



Survey of 'playing out' streets: Summary and Report

Background

The 'Playing Out' model of resident-led temporary road closures for play originated on one street in Bristol in 2009. To date, over 500 streets across the UK have followed this model, supported by their local councils. As the organisation promoting and supporting the model nationally as part of growing a grassroots movement for children's freedom to play out, we felt this was a good time to find out how it's going for people and see what we can learn about the outcomes and challenges.

This online survey was therefore aimed at anyone directly involved in regular street play sessions and was promoted via social media by email to our network of active residents. 32 questions covered demographic information about adults and children taking part in playing out, as well as asking for people's views on the difference playing out has made to their street.

Response rate and geographical reach

The survey was open from November 2016 to January 2017 and 186 people responded in total, from across 18 different UK towns and cities. Responses came from many different neighbourhoods in Bristol and London, where the model is well established, as well as from Bath, Brighton, Croydon, Derby, Edinburgh, Gloucester, Harpenden, Haywards Heath, Leeds, Lewes, Medway, North Tyneside, Oxford, Reading, Rochdale and Sutton.

As this was about getting a genuine picture of how the playing out model is working on streets around the country, we discounted a small number of responses from people with general views about the idea but no direct experience of the model. Another 22 responses were discounted as having insufficient information to make analysis meaningful. In total, 31 responses were discounted for these reasons and the final analysis used the remaining 155.

Key findings

Gender, age and role of respondents

83% of respondents were female and 17% male.

78.6% of respondents were aged 35 to 54, with 3.9% between 18 and 34 and 16.9% in the 55 to 74 age group.

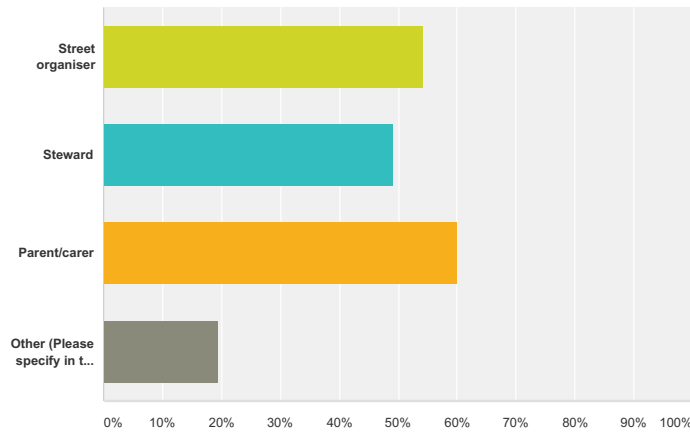
There was an even split between the roles respondents had in playing out on their streets and clearly there are overlaps between these roles: **54% of people said they were a street organiser, 49% a steward and 60% a parent/carer.**

The comments box allowed respondents to describe other roles and these included "*local government lead for the scheme*" and "*I provide gingerbread biscuits and hot and cold drinks for all involving in the playing out*" reflecting the levels of interest and engagement and different ways of participating in playing out. One respondent described their role as "*affected resident*".

42% of respondents said they have been involved on other streets and went on to give examples of this involvement, which included stewarding, leafleting and linking other residents to information.

**Q3 What role do you have in playing out?
Please tick all boxes that apply:**

Answered: 155 Skipped: 0



| Answer Choices | Responses |
|---|-----------|
| Street organiser | 54.19% 84 |
| Steward | 49.03% 76 |
| Parent/carer | 60.00% 93 |
| Other (Please specify in the box below) | 19.35% 30 |
| Total Respondents: 155 | |

Type of streets

66% of respondents' streets have terraced housing, with 25% predominantly semi-detached housing and 9% mixed.

87% have on-street parking on their street and 33% off-street parking.

The majority of streets - 74% - are through roads; 16% are cul-de-sacs and 53% are in 20mph zones

Number, length and frequency of sessions

24% of streets had held more than 24 sessions. 25% had held between 12 and 24 sessions. 29% had had 1-6 sessions, reflecting that they are fairly newly started.

