

The Play Quarters Pilot Palmers Green 2017 An evaluation

Children's freedom to roam - to independently go to the shops, the park or walk to school has been steadily shrinking over the last three generations. This ground-breaking six-month pilot project aimed to begin reversing that trend. This report shows progress.

1 Introduction



The Palmers Green Play Quarter Pilot aimed to explore and test the appetite in the local community to actively support the development of London's first 'Play Quarter' in Palmers Green, Enfield.

London Play conceptualises 'Play Quarters' as areas where children can play independently and freely outdoors, are welcomed by the community as citizens in their own right, and can enjoy what the area has to offer. In Palmers Green the Play Quarter was built on a network of established Play Streets – streets whose residents have agreed to regularly close their roads temporarily to through traffic so children can play out and neighbours can get to know one another. Play Quarters are envisaged as wider communities of practice made up of individuals and networks within a neighbourhood who share common aims around promoting children's play and independence, and who are interested in exploring the benefits of working together to further them.

The aim in Palmers Green was therefore to join up existing play opportunities, meanwhile placing a higher quality childhood for children at the heart of wider local decision-making and service delivery.

This report documents and explores how this worked in practice during the brief six-month pilot. The pilot involved recruiting a Project Worker to work with existing local networks including play streets, as well as interested businesses, service providers, organisations and residents in order to explore and pilot how a Play Quarter might be instigated and supported to develop. Palmers Green in Enfield was chosen as a potential 'Play Quarter' due to its established network of play streets and active network of community activists committed to encouraging traffic-free streets.

The development of the Play Quarter takes place within a wider movement for a return to people-friendly streets gaining momentum across the capital and country.

London Mayor Sadiq Khan has said this: "I am very supportive of the Play Streets initiative. I am also keen to encourage Londoners to see their streets differently, and an important part of my Healthy Streets work will be to reassert the priority of people, rather than private vehicles, on the local streets where people spend

much of their time. The Play Quarters pilot sounds like an interesting development of the Play Streets concept, and I will ask TFL to look into the results of the pilot in Enfield.”

2 The need for play in Palmers Green

In baseline feedback, 88% of children and young people said they never play out without a parent/guardian. The remainder played out alone only once a month. Parents identified several factors preventing them from letting their children play out:

- There are many more cars on the road than during their own childhoods
- The fact that some parents don't let their child out alone makes others hesitant in fear of judgement
- Play dates in busy contemporary family life can formalise play in a way that limits child-led free play
- There is a perception that stranger danger makes outdoor play more dangerous than in the past
- There is a perception that children who would benefit most from free play are denied it due to living in larger families on narrower streets in more deprived areas



3 Project Timeline

November 2016	Project Worker recruited. Contacted all community and local businesses to request their involvement.
December 2016	Play Quarter consultation meeting at Baskervilles Tea Shop attended by 13 local residents: parents, school governors, retirees, and local business owners. Participants discussed the differences between their own and contemporary childhoods and identified some of the barriers to children playing out freely in Palmers Green. They then came up with ideas about how to generate regular free play opportunities.
January 2017	Promotion of project through social media, posters and leaflets advertising workshops. The Project Worker successfully liaised with the council to improve Play Street policy and the process for residents. By adding a second deadline for applications in the year, more residents were able to apply for a play street.
February 2017	Safe 'Pit Stop' points established across the neighbourhood. These are places where children can drop in for a healthy snack, badge or to find a responsible adult. Workshops were run with children at Palmers Green Beavers, as well as the local Mosque's Youth group. Here, children created their own maps of Palmers Green, sharing stories about their favourite places to go, and encouraging one another to explore further in their local area. The Beavers' session also included parents, providing an opportunity to explore and challenge generally accepted perceptions about play. <i>'I am going to use the new map I made with my friend. We're going to the park to find all the secret places.'</i> Josh, Beaver, Age 7.
March 2017	Partnership with local artist studio Varosi. The artists opened up their workshop at the former Cypriot Men's working club to children for a day, exploring spinning and hosting play opportunities in their new space. An open play street was held on Devonshire Rd, with community members from all over town invited to see how a play street works and to get advice on starting up their own.
April 2017	The Walking Bus. Lead by the Project Worker and Beaver Scout Leader this helped the five children who attended find their best and safest route to the park. <i>'This is such a lovely idea. Thank you for organising! I hope something like this is around for my two year old when she's old enough to enjoy it.'</i> Katherine, local mother (in reference to the walking bus to the park) Over Easter, an intergenerational knitting day was organised where children and older people got together at Ruth Winston House (an older people's centre) to learn to knit and discuss how older and younger people can support one another in our communities.
May 2017	Intergenerational ukulele workshop at Ruth Winston House.
June 2017	London Play's Play Street Picnic was held in June. All Enfield Play Quarter and Play Street participants were invited, with one attending and initiating exchange visits with play streets in neighbouring boroughs.

