

Bristol's 'Temporary Play Street Order' Trial September 2011-12



Report by Playing Out CIC, in partnership with Bristol City Council,
NHS Bristol and Streets Alive. Sept 2012.



ACTIVE
Bristol



Streets Alive

Introduction

The Temporary Play Street Order (TPSO) trial was developed by Bristol City Council, with support from NHS Bristol and Streets Alive, in response to the grassroots Playing Out project, which promotes resident-led, short, stewarded street play sessions.

“Playing Out is a very obvious and important way of building a community in your street. Not everyone can get to residents’ meetings or give a great deal of time to dealing with planning impacts, traffic changes, or creating ways of improving the appearance or functioning of the street. However all these things are more likely to be happening if people can actually see activities where people get together.

Street parties are great, but Playing Out takes this further. It is a regular happening, which needs some co-operation from everyone and participation by as many as possible. It is child-centred, providing for the long-ignored need for street play, so makes children feel valued by the community. It also gives the adults who are helping and stewarding the opportunity for a chat and getting to know each other. All in all a very positive community building activity, led by residents, and focused on children who are to be the future community”. Diane Jones, resident steward.

Timeline

June 2009	1 st one-off ‘Playing Out’ session, Greville Rd, Southville, using street party application developed by BCC/Streets Alive
June 2010	Playing Out ‘pilot’ on 6 Bristol streets Jon Rogers (Cabinet member for Health) visits street
October 2010	Playing Out website launched as free resource for residents
April/May 2011	Residents in Bishopston and Hotwells request permission for repeat closures for Playing Out. Discover limit of 3 ‘street parties’ per year
May 2011	Alice Ferguson (Playing Out) and Claire Lowman (Active Bristol) meet traffic officers to discuss possibility of repeat closures.
June 2011	Jon Rogers convenes meeting of Cabinet members, officers from CYPS, Health and Highways, Playing Out and Streets Alive. Cabinet approves idea of 1 year trial for regular (weekly) road closures for play, using existing street party procedure.
August 2011	New procedure announced at Playday. Radio 4 ‘PM’ programme covers story and reports from a Playing Out session.
Sept 2011	‘Temporary Play Street Order’ procedure and application form finalised and launched by BCC, with input from Streets Alive and Playing Out
Sept 2011- Jul 2012	Playing Out provides support, advice and materials (including road closure kits) to streets interested in applying for TPSO (over 50 enquiries)
Dec 2011	First streets begin regular Playing Out sessions
June 2012	Representatives from Playing Out, BCC and Bristol University meet with

	Play England, London Play, Dept for Health and Dept for Transport to discuss possible national roll-out of TPSO / Play Streets.
	Flick Rae, LGA, gives support to idea of national roll-out.
June-July 2012	Playing Out features on Woman's Hour, The Guardian, BBC Breakfast news etc. and receives over 100 enquiries for advice on TPSO / Playing Out from around 50 different local authority areas
July 2012	16 'Temporary Play Streets' established across Bristol
August-Sept 2012	BCC and Playing Out receive numerous enquiries about the TPSO from individuals and local authorities across the UK.

Publicity and communication

Playing Out has been worked closely with the communications team at BCC to coordinate local and national publicity. Coverage between August 2011 and June 2012 includes:

Radio 4 'PM' programme feature on Playday 2011
Bristol Evening Post

(<http://www.thisisbristol.co.uk/Making-streets-safe-children-play/story-13067792-detail/story.html>)

Heart FM and Radio Bristol features
Bristol 24/7

(<http://www.bristol247.com/2011/09/16/back-to-good-old-days-as-bristol-residents-reclaim-streets-for-children-17239/>)

ITV West feature <http://www.itv.com/westcountry-east/decline-in-outside-play66687/>.