There was an even split in terms of the length of time streets have been playing out, with 18% reporting less than six months, 13% between 6 months and one year, 26% between one and two

years and 21% between two and three years. **22% of streets had held sessions for more than three years.**

The majority of streets are holding monthly playing out sessions, with 7% holding weekly sessions and 9% playing out fortnightly.

7% are no longer doing playing out sessions but this could be a sign of lasting change as comments included, *"we just play out as and when, without formally closing the street."*

What stops it going ahead?

Bad weather and not enough stewards were the main reasons people gave for not going ahead with planned sessions. But other significant comments show that people are often struggling with a lack of interest and support from others as well as juggling the demands of a busy life. For example, *"work/life got in the way"* and *"We did not have enough interest from other families on the street and there are only a relatively small number of families in total."*

How long are people permitted to play out for each time and how long do they actually do it for?

There was only a slight difference in the time frame permission was given for sessions and the actual duration of sessions that took place. 44% of people reported that they had permission to play out for two hours, 25% said their permission was for three hours and 7% said it was one and a half hours

Responses to the question about how long sessions actually ran for showed that **53% ran for two hours**, 19% for three hours and 12% for one and a half hours. This suggests that a minority of sessions are shortened from three to two hours despite permission being for a three-hour period.

Several people explained in the comments section that their pattern varies from summer to winter and they shorten their sessions during the winter months.

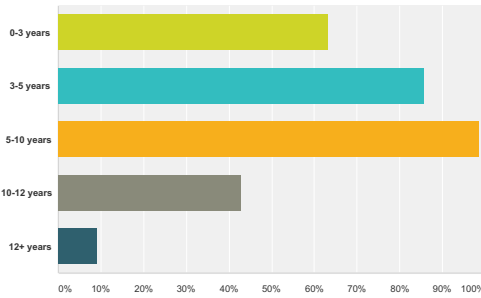
Who is playing out?

55% of people said that **between 10 and 20 children** normally took part in each session and **24%** reported **between 20 and 30 children** at each session. 17% said the figure was usually 10 or fewer.

The next question allowed people to tick a number of different boxes to indicate the spread of ages of children involved. The responses given in the graph below show that **children aged from 0-10 are taking part in sessions on most streets.**

Q18 Roughly what ages are the children who normally take part during playing out sessions? Please tick all boxes that apply:

Answered: 131 Skipped: 24



| Answer Choices | Responses |
|-------------------------------|------------|
| 0-3 years | 63.36% 83 |
| 3-5 years | 85.50% 112 |
| 5-10 years | 98.47% 129 |
| 10-12 years | 42.75% 56 |
| 12+ years | 9.16% 12 |
| Total Respondents: 131 | |

How representative and inclusive are playing out sessions?

People were asked whether their playing out sessions were representative of their street demographic as a whole. **78% of people agreed to some extent that their sessions are representative in terms of age, 79% in terms of ethnicity and 85% in terms of gender.**

However, comments from people who disagreed to some extent that their sessions were inclusive of these groups highlighted in more detail the challenges in some streets:

"The older people/seniors don't come out. Mums much more heavily represented than Dads."

"Hard to get some neighbours involved in assisted housing/flats and young professionals. Still more women than men."

"Mainly white British take part, but some European."

"People without children are generally supportive but don't want to come out."

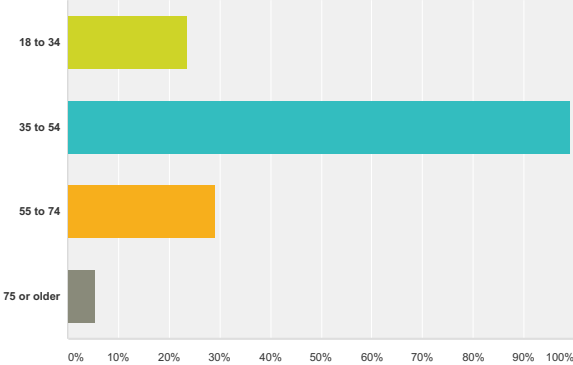
How many adults are present at sessions and what ages are they?

