Overview of Literature related to Black and Minoritised Communities and Playing Out

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Introduction

Background and objectives

The powerful consciousness raising led by the Black Lives Matter movement around systemic injustice and racism rightly resulted in Playing Out – like many organisations – becoming aware of the need to understand and respond to the racism, discrimination, and racial inequality experienced by Black and racialised people. As part of this process of self-reflection, Playing Out commissioned a rapid review to identify and address issues and barriers related to race and racism that are impacting children's ability to play out and benefit from community-led play interventions.

This rapid review of literature seeks to offer a picture of the evidence and research agendas around these topics and start building a knowledge base to inform future research and implementation of play interventions. The rapid review is not a formal academic literature review. It aims to offer a pragmatic and current overview using open access literature, including grey literature such as policy documents, evaluations and news articles.

The review specifically set out to identify:

- barriers and issues related to racism and intersectional inequalities for children accessing public space, streets, outdoor play and active travel;
- enabling factors, opportunities and solutions linked to this;
- positive outcomes of outdoor play for children related to increasing integration, addressing racism or reducing inequalities; and
- gaps in research, practice and understanding around this topic.

Overview of literature on race and racism in outdoor play

Few studies on children's use of their neighbourhoods and children's mobility consider race and ethnicity. Reviews that have explored this, have found that there are differences though they appear to be relatively poorly understood. The topic may be particularly difficult because the variety of contexts and the importance of not generalising the experience of people from very different backgrounds, and how race and ethnicity intersect with other social characteristics such as gender or the level of deprivation. Findings are therefore often intertwined with other factors and presented at neighbourhood-level. Yet, data and evidence on racism, race and ethnicity already exist for other related domains such as physical activity and access to the nature, which suggests that, although complicated, the topic deserves more attention in the field of outdoor play.

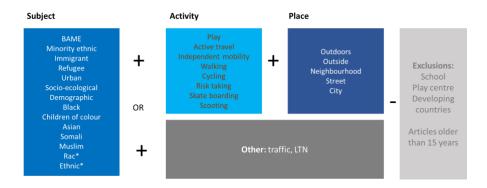
The first section explains the methodology. The findings are presented in the following five sections. These sections are based on themes that cover or are closely related to Playing Out's activities and outcome objectives: independent outdoor play (2.1), community organised outdoor play (2.2), children's independent mobility (2.3), physical activity and sports (2.4), and spending time outdoors and in nature (2.5). The final section (3) relates the findings back to the research questions outlined in the Introduction.

For a long list of literature on, see <u>here</u>. For a map of all the themes and their intersects feeding into the review, <u>here</u>.

I. Methodology

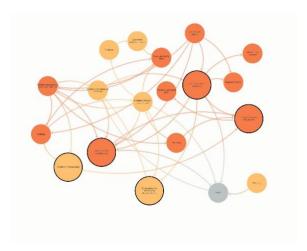
Figure I lists the words that were used for the first round of the review to create a start set. This was followed by snowballing. Often the words in the 'subject' category did not return many findings but replacing subjects with the word 'barrier' helped hone the list of content.

Figure 1: Literature search framework



Even if evidence on barriers to the activities was not usually disaggregated or discussed in terms or race and ethnicity, a search on how specific barriers to, for example, play or active travel (e.g. housing) related to race and ethnicity yielded intersecting themes and subthemes (see Figure 2. The full-size, interactive version can be viewed here.). Mapping the search results on Kumu, a systems mapping tool, allows for visualising the connections between the themes. The findings in the next sections are structured by the main themes.

Figure 2 Map of themes.



2. Findings

2.1 Independent outdoor play

Children of minority ethnic groups spend less time being active outdoors than children from the white majority background, according to evidence from the UK and elsewhere. The ethnic background of the parent – and of the mother, in particular – influences the age children are allowed to play

out and the amount of outdoor play the get (Zougheibe et al 2021, Parent et al, 2021; Boxberger et al., Dodd et al, 2021). There is a lack of studies that explore reasons behind this difference.

Parents' perceptions and fears consistently feature in studies focused on children's independent outdoor play. Children who live in perceived unsafe areas spend less time playing outside than children who do not. The Playing Out evaluation of its estates project (2016) provides illustrative examples, including long-term building works taking over spaces for play, poorly equipped and maintained children's play areas, the proximity of dangerous waste, broken glass, and other hazards. A small qualitative US study found that parents who feel they have no control over neighbourhood problems were more likely to restrict their child's outdoor play (News Medical Life Sciences, 2017).

