

 A.P.E. Project CIC

# Impact

# Report 2019/20



“This place is great, it’s the best place on earth.”

## A report on the impact of St Pauls Adventure Playground

*The harder, deeper truth is that the future is uncharted, that we can’t map it ‘til we get there. But that’s okay because we have so much imagination, if we use it. We have deep talents of inventiveness and exploration, if we apply them. We are brave enough to invent things we’ve never seen before. Lose those skills and we are adrift. But hone and develop them... we can make any future we choose.*

*Margaret Heffernan<sup>1</sup>*



*Image credit Esther May Campbell*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.mheffernan.com/resources.php#videos>, *The human skills we need in an unpredictable world*, TED Summit - July 2019

## Table of Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| A report on the impact of St Pauls Adventure Playground ..... | 2  |
| Introduction .....  | 4  |
| Local context .....   | 5  |
| Theoretical framework.....                                    | 6  |
| Research Questions.....                                       | 6  |
| Methods of data collection .....                              | 6  |
| Methods of data analysis .....                                | 8  |
| Findings.....   | 8  |
| 1. Community .....  | 9  |
| 2. Education .....  | 11 |
| 3. Health .....   | 13 |
| 4. Fun.....   | 15 |
| Ethical and methodological issues encountered.....            | 16 |
| Conclusion.....   | 16 |
| The Fire .....  | 17 |
| Appendix 1 – Questionnaire.....                               | 18 |
| Appendix 2 – Themes showing quotations .....                  | 27 |

## List of Tables

|  |                           |
|--|---------------------------|
| <a href="#"><u>Table 1 – Coding of the data .....</u></a>  | <a href="#"><u>7</u></a>  |
| <a href="#"><u>Table 2 – Demographic characteristics of questionnaire respondents .....</u></a>    | <a href="#"><u>8</u></a>  |
| <a href="#"><u>Table 3 – Summary of questionnaire responses by theme .....</u></a>                 | <a href="#"><u>9</u></a>  |
| <a href="#"><u>Table 4 – Skills developed through adventure playground participation .....</u></a> | <a href="#"><u>11</u></a> |

## Introduction

The purpose of this project is to establish an evidence base for the impact of St Pauls Adventure Playground (hereafter referred to as the Playground) on the children who play there, their families and the wider community. This will fortify fundraising bids as well as provide a starting point for future monitoring and evaluation. The intended audience is the A.P.E. Project's (the community interest company who run the Playground) staff and management committee.

I was appointed to undertake this project because of my background in social research. I am also a regular user of the Playground, along with my two young children. I have lived in St Pauls for ten years and am personally affected by the issues raised in this project. We live in a flat with a tiny garden, more of a yard, which is shared with a neighbour. Unfortunately, she is caught up in addiction and mental illness, making it unsafe for my children to play outside. I was diagnosed with depression when my first child was two which was exacerbated by the isolation I experienced. I believe that regular attendance at the Playground helped prevent a further bout of depression when my second child was a baby. Following the sudden death of my dad, when I was struggling to organise meals for the children, the Playground provided stability for our whole family, and a place for the children to play when I couldn't play with them. While I did not gather data from myself, the story that emerges from the questionnaires and interviews reflects my story. Throughout the project, I have tried to maintain objectivity as a researcher while drawing on my insider perspective to enrich the analysis.

## Local context

The Playground is located in the St Agnes area of St Pauls, an urban neighbourhood, next to the M32 motorway. Although it is a wonderful place to live in many ways (79% of residents are satisfied with their local area, in line with the national average<sup>2</sup>), St Agnes faces a variety of challenges:

- Child poverty – twice as many children live in poverty in St Agnes compared to the average across England (35% compared with 17%).
- Crime – between June 2019 and May 2020, during which time this research was carried out, 452 crimes were reported in St Agnes. That equates to 186 per 1,000 population where the England average is 102. Of these crimes, the majority were either violent (51 per 1000 population where the England average is 29) or anti-social behaviour (42 per 1000 population where the England average is 24).
- Housing – 40% of the population of St Agnes live in flats compared with 22% of the population of England. Most (51%) of the rest live in terraced housing which was built for the employees of Brookes Dye Works in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. As such most families lack significant garden space. Only 32% of homes are owner occupied, half the national average (64%). 35% are socially rented compared with 18% nationally. 19% of households are overcrowded by the standard definition, compared with 9% nationally.
- Health – although St Agnes benefits from access to health services and the green space that is St Agnes Park, fast food outlets, pubs, off-licences, tobacconists and gambling outlets dominate the retail space. The area is rated 40.4 on the index of ‘Access to Health Assets and Hazards’ where the England average is 23.4. Twice as many people as the national average in St Agnes claim mental health related benefits (5.2% compared to 2.3%)
- Ethnic diversity - 42.3% of people in St Agnes are White British and 29.3% are Black compared with 79.8% and 3.5% of people in England.
- Community cohesion – 21.3% of people in St Agnes moved into their address within the last 12 months according to the 2011 Census. This was compared to 12.3% across England. 30.2% of the population were born outside the UK compared to 13.8% nationally. Over twice as many households as the national average have no members with English as their main language (10.0% compared to 4.4%).
- Gentrification - Between 2015 and 2019, St Agnes just made it out of the 10% most deprived LSOAs (Lower Super Output Area – a small area used to generate detailed demographic data). It is now 3,573 out of 32,844 LSOSs in England<sup>3</sup>. As outlined above,

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<sup>2</sup> OCSI report “Local Insight profile for St Pauls Adventure Playground target area”, OCSI 2020

<sup>3</sup> [http://dclgapps.communities.gov.uk/imd/iod\\_index.html](http://dclgapps.communities.gov.uk/imd/iod_index.html)

some of the challenges facing residents are common to all. The challenges particular to those residents experiencing deprivation, particularly children, are not alleviated by their close proximity to relative affluence.

The respondents to the survey echo these issues as outlined below.

### Theoretical framework

This research is undertaken within a social constructionist epistemological framework. This means that, for the purposes of this research, meaning is produced socially, in the relationships between people and their environment. Meaning is not inherent in events or places; it is contextual. This framework is appropriate because the Playground itself is not the object of study; I am interested in the network of meanings that the children who play and their families attach to the playground.

The research process is inductive – conclusions are drawn from the data. I did not formulate hypotheses prior to collecting data. This means that the voices of the children who play and their families are the driving force behind this report.

### Research Questions

These questions form the basis of this project. This project sought to generate knowledge in answer to these questions in order to better evidence the impact of the Playground:

- a) How does the Playground make a difference to the children who play there?
- b) How does the Playground make a difference to their parents?
- c) How does the Playground make a difference to the wider community?

The questions are deliberately broad and open ended because the research process was inductive.

### Methods of data collection

The Playground runs three weekly open sessions. Data was collected first from parents who were at the Playground at one of each of these sessions: Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> and Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> January 2020 and Friday 7<sup>th</sup> February 2020. These days were selected because someone else was available to take care of my children while I worked. Every parent who came to the playground on these sessions was invited to participate in the research and most did. This means that the data collected represents the range of Playground users rather than just those users known to me. However, children aged 8 and over can attend the Playground unaccompanied by a parent. This means that the families of these children are less likely to be represented in the data. It was not possible to reach the parents who did not attend in person due to time and resource constraints. Because of the cold weather at that time of year, fewer families might attend than during the busy summer leading to less volume of data collection. However, the timing of the research

meant that the data collected was rich – the families who attend over the winter are particularly committed to the playground.

Parents completed a questionnaire containing qualitative and quantitative questions (see Appendix 1), either on paper or through Google Forms on their mobile phones. The paper questionnaires were typed into Google Forms so that the data could be analysed collectively. There were 38 completed questionnaires in total.

The final question in the questionnaire was for children: ‘If you would like, please ask your child/ children to draw a picture of their favourite thing about the Playground. This will help us gain an understanding of what the playground means to them.’ This was included at the suggestion of a member of staff who had seen this work well in other settings. However, I did not receive a single picture, despite there being plenty of art supplies available. It seems the children, quite rightly, had other priorities during their time at the Playground. This question remained: how best to elicit the voices of the children, the main users of the Playground, in a way which did not jar against the whole ethos of the play session?