45% reported that between five and ten adults usually took part, with 29% saying the figure was between 10 and 20. 17% of people said that five or fewer adults were present during sessions.

Amongst adults present, the **35 to 54 age group were most heavily represented** and the 75 and older group the least represented.

Q21 Roughly what age are the adults who normally take part during playing out sessions? Please tick all boxes that apply.

Answered: 131 Skipped: 24



| Answer Choices | Responses |
|-------------------------------|------------|
| 18 to 34 | 23.66% 31 |
| 35 to 54 | 99.24% 130 |
| 55 to 74 | 29.01% 38 |
| 75 or older | 5.34% 7 |
| Total Respondents: 131 | |

The impact of playing out sessions for children

The survey asked a number of questions about the impact of playing out on children's physical and social skills and whether it has led to them doing new things.

The majority of people reported that children had learnt or improved physical skills during playing out, including riding a bike (80%), scooting (85%), roller-skating (63%) and skipping (66%).

Many other skills were mentioned in the comments including:

"art and craft: chalk pictures, face painting, costumes"

"balance with circus skill 'toys'"

"street art skills and old rhymes"

"skateboarding, games like hopscotch, hide and seek, building chains of vehicles, inventing new rules like chalking and scootering at the same time."

"physical confidence and balance on stilts"

The vast majority of respondents said that children had learnt or improved social skills during playing out sessions, including interacting with other children (88%), learning about road safety, (56%) and interacting with adults (83%).

Other social skills mentioned in the comments included:

"making friends, negotiating"

"sharing, looking after each other"

"awareness of respecting others' property, how others may feel"

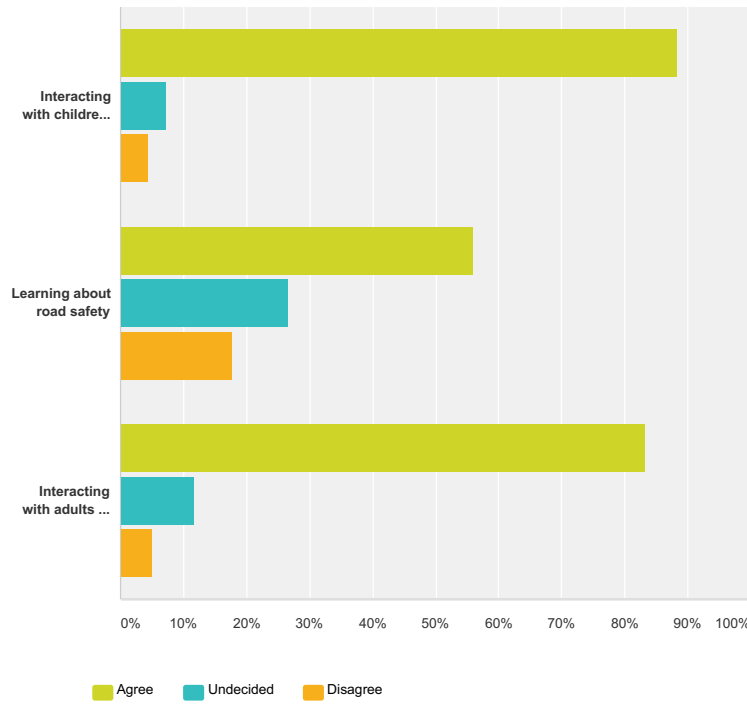
"lots of the children were scared of talking to 'strange' adults and the sessions have broken down some of these barriers."

"mixing with other cultures"

"taking responsibility for younger children and confidence in speaking to adults."

