



Playing Out Lawrence Hill & Redcliffe, Bristol 2016-2018

Neighbourhood Play Initiatives on Central Bristol Estates

Abstract

From 2016-2018 Playing Out, Up Our Street and residents of Twinnell House & Wills Drive (Lawrence Hill) and the vicinity of Somerset Square (Redcliffe) have endeavoured to bring about change for neighbourhood play on these estates.

This was rooted in experiments with the Playing Out / Play Streets model to see how pop-up outdoor play might best be enabled on outdoor spaces around the tower blocks.

- Initiatives trialled both
- creative ways the open spaces could be used
 - &
 - ideas for improving existing play amenity

Initial considerations for an organisation wanting to support Playing Out on tower block estates

What is the budget / resource?	What area (how many homes) can you sensibly cover? (May be best to start small and manageable and expand, rather than aim too high and get disheartened).
Much easier where: -there are existing resident group(s) -you know the local community/ies & are known (trusted) by them	Keep to principle of non-prescriptive Free / Creative Play / 'Loose Parts' - Keep in mind how some site features are shown to enable play e.g passive surveillance principles (Can parents/carers keep an eye on kids without the kids feeling constrained?)
Be prepared to go where the energy is (e.g. In Redcliffe a good 'way in' was to work alongside the local gardening club).	Spaces with some hard and some soft (grass) surface are good to enable different types of play.
Networks - What other agencies can you work with / alongside? (Schools, churches, homework clubs etc).	Features such as benches, canopies, trees, kerbs, fences, a bin etc. can make a space even more accommodating (e.g. for parents to sit / somewhere to tie one end of a skipping rope)
Work out what languages are spoken / ethnic mix. -How will you manage this? Good to get resident(s) on board from the outset, particularly if you need someone to translate (both so residents understand what you are trying to achieve but also so you know what they might be feeling).	Clear boundaries (e.g. fences) or at least implied boundaries (e.g. a change between paving slabs and tarmac) are useful so kids know how far they can venture while being within view of parents.
Are there any major development plans that could affect your project (building / park renovations, road works etc).	

Successful Approaches

Recruit residents to do some of any paid work required	Be present, visible and opportunistic in order to establish contact; Use the sessions themselves to give you an excuse to approach & invite passing families with a flyer:
Publicise little & often: Text messages (and flyers through letterboxes) are essential to remind people that the sessions are happening.	<i>"You're probably busy today but we're playing out here at this time every week and you're very welcome to join us. Take this reminder and put it on the fridge!"</i>
Use existing publicity channels locally (e.g. flyers distributed with parish magazine / sent out through local school / nursery bulletins)	Piggy back community events for establishing contact and publicising (Resident meetings, fetes, play groups etc).
In turn, the association with local institutions (schools etc.) gives legitimacy / trust	Getting to know the potential spaces with residents is useful (green spaces, bits of street, car parks etc). This can be done by piloting play sessions in the beginning in different areas of the estate. Useful to understand safety issues, areas of conflict, and whether a consensus can be reached.
Door knocking is good to establish relationships	Ideally with a resident (particularly if they can assist with a common language barrier), or could be in partnership with representative of another agency already known and trusted locally.
Keep initial contact simple (outlining what the message is - e.g. Don't try to overload with questionnaires etc.)	

Transferring Responsibility

Find key people (residents, parents, local community workers)	Workshops (planned and advertised) are worth trying, to share skills and experiences. Best to promote these as social events, and include a social core to the session, as people are often put off by meetings.
Need more than 1 person, ideally with a trust relationship (so they can support each other, & to ensure continuity when a key person can't do something)	Invite active residents (perhaps from other neighbourhoods) to share experiences.
If a budget enables, regular text message reminders and flyers can be distributed by a paid resident.	Trial having an external project worker to kick start a session and then leave (where 2 or more parents can share responsibility for putting away any kit etc).
Holding the kit - Could this be supported by the council / housing association?	Sharing tea / refreshments & Encouraging older adults (e.g. elderly or isolated residents) to 'help' or join for a cuppa, encourages engagement in the neighbourhood generally.
Parents/residents will & should do what they want - This doesn't necessarily have to include regular Playing Out sessions.	
Finding someone else working in the area (whose ongoing involvement isn't dependent on temporary funding such as a local youth or community development worker) to do very low-key prompting, touching base etc. with key resident parents is invaluable.	