Data was then collected from some of the children at the playground through informal, unstructured interviews. The playworkers and I discussed how best to do this at one of their team meetings. The point was made that collected data clashes with the purpose of the Playground. The Playground is the space where the children are free from the demands and expectations of the adult world, free to follow their own interests for their own reasons. The importance of hearing the children’s voice was also acknowledged, so we devised a way of collecting data in a playful way. Lu, one of the playworkers, particularly took ownership of this and created a television out of a cardboard box. She proceeded to interview children “for Adventure Playground TV” while they were being filmed with their heads in the cardboard box. These interviews were transcribed and analysed alongside the interview data from the adults. The comments from the children reflect the creativity of the medium of data collection. For example:

*Lu: How often do you come?*

*B: Every Friday.*

*C: Every Friday.*

*A: Every Friday.*

*Lu: Every Friday! And what would you do if you didn’t come here?*

*B: Cry.*

*A: We would die!*

*C: I would just play Fortnite.*

*B: He would play Fortnite, I would cry.*

*A: I would go to China.*

These comments demonstrate how important the playground is to these boys. If they were not at the Playground, they would be, they say, sad and/or in front of a screen (or in China!). This might have an adverse effect on their health and wellbeing. But they do not express their experiences in these terms. It is up to me as the researcher to interpret the data.

### Methods of data analysis

Collating the quantitative data using Google Forms was very straightforward as pie charts are generated automatically. Thematic analysis was applied to the qualitative data, using the method set out by Braun and Clarke (2006). I read and re-read the transcripts before developing an initial codes (see Table 1). These codes are the ideas that emerge from the data, in no particular order and without much filter at this stage. I then colour coded the entire transcript, using highlighters, to see the prevalence of each idea. The next stage was to group the codes into themes. This was about starting to distil the underlying meaning of the impact of the Playground on children, families and the community. What emerged is that the Playground has a social impact, an educational one (in the broadest sense), there is an impact on health and overall, the Playground enables fun.

| Theme          | Social   | Educational  | Health  | Fun                                 |
|----------------|--|--|---|-------------------------------------|
| Codes included | Connection/<br>community<br><br>Diversity<br><br>Wider<br>neighbourhood/<br>location | Skill development<br>incl. life<br><br>Freedom/risk,<br>creativity | Physical health esp.<br>exercise<br><br>Food<br><br>Parental respite<br><br>Money | Space/things/ staff<br><br>Fun/love |

*Table 1 – Coding of the data*

I then returned to the data to check that these themes reflect everything in the responses without distortion. I then created a table (see Appendix 2) where I selected key quotations from the data for each theme. Finally, I summarised the story from the data for each theme, in preparation for writing up this report.

### Findings

Between 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2019 and 29<sup>th</sup> February 2020, a period of five months and the cold period of the year, there were 3,329 child visits to the Playground's open sessions. This is an average of 59 children playing at each session. There were 1,294 adult visits, an average of 22 per session.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The Playground's own daily record and debrief form. Before October 2019, this was done on paper so data not readily available.



Responses to the multiple-choice questions on the questionnaire show that the users of the Playground mirror the community of St Agnes. There are higher levels of deprivation and challenging circumstances among Playground users than in the general population.

|  | Respondents % | National % |
|--|---------------|------------|
| Single parents                               | 32            | 23         |
| Receipt of benefits other than child benefit | 49            | 10         |
| Mental health problems – present or past     | 32            | 17         |
| Ethnicity other than white British           | 44            | 20         |
| Social housing                               | 24            | 17         |
| Access to a car                              | 26            | 19         |

*Table 2 – Demographic characteristics of questionnaire respondents*

The responses to the quantitative section at the beginning of the questionnaire support the analysis of the qualitative data. These serve as headings for the rest of the analysis where each theme will be unpacked in more depth.

| Theme               | 100% of respondents say that...  |
|---------------------|--|
| <i>1. Community</i> | ...coming to the Adventure Playground gives them a sense of community.               |
| <i>2. Education</i> | ...their children develop resilience through their time at the Adventure Playground. |
| <i>3. Health</i>    | ...coming to the Adventure Playground helps the children stay healthy.               |
| <i>4. Fun</i>       | ...they look forward to their visits to the Playground.                              |

*Table 3 – Summary of questionnaire responses by theme*

### *1. Community*

That the word community appears fifty-two times across the transcripts shows that this is the central theme of the data. The Playground is a focal point for building a sense of community as well as a focal point for expressing communities that exist already.

