

# **‘Playing Out’ June 2010**



## **Project Report**

## **Thank you to:**

Claire Lowman (Active Bristol), Sparkplugs, Paul Gilbert, Kamina Walton and the Ashton Gate Documenters, Naomi Fuller, Dani Landau, Jack Rose, Beccy Young, Alison Fields, Lucy Fiddick, Cindy Travis, Kim Lawrence, Helen Adshead, Phaedra Mawle, Ben Barker, Diane Jones, Glen Eastman, Chris Pirrie, Tom Griffin and all the volunteer stewards and helpers and everyone who came out to play!

## **Photo credits:**

Front cover: Katherine (Ashton Gate Documenter)  
Other photographs: Kamina Walton and Amy Rose.

## About us

Amy Rose is a theatre director and street performer. Alice Ferguson is an environmental consultant specialising in children's independent mobility. We are neighbours on Greville Road, Bristol who have a shared interest in free play, independent mobility, community action and street re-purposing. We started the Playing Out project because we wanted our children to have some of the same freedom we had growing up and to be active, healthy, happy, socially aware and independent. We believe that having the freedom to play outside every day and beginning to increase independent mobility is crucial to this. We know that a lot of other parents feel the same.

## Introduction

Children need to play. It is vital for their physical, social and emotional development. It is also a human right under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Play England defines play as "what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way and for their own reasons". This implies a degree of freedom and independence, which cannot be satisfied by organised or over-supervised play.

Street play allows for both semi-supervised 'free play' and for vigorous physical activity. A recent study has found that urban children already get the majority of their after-school physical activity in outdoor 'non-greenspace', including streets, concluding that "non-green urban environments are therefore very important for children's activity"<sup>1</sup>. However, there is also ample evidence that "children play outside less than they want to"<sup>2</sup>. Over the past few decades it has become generally accepted that "roads are for cars"<sup>3</sup> and the idea of residential streets as play spaces has virtually disappeared<sup>4</sup>. The Playing Out project is a practical response by parents who do not accept that this situation is irreversible or that street play is a thing of the past.

We found that there was a latent desire for street play amongst both parents and children, but that fear of traffic, 'stranger danger' and unpopulated streets made many parents reluctant to give permission for playing out, even on the pavement. We held a pilot event on Greville Road, on International Children's Day in June 2009, using a stewarded after-school road closure to temporarily remove the traffic problem and give parents and children a chance to experience their street as a play space. Following the success of this first 'Playing Out' event, Active Bristol provided funding to support six other local streets to do the same.

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<sup>1</sup> Wheeler, B.W. et al. 'Greenspace and children's physical activity: A GPS/GIS analysis of the PEACH project'. Preventative Medicine 51 (2010) 148-152

<sup>2</sup> Beunderman et al, 'Seen and Heard: Reclaiming the public realm with children and young people', Demos 2007, p45.

<sup>3</sup> From letter received from a resident on Leighton Road, one of the 6 streets involved in this project.

<sup>4</sup> A 2007 poll found that 71% of adults played out near their homes every day compared to only 21% of children today (Play England)

## The 'Playing Out' Model

Playing Out events are short (2-3hr) after-school road closures, with 1 or 2 volunteer stewards at each road closure point. The stewards are fully briefed and given fluorescent jackets and lanyards with essential information. Other than this, there is no need for anything else to be organised. The idea is simply to provide a safe space at a time when children need and want to play.



Generally residents are allowed vehicle access during the event and it is the stewards' role to ensure this happens safely. Parked cars may or may not be moved, depending on the space available. The aim is to cause as little disruption as possible to normal life, demonstrating that street play does not require anything more than a tacit agreement amongst car drivers to prioritise children's safety and recognise their right to play outside their homes.

Ideally, all children from a reasonable age should be free to play out on their streets without fear of traffic and without needing constant adult supervision. It should be a chance for them to experience a degree of independence and for parents to have the flexibility to be in or out of the house knowing their children are getting the exercise, free play and social interaction they need. However, there is some way to go before this situation is possible for the majority of children. The perception and reality of traffic danger, the simple fact of parked cars and traffic making streets less pleasant spaces to be in and a general shift towards a 'closed-doors' culture has meant that parents allowing children to play out on the street are in the minority. Tim Gill quotes Frank Furedi:

*"Parents are almost forced to fall into line...The minority of parents who try to resist it are stigmatized as irresponsible. When your own kid is the only one allowed to go shopping, to go to the swimming pool by himself, it looks very strange"*<sup>5</sup>

This statement is backed up by statistics from the latest Playday ICM opinion poll<sup>6</sup> which found that half of parents do not let their children play outside without an adult and over a third worry that their neighbours will judge them if they let their children play outside unsupervised. The poll also found that over half (54%) of parents only feel confident letting their children play

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<sup>5</sup> Independent on Sunday, 24 October 2004, quoted in Gill, T. 'No Fear: Growing up in a risk averse society', 2007, p.63.

