

**“ALL KIDS NEED PLAY”**

**FINAL REPORT**

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**Bristol Children's Fund  
The West of England Centre for Inclusive Living**

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## PREFACE

Bristol Children's Fund is committed to inclusive provision for children and reducing all forms of exclusion. The Fund is equally committed to improving and promoting inclusive play as fundamental and integral to community services for children and has been active in supporting community and statutory out-of-school and play scheme services in Bristol. The Fund commissioned **All Kids Need Play** - a small-scale Project which aimed to identify local barriers to the inclusion of disabled children in community play settings and to develop best practice.

The following report documents the process and progress of the **All Kids Need Play** Project. It was managed by WECIL (The West of England Centre for Inclusive Living) and carried out by Disability Equality consultants Christine Wilson and Clare Gray from October 2004 to March 2006. They worked in partnership with disabled and non-disabled children aged 5 – 13 years, Children's Fund participation workers and three community out-of-school services in Bristol – the Owl Out-Of-School Club in Lockleaze, The Mede Out-Of-School Club in Knowle West, and Felix Road Adventure Playground, Easton, Bristol.

In addition, the Project worked with a number of parents of disabled children to identify with them the barriers to their children's participation in local, community based out-of-school clubs and holiday play schemes. The Project also liaised closely with Wendy Sharp - Co-ordinator Out-of School Activities Children & Young People's Services.

## INTRODUCTION

*“The right to play is a child’s first claim on the community. Play is nature’s training for life. No community can infringe that right without doing enduring harm to the minds and bodies of its citizens.”* David Lloyd George

Playfulness and the desire to play are natural to all children no matter where they live, or how rich or poor their families are, or how much they can move independently, speak, see or hear. The first of the Play work Principles<sup>1</sup> emphasises play’s essential nature:

*“All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate. Play is a biological and psychological and social necessity, and is fundamental to the healthy development and well being of individuals and communities.”*

Ask almost any adult to describe a favourite play memory from their childhood and they will be able to recall not only what they did but also how they felt, especially if their game was ‘risky’, exciting, fun or exhausting.

Play is a valuable activity in its own right without necessarily having a specific goal yet it is essential for a child’s emotional development. Bristol City Council Draft Play Policy describes play as ‘Learning what cannot be taught’, in particular “self confidence; the sense of themselves as autonomous agents able to make choices....” Play enables children to learn self-reliance and to develop resilience through coping with disputes and overcoming their fears.

Adrian Voce of the Children’s Play Council also reminds us that active play also has other positive societal benefits:

*“There is overwhelming evidence that active play is a solution to a range of urgent problems facing young people, from health and fitness, emotional and social development to environmental awareness and social inclusion.”*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> KIDS Active

<sup>2</sup> Community Care Oct. 2004

But, perhaps most important of all, he reminds us that play is “how [children] most enjoy their childhood.”

An aspect of play that is central to the **All Kids Need Play** Project is the set of Play Values which modern play work aspires to meet

### **PLAY VALUES**

- Child at the centre of the process
- Empowering children
- Self-directed play
- Opportunities for risk, challenge, growth of confidence and self-esteem
- Health and safety
- Individuality
- Consideration and care
- Equality of opportunity and anti-discrimination practice
- New experiences
- Co-operation
- Legislative framework
- Access

These Values place play work firmly within a rights framework endorsed by Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Child.

*“Every child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities...”*

But not all children can exercise this right. Poverty, racism, homelessness, disability and other forms of discrimination are some of the ‘exclusionary pressures’<sup>3</sup> that children and their families are subject to, presenting barriers to their access to play opportunities.

However, in this age of anti-discrimination and equal opportunities it has been demonstrated that decisive action<sup>4</sup> can be taken to address obstacles to play that some children experience. Play schemes themselves can develop inclusive practice – a process that positively welcomes everyone into a culture where diversity is celebrated and individuals are respected and valued.

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<sup>3</sup> Index for Inclusion

<sup>4</sup> Alliance for Inclusive Education ‘Snapshots of Possibility’

Inclusive practice in play is concerned with the participation of all those children and parents who want to use a service. The particular focus of the **All Kids Need Play** Project has been on how inclusion can address the play opportunities of disabled children in their local community play services. Disabled children are found in every group of excluded children whether they are refugees, from traveller families, homeless, or from black and minority ethnic communities. However, even when mainstream community services for children purport to be 'open to all', disabled children are generally not included in that category, especially if they have high levels of support needs. Assumptions that they are catered for by specialist provision or that only expertly trained staff should work with them keeps the barriers up and disabled children out. Their right to play alongside their siblings and friends at the club or scheme on their street is denied and the opportunity to enrich their lives and the community is lost. But as Philip Douch has pointed out inclusive practice - where "Open to All" really does mean what it says - is not impossible to achieve:

*"There is no special set of extra skills involved. In fact, there's nothing 'special' going on at all. It is spectacularly ordinary – though the impact is quite profound."*<sup>5</sup>

What is involved, however, is a significant change of attitude that embraces the social model of disability<sup>6</sup> as the basis of inclusive practice plus commitment, planning, partnership and action drawing on the human resources available in the play schemes and their local communities.

