



Street play initiatives in disadvantaged areas: experiences and emerging issues

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Contents

SUMMARY	5
INTRODUCTION	7
METHOD	11
FINDINGS	15
Goals, motivation and progress	15
Disadvantage	16
Traffic levels and street layout	23
Ethnic and cultural diversity	25
Local culture and attitudes to street play	27
Support role	27
Local authority role	30
Summary picture	31
CONCLUSIONS	33
APPENDIX	
Questions posed to interviewees	37
REFERENCES	39

Abbreviations

DH: Department of Health

IMD: Index of Multiple Deprivation

LLSOA: Lower Layer Super Output Areas

TSPC: Temporary Street Play Closure



SUMMARY

This report explores how local, resident-led street play initiatives and programmes are being taken forward in disadvantaged areas of England, in response to concerns about the decline in children's opportunities for outdoor play. It is based on interviews with 21 people involved in such schemes in five local authority areas. Its aim is to clarify areas of debate, share experiences and set out emerging issues on a topic where experience is evolving rapidly.

Interviewees confirmed the picture from other work: street play initiatives are being successfully started and sustained in disadvantaged areas. However, there are significant challenges. These are likely to be greatest in the most disadvantaged areas and those that do not have typical street layouts.

Overall, a range of factors emerged that influence the likelihood of success of street play initiatives in disadvantaged areas, summarised in the table below.

Factors that may make street play initiatives more likely to succeed	Factors that may make street play initiatives likely to need additional support
Simple, free local authority application procedures	Complex procedures and procedures that charge residents
Practical local support available	Lack of local support
Conventional street layouts such as terraced housing or cul-de-sacs	Non-traditional street layouts, especially high-rise housing
Areas with higher housing densities	Areas with lower housing densities
Areas with a more mixed socio-economic profile	Areas with very high levels of disadvantage
Areas with a high proportion of confident English speakers	Linguistically diverse areas with comparatively low levels of confident English speakers
Areas where residents have concerns about traffic danger	Areas where traffic levels are so high that road closures may be problematic (or not possible at all)
Areas where there is parental concern about a lack of opportunities for outdoor play	Areas with a pre-existing culture of spontaneous outdoor play
Areas where gangs and the behaviour of other children are not concerns for parents	Areas where parents have significant concerns about gangs or the behaviour of other children

Given the limitations of the project, it would not be appropriate to reach firm conclusions about the prospects in any given area based on this summary. However, one clear conclusion is that streamlining local authority application procedures and removing cost barriers should improve the prospects for street play initiatives in disadvantaged areas. Another is the value of local sources of practical support working alongside the local authority.

Finally, three issues are highlighted that need further exploration:

- Piloting new approaches to tackle challenges in recruiting stewards;
- Adapting the street play model for use in non-traditional housing designs such as housing estates;
- Where children are playing spontaneously in neighbourhood streets, supporting this and addressing any conflicts or concerns that may arise.



INTRODUCTION

This report explores how local, resident-led street play initiatives and programmes are being taken forward in disadvantaged areas of England. It draws mainly on interviews with residents and others who have been directly involved in such schemes*.

The activity that features in this report is part of a wider Department of Health (DH) funded project to promote street play. This project ran from April 2013 to March 2016 and was delivered by a partnership of organisations. The consortium was led by Play England, working in partnership with Playing Out, London Play, Hackney Play Association, Haringey Play Association, House of Objects, Leeds Play Network and Nottingham Playworks. A separate evaluation has been carried out by Bristol University on behalf of Play England.

Interest in street play has been growing in recent years, because of concerns about the decline in children's opportunities for outdoor play. These concerns are held by parents, educators, health experts and experts in child development amongst others. In public policy terms, a key driver is the rising prevalence of childhood obesity and inactivity, and this was the main rationale for the DH-funded project.

Street play initiatives are a practical response to this interest and concern. They create new opportunities for children to play freely out of doors and for residents to meet and socialise. And they also offer a different vision of the role and function of streets, and hence have the potential to lead to longer-term changes in the way people of all ages view and use the streets in which they live.

Much of the local street play activity supported by the DH project was based on the resident-led model and process developed by Playing Out. This involves residents of a street coming together on a voluntary basis to close the road to traffic for two or three hours on a regular basis (typically once a week or month, though sometimes at other frequencies). The closures are approved by the local highways authority after a completion of a formal application process. Signage and temporary barriers are present at key points in the road, with pairs of stewards at each barrier to control traffic. Only through-traffic is diverted. Residents still have vehicle access; they are walked through by a steward once children and adults have been cleared from the street. Typically the play sessions are unstructured, giving children opportunities for freely chosen, self-directed play.

In some areas variations of this model have been tried. These include a version that focuses on sessions in streets outside school gates (typically once a term)

* For the purposes of this report the terms 'disadvantage' and 'deprivation' are used interchangeably.

and a version that runs in outdoor spaces in housing estates where no road closures are needed (with initial sessions facilitated by paid playworkers or others).

In most of the local authority areas included in this report, additional local support has been available to residents. This was sometimes from a voluntary/community agency, and sometimes from 'area activators' — individual residents with experience of organising street play activity. In effect, a three-way partnership is in place. The local authority oversees the formal process for dealing with road closure applications. The local agency/area activator supports groups of residents in going through the process, giving advice on building up support and the practicalities of running sessions, and offering more hands-on support with tasks such as stewarding. (In one local authority area, a local authority officer had this role.) Residents lead the process in their street/s and take on the ongoing practicalities of running sessions.

The focus of this study is to consider the distinct issues experienced in taking forward street play initiatives in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. This topic has emerged with the spread of the resident-led model described above. Anecdotally, the model was perceived by some to be more prevalent in, and taken up more enthusiastically by, more middle-class neighbourhoods.

There are some grounds for thinking that resident-led street play initiatives may face greater challenges in disadvantaged areas, given their dependence on collective effort by members of the same street or local neighbourhood. Studies of social capital — in essence, the degree of neighbourliness and social support structures in an area — show that these are higher in more affluent areas than disadvantaged ones¹.

On the other hand, some of the typical features of disadvantaged areas may provide a stronger rationale for street play initiatives than would be the case in more affluent areas. Disadvantaged areas suffer more from traffic danger, crime and fear of crime^{2,3}. They also tend to have less private/semi-private outdoor space (especially private gardens) and poorer quality public open space⁴. All of these factors could provide greater motivation for concerned parents in more disadvantaged areas to get involved in street play initiatives compared to parents in more affluent ones.

If street play initiatives were to prove difficult to initiate and sustain in disadvantaged areas, this would raise questions of public policy and whether greater investment of resources in these areas is required. There is strong evidence that levels of childhood obesity are higher in more socio-economically disadvantaged groups and areas⁵. The DH-funded street play programme, one of whose aims was to promote street play in disadvantaged areas, presented an opportunity to explore these issues. (Though it is important to note that only a proportion of people on low incomes live in areas that score highly for disadvantage and that not everyone in areas of disadvantage is on a low income.)