Green Parent magazine

Juno magazine

BCC 'Our City' magazine

Various Oxford media, including BBC Oxford (tv and radio)

BBC Radio Bristol feature

R4 Woman's Hour feature

The Guardian

BBC Breakfast and lunchtime news

BBC Radio 5 Live

Parentdish website article

Since June 2012, Playing Out has received 15 further media enquiries, including BBC Points West, The One Show, ITV Daybreak, BBC Newsround and The Big Issue.

In addition, Playing Out has actively communicated the scheme through its networks and social media outlets, with nearly 500 Facebook group members and 465 Twitter followers, including many influential local and national organisations.



Playing Out has further promoted the scheme in Bristol through creative projects and local events, such as creating and hosting a touring exhibition at the Southbank Arts Trail and Big Green Week:



Uptake and impact in Bristol

Playing Out has received over 50 email/phone enquiries from Bristol residents in response to TPSO publicity, as well as much interest at public events such as Big Green Week and the Southbank Arts Trail.

Enquiries mostly constitute requests for further information and advice, as well as practical help e.g. fielding objections, sourcing equipment, publicity, organising stewards, practicalities around car access.

Enquiries received from the following neighbourhoods: Southville, Bedminster, Ashton, Hotwells, Windmill Hill, Bishopston, Redland, Horfield, Ashley Down, Fishponds, Eastville, Whitehall, St Werburgh's, Montpelier, Totterdown, Knowle, Hartcliffe, Stockwood

As well as providing tailored and on-site support for individual street organisers, Playing Out has held workshops for residents in Bedminster and St Werburgh's, providing in-depth training to 10 residents and 2 BCC 'Learning Communities' officers.



Number of streets

A total of 17 applications have been made (compared to a target of 10), following approximately 25 enquiries to council officers. Most streets have opted for a monthly closure, with 2 applying for a weekly closure. A total of 76 sessions will have been held by end July 2012, with a further 105 planned. Several other streets have begun the process of meeting with neighbours and applications are pending.

Number of individuals benefitted

Around 500 children and 200 adults are regularly present/actively involved (based on observation by Playing Out and street organisers)



Quotes from residents/organisers

"It's great to see relaxed parents and energetic children in a street environment, not something we get to see every day" Resident, Clift Rd

"I think the playing out is fantastic". Resident, Bartlett's Rd

"The kids love it - and really look forward to it " Parent, Leighton Rd

"All in all a very positive community building activity, led by residents, and focused on children who are to be the future community". Retired resident, Greville Rd

"As time has gone on, it's become almost a self-contained thing, with very little organisation needed as people pass the responsibility for stewarding around". Resident organiser, Birch Rd

"Issues from last year have been ironed out via changes to application process which I believe is now more streamlined." Resident organiser, Monk Rd

"The weather wasn't always kind in April, May and June but it had to be really pelting down for the children to give up and go indoors." Resident organiser, Hawthorne St

Support

From residents:

Resident organisers have all reported either increased or consistent levels of support from other residents, including non-parents and older residents, during the trial period.

Example comments from organisers:

"I had an email quite early on from a couple whose children who had grown up and moved home and they were like it's a great idea we want to be fully supportive, we will make sure on a Friday we don't park here we will park somewhere else".

"I mean there is a very old man, I have seen him they live at the top and we said don't worry we will make sure you can drive through and clear the road, and he was like no no, and he got off his transport taxi and walked the rest of the way".

"I have spoken to a couple a bit further up there and they have a daughter who is a bit older, and they were saying I wish we had that when our daughter was a girl, and they really support it".

From Bristol:

Deputy Leader Jon Rogers has strongly supported the scheme, as well as Executive Members and senior officers in CYPS, Neighbourhoods and Transport.

Bristol's Director of Public Health Hugh Annett has also given his backing for the project.

Kerry McCarthy MP for Bristol East has praised the scheme and offered support.

Outside Bristol:

Flick Rae of the Local Government Association, has given her support to the scheme saying, *"I think this is a wonderful initiative and I will be doing all I can to promote it!"*

Play England has praised the scheme and are currently working in partnership with Playing Out to develop a national street play programme based on the Bristol model.

