait while the others played. At several projects rules and lists for sharing were established so that everyone got a turn.

At projects where the atmosphere appeared more tense there were problems with disagreements between children. At one project, older children did not share things despite having a choice of resources. For example, arguments broke out over bowling balls, pool cues and magazines.

At some projects with fewer resources children appeared to share less well and tended towards an 'each for their own culture' in relation to space or activities. For

example, while making chocolate cakes, several children stole the whole lot and ate them.

Sharing was most obviously an issue in relation to particular pieces of equipment such as pool tables and dance mats. Sharing was less of an issue at projects with a wide selection of resources which enabled children to spread themselves across activities.

Indicator WB 2.5 Children play together

All the children played with one another to some degree at all the projects. However there were variations relating to gender, race and age. At some projects the children played together, but there was a divide between boys and girls possibly for cultural reasons. At others children played together in mixed gender groups consistently. There was also evidence of children of different ages playing together, and parents and play workers commented that older children helped younger children, though at one project older children appeared disruptive and not to play with younger children.

There were groups of children that did not mix. For example, at one project children played together only during organised activities, possibly because parents accompanied many children to the park. At another project, children occasionally got involved with activities with each other but generally did not. For example, an adventure playground website was made by everyone, but children didn't seem to have the will or encouragement to play together otherwise. At one project two groups of Bengali boys that attended different schools did not play together.

Indicator WB 2.6 Children make and keep friends

There was evidence that children make and keep friends at the majority of projects. For example, at one project a child commented that everyone was so friendly and another commented 'I have loads of friends'. Friends were also mentioned in the diaries. A less commonly observed experience was that children made but didn't keep friends. For example, at one project a child said 'I have met friends here...only one comes.'

At some projects it was evident that children came to the project with friends or relatives either from school or from home. However, it was also evident in some cases that children knew each other through the project but did not see each other much outside it.

Indicator WB 2.7 Children show awareness of each others feelings and respect one another

The extent to which children showed respect to each other and showed awareness of feelings varied between projects. For example, at some projects, children showed a lot of respect for one another in the activities they took part in and in sharing materials. One child commented:

‘Sometimes I think I am rubbish at things but at (the project) people say I’m good at things, especially swing ball.’

Children also showed awareness of each others’ feelings by comforting others and showing concern when others’ feelings may have been hurt. There was evidence of children showing respect toward adults at some projects. For example, children at one project thanked the play workers for their food and helped clear up.

Small groups of children were disrespectful occasionally at some projects. For example, children would make fun of others, argue or fight when not supervised.

At some projects there appeared to be little respect or awareness of others feelings during our visits. For example at one project children stole photos off the montages to torment and laugh at other children. At another, younger children complained that the older children caused trouble and spoiled their adventures.

Indicator WB 2.8 Children communicate more effectively

In general children appeared to communicate effectively, though there were examples of communication breaking down at one project amongst older challenging children. There was also some evidence that boys did not communicate effectively and had a greater tendency to resort to violence at some projects.

Based on our observations, it was hard to tell whether children communicated more effectively. However, there was some evidence that children had learnt to communicate more effectively, either because they had overcome previous difficulties or where they were new to the area. For example one girl couldn’t speak for herself on our first visit but a few months later was very comfortable talking to the evaluators.

Indicator WB 2.9 Children show respect for property

Respect for property was demonstrated where the children respected the rules, had pride in their space or took part in gardening to make the place look better.

There were examples of children being disrespectful of property, though in general this was only occasional. For example at one project children spat and threw rubbish and children commented:

'They write all over the walls'.

'Don't like the toilets though because people wipe their poo on the walls and stuff'.

Indicator WB 2.10 Parents and carers feel that their children's behaviour is improved

Most parents interviewed or completing questionnaires said that their children's behaviour had improved. Some gave specific examples including learning to share things, to take turns, to mix with other children better and to deal with rules and regulations. One parent commented that her children had learnt 'not to be selfish.'

5.10 Well Being Objective Three – Children's healthy growth and development are promoted

Indicator WB 3.1 Children enjoy healthy food

Children were provided with juice and water at all the projects. However beyond that the picture varied. For example, at some projects children brought their own food or bought it from local shops, whereas at another no food was provided or brought. At others, they were exposed to healthy foods, because they were grown on site, because they were sold there or through participating in cooking. For example, at one project the children picked food from the garden and learnt how to make mint tea, at others they learnt to cook food and at one the café sold healthy options. However, at some projects children were provided with unhealthy snacks like crisps and coke or were able to buy chips, burgers and sweets onsite.

Indicator WB 3.2 Children enjoy physical exercise

Children enjoyed physical exercise at all projects. Open spaces encouraged physical exercise and projects with access to outdoor space provided the greatest opportunities. Indoor projects also allowed for a lot of exercise when the children were provided the space and opportunities to do so. However, lack of space did limit some projects and at one, unsafe space limited physical activities. Equipment provided by projects such as dance mats and trips also provided opportunities for physical activity.

Indicator WB 3.3 Children acquire knowledge

Most projects appeared to encourage children to learn and offered opportunities. Children could acquire knowledge taking part in a variety of activities. These might relate specifically to the project environment. For example, at one farm based project children learned about and nature, animal welfare, recycling, health and safety. When several children were asked what a spindle was play workers explained what it was used for and how to use it.

Posters and murals, participation in games and trips to museums also provided opportunities for learning.

Indicator WB 3.4 Children learn new skills

Children appeared to learn new skills at the majority of projects. What was learnt was dependent upon the activities that the children took part in. A wide variety of skills were learnt including football, coping with life events, social skills, arts and crafts, rock climbing and canoeing, creating a website, construction, animal welfare and cooking.

Indicator WB 3.5 Parents and carers feel that children's health and development is enhanced

All the parents interviewed or completing questionnaires felt that their child(rens) health and learning had benefited from attending the projects. Health was said to have been enhanced by physical activity particularly in relation to projects with outdoor facilities.

Parents specifically commented that their child(ren) had learnt new things and some commented on activities and trips. For Muslim parents from both the Bengali and Somali communities the emphasis on learning through play was very strong, particularly for Muslim men. One Somali father commented that 'play is education', whilst another said:

'It is also a learning issue, mayb it could be more of that in the future. I would like to emphasise the learning more.' (Somali father)

Parents also explained that the projects enabled children to do things they would otherwise not be able to do, either because school did not present the same opportunities or because they didn't have access to resources at home. A common view was that if the project didn't exist there would be nothing else for children to do in the local area.