The aim of this report is to clarify key areas of debate, to share experiences, and to set out some emerging issues. Street play initiatives based on the resident-led model have been running for only a few years, and experience is evolving rapidly. Moreover, not all disadvantaged neighbourhoods are alike, in make-up or built form, and not all populations or families in such



neighbourhoods are alike. This study is based on a comparatively small number of people and schemes/areas: too small a sample for any firm conclusions to be reached. However, the interviewees brought together a wealth of practical experience and insight into supporting street play in disadvantaged areas.

This report is largely based on interviews with 21 people who have been involved in different ways in taking forward street play initiatives in disadvantaged areas. These people include: resident organisers of street play sessions; people working for voluntary/community agencies that are funded to support groups of residents; and local authority officers/elected members who have been involved in promoting and implementing the initiative.



METHOD

In selecting potential interviewees, the first step was to identify local authority areas where street play sessions had been running (ideally regularly for at least a year) in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. This was not an exact process. Data from the Bristol University evaluation was used to identify streets that were located in Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) that scored highly for deprivation indices (typically in the top 10 or 20 per cent as measured by the index of multiple deprivation using 2011 Census data). LSOAs are the most fine-grained of geographical areas for which census data is easily available: they typically cover around 650 households/1,500 residents. Hence depending on local characteristics a LSOA may cover five or ten streets, or perhaps more. Inevitably, levels of deprivation will vary within LSOAs. What is more, there are various definitions of, and criteria for, deprivation: the appropriateness of those used in government statistics is a matter of debate⁶.

A shortlist of areas and streets based on Bristol University's data was checked with staff from Play England, Playing Out and local agencies to firm up a list of streets and people to contact. Some adjustments and substitutions were made because sessions had stopped or contact people had moved on. Note that while all the interviewees were active in local authority areas with significant areas of deprivation, not all the residents interviewed lived in LSOAs that score highly on measures of deprivation. Material from these residents is included because, in the view of the author and of staff involved in this project, it is relevant to the focus of this report.

Interviewees were active in five local authority areas. In all five areas, the local authority has policies and procedures that enable resident groups to take forward street play initiatives relatively easily. This is not the case in many local authority areas. Indeed some local authorities have significant barriers in place, both in terms of the bureaucracy (for instance, requiring complex forms or onerous approval processes) and in terms of finances (charging for applications or signage, or requiring groups to take out public liability insurance).

Two of the areas are in large, diverse cities (Bristol and the London Borough of Hackney). One is a medium-sized regional town (Reading), one a coastal town (Worthing) and one an urban area in the North East (North Tyneside). Over half of those interviewed were involved in street play in Bristol and Hackney. This reflects the level of activity in these areas. They were amongst the first to see significant uptake of the idea, and were also areas where local agencies had been supporting and promoting the idea since before the start of the Department of Health programme.

However, the areas and people selected for interview were not the only ones involved in taking forward street play initiatives in disadvantaged areas. For example, London Play has been supporting work in disadvantaged parts of Hounslow.

London Play's report on street play in Hounslow is available at https://www.londonplay.org.uk/blog_entry/3261/resources/publications/recent_publications/building_community_cohesion_with_play_streets

Interviews were carried out face-to-face between November 2015 and February 2016. Interviewees were given brief information about the study (which did not mention the focus on disadvantage, so as to reduce the possibility of influencing responses) and were asked to complete a consent form. They were interviewed on the basis that all information from them would be anonymised: the aim being to reduce any concerns interviewees may have about their comments being made public.

Interviewees were largely asked the same questions (with slight variations in delivery, and in wording depending on their role). The questions asked are given in the Appendix (see page 37). Interviews were recorded electronically and transcribed in full. Some of the quotes in this report have been lightly edited for easier reading, and all references to individuals, streets, and geographical areas have been removed to preserve anonymity. They are otherwise unchanged.



Table 1 below gives an overview of the interviewees and, where relevant, deprivation information about the street/s whose schemes they were involved with. It also introduces an interviewee-naming system, to allow readers to place quotes in a context.

Table 1: Interviewees

Identifier	Type of interviewee	Street deprivation status
Int 01	Support	N/A
Int 02	Local Authority	N/A
Int 03	Resident & Support	IMD* 4th
Int 04	Local Authority	N/A
Int 05	Resident & Support	None
Int 06	Resident	BAME**, child obesity levels
Int 07	Resident	IMD 2nd
Int 08	Support	IMD 1st
Int 09	Resident	IMD 1st
Int 10	Support	N/A
Int 11	Support	N/A
Int 12	Resident	None
Int 13	Resident	None
Int 14	Resident	None
Int 15	Resident	IMD 4th
Int 16	Support	N/A
Int 17	Resident	IMD 1st, General Health ***, BAME
Int 18	Resident & Support	IMD 2nd, General Health, BAME
Int 19	Support	N/A
Int 20	Local Authority	N/A
Int 21	Local Authority	N/A

* IMD: Index of Multiple Deprivation (decile as stated)

** BAME: 1st decile, black and minority ethnic population

*** General Health: 1st decile, standardised poor general health

Key material from these interviews is presented in the Findings section of this report, which also offers a summary picture (see Table 2, page 32). No formal content analysis methods were used; the selection, presentation and interpretation reflect the author's judgements on the interview material. In the Findings section, some information is included on the number of comments or interviewees on different topics. This is purely to give a rough idea of the salience and spread of comments for this group of interviewees — it is not meant to make any wider claims about the significance, prevalence or validity of any view.



FINDINGS

This section gives a summary of the views of interviewees themselves on the goals and motivations of those involved in street play initiatives, the progress that had been made in their area and the influence of a range of different factors. It covers the following key factors: disadvantage, traffic levels/street layout, ethnic and cultural diversity, local culture and attitudes to street play, and the roles of support agencies/area activators and the local authority. It includes a selection of relevant quotes.

Goals, motivation and progress

All interviewees agreed that the two main reasons why people became involved in street play initiatives were to give children more opportunities for outdoor play, and to build community spirit and a sense of neighbourliness. Almost all felt that significant progress had been made in their areas, with some areas showing a significant growth in the level of interest in the last year or two. A few interviewees felt the initiative had had a positive impact on attitudes and activity that extended beyond the sessions themselves.