Q23 Children have learnt or improved social skills during playing out, such as:

Answered: 137 Skipped: 18



| | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Total |
|---|---------------|--------------|--------------|-------|
| Interacting with children of different ages | 88.24% 120 | 7.35% 10 | 4.41% 6 | 136 |
| Learning about road safety | 55.88% 76 | 26.47% 36 | 17.65% 24 | 136 |
| Interacting with adults on the street | 83.21% 114 | 11.68% 16 | 5.11% 7 | 137 |

14% of respondents said that playing out had led to children doing other things outside sessions. A total of 66 comments show the range of these new activities:

"Over time has led to more of a "calling for you" culture as more kids know each other. Older children sometimes play football in the street now in the evenings."

"More willingness and comfort with 'hanging out' with each other and chatting on the street - but not actual PLAY because there is no room to run etc when all the cars are parked on the street."

"Creating friendships with children who do not attend the same school."

"More readily play on the pavements and interact with neighbours on the street."

"If it hadn't been for Playing Out, we would not have realised that we can use the outdoor space on our doorstep as it is so ingrained that the roads are just for cars."

Other comments show that for many people, despite playing out sessions having a positive impact, they have not made enough change to the general conditions. For example:

"We have done this only a handful of times, The street does not feel safe enough to let the children out to play at other times without my supervision."

"I don't see any evidence of this having happened. I think families are still scared of the road and feel the need to always know where their children are."

The impact of playing out for adults

The survey asked people to indicate how much playing out has helped to build trust and social contact with neighbours. The majority of respondents agreed that:

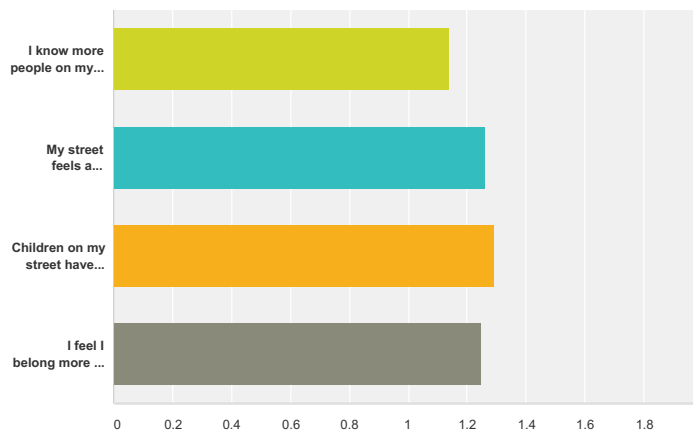
- They know more people on their street (91%)**
- Their street feels a friendlier, safer place to live (81%)**
- Children on their street have made new friends (80%)**
- They feel they belong more in their neighbourhood (84%)**

Playing Out Survey

SurveyMonkey

Q26 We've heard examples of how playing out has helped people build trust and social contact with their neighbours. Please share your experiences by responding to the following statements:

Answered: 134 Skipped: 21



| | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Total | Weighted Average |
|---|---------------|--------------|-------------|-------|------------------|
| I know more people on my street because of playing out | 91.04% 122 | 3.73% 5 | 5.22% 7 | 134 | 1.14 |
| My street feels a friendlier, safer place to live through doing playing out | 81.34% 109 | 11.19% 15 | 7.46% 10 | 134 | 1.26 |
| Children on my street have made new friends through doing playing out | 80.45% 107 | 10.53% 14 | 9.02% 12 | 133 | 1.29 |
| I feel I belong more in my neighbourhood because of playing out | 83.58% 112 | 7.46% 10 | 8.96% 12 | 134 | 1.25 |

There are significant comments leading from this question showing the depth and range of social contacts made due to playing out on streets. These include:

"Playing out has really helped bridge the generation gap. It's been a very positive experience."

"It is much more of a living street. Stewarding incidents to placate irate car drivers appear to be fewer now that playing out has established itself as a regular event. To claim territory one has to use it and establish a presence."