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<sup>6</sup> The social model of disability makes a fundamental distinction between 'disability' and 'impairment'. It defines 'impairment' as the "loss or limitation of physical, mental or sensory function on a long term or permanent basis" (Disabled People International 1981) whereas 'disability' is defined as disabled people's individual and collective disadvantage due to a complex form of institutional discrimination. The social model of disability, then, locates the problem of disability within social structures and attitudes. On the other hand, the medical model of disability locates the problem of disability within the individual and their impairment.

## CONTEXT

The political and policy climate looks positive for the progression of inclusive services where disabled children can take their place alongside their non-disabled peers and enjoy the same opportunities for their own development. Children and young people's issues have an unprecedented profile on the public policy agenda. At a national level the country now has a minister for children, and there are commissioners for children in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland with a brief to give children and young people a voice in Government and in public life. Local Authorities must create designated posts for Directors of Children's Services. There is an emphasis on the consultation and participation of children about the decisions that affect their lives. A general comment from the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child asserts that the young child is a human being with rights.

*"The Convention requires that young children should be recognised as active members of families, communities and societies, with their own concerns, interests and point of view".*

As far as play is concerned, in latter years its status nationally has improved considerably. It seemed as if the 'Triviality Barrier'<sup>7</sup> is slowly being breached – Bristol City Council's Play Policy with its accompanying draft inclusive play strategy shows how seriously play as a public service is now viewed. Strong indications that mainstream play facilities should be open to all young people including disabled children is demonstrated in Section 8 of the National Service Framework for Children, Young People & Maternity Services. The Section addresses the issues of disabled children and those with complex health needs and declares that

*"Local Authorities and Primary Care Trusts ensure that... holiday play schemes, other holiday activities and after-school clubs [are] accessible to all children."*<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Brian Sutton Smith - quoted by Tim Gill ILAM Speech Feb. 2005

<sup>8</sup> NSF For Children & Young People & Maternity Services Standard 8 p 7

A stated outcome of the Every Child Matters initiative - “enjoying and achieving” - is expressed in the strategy as “achieve personal and social development and enjoy recreation”. The Children Act 2004 includes clauses on recreation and Children’s Services Authorities have to plan for recreation.

However, the situation regarding the accessibility of play opportunities for the entire nation’s children is a mixed one. For example, in the past decade or so social changes have also left

*“...many children and young people with poorer access to many kinds of play opportunities, especially those that need outdoor space. They are less likely to get around on their own and more dependent on their parents or carers. At the same time, they have many more forms of indoor entertainment to keep them occupied – a lifestyle change that partly explains the dramatic growth in child obesity in recent years. ...They say they are stopped from playing because of: fears for their safety, especially from bullying; traffic; dirty and/or run-down play areas and parks; lack of choice; and play provision that is too far away.”<sup>9</sup>*

Historically, funding for children’s play in the voluntary sector has been inadequate, piecemeal and insecure. The role of play as a factor in the health and well-being of children has either been ignored or underestimated.

The Children's Fund is one of a number of government initiatives with a remit that includes addressing the shrinking opportunities and facilities that support children’s access to play. It welcomed, therefore, the first ever government funded review of play “Getting Serious About Play” (quoted above) commissioned by the Department of Culture Media and Sport and overseen by the Rt. Hon. Frank Dobson.

Following publication of the review the Big Lottery Fund announcement of £155 million ring-fenced for play (to be launched March 2006) is good news for the play sector, particularly the expectation that all local areas will develop a play strategy. Bristol City Council is to be allocated £940,000 to be spent over 3 years and, with a draft strategy already set for consultation, Young

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<sup>9</sup> Getting Serious About Play p. 14

People's Services is in a good position to bid for funds. However, there are concerns that the disadvantages in play opportunities experienced by disabled children highlighted by 'Getting Serious about Play' may still not be ameliorated by this new funding stream:

*“Disabled children and young people have significantly worse access to good play opportunities [than other children]. There are a limited number of specialist playgrounds, but most disabled children and young people, supported by their parents and carers, want to be able to go to the same places as all the other children. Despite the Disability Discrimination Act and a growing body of information, advice and support for the development of more inclusive provision, practice has not changed in many places.”<sup>10</sup>*

Set against the recommendations of the Dobson report and other initiatives outlined above, is the government's child-care strategy with its emphasis on “wrap-around child-care” based in educational settings like schools i.e. the Extended Schools initiative. These proposals illuminate tensions between ‘child-care’, ‘education’ and ‘play’ that threaten to undermine the funding of, and attendance at, community-based voluntary out-of-school services. In addition, the criteria for Big Lottery play grants include the requirement that facilities are “free, open-access.” This could benefit Adventure Playgrounds but poses a challenge to the inclusive practice being developed in small local facilities that both register the children that use them and rely partly on fees to keep open. Yet other criteria could support inclusive provision, for example, expecting facilities to be “staffed neighbourhood play for children in need”.

It is against this background of opportunities and threats that **All Kids Need Play** set out to raise the profile of inclusive play in Bristol. It did this by working in partnership on both macro and micro levels. For example, on the macro level, the West of England Centre for Inclusive Living (WECIL) is an organisation led by disabled people that promotes equality and Independent Living for disabled people. Its partnership with the Children's Fund on this Project brought together disabled adults experienced in training, consultancy and service delivery based on Disability Equality principles and the Children's Fund's focus on the alleviation of

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<sup>10</sup> 'Getting Serious About Play' p. 14

disadvantage experienced by many children, their participation, and their rights. The Project also contributed to the drafting of Bristol City Council Young People's Services Play Inclusion Strategy that will hopefully have a significant impact on developing and consolidating inclusive practice in play across the City.