<sup>6</sup> Playday 2010 opinion poll conducted by ICM Research 16 - 22 June 2010, with 1034 adults and 1031 children aged 7-14. <http://www.playday.org.uk>



outside if other children are playing out too. Playing Out aims to address this issue directly both by ensuring that, for one day at least, many parents will be letting their children out to play, and also by reassuring parents that they are not alone in wanting their children to have more freedom. The Playday study also found that “an ethos of collectively allowing neighbouring children to play out together improves confidence”<sup>7</sup>. Our hope is that these events may lead to parents developing informal arrangements to continue a culture of street play.

The Playing Out model is not intended to be a permanent solution, but to act as a bridge between the current situation and the long-term goal of street play being a normal, safe and positive part of urban life. Obvious differences between these events and normal, everyday street play are:

- These are events, special occasions, involving pre-planning and organisation
- They rely on an official, stewarded road closure to remove traffic danger
- They are advertised (albeit very locally), and may attract more children and adults than would normally be out on the street at one time.
- Children and adults may come from other streets, meaning they do not have direct access to their own homes, refreshments and toys.
- The presence of parents and other adults means play is semi-supervised and observed, although in general adults are a passive presence (more interested in chatting and drinking tea!) and children still engage in free play.
- The type of play may be more solitary and physical (e.g. cycling) and less imaginative and involved than it would be if children regularly played out unsupervised and developed games and relationships over time.
- The timing is designated, whereas one benefit of ‘normal’ street play is that children and parents have flexibility about when to start and stop playing.



It is hoped that, as a next step towards normalising street play, the current model may evolve into a less time-consuming and more spontaneous occurrence. In particular, it would be a big step forward to remove the need for official road closures and make supervision/stewarding more informal. One resident of a nearby street not included in this project is already talking about experimenting with something along these lines. Certainly, different streets will lend themselves to slightly different approaches.

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<sup>7</sup> Playday 2010 opinion poll summary, p.2

## Aims and objectives

Our overall aim was to raise awareness about the benefits of and desire for street play, and to contribute to a cultural shift towards streets being seen as viable play spaces. Within this, specific aims of the project were:

- To model an alternative use of street space as play space.
- To give children a chance to experience their street as play space and make new friends.
- To create an opportunity for parents to meet and talk about their hopes and fears around allowing children to play out independently.
- For those parents who want to encourage regular playing out to support each other in this, both morally and practically.
- To observe and assess desire and demand for street play.
- To identify the main obstacles and enabling factors for playing out.
- To transfer skills for organising street play events to street organisers.
- To build neighbourliness and involve residents of all ages.
- To disseminate the idea of Playing Out locally and feed into wider national and international dialogue about street play.
- To challenge the assumption that residential streets are simply 'roads' where cars take precedence over people.
- To inspire others to hold Playing Out events on their own streets.
- Through creating a website, to provide longer-term support to those wanting to do Playing Out events.

## Planning and preparation

In April an article was placed in a local newsletter, outlining the project and calling for streets to get involved. In response to this, we were contacted by 8 individuals\* interested in organising a Playing Out event in their street. As some of these people happened to live in the same street, or in close proximity to each other, we decided to include 4 streets with a good geographical spread and variety of physical features – **Drake Road, Crowther Street, Leighton Road and Morley Road**. We provided email and face-to-face advice and support to those not included, and put near neighbours in touch with each other. **Eldon Terrace** was included as it represented a discrete neighbourhood – Windmill Hill – and we had had interest from 2 residents through word of mouth. We also decided to hold the first of the events on **Greville Road**, to build on the previous year's event and to act as a trial run.

During April we met with representatives from each of the streets involved to talk through the project and establish dates for the event and for a planning meeting with residents. In order to maximize visibility, all the events were planned for the three weeks from 7<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> June. Following these initial meetings, we applied for the road closures and, with the street organisers, delivered letters to residents notifying them of the road closure and inviting them to a planning meeting.