However, the perception of 'unsafe' varies by activity. Fear of traffic reduces all types of outdoor activity – play, exercise, and travel – whereas worries for personal safety are less present for outdoor play than they are for active travel (Zougheibe, 2021). This rapid review did not find evidence of any ethnic or race-based variation in perceptions of safety. However, there is (now somewhat dated) evidence that in London, Black and Asian children, regardless of their level of deprivation, have higher traffic injury rates than white children (Steinbach et al., 2007).

In discussions around children's play in the US context, the fear of police violence against Black children and young people is a serious concern (Hill, 2021). While the picture is different for the UK, based on the government's data (2020), there were 52.6 police stop and searches for every thousand Black people, compared to 7.5 for every thousand white people. As most stop and searches target younger people (Flack, 2018), and given the adultification of Black children (Hill, 2021), it is reasonable to assume that policing children and young people in public spaces in the UK comes with a racial aspect. However, no academic studies were found on how this profiling interacts with parental perceptions and outdoor play.

Finally, there may be another distinct layer of fears for refugee parents who are getting used to unfamiliar environments and may have previous traumatic experiences and thus be more sensitive about safety issues than non-refugees (Chen et al., 2021).

People link independent outdoor play to being poor, white British, and having conduct problems (Aggio et al., 2017). This finding from a British cross-sectional analysis resonates with participants in the evaluation Playing Out carried out in Hartcliffe (2016), one of Bristol's poorer and predominantly white areas. While data shows that parents with a higher level of education allow their children to play out independently at a younger age (Dodd et al., 2021), parents interviewed in the evaluation associated independent outdoor play with parental neglect because 'good' parents were seen to keep their children safely indoors. A qualitative study for the UK Department for the Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) on children's engagement with natural environments outside school (Waite et al., 2021) brings up similar assumptions: "There is a feeling that if I let my kids be outside, I'm being a bad parent. I should be having them sit at home doing their homework, keeping quiet, not to get into trouble." Outdoor activity providers have observed that people from disadvantaged backgrounds wanted to avoid getting dirty for fear of not being seen as 'civilised' (Waite, 2021).

Parents from minority ethnic groups may value more time spent doing homework and structured activities. For historical, cultural, and social reasons –such as discrimination and the pressure to assimilate, to be successful and a 'good' immigrant— the negative view of parenting and independent outdoor play may be more common among parents who are not white. In the DEFRA report, Asian/Asian British and Black/Black British children were more likely to cite 'I was not allowed to go out on my own and no-one could go with me,' being too busy doing homework, and worry about coronavirus as reasons for not spending time outdoors, than white children. In the US, evidence shows that Black parents have children spend more time attending summer camps than other parents. Compared with white parents, Black and Asian parents had their children engaged in academic activities more and played outside less; Latino parents

did learning activities with their children less but were more likely to have them tutored (Nomaguchi et al., 2021).

Social cohesion and neighbourhood trust matter for parents' attitudes toward independent outdoor play: higher social cohesion predicts more outdoor play (Dodd et al., 2021; Loebach et al., 2021; Wolfe, 2016; English et al., 2015; Parent et al., 2021). While studies do not tend to disaggregate findings by race and ethnicity, ethnic diversity can challenge community cohesion. For example, an evaluation by Playing Out (2016), which interviewed community members from Bristol estates with high ethnic diversity, talked about the lack of community cohesion and sense of belonging and poor integration between cultures. Living near family and friends is associated with increased independent outdoor play (Aggio, 2017). Having family connections nearby may be less likely for people from ethnic minorities and immigrant families.

2.2 Community organised play

Very few studies of Play Streets include data on race and ethnicity, although some discuss ethnic diversity in the context of social cohesion. The authors of possibly the only systematic review of academic evidence on Play Streets (Umstattd Meyer et al., 2019) could not tell whether the missing race and ethnicity data was due to research design or a lack of diversity in the implementation. A research project on street play initiatives in disadvantaged areas in England (Gill, 2016) included race and ethnicity as a theme researchers asked interviewees about but did not find related barriers or opportunities (although the author suggests low levels of confident English speakers might introduce challenges). The respondents' ethnicity, however, is not described. The interviewees saw ethnic diversity and mixing with people from different backgrounds as more of a hindrance than an enabler, and some parents dismissed the relevance of ethnic diversity for play initiatives based on the misconception (Rogers, 2021) that children 'don't see race'.