The ability for children to mix with children from other cultures was also highlighted as a positive factor by both white, black and minority ethnic parents.

6. Key issues arising from the research

Play provision

- Play opportunities

The evaluation revealed a high level of motivation and enthusiasm amongst children, particularly for physical and creative activities. Evidence that the provision of such activities could motivate and stimulate children was provided by the fact that they enabled them to become absorbed in play and created opportunities to try out new things. Further evidence of enthusiasm for the play projects included children waiting outside before projects were due to open and parents commenting on the fact that their children talked about the projects at home and looked forward to coming back.

Provision of a wide range of activities on a day to day basis with a change in focus within play sessions were important in generating and sustaining motivation and enthusiasm. Trips and special events helped because they provided variety and additional opportunities to try new things. Other factors which enabled projects to provide a wide range of play opportunities included the availability of open space, both indoors and out, and the availability of staff and volunteers.

6.3 The availability of space at the projects influenced both the level and type of play provision and the level of ownership by children. Projects with both indoor and outdoor space were better able to provide the full range of play opportunities. Some projects with limited or no access to outdoor space were not well placed to cater for physical and sporting activities. Similarly, one project with very limited indoor space had to deal with limitations on activities and on a few occasions had found it necessary to close because of adverse weather conditions.

6.4 At some projects the children had been involved in developing the space themselves. For example, at two projects with outdoor space, the children had been involved in designing the environment. In one case this had involved a garden project, creating a quiet space where they could 'go and sit and get away from the hustle and bustle'. At another project children had worked with landscapers to make improvements to the space.

The extent to which trips out formed part of the menu of activities on offer was also a factor in play provision. Some of those projects with limited space relied on trips to extend the range of play provision. It was accepted by some projects that these activities were more structured by necessity and not necessarily play, but justified on the grounds that they provided variety and an incentive for children to engage with the project. For example, one play worker said:

'No, they are not play. They are days out, but when you are faced with a six day a week play scheme and if you were to have a six week play scheme and you had kids on site every single day, it would be hell because they really would get bored and you would have what happened here, which was that it actually went really quiet in the middle of it. So I think the idea of having trips is it is not strictly play, but it is something the kids want and ask for and it is good to do it. You can use it as an incentive.'

Across all projects trips were clearly popular with children and parents alike, particularly during school holidays. They were seen as an opportunity for children to learn new skills and to try out new things that they would not otherwise have the opportunity to do.

Play workers also discussed the wide range of activities on offer at their projects. In doing so they offered various perspectives on the nature of the play provision. At one end of the spectrum they described 'free play' whereby children 'just go there and do their own thing'. At one adventure playground this was described as: 'Kids running around on the structures, the kids using the swings, kids getting involved with changing the environment here. Coming in here and saying can we have a saw, a hammer and some nails and going off and doing whatever they want. It is kids doing an art activity in here and something where they are allowed to put in whatever they want and whatever is going on.'

6.7 Play workers emphasised the importance of providing a space where children were provided with opportunities to engage in 'creative play':

'What goes on up here is creative space where the children that come can do what they like. They walk in and say I would really like to do this and we say well you can.....and so it is offering them creative activities and creative play that they do what they really want to do.'

In addition to the range of activities available within a project, the environment in which the project was organised could offer particular opportunities for creative and stimulating play:

'I think that we are unique because we are based on a farm (and) we have this fantastic resource with all these animals and open space. I think that any work with animals is creative and stimulating.'

6.8 Some projects accepted that they were still moving towards play provision from a more activities based approach that was seen as more traditionally associated with youth work. This was associated with different factors including the background of play workers and the fact that many were used to working in

different ways. For example, some play workers were used to intervening in play rather than waiting to be invited by children to participate or observing for 'play cues' before asking children, 'Do you want me to show you how to do that?'

6.9 At one project that catered solely for older and more challenging children, the approach was described as 'adapted play' in order to respond to the specific needs of that group. The notion of adapted play recognised that older children may not identify what they come to the project for as play. The blurred line between play provision and youth provision was also highlighted by the senior play worker at another project that attracted older children with challenging behaviour. These children could be more difficult to engage and required a more structured approach to prevent boredom that could result in aggressive or disruptive behaviour.

6.10 Evidence from the children suggests that children were generally happy with the level and choice of activities for their age group. The lack of OFSTED registration meant that the majority of projects catered primarily for children aged 8-13. However, in various ways projects acknowledged that age played a factor in play provision. A more 'structured' approach involved dividing children into age groups for particular activities. A more fluid approach involved children of different ages determining movement between the play opportunities on offer themselves. One project which catered for girls only was integrated into a broader project that included girls from 8-18. The involvement of older sisters as 'peer leaders' was crucial to the success of the project in attracting younger girls with the support of their families. These 'peer leaders' enabled a relationship of trust and confidence with the predominantly Muslim families targeted by the project, providing a bridge between the project and the younger girls' parents.

6.11 The evidence demonstrates that the ten projects varied in the way they provided play opportunities. At 'structured' projects there was an emphasis on organised activities and games. At these projects, activities were organised in advance or timetabled within play sessions and there were limited opportunities for free play. At 'unstructured' projects there was a greater emphasis on opportunities for free play overseen by play workers. At these projects a range of activities and games was available, but children moved between them when they chose to. In practice not all projects could be defined by these two types. There was evidence of a mix of structured and unstructured provision within projects and of a shift towards unstructured provision over time. The evidence underlines the importance of achieving a balance between free play and time, and organised activities and games, in order to secure and maintain the engagement of children.

- Choice and control

6.12 Projects employed a variety of means of enabling children to exercise choice and control over their play. Evidence from children suggested that they were aware of the opportunity to make choices and felt supported in doing so. The evaluation suggests that they felt they had the freedom to choose what activities they took part in at all the projects. Children appeared most comfortable when they were able to exercise control over their choice of activities. However, the extent to which they were able to move between play activities depended on a range of factors such as the space and resources available, the level of demand for particular activities, and the availability of play workers. The most fluid movement between play opportunities occurred where play sessions were unstructured and children were able to play freely with little direction from play workers. Moreover, evidence that children felt they could do what they want included the ability to take time out between activities as well as participate in them.

