

CASE STUDY: AUGUST 2020

Play Haven is a ‘godsend’



Rachel with Dee-jay at Somerford Grove Adventure Playground’s Play Haven session

David and Rachel smile as Dee-jay, 4, flashes past pushing a bright red ride-on car. “He just loves it here,” says David, beaming. The family is at Somerford Grove Adventure Playground in Haringey for a Neighbourhood Play Havens session, which gives them exclusive access to the playground for an hour, before the public sessions begin.

With a serious lung condition which at times leaves him reliant on a wheelchair, David has until recently been shielding – and consequently the whole family largely confined to their one bedroom flat. Lack of space is not the only problem; they are also forced to cope with daily incidents of antisocial behavior and noise in their block, intensifying the claustrophobia and anxiety caused by months of confinement. David’s doctor has said that getting out and walking in the fresh air will improve his health, but the pandemic has made this near impossible.

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It has been difficult, David admits. He doesn’t like sitting around; he prefers to be productive: “I used to work as a roofer, and a chef. Being able to come here, it gets me out of the house and spending time with Dee-jay.” He is volunteering his time to help maintain the playground when his health and the circumstances allow. Rachel agrees vigorously. “This has been a godsend for all of us, this place,” she says. “It’s helped David feel less anxious and I get some peace and quiet.” Dee-jay

flashes past again, enjoying the run of the space. Meanwhile David gets busy in the kitchen, preparing the family breakfast.

Haringey is one of five boroughs where London Play's Neighbourhood Play Havens scheme is operating this summer, supporting adventure playgrounds to meet the needs of vulnerable children and families, or those who would otherwise have been excluded. Because of Covid restrictions, Somerford Grove is only able to cater for groups of 15 children at a time; they must book two-hour sessions in advance. This is a significant departure from the open access, come-and-go-as-you-please ethos that prevails in normal times.

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Lead playworker Tam says that it has been a challenging adjustment for playworkers and children, and that there has been conflict outside the gates as local young people find themselves excluded when sessions are at capacity. “In the summer holidays we would usually see up to 100 children coming through the gates every day. And lots of them would stay all day. Now we have to turn kids away, and turn them out too. It doesn't feel right.”

The Play Havens project is funding an additional three hours of opening for the playground each day, enabling them to help families like David and Rachel. “This place is really needed, especially after the tough time that some families have had during lockdown” says Tam. “The Play Havens funding means more children having fun and more families getting the support they need.”

NOTE

London Play's [Neighbourhood Play Havens](#) project aims to ensure that adventurous play is within reach of those children and families who may otherwise be excluded – due to clinical vulnerabilities or capacity limits. Those who are most in need can experience a free weekly hour-long play session in their local safe space to play. Play workers are also receiving specialised training to help adapt their practice and enable them to support quality play experiences in the context of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. The project is funded by the government's Coronavirus Community Support Fund, distributed by the National Lottery Community Fund.