At the same time, Play Streets have been found to have strengthened relationships, increased social interactions and connections and positive feelings about participants' communities (Umstattd Meyer et al., 2019) This speaks to the potential of Play Street interventions to increase social cohesion, the lack of which was discussed as a barrier to play in Section 1.2.

There are intersectional themes and contextual disadvantages, mainly around housing and the physical environment, that may have relevance for a focus on the role of race and ethnicity in street play. People have perceptions around the type of housing required for Play Streets – with cul-desacs offering the most favourable conditions, whereas housing estates are seen as most poorly suited (Gill, 2016). Because the type of housing in England is often also linked to housing conditions, it is possible that people conflate the type and quality of housing, because there are examples from around the world of play-friendly housing estates (see Laker, 2018). However, there is global evidence that the home environment's quality determines conditions for meaningful play (Real Play Coalition, 2020). While it is essential not to generalise people from different backgrounds as one homogenous 'ethnic minority', most ethnic groups are overrepresented in deprived areas (Shibli et al., 2021).

Parents from disadvantaged neighbourhoods (justifiably) think that middle-class parents have better access to resources and are more likely to be more confident. In the study on disadvantaged neighbourhoods, parents identify several barriers to Play Streets in their communities, including disempowerment, transiency; unsupportive residents' associations; and cuts to services for children and young people (Gill, 2016). As an example of disempowerment, the Playing Out evaluation (2016) describes how residents' attempts to address hazards in the estate failed to get a response from the council.

Given that Play Streets tend to be hosted in more deprived neighbourhoods, it is possible that they indirectly target children from ethnic minority backgrounds. A systematic review of grey literature on Play Street implementation (Bridges et al., 2020) found that Play Streets are hosted in deprived neighbourhoods: places that lack parks; low-income neighbourhoods and neighbourhoods prone to violence, thus addressing some of the main barriers to outdoor play discussed in Section 1.1. While designed to enable play, many implementers also reported objectives around transforming neighbourhoods (Bridges et al.

2020) including improvements to perceived safety (Umstattd Meyer et al., 2019). Although the review included studies from the UK, most of the examples of the above are from the US and none are from the UK context. It is not clear whether the data was not available or whether the findings did not apply to UK interventions. It is more likely to be the former, as the examples referenced in this rapid review (Playing Out, 2016; Gill, 2016) specifically focus on disadvantaged areas.

2.3 Independent mobility

While fears around traffic and perceptions of social cohesion impact play and mobility, there are specific barriers to children's independent travel. The British children's play survey found that while geographical location matters little for children's play outside, it is important for independent mobility (Dodd et al., 2021). Also, in a systematic review of children's outdoor mobility behaviour (which included independent play), 'stranger danger' and crime were perceived as a threat to independent mobility but not to independent play (Zougheibe et al., 2021). In line with the lack of studies focusing children's mobility that include data on race and ethnicity, it is not clear whether there are any differences in these perceptions by ethnic group. However, as discussed in Section 1.1, it is possible that people from Black backgrounds are concerned about their higher likelihood of falling victims of not just crime but being targeted by the police.

Gender, socioeconomic background and, in some contexts, ethnicity interact with perceptions of and opportunities for active travel. Gender tends to feature prominently in studies on independent mobility, and socioeconomic background impacts girls' mobility (Stone et al., 2014). For example, a girl from a lower socioeconomic status is not more likely to cycle if they have a parent who cycles. In contrast, girls from a higher socioeconomic status are more likely to cycle if they have a cycling parent (Ghekiere et al., 2017). None of the above studies discuss the reasons for these differences, which could relate to the physical environment as well as social factors such as enjoyment, status, and the degree of choice the parent has with their mode of travel.

Children whose caregiver is not white tend to be older when they are allowed out independently (Dodd et al., 2021). When considering active travel beyond independent mobility, a London-based study found children from Asian backgrounds are less likely than other children to walk other than school journeys (Steinbach et al., 2012). This finding could be related to how walking is perceived in some communities. These perceptions may be compounded with and reinforced by the lower quality infrastructure and ugly scenery, as a US study looking at the walking environment reports (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2011).