4 Key Achievements



95% of children said the activities were useful for helping them to **get out and about** in their area during the course of the project

Local stakeholders including businesses, non-profit organisations, providers of children's activities and venues became interested, **supportive and engaged** with the Play Quarter pilot. In effect, a network made up of local 'Play Champions' and a smaller number of **'Play Ambassadors'** began to emerge during the pilot.

Some **104 children took part** in activities in the Play Quarter during the six-month pilot: at play streets, in arts workshops and walking buses.

Over 130 adults also attended events and meetings as supporters and volunteers

97% of participants stated that they **enjoyed themselves** at Play Quarters activities, events and workshops.

Play Quarters **raised local awareness** of children's freedoms and encouraged children to play out more without parents or guardians.

Play Quarters **helped promote stronger communities** in Palmers Green, through events that encouraged cohesion. For example workshops for the local Scouts and Mosque culminated in a multi-faith open day at the mosque.

Existing Play Streets were self-sustaining and **three more play streets were created** during the pilot.

5 Community impacts

Stronger communities

'Local community members will share a common goal and get to know each other while developing strategies and actions to improve children's experience of their neighbourhood. Independent play events will increase not only children's, but all participants' wellbeing, fostering new friendships and reducing isolation.'

The community consultation at Baskervilles Tea Shop brought local Play Street champions together with activists, a retired teacher and local business owner. The meeting led to the development of the Palmers Green Play Quarter Action Plan.

"We now have a very positive bunch of people who have a love of our local area and inhabitants and are up for improving the environment by engaging the community spirit we already have in the area. Play Streets is one way we are hoping to start getting to know our neighbours better and to provide a platform for people to enjoy the space outside of their homes."

Sarah Chandler, local mum and owner of Community café.

The intergenerational knitting workshop at older people's centre gave children the opportunity to change older people's perceptions that young people might be boisterous or want to cause them harm. It also gave older people a platform to share stories and knowledge with children. This sharing sparked debate about parenting styles, and the wish for more children to have freedom away from screens. It also stimulated lots of conversation about how to help older and younger residents support each other's needs.

Having run a creative mapping activity event with 23 children, the Mosque subsequently opened its doors as a multi-faith centre, where non-Muslims are welcome to attend workshops.

Improved urban environments

'Creating a play quarter will transform the urban environment, bringing a plethora of improvements. The project will encourage and support traffic calming measures, working alongside Enfield's Mini-Holland scheme. Play sessions will lead to an improved urban environment. The project will create safe routes enabling children to independently access and better enjoy two local parks.'

Three new **Play Streets** were set up within the Play Quarter. This was made possible by:

- a) An open Play Street event, encouraging local participants to come to a play street and find out how they work and how to set up their own; and
- b) Lobbying local government to change the rules around Play Streets, allowing people to apply year-round, rather than with one deadline, and also lifting the fee for play streets.

"Your help with loosening the red tape at the council was invaluable."

Clare Rogers, local play street advocate, 2017

Healthier and more active people and communities

'The project will provide independent play opportunities significantly increasing local children's activity levels and tackling the obesity crisis facing the borough's children head-on, in an exhilarating way.'



Walking Bus to the park

Through an informal walking bus to the park, five children were able to better explore and understand their local environment without the aid of parents. Of children asked for feedback, only 20% already get 'out and about'. The other 80% children had never been to the park without their parents before. More delivery and research is needed explore whether walking buses can help children feel more comfortable using public spaces for free and active play.

Play Streets

Play Quarters activity including the open play street stimulated three new potential play streets. Research on the impact of play streets has shown they encourage an increase in physical activity amongst local children.

"Play Streets are my favourite day on the month. I just wish we had them every week. They are my favourite time to play because everyone is out and about and because I can use my rollerblades all afternoon."

Ffion, Play Street Resident, Age 10.