The residents' meetings were held in the evenings, between 10<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> May, either in someone's house or in a nearby community venue. Attendance varied from just the key organisers, to around 12 residents. These meetings were used as an opportunity to talk about fears and hopes for the event and about street play in general. Roles were also clarified and details about timings, publicity and vehicle access were agreed.

One person from each street (usually the person who had initiated the event) was responsible for recruiting volunteer stewards and drawing up a rota. They also did their own risk assessments. We provided each street organiser with a guidance pack containing advice and all the printed materials they would need (see appendix A).

Around 10 days before each event, the street organisers delivered flyers and window posters to all houses on their street and some adjacent streets. On the evening before the event, some of the streets leafleted parked cars, politely requesting them to park elsewhere during the event.

\*Mel Whickam, Lucy Whittle, Alison Fields, Beccy Young, Phaedra Mawle, Sam Poland, Lucy Fiddick, Charlie Stokes.

## The Events, June 2010.

**Street:** Greville Road, Southville

**Event date/time:** Monday 7<sup>th</sup> June,  
3.30-5.30pm

**Key Organiser:** Amy Rose

**Physical features:** Long, straight,  
wide road.

**Weather:** Warm but overcast. Began  
to rain at 5.25pm.

**Parked cars:** Residents were asked  
to move cars. Street was fairly free of  
parked cars for the event.

**Number of children present:** 56

**Age range:** 0-12

**Number of adults present:** 20

**Catchment:** Greville Road, Upton  
Road, Gathorne Road, Vicarage Road.

**Activities:** Scooting, roller-skating, cycling, chalking, long hopscotch, lego, hoop and stick, football, pushing 'babies', running, dancing, big skipping.



**Background:** There is not a strong culture of play on the street even though around half of the 60 households on the street are families with children under 18. Individual children occasionally play out on the pavement but rarely in the road itself. Children aged around 8 and above may cross the road to visit friends but for younger children the road is perceived as a

major barrier and they only play on their own side of the street. Traffic speed data from March 2009 (before the 20mph limit was introduced) showed that although mean average speeds on Greville road were around 23.7mph, a significant number of cars travelled at over 31mph, and a smaller number over 36mph<sup>8</sup>. Even this small number of cars travelling at high speeds makes the street feel quite unsafe for children to cross or play out. Greville Road residents hold regular street parties and are working on a 'DIY street' project<sup>9</sup>. The nearest park is Dame Emily Park, which involves crossing 4 residential roads.

**Other observations:** Whilst children used the whole street, adults mostly congregated in a small area where the youngest children were playing. There was a wide age range and good interaction between age groups and across genders and schools (e.g. a group of year 6 girls made "The world's longest hopscotch" and then younger children added to it and led the older girls in a hopscotch line). Inter-generational games (skipping rhymes). Small group of younger girls chalking and discussing what to draw next – sun, "big clouds" – collaborative art! Ice-cream van came at the end (the owner is a resident) and gave out free ice-creams. Community PCO came and chatted to parents.

**Quotes/comments: (Adults)** "This is great. This is what it should be like all the time". "I played out on the street all the time when I was a kid. That's just what we did." "We used to disappear for hours without watches" "What's really nice is seeing the mix of ages – older kids playing with the younger ones". "I didn't realise there were so many children on the street!" **(Children)** 6-year-old girl: "No-one's allowed in this road – only us! Only people are allowed on the road", her friend: "There's no cars!" Year 6 girls: "Normally we can't do it [play out] because we might get run over by a car", "really fun" "- and worth it!" "[the best thing about playing out is] if you work together doing something". "I love playing out! I don't want to go iiiiiiin!"

**Street:** Drake Road, Ashton

**Event date/time:** Monday 14<sup>th</sup> June, 3.30-5.30pm

**Key organiser:** Beccy Young

**Physical features:** Short, flat, wide stretch of road. Semi-detached 1930s houses with driveways, Wide, low pavements.

**Weather:** Sunny/windy

**Parked cars:** Residents were asked to move cars from immediate area.

Street was fairly free of parked cars for the event.

**Number of children present:** 42

**Age range:** 0-11

**Number of adults present:** 20



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<sup>8</sup> Data provided by Bristol City Council

<sup>9</sup> See [www.sustrans.org.uk/DIYstreets](http://www.sustrans.org.uk/DIYstreets)



**Catchment:** Drake Rd, Smyth Rd, Dampier Rd, Ashfield Rd

**Activities:** Scooting, cycling, skateboarding, chalking, football, imaginative play in 2s and 3s, trail-making, filling drains with stones...