6.13 There was some evidence of a structured element to providing choice whereby children were given forms to complete or consulted on a weekly or, in the case of one project which only operated one day a week, a termly basis. However, the more common approach was to operate flexibly within individual sessions and accept that activities were subject to change depending on what children wanted to do on any given day:

'We will put things out that we think will be something different for the kids, if they don't like it we will investigate why they don't like it and if there isn't a solution to it then we will take it away and try something else. The kids lead in what they want to do.'

'They tell us what they want to do basically. We lay on the activities and they are always subject to change. If they do not want to do it or they decide they want to do something else, then we just facilitate what they want. It is not about organising a workshop today and saying this is the activity today, this is what you will be doing. We don't work that way. We wait for the kids to give us the cues and then we provide to suit the cues.'

- Testing boundaries

6.14 Evidence from children demonstrates that they were able to test boundaries by doing things they hadn't done before and being daring. The extent to which they were able to do so was in part dependent on the structure of the project and the availability of resources. Children had the freedom to try new things where there was less direction and structure.

6.15 Play workers discussed a wide range of ways in which their projects enabled children to test boundaries. These included physical, social and behavioural boundaries. Adventure playgrounds offered particular challenges in terms of physical boundaries because of the outdoor structures:

'They are testing the boundaries knowing if you catch me, he might stop me from having a go on it, but if he doesn't I'm going to get a thrill out of jumping off it.'

Boundaries could also be tested within particular games:

'They also test boundaries when they change the rules in things like rounders, so they are testing what the rules are and why can't we have it this way and that way. Then when it doesn't work they realise that this is why that rule doesn't work and that is why it is not there.'

Social boundaries on the other hand were concerned with the ethos of the project and the extent to which it offered a 'permissive environment'. This involved stepping back and letting the children find and learn their own boundaries. One play worker commented that initially children were 'constantly asking for permission', but that gradually they were learning that the project was their space in which they could decide what they wanted to do.

6.16 Testing boundaries also raised the issue of rules for behaviour. Rules provided a means of defining acceptable boundaries. All projects had rules that to varying degrees had been developed in consultation with the children. Children knew that rules were in place at the majority of projects, though levels of awareness and adherence varied. In some cases rules were displayed on the wall, though it was accepted that they were broken regularly. Older children appeared to be more likely to challenge or test rules with play workers.

6.17 Moreover, it was accepted that to make rules work, it was necessary to talk to children rather than simply stick things on the wall. There was evidence that explaining and clarifying the rules verbally helped to increase awareness and adherence. In practice, the common factor in setting and enforcing rules was the notion of respect. Children were expected to recognise the right of all children to attend the project and play without being intimidated or bullied by others.

6.18 Most projects had relatively few problems enforcing rules and heavy sanctions such as exclusion were rare. However, one project had banned children for behavioural problems and at another project that targeted challenging children, the play worker explained that enforcing rules was the hardest aspect of what they did as the children were constantly pushing the boundaries in terms of behaviour. In order to make discipline work it had to be treated as a 'learning process as well as a control process.'

- Risk and safety

6.19 All projects carried out risk assessments in relation to premises and equipment, and used consent forms for particular activities as appropriate. The level and type of risk varied depending on the nature of the project and the environment in which it operated. For example, farm based projects entailed risks in relation to contact with animals, whilst adventure playgrounds created risk in terms of outdoor structures.

6.20 There was evidence that children enjoyed being daring and taking risks. For example they were able to do things that they were scared or nervous about. Whilst the element of risk for children was most obvious in relation to outdoor structures and the physical risks associated with them, there was also evidence that children took risks participating in indoor activities, for example by painting with other children even though they felt shy or nervous about it. Achieving a balance between risk and safety involved enabling children to be daring in a safe, secure and comfortable environment whatever the activity.

6.21 Play workers accepted that play necessarily involved an element of risk that could not be 'negated'. This meant that judgment had to be exercised by play workers on a constant basis. One play worker explained that this involved battling against an attitude that says 'we shouldn't take risks'. The key distinction here was between 'risks' and 'hazards'. Risks were inevitable and risk taking an important aspect of building children's confidence, whilst hazards were to be avoided. The evidence also suggests that children could and did recognise physical hazards through learning about the environment in which they were playing.

6.22 Concern was expressed about the 'claims culture' whereby all accidents were wrongly seen as avoidable. Accidents would happen and this was accepted by parents. However it was important to recognise that legitimate claims could be made where something which should have been in place was not.

'We do risk assess and we make an assessment of whether there is a risk, (but) children are going to have accidents no matter what. For me it is about, if you don't let children take risks, they are never going to get any sense of danger. How are they ever going to become more confident? The more you tell children don't do this and don't do this it will hurt you, well then you are just installing fears in them about unnecessary fears.'

'But I think the environment offers risk. It is quite an exciting environment and I don't think we can wrap it in cotton wool, because it would just ruin the experience really.'

6.23 Interviews with parents showed that they too were aware of this distinction. Their confidence in the projects was linked to trusting the play workers and the knowledge that their children were in a secure environment. Their knowledge of what their children were doing was achieved by a variety of means including communicating with play workers by telephone and by accompanying their children to and from the project, though this depended on the age of children and the proximity of the project. Both parents and play workers contrasted the risks within the play projects with unacceptable risks and exposure to crime on the streets.

Service delivery

- Welcoming new and existing users

The extent to which projects promoted the service to new and existing users in the first instance varied depending on how established they were prior to the funding. Two of the projects were established play providers and in both instances one the objectives of funding was to broaden their user base, particularly to the Bengali community. The remaining projects were essentially new projects, though not necessarily new organisations, and were largely recruiting from scratch.

Play workers described a variety of means of promoting the projects including word of mouth, door knocking, local leafleting, outreach to schools, liaison with tenants and residents associations and other local organisations. In practice, the means used depended on the extent to which specific groups were being targeted. For example, one established play provider which was looking to extend provision on a particular local estate with a high proportion of Bengali residents carried out door to door canvassing. Another project, targeting disadvantaged and difficult children initially recruited via street work.

Amongst parents who were interviewed or who completed questionnaires the most common means of accessing the project were direct contact with the organisation itself (i.e. because of a pre-existing connection), and word of mouth via friends. One project referred to difficulties with seeking to promote provision via local schools.

Factors which enabled children to feel welcome at the projects included a welcoming atmosphere in the group, active encouragement by play workers and children being made to feel welcome by other children. For parents the approachability and friendliness of play workers was important. Those who felt their children were welcome used phrases such as 'child-orientated' or 'child-focused' to describe the approach of play workers.