"An elderly (70) gent was approached by my medically trained neighbour who offered to give him help with a leg bandage that had been misapplied. They did not know each other prior to seeing each other in the street that Sunday."

"Children [are] known and have adults to call on if they are in need."

63% of people said that playing out has led to neighbours doing other social activities.

Examples given were street parties, play dates, Christmas parties, social evenings, sharing food and drink, community clean ups, bonfire parties and other occasions. For example,

"Parents meeting socially, initially motivated by planning playing out but now it's more social"

"We discuss the street more amongst neighbours, have set up a street Facebook page. We visit other neighbours more"

Interestingly, a few comments made it clear that those social contacts and events were already in place and that playing out on the street was the result of those not the catalyst for them. For example:

"We already have a framework for other activities in our neighbourhood. We have organised walks, book clubs, drop-ins and snow/leaf clearups"

"It's not just playing out. Our big lunch was the starting point. We also have had a pop up choir twice which was great fun too."

38% of people said playing out has led to them being involved in other community groups and activities.

Examples given included:

- Responding to local planning applications and developments
- Trying to tackle parking issues
- Attending neighbourhood meetings
- Re-forming neighbourhood watch
- Forming a residents' association
- Attending a park group

A couple of comments emphasised once again how playing out has been part of a general momentum rather than necessarily being the starting point for it. For example:

"Other community activities also increase likelihood of engagement [with playing out]. It's not linear, it's circular/systemic."

"Many of those involved are already doing that kind of thing, eg involved in church, or in local community garden, or in fundraising activities or other voluntary work."

45% of people said that there had been **other personal outcomes** for them through playing out on their street. 54 separate comments covered a huge range of very personal and honest testimony, including:

"Was a huge confidence boost and helped me develop new skills in terms of campaigning and community development work. Led to me getting paid work as a project coordinator in my local area, which I've been doing for the last 3 years."

"Care for elderly neighbours."

"A neighbour at the far end of our road knowing us and our car well enough to knock on our door when he noticed a problem with our car."

"Am much more locally engaged than I used to be."

"I feel like an important and trusted person in my community which is personally very rewarding."

"I feel less isolation as a single parent."

"Reciprocal child minding, adult socialising"

"Loving that everyone else enjoys playing out; my children getting to know the older people on the street."

"I feel more empowered to make positive change in my community and feel I can positively impact the street where I live. I feel a greater sense of ownership of my street. I feel more confident at giving my daughter independence."

"I last did playground duty as a Middle School teacher when I was 27 years old. I am now 66 and my later career was firstly teaching adults and then (when I was 46) curtailed by a serious RTA. It is pleasant to be on my feet and to assume a role of responsibility again which now allows me to be with younger age groups of adult as well as child[ren]."

"Increased my personal confidence by being an organiser, needing to be more confident and outgoing to approach neighbours."

"It has been personally very rewarding for me. My son is an only child so it has given him a lot of freedom to play out and meet new people. On a deeper level it has given me the opportunity to engage with many wonderful children and their parents, each time we do a session I feel as though it changes the whole community for the better, visually, socially and it is a very healing activity."

"Lifted depression"

"Feel better about my children being known and cared about by other people"

"I was asked to give a talk at a Play Wales conference about our sessions"

"neighbour put up post box for me. Children and parents speak to me."

"I feel more empowered to make positive change in my community and feel I can positively impact the street where I live. I feel a greater sense of ownership of my street. I feel more confident at giving my daughter independence."

"makes me feel personally safer and more rooted. I think it gives my children more confidence in neighbours than I had growing up"

"Become more inclined to walk and cycle"

"Feeling inspired that there are things that can be done to help not just kids play outside but everyone to experience the city without fear of traffic"

Playing out in the future

84% of people said they hope to continue sessions on their street.

If people answered "no" to this question, we asked them to say why. 17 responses indicated a variety of reasons.