It was lovely to see the kids out in the street and knowing they were safe. I'd get to meet some of the neighbours, the children would get to meet different people in their area and they can all play together nicely in a safe environment. (Int 09)

In most wards in [local authority] we've got play streets happening. And often when I'm talking to people, people know about it, which I think is a great thing. And I think it's created more of a positive culture around children playing out more generally, which I think is a really important thing, because up until a few years ago the way children were talked about generally in society was that we need to get children off the streets, and I think that's changing. I also think it's helping to galvanize this sense that residents can change their local area, which goes further than street play, and it's made the council realise that residents are a really powerful resource for change and good. (Int 01)

An old lady came out and stood on the pavement and she was absolutely amazed. She said 'I haven't witnessed anything like this for years and years; this is what I've done as a kid'. And she got talking and she lives in a block of flats and she meet for the first time other people who lived in her block of flats — and that was a knock-on as far as the well being things. We have got a lot of elderly in [area] who are very vulnerable and we have got a lot of lonely old people in [area] who are even more vulnerable. This was one of the unexpected consequences because these old people were coming out. (Int 02)

I think it is gradually building a sense of community. I think it just gives people an option to get involved with their community a little bit more and I think that does really help. One of the things that happened to me personally was, one of the children who had been coming along to the Play Street, they're from a big family, the mum's got five children I think, and the little boy started turning up at our house on his own afterwards to play with my son. It transpired that over the summer holidays he spent a lot of time coming to our house, and one of the things he said to me that really resonated with me was 'If my house was on fire, I know where I'd come, I'd come to your house', and for me that was really poignant, because he's coming from a background where there weren't necessarily very many identifiable adults around that you could go to if you were in trouble. (Int 06)

We're in a position where after two or three years of the system running, where in the first year we possibly received maybe between 10 and 15 applications; subsequently I think then it went up to about 20 or 30, and now I think — again we've just come to the end of this financial year — we've already received 51. [...] Obviously attitudes towards it are very varied. Predominantly positive. I mean, obviously people who are on a road and where there's going to be a temporary play street-type closure, usually any negative response is a knee-jerk thing which is actually just a worry really, and almost invariably those worries tend to be quelled once the event starts and they realise that there's actually not an awful lot to be concerned about. (Int 21)

Disadvantage

The key part of each interview was where interviewees were asked for their views on the issues around taking forward play street initiatives in disadvantaged areas. This question was posed in a neutral way, so as not to influence responses (see Appendix).

Interviewees' responses showed a consensus that, on balance, high levels of disadvantage were a hindrance to starting and/or sustaining street play initiatives. Across all interviews, there were over 30 comments from 14 interviewees that described different ways in which levels of disadvantage would be a hindrance. In contrast, three comments (from two interviewees) described ways in which they would be a help.

However the complexity of the topic, and the dangers of oversimplification, were brought out in a number of comments.

Parental circumstances

Fourteen interviewees described hindrances that relate to the circumstances, capacity and motivation of parents. Nine interviewees thought that middle-class parents were more likely to be more confident, have better access to resources (including practical resources like computers), and be more able to make progress.

I think poverty is a huge barrier! [...] There can be a sense of people lacking the social capital to do stuff like this, because it takes a lot of confidence and feeling that you're listened to. People who are living in poverty basically have to stand in a line. They're quite powerless in a lot of areas of their life in a way that a middle-class person isn't powerless. (Int 01)

In more disadvantaged areas, there are a number of factors that play out for some families in organising this. Sometimes it's about resources, so maybe some physical resources or maybe kind of, well resources in the wider sense. If you're looking at residents that are huge advocates for the scheme, they're very middle-class, they're very able, very intelligent people who are...who have naturally great skills at organising people. I'm not saying that isn't available in more disadvantaged areas, but it's something that's sometimes more challenging to access. (Int 04)

The bits that are really crucial I think, is having the confidence. [...] [In area] they don't have the confidence and the courage to speak out because they don't necessarily have the words or the inclination. It takes a lot of courage for people to go there in front of the police or MPs or local councillors and things like that and stand up and translate what their issues are. There's a language used in these kind of places that they're not familiar with. (Int 08)

It's certainly not exclusively a middle-class activity at all, but it does take an amount of confidence in putting yourself forward and having that expectation that you can make changes to your environment. We were doing some work with someone from the Housing Association and she said 'well you have to understand if people are living in a situation where they really ought not to be changing their own light bulbs, what in the world would make them think that they are entitled to close the street outside their house'. (Int 16)

In areas of deprivation sticking your head up above water is sometimes a bit scary because in a lot of the areas of deprivation they don't tend to leave. That's what I've found just from doing my little outreach work is there are certain areas where you feel like those people literally just live in that little circle, so they don't have the social mobility to go in to town or go into another area of the city. So it's all quite insular and so therefore it's quite difficult for them to just take that leap and take ownership of a space. [...] (Int 18)

It brings up particular issues that aren't there in the more affluent areas. And they are about how people perceive perhaps just even their own position within society and what ownership they have of the spaces that are available to them or even where they live and how they live. So overall it's a bit of a hindrance because it makes it harder. I'm not saying it's insurmountable because I don't think it is. You have to try different ways of getting round some of those issues. (Int 21)

Four interviewees thought that parents in more middle-class areas may be more motivated and find it easier to engage.

All the streets here tend to be friends of friends who have done it or people who have heard about it. Trying to break into what the council term more areas of need has been harder. (Int 03)

[In disadvantaged areas] they are not so motivated to be involved, and [you may not get] the practical hands-on help which you would probably get more in advantaged areas where they know it's important.. But it's swings and roundabouts [...] As long as you have got enough people to physically close the road, I don't think it matters. (Int 06)

We've found it quite challenging to get a consistent level of engagement from people who've originally said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah-yeah!" and then haven't replied to calls or haven't turned up at trainings that they said they'd be at. [...] The biggest hindrance has been maybe a culture of quite hands-off parenting; a culture of "it all happens in school" and "that's where learning happens". It's hard to say because that's also my perception from my background but I feel like it's been really hard to get parents involved. It's been really, really, really hard. It's not something that they willingly want to spend their time doing. It's something that they expect to be provided for. (Int 19)

There does seem to be a bit of a resurgence in the idea that it's good for children and that they need to get out and they need to access nature. But perhaps that is driven more by the affluent people in our society, and maybe less so for working-class families. But maybe that's because their children might play out more anyway. I think there's still an aspect of children out and about on estates, perhaps more so than on the more residential streets. (Int 21)

Four interviewees mentioned that some parents in poverty may have other more pressing priorities and concerns around money, housing, health and other personal circumstances.