Dept. for Health and Dept. for Transport officials have responded positively to the idea and offered support to pursue national roll-out.

Selection of public response to national publicity:

I wanted to write to share my experience, but also to congratulate you on getting on with this as a simple and effective way to make a huge difference to children and families in urban areas.

I agree that things need to change and the way we use our streets is part of that. I would hope that your lead will inspire many to follow.

Brilliant, thank you for this! Absolutely going to use your stuff. I live on a relatively quiet street. Older children play out already, so I think it'll be a roaring success.

I am so glad you are doing this and wish you every success.

Hello...Just come across your fabulous site...what a fantastic but simple idea...Wish you all the success in the world

This is genius! - Roger Geffen, Campaigns & Policy Director, CTC

This is basically just to say congratulations on an amazing project. This is what the world needs today. We've all become too afraid to let our kids out and about and trust each other this solves the problem and also brings back that old community spirit for both young and old.

I read your article in the Guardian yesterday and it has spurred me into action, THANK YOU!

I think your idea is fantastic! I am a Landscape Architect and interested in ideas like 'Shared Space' and making cities more friendly to people on foot. This is one of the best ideas I've seen in a long time. It should be part of every city.

Evaluation

An evaluation study conducted by Bristol University's PEACH project, in collaboration with Playing Out, measured children's physical activity levels during sessions on 2 streets, showing a significant increase (compared to baseline) in both time outdoors and physical activity levels during Playing Out sessions. Summary of findings attached. Full academic paper is to be published later this year. Other outcomes were assessed through questionnaires and interviews with residents, based on the following questions:

Apart from increased activity, are there any extra benefits to children?

"it's been invaluable for him to be able to learn to ride a bike".

"having a real teenage child mix I think it a real positive I think, like older brothers and sisters"

"If they want to just run up and down the road for an hour they can do, or if they want to get the chalk out on the road, you know they are just never allowed to do that normally. I think it's a real freedom for them, to do things which you know they never otherwise get to do"

"It's a chance for my kids to have a bit of extra space that they don't get because of the makeup of the houses round here. So they get to play in a way which they wouldn't do and even wouldn't do in the park necessarily, and it's a really lovely opportunity to meet neighbours and make friends."

Any increase in neighbour interaction?

"Yes – Mostly children getting together but also more parents chatting. It has sparked off discussions about other aspects of living in our road – street parties, street furniture, road safety etc."

"There was a guy who came out at one point who didn't know what was happening, and didn't quite understand but he immediately got nostalgic about how he had lived there all his life and it had been exactly like this when he was a kid and he happened to bump into someone he hadn't seen for 20 years who only lived round the corner".

Any increase in neighbour trust?

"I think one of my special moments was last week when I was stewarding up the top of the road and left Ellie (14 months) to amble around. My close neighbour came up to me with her in her arms and said "I found her in my kitchen!". For me that spoke volumes about trust and community"

Any impact on road safety awareness?

"I thought is she going to think the roads a play area now, but it hasn't happened at all. If anything it's kind of heightened her awareness of road safety"

"My initial concern of making them think oh my god that the road, I don't want them to see the road as a play area when it's not play out, it's had the reverse affect it has actually made them more aware that cars do come up and down the road"

Any increased use of street for other purposes?

"Definitely – more children playing in front gardens and on the pavement"

Do residents feel more confident and engaged? *"Yes" "I think so"*

Any interest in further action/activity (e.g. towards traffic calming)?

"No action as yet, but lots of discussion! We are hoping to take some ideas forward once we've identified sources to apply for funding"

(Quotes taken from Bristol University MSc study based on interviews with parents, due to be completed by September 2012).