On the micro level close partnerships were formed with play workers at the focus services and some the parents of disabled children. Finally, and very importantly, the children at the play schemes were active partners with the Project. They joined in with filming for the DVD and willingly broke off from their games to talk to the Project workers. From their perspective inclusion is a 'given' because that is how all children have fun and make friends.

## METHODOLOGY

The Project began by exploring the context in which play services for children aged 5 – 15 are organised and funded in Bristol. Background information about the policy and practice context was sought from a number of individuals active in agencies with a remit for play and / or disabled children. This included an overview of child-care provision and training for play workers.

The focus play schemes - Felix Road Adventure Playground, Easton, the Mede Community Out-Of-School Club and Play scheme and the Owl Project in Lockleaze - were visited to assess physical access to the settings, facilities and safety aspects of the clubs' premises. Time was spent with the children and play workers observing activities, games and equipment and talking informally with the children.

Group discussions were held with the play workers to explore definitions and understanding of disability and to explore common issues and concerns. Their thinking about barriers to inclusion and solutions that could be shared with other services was also sought.

Each senior play leader filled in a brief questionnaire detailing information about infrastructure, funding, and training courses undertaken by staff. Copies of policies, booking forms and other protocols were shared. More formal conversations were held with some of the children at the play schemes about their views about disabled children using the club.

An internet search was made for examples of services in other parts of the country that provide inclusion play workers to support disabled children as they settle into a mainstream out-of-school club or play schemes.

### Parents of Disabled Children

A small-scale qualitative survey using one to one interviews, group discussions, e-mail, telephone interviews and questionnaires canvassed parents of disabled children in Bristol.

Twenty-six parents were interviewed. They were contacted through various agencies, organisations and educational facilities. The majority lived in the Children's Fund focus areas in Bristol, i.e.

Easton, Knowle and Lockleaze, although some families were from outside these areas. Some parents took part in group discussions but 16 parents were interviewed on a one-to-one basis. Their children were aged from 5 to 15.

Key questions in the interviews covered

- Access to play facilities and play with other children in the community
- Barriers to play in the local community
- 'Wish list' for play in the local community
- Knowledge of Direct Payments for families with disabled children

Two sets of questionnaires explored the experiences of other parents of disabled children in relation to play in local facilities and support. The first canvassed the views of parents of disabled children who attend mainstream play facilities outside the focus areas which receive additional funding from the Children and Young People's Service, Out of School Activities and Inclusive Play Fund.

A second questionnaire was sent through the WECIL Direct Payments service to families with disabled children who are receiving Direct Payments for their views and experiences of using Direct Payments.

Additionally, seven parents in other parts of the UK who are experienced in using Direct Payments were also contacted via various organisations to find out specifically how the use of a PA (Personal Assistant) benefits the child and removes barriers to play.

### Project Review & Advisory Groups

A Project Review Group met regularly to guide the progress of the Project and share information. It was composed of the Project workers, Children's Fund participation staff, senior play workers and / or development workers from the three play schemes and the Co-ordinator Out-of School Activities Children and Young People's Services.

In addition, individuals in strategic positions from a range of agencies that are charged with promoting play and / or disabled

children's interests were invited to join the Project's Advisory Group. The purpose of this Group, in the spirit of partnership working, was to advise the Project, help to disseminate messages coming from its work and to raise those issues on the agendas of other agencies. However, representation and involvement from statutory organisations that have a remit to manage services for children was limited. It was disappointing, therefore, not to have the opportunity to directly share outcomes from the Project with them or to benefit from their perspective.

## THE PLAYSCHEMES

*“Inclusive provision is open and accessible to all, and takes positive action in removing disabling barriers so that disabled children and non-disabled children can participate.”* Alison John for Kids Active & Better Play

All three services have wheelchair accessible premises with varying degrees of indoor and outdoor space. The Owl out-of-school club has the most cramped premises but enjoys access to an outdoor play area for fine weather. The Owl and Felix Road Adventure Playground (FRAP) both have wheelchair accessible toilets. The Mede has a big play room, a large hall available for games or dance as well as a garden with equipment for outdoor play. At this stage of the project FRAP had a range of exciting structures for adventure play but these have now been removed and will be replaced with new equipment chosen by the children in discussion with the play workers. FRAP also has a garden for younger children with suitably scaled down play structures, an outdoor stage, a playground as well as indoor facilities such as an art-room, kitchen and indoor hall. The Owl project also has the benefit of a wheelchair accessible mini-bus.

In all three services, staff expressed their openness and willingness to work with all children – disabled and non-disabled – who want to use their service. However, disabled children are very much in the minority of the groups of children who regularly use the service. Reasons play workers identified as to why this is the case ranged from:

- Parents of disabled children are unaware of the existence of the service
- Parents lack confidence in the services' ability to meet their child's needs
- The play schemes' lack of contact with special schools in the area
- Children going to special school outside the area of the play schemes
- Lack of inclusion workers / extra staff to give support to disabled children.

In spite of their welcoming attitude to disabled children a number of play workers gave the impression that they lacked confidence in their ability to meet the needs of disabled children, which focused on their inadequate knowledge or understanding of the different

impairments disabled children may present. Consequently they felt untrained and ill equipped to deal with the medical or personal care needs that some children and young people might have, particularly around using the toilet.