Safe 'Pit Stop' Points

These locations were set up around the area (in shops, community locations) as safe places children could collect badges, healthy snacks, and speak to a responsible adult, to support them to navigate and explore their environment with more security. There was a considerable

level of support and willingness amongst local organisations and businesses in becoming 'Pit Stops' and supporting child-friendly public spaces. More piloting is needed to effectively market these Pit Stop points, followed by research into the potential for these safe points to effectively encourage greater use of public spaces by children and reduce fear amongst parents.



6 What we learned



The Play Quarter idea was enthusiastically adopted by existing networks of 'play champions' based around existing play streets operating in the area.

We identified a number of key functions for London Play in leading the development of the emerging Play Quarter:

Identifying and NAMING the need for street play in the capital, and, through consultation, discovering how deeply the concern about lack of play was shared across the local community of Palmers' Green.

Identifying and CONNECTING existing (Play Street advocates) and new local play champions through holding meetings to bring organisations and generations together to talk about play; and via social media. Palmers Green has a well-used community website, strong attendance at Residents Associations, and events, and some very vocal parents. This high level of activism and engagement was identified by the Project Worker as very helpful for developing momentum in a short-term project. As an 'outside agent', London Play helped bring communities together in surprising ways: “

“We realised that it takes an outside eye to help team up existing offers, e.g. a multi-faith session where the Mosque's youth group meet to play with the Scouts.”

Project Coordinator.

NOURISHING emerging networks and helping to ignite a sense of a local 'community of practice' around play. Examples include the shared creation of the Palmers Green Play Quarter Action Plan, and empowering local play champions to become active in delivering child- and play-friendly events including play ideas to take away such as Junk Modelling. London Play also encouraged safe 'Pit Stops' to be mapped and activated, in partnership with local businesses and providers. London Play also supported the creation of more play streets by working with the London Borough of Enfield to simplify the application process, and challenged accepted notions about play during workshops that included parents e.g. Beavers.

ILLUMINATING the potential of Play Quarters by documenting what was learned, achieved and as the potential to be further explored and developed

“The workshop went down well with the Beavers and gave their parents something to think about. As you know I am all for children having the freedom to grow up without being watched every minute of the day, and your input to our parents made them think deeply about the way forward.”

Leader, Beavers, May 2017

7 Areas for development

As a pilot project, one of the aims was to identify strategies for future rollout of the concept. Some of the areas identified for further development include:

- A longer time frame and more resourcing would allow more indepth research to be carried out and realise the full potential of UK/London Play Quarters. For example, exploring and illuminating what might keep a Play Quarter alive and growing, what would help members stay connected, and how long and how many Play Quarters are needed before they emerge as a powerful system of influence on the resurgence of street play across the capital and the UK.
- **Although London Play was fortunate to have lots of keen community members who wanted the project to succeed, most wanted to volunteer to support one or two events, rather than become an ‘ambassador’ for the project. Ongoing support from a core team led by London Play would help ensure the project continues and evolves, and could further support the emergence of more local and powerful play ambassadors.**
- Preparing the ground before engagement would work to optimise activation, for example via social media over a number of months, plus seeding the idea through visiting existing play streets.
- **The local primary school felt unable to get involved in the project in Palmers Green. This proved challenging as it limited the number of children the Project Coordinator could interact with in a short timeframe and also how comprehensively the project could be marketed to children and families. For future Play Quarters, it is recommended a signed agreement be in place with the local school before project activity begins**
- A longer-term project and more extensive marketing strategy would help to make the most of existing local publicity channels to spread the word about the project and its offerings for children and families – for example the library’s social media channels.
- **Seasonality should be built into the programme timeline when planning for Play Quarter rollout – as for example play streets are better attended by all ages in the warmer months when people are naturally more inclined to be outside.**

Appendix

Participants:

Activity	Adults	Children	Total
Consultation	13	0	13
Play streets consultation	24	32	56
Open play street	20	20	40
Arts Workshop (Varosi)	4	5	9
Knitting Workshop (intergenerational)	16	3	19
Mapping at Mosque	4	23	27
Mapping at Beavers Session	5	16	21
Walking Bus to the Park	3	5	8
Talk for Fox Lane Residents	45	0	45
Ukulele Workshop (intergenerational)			
TOTALS	134	104	238
Online presence – PQ page on LP website	44 hits		