



investing in children

Newton Hall Play Park

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Newton Hall Play Park

Introduction

The aim of this research was to try and discover the views, wants and needs of young children in the Newton Hall area. The research was commissioned by Newton Hall Play Parks Fund.

The research is based firstly very much on the belief that all young people and children have a right to have their voices heard and listened to in decisions that affect them. Children and young people have a valuable contribution to make to the debate about services and facilities.

Secondly, that all children have a right to play. It is hoped that this research will contribute to raising awareness of the importance of play in children's lives and the need for all children to have access to good play opportunities and services. This is in keeping with the Government's aims outlined in the Every Child Matters programme.

The research was carried out using qualitative methods and draws on dialogue with children. The research explores their views about what they need to be happy and healthy, to stay safe and to enjoy and achieve.

The research highlights the need for decision makers to provide the necessary play facilities that the children themselves are asking for. There is a demand by children in the Newton Hall area for improved access to play facilities. There is a call for these to be well maintained and for these areas to be both child and adult friendly. In summary, the outcomes now expected are for relevant decision makers to deliver facilities which enable young and old to enjoy the outdoors for a range of purposes, be they personal or social.

The Research Process

Practicalities

A focus was placed during the research on how to determine what is 'best' for children and who is in the right position to determine this. Giving children rights to participate placed an obligation on this research to search for their own perspectives and experiences.

Three schools in the Newton Hall area were approached. These were Newton Hall Infants, Blue Coat Church of England (Aided Junior) and Finchale Primary School. The co-operation of the schools proved invaluable.

Meetings were arranged with the School Council representatives from each school. These children were asked if they would like to participate in finding out the views of other children in the school about what they feel they need to help them to be happy, healthy and safe outside of school. All names of people and places were made anonymous. The principle of confidentiality was agreed with the children at the start of the research.

The groups talked about the best way of finding out this information and they chose to hold class discussions (child led) and simply ask the children to talk about their views and experiences. This information was then passed back to the adult researchers by verbally reporting back what was said and by showing drawings and plans done by the children.

It was decided that by inviting children to participate in the research, the problem of power dimensions between adult and child could be somewhat alleviated. Within a narrative approach, children were allowed to tell what was important to them at the moment. While a visual approach enabled the children to express their views and provided an alternative way through which they can be listened to.

Views of the Children

Keeping Healthy

The children described various sports that they presently participate in. These include rugby, football, gymnastics, swimming, horse riding, rollerblading and dancing. One boy said “I play football in my garden and score some goals.” A girl also told us, “I like playing inside, but playing outside is better because there’s more space to play with your friends.” Another said that he enjoys playing football on the field next to where he lives. He added he uses the trees as goal posts.

Most of the children said that the activities they are involved in are through organised sports and clubs. The majority of these are supervised and paid for by their parents. For example, three children stated they often go to the skate park behind the Abbey Sports Centre. Also, many of the children said they like to participate in the after school clubs. The children added that they also like to play in their houses and play games on their X boxes and Playstations.

Alongside physical activity, the children also pointed out diet as one of the most important ways to maintain good health. The children were very much aware that, “You have to eat five different fruit and vegetables a day and do exercise.” Others added, “At tea time I eat vegetables and sometimes fruit.”

Keeping Safe

The majority of children who took part in this research said they always play in their garden or in their street, close to their own home. The children reported that they are told by their parents, “not to wander off.” Many identified concerns around not feeling safe and this was one reason as to why designated play areas are not used. Those children who did use play areas, all said they only went with their parents and they were always supervised.

The children also informed the researchers that local play areas often had broken equipment. One girl stated, “We don’t like to use it cos it is now a hangout for older children and it’s all vandalised.” Another child said that the swings were broken by the older children, but suggested that they did this as they did not enjoy them. One major concern raised by all the groups, centred on the amount of broken glass in play areas.

Suggestions for Newton Hall Play Park

Each group was asked if they thought it was a good idea to develop Newton Hall play area and there was a unanimous yes.

The groups came up with a list of equipment they would like to use in a play area. These included:

- Slide
- See-saw
- Monkey bars
- Zip line
- Climbing frame/Wall
- Shuggy boat
- Twister
- Electric cars
- Bikes and scooters
- Climbing frame
- Basket ball nets
- Football goals
- Tyre/rope swing
- Tree house/Wendy house
- Obstacle course
- Fire mans pole
- Rocking animals on swings
- Army net
- Sand pit
- Picnic area
- Shelter for young people

One group reported back that the children suggestion a specific area and shelter for older children. It was argued that, “this would be somewhere the older children could hang out.” Further suggestions included blank walls in the shelters so the older children could graffiti and decorate them, making them their own. The children explained that this could stop them using the play equipment for graffiti.

This idea was also developed by another group. The children thought it was a good idea to separate the field into two areas. One half for the younger children and the other half for the older children.

There were lots of suggestions about how the play area could be made into a safer environment.

All the groups agreed that they would like some type of fence around the play area. One boy added, “And it would stop the football being kicked too far and onto the road.”

There were lots of suggestions about locking the play area gates at certain times, especially at night. Other ideas included a membership scheme for the play area, application forms to be completed by children and parents and then members issued with arm bands rather than cards which, “Could be easily lost.” Finally, the children said the park should be well lit and asked if it could be patrolled by the police “to keep an eye on what’s going on.”

One group presented some ideas that could be used to save money. One boy suggested that a sand pit could be used by the younger children, and then later the older children could use it for a “long jump pit.” Another suggestion was that a football pitch could be made with artificial turf and this could also be used as a tennis court.

All the children said they would like benches or a picnic area for their parents to enjoy. They also added that the play area should have public toilets and the area could be decorated with flowers.

Conclusion

The Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has highlighted a growing concern about play, not least about the consequences of the lack of good play opportunities, both for children themselves, and for their families and for communities. There is a need to respond positively to the challenges laid down by statements such as Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which states 'All children have a right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of activities.'

The Government is concerned that children are given the rounded childhood they deserve. An emphasis has been placed on children of school age and on their play outside the home. This recognises the fact that as they begin school, children start to spend significant amounts of free time in settings and spaces outside the home. This is in keeping with what the children of Newton Hall expressed.

Therefore it is important to listen to children and work to provide what they are asking for. What has become clear through this research is children from the Newton Hall area, play in the everyday places in which they spend their childhood. The children themselves have identified the importance of outdoor play in providing the vital exercise that they need and want. The children also spoke simply but eloquently about the importance of being provided with opportunities for social, emotional and creative development.

The children commented on the need for a seating area, which could encourage parents to visit the area with their children. One outcome of this might be a stronger sense of community developing and a feeling of ownership. This could address some of the children's concerns about potential vandalism.

We would like to thank all the children who helped with this research. We hope their views and opinions will be valued and of help to those making decisions. We feel this research is only the first step of an exciting and vital project which will undoubtedly benefit children now and in the future. Dialogue with children should not stop here. This process should be maintained throughout the development of the play area.

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