2.4 Physical activity and sports

Studies from Europe and North America find lower physical activity levels among children of colour than white children. Non-white and immigrant children also participate less in sports clubs and spend less time outdoors (e.g., Wijtzes et al., 2014; Marconnot et al., 2019; Reimers et al., 2019; Sport England, 2020 & 2021). In the UK, pre-pandemic, Sport England reported (2020) that children and young people from an Asian background had the lowest activity levels overall. However, in a report published a year later, Black children and young people were the least likely to be active (2021). The latter study finds that children of mixed and Black ethnicities primarily drove children's activity decrease during the pandemic (2020-2021). The gender gap in activity levels remains widest amongst Asian and Black children and young people, with boys being more likely to be active than girls. Given ethnic minority populations have a younger age profile (and young people are generally more active) the inequalities are further amplified (Shibli et al., 2021).

Surveys find competence and confidence behind lower activity levels for children from minority groups. Studies looking at relatively different contexts—from minority ethnic groups in England (Sport England, 2020); to immigrant children in Spain (Marconnot et al., 2019) and Hispanic children in the US (Ross, 2016)—cite competence, attitudes to and meaning of physical activity; fear and safety concerns as barriers to physical activity.

Children perceive physical activity and play to be the same. Children from different ethnic backgrounds have different activity preferences but these activities may not be equally valued or catered for in communities. The Sport England study (2020) discusses the role of enjoyment in sport participation, which is consistent with this US study of Hispanic children, which identified "fun" as a primary driver of physical activity preferences (Ross, 2016). In terms of preferences, the Sport England data (2020) reveals that young people from Black backgrounds are overrepresented in activities, including basketball, track and field, and dance. In contrast, young people from Asian backgrounds are significantly overrepresented in badminton, cricket, handball, and basketball. White British children are significantly overrepresented in sports such as golf, swimming, cycling, and rugby.

With enjoyment as the biggest driver of activity levels (Sport England, 2022), it is essential to consider the implications of different preferred activities. However, especially in the case of older children and teenagers, popular and often self-organised physical activities can quickly become stigmatised. An article by Open Democracy (Appleton, 2015) lists English councils that have, directly and indirectly, banned young people from spending time in public spaces. These bans are not specific to race or ethnicity. Still, they may have a disproportionate effect on children from minority ethnic backgrounds because of the lack of alternative spaces (such as private gardens, access to nature or green spaces, or organised activity); and by criminalising activities preferred by urban dwelling teens, such as skateboarding, for example. Groups of primarily boys riding BMX bikes and pulling wheelies in the city environment tend to attract negative attention. Those speaking from inside the culture refer to the activity as a movement that promotes community cohesion, keeping fit, spending time constructively, and avoiding trouble (Thapar, 2019). The social and actual policing of teens may have direct consequences for younger children from minority ethnic backgrounds given the adultification (Hill, 2021) of Black children.

Deprivation is directly related to being active. As discussed under community-organised play in Section 1.2, infrastructure and surroundings play a role in children's activity level. For example, people from all Black backgrounds are more likely to experience housing deprivation linked to accessibility, affordability, and the proximity of local services. Pakistani Bangladeshi people also experience relatively high housing deprivation. (By contrast, Indian people are largely underrepresented in the 10% of most deprived areas.)

Racism impacts sport participation. Racism in sport participation has received increased attention from researchers and practitioners. 'Race' and ethnicity influence the way sport is accessed and experienced and research findings present a picture of mistrust, micro-aggressions, ignorance, not being made to feel welcome, and in extreme cases outright hostility (Hylton et al., 2015; Shibli et al., 2021).

2.5 Spending time outdoors and in nature

Most people from ethnic minorities experience nature within the urban environment, but access to and quality of green spaces are not equal. Research on equal access to the outdoors often sees the outdoors as the countryside and the wild, where People of Colour tend to be underrepresented. Even within the urban environment, unequal access to green spaces is well documented both at the global level (e.g., Arup, 2022) and at the local level (Groundwork, 2021). Groundwork summarises the evidence of green space access by people from ethnic minority backgrounds in England: almost 40% of people from ethnic minority backgrounds are less likely to live within a five-minute walk of green space than people that identify as white (39% compared to 58%); less likely to report that there are good walking routes where they live (38% compared to 52%); and less likely to report a variety of different green spaces within walking distance of where they live (46% compared to 58%). The Playing Out evaluation of the Bristol Estates project heard residents complain about inaccessible parks due to busy roads and the small size of safe green space, often reduced further by building works and other uses (2016).