They may not have the time because maybe they're holding down a few jobs and maybe they're struggling in that respect. When you're looking at more disadvantaged areas, you're looking at other issues that come into play such as alcohol, such as drugs, such as housing issues. The reality is for some families who are really struggling with day-to-day life, play streets might not be at the top of their agenda. (Int 04)

If you take a family that's not got heating and not got food, the priority is not going to be their child playing; the priority is covering your basic needs. If you're worried about being evicted, if there's domestic violence, those are going to be your priorities. So when there's really high levels of deprivation, I think to get adult involvement in street play is really hard, because the adults often don't have the resources within themselves to do that without support. (Int 10)

A couple of the leaders, key residents involved with this project, of any week they've had things like kids in hospital, kids in prison, glaucoma, inflamed ankles, serious health difficulties. Fundamentally when you're just trying to get by, then coordinating or organising anything is pretty low on the priority. (Int 19)

Four interviewees thought that parents in disadvantaged areas may be worried about letting children mix socially with children who they may have concerns about, or that there is more potential for conflict in social housing areas (though one interviewee acknowledged that these issues can also arise in other contexts).

There are some areas of the city where we've had conversations with people who've said 'well there are kids that play out, but they are not the kids I want my kids to play with' and so on in social housing type areas. (Int 16)

If you have a group of people who want to be involved in an activity and if they have conflict with another group, that group will not be involved. They think that this activity is for specific residents on the estate. We involve some parents to support activities but others look at you strangely, like they don't want to be involved. It's a kind of conflict within the estate. First of all when we organised the street party some people didn't like it. They said "It's noisy." It's noisy — some people are ill, sick, so it was noisy and some children ... because of conflict — not big conflict but you know, when you live in the estates, sometimes there are little conflicts. (Int 07)

When we had the initial planning meeting, a couple of the women said, 'Well, what if so-and-so comes out, what are we going to do then?' Because there was this sense that there was a presence, a person that there was anti-social, you know, allegations around, police often being called, and, 'I'm not taking part if X is gonna be there and...' there can be that sense of wanting to avoid people sometimes. Not just in estates actually, we've had that in one street in [more affluent area] where someone said, 'I don't want to do it because there's a problem family in this street and I'm worried that they're going to come and take part'. (Int 01)

Community circumstances

Broadening the focus from the personal circumstances of parents to the wider community, seven interviewees mentioned different ways in which a disadvantaged community context would be a hindrance. Issues mentioned included disempowerment, transient neighbourhoods (or by contrast, in one case a culture of insularity and lack of mobility), unsupportive residents' associations and the impact of cuts to services for children and young people.

There's such a deep expectation in that particular community that the local authority will sort everything out, and partly that's been set up by service providers, so to break through that and actually try and support and encourage residents to feel empowered to take things on for themselves when they may have never worked, they may have left school quite early on, they may not have the confidence and the skills to feel

enabled to take on a project like that. [...] We've seen massive, massive cuts to youth services in [area], so some of the things that parents were taking their kids to on a weekly basis, the only activity that was free that they could get covered — childcare, basically, have gone. (Int 19)

I think living in estates or in the middle of disadvantaged areas, you might be less likely to know your neighbours in the first place, and you see people coming and going but you don't know them, you know that sort of transient nature. [...] And in disadvantaged areas you quite often will have a residents' association which is the voice of the residents, but it doesn't always reflect the voice of families and children. It can be quite hard to find the sort of activator type person easily. We thought when we started off, 'we'll go to the residents' groups and that will be the way we find those people', and actually it's not in my experience. They can be quite conservative and blocking. (Int 01)

Three observed that uptake of the idea was stronger in less disadvantaged areas, and two that it had spread from middle-class areas to less affluent areas.

Initially the applications were coming from more traditionally middle-class areas. Whereas I think especially more recently they've come from more working-class, certainly more traditionally poorer areas. (Int 20)

Disadvantage as an asset

Two interviewees took a different perspective, mentioning ways in which a disadvantaged context could be helpful for street play initiatives. Comments addressed the potential additional parental help available in more densely populated areas, and areas where parents were not all at work, and suggested that some families in poorer areas may have strong concerns about improving play opportunities, even if others may struggle to engage.

You have got more parental help in the more deprived areas than you did in the more affluent areas. The affluent were all at work and you only had one or two volunteers that struggled to do everything that had to be done, like marshalling either end of the road, setting up and all that. I think maybe because in the affluent areas where we tried it the houses are big and there isn't the density there anyway. But in the...I don't want to use the word 'poorer' but in the older streets the old terrace streets, some days you couldn't move for kids. Because they are in the more densely populated areas anyway, so you have got a bigger choice of people. And you have got a tight row of terraced houses, you have got to find one person in there that wants to make a difference and in most places you will find two or three. You get the right two and three — the sort of people who are governors of their local school — and they have got an interest in their community. (Int 02)

There were definitely parents on that estate that wanted to create a space that was playful for their children and for the other children on the estate. So I think that that was a motivator behind some of the parents. I think another set of parents wanted to get involved, but due to their own kind of feelings and emotional state, like people who were quite low and depressed and isolated found it quite difficult to engage. (Int 10)

One interviewee made the point that street play initiatives were not simply a middle-class thing, and another observed that in some more affluent areas, the idea was not being taken up at all.

Looking at the kids that are using our road, they are mostly black, minority ethnic. So you can't really say that this is just a middle-class thing that certain groups are doing. (Int 17)

We were looking at [...] the list of wards that haven't had playing out sessions across the city and some of them are I suppose what some people might expect in terms of the most disadvantaged wards. Some of them are the richest wards as well. There are reasons for each of those wards. Some of them have just relatively few numbers of primary aged children because it's older people or there's lots of student accommodation. But there are still kids in those wards. There are still schools in those wards, it's not that there are no primary children there, it's that they haven't participated in this. The wards that have had no-one involved are at the two extremes of the economic spectrum. (Int 16)

Understandings of disadvantage and deprivation

Two interviewees commented on complexities around the way that disadvantage and deprivation are understood. They questioned the terminology used in the project, and the underlying assumptions.

I don't know if they'd see themselves as deprived. I'm always very nervous of that word and I don't like using it. I would say that they've been deprived of opportunities and I don't think they're listened to and sometimes I think they're out on the periphery there and forgotten about and there's a certain level of acceptance with that. Well it can be quite overwhelming when outside people come in and tell you what your life could be like. (Int 08)

There's a point around terminology, that I have also struggled sometimes with the word 'disadvantaged' and the word 'deprived' because in a way it's a self-fulfilling prophecy and it creates this idea that this is how this place is. There's a huge amount of positive stuff that is going on there, mainly what I talked about before — these really, really close families that rely on each other and support each other, and really strong women who hold it all together. [...] I just wonder if we can get away from using the word 'disadvantaged'. (Int 19)

Targeting disadvantaged areas

The resident-led street play model places a strong emphasis on the actions of parents and local residents in a street. But other agencies can influence how and where it is taken up and supported. One interviewee thought that in their area, the idea naturally took root most strongly in more disadvantaged areas, while another thought that, in more disadvantaged areas, interest in street play was driven more by community groups than by individual families.