National impact

Playing Out's Director, together with Tim Gill (Rethinking Childhood) and Dr Angie Page (Bristol University), met with senior Dept. of Health Officials in July 2011 to discuss the possibility of government support for the scheme, including legislative change at national level. The idea of a ministerial visit to Bristol was proposed by the officials, to see the TPSO in action and how it might be rolled out nationally. A further meeting was coordinated by Play England in June 2012, attended by both DH and DfT as well as representatives from several London councils. Cllr Jon Rogers and Dr Angie Page (UOB) went with Alice Ferguson (Playing Out) to present the 'Bristol model' (Playing Out and TPSO), which was well received.

Further to this, Playing Out is working with Play England and London Play on a partnership proposal to accelerate impact of the scheme across the UK, showcasing Bristol as a 'Street Play Demonstration City'.

Since April 2012, Playing Out has fielded enquiries (via email, Facebook and Twitter) from around 200 individuals, Local Authorities and other organisations across 40-50 different local authority areas, asking for information and support to replicate the TPSO in their area.

Bristol City Council has received, "numerous enquiries from various Authorities including Brighton, Stockport, Telford, and Hackney. Enquiries have been more frequent since the publication of a recent article in The Guardian. Enquiries are mainly about which legislation we use for the closure Order, as well as the differences between the TPSO and normal street party or event road closure applications. Other enquiries are about costs, traffic management, objection procedure, etc."

Local campaigns have taken off in Leeds, Hackney, Reading, Worthing and Brighton, with councilors and residents lobbying local authorities to follow Bristol's lead in allowing regular road closures for play. Hackney and Swansea Councils both announced a trial temporary play street scheme in September 2012.

In September 2012, Playing Out is meeting with the National Heart Forum to discuss ways to clarify the legal framework and inclusion of the project on the website www.healthyplaces.org.uk

Issues and considerations

Objections

Officers decided early on that, during the trial period, permission would only be given to streets where there were no unresolved objections. This is a departure from the existing street party policy, where objections are addressed but unlikely to prevent permission being granted where the majority of people are in favour.

During the trial, one street in Bristol was refused permission due to unassailable objections (some anonymous) from 3-4 residents, despite 15 letters of support and several attempts by residents to engage with the objectors and address their concerns.

5 individual objections relating to 5 other streets were resolved by BCC officers or by residents and permission was granted.

A BCC Network Management officer said, "This application and refusal has prompted further discussion about how to make the application process fair for both applicants and objectors. I feel that the current application conditions are both easy and flexible for applicants, and also strong enough to prevent anyone

in disfavour of an application being refused a say in what happens on the street. Naturally there will be disappointment and frustration from those in favour if an application is refused, but the fact that this has only occurred once so far seems to indicate that the scheme has been generally well received and/or that objections can normally be dealt with by organisers/BCC.”

The question of what constitutes a ‘reasonable’ objection remains unclear, as residents are not prevented from having vehicle access to their street and objections relate to other concerns such as: traffic problems, too few participants, location, timing, weather, inconvenience of traffic route, potential damage to vehicles, disagreement with Playing Out principle, attendance from children on other streets, chalk marks, safety of children, difficulty of assigning liability for damage.

Stewarding

The aspect that residents found most challenging was organising a stewarding rota, although this was more of an issue for those doing a weekly, rather than a monthly closure.

Some planned sessions were cancelled due to lack of available stewards, particularly during school holidays or bad weather, but the vast majority of planned sessions went ahead.

There are signs that this may be a ‘teething’ problem and that as support builds on the street more people are willing to steward and a routine is easier to maintain. It may also suggest that busier roads, which require higher stewarding levels, are less suited to weekly closure than quieter roads and cul-de-sacs. Some streets doing a regular closure have found it more sustainable to do shorter sessions (e.g. 4-5pm) with one stewarding ‘shift’.

Weather

Some sessions have been cancelled due to particularly bad weather, especially during the winter and the very wet early summer. This is mainly due to adults being reluctant to stand out in bad weather, rather than children being unwilling to play out! It does raise some questions about the slight rigidity of this model, only allowing residents to close streets on pre-designated days. For those doing a monthly closure, this means waiting a whole month before being able to do it again.