A diverse community has been built up around the Playground. Users emphasise its inclusivity – all are welcome regardless of ethnicity, culture, age and special educational needs or disabilities (SEND). Several parents specifically note that playing at the Playground enables their children to make friends across divides that exist in society; one parent calls this “exposure to diversity.” For me as a playground user and community member, this is extremely valuable and sadly rare. Although St Pauls is amazingly diverse, it is also divided. The Playground is the only community resource that I know of that feels like it doesn’t belong to a particular group within the community (other than the Nursery and Children’s Centre which is only accessible to families of

very young children). This is important because diversity is associated with social cohesion and, for members of ethnic minorities, better mental health.<sup>5</sup> Research from the University of Toronto has also found that infants who are exposed to people from races other than their own develop less pronounced racial bias.<sup>6</sup> The diversity of the community that has formed around the Playground is incredibly precious.

Although the data collected is emphatic that diversity is at the heart of the impact of the Playground, there is a nuance here. One parent commented that they use the playground so that their “children get to mix with children who are similar to them”. This comment contrasts with many others about choosing the Playground to give their children opportunities to mix with children who differ to them in terms of ethnicity and age. The parent identifies as Black Caribbean and lives in an area that is predominantly white, some distance from St Pauls. Before I was a parent myself, I spent some time volunteering at the Playground. The then manager told me that the Playground was a meeting point for Black children from all over Bristol. Many Black families have been priced out of living in St Pauls so have moved to other parts of Bristol yet still feel at home here. The Playground gives those children an opportunity to connect with their Black identity. Musician, writer and social entrepreneur Akala describes how black consciousness “shaped [his] sense of self-worth and imbued [him] with a community-orientated moral compass.”<sup>7</sup> In a city with a terrible track record for racial equality<sup>8</sup>, creating a safe space for Black children to build their sense of identity is crucial.

Finally on community, there is a sense that the Playground’s presence improves the wider neighbourhood. The Playground was missed during the years before the A.P.E. Project took over its running. Now that it has re-opened more widely, more families use St Agnes park leading to less litter and less antisocial behaviour than before, according to one parent. Another parent remarks that the Playground makes St Agnes a more “desirable” place to live. This echoes what Thangham Debonnaire, MP for our constituency, said when she visited the Playground in February:

*As a neighbour and a local, I just think you're great. It's such a magical place.*

*Thangham Debonnaire MP*

Rob Dolan, former beat manager for St Pauls with Avon and Somerset Police had this to say:

*St Pauls Playground from a community policing perspective is an extremely positive community activity that adds value to the community of St Pauls in*

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<sup>5</sup> Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity, *Diversity or deprivation – what’s the issue?*. Retrieved on 5.11.2020 from: <https://hummedia.manchester.ac.uk/institutes/code/briefings/publications/diverse-neighbourhoods-policy-brief.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/desc.12537>

<sup>7</sup> p. 14, Daley, K. (2018) *Natives*. London: Two Roads.

<sup>8</sup> Elahi, F., Finney, N. & Lympelopoulou, K. (2017) *Bristol: a city divided?* Retrieved on 5.11.2020 from: <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/CoDE%20Briefing%20Bristol%20v2.pdf>

*Bristol. The Playground is supported by its team of volunteers and trustees who work tirelessly to provide amazing opportunities and facilities to be enjoyed and accessed by all. The Playground compliments the surrounding St Agnes Park green space area, making it a key community area maximised by all within the community of St Pauls. Like any community resource I am proud to support it within my role as St Pauls Neighbourhood Police Officer.*

*Rob Dolan, Avon and Somerset Police*

It is clear that the Playground is held in high esteem for the impact it has on the community, beyond the children and families who directly use it.

## 2. Education

The Playground is “inspiring”. Parents identify a long list of skills that are developed during their children’s play. These cover social and emotional as well as physical, practical and creative skills:

| Skills in the sense of character attributes | Skills in the sense of activities |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| Resilience                                  | Washing up                        |
| ‘street wise skills’                        | Music                             |
| Social                                      | Photo club                        |
| Physical and motor skills                   | Cooking                           |
| Creativity                                  | Bike-riding                       |
| Respect                                     | Climbing                          |
| Self-esteem                                 | Football                          |
| Understanding                               |                                   |
| Awareness                                   |                                   |
| Risk taking                                 |                                   |
| Exploring                                   |                                   |
| Confidence                                  |                                   |