One respondent (who earlier said they had never formally closed the road) raised questions about the relevance of the model for their area of high deprivation, saying: *"we simply couldn't afford the time and money to keep organising something that police were against (yes of COURSE we went through the proper channels)"*.

Another couple of respondents suggest a loss of confidence in interactions with drivers on the street. For example: *"I felt I was bothering the adults about having to tell them the road was going to be closed so they would not be able to drive down the road or be able to park their car or to move their car in the first place so kids could play safely in the road and have more room."*

But, very encouragingly, some streets have stopped 'playing out' formally only because, *"the children now play out without shutting the road in a formal way"*.

99 other comments about people's aims for the future showed that many share ambitions around becoming more inclusive of other residents on the street and developing play on green spaces and into other areas of the neighbourhood.

Several respondents talk of wanting to get to a stage when a formal road closure is no longer needed.

Other comments show that some residents are thinking in terms of other infrastructure and creative interventions to promote children's play and rights to the street space:

"Will see how it changes as children grow. I would love to install a visual or physical element to slow down through traffic and encourage more free play. I would like to develop thoughts on more flexible sessions with less emphasis on stewards but am aware other parents are wary of this as kids still young."

Final comments

73 people took the opportunity to leave a final comment.

Many highlighted the profound change that has taken place on their street:

"We love Playing Out. I like the way that it reminds everyone at least once a month of the great community we live in and that cars are not the most important thing on the road."

"It's a brilliant thing - has really changed the dynamic of our street for the better and allowed people to meet neighbours from different backgrounds/age groups etc they would never have had the chance to meet ordinarily. I probably know about 50 or 60 people on my street now whereas before I knew about 10....It's also great knowing that my kids are so known in the street - if they were in trouble they'd have so many people they could call on and we all look out for each other. It's not uncommon for someone to send an email saying one of the older people has had a fall, or needs something, and others respond offering to look in etc. We also do stuff like ask the police along occasionally to say hello or do bike marking, which has been really appreciated on both sides".

"My family has really enjoyed these sessions. We were new to the street and this helped us settle very quickly and made great friendships. The school walk is a much more social event. Wonderful idea... long may it continue."

"Playing out is really great for both children and adults. A little boy came out and could not pedal his bike, his mum kept pushing him round and after 2 hours he was cycling around on his own. A girl was 10 on the day we were out so the others chalked happy birthday messages on the road. We had big cardboard boxes, the boys pretended they were coffins and shut each other in side, a girl made head and arm holes in a box so she could wear it, a lot of the boys just rode their bikes into the piled up boxes and destroyed them! Lots more streets should play out".

"A couple of neighbours mentioned it was the best thing that had happen in our street. A couple of dads came to steward in the August session despite their kids being on holiday. It's really brought our street together".

"My children independently play out during the sessions and have grown in confidence due to this - they know the other kids and have made friends, and they know the other adults. My whole family has benefitted and so has the whole street. We have a lot more to do with each other and it's because of playing out"

"When I was a child, I had a field I could play on at all times just across the road. I had doubts when we started these sessions that the hard surface of a road could rival the open space which I enjoyed in the 1950s, but observing Round Hill's playing out sessions on the tarmac of Mayo Road has reassured me. People make the most of what is available to them. The important thing is that they are safe. We did not have stewards as small children in the 1950s, but the UK has an older demographic now so it is important that pensioners have something to do!"

"Playing out has made my street feel like home. When I walk my kids to school I know almost every one that I see, including the drivers. Even the tough bits such as dealing with the occasional obstructive driver or resident has helped strengthen the community. It's fantastic to feel part of such a positive national movement".

"Love how Playing Out has brought our street together as a friendly, happy place to live. Long may it continue! :)"

Some comments reflect challenges/limitations of the playing out model and the need for further changes to enable children to play out every day:

"It's not easy to keep it going, but I am always happy when we manage to Play Out!"