- Recognising diversity

All the projects had some form of equal opportunities policy. However, in some cases this was effectively the policy of the host organisation rather than a policy specifically written with play provision in mind. In practice approaches to inclusion and diversity in terms of ethnicity varied in relation to local and cultural contexts. The user base of two projects was essentially Bengali and Somali respectively and in those projects the cultural and gender specificity of the user base was clearly important to developing a relationship of trust with families from those communities. All other projects had to varying degrees attempted to promote and provide services to all ethnic groups, for example through the range and type of activities and resources made available.

6.29 Play workers discussed both their projects' approaches to promoting diversity and their observations of diverse groups of children at play. Some highlighted the importance of employing Bengali workers to attract Bengali families and children and there was evidence to suggest that this had made a substantial difference, though, according to PATH, not necessarily to the extent that user numbers reflected the ethnic mix of local school populations. Moreover there was some suggestion that the projects had been more successful in attracting Bengali boys than Bengali girls. A play worker at one project which had a female Bengali play worker and had attracted some Bengali girls commented on the way in which the project offered opportunities for Bengali girls to transgress traditional expectations in terms of behaviour. Another project had less success in attracting Bengali users despite the existence of a multi-ethnic user base including white, Turkish, Moroccan, Somalian and Bengali children. This has been an issue of concern and the lack of Bengali workers may have had an impact upon the community's usage.

6.30 The gender of the workers also appeared to be influential in the recruitment of Bengali children, though not in a uniform way. Play workers at one project aimed primarily at Bengali girls commented that the Bengali community had not traditionally taken girls work seriously, but the presence of female Bengali play workers, in conjunction with older sisters, was considered to have been vital to winning the trust of Bengali families and parents. At another project a female Bengali play worker had encountered problems in canvassing Bengali families on a local estate. However, a male Bengali play worker with a more traditional approach appeared to have secured the confidence of parents:

'Parents looked at him and thought well, he is not going to be the one that encourages our kids into sex, drugs and rock and roll. They are going to be safe. I think that probably made a big difference.'

6.31 The extent to which children played with children from other backgrounds varied within and between projects. Whilst there was evidence that children mixed, it is necessary to make a distinction between situations where they played 'alongside' children from other ethnic groups rather than 'with' them. For example children might play in small groups that were not ethnically diverse and the groups did not necessarily mix.

6.32 Play workers at some projects discussed tensions between children in relation to ethnicity. At one project, Bengali boys had attended for a limited period, but had stopped coming without any apparent explanation. However, some racial tensions were evident at the project, with white children occasionally referring to Bengali children as 'Pakis', despite not using such terms of abuse in relation to other Asian children.

6.33 Such terms of abuse had been witnessed by play workers at another project where there were tensions. According to the play worker, children were aware that such behaviour attracted sanctions including the possibility of banning them, but nevertheless persisted in order to 'test' workers out. The play worker also commented on the way in which Bengali children could be observed playing with each other and separately from white and African-Caribbean children who tended to play together. It was suggested that whilst the project could make inroads to the extent that the children played alongside each other without aggravation, the challenge was the existence of racial tension 'outside the gates'.

6.34 Whilst in the main the issue of ethnic diversity concerned the need for projects to recruit Bengali children, one play worker expressed concern at the way in which the project on one estate was almost exclusively Bengali despite the presence of other children. It was feared that the project had become identified as a Bengali one and that this was discouraging other children. A management committee member at another project emphasised the importance of projects transcending the ethnic divide which he believed had been a feature of local youth provision:

'(The) real benefit is the potential for races to mix. Since the Bengali worker started, there have been more Bengali kids but more needs to be done. That needs thought and work. But this is one place where kids of different ethnicities can mix. There are youth clubs but they are Bengali or white. Mixing doesn't really happen on other projects.

6.35 Approaches to diversity and inclusion in relation to disability were less developed. Play workers highlighted the issue of accessibility, particularly the challenge of providing wheelchair access. It appeared that the need to address the issue in relation to securing funding had raised awareness, but most projects accepted that a great deal more needed to be done. For example, one play worker said:

'We are thinking about it. We have been thinking about it ever since we opened, but I think it is going to be a slow process.'

6.36 Some projects were attended by small numbers of disabled children and children with specific educational needs who played with other children. Play workers referred to children with Downs syndrome, ADHD and autism. However, there was a common concern about the staffing implications of dealing with children with more complex specific needs, which projects did not feel they had the capacity to meet.

6.37 Where individual deaf or hearing impaired children attended the projects it was suggested that these children had been included to varying degrees, in some instances increasing awareness about communication amongst hearing children. For example, there were some isolated examples of deaf or hearing impaired children who used lip reading when playing with hearing children. However, one play worker said he thought that a new deaf child may not have been included in the group so readily.

6.38 A minority of projects had attempted to make links with special schools or were planning to, though there was little evidence of sustained relationships having been built to date.

- Involving children and parents

6.39 All the parents who were interviewed or who completed questionnaires were satisfied that their views were listened to or acted on where necessary. However, the level of parental involvement at the projects varied considerably. Only a minority of projects had parent representatives on the management committee and these were dedicated play providers. The play worker at one project within a host organisation explained that there were plans to create a separate management committee for the project which would provide a mechanism for parents to be more directly involved. Concern was expressed that whilst it was valuable to have the perspective of parents, they didn't always have the necessary skills to contribute in some areas and that a mix of parents and non-parents was desirable.

6.40 The involvement of parents as volunteers was common, though they were not necessarily involved in working directly with children on a formal basis. Where parents were recruited and trained to work with children, the additional staffing capacity could enable more choices to be made available to children. However at most projects parental involvement was more informal or linked to particular events, for example through open days, family days or trips. Play workers described trips as a very useful way of involving parents, enabling them to get to know one

another and the projects. However play workers at one project explained that some parents tended to hang around and were reluctant to get more involved.

6.41 The extent to which children demonstrated ownership varied and appeared to be dependent on factors such as how often they came, who they knew at the project, how well they knew the routine and who else used the space. In shared spaces, developing a sense of ownership by the children could take time and could depend on whether things had to be packed away in between play sessions or whether the walls could be used to display things such as children's art. At one project where a wide variety of other activities took place, a strong sense of ownership appeared to have been developed by allowing a particular area, including indoor space, to be used exclusively by the project.

