

EA Positive Play

Evaluation Report

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Acknowledgements

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Main Messages

The report that follows provides a fuller account of the SPIU evaluation. Here, we summarise the key findings for readers familiar with EA Positive Play:

What evidence supports the contention that EA Positive Play is achieving its goals?

1. Facilitating and applying increased awareness, knowledge and understanding of the benefits of play.

- The quantitative target for each milestone was achieved or exceeded in each of the first two years of the project.
- EA Positive Play produced a wide range of documentation and activity designed to inform parents/carers.
- EA interventions are appropriately focused on changing attitudes and enabling engagement
- Evaluation exercises with users - the very process and the actual results of the evaluations - suggest that positive play interactions are being facilitated between parents/carers and children
- Parents perceive that participation in EA Positive Play is enhancing the skills and personal development of their children

2. Reaping the rewards of increasing opportunities for active play and physical play

- The quantitative target for each milestone was achieved or exceeded in each of the first two years of the project.
- EA Positive Play has increased opportunities for active and physical play.
- Opportunities for home play have been increased through the provision of packs and through community interventions that aim to enable home-based play

3. Developing play for the benefit of the community

- An effective Community Play Forum has been established.
- Three of the four project milestones were exceeded in the first year of the project and all project milestones were achieved or exceeded in the second year of the project
- East Ayrshire Council is acknowledging the importance of play in key strategic documents
- There is ample qualitative evidence that capacity has been enhanced and community cohesion has been promoted through EA Positive Play

What needs to change now?

EA Positive Play is clearly a success and has achieved its outcomes and milestones. The primary recommendation would be to ensure that ***the work of EA Positive Play is carried forward by East Ayrshire Council and its respective partners after the end of the Big Lottery project funding.*** In terms of specific developments to enhance the work of promoting positive play in East Ayrshire, it is recommended that the following issues are considered.

- ***Parents and carers.*** There is some evidence that EA Positive Play initiatives cascade beyond those adults/carers specifically trained to facilitate physical and active play. Future evaluation and future design of initiatives should pay greater attention to the extent to which, and the ways in which, the interventions are affording secondary skill development to other parents/carers beyond those to whom training/resources are delivered.
- ***Gender.*** EA Positive Play uses existing community groups as the primary medium to engage parents/carers. Not surprisingly, this means that more women than men are engaged. Future initiatives might give more explicit consideration as to how fathers and male carers might be encouraged to promote active and physical play with their children.
- ***Community play culture.*** EA Positive Play is primarily focused on parents/carers. Future initiatives should acknowledge the wider community contexts within which active outdoor physical play sits. Ways of informing and engaging the wider community - beyond parents and carers - to embrace a community play culture is the next logical step in promoting active and physical play in East Ayrshire. This can be achieved through the community play forum also which is part of the BLF initiative.
- ***More systematic focus on specific resources.*** EA Positive Play systematically evaluated the individual resources that comprised the initiative. However, it was not possible in this evaluation, nor was it in the remit of this evaluation, to appraise these user resource reviews systematically. Future developments of EA Positive Play should focus on the merits and points for development of specific EA Positive Play resources.
- ***Beyond active play for holidays and the summer seasons.*** Active and physical play is not limited to the summer months. Events and play sessions are currently delivered during term time, Easter, summer and October holidays. However, the weather and daylight hours of a winter in the northern hemisphere means that strategies to embrace physical and outdoor active play must vary across the seasons. Future development of EA Positive Play should give explicit consideration to how such play might be facilitated. Embracing seasonality would be a positive future development for EA Positive Play.
- ***Evaluating EA Positive Play with younger parents.*** This evaluation engaged mainly middle and older-aged parents/carers, reflecting the age composition of those attending the groups that were selected for the evaluation. It would be prudent for future evaluation to pay particular attention to younger parents to confirm that they are also taking an active role in promoting active physical play through EA Positive Play.

Introduction: Positive Play in East Ayrshire

The Value of Children's Play

The importance of play in children's lives is acknowledged in abundance through anecdotal evidence, casual observation, personal experience and received wisdom. Indeed, children are widely understood to be synonymous with play.

However, in recent years, there has been growing recognition that it is insufficient to assume that children will partake, and reap the benefits, of play. Fears for children's safety - from traffic, other children and adult strangers - have heightened parental fears over outdoor play and led to restrictions being placed upon it; and increased opportunities for home-based play render physical outdoor play less common and contribute to concerns that the health of contemporary children is being impaired by the lack of active physical play.

Coincidentally, these concerns over children's play have heightened as the positive value of children's play has

been articulated for children, their families and the wider communities of which they are part. Most significantly, challenged by the UK Government to demonstrate the value of children's play, the play sector responded with *Making the Case for Play: Building policies and strategies for school-age children* (Hamilton and Gill, 2002), which led to the formal response of the UK Government in the form of the 'Dobson report', *Getting Serious About Play*, in 2005.

These diverse trends - growing public concern over the nature of contemporary children's play and the explicit articulation of the benefits of play by play professionals and service managers - lead to the recognition that quality play experiences and outcomes cannot be assumed to prevail. Rather, those with responsibilities for children's welfare and development - parents, families, communities, local authorities, children's organisations, etc. - need to facilitate positive play for children.