"The only challenge is drawing in people without kids. Some older people and those without kids do join in the sessions - but I know some think it 'isn't for them' and that there are sensitivities for those who are childless etc."

"Some of our neighbours continue to be anti the whole idea which is uncomfortable for the committee. Some committee members feel that they do all the work to make the events run whilst other neighbours take advantage of them"

"Your campaign is a good one and I applaud and support it. Sadly we are in too deprived an area for it to be applicable on your terms. We have had to be a LOT more Guerrilla... and planting trees and bushes has been some success (in between the vandalism)."

"I would love to see this initiative spread to tower block communities who say they find it difficult to organise"

"Not sure it's been a success as we've had a lack of volunteers to steward the events - although families came out to be with their children and chat, these people didn't offer to help, and it was up to a few neighbours - including older people without children - to do this. A shame but we plan to have another go next year!"

"I think we are at a bit of a crunch point at the moment, as we try to find new blood to get involved and take over as organisers. We've had to do our first leafletting in three years (since starting the play street). People are still very enthusiastic about the idea, and would like it to keep going, but it's been a challenge to demonstrate to residents that it can only continue if they get involved. I wish drivers would be more respectful on the roads, especially residential street, and to expect that there may be children out playing"

"It's great but it still isn't the same as playing out in the 70s - children are still watched and adults involved"

"We'd like more 'official looking' road closure signs - we've had several opponents saying 'you can't stop me with wheely bins!'"

"I'm interested in guerilla playing out tactics - doing things without permission to help the kids to play more and improve the street environment for everyone. Spray painting, blocking off through streets. That kind of thing..."

"Keep up the good work. After 3 years of battles, this was our first year with no hitches, it takes a while....."

The value of Playing Out's support and resources (from the main team and local activators both in Bristol and around the country) was mentioned in several comments:

"The support from the Playing Out team has been invaluable, I have ended up doing most of this by myself, and without their initial advice and guides I would never have tackled this"

Playing Out, July 2017.

"Thanks Gaby for your help in getting us started."

"I have been really impressed with the support and encouragement from Playing Out staff."

"Thank you for starting the movement and being so well organised."

"Fantastic scheme. ALL the support we have received from playing out has been fantastic. Can not recommend it enough to people!"

"Thank you so much to the Playing Out team who provide such great support to those of us planning and organising. I find the handbook very helpful and clear. The downloadable resources are great too."

"Thanks for providing all the info and resources to get started. I know it has made a big difference to our road. Everyone really enjoys it. I think it's so important for our community."

...and some people just took the opportunity to tell us how much they love the whole idea:

"Playing Out is great. There will always be people who object but we are making use of the space in the street for 3 hours out of over 300 (in a fortnight). That little window of time makes so much difference."

"I absolutely love the concept of play streets, it always feels like a radical and positive event in our road."

"It is such a great scheme. I'd just encourage everyone to do it if they can!"

"I just love the idea and the thinking behind it."

"We loved it and will be doing more!"

"Playing Out is wonderful! Thank you for starting the movement."

Summary and response from Playing Out

We hoped this survey would help build a more detailed picture of how the 'playing out' model is working around the country, including its outcomes and challenges. It has done that - both confirming our observations and instincts and surprising us with the depth and breadth of impact for individuals and streets.

Feedback on the current challenges and limitations is also extremely useful in informing the work that needs to happen make the model as inclusive, accessible, relevant and sustainable as possible. We are already delivering two 'action research' projects in Bristol towards this - working with residents in ethnically diverse tower block estates and with children from a large low-rise estate - and we are planning further work around inclusivity for older people. We are also constantly trying to learn and share ideas from the wider 'playing out' network.

Response to the survey demonstrates a real sense of ownership of the 'playing out' model by individuals and streets, which is vital to its success and sustainability. It is also clear that many people are seeing their own street's sessions as part of a wider movement for children's freedom to play out where they live every day.