6.42 There was evidence that children felt their views were listened to and acted upon at all the projects. However, children's involvement in service delivery beyond activity planning was minimal, though there were examples of innovation such as the use of a small steering group to plan individual play sessions and a consultation day to plan over the longer term. Two projects had involved children in the process of recruiting play workers. Both were extremely positive about the experience, despite some initial scepticism in one instance.

'It was amazing, but they came up with the same shortlist as we did, but by a different route. We said it is something we would always do again because it was so successful.'

Children's well-being

- Confidence and independence

6.43 Children's well being was the most challenging aspect of the research with children given that it was not possible to observe changes over time. It was also the area which play workers found it most difficult to comment upon. This was particularly the case in relation to independence and confidence, which was considered very hard to measure. Nevertheless, play workers were able to give examples of individual children where they had observed a noticeable change, such as children who were quiet had become more verbal. Others who were shy, perhaps because they had been bullied, had become more interactive. There were also examples of individual children with aggressive behaviour who had become calmer, perhaps because of the experience of being able to mix in a different environment.

6.44 However, the play worker at a project that targeted challenging children was more cautious. Whilst it was felt that on balance children had become less 'rude', behaviour varied from week to week and it was felt that a longer term perspective

was needed to assess the extent to which behaviour might change. Another play worker was similarly cautious in that changes in behaviour needed to be examined as part of the bigger picture in relation to any given young person.

'I think there are kind of slight behavioural changes and things that you notice, some feeling that it has been a positive experience for them.'

6.45 Different aspects of the play environment were said to have contributed to children's confidence. For example, the physical environment offered opportunities in relation to playing on outdoor structures and handling animals. The social environment had led to changes in the way children interacted with both each other and the play workers.

'They will kind of chat and smile and do some kind of interaction a lot more you will see them in the street and they will communicate with you where they would never have done before.'

At one project, play workers commented on improvements over time in interaction between children and pensioners who used the same venue and the way in which this had contributed to improved social skills. Others emphasised children's relationships with each other, the way in which playing together had enabled them to learn how to share things and take turns, and the way in which older children looked out for or helped younger children. Another play worker explained the importance of creating the right kind of social environment at the project:

'It does improve self-confidence because they are finding out about themselves and what you are trying to promote is an atmosphere where they are not going to be judged.'

6.46 Evidence from observation of the children suggests that the projects were contributing to children's well-being. For example, there was evidence of confidence and independence in that children felt able to make choices and were able to speak for themselves, though this varied by age. There was also evidence of positive interaction both between children and between children and adults. For example, children took pride in their achievements, were capable of resolving disagreements with each other and were respectful and helpful to adults, though at some projects the evidence in relation to such indicators was mixed.

6.47 The difficulty with measuring outcomes in relation to indicators concerning confidence and independence is that the snapshot nature of the observation, based on a limited number of visits to each project, was only able to offer limited evidence of changes over time. For example, it was not possible to measure whether children asked for help less frequently over time. However, parents did

comment that their children's confidence had increased as a result of attending the projects. This was most commonly linked to the development of social skills and interaction with other children. Other indicators of increased confidence for parents included greater creativity, children being comfortable with spending time outside the home and overcoming shyness.

- Respect for others

6.48 Similarly, evidence from observing the children indicates that children had respect for other children through sharing things, playing together, showing enthusiasm for what other children were doing and showing awareness of each others' feelings. There was some evidence that girls could be more responsive to each others' feelings than boys. However, the extent to which their respect for others had increased or that they were able to communicate more effectively over time is more difficult to comment on, again because of the snapshot nature of the observation.

6.49 The extent to which children respected each other's cultures varied. There was some evidence that it could be influenced by the organisation and practice of the play project, for example through the provision of particular materials and activities. Children's awareness of the specific needs of other children appeared to be enhanced by exposure to those needs. For example, hearing children learnt to communicate with hearing impaired children. However, opportunities for observing this were limited due to the small numbers of disabled children present.

6.50 Parents were able to offer some evidence that their children's behaviour had improved over time, for example by learning to share things, take turns, mix better with other children and deal with rules and regulations.

- Healthy growth and development

6.51 Play workers were more confident in relation to the way in which projects had fostered learning both in terms of knowledge and new skills. However, they were keen to underline differences between the project environment and a school environment. The projects were said to allow for more freedom, fluidity and informality. Learning was based less on instruction and more on questioning from the children themselves and exploration.

6.52 Our observation was that the projects offered a wide range of opportunities for acquiring knowledge and learning new skills. Most commonly opportunities were present through everyday participation in games and activities with other children. However the limits of our evaluation again meant that it was not possible for us to explore learning on the part of specific children over time.

6.53 Nevertheless, parents commented that their children had learnt new things and that the projects had enabled them to do things they would not otherwise be able to do at school or at home. Muslim parents, particularly fathers, placed particular emphasis on learning through play.

6.54 Play workers at many projects also felt that the opportunities for physical exercise, both indoors and outdoors, contributed to the children's health. One play worker commented that physical activity was good for mental stimulation too. Evidence from observing the children at play indicated that children enjoyed physical exercise at all the projects, both indoors and outdoors. However, opportunities for physical exercise were limited at some projects, particularly where there was little or no outdoor space. Parents commented that physical activity at the projects, particularly those with outdoor space, enhanced their children's health

6.55 Play workers also referred to the provision of healthy food and advice on healthy eating. For example, children learnt about healthy foods, either because they were grown or sold there or through involving children in cooking. However, at some projects less healthy food and snacks were available and overall exposure to healthy eating at the projects was limited.

The contribution of PATH

6.56 Play workers at all projects were positive about the contribution that PATH had made. On the whole PATH was considered to be very supportive. Some play workers contrasted this to their experience of relationships with other funders. PATH was seen to be much more hands on and involved in the ongoing development of the projects:

'Funders haven't been there to necessarily help. They have been there to make sure you are crossing your t's and dotting your l's and your paperwork is in order. That is about it really.'

However, some play workers whilst enthusiastic about the level of support offered also expressed reservations:

'The relationship that I have personally had with PATH is quite supportive really and overall they are an incredibly supportive funder, more than I have ever actually encountered. I think that what I have found recently is that along with all that support comes quite a lot of demand and kind of interference for a better word.'