**Background:** The mother who initiated the event wanted her 5-year-old daughter to play out, but no other young children played on the street. However, there is a long-term culture of playing out on Drake Road and older children from a few families still play out. The majority of residents have lived on the street for a long time – many for more than one generation. The street could lend itself to play very well, with the support of residents, as it is relatively quiet and spacious. There was little overt support for the event and one letter from a resident strongly objecting to the idea (see appendix B). Becky was concerned before the event that turnout would be low. The nearest park is Greville Smyth Park, which involves crossing 2 busy primary roads.

**Other observations:** Residents of all ages came out on the street, including some older residents who remembered playing out themselves. Many commented that they were surprised by the number of children living on the street and nearby. Children from different schools met and played together and families who didn't often socialise on the street came out and talked with neighbours. Stewarding was fairly relaxed, with just one incident of a van needing to get access to the street during the event causing some disruption to play.

**Quotes and comments: (Adults)** "I want to do this on my street", "I used to play on this street when I was a kid – just being naughty really!" "This is great but I couldn't normally let my daughter out as it's too dangerous with the traffic" "I don't think [my granddaughter] goes out at all. Today is lovely but she might want to run out tomorrow and she can't" "We had a slag-heap at the top. We used to go and play on that" One mother talked about how they used to make up games using the physical street features, e.g. paving slabs and lamp posts "[This is] a fantastic idea. Children have the freedom just to be outside and also it brings the community together", "I was always the cowboy or the sheriff – most of the girls were indians!" **(Children)** "no time to explain – bye – I'm off!", "this is the only day we can do it", "follow the snake..."

**Street:** Eldon Terrace, Windmill Hill.

**Event date/time:** Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> June, 3.30-6pm

**Key organisers:** Kim Lawrence and Helen Adshead

**Physical features:** Long, winding, narrow street with steep slope at one end.

**Weather:** Very hot and sunny

**Parked cars:** Residents were asked to move cars. Street virtually empty of parked cars. One resident asked to drive out during the event.

**Number of children present:** 50

**Age range:** 0-16



**Number of adults present:** 30

**Catchment:** Eldon Ter, Mendip Road, Porlock Road

**Activities:** Water fights, paddling pools, hula-hooping, skipping, mini-basketball, cycling, scooting and freewheeling, football, martial arts, catch.

**Background:** Two separate residents had heard about the project and contacted us about being involved. An email group of interested residents already existed and they had held street parties previously. Although many families with children live on the street, street play is made virtually impossible by 'rat-running' coupled with narrow pavements and parked cars. The nearest park is Victoria Park, which involves crossing Windmill Hill – a major rat-run with traffic speeds regularly well over 20mph.

**Other observations:** Whole families came out and sat on their front steps or on the pavement to enjoy being in the street. Activity was spread out along the whole length of the street and the event felt very 'natural' – as it might be if the street were permanently free of cars – rather than being 'an event'. Many children stripped naked (seeing street as extension of home environment?). The stewarding was extremely relaxed as there were virtually no cars trying to enter or leave the road during the event.

**Quotes/comments: (Adults)** "Can we do this every week?" "Let's all bring food out next time!" "Do we need to let the cars back in?" "a little bit of inconvenience for the motorist is a small price to pay for the kids to be able to come out and play en masse" "we used to collect little silver discs and melt them down to make silver. There was a rumour they came from the dust van"

**Street:** Leighton Road, Southville.

**Event date/time:** Friday 18<sup>th</sup> June, 3.30-5.30pm

**Key organisers:** Lucy Fiddick and Cindy Travis

**Physical features:** Long, terraced street on a fairly steep slope.

**Weather:** Hot and sunny

**Parked cars:** Residents were not asked to move cars. Both sides of the street were lined with parked cars.

**Number of children present:** 60-70

**Age range:** 0-16

**Number of adults present:** 40

**Catchment:** Leighton Rd, Hamilton Rd, Beasley Rd, Stackpool Rd, Raleigh Rd.

**Activities:** Football, 'freewheeling' and rolling downhill, chalking body outlines, water fights.



**Background:** There was very strong support for the event from residents as a large number of families live on the street and there is already a fairly good 'playing out' culture (on the pavements) and sense of neighbourliness. Several parents on the street already had clear views about the importance of street play and allowed older children to play on the pavements. During the heavy snow the road was inaccessible to cars and several residents commented on

how nice it was that the children had temporarily been able to play out. The residents were planning their first street party for the following September and had begun holding residents' meetings. However, we also received the highest level of objection from this street (3 letters/emails) and some residents seemed particularly determined to retain car access to the street during the event. Those organising the event attributed this to there being a lot of anxiety about car parking and access to the street, and also to residents without young children feeling marginalised. The nearest park is Dame Emily Park, which involves crossing 3 roads.