However, the play workers' positive attitude towards inclusion meant that they could show examples of where they had worked in straightforward but innovative ways to ensure disabled children participated with equality in their schemes. For example a senior play worker demonstrated commitment to the inclusion of one young person by training other staff to assist the young person in the toilet. In another example play workers encouraged the non-disabled children to adjust their games and behaviour to include a disabled child.

*“The children got on very well. We bought extra equipment for water play but we said to the children – ‘don’t have more than two playing with him because he doesn’t like to be crowded.’ The children adapted their games to suit him. When one came away from playing with him another would take their place. It worked very well – it was very nice to see. The children calmed right down with him. They accepted him and he accepted them.”* Senior Play worker

It became clear that good inclusive practice was happening in the play schemes but in an ad hoc, uncoordinated way. Play staff were not working strategically towards developing a culture of inclusion in their settings, yet were responding sensitively and imaginatively to situations as they arose.

The part-time nature of play work and the isolation of many play schemes can mean that play workers are seldom able to share their practice or work across the city. Opportunities to learn from each other are very limited and it was clear that a forum in which they could meet to specifically address issues of inclusion would be beneficial.

## THE PARENTS

The Project found that very few disabled children were using the focus play schemes. It was important, therefore, to hear directly from parents about their experiences of trying to find or use holiday and out-of-school play schemes.

Interviews and discussions with parents revealed that they were often unaware of local play schemes yet held negative assumptions about the ability or resources of community play schemes to meet the needs of their disabled children. They held an expectation of hostility from other children and parents and unfortunately some had actual experience of seeing their child isolated in a play scheme when activities had not been adapted to include them. They were particularly concerned that there would be an absence of suitably trained play workers, one-to-one support for their child or suitable activities.

*“He has learning difficulties and needs someone to provide him with one to one attention. He doesn’t need it all the time, but a few weeks ago some of the other children were very unkind to him and pushed over the model he had made. At times like that it is good to have someone keeping an eye on things to step in when needed.”*

Parent M

Only six children of the parents interviewed had used a mainstream play scheme. Two of those children had to be withdrawn from the play scheme because the facility could not meet the child’s needs.

The assumptions and experiences outlined above often deterred parents from exploring play opportunities in their locality. One group of parents used a specialist scheme because they believed that their cultural needs would not be met in a mainstream service.

There were additional barriers to the children going to their local out-of-school club or holiday play scheme regardless of the nature of the child’s impairment. They included parents’ lack of transport and financial considerations. In addition, children who go to Special Schools who have long journeys to school are too tired or come home too late to use out-of-school clubs.

*“The places we have taken him to we tend to be there as well. I’m not really aware of any local play schemes, they’re not advertised well. I sort of imagine play schemes to be on housing estates and I almost feel that they are for that local community and are not accessible to us.”*

Parent E

*“After school clubs are not local to this area and so we have transport problems as well as cost difficulties. If there was something local I would use it.”* Parent F

One of the other concerns expressed by parents was that their disabled child would not have enough adult support if they were in a busy mainstream play scheme competing with non-disabled children for the attention or supervision of play workers. They also felt that their child’s impairment-specific needs might also be neglected.

*“When I arrived in the afternoon M was sat in a group watching TV without his key worker being present. M has a history of seizures and it can happen that he can be fitting while he is sitting watching TV. ....If he is sitting upright he can choke in that situation. The staffs were in and out from looking after the whole group. The lady who was looking after the group may not have known that he could be fitting. If his key worker had been present she would have been aware of this possibility. From then on, I lost my confidence.”*  
Parent G

Many parents, whose children attend specialist play schemes, commented that they gain from the support that the play schemes provide for them. To have an opportunity to meet with other parents who may have experienced similar problems or difficulties appears to be an important element that they feel mainstream play schemes would not provide.

The parents interviewed were clear about what would encourage them to use community play services. Their ‘wish list’ contains key elements of good inclusive practice.

## WHAT PARENTS WOULD LIKE FROM PLAYSCHMES

- Staff trained in inclusive practice and aware of/carry out impairment specific requirements, such as personal care
- A welcoming and supportive environment for the children and their families
- Fun and varied activities
- Secure environment
- Parking facilities
- Anti-bullying policies and practices

### ‘Extra Pairs of Hands’

There are several ways to address the need for extra staff to support disabled children in play schemes. One is through **Direct Payments**. These are cash payments made to disabled individuals to enable them to meet their needs in lieu of traditional community care services. Anyone who is assessed as eligible for a community care service is and meets the Direct Payments criteria can then make their own arrangements for the provision of that service, enabling them to have freedom and choice about how their needs are met.

Payments can be made directly to parents of disabled children to buy services such as personal assistance, or respite care with an organisation independent of the local authority. If access to play is an element that has been written into the child’s care plan, the disabled child could attend play schemes with their own personal assistant (PA) to facilitate their play and meet their specific requirements, for example: feeding, toileting, changing and so on. On the other hand, Direct Payments could help to pay for a place at a play scheme or out-of-school club if the scheme is not financed the Local Authority. (On occasions, the Carers’ grant has been used on an ad hoc basis to pay session fees at play schemes for disabled children.)

Direct Payments have been available since April 2003 when the law was changed to make it a duty on every council to offer Direct Payments. WECIL’s Direct Payments Service is currently supporting 23 families in Bristol with Direct Payments for their children (69 across the four unitary authorities.)