I wanted to target areas but [organiser] was more interested in targeting people where she already had somebody to help her. You know she is very practical and I went along with that. As it turned out I would say 80% of them were in the areas I wanted anyway, the areas of multiple occupancy and all the things that go with that. (Int 02)

Several interviewees mentioned various ways in which the idea was targeted at, and promoted and supported in, more disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

It was bit of trial and error, and doing workshops in areas that were more disadvantaged. But then you have to see where the interest comes from and run with that, so actually some of the areas where it took off weren't where we targeted our workshops. [We are] looking at both where there's no play streets and where there are big estates or more deprived areas. And there is a sense as well of getting information from other organisations working in the area. We'd quite often approach the school and see if there's anything we can do there, in terms of going along to coffee mornings with the parents or doing a mini info session. We would, with one school, for example, link with an organisation that works mainly with black families. We also tried, with the estates, doing the model where – it was similar to the Playing Out model, but in green spaces or paved areas, where you didn't have to actually shut the road, facilitated by play workers initially, and a senior staff member. And then after six to eight sessions taking away the play worker. We did that in three estates. One of them is continuing – we just had feedback from the lady who's organising that, and she said she's done forty sessions in the last year. She really surprised me! On a small scale, but it's still running, you know. I'd say the jury's out on whether that works or not, because the problem with not having a road closure is that parents don't actually have to come out to steward it. In the two estates where we had residents being an activator – you know, doing it – they found quite quickly that the adult support dissipated really quickly, so it was just them and ten kids. (Int 01)

A lot of the work that we do is around working with disadvantaged areas and we may not have been very overt about that in the past as we are now. Play streets turned that on its head and for me was very much about an asset-based approach. It was just opportunistic, it really came out of one resident saying "hey we want to do this" and then it growing dependent on where people came from. So I know it started in more middle-class neighbourhoods, more middle-class roads. And interestingly some of our members challenged us about that, "well ok this is great, but it's middle-class neighbourhoods, what difference is this really making?" To which my response has always been this is about helping to build and cultivate our assets to help improve our overall place and at the end of the day, if we can help nurture people like [organiser] who can then go out and talk to other places, that for me has been a real success. So if somebody like [organiser] and other residents have worked with us to try and help get this in to other roads. So for example, in [area] which has quite a poor neighbourhood, with quite a lot of inequalities, taking the model of play streets and then looking how we can adapt that into other areas is really helpful. (Int 04)

You have pockets of deprivation and you have pockets of affluence. Areas were identified that score lower on the indices of deprivation. So either trying to get streets in those areas or looking at housing estates in those areas, or even schools in those areas. Schools were a really good way of hitting the whole demographic, especially primary schools because they tend to be very locally-based. Trying to spread the demographic of the project, we had to be quite creative about that. One strand was looking at other agencies, mostly schools, primary schools, and also children's centres. (Int 21)

Traffic levels and street layout

A second theme explored with interviewees was the built environment context for street play initiatives. This focused on the immediate locality, and included discussion of traffic levels, street layout and housing type.

Overall, around 13 significant comments were made on this topic. Comments were quite diverse. Traffic speed and volume were mentioned by six interviewees. Apart from this, no strong themes emerged. There were some conflicting views (for instance on the merits of front gardens).

High traffic volumes and/or high vehicle speeds were, not surprisingly, seen as a key factor. In some streets the presence of these factors was seen as a strong motivation for residents to get involved in street play in the first place.

Speeding traffic was a top agenda. That was really part of a holistic package that we could use to work on the issue of the speeding traffic, reclaiming the space and giving their children an opportunity to come out and play, connecting with the neighbours and slowly trying to build this sense of community where they could tackle the problem themselves. Some of the comments that I've heard from people who've chosen not to get involved in playing out, is that they think that it's going to encourage the children to play out on what is actually a very, very dangerous street. (Int 08)

We would have two cars coming up there, one would come on the inside, one would come on the outside and they would race each other right outside my gates. My little girl steps out, bang she's gone. When it is for their safety you feel awful not letting them go out to play or if they do 'mind the road', 'watch the traffic' and you are constantly worrying about them all the time. (Int 09)

The people in the school, the community of mums from the school, needed quite a lot of hand-holding to get up and running, and they were particularly anxious about the cars, how to respond to car drivers, because that road, the road that we had the play street on, is a road that people use for rat running. (Int 10)

Traffic is a big thing. In a lot of the streets that we've done there's a lot of through traffic, which is a problem. When you stand there, I don't think the people realise exactly how much through traffic there is until you've actually shut the road, and you see how many cars are approaching. It's the volume and the speed. (Int 11)

I'd say twice or maybe three times between every session we'd have a really difficult, challenging interaction with an angry driver, partly because culturally it's just not something that has happened in that area, so people aren't used to seeing Road Closed signs, and people aren't particularly used to being flexible about driving around another street. The speeding traffic is a massive hindrance. Cars just rampage down that street because it's so long. (Int 19)

One of the main issues in terms of whether we'd be happy for the road to be put up for a temporary play street and to be eligible to do that is the volume of traffic on that road. So if we're talking about, say, a main road obviously, we would never consider having a temporary play street. Indeed, people wouldn't apply for that because they would know it would be impossible. Now, most streets fall somewhere between that and a completely quiet residential street. The vast majority are very quiet residential streets that get very little through traffic. (Int 20)

Four interviewees commented on the style/type of housing. Some felt that terraced housing was particularly suitable for street play, whereas non-traditional layouts such as housing estates — and especially tower blocks — were more challenging.

It's worked best in a street where there's front doors onto the street, and quietish streets so that you're not having to walk many cars in and out. And tower blocks, big tall tower blocks — it's a harder thing because mums and dads can't go in and out of their houses, and you've got to go up a lift shaft, and they can't pop in and out. Part of the lovely thing about street play is the way the kids are going in and out of each other's houses as well as playing on the street and bringing stuff out easily. The architecture of estates is not as conducive as a terraced street. The benefits can be as great, but you know, it's more hurdles to get there. (Int 01)

The most successful were definitely the terraces. They tend to be a tighter knit community anyway. But they are also in the more deprived areas of the town, so they were the big successes if you like. The more affluent areas with the big houses, less dense population they worked but they didn't have the wow factor. (Int 02)

In this community there are also five massive massive tower blocks. I tried to target those areas and instigate a bit of Playing Out there and it was just a complete no-goer because it's just not a suitable environment for kids to play in at all really. (Int 19)

There is more resistance within housing estates, probably because there's more different kinds of pressure on the open space there, be it from dog owners, perhaps outdoor drinkers, older young people, and different perceptions about the nature of that space and how it should be used. Resistance to noise, resistance to ball games. We still have "No ball games" signs up on our estates, which makes people have a less positive attitude about big groups of children playing out. (Int 21)

However, others took different views. One interviewee felt that cul-de-sacs were perhaps the best road layout. One thought that front gardens and wide pavements can be a help: a view that was contradicted by another interviewee.