**Observations:** There was an extremely high turnout on the day. Many residents (even those without young children and some who had been unsure about the idea) came out with cups of tea to chat with their neighbours. Activity was spread along the whole street, with adults mostly remaining in small groups near their own houses. Children loved being able to use the road itself, and especially the hill, and made the most of the space. The event was by far the most difficult for those stewarding as a relatively high number of residents insisted on driving in and out during the event and some were confrontational. However, this did not pose any danger or affect the enjoyment of those in the street. Quite a high number of drivers wanting to drive through had to be re-directed by stewards.

**Quotes and comments: (Adults)** "My son will come in this evening and say, "this is the best day of my life". Many adults commented on how great it was to see the children playing out and to have a chance to chat to their neighbours.

**Street:** Crowther Street & Parker Street,  
Chessels, Bedminster

**Event date/time:** Monday 21<sup>st</sup> June,  
3.30-5.30pm

**Key organiser:** Alison Fields

**Physical features:** 'T' consisting of short  
connecting road with small cul-de-sac.

**Weather:** Hot and sunny

**Parked cars:** Residents were asked to  
move cars. Street was fairly empty of parked  
cars.

**Number of children present:** 25

**Age range:** 0-9

**Number of adults present:** 15

**Catchment:** Crowther St, Parker St, Agate St, South St, Pearl St.

**Activities:** Football, chalking body outlines, colouring-in cobblestones, food-sharing



**Background:** One mother led on the organisation of the event; although neighbours were supportive about the idea she found it difficult to get people to commit to helping on the day, so we put her in touch with other parents from neighbouring streets who had either contacted us, or who we knew from the local community. There are around 7 families with children in the two streets, but although traffic volume and speed is low there is not a culture of playing out. Parents said this was partly because other children didn't play out, and partly because of



worries about cars pulling out or turning in without looking. The nearest park is South Street Park, which involves crossing a busy primary road.

**Other observations:** This was one of the smallest and most relaxed of the 6 events. The physical space was small and the children were mostly fairly young (under 7). Neighbours brought out food to share and it had the feel of a low-key street party, where the adults mostly congregated together around a front porch while the children played on the street nearby. Some older residents came out into their front gardens to watch and chat to neighbours. Only one resident drove in to park during the event. No other cars had to be re-directed.

**Quotes and comments:** One older resident talked about how all the parents used to share responsibility for the children when her children were younger, and children would play out until dinner time, when they might all go to eat in one house. Several people commented that it might be possible to create a regular 'play street' in the cul-de-sac, with rota of parents supervising / looking out for cars.

**Street:** Morley Road, Southville.

**Event date/time:** Friday 25<sup>th</sup> June,  
3.30-5.30pm

**Key organiser:** Phaedra Mawle

**Physical features:** Very narrow 'back' road,  
narrow pavement, adjacent to park.

**Weather:** Hot and sunny

**Parked cars:** Residents were asked to move cars.

Street was fairly empty of parked cars.

**Number of children present:** 15

**Age range:** 0-8

**Number of adults present:** 10

**Catchment:** Morley Road, Kingston Road

**Activities:** Cycling, chalking, splashing in puddle, scooting.



**Background:** Although the entrance to Dame Emily Park is actually on Morley Road, the parent who led on this event felt that she would like her children (6 and 4) to be able to play on the street as they were too young to independently visit the park. She also said she would like for the street to one day be a safe route to the park. Barriers to this were cars parking on the pavement, traffic speed and lack of a playing out culture. We felt this was a valid reason to include the street in the project. Again, although there was tacit support from neighbours, recruiting stewards proved difficult (partly due to people being away) and friends were recruited from further afield and from other Playing Out streets.

**Other observations:** Like Crowther Street, this had a very relaxed and 'natural' feel – less of an event than a chance for residents to come out of their houses and hang around on the pavement while children played.