However, only one family of the 26 interviewed was receiving Direct Payments for their child. Another parent, although informed about the scheme by her Social Worker, was advised not to apply because of lack of funding. The remaining parents were previously unaware of Direct Payments but were interested in exploring the possibility of making an application.

Parents in Bristol using Direct Payments who returned their questionnaires said that the greatest advantage of using the scheme was that it gave them more 'choice and control', 'independence', 'flexibility' and 'time out'. The biggest disadvantage, however, was the assessment process and associated paperwork. But there is no doubt that once Direct Payments are set up and working they can be of great benefit to the disabled child and his family:

*“S was eight when we started with Direct Payments - the 'interviewing process' didn't really happen in the sense that we picked two of M's friends who we had already known some time, and we asked them if they would be interested. We observed how they got on with S in a party situation before they started work, and he was keen and interested in them, and they in him, so we went ahead on that basis.....I love seeing S walking down the road looking animated, chatting and laughing and looking invincible with his big friends. I feel a tremendous sense of satisfaction that I have been able to give him this experience.”* Parent L

However, not all parents of disabled children have the resources to recruit, train and supervise PAs. Assistance for parents in this area should be part of any proposed outreach or support strategy for parents of disabled children who want to apply for and use Direct Payments. It should be also be noted that PAs working with disabled children in a play environment need to understand and be able to work with the same play values and inclusive values that the play scheme has adopted.

Another mechanism for supporting inclusive play employing an “extra pair of hands” is for play schemes to secure funding for additional play workers to work alongside permanent staff when disabled children are using the setting at busy times such as in the summer holidays. In Bristol the Children and Young People's Service Out of School Activities and Inclusive Play Fund can pay

for extra play workers to fulfil this function. Parents and children returning questionnaires evaluating these services had positive comments to make:

*“All the staff are very friendly and very approachable..... C is able to join in all activities – indoors and outside play and to even join in with trips to parks and the cinema. It’s great as C is with children from her own school and they all know her very well.”* Parent A

*“I think it is important to keep including children with Special Needs in play schemes and providing the additional support to enable this to happen. Otherwise they have nowhere to go during the long holidays. It is almost impossible to find holiday provision for S.E.N. children. There is a great need for this in and around Bristol.”* Parent B

This initiative has been used by at least one of the focus play schemes during the life of the Project.

Examples of services in other parts of the country that provide inclusion play workers to support disabled children as they settle into a mainstream out-of-school club or play scheme were researched to see what could be learned from them.

They shared some common features, for example:

- Play workers and voluntary workers are recruited and trained from a disability equality perspective by the organisation,
- Funding is provided by external sources
- Parents are allocated a certain number of hours per day/per week of play support for their child.
- Parents of disabled children contact the organisation to book a play worker or volunteer to provide additional support for their child at any local mainstream play facility
- Support is provided with the intention that it will be on a short-term basis until the child and the play scheme feel confident enough to reduce the support or remove it completely. <sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Darlington Association of Disabled People (DASH Project) & Inclusive Opportunities for Play – London Borough of Barnet. Both DASH and IPOP have evolved from originally providing segregated play settings where non-disabled children were invited to join in, to creating a pool of inclusion workers to support children in mainstream community play schemes and activities.

The City Council's Young People's Services draft Play Strategy Inclusion Framework has been adapted from the Kids Active Inclusion Framework for Local Authorities. The Framework proposes that a role be created to act as "bridge" between families with disabled children to promote and facilitate access to inclusive play:

"People need to be in place who have both an understanding of inclusion and experience with disabled children, who can act as bridges between potentially inclusive settings and segregated services or families with a disabled child. The service they provide needs to be pro-active in order to help change people's expectations.

- Settings and families may need a 'go-between' employed by the authority or by a voluntary agency to provide this service.
- Larger settings or groups of settings may do this themselves by allocating staff time."<sup>12</sup>

However, it should be stressed that a potential tension exists between the child's need for their specific requirements and access play facilities to be met, and a central principle of play:

*'Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated.'*<sup>13</sup>

The challenge is how to use the extra staff member to facilitate inclusion, and not to create dependency on that single play worker. Extra adults can also inadvertently contribute to exclusion by getting between disabled children and their peers at the setting and preventing them from forming their own friendships.

A balance has to be struck between encouraging the child to develop autonomy and friendships based on their terms, and providing effective but unobtrusive adult support. There are occasions when one-to-one support seems like the best option but this should always be assessed to check that it's the most appropriate way to support the child. The Project found that play

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<sup>12</sup> "All Of Us" – Inclusion Framework for Local Authorities – Twelve ways to move policy into practice. KIDS Active

<sup>13</sup> Play Wales - give reference

schemes worked flexibly around the notion of extra support depending on the circumstances, for example:

*“When we’ve got a lot of children in during the play scheme our numbers go quite high then. I think then it’s a good thing because we’ve got quite a lot of children that have behaviour problems and sometimes it takes two staff to deal with one or two children having an argument, so then it’s good to have an extra member of staff. But during out-of-school club when our numbers are a bit lower, I don’t think we really need that. I think we deal with it as a team. We don’t assign anybody to that one child because that one child comes to all of us, so it’s not like he’s going to go to sort of.... myself. We deal with it as he needs it. And he doesn’t always need support.”* Senior Play worker

A play worker supporting a disabled child expressed the importance of knowing the child well and then responding sensitively to how he wants to play.