I think cul-de-sacs probably make a huge difference in terms of they're just relatively easy to do, you need half the number of volunteers and there may well be a pre-existing bit of culture of people being out in the street a bit more because we know the less through traffic, the more you know your neighbours. (Int 16)

The houses have quite large front gardens and there's a big wide pavement and it's quite a wide street. So on that particular street, that's helped. (Int 19)

Some of our spread out 1930s houses with driveways have had potential problems on a longer street. (Int 03)

Ethnic and cultural diversity

A third theme explored with interviewees was diversity. Interviewees were asked their views on the role of cultural/ethnic diversity, as distinct from disadvantage. Overall, fewer significant comments were made on this theme than the two already discussed, and they were more varied in content. More comments were made that pointed to a diverse population as a hindrance (four) compared to seeing it as a help (one). However, other comments questioned whether diversity was relevant, and pointed out that for children at play, culture or ethnic origin may not be as salient as it may be for adults. Two interviewees made the point that street play sessions can break down barriers and help to make connections between different groups in communities.

There is a sense of worrying that — this is second hand, but people have said to me — people, like, the Turkish parents don't let their kids play in this estate because they don't want them to mix with the black kids, because there's a sense that they want to keep them amongst their own, and the black kids are in the gangs. So I haven't heard that straight from a parent, but that's what people have sometimes told me. Where there's lots of different people who maybe don't speak the same language — that's obviously a barrier. Whereas if you've got a street where everyone has English as a first language that isn't the same barrier. [...] Most of the streets where it's taken off are predominantly white, middle-class, but with some people who are not white middle-class. It's important to link in with groups as well as individual residents: groups that are working in relation to different ethnicities, because they know those communities. The woman we've worked with from [black and ethnic minority agency] has said that it's... you recruit to your image, don't you? I think it really helps if you have somebody who's black in a room when you've got a room full of black women, to be credible to them. Because they're likely to be more in tune with those communities. And I think it's really important that organisers are aware of that. (Int 01)

There is an element especially from other cultures, a generosity of things that they will bring along to the play street, but they won't necessarily think that they can participate any more than that. [...] I think language can sometimes be a problem, in explaining to people that they are meant to be supervising their children. Culturally, some cultures are not so over the top about their children as we are, so there's an element about that which I think is quite healthy. (Int 06)

I think the fears, particularly of parents from black and ethnic minority communities are quite... they have a basis of being scared of their children being on the streets, because gang involvement is just so pervasive, and so destructive. (Int 10)

We don't have large portions of Somali parents getting involved for example, which I think would probably be quite typical of people taking active steps across the city. That's a community that's less involved in volunteering and that kind of thing across the city as a whole. But we are doing work with social housing particularly in some of those areas and really trying more explicitly to get, for example, Somali families involved in those areas. And we seem to have made some good connections, where Somali mums are interested about kids playing as much as mums elsewhere, anywhere else. It's not rocket science; if they live in small houses and have large families they are particularly interested in kids playing outside. (Int 16)

There's something quite exciting about seeing, from the parents point of view, and the children's point of view, about seeing different types of play going on, that you would never... like Turkish mums doing French skipping. You don't normally see that: if you think of what is a Turkish mum, you wouldn't think of a woman French skipping. There's something quite exciting about seeing different cultures play in different ways, and seeing the universality of it, but also breaking down people's assumptions about who does what and how people play. So I think that that's a real buzz. [...] The meeting where we brought everybody together to discuss what play streets were, and the process, was quite important, because everybody's in the room for a common cause, they all want a particular thing to take place. I can remember the meeting quite distinctly because you're bringing together these very different groups of people and you think, are they going to actually be able to work together? And will the barriers come down? And after the play street, the first play street, I think there was certainly a reduction in anxiety about talking to people who were different. I think the hindrance is that people have different expectations about what is play, how you play, and things about safety. I think that, credit where credit's due, in the meeting that [support worker] had at the beginning, where we were all talking about what play streets are, some of those things were broken down. But that I think is a process that needs support, particularly within really, really diverse areas. (Int 10)

In the estate we live in diversity with all backgrounds, all families. When it comes to kids' play we don't see this kind of attitude due to diversity. Most of the time it's adults who have this kind of thinking. My children, when they want to play, they don't see this barrier between race or whatever, what they do is just play. They just enjoy playing, that's it. They don't care about who you are, race or colour, whatever, but play for them is ... they enjoy play. (Int 07)

Street play is open to everyone, it doesn't matter what culture you're from or what age you are. If you're a seven or eight year old you can be riding your bike, if you're a two year old you're scooting and that's got nothing to do with race or anything like that, so it's a real leveller I think. I do know that there are certain cultures that are less likely to engage. We had a child on our street who was allowed for the first few Playing Out sessions but then just didn't come out at all and we really tried to make them feel included but that just didn't happen really. (Int 18)

Local culture and attitudes to street play

Four interviewees thought that spontaneous street play may be more common — or perhaps the only option — in some disadvantaged areas, although one stated that local attitudes to it may be mixed.

In disadvantaged areas you may have kids already playing out on the street, because maybe they're not being watched in the same way — though this is massively over simplifying. (Int 04)

We live in the estates where people live on low income or they live on benefits so they don't have the resources to take their kids to some entertainment places or restaurants, cinema, whatever, so the street is the only option. (Int 07)

Some of the comments that I've heard from other residents are that those who do let their children play out shouldn't be doing that because it's a dangerous thing to do, so they see that's slightly incompetent parenting. There's a mixture of people who want their children to play out and just let them anyway, those who think that that's really foolhardy and those who just keep them in and refuse to let them out full stop. (Int 08)

Perhaps in more deprived areas there's more of a perception that it's a slightly luxurious, almost a cossetting type of thing to do with children, and again the expectation with that is, "Look, if kids want to go out they can go outside". (Int 20)

Support role

Almost all the resident organisers, and several of the local authority interviewees, were positive about the role of local and national support agencies and area activators. They were appreciated for the help and advice they gave in going through the process, the printed and online resources,

the support for local and national networks and their ability to help resolve disputes and respond to objections. As one support worker explained, there is a high level of support on offer in some areas.