**Quotes and comments: (Adults)** “It’s just so nice to see the street without being full of parked cars. It feels completely different”.

## Outcomes / Evaluation

### Some post-event comments from organisers

“Thanks again for today....I (and all the children!) really enjoyed it” (Phaedra, Morley Road).

“It's brill! You're amazing! It's brought nothing but joy and unity to our community. Thank you so so much!” (Jessie, Leighton Rd)

“One of the neighbours was about to sell house and move but decided to stay after the event!” (Resident, Leighton Road)

“I felt on real high afterwards. I had a sense of personal achievement, and Tom [7] was very proud of me!” (Lucy, Leighton Road)

“I just wanted to thank everyone for helping today! I thought it was a great success and I really appreciate you all donating you time to help” (Alison, Crowther Street)

“Seems like the Windmill Hill event was a great success. Thanks for your efforts!” (Nancy, Eldon Terrace)

“Thank you so much for all the help and enthusiasm you gave towards our Playing Out afternoon on Eldon Terrace. Everyone seemed to really enjoy it. We had lots of people saying 'lets do this every month' and several saying 'lets do this once a week'. (Helen, Eldon Terrace).

“It was really positive - it encouraged participation from fathers, it got families on the street working together, it really empowered the children and made them proud. It made me feel hopeful about building a community around the children in our street” (Phaedra, Morley Rd)

## Evaluation of the project in relation to our aims and objectives

### **Modelling an alternative use of street space as play space**

This was more or less a given – once the streets were closed to cars (and in some cases free of parked cars) both children and adults immediately began ‘claiming’ the space – bringing out chairs and tables, toys, sitting and standing and playing in the road. As with street parties, there was an overall sense of liberation and excitement amongst residents of all ages at being able to simply ‘be’ in their own street.’ The overwhelming sense from the children was one of immediate joy and freedom at being given the chance to play in the street.

“Now I want to organise a street party – I want to green up the street and make it a green route through to the park. Ideally I would like to move parking off the street and put play equipment in the street!” (Phaedra, Morley Rd)

### **Giving children a chance to experience their street as play space and make new friends.**

In post-event interviews, all the organisers said their own children had enjoyed the event, and almost all had met other children on the street they had not known before. One girl now plays out regularly with other children on the street. Two mothers also said their children had more sense of pride and ownership in their street since the event. Several parents commented that their children had made new friends – some becoming regular playmates following the event:

“Maisy now says: ‘I can play whenever I want with [she names about 7 kids on the street] can’t I?’” (Beccy, Drake Road).

### **Creating an opportunity for parents to meet and talk about their hopes and fears around allowing children to play out independently / support each other to increase opportunities for playing out.**

We did actively engage parents and other adults in talking about their feelings about street play, although this was not really necessary as the main topics of conversation anyway were remembering playing out as children, the contrast between the event and ‘normal life’, and the barriers to street play – especially traffic.

Helen (Eldon Terrace) said: “I can now envisage a day when we have a curfew on cars every day after school. We’ve just let cars take over. If kids were playing out regularly people would get used to it”.

### **Assessing desire and demand for street play.**

The turnout and general enthusiasm for the events strongly supported our belief that there is widespread desire for street play amongst both adults and children. Many people said things along the lines of “wouldn’t it be great if the street was always like this”. Several parents, including the street organisers, said they wanted their children to play out more, and that their children would also like to play out more than they did.

## **Identifying the main obstacles and enabling factors for playing out.**

Traffic speed was by far the most common reason given for not letting children play out. Other reasons were, *"no other children [of their age] play out"*, *"I think some of the neighbours would disapprove"*, *"I know it sounds silly, but I'm worried that if I'm not watching my kids they will be taken"*. We didn't explicitly ask parents what changes would need to take place for street play to be possible or permissible, but the overall impression we got from talking to and overhearing conversations was that the three main enabling factors would be:

1. Much slower traffic speeds
2. Other children playing out
3. Support from neighbours and other parents

As for children's own barriers to playing out the only reasons given, other than lack of permission, was fear of traffic and that there was no-one else to play with.

As traffic was removed from all the streets involved, it was difficult to assess how the physical factors of different streets would lend themselves to play. However, parents from the normally 'quieter' streets were perhaps more open to the idea of street play becoming an everyday reality, suggesting that the traffic factor was more important than 'safety in numbers'.