*Table 4 – Skills developed through adventure playground participation*

What emerges from this list is that the specific activities are valued – creative and life skills are so important for young people. But even more important are the attributes that the children are developing during their play time at the Playground. Research tells us that the ability to plan, monitor and review learning alongside the motivation to learn is a huge factor in how much

academic progress a child will make.<sup>9</sup> Managed risk-taking, confidence, creativity (the ability to try things in different ways), self-awareness and self-esteem are all inherent in the learning process. Such skills are also sought after by employers who consistently argue that they are not sufficiently developed within traditional education.<sup>10</sup>

The specific skills that the children are learning, from cooking to climbing, photography to acrobatics are the vehicle by which the children learn the fundamental life skills. However, these activities are also the vehicle for a lot of community-building and a lot of fun. For example, this year we have had the Photo Club project and the Scrap Book exhibition. Esther May Campbell, photographer and facilitator, had this to say:

*I was riveted at the playground, seeing young people play hard, take risks, fall down and get up again, destroy and create. I could feel how this play time builds resilience, community connection and feeds creativity. Bringing art and photography to kids who are already brilliant at taking risks has been a joy. They've attacked, toyed and played with photography with the same urgency and joy as they do around the playground. The pictures they have taken are extraordinary. Clearly the project reveals how crucial play spaces and art projects are for young people, and all of us! It allows imaginations to flourish, and we need our young people to be creative, problem solving, risk taking grown-ups in order to re-imagine our world, change the paradigms we are in, imagine something new.*

*Esther May Campbell*

We all enjoyed seeing the incredible artistry of the children, a real celebration of the Playground. Participation in extra-curricular activities such as the arts is associated with a wide range of benefits particularly for engagement in school and wider skill development.<sup>11</sup> The Playground affords such opportunities to the children who play there.

The final aspect of the educational impact of the Playground to highlight from the data is the area of social skills. Character education is high on the government's agenda at the moment because of the importance of character attributes like respect and reliability for economic and social wellbeing.<sup>12</sup> The data, not only from the parents but also directly from the children, shows that children are developing social skills at the Playground. Here's Lu again, interviewing a boy aged seven:

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<sup>9</sup> <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/meta-cognition-and-self-regulation/>

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.cbi.org.uk/media/3841/12546\\_tess\\_2019.pdf](https://www.cbi.org.uk/media/3841/12546_tess_2019.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/818679/An\\_Unequal\\_Playing\\_Field\\_report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/818679/An_Unequal_Playing_Field_report.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/character-education-framework>

*L: How would you be different?*

*B: Because this, this has changed me a lot.*

*L: In what way?*

*B: In my happiness and my kindness.*

*L: In your happiness and your kindness, it's made you a kinder person?*

*B: It's shown me how to treat other people.*

I have seen this particular child play with children younger and older than himself; I've seen him regulate his emotions, defuse conflicts, and challenge as well as encourage others. The Playground has provided a context for him to develop these vital skills while having a great time. (Additionally, this is the quotation in the title of this report: 'this place is great, it's the best place on earth.')

### *3. Health*

Parents identify that their children's play benefits their physical health enormously, particularly as the children use their play time to exercise. Research indicates that free play, such as the play the children do at the Playground, is more effective in halting weight gain in obese children than exercise and food programmes combined.<sup>13</sup> The long-term benefits of free play are not limited to physical health, important as that is. Parents describe the impact of the Playground in terms of their children having the chance to "let off steam" or "burn energy." This implies that when their children are cooped up at home, there is an adverse effect on their behaviour, impacting themselves and the whole family. This health-giving play is made possible by the freedom and space available at the Playground which otherwise is unavailable to the families that need it most. It is also facilitated by the skilled and trained staff. As one child puts it, without the staff "there would be a lot of beef" and they are very helpful, especially when it comes to making slides. (Actually, the slides come up a lot in the data – they are clearly very important.)

Children and parents alike appreciate the Playground for the availability of free, nutritious food. For example, one boy's favourite memory of the Playground is "eating macaroni and cheese". One parent says:

*Sometimes my child is fed when I don't have money to, or provided with snacks and drinks.*

The physical health benefits of providing food to children who would otherwise go without are clear and vital in an age of growing food poverty.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, food is tied up with our other three themes of community, learning and enjoyment. As mentioned above I had a chaotic time

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<sup>13</sup> <https://islingtonplay.org.uk/what-we-do/why-play-matters/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/>

last year during which I was hugely grateful for the meals. They nourished our bodies but also connected us to the community and made us smile. And my toddlers would try vegetables they would never touch at home.