The design of urban natural spaces and social norms around their use can reinforce barriers to people from ethnic minority groups. The Groundwork review references a study on the Queen

Elizabeth Olympic Park in London that found significant differences between local people's spatial practices and preferences along ethnic lines. People from Asian and African ethnic backgrounds were less likely to be attracted to the 'wildness' of green space than white participants, and the symbolism used in the design of these spaces does not resonate with people from all backgrounds. Waite et al. (2021) present similar findings to a study into structural and cultural barriers to children engaging with nature. They found significant differences when comparing responses between Asian/Asian British, Black/Black British, mixed/multiple ethnic groups, and white children and young people. Asian/Asian British children and young people report a stronger sense of connection to nature than white children and young people. At the same time, Black/Black British children and young people were less likely than white children to agree that being in nature made them very happy.

There are also social norms around the use of space. Some people from specific ethnic backgrounds see natural spaces as spaces for a large family or social gatherings rather than for individual recreation and exercise. Waite et al. (2021) describe an assumed white Britishness in nature activities: the norm is to learn about the natural environment, as opposed to activities such as picnics or sports.

Children and young people from low-income and minority ethnic backgrounds are often invisible in natural environment activity promotion. Between the ages of three and six, children start to model and mirror the biases of others and use ethnic-racial group membership to organise games and play and be conscious of their skin colour (Rogers et al., 2021). The literature on independent play alluded to the role of representation in describing the race-based perceptions of independent outdoor play seen as a (poor) white practice. However, in nature access literature, there has been a more explicit focus on representation. The study of children and young people's engagement with the natural environment, for example, observes the lack of diversity among staff in adventure education and the environmental sector, which is seen to contribute to the difficulty of recruiting volunteers from more diverse backgrounds. The impact of the lack of representation was noted not just on children of colour, but also on white males from non-British backgrounds (Waite, 2021)

For some minority ethnic groups, outdoor activity may be restricted by how they experience the weather and seasons. Seasonal or weather differences only came up in research with families of Somali origin (Roth et al., 2010; Playing Out, 2016). The barriers to outdoor activity in winter include a lack of resources, health concerns, gender barriers for females, and knowledge barriers.

3. Discussion

What does the literature say around specific barriers and issues related to racism and intersectional inequalities for children accessing public space, streets, outdoor play and active travel?

Based on an analysis of connections between the themes highlighted in this review, the themes appearing most frequently between different topics include parental perceptions, attitudes and fears; neighbourhood place and space; and social cohesion. This means that changes to these themes are most likely to catalyse changes in a number of different areas. Spending time outdoors and neighbourhood, place and space received the broadest coverage based on their connections to the various subthemes.

There is patchy data on the interplay between the role of race and ethnicity and children and barriers to accessing public space, streets, outdoor play or active travel. Physical activity and sports, access to and use of the outdoors, nature and urban green space involve research with a specific race and ethnicity focus. The content on play (independent and community-led) had the least race and ethnicity lens. However, there is evidence of intersectional inequalities that interact with all the above domains. This suggests that the Playing Out interest in this matter is topical and needed. There is not only a need to collect relevant data on direct

or reported experiences of racism but to understand the underlying, systemic and sometimes invisible racism that drive intersectional inequalities to begin with. The above are likely to be complex and contextually specific and apply to the rest of the take-aways described below.

Enabling factors and opportunities linked to the role of race and ethnicity in outdoor play and activity in public space

It may be worth promoting structured outdoor play activity and sell the educational benefits of outdoor play to mothers from ethnic minority backgrounds. There are strong perceptions around independent, adventurous outdoor play. Even where a parent may perceive the benefits to be greater than the actual risks, allowing children to play outside may have a social cost, given that this is associated with poverty and bad parenting. This cost may be relatively higher for marginalised groups. For parents from minority ethnic groups, outdoor play may represent a lack of aspiration while at the same time risk drawing attention to oneself within the community. Mothers from ethnic minority backgrounds could be targeted with interventions, given their role in children's outdoor play.