Other physical differences between streets – the number of parked cars, street length, width and topography – did not have any obvious effect on children's ability or willingness to play. In fact, we observed that children easily and creatively adapted and responded to the physical environment, for example rolling down hills or making games with cobblestones. On Leighton Road, where there were almost as many cars parked as on a normal day, children played between and around them without seeming bothered by them. Even cars coming slowly in or out of the street only temporarily stopped play – children were generally quick to move out of the way and then immediately return to their activity. Only a small number of residents over all six streets expressed any worry about damage to their vehicles.

## **Transferring skills for organising street play events.**

All the 'street organisers' said afterwards that they would have been unlikely to do the event without our support, but that having done it once they would consider doing it again on their own.

Some had past experience of organising street parties or other community events. All were computer literate and had good communication skills. However, most had no previous experience of involving their own neighbours in organising an event, or in recruiting and managing volunteers from their own neighbourhood. 2 of the organisers said the aspect of their role that most worried them, and which they most appreciated having help with, was fielding objections from neighbours. We responded to 3 letters of complaint (see appendix B) and provided organisers with a list of possible questions and responses (see appendix A), and a list of '10 good reasons for playing out', but much of the task of 'talking up' the project was left to them.

Other skills ‘transferred’ were:

- Applying for road closures (due to time pressures, we did the paperwork for this, but the organisers were aware of the process)
- Door-knocking
- Distribution of publicity
- Project management
- Organising street meetings
- Recruiting and managing volunteers
- Doing a risk-assessment

In post-event interviews, organisers commented that the event had been made very easy and do-able through having the practical and moral support we provided, and that they had gained confidence through being involved. One organiser described the project as “Really achievable; smart, specific, contained, structured”. We have conducted interviews with 5 of the 6 street organisers (including 2 from Eldon Terrace) – one organiser completed a questionnaire by email. A more detailed summary of their responses is below (appendix C).

### **Building neighbourliness and involving residents of all ages.**

Older residents (not parents of young children) were involved to a greater or lesser extent in 5 of the 6 events (Morley Road being the exception). In Greville Road and Drake Road, older people helped to steward, and in all the other streets, they participated by just being out in the street, observing children playing, talking to neighbours, providing refreshments and reminiscing about their own childhood.

At all the events, sign-up sheets for joining a neighbourhood email list were made available. There was a strong sense of neighbourliness at all the events, with adults making the most of the opportunity to meet and talk to their neighbours. There was talk at all of the events about ‘what to do next’ to build on the community spirit – residents of Eldon Terrace and Crowther Street both expressed desire for a street party. One Leighton Road resident said that the event had been especially good for bringing together neighbours who previously hadn’t had much to do with each other and since the event she had definitely noticed an increase in interaction between neighbours. Phaedra (Morley Road organiser) said one neighbour had come up to her to say, “Thank you – this is really great. I’m meeting people on the street I’ve never met before”.

### **Disseminating the idea of Playing Out locally and feeding into wider national and international dialogue about street play.**

The events had local visibility through the posters and word of mouth, as well as two articles in ‘The Pigeon’ newsletter (April and May 2010).

We employed a press officer for 2 days to promote the story in the local and national press. Bristol Evening Post devoted a whole page to an article on the project entitled ‘Are You



Playing Out?’<sup>10</sup>. Bristol City Council’s ‘Go Places to Play’ website has a piece on the project <sup>11</sup> and Bristol’s ‘Our City’ magazine is planning to include the project in its autumn edition.

There has also been interest from some national publications, two of which are planning to feature the project in the autumn.

### **Challenging the assumption that residential streets are simply ‘roads’ where cars take precedence over people.**

Whilst it is hard to evaluate the success of this aim, simply doing the events raises questions about the function of residential streets and demonstrates the benefits of reducing car dominance. After the event, one resident commented that it had made her street feel “more welcoming, like home”, and many people at the events talked about how they would like their streets to be safer, more social and less car-dominated. Information about the project was handed out to car drivers who were redirected as a result of the road closure, explaining the importance of outdoor/street play.

### **Inspiring others to hold Playing Out events on their own streets.**

So far two residents of streets not involved in the project have contacted us with an interest in doing Playing Out events. Many more people have informally expressed an interest in the project. Several street parties in the local area this summer happened partly as a result of talking to us about the project, combined with support from Streets Alive.

### **Through creating a website, providing longer-term support to those wanting to do Playing Out events.**

Our website [www.playingout.net](http://www.playingout.net) will go live at the end of September 2010 and will provide practical advice and inspiration (hopefully!) for anyone interested in organising an event or enabling street play in their neighbourhood.