Physical and mental health are closely related. Alongside the benefits of free play, fresh air and food for the children, parents identify the positive impact on their own mental health of having time to relax and socialise. In response to the question “what do you gain from using the Playground”, one parent wrote:

*A chance to see adults! As a single mum (lone parent) I don't get out at all so this is the one time I get to discuss my child's behaviour or indeed anything else!  
This is a community on which I have had to depend at times and which has depended on me.*

This resonates with research into loneliness among parents: over half of parents feel lonely, at least some of the time. The problem is particularly acute among parents of babies and children who have not yet started school. What helps is local activities for parents and children together.<sup>15</sup> Loneliness is detrimental to our health. Psychologist Julianne Holt-Lunstad has found that the impact of lacking social connection on reducing life span is greater than the risk associated with obesity, excess alcohol consumption, and a lack of exercise.<sup>16</sup> The antidote to loneliness is social connection; community is healing.

There is a growing body of research around Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). The original study showed that adults who had experienced adversity as children were more likely to develop health problems in adulthood than the general population. For example an ACE score of 4 or more (meaning that the person has been exposed to four incidences of adversity during childhood such as abuse, neglect, domestic violence, parental substance-abuse, mental ill-health, or incarceration) corresponds to being two a half times as likely as someone with an ACE score of zero to develop chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and hepatitis, four and a half times as likely to develop depression and twelve times more likely to attempt suicide.<sup>17</sup> The reason for this is that continuous activation of the stress response system has profound impacts on the developing brains and bodies of children. This is known as toxic stress. Thanks to the work of Emmy Werner, it is now understood that toxic stress can be prevented and addressed through healthy social connection. Although ACEs are prevalent throughout the population, they are correlated with poverty.<sup>18</sup> This indicates that the children and parents in St Agnes are likely to have high ACE scores and are therefore at elevated risk of physical and mental illness. The role of the Playground in building and facilitating community is inextricable from its impact on the health of the community.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/lonelinessbriefing>

<sup>16</sup> <https://brenebrown.com/transcript/vivek-murthy-and-brene/>

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(98\)00017-8/abstract](https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(98)00017-8/abstract)

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6872440/>

#### 4. Fun

Underpinning the themes of community, education and health is the theme of fun, pleasure, joy. Unanimously, parents and children look forward to their visits to the Playground and enjoy being there. The facilities, particularly the play structures, are cited as the reason that they have so much fun at the Playground. Fresh air and outside space as well as the cosy inside space enable fun. The highly skilled staff enable fun. Everyone laughs a lot and, as they say, laughter is the best medicine of all. This is the reason that the Playground has such a profound impact on building community, and the education and health of the children. We'll end the discussion of these research findings with the words of a parent:

*I don't have any family round here and it's the closest thing we get.*

## Ethical and methodological issues encountered

The anonymity of participants has been protected and all raw data is securely stored on password protected systems. The adult participants explicitly gave their consent by signing before filling in their questionnaires. The children interviewed for this project gave their consent verbally and participated voluntarily. However, it would have been better to get consent from their parents in addition. All participants benefit from the outcomes of the study which should provide evidence to support future funding bids, safeguarding the future of the Playground.

As discussed above, all parents who attend the Playground for certain sessions were invited to take part in the study. Most did fill in questionnaires which means that their voices are represented in this report. However the extent to which they were able to respond depended on factors such as their proficiency with English, their ability to use Google Forms on their phones, how much supervision their children required. One parent helped to translate the questionnaire into Somali but the Somali speakers were still not able to write as much through the translator as those who wrote for themselves in English. This means that parents whose first language is English and whose children were calm at that moment are over-represented in this study. The issue was exacerbated as the questionnaire was quite long. This is because contextual information was important for this study. Ideally the contextual information would have been available elsewhere so the survey could have focused exclusively on impact. Further work could be done around eliciting feedback from more marginalised groups in the community such as those with English as an additional language and the parents of multiple children or children with SEND.

Sample size is often an issue in social research. A good number of parents (thirty-eight) completed the questionnaire but only three interviews, involving a total of five children, were carried out. (The first interview was with a parent.) One of the children was only three years old at the time and did not say a whole lot although he expressed his enjoyment through dancing and smiling. Although I have tried to foreground the words of those children throughout this report, further work could be done around eliciting feedback from children, particularly in the 8-13 years age bracket. Due to a lack of communication infrastructure, it was not possible to get questionnaires to the parents of all the children who attend the Playground unaccompanied, the over eight-year olds. The questionnaire did go up on the APE Facebook page but nearly all the respondents were those who were approached in person.