*“He likes to flit from activity, so he does all the normal activities that are out. And I’m just there to support him because he doesn’t stay very long. I’m there to encourage him to stay longer and to help him do it. ....Because he’s so independent and he can play with other children, I don’t think it’s always appropriate for me to be there. On the trips, when he goes into the play areas, and things, he’s quite happy to play with the other children and play chase and tag. ....But then there’s other times when he wants to go off and do things .....I take him to the animals and things like that, so I’m there for him to do that. I’m just there when he needs me really, like, hovering in the background.”* Inclusion play worker

For many parents of disabled children an inclusive supportive play environment where their children are welcomed and treated as individuals, and where difference is celebrated rather than ‘accommodated’, is a delight they have yet to experience. It is unsurprising therefore, that without confidence in the service that their local community play scheme can offer their children, parents will inevitably become the gate keepers to those facilities and their children will continue to be excluded.

## The DVD

The Project addressed the isolation, lack of information and confidence of the parents by producing a **DVD** encouraging them to explore local community play services. A small focus group of the parents who were interviewed in the survey helped to shape the content and style of the DVD. The aim was to make it child-centred and at the same time, give parents of disabled children the opportunity to talk about good experiences at inclusive play schemes. It was also important for the DVD to show play workers working systematically through training and other mechanisms like the Index for Inclusion (see p.26) to improve their practice to welcome all children.

The DVD was made with the support of the staff and children at three focus settings showing the kind of activities that take place during the summer play schemes and hearing from some of the children what they like about their play scheme. They liked many of the activities on offer but particularly making friends. Additional printed information in the form of a flowchart about how parents can find and choose play schemes with inclusive practice is included with the DVD.

Community play services have a responsibility not only to develop best practice, but also to promote it actively and vigorously. Integral to inclusion is the participation of all stakeholders in reviewing and improving a service. This implies that play schemes should be reaching out to families with disabled children, listening to their concerns, working with them on ideas about how to include their children, and implementing those ideas in a spirit of partnership. Outreach to families with disabled children will become an important element of developing inclusive practice in the future.

## MAKING INCLUSION HAPPEN

By providing a focus on developing inclusive play, **All Kids Need Play** acted as a catalyst for the play settings stimulating them to take action on improving their service in a strategic and co-ordinated manner.

This happened in two major ways. First of all, discussions with the play workers revealed a need for access to regular training and development on Disability Equality and inclusion in play work, which was addressed by providing specific training opportunities led by Alison John - who is both a play worker and a Disability Equality trainer. The programme was supported by the Out-of-school Activities and Inclusive Play Fund, which paid for some of the play workers' hours while they undertook the training.

### Training

The training began with a generic *Disability Equality Training* day focussing on anti-discrimination and offered to all Children's Fund supported settings working with children. This was followed by *Everyone Can Play* – a three day training programme specifically for play workers developing inclusive play provision with a particular emphasis on promoting equality of opportunity for disabled children.

*Everyone Can Play* has been developed by Play work Partnerships (which are based at the University of Gloucestershire) and endorsed by Skills Active. The course emphasises the importance of Disability Equality as a fundamental part of play work policy and relates it to play work values. It examines social attitudes that present barriers to inclusion and how these can be addressed by inclusive practice supported and informed by legislation and guidance endorsing the rights of children. The course is very practical. It uses games and play activities to demonstrate principles of inclusion that can then be transferred to participants' settings.

Finally, the play workers were able to take part in an *Inclusion Training* day addressing inclusion in play in its widest sense, i.e. embracing race, sex, sexuality and disability. One play worker summed up her learning after the training:

*“It’s made me think more creatively about how to adapt games and activities to make them inclusive and to do that thinking with colleagues around planning activities which are fun for all children and accessible to all children.”*

Central to all the training is understanding and applying the social model of disability to practice. This goes hand in hand with recognising how the dominance of the medical model of disability has created a ‘special needs culture’ that undermines play workers’ confidence in their ability to welcome all children to their setting.

Key outcomes of the training programme for the participants were their appreciation of the benefits of on-going training, networking, and sharing good practice. They remarked that it was unusual for play workers from statutory and voluntary sectors to mix in a training forum but they found it very helpful to learn about each other’s services and to swap ideas and experiences.

It was also particularly valuable that some senior play workers and their teams were able to undertake the training together. This helped learning to be quickly consolidated back at the settings through joint problem solving, making practical changes, and adapting games and activities so that everyone could join in.

Training about how to work inclusively is essential for practitioners delivering services on a face to face level but it is also crucial to inform and influence strategic policy makers through similar events if those at the ‘top’ are to take a lead on these issues. The Children's Fund’s Management Board had their own Disability Equality training day which focussed on policy development and implementation, the impact of which will help to create a conducive climate where inclusive practice can thrive.

## The Index for Inclusion

Even this short rolling programme of training to improve inclusive practice has already proved its worth, but it is also important that training does not happen in a vacuum. The second part of the Project's inclusion development strategy was to introduce the settings to **The Index for Inclusion**<sup>14</sup> – a tool for the systematic development of inclusive practice in early years and child-care settings. The Index provides comprehensive support to settings through a set of materials designed to help them improve three major, interconnected dimensions of the setting i.e. “creating inclusive cultures, producing inclusive policies and evolving inclusive practices.” p.9

The process is one of a continuous cycle of action and self-reviews of all aspects of a setting drawing on all involved – volunteers; children, managers, parents and play workers.