Other Considerations

Tendency for any paid workers to be seen:	
-as 'official' or a route to authorities.	
-as 'play leader' & / or child supervisor - Parents / carers must always be responsible for their own children (or arrange to take turns with a friend / neighbour).	
-as essential outside support - perpetuating a false notion that residents can't do things for themselves.	
Momentum always drops over winter & this make it very difficult to be 100% resident led. Activities need a 'kick-start' in spring.	
Consider how you might deal with any anti-social behaviour that may arise	
People have complex lives & capacity to be involved will fluctuate.	
Don't be too dependent on links through one person / family as people move and their situations change.	



Tales from Redcliffe



Playable, sit-on-able, planting boxes codesigned and co-planted with Hot Soup House, Redcliffe Gardening Club and the families of Redcliffe. Part of a broader and deeper 3-year programme of engagement (and play!) with resident families and the spaces around their homes

Tales from Lawrence Hill

About

Playing Out Twinnell House & Wills Drive was established as a two year project of play initiatives and physical improvements to the public realm in the vicinity of these homes. The project is facilitated by Up Our Street and architect George Lovesmith.

Alongside a series of between 20-30 play sessions in 2016-17, children and their families have been invited to participate in the realisation of small interventions around their homes to enable more and better outdoor play.



Background - Spaceshaper

This work builds on previous activity in the neighbourhood in 2015 including play sessions, bulb planting and a 'Spaceshaper' event to begin conversations about how the spaces around Twinnell House might be made better.



Wills Drive Playground Markings

In late 2016, after years of building work the site compound was due to be returned to use as a playground. Designs for the playground markings were developed with around 20 local children and parents in a design workshop.

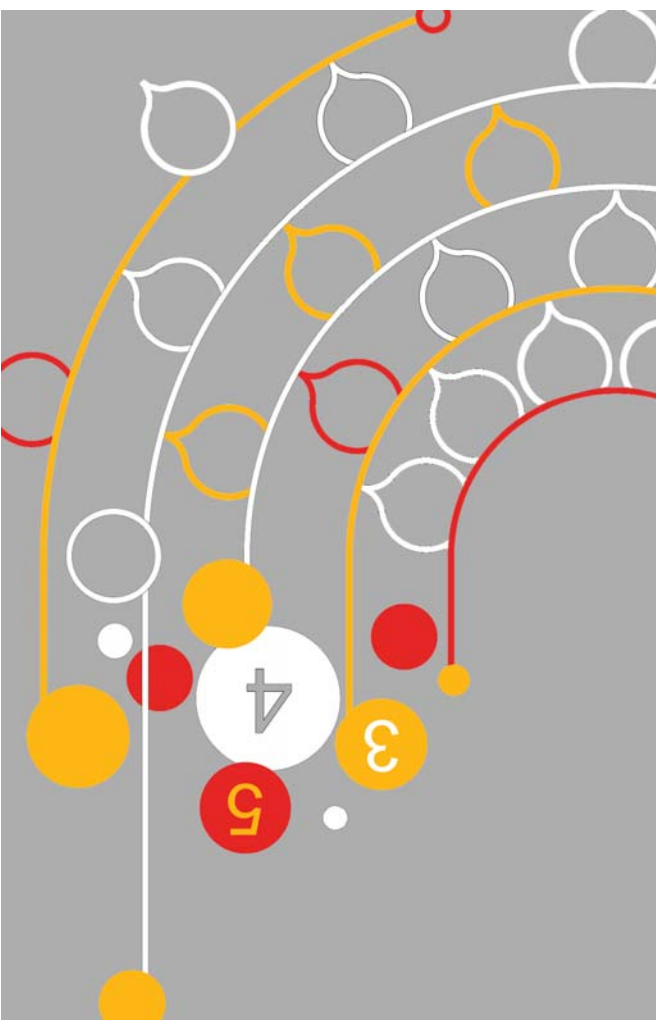
Children's ideas of running tracks are incorporated alongside dotty paint splashes, henna style patterns and a grid for a game - not too prescriptive and open to different games, uses & imaginative play



Twinnell House Play Area Willow Planting

Residents old and young rolled up their sleeves in Spring 2017 and got their hands muddy planting willow. This talking point prompted discussions about what the space was like and what other changes residents wanted to see.

There are now green shoots on a playful green screen between the dilapidated play area and the busy roads 'softening' the fence along the boundary & reminding us of what we were able to do together quickly and easily.



An invitation to make change happen

We also invited local residents to put forward ideas for small scale changes that we could help fund and execute. We got lots of response and not always quite what we expected!



'Mums of Stapleton Road' gain momentum!

In response to our 'Invitation for Ideas' a growing group of around 20 parent residents, the 'Mums of Stapleton Road' group, met regularly to discuss and make plans for some significant and strategic changes to the play facilities around their homes. There wasn't a lot of money available but decisions about what might be done with it were carefully considered.

Optimism and drive were high but ultimately a lack of council support means things have now stalled.



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