Some play workers commented that they felt that they didn't have time to sustain the kind of relationship and level of involvement expected by PATH. For example, one play worker commented on feeling 'bombarded' by emails, whilst another

commented on the pressure to get involved and said there had been times when 'I wish they would leave me alone.'

6.57 Despite these reservations, most play workers felt that PATH was very helpful and a very good source of advice and information, including legal advice and policy development. Particular emphasis was placed on their responsiveness and approachability and the way in which they were able to provide advice on the telephone. One play worker who said that to begin with the relationship felt somewhat interrogative explained that it was great to be able to have an organisation you felt 'safe' going to for advice about problems with issues such as staffing:

'It's amazing and as time has gone on I have realised they are so helpful and so friendly, no matter what you have got a query about.'

Another explained that the context of the relationship as being one which was about being supported, not about being 'watched or scrutinised.'

6.58 Alongside advice and information, training and assistance with financial matters were highlighted as positive and valuable. Some workers also commented on the opportunities for networking that were created by the relationship with PATH and there was evidence that this had as one play worker suggested 'created a context of collaboration and joint working'. For example, some projects had taken groups of children to other projects, whilst others had drawn on the expertise of play workers from other projects who had run one-off sessions.

6.59 Some play workers were particularly positive about the fact that PATH understood and had expertise in relation to play as opposed to the 'traditional funder'. For example, they were seen to understand the nature of provision at adventure playgrounds, whereas other funders might have erroneous concerns about health and safety. For one play worker, the relationship offered a valuable source of support in promoting play at the project, where the approach had previously been more structured and activity orientated.

6.60 However, the extent to which play workers embraced PATH's approach to some extent depended on their background. Those from a youth work background were in some cases less enthusiastic. One in particular commented on the fact that there had been tensions in this area and was concerned that the 'play ethos' had been pushed too much.

Sustainability and development

6.61 Whilst most play workers underlined the importance of funding to the sustainability of the projects in the longer term, they also recognised that the

support and involvement of PATH had contributed to the sustainability of the projects in other ways. For example, the provision of training, assistance with financial systems, advice and assistance with OFSTED registration and the development of quality assurance were all cited as having improved the capacity of projects. Quality in Play was cited by one project as a benchmark for standards that 'puts you on the map'.

6.62 PATH was also seen to be a valuable source of advice about other sources of funding. One organisation where project funding was being discontinued nevertheless acknowledged that developing a pilot project with the support of PATH had been important in identifying obstacles and issues and that they were in a better position to apply for other funding as a result of the assistance they had received.

6.63 Projects also identified a range of future development needs that were relevant to their sustainability. These included improved capacity in relation to disabled children, staff training and management committee development. In relation to funding projects highlighted as important for sustainability included a secure and stable funding base, increased revenue funding for staff and capital funding for building alterations and resource provision.

Assessing the evaluation framework and process

6.64 Section 4 of this report describes the research strategy employed in this evaluation, including the development of objectives and the indicator framework. The evaluation team will be undertaking an assessment of the indicator framework in collaboration with policy makers and practitioners and developing it in an evaluation of eight play projects across England in 2004/5. However, we offer some preliminary observations here.

- Using indicators

6.65 The evaluation suggests that a link can be between input and output indicators and outcomes for children in relation to play provision. For example, there appears to be a relationship between:

The level and type of provision in terms of equipment, materials and indoor and outdoor space, and the extent to which children are motivated, enthusiastic, excited and stimulated, able to try out different things and focus on and become absorbed by their play;

The provision of opportunities for spontaneous play activities and the extent to which children feel they can make their own choices and move between play opportunities;

The provision of play opportunities in which children are encouraged to test boundaries and the extent to which children do things they haven't done before; There appears to be a relationship between the provision of activities in which children are enabled to take risks and the extent to which children feel able to be daring and do things they feel nervous about.

- Quality of evidence

6.66 However, the evaluation also suggests that other factors may be relevant in relation to outcomes for play provision, in particular those relating to the local context such as the availability of other play opportunities including areas of open space. Moreover, a limited number of visits to projects over a short period of time may not necessarily enable a complete picture of play provision to be obtained. For example, visits may take place on days when attendance is lower than average or when activities are curtailed due to factors such as the weather.

6.67 An overview of the evidence collected in relation to the ten objectives also shows that while a limited number of visits over a short period of time may provide reasonably robust evidence in relation to play provision and service delivery outcomes, those relating to children's well-being require more intensive measurement over time. Thus while our evaluation provided a great deal of evidence in relation to well-being objectives, this was of limited value in measuring changes in children's well being, for example in relation to confidence or behaviour.

6.68 Moreover, the fact that children's behaviour appeared to be problematic, for example due to aggression or boredom, did not necessarily mean that the quality of play provision was poor. It may relate to other factors such as the challenging behaviour of children attending the project or the levels of play deprivation experienced by those children. This could mean that the extent to which play at the projects might lead to changes in behaviour may be more limited or vary between projects.

- Dissemination

6.69 Following the evaluation, we provided individual dissemination to play workers about outcomes in relation to their individual projects. Workers from PATH attended these sessions and commented that the data gathered during the evaluation could be used to provide evidence for quality assurance.

6.70 During these sessions play workers offered a variety of perspectives on the evaluation process. While the overall consensus was that the evidence gathered portrayed an accurate picture of the projects, play workers from one project were

concerned that it did provide a wholly accurate assessment of the project in relation to play provision. We have agreed to explore this further with the project.

6.71 Play workers from some projects also expressed concern about the 'snapshot' nature of the evaluation process. Whilst not challenging our findings, there were concerns that what could be understood from, and understood at, a limited number of visits would inevitably be limited. It was suggested by one project that a fuller picture could have been obtained by conducting more visits over a longer period of time. Others were concerned about the burden placed on projects by evaluation.

6.72 Some play workers also offered positive comments. For example, the evaluators had worked successfully to integrate their observation and interaction with children into play activities. One project commented that the diary method had worked very well and that they would continue to use it. Another said that the whole exercise had enabled play workers to reflect on what they were doing.

7. Conclusions

Doing play evaluation

The evaluation of the Tower Hamlets Community Play Programme offers some useful lessons in evaluating play provision:

It underlines the importance of a child focused approach that places children's experiences and perspectives at the heart of the evaluation;

It emphasises the value of a flexible approach to the collection of data that respects and understands the context and nature of individual projects;

It points to the need for an outcome focused research strategy with measurable and multiple indicators that relate to transparent objectives that are understood by both commissioners and play practitioners⁹;

It underlines the strength of qualitative evidence that can explain the circumstances and processes that give rise to particular outcomes;

It suggests that whilst play provision and service delivery can be evaluated within the short term, evaluating outcomes in relation to children's well being requires a longer term approach.