The materials emphasise the fundamental importance of addressing change in the culture of the setting to ensure that inclusive practice is not dependent on one or two individuals taking it forward but it is based on shared values thereby becoming an integral part of the modus operandi of the service. The Index has a primary aim of building a “culture of collaboration”. Creating an inclusive culture is “at the heart of improvement”.

*“The development of shared inclusive values and collaborative relationships may lead to changes.... which can be sustained when new practitioners, children and young people join a setting.”*<sup>15</sup>

These changes will be reflected in policies and protocols that do not focus on ‘special needs’ but address the needs of all children, parents and others using the settings.

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<sup>14</sup> Centre For Studies on Inclusive Education

<sup>15</sup> Index for Inclusion p.12

Denise Kingston from East Sussex EYDCP Inclusion Team - one of the developers of the Index - started the process for the Project by providing an introductory session for the senior play workers. Play workers then began meeting at their settings on a weekly basis to work through aspects of the Index for Inclusion and / or the Bristol Standard. They found the process challenging but productive. It brought staff together to debate their different views and, through discussion is moving them towards a shared understanding of inclusion and practice development. In particular, they started working collectively to improve their settings, finding better ways of consulting the children and involving them in evaluating the service.

### The Children

*"I reckon it's quite good that disabled people come - that they gets the chance to play with other children they don't get to meet often." **Girl aged 10***

The training programme and work on the Index for Inclusion were building on good practice, strengths and knowledge already present among staff at the settings. For example, bullying was an issue of concern raised by the parents interviewed. In the course of the Project discussions were held with children using the play schemes with a view to engaging them in participation work but it was found that they already understood what was needed in terms of supporting each other and welcoming new children into their play scheme. Essentially, anti-bullying work with the children carried out as a regular part of play work had set safe boundaries in behaviour to which the children had contributed. Because the children themselves help to set ground rules for behaviour they are, therefore, more meaningful than anything imposed by adults. It was clear from talking to the children that they already have the knowledge and skills needed to create a welcoming play environment. The Project found that play workers drew on that understanding to the benefit of all children using the scheme. There were numerous examples of how children adapted their games or simply joined in on equal terms with disabled children at their scheme.

## Trying Out the Play schemes

A welcome result from interviews and discussions with parents during the course of the Project was that some families felt encouraged and confident enough to explore some of the focus play schemes with pleasing results.

*“The children really enjoyed every day they were at the play scheme.”*

Parent S

*“...She was really happy. When she walked in she on the first day she was a bit quiet, but the second time she was much more ‘oh, great, we’re going in!’ And she was pleased to see me at the end of the day and was really happy. “*

Parent W

The parents and their children were made very welcome and were impressed by the ‘can-do’ attitude of the play workers.

*“She’s in nappies so they had to change her nappies, and help her with her dinner but they were really fine about doing that. And they were really discreet as well, which was nice. They took her aside quietly instead of making a big thing of it..”* Parent W

*“[The play workers] weren’t anxious at all. They took his medical kit – put it in the cupboard somewhere. There was never any problem. They weren’t fazed by any of his difficulties at all - even down to the fact that he can’t communicate was not a problem for them.”* **Parent S**

Parents particularly appreciated the feedback from play workers each day their children attended the schemes and felt happy and confident that their children were valued, were enjoying themselves, and were included in all activities.

*“When I went to collect her somebody would say, ‘well, she’s had a really good day,’ or ‘we had difficulties here’ and would just discuss how the day went. Which was nice? You didn’t feel, you know, that you just took them up there and didn’t know what was happening. You’d have definite feedback at the end of the day how the session went.”* Parent W

Some play workers embraced the needs presented by the children as opportunities to enhance their own professional development. One play worker began learning Makaton so that he could communicate with a child about choices the child wanted to make in play.

*“I’ve been on a foundation course, which is just like basic signs like ‘Mum’ and ‘Dad’. And this has helped a lot with play because when he wants to play with cars or trains, we’ve got communication. Where he might not be able to tell me, he can sign ‘car’ for me and that helps a lot. And after doing this, I’ve decided to take the course further – I’m now on Stage Two Makaton and there’s another 7,000 signs I’ve still got to learn, but I’m really enjoying it.”* Play worker

One of the barriers identified by parents of disabled children who go to special schools on school transport is that the transport gets the child home too late to attend the out-of-school clubs. However, using a local play scheme has encouraged one parent to lobby for her child to be dropped off at the out-of-school club after school. The bus escort now telephones the club as they arrive so that a play worker can come out to meet the child.

Some parents interviewed in the survey were anxious that their children would not be able to take part in what might be considered ‘age appropriate’ activities or activities set up by play workers. However, play workers working inclusively and keeping the Play Values central to their practice take their lead from the children themselves:

*“...it’s actually when we meet the children, and they come in then we find out what likes and dislikes they’ve got. Sometimes, some children don’t tell you, or can’t tell you, so sometimes it’s from observation what things they join in, what things they don’t. So, mostly it’s from the child.”*  
Senior Play worker

Observing what the children like and enjoy rather than fitting them into a rigid pattern of set activities is associated with removing barriers to children’s choice and free play. Inclusive practice is also responsive to all the children’s changing needs:

*“The disabled child was getting very, very, tired in the afternoon. So (we) bought one of those camp beds. So we’d get that out and he’d lay on there if he got really tired ...And the other children could use it if they wanted to.”*  
Play worker

The **All Kids Need Play** Project has been operational over a relatively short period of time but it has shown that the benefits of inclusion both professionally for the play workers and for the children who use the play schemes – especially the disabled children and their parents – are tangible and, hopefully, long-lasting. The play workers have begun a process that has a momentum driven by their enthusiasm and commitment. They can keep it going by building their networks, sharing practice and using the processes provided by the Index for Inclusion.