## Conclusion

This research has shown that the Playground has a massive impact and is of huge strategic importance to the community. The Playground serves a neighbourhood with high needs in terms of economic deprivation, poor health, particularly mental health, and overcrowded housing. According to this data, the families who use the Playground are representative of this population. As such the community of the Playground is wonderfully diverse in terms of socio-economic background as well as ethnicity. Families treasure the Playground and their attendance builds their sense of belonging to the community. At the same time the children develop skills that are



vital for success in education and life. Their physical and mental health is improved along with the mental health of the parents. All this while having a great time.

## The Fire

Having collected the data for this research project, I was forced to take a break before writing this report due to a lack of childcare during the Covid-19 pandemic. On the 11<sup>th</sup> April 2020, during the lockdown, the Playground suffered a devastating arson attack. The whole community, especially the children, was shocked to the core and so sad. We were so relieved that Guy and Rachel stood firm and kept going. But then we were all blown away by an amazing outpouring of support, especially at a time when so much was going on around the world and at home. Sixteen-year-old volunteer Stan Jones started a Crowdfunder page, raising £35,757 with 1,047 supporters in forty-eight days. This is a real testament to the value of the Playground among the community. To end this report, here are just a couple of the 402 comments from the Crowdfunder, to give a flavour of the esteem in which the Playground is held by the community:

*WE ALL NEED PLAY AND THE LOVE AND CREATIVITY YOU ALL GIVE THE  
CHILDREN*

*Thank you St Pauls adventure playground for creating a safe space to play for  
our kids for so long.*

## Appendix 1 – Questionnaire

# St Pauls Adventure Playground Impact Survey

Thank you for picking up this questionnaire. We are surveying users of St Pauls Adventure Playground open sessions in order to find out about the impact of the project. This will help us to apply for funding to secure the future of the playground. Some of the questions may seem irrelevant or intrusive - please answer as much as you can in order to help us build a full picture. This research is being carried out by Susannah Harlow who is also a user of the playground.

By completing this survey, you are agreeing to participate in this research project. Your data (answers to these questions) will be stored securely on password protected systems and your anonymity will be protected. You have the right to withdraw at any time until the report is completed. This should be the start of May 2020. To withdraw your data, please contact Susannah Harlow on [susannah.harlow@gmail.com](mailto:susannah.harlow@gmail.com). If you have any complaints about the way this research is being carried out, please contact Guy or Rachel at the playground. \* Required

1. Please sign here to confirm you understand the above and are happy to participate in this research project. \*

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2. Please write your name. \*

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3. Please write today's date \*

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*Example: January 7, 2019*

Who are you and your family?

We need to know a bit about your background as a family.

4. How old are you?

*Mark only one oval.*

- Under 21
- 21-25
- 25-30
- 30-35
- 35-40
- 40-45
- 46 or older

5. Please tell us about the children in your care.

*Check all that apply.*

|         | 0 yr old                 | 1 yr old                 | 2 yr old                 | 3 yr old                 | 4 yr old                 | 5 yr old                 | 6 yr old                 | 7 yr old                 | 8 yr old                 |
|---------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Child 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Child 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Child 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Child 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Child 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Child 6 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Child 7 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Child 8 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Child 9 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

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6. Are you a single parent?

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

Other:

\_\_\_\_\_

7. What kind of accommodation do you live in?

*Mark only one oval.*

- A property that we own
- A property that we rent privately
- Social housing Other:
- \_\_\_\_\_

8. Do your children have space to play outdoors at your home?

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Kind of (please explain)

9. Do you have access to a car?

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No

10. Do you or have you ever suffered from mental health problems?

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No

11. Which ethnicity do you identify as?

*Mark only one oval.*

- White British
- Irish
- Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- White other - please describe
- White and Black Carribean
- White and Black African
- White and Asian
- Indian
- Pakistani
- Bangladeshi
- Chinese
- Asian other - please describe
- Black African
- Black African - Somali
- Black Carribean
- Black other - please describe
- Arab
- Other ethnic group - please describe

12. Where does your household income come from?

*Mark only one oval.*

- Employment only
- Benefits only
- A combination of employment and benefits for example tax credits. (Please exclude child benefit.)
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

13. What's your postcode?

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14. Do you have a disability or learning difficulty?