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<sup>10</sup> Evening Post, Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2010, [www.thisisbristol.co.uk/news/PLAYING/article-2336631-detail/article.html](http://www.thisisbristol.co.uk/news/PLAYING/article-2336631-detail/article.html)

<sup>11</sup> [www.goplacesto play.org.uk/news-articles/10-bristol%E2%80%99s-children-discover-the-fun-of-street-play](http://www.goplacesto play.org.uk/news-articles/10-bristol%E2%80%99s-children-discover-the-fun-of-street-play)

## Financial Report

<b>Funding:</b>		
Active Bristol/Quartet		£2780
Sparkplugs		£1000
Volunteer time	Approx. 440 hours	In kind
<b>TOTAL FUNDING</b>		<b>£3780</b>
<b>Project costs:</b>		
Staff time	Project management	£2376
	Website	£400
	Film	£400
	Press officer	£200
Publicity/printing		£90
Signage and safety equipment		£133.69
Website hosting and domain name (2 years)		£65.39
Snacks/drinks for events		£25
Office overheads		£74.97
<b>TOTAL COSTS:</b>		<b>£3765.05</b>
(Underspend)	Rollover to future events	(£14.95)

## Conclusions and learning

There is widespread desire amongst both adults and children for street play to be a more normal part of daily life. There was a clear consensus amongst those who came to the events that playing in the street is ‘a good thing’ and ‘what it should be like’. However, there are still major barriers, which need to be faced if the majority of parents are going to allow their children to ‘play out’.

Whilst the recent Playday survey<sup>12</sup> found an “overwhelming recognition of the benefits of children playing outside for children *and* their local communities”, it also starkly illustrates the reasons why children no longer play out. Of adults surveyed:

- 47% of adults and 48% of 7-10 year olds think it is unsafe for children to play outside without an adult.
- 55% of parents worry that their children making noise outside might upset the neighbours
- 40% of parents are worried that chalking on the pavement would upset the neighbours
- Over a quarter of adults (26%) believe that children commonly face the threat of being followed or abducted by strangers when playing outside where they live
- 63% of parents think the biggest threat that children face when playing is road accidents

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<sup>12</sup> Playday 2010 opinion poll summary

As for children themselves, 71% worried about being followed or taken by strangers where they live, compared to 64% who worried about traffic. In reality a child is many times more likely to be killed by a car than abducted by a stranger, but these results suggest that the impact of *perceived* dangers on children's freedom could be even stronger than that of actual dangers.

Our subjective experience from the Playing Out events is that the vast majority of adults support the idea of children playing in the street under safe and supervised conditions, and many strongly believe in the right of children to play out, but there is also doubt amongst many parents about the wisdom of allowing children to play on the street under normal circumstances, due to a combination of the reasons given above. A very small minority (we received 3 letters of objection - see appendix B) were completely opposed to the idea of the Playing Out events themselves.

Overall, it seems as though the idea of informal, neighbour-led, semi-supervised street play 'events' is a sensible way to gradually re-introduce the concept of street play in places where it has ceased to be part of the culture. These events help parents build confidence and could act as a starting point for tackling some of the barriers to street play. Through organising regular events, residents might even begin to look at ways to permanently make their street or neighbourhood more child-friendly - for example embarking on a 'DIY street' project to slow traffic and make their street more playable.

Bristol City Council has been very supportive of this project, both in terms of funding (Active Bristol and Sparkplugs) and on a practical level. The traffic management team in particular seem to 'get it' and were very helpful with organising the road closures. There are signs that the government is looking to make the road closure process easier for community events, and we are currently talking with the council to find ways to make Playing Out easier and more replicable.

The Greater Bedminster area has recently become one of two pilot 20mph areas in Bristol. The limit is non-enforceable and relies solely on signage and driver compliance. Playing Out and other grassroots projects and community events will play an important part in demonstrating the desire amongst local people of all ages for safer, liveable and 'playable' streets. Reducing traffic speeds through both 'hard' and 'soft' measures is essential to achieving this.

We have recently won funding to facilitate street play in the Clifton, Cabot and Clifton East Neighbourhood Partnership area of Bristol and are in the process of planning this next stage of the project.

**Alice Ferguson and Amy Rose, September 2010.**

[www.playingout.net](http://www.playingout.net)