Promoting social inclusion in play provision

The evaluation raises a number of issues in relation to promoting inclusivity and diversity in play provision:

There is a need to distinguish between inclusive provision at the level of the programme and at the level of individual projects. An inclusive programme in an area such as Tower Hamlets may contain projects that target particular children and communities and this can provide an important contribution to the extension of play provision overall;

Promoting social inclusion necessarily involves understanding the complex interplay between gender, ethnicity and age. Individual projects need to consider

⁹ Barnardo's will be discussing the outcome indicator framework further with play practitioners in collaboration with the Children's Play Council. The framework will also be used to undertake the evaluation of eight projects selected from the final round of Better Play in 2004/05 informed by the experiences of this evaluation.

these factors in relation to the particular groups of children they are seeking to engage;

The experience of projects within the programme suggests that understanding local context in terms of culture and attitudes is crucial to extending play provision and building trust with families and communities;

The evaluation illustrates the way in which 'play' provision is understood and valued within different communities. It suggests that play may not always be a helpful term in attracting children or winning the confidence of parents, for example for older children or children from diverse cultures;

The process of developing outcome indicators underlines the need to make issues of diversity explicit in play objectives, in order to capture the experience and perspective of different communities;

The evaluation suggests that the capacity of individual projects to be fully inclusive in terms of gender, ethnicity, disability and age is contingent on a range of factors including the type of organisation, the available play environment and the culture and experience of play workers and the level of resources including staffing.

Supporting local groups in play provision

An examination of the contribution of PATH to the play projects within the programme raises a variety of issues:

The experience and perspective of play workers and projects overall underlines the value of a hands on and developmental relationship between funders and providers in improving and extending play provision;

The experience of individual projects suggests however that such an approach has resource implications for projects, particularly in terms of the time needed to focus on capacity building and longer term development;

The experience of some projects suggests that organisations that are new to play provision may need a longer lead in time to build capacity in terms of resources and expertise and that funding programmes need to recognise this;

The contribution of PATH illustrates the fact that project sustainability is dependent on a range of factors and not merely levels of funding. However, measuring outcomes in terms of sustainability in relation to the support of an organisation like PATH will require a longer term approach to evaluation.

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Appendix One – Indicator Framework

Play Provision Objective 1 To Provide opportunities for creative, stimulating, age appropriate play	
Input indicators	Provision of staff training Provision of equipment and materials for creative activities Provision of equipment for physical activities Provision of equipment and space for quiet activities
Output indicators	Provision of a range of arts, crafts, dance, drama and cookery activities Provision of a range of indoor/outdoor and Physical/quiet activities Provision of age appropriate activities
Outcome indicators	Children feel motivated, enthusiastic, excited and stimulated Children feel comfortable with the level of activities offered and there is plenty of choice

	<p>for their age group</p> <p>Children look forward to coming and want to come back</p> <p>Children try out different things</p> <p>Children focus on and become absorbed by activities</p> <p>Children are happy with the Standard of resources</p>
Primary data	<p>Participant observation of children</p> <p>Focus groups with children</p> <p>Other activities with children</p> <p>Interviews with play workers</p> <p>Interviews with parents/carers</p>
Documents And Secondary data	<p>Project bids</p> <p>Activity programmes/plans</p> <p>Activity and attendance monitoring</p>

Play Provision Objective 2	
To enable children to exercise choice and control over their play	
Input indicator	Provision of staff training Policy on children's involvement Provision of Materials/equipment/physical environment for spontaneous/organised play
Output indicators	Provision of opportunities for spontaneous play activities Provision of a range of organised play activities Provision of a range of play environments Policy on children's involvement is monitored and reviewed Children are involved in planning activities
Outcome indicators	Children are aware of choices Children feel they can make Their own choices and feel supported in doing so

	<p>Children move between play opportunities</p> <p>Children can explain their choice of play activities</p> <p>Children say there are enough choices</p> <p>Children feel they are allowed to do what they want</p>
Primary data	<p>Participant observation of children</p> <p>Focus groups with children</p> <p>Other activities with children</p> <p>Interviews with play workers</p> <p>Interviews with parents/carers</p>
Documents And secondary data	<p>Project bids</p> <p>Play workers' plans and notes</p> <p>Activity programmes/plans</p> <p>Policies on children's involvement</p>

Play Provision Objective 3

To enable children to test boundaries

<p>Input indicators</p>	<p>Provision of staff training provision of equipment/materials/physical environment that enable boundaries to be tested Policies and rules on behaviour Policy on health and safety Policy on risk management</p>
<p>Output indicators</p>	<p>Provision of play activities in which children are encouraged to test physical, social and creative boundaries Policies on behaviour, safety and risk management are monitored and reviewed Children have the opportunity to review rules and policies</p>
<p>Outcome indicators</p>	<p>Children do things they haven't done before, are not afraid to do so and feel supported</p>

	<p>Children feel they have freedom to do new things</p> <p>Children know and understand the rules</p>
Primary data	<p>Participant observation of children</p> <p>Focus groups with children</p> <p>Other activities with children</p> <p>Interviews with play workers</p> <p>Interviews with project managers</p>
Documents and secondary data	<p>Policies on behaviour/safety/risk management</p> <p>Play workers' plans and notes</p>

Play Provision Objective 4

**To achieve an appropriate balance
between risk and safety**

Input indicators	<p>Provision of staff training</p> <p>Health and safety policies and procedures</p> <p>Risk assessment procedures</p> <p>child protection policies</p> <p>Registration/consent systems</p>
Output indicators	<p>Provision of activities in which children are encouraged/enabled to meet challenges/take risks</p> <p>Policies on health and safety, risk assessment, child protection are monitored and reviewed</p> <p>Policies and rules on behaviour</p>
Outcome indicators	<p>Children feel able to be daring and do things they are nervous or scared about</p> <p>Children can recognise physical hazards</p>