We can provide materials in the form of an organisers' pack that has leaflets for other people in the street. It has a manual, posters, a risk assessment form, a sign up form for neighbours to put their contacts down and rotas and application form to the council and consultation letters so kind of pretty much everything. You need that and a photocopier and you go if you want and we also provide — again funded through the council — signs and kit boxes for streets to close their streets. So the kit box has hi-viz jackets, skipping rope, chalk, steward briefings, whistles and more posters, always more posters and then alongside that we have road closure equipment like cones and signs basically so the road can be safely closed. So we will lend to anyone in the city with a TPSO, that for the length of their TPSO and then also we'll go and meet and support people. So we'll go to residents meetings if people want us to come to their residents meetings. We will just come along and look at the street with someone and chat to them about their street and 'well there's 400 houses, are you sure you want to close it all or maybe we could look at this portion', you know. Then we would always want to go to a first session as well. Someone would go along; help people get the signs ready; do the stewards briefing, intentionally modelling what we think of as good practice so that empowers the street organiser to do that in subsequent sessions. We'll often say sorry this might sound a bit formal and bossy but actually we're talking about the safety of the children in the space that we are enabling them to play in. (Int 16)

This level of support reflects the fact that taking the first steps in a street can be daunting, and the process can be quite onerous, as can sustaining sessions.

The consultation process seems like quite a lot to do, especially if you're living on an estate and you've got to go and door-knock 400 properties. You're trying to change something in your street, and people worry about what others are going to think of them or if people are going to object to it, and sometimes when people have had really snotty objection letters it's quite off-putting and that can feel quite upsetting. In the early stages, I think it is mainly that it's quite a lot of leg work, and there's letter drops. And unless you've really bought into it, unless you really, really are excited by it, why would you do it? Once the actual sessions are running, stewarding is the issue that people have the most problem with, because not enough people regularly offer to steward, and in some streets it's literally the organiser and her husband who do it. (Int 01)

People actually going from being interested to filling in the form and doing it. Even when I've given them all the forms and helped them, it is a scary step to take and quite a time commitment. (Int 03)

What it depends on is whether you've got a group of people who are willing to go out there and be prepared to don the hi-vis and make the street safe. It wouldn't matter what their income was, it would just be what their sense of responsibility to provide something for the kids to do. (Int 13)

It actually feels like quite a big step to put your head above the parapet: to be the person that says 'hey street I don't really know all of you but I think this is a good idea and I'm kind of trusting that there'll be enough of you that think this is a good idea in the place that I live', because that is a very local, very personal exposure. (Int 16)

Keeping sessions going when initial supporters move on can be particularly challenging.

Two of the key people that were filling in the applications and supporting them have left the street and so [resident] is the only one who's left holding the baby so we're now currently at a place where we're like how do we move forward with this? She feels like she's managing the whole thing herself. (Int 08)

Several interviewees emphasised the value of peer-to-peer support, and one emphasised the value of tapering external support, with the aim of gradually enabling groups of residents to run sessions themselves.

They really, really helped — especially the local activators. I think for me being the first person in [area] to do it... we have tried to connect on social media but actually meeting somebody is so much better. (Int 03)

Last month they sent us some new signs, some Road Closed signs, some skipping ropes, some chalk, things like that. Massively, massively helpful because once people think that you're getting help they tend to take it more seriously I think. (Int 06)

For myself it was our first time to organise street play so [support worker] gave us guides, she was very active. I remember the first time I went with her to knock on doors to talk to residents about the activity, publishing leaflets for us, she was very, very, very, very good, yes. (Int 07)

[Support worker] is fantastic. She offers a lot of support initially, with the idea that she will take gentle steps, like backward steps in terms of the amount of support that she gives. Graduated, decrease in support. So she was on hand at the beginning to help apply for the permit to close the streets, she helped organise a meeting between the school and the residents, she helped with some of the logistics around shutting the street initially and with the steward briefings. So she's holding your hand right the way through for the initial one or two, and then as you become more confident — and as people become more confident — in shutting the streets and in the whole organising and setting it up, she is less and less present. (Int 10)

On an emotional level it was really nice to be invited to two [support agency] National Days and to be there, it gives you a great personal satisfaction to have achieved something that you know that you started and you've made some change happen in your local community and be recognised for that, and going to these meetings and your voice is heard and sharing with like-minded people. It's quite inspiring and you come back feeling quite jolly — and the [support agency] Facebook page has been so helpful. (Int 05)

It's really hard for somebody in the street that's had an issue with a neighbour to go and say that and then it not become personal. It needs somebody else to go and knock and say, 'Yeah, you might have had problems before but this has worked, and we've never had any issues.'

(Int 11)

The help from [support agency] has been really good. I didn't feel like it was a chore to set up, because they did all the leg work: photocopying things and getting the signs made up and things like that which would have been difficult for me to do myself, which has been really helpful.

(Int 12)

Yes, it was really important for us to have some support from [support agency]. They were able to help us and we did have some neighbours who were a bit negative initially and they helped us print out a few more fliers and do a bit more door knocking and stewarding just in case things did blow up

(Int 17)

We initially started the process just by looking at the website one evening and then we rang the [support agency] office and they talked us through the process and then we managed to do the application on our own.

(Int 18)

Local authority role

Interviewees were generally positive about the role of their local authority. This is not surprising, as interviewees were all active in local authorities with a supportive approach around the bureaucracy and procedures for road closures. Overall there were fewer comments on this issue, in part because in some areas resident organisers had not had much direct contact with the local authority, as the application process had been handled by a support agency.

Several interviewees pointed out the value of having 'official' support (for instance in dealing with objections or when redirecting drivers during sessions) and of a robust local authority position on possible objections. But several also mentioned the need to emphasise that street play initiatives were led by residents rather than being imposed by councils. Several were very positive about the way that their council had streamlined the process, and in doing so been involved in positive change in people's neighbourhoods.

We can tell people yes, this is official and it's closed and the council supports it. It's been really important to have that local government support.

(Int 17)

Having a supportive council that doesn't easily blow over, doesn't easily bend to people objecting. Residents feel that there's tacit support from the council. And that there aren't really many grounds for a reasonable objection.

(Int 01)

I think that it can put people off in some of the areas that when it's sort of an official, that it sort of... people don't like being told that it's something they should do.

(Int 11)

It's been a massive help. [LA officer] he's come round to this idea of temporary street closures in large part by the work that [support agency] have been doing to raise awareness. I think, like anything, if you see it happening and working in enough places you're likely to take it on as a functioning model. So, yeah, the local authority has been really, really supportive. (Int 19)

They thought it was a really positive development, and for them and their work, one of them said to me, "It makes such a delightful change not to be listening to complaints about potholes and road works and actually do something that people like and that feels positive." So they loved it. (Int 21)

One interviewee took a different view, stating that her council could have been more supportive.

I feel very strongly that the Council could have made it a bit easier for us to start. It took me a whole year to campaign and it went through the Transport group: it was a Transport issue and it was all about safety. (Int 05)

Another pointed out the wide variations in local authority attitudes and policies, and that in some areas these could prove fatal to play street initiatives.