Include neighbourhood level efforts to improve social cohesion and trust to increase independent play and mobility. Given the evidence that point to the impact of Play Streets on community relations could be a starting point for engaging with policies and projects that seek to increase play and improve more equitable and child-focused active travel. Improvements to neighbourhood and traffic safety would benefit all, but possibly children from Black and Asian ethnic groups more, given their higher rates of injury from traffic.

It may not be effective to overplay the money-saving benefits of active travel. In some communities active travel and walking may be associated with poverty.

Targeting activities to include girls and more positive representation of urban sports could increase engagement. The reviewed studies suggest that ethnic minority children, particularly girls, represent essential target groups for interventions designed to promote physical activity. Building confidence and competence while having an emphasis on fun and active play may be more fruitful, as well as considering sports already popular within ethnic minority groups. Sports enjoyed by children from minority ethnic groups are already often 'tailored' for the urban environment and therefore relatively easy to incorporate into a street play activity (dance, basketball, street cricket or BMX riding, as opposed to golf or swimming!) which presents an opportunity for Playing Out especially for engaging older children.

Promote a more inclusive idea of the purpose of the time spent outdoors and in nature. Given that people from non-white backgrounds are less likely to access the outdoors beyond their neighbourhood and are more limited (and possibly self-limiting) in accessing urban green spaces, children from ethnic minorities face a double disadvantage. Interventions need to recognise perceived and real threats to children's safety but instead of framing activities as 'safe' or 'healthy', emphasise enjoyment. Instead of overemphasising connection with nature, it may be more effective to focus on connections between people encouraging eating, playing and having fun together. Representation of people enjoying the outdoors should also be more diverse and there should be efforts to recruit leaders from more diverse backgrounds.

Identify positive outcomes of outdoor play for children related to increasing integration, addressing racism or reducing inequalities

The promotion of play in diverse neighbourhoods should be seen in the context of social and community cohesion. While the reduction of race and ethnicity-based health inequalities is a relatively easy argument to make in favour of outdoor play interventions, community cohesion could be a strong argument to promote Play Street interventions from a broader social justice perspective.

There is no evidence on outcomes of outdoor play and racism. Findings and lessons around racism in organised sports and outdoor activity could be relevant to outdoor play but it is important not to

generalise. There could be a new research agenda on the shape and impact of racism in outdoor play, as well as the role of outdoor play in addressing racism. This and other research and knowledge gaps are discussed below.

Gaps in research, practice and understanding around this topic

The rapid review did identify findings on race and ethnicity independent of deprivation, but these are still patchy or generalised and do not cover racism. There is a need for contextually specific research that focuses on specific target communities (as the census categories mask a lot of differences) and experiences of racism. This is a little researched area except in the organised sports context.

There is a need for better understanding of the causes of different levels of engagement in outdoor play. Where there is evidence of differences, the discussion on 'why' is missing. Future research could, for example build on existing evidence and look at causal links on, for example: why do Black and Asian children have higher traffic injury rates; why are Asian and Black British children less likely to be allowed out independently and say they have no-one to play with; why did the activity levels of children of mixed and Black ethnicities drop so significantly during the pandemic – and so on.

Finally, there is a need for better disaggregation and more variety in research methods. Specifically on outdoor play and Play Streets, a lot of the research is based on surveys with parents and thus focuses on their perceptions, which may overplay the impact of these and thus risk individually focused interventions (e.g. change parents' perception of traffic danger rather than focus on the traffic itself). Some studies address 'diversity' by having a 'diverse sample' but they don't disaggregate the data, nor describe the

studies address 'diversity' by having a 'diverse sample' but they don't disaggregate the data, nor describe the respondents' ethnicity. This makes it difficult to see whether there are race and ethnicity-based differences. For example, the higher likelihood of Black children, independent of deprivation to be victims of crime, injured in traffic and targets of police profiling do not seem to come up in perceptions – why?

In thinking about play interventions, it would be helpful to contextualise design based on disaggregated data, where possible, and rather than just seek to change perceptions, explore the root causes behind these. Even if it is unlikely that any single intervention can address these, it could inform partnerships based on a better understanding of the issues.

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Playing Out is a not-for-profit organisation aimed at restoring all children's freedom to play out where they live, regardless of income, family circumstance, race, ethnicity, gender, ability or geography. One way we do this is through supporting resident-led play streets – temporarily reclaiming doorstep space for children to play out safely.

Read more about play streets and Playing Out's wider work here: https://playingout.net/