	<p>Children can take steps to reduce the risk of serious injury</p> <p>Parents/carers know what their children are doing</p> <p>Parents/carers feel confident that children are safe</p>
Primary data	<p>Participant observation of children</p> <p>Focus groups with</p> <p>Other activities with children</p> <p>Interviews with play workers</p> <p>Interviews with project managers</p> <p>Interviews with parents/carers</p>
Documents and secondary data	<p>Policies on health and safety, risk assessment and child protection</p> <p>Health and safety records</p> <p>Accident records</p> <p>Training records</p>

Service Delivery Objective 1	
To promote and provide services to both new and existing users	
Input indicators	work with schools Projects are advertised and promoted Outreach and community organizations Policy on dealing with new and existing users
Output indicators	Children who have attended before register and attend Children who have not attended before register and attend
Outcome indicators	Children feel welcome and included Parents feel that their children are welcome and included
Primary data	Focus groups with children Other activities with children Interviews with project managers Interviews with play workers Interviews with parents/carers Interviews with community

	representatives/schools
Documents and secondary data	Promotional material e.g. leaflets, flyers Registration/attendance records Policy on dealing with new and existing users

Service Delivery Objective 2

To promote and provide inclusive services which recognise diversity

<p>Input indicators</p>	<p>Projects are advertised to diverse groups</p> <p>Outreach work with schools and community organizations</p> <p>Diversity/equality policy statement and explanation</p> <p>Staff training on equality/diversity issues/augmentative communication/promoting and understanding diversity</p> <p>Recruitment of diverse range of staff and volunteers</p>
<p>Output indicators</p>	<p>Diverse range of children by age, gender, ethnicity and ability attend</p> <p>Staff know the composition of the local area</p> <p>Staff know who the disabled children are</p> <p>Images of diverse range of children on walls and in</p>

	equipment
Outcome indicators	<p>Children play with children from other ethnic backgrounds</p> <p>Children are aware of equality and diversity issues</p> <p>Non-disabled and disabled children play together</p> <p>Parents/carers feel that projects recognise their children's needs</p>
Primary data	<p>Participant observation of children</p> <p>Focus groups with children</p> <p>Other activities with children</p> <p>Interviews with project managers</p> <p>Interviews with play workers</p> <p>Interviews with parents/carers</p>
Documents and secondary data	<p>Diversity/equality policies</p> <p>Promotional material</p> <p>Training records</p>

Service Delivery Objective 3

To actively involve children and parents in service planning and delivery

Input indicators	Policy on involvement of parents Policy on involvement of children
Output indicators	Parents/children participate in writing the project bid Parents participate in management committees Children are involved in planning activities informally/formally Parents/children participate in staff recruitment Parents/children are involved in planning activities
Outcome indicators	Children feel that their views are listened to and acted upon Children have a level of ownership Children understand why decision are taken

	<p>Parents/carers know that they have the opportunity to be involved</p> <p>Parents/carers feel that their views are listened to and acted upon</p>
Primary data	<p>Focus groups with children</p> <p>Other activities with children</p> <p>Interviews with project managers</p> <p>Interviews with play workers</p> <p>Interviews with parents/carers</p> <p>Interviews with community</p>
Documents and secondary data	<p>Project bids</p> <p>Management committee minutes</p> <p>Recruitment records</p> <p>Policies on children's/parents' involvement</p>

Children's Well-being Objective 1

Children feel more confident and independent

Input indicators	Provision of staff training Policy on behaviour Policy on bullying Policy on safety Policy on risk management
Output indicators	Provision of activities/environment that encourages/enables children to take risks Provision of activities that encourage children to try new things Provision of activities/environment that encourage children to make decisions/choices Bullying and inappropriate behaviour is dealt with effectively
Outcome indicators	Children feel able to make choices

	<p>Children are able to speak for themselves</p> <p>Children ask for help less frequently</p> <p>Children positively interact with adults</p> <p>Children organise their own play and activities</p> <p>Children are pleased with their achievements</p> <p>Children approach others in a positive way</p> <p>Children are trying out new things regularly</p> <p>Children resolve differences and disagreements themselves</p> <p>Parents/carers feel their children are more confident and independent</p>
<p>Primary data</p>	<p>Participant observation of children</p> <p>Focus groups with children</p> <p>Other activities with children</p> <p>Interviews with project managers</p> <p>Interviews with play workers</p> <p>Interviews with parents/carers</p>

	Interviews with community
Documents and secondary data	Training records Policies on behaviour, bullying, safety and risk management

Children's Well-being Objective 2

Children have increased respect for others

Input indicators	Provision of staff training Policy on behaviour Policy on bullying Diversity/equality policy
Output indicators	Play provision that encourages/enables children to play together Play provision that increases awareness of different needs/cultures Less bullying is observed and reported
Outcome indicators	Children are aware of different cultures Children are aware of different needs Children are enthusiastic about what others are doing Children share things Children play together Children make and keep

	<p>friends</p> <p>Children show awareness of each others' feelings and respect one another</p> <p>Children communicate more effectively</p> <p>Children show respect for property</p> <p>Parents/carers feel that children's behaviour is improved</p>
Primary data	<p>Participant observation of children</p> <p>Focus groups with children</p> <p>Other activities with children</p> <p>Interviews with project managers</p> <p>Interviews with play workers</p> <p>Interviews with parents/carers</p>
Documents and secondary data	<p>Training records</p> <p>Play workers' plans and notes</p> <p>Policies on behaviour, bullying, diversity and equality</p>

Children's Well-being Objective 3	
Children's healthy growth and development are promoted	
Input indicators	Provision of staff training Policy on behaviour Policy on healthy eating Policy on smoking Provision of equipment/materials/physical environment
Output indicators	Provision of play that encourages/enables physical exercise Provision of play activities that increase awareness of healthy eating Provision of play activities that encourage mental stimulation Provision of play activities that encourage creativity Provision of play activities that encourage learning Provision of play activities that promote new skills Provision of play that

	<p>encourages active listening</p> <p>Provision of play that encourages/enables interaction and communication</p> <p>Provision of healthy food daily/at each session</p>
Outcome indicators	<p>Children enjoy healthy food</p> <p>Children enjoy physical exercise</p> <p>Children acquire knowledge</p> <p>Children learn new skills</p> <p>Parents/carers feel that children's health and development is enhanced</p>
Primary data	<p>Focus groups with children</p> <p>Other activities with children</p> <p>Interviews with project managers</p> <p>Interviews with play workers</p> <p>Interviews with parents/carers</p>
Documents and secondary data	<p>Training records</p> <p>Policies on behaviour, healthy eating and smoking</p>