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

What does  
the  
Adventure  
Playground  
mean to  
you?

In this section, please give as much detail as possible. Perhaps give examples of special moments at the playground along with reasons why they meant something to you. If it's easier to talk than write, please let me, Susannah, know - I might be able to record your answers.

15. Do you look forward to your visits to the Adventure Playground?

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No

16. Does coming to the Adventure Playground give you a sense of community?

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Other:
- 

17. Do you feel that your children develop resilience through their time at the Adventure Playground?

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

18. Do you think coming to the Adventure Playground helps the children stay healthy?

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

Not sure

19. How important is the food provided at the Adventure Playground for you and your family?

*Mark only one oval.*

Really important

Not important at all

Neutral

20. Why do you use the Playground?

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21. What do your children gain from using the playground?

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22. What do you gain from using the playground?

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23. What do you think the wider community gains from the Playground being here?

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24. If the Playground weren't here, what would you miss?

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25. Please use this space to add anything else you would like to say about the Playground.

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26. If you would like, please ask your child/children to draw a picture of their favourite thing about the Playground. This will help us gain an understanding of what the playground means to them.

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27. If you would be happy to be contacted for further research, please leave your email address here. Thanks.

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28. THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE! It will help secure the future of the playground.

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## Appendix 2 – Themes showing quotations

| Theme          | Social  | Educational   | Health  | Fun                                    |
|----------------|---|---|---|--|
| Codes included | Connection/<br>community<br><br>Diversity<br><br>Wider<br>neighbourhood<br>/ location | Skill<br>development<br>including life<br><br>Freedom/risk,<br>creativity | Physical health<br>esp. exercise<br><br>Food<br><br>Parental respite<br><br>Money | Space/things/<br>staff<br><br>Fun/love |

|                       |   |   |   |   |
|-----------------------|---|---|---|---|
| <p>Key quotations</p> | <p>I use the playground so that my children see their friends &amp; have some fun. They also get to explore in their interests and find out more about others.</p> <p>Neutral environment</p> <p>to be a part of a community who care and support each other. for my children to also feel that sense of belonging too and for them to get space, physical freedom and physically moving too.</p> <p>Acceptance</p> <p>So my son has a sense of community. As a single mum of a single child it's vital to have an indoor/ outdoor place to do this</p> <p>My children get to mix with children who</p> | <p>SEND</p> <p>Resilience</p> <p>'street wise skills'</p> <p>Inspiring</p> <p>Social</p> <p>Physical and motor skills</p> <p>Creativity</p> <p>Washing up</p> <p>Music</p> <p>Photo club</p> <p>Respect</p> <p>Confidence</p> <p>Self –esteem</p> <p>Understanding</p> <p>Awareness</p> <p>Risk taking</p> <p>Cooking</p> <p>Exploring</p> <p>B: Because this, this has changed me a lot.</p> <p>L: In what way?</p> <p>B: In my happiness and my kindness.</p> <p>L: In your happiness and your kindness, it's made you a kinder person?</p> | <p>Burn energy</p> <p>Let off steam and be truly free</p> <p>Outside space</p> <p>Free</p> <p>A sense of adventure</p> <p>Exercise/ movement</p> <p>Bike riding</p> <p>Climbing</p> <p>Football</p> <p>'to gain friendships and to understand the community so that they will not become vulnerable and have the understanding of how life work'</p> <p>Some time to have a cup of tea and speak to adults</p> <p>I gain from relaxing</p> <p>A chance to see adults! As a single mum (lone parent) I don't get out at all so this is the one time I get to discuss my child's behaviour or</p> | <p>Slides</p> <p>To do something together with the children</p> <p>Meaningful experiences with my kids</p> <p>Swings</p> <p>Netting</p> <p>Staff are so great</p> <p>Playing with things they don't normally get to do</p> <p>Beyond the scope of our small terrace garden</p> <p>Laughter</p> <p>Outside</p> <p>A lot of support from Guy and Rachel as well as the other play workers, a break from being one on one with my son, a sense of community and belonging</p> <p>The trees</p> <p>the adventure playground is so varied it's always fun and exciting</p> |
|-----------------------|---|---|---|---|