So around public liability insurance requirements or charging fees, I mean those are the two kind of things that really absolutely, for the great majority of streets, will stop them dead. We have had authorities who have said 'we would like to do this but we just haven't got the time capacity to do anything with it at the moment'. Residents are really frustrated by that. (Int 16)

Summary picture

Table 2 overleaf on page 32 gives a summary of the emerging picture from interviews. It sets out how different factors that influence the prospects for street play initiatives might interact with levels of disadvantage.

Table 2: Factors and their potential interaction with levels of disadvantage

Factor	Potential interaction with levels of disadvantage
Resident interest and capacity	There may be a smaller pool of parents in disadvantaged areas with the capacity/confidence/resources to take an organising/stewarding role.
Traffic conditions and street layout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Areas of high traffic speed/volume may face more procedural barriers (or it may not be possible at all). ● Parents in areas with problematic traffic conditions may be more motivated to get involved. ● More densely populated areas may have a bigger pool of potential organisers. ● Low rise and terraced housing may be particularly suitable. ● Non-traditional street layouts in housing estates may be particularly challenging.
Ethnic and cultural diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Areas that are linguistically diverse, with comparatively low levels of confident English speakers, may face challenges. ● Community cohesion and getting to know people of different backgrounds is an attraction for some parents, but others may be worried about who their children are mixing with.
Local culture and attitudes to street play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There may be more worries about children's behaviour in some disadvantaged areas. ● A pre-existing culture of spontaneous outdoor play in some disadvantaged areas may lessen the rationale for street play initiatives. ● Some parents in more disadvantaged areas may be resistant to their children spending time in the street because of concerns about their children becoming involved in gangs.*
Support role	Sources of local support may be likely to have a greater impact in disadvantaged areas, because they reduce the workload, provide practical resources, and offer help and reassurance around potential conflicts.
Local authority application procedures	Considerable variation: can be an insurmountable barrier, or can smooth the process. Disadvantaged areas may be more likely to be adversely affected by onerous/costly procedures.

* None of the interviewees mentioned street play being a diversion from gang activity.

CONCLUSIONS

It is clear, both from the responses to interviewees and from other monitoring and evaluation, that street play initiatives are being started and sustained in a wide variety of contexts. The resident-led model has been shown to be flexible enough to be viable in a range of street types, including terraced housing, streets with driveways and cul-de-sacs. It is also viable in a spread of socio-economic contexts. While in some local authorities it was initially taken up in more affluent areas, it has spread to more disadvantaged ones.⁷ That said, the challenges facing residents who want to take forward street play initiatives are not insignificant. This is true even in areas where the local authority has a supportive procedure and where local support is on hand.

Many, though not all, of these challenges may be harder to overcome in disadvantaged areas — or at least, may be perceived to be harder to overcome by those who have been closely involved in taking action. The challenges are likely to be greatest in the most disadvantaged areas, and in areas that do not have typical street layouts.

Table 3 (on page 34 overleaf) takes the emerging picture from Table 2 (opposite), and presents it in terms of positive and negative success factors for street play initiatives in disadvantaged areas.



Table 3: Positive and negative factors for street play in disadvantaged areas

Factors that may make street play initiatives more likely to succeed	Factors that may make street play initiatives likely to need additional support
Simple, free local authority application procedures	Complex procedures, and procedures that charge residents
Practical local support available	Lack of local support
Conventional street layouts such as terraced housing or cul-de-sacs	Non-traditional street layouts, especially high-rise housing
Areas with higher housing densities	Areas with lower housing densities
Areas with a more mixed socio-economic profile	Areas with very high levels of disadvantage
Areas with a high proportion of confident English speakers	Linguistically diverse areas with comparatively low levels of confident English speakers
Areas where residents have concerns about traffic danger	Areas where traffic levels are so high that road closures may be problematic (or not possible at all)
Areas where there is parental concern about a lack of opportunities for outdoor play	Areas with a pre-existing culture of spontaneous outdoor play
Areas where gangs and the behaviour of other children are not concerns for parents	Areas where parents have significant concerns about gangs or the behaviour of other children



The picture set out in Table 3 is partial, and deliberately vague in its outline and implications. As has already been mentioned, a small sample of interviews were conducted, and interviewees are active in an even smaller number of areas, supporting a comparatively new idea that is still evolving. What is more, some of the opinions given may reflect unconscious or inaccurate assumptions or assessments (for example, it is not clear whether parents in more disadvantaged areas do, in fact, let their children play out more).

In particular, applying this picture to specific streets, areas or local authorities is not straightforward. As with other forms of community action, taking forward street play initiatives is not an exact science. It would not be appropriate to reach conclusions about the prospects in any given area based on the above summary.

One clear conclusion from this study is that streamlining local authority application procedures and removing cost barriers should improve the prospects for street play initiatives in disadvantaged areas (and indeed more widely).

This study also provides a strong rationale for support for local agencies and area activators to work alongside the local authority providing a range of practical advice, guidance and support. Such support has proved its worth in a range of contexts, including disadvantaged areas.

Aside from these conclusions about how local individuals and agencies can work to create a supportive climate of policy and practice, this study poses a number of other questions to explore and debate:

- How can the 'pure' resident-led model be adapted to tackle challenges in maintaining a sufficient pool of stewards — for instance through the use of volunteers (an idea mentioned by a number of interviewees)?
- How can the model be adapted for use in non-traditional housing designs such as housing estates, where there may not be a need for traffic stewarding but where the estate layout and/or culture may work against outdoor play and social use of outdoor space?
- Where children are playing spontaneously in neighbourhood streets, what can be done to support this and address any conflicts or concerns that may arise?

These questions are not new to those most closely involved in taking forward street play initiatives. Indeed they are all being actively explored by Playing Out and Hackney Play Association, amongst other agencies. The challenge in disadvantaged areas is to explore them thoughtfully and sensitively, and to build on the progress that has already been made.



APPENDIX

Questions posed to interviewees

- How have you been involved in taking play street sessions forward?
- What progress have you made in your street/estate/area?
- How much did children play out in your neighbourhood/area before the sessions, and how much has this changed?
- Have you targeted particular areas for support, and if so, which ones and why? [resident organisers not asked this question]
- What first attracted you to the idea?
- What do you hope to see happen as a result?
- What do other parents and residents think about the idea? [prompt for positive and negative views]
- What help or support have you had from neighbours? [local authority/ support agencies not asked this question]
- What challenges have you faced in taking the idea forward?
- What has been most helpful in overcoming these challenges?
- How have the following factors helped or hindered you?
 - ▶ Traffic levels and physical features of local streets/estates
 - ▶ Support from local or national voluntary agencies
 - ▶ Local authority
 - ▶ Local culture and attitudes regarding neighbourhood play
 - ▶ Level of parental interest in outdoor play
 - ▶ Diversity of residents (ethnicity, cultural background)
- Some have suggested that the level of disadvantage in a street or area could be an important factor. What do you think?

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