Positive Play in East Ayrshire

Although the provision of play is not an explicit statutory responsibility for local authorities outside Wales, local authorities in Scotland have responsibilities to support play and recreation within the framework of *Getting it Right for Every Child*.

East Ayrshire Council recognises the importance of play. As with all local authorities in Scotland, this can be evidenced through the provision of spaces for play in neighbourhoods, parks and school grounds, and the employment of professionals with responsibility for delivering and managing play services. Indeed, Leisure Development Services in East Ayrshire, explicitly acknowledge the importance of play on its home page, where the service describes itself as, *"... committed to providing a broad range of high quality play, sports and health development services for the residents of East Ayrshire. The key aim is to ensure that local people can access leisure and lifestyle opportunities which are based on their needs and expectations and*

contribute to healthy and active living."

However, in East Ayrshire, the importance of providing quality play opportunities extends beyond the provision of everyday playspaces and the routine interventions of professionals. *EA Positive Play* was launched in March 2008 as a means to *"... increase physical activity levels, encourage creativity and use play as a medium to build confidence and self-esteem of children and adults."*

Indeed, *EA Positive Play* itself emerged from the success of the *Fit Ayrshire Babies* initiative which was established in 2001 as a partnership between the three local authorities in Ayrshire and NHS Ayrshire and Arran. Aiming to promote the benefits and importance of physical play for very young children, *Fit Ayrshire Babies* explicitly sought to (i) influence the attitudes of parents/carers, (ii) improve the skills of parents/carers, (iii) increase the knowledge of parents/carers, and (iv) to maximise opportunities (for play). In East Ayrshire, the mainstreaming of this

service has been developed into *EA Positive Play*.

EA Positive Play is a three-year programme funded through the Big Lottery Fund and supported by the *Early Education and Childcare* and *Leisure Development* services in East Ayrshire Council, which aims to achieve the following outcomes:

- Increased awareness, knowledge and understanding for 300 parents/carers of the long term benefits of play, resulting in increased confidence and skills to enable positive interaction to take place by 2010.
- Improved interaction and bonding for 750 children aged 0 - 5 years and 450 parents/carers and extended family, through increased opportunities for active

play and physical activity at home and within the community

- A minimum of 60 community groups/organisations and associated individuals empowered to build and develop sustainable play related infrastructures through increased skills and confidence, which will impact positively on community cohesion and capacity building by 2010.

Ten milestones were defined to ascertain whether each of the outcomes had been achieved (three-four for each milestone).

About this Evaluation

Overview

The overall aim of this evaluation was to conduct an appraisal of *EA Positive Play*. This was achieved by: focusing on the outcomes and milestones set out within the Big Lottery bid,

reviewing the progress of the project (to date); and appraising a sample of the activities carried out as part of the project.

The evaluation comprised five elements (work programmes):

- Appraisal of project monitoring data
- Observation and consultation at area based workshops
- Play Forum workshop
- Staff workshop
- Observation at Play Day

Although involving quantitative analysis, the primary approach was qualitative in nature. The use of qualitative methods provided an opportunity to explore the experiences and opinions of all stakeholders in the project. This approach recognised that those involved in the project, whether as staff members or service users, have uniquely important insights into how the project has developed and the processes that influenced its development.

For each of the five work programmes, the evaluation focused on appraising the extent to which *EA Positive Play* achieved the objectives established in the Big Lottery grant award.

Appraisal of project monitoring data

The first part of the evaluation involved reviewing and analysing data collected and produced by EA Positive Play throughout the life of the project. The following documents were reviewed and analysed:

- Year 1 Monitoring Report for Big Lottery
- Year 2 Monitoring Report for Big Lottery
- Minutes of Community Play Forum
- Video of Play & Activity Motivator - (early years) session in Netherthird (December 2008)
- Positive Play: 21st Century Play

Observation and consultation at area based workshops

Workshops were held with four Parent & Toddler groups visited by the Play and Activity (early years) Motivator. Two workshops were held in each of the four areas. The areas were selected on the basis of the Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification 2007-2008 and included two groups

based within an 'urban area'¹; one group located in an 'accessible small town'²; and one group located in an 'accessible rural area'³. The final area selection was agreed by project staff at the initial evaluation project meeting.

The first workshop session in each area provided the evaluators with an opportunity to engage with participants and to build relationships with parents/carers attending the sessions. Ethical issues and matters pertaining to consent were discussed at this meeting. Potential participants were introduced to the evaluation and given the opportunity to ask questions about the evaluation and their involvement. A date for the second session was agreed at this meeting. This visit also allowed the evaluators to observe the Play & Activity Motivator (early years) in operation.

The second workshop was a mixture of participative exercises and self completion work sheets. The same questions were asked of each group although the methods used on the day were determined by the nature of the group.

The evaluation took place in the following four areas:

- Galston
- Netherthird
- Onthank Jack and Jill
- Onthank Jellytots

51 parents and carers were consulted (Figure 1).