## CONCLUSION

Inclusive practice in play is best practice. It addresses inequality and exclusion and benefits all children and all parents. It contributes towards building a more inclusive society by counteracting prevailing negative stereotypes, attitudes, myths and pre-conceptions about disability and in this sense, reduces prejudice and discrimination. It ameliorates the social isolation of families with disabled children.

Disabled children are rarely able to exercise their right to play where and when they want to. Their families are in urgent need of good clear information about local play facilities that are accessible and positively welcome their children. Proactive outreach by play providers to those families, addressing their concerns, will help to give them the confidence to try out play experiences for their children that advantage all concerned.

Funding for play, per se, needs commitment to long-term stability if the progress made by the sector is not to be lost. Funding criteria need, also, to treat inclusion as an essential element of a quality service and not as an additional cost. Inclusive practice requires resources invested in the professional development of staff through training and networking rather than in expensive equipment. It is relationships and the attitudes on which they are based that form an inclusive culture in which good practice can flourish.

The status and professionalism of play provision has improved considerably in the last few years. The development of Bristol City Council's Play Strategy and Inclusion Framework, if implemented, could provide the momentum to drive forward the inclusion agenda for play in the City. The time is right, therefore, to capitalise on the advocacy for increased play opportunities for all children, and it is particularly important to renew efforts to argue the case for, and demonstrate the benefits of mainstream inclusive play for disabled children and young people.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Children and Young People

- Inform disabled and non-disabled children about children's rights in this context.
- Provide advocacy for, and encourage the participation of, disabled and non-disabled children in the implementation of inclusive play.
- Encourage the implementation of legislation enabling disabled children and young people access to Direct Payments to facilitate their participation in inclusive play.

### Parents

- Provide parents of disabled children with information about local play schemes to enable them to make informed decisions and choices about inclusive play.
- Provide training for parents in the use of Direct Payments and how to manage and work effectively/efficiently with Personal Assistants supporting their children.
- Provide parents with the tools to explore fresh ways of thinking about disability, for example, Disability Equality and the social model of disability.

### Play schemes & Play workers

- Engage in a rolling programme of training and skill development that includes specific training on developing inclusive practice and policies.
- Engage in a systematic process which supports culture change, policy and practice development, for example the Index for Inclusion – Early Years and Childcare Settings
- Regularly review policies and practice in the light of support from the Index for Inclusion.

- Develop and carry out an outreach strategy to encourage local parents with disabled children to use the scheme.
- Regularly canvass disabled and non-disabled children and parents for their ideas about enhancing inclusive practice.
- Maintain links with other schemes working towards inclusive practice.

## Partnerships

- Re-establish an independent network that can act as a focus and meeting point for play workers, and those with an interest in play, to discuss and develop inclusive practice – for example, the Forum for Inclusive Play.
- Develop and maintain relationships with statutory play providers ensuring that play workers in the voluntary sector can network with and feed into the development of the City Council's Play Inclusion Strategy and the Bristol Standard.
- Bring together voluntary organisations whose work is based on the social model of disability to support, inform and empower the parents of disabled children through training and networking.
- Build relationships between mainstream and special schools and local out-of-school clubs / play schemes particularly in relation to the Extended Schools agenda.
- Work in partnership to keep inclusive play high on the agenda of funding bodies that support the play sector, and secure long-term strategic funding for community-based, small, local play facilities.

## APPENDIX

These steps accompany the DVD and can be used as guidelines for finding an inclusive play service:

### ACCESSING A PLAYScheme FOR MY DISABLED CHILD

Do I want a holiday play scheme? An out-of-school club? An open access facility?

How do I find out what's available in my community?

Try the following:

- Bristol Association of Neighbourhood Day Care (BAND)  
0117 954 2128
- Bristol City Council Young People's Services  
0117 922 3719
- Children's Information Service 0845 129 7217
- Word of mouth – friends, family, neighbours

Once you've identified a scheme, make enquiries and visit.

Does the scheme have?

1. Accessible facilities?
2. Good staffing levels?
3. Vacant places?
4. Someone who can communicate with my child?

Does the scheme provide?

1. Inclusive play?
2. Opportunities for children to have a say in planning activities etc?
3. Suitable costs and timings?

Will it interest my child?

If yes, does my child need support to access the chosen service  
i.e. transport, personal assistance?

Then contact Children & Young people's Service Duty desk on  
0117 903 8250

**or** Bristol City Council Young People's Services 0117 922 3719

**or** Bristol Children's Information Service 0845 129 7217

### **Further Information**

Information about Bristol City Council Young People's Services  
Play Policy and Strategy can be found at the City Council's website  
at [www.bristol-city.gov.uk](http://www.bristol-city.gov.uk)

'Find It Out' – Bristol Directory of Services for Children with  
Additional Needs 2005 – is available from 0117 903 8250.  
An up-to-date version is on the City Council's website at  
[www.bristol-city.gov.uk](http://www.bristol-city.gov.uk)

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