Safety

Residents were advised and supported by Playing Out to conduct an informal risk/benefit assessment prior to the first closure. There have been no reported accidents or incidents during the trial.

Liability

The question about liability for potential vehicle or other damage has been raised by a few objectors, although it has not been an issue during the trial. Playing Out has received pro bono legal advice that resident organisers (although likely to have a robust defence if they have followed correct procedure) are likely to be the recipients of any legal claim and should be advised of this risk. Playing Out has further been advised that parental responsibility for children is paramount and should be clearly communicated through guidance and publicity materials to residents. This advice has been incorporated into Playing Out’s ‘manual for organisers’.

Frequency

Initial take up has shown a preference for a monthly closure as providing a good balance between needs of children, consideration for other residents and practicalities of organisation.

However, on the streets with a weekly closure, residents have generally expressed support for this and have welcomed the greater frequency and ‘normality’ of it becoming part of the weekly routine.

Furthermore, some streets holding a monthly closure are planning to reapply at the end of the trial period for a more frequent closure (weekly or fortnightly), demonstrating a build-up of momentum and support on the street.

Conclusion and recommendations

Overall, response to the scheme both within Bristol and beyond has been overwhelmingly positive. It is recommended that Bristol City Council adopts the TPSO as permanent policy from September 2012 and provides support for residents to take up the scheme across the city. A review meeting of the TPSO steering group is recommended to look at any ways in which the scheme could be improved and issues identified in this report overcome.

There is still enormous potential to roll this project out across Bristol, with Playing Out providing advice and extra support to hard to reach communities.

BCC Network Management: “The process is already very simple, and we use legislation which demands very little financially and administratively from the applicant. The only potential cost for the applicant at present is in obtaining traffic management signs/cones/clothing. BCC are open to improving any element of the current procedure for TPSOs”.



Dr Angie Page and Professor Ashley Cooper from the University of Bristol have been using combined GPS Global Positioning System (GPS) and activity monitoring for the past 5 years in Bristol to investigate the contribution of time spent outdoors to health outcomes including physical activity, obesity and well being. They are now extending their use of this technology from observational research (www.bris.ac.uk/enhs/peach) to evaluate environmental interventions such as the 'Playing Out' project.

Unique Bristol based pilot study evaluating Playing Out

66 children aged 2 to 13yrs wore GPS and accelerometers during playing out events on 2 residential streets after school between 4 and 5pm. Parent/carer consent was obtained before children wore the equipment and ethical approval was provided by University of Bristol Ethics Committee. One-to-one 45minute interviews were carried out by a researcher with 11 parents living on the 2 streets.

Preliminary results of the combined accelerometry/GPS data show that:

- Children were outside approximately 70% of the time during the street closure monitoring period
 - This compares to less than 20% usually spent outdoors during this time period on an average school day by Bristol children of a similar age.
- Children spent 30% of their time outside during Playing Out sessions in moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) and another 15% in light activity.
 - This compares to on average 5% of time indoors spent in MVPA during this time of day for children of a similar age.

Preliminary findings from interviews suggest that for those parents interviewed:

- Traffic is the biggest barrier to street play and the Playing Out closures are seen as a way to overcome this to some extent
- Playing Out helps parents resist the pressure to resort to TV viewing after school
- Parents link opportunities for street play with wider initiatives such as 20mph and see these as complementary
- Playing Out has meant greater interaction with other neighbours including those without children
- Parents actively engage with children to make clear that playing in the road is only 'safe' on Playing Out days
- Playing out offers opportunity for children to develop confidence and try out' independence away from direct control of parents and helps parents have the confidence to let them.
- Parents really value the opportunity to give their children the 'freedom of the street' – something they themselves had and feel their own children are denied.

Contacts for further information:

University of Bristol, Dr Angie Page (a.s.page@bris.ac.uk), www.bris.ac.uk/enhs/staff
Playing Out, Alice Ferguson (alice@playingout.net), <http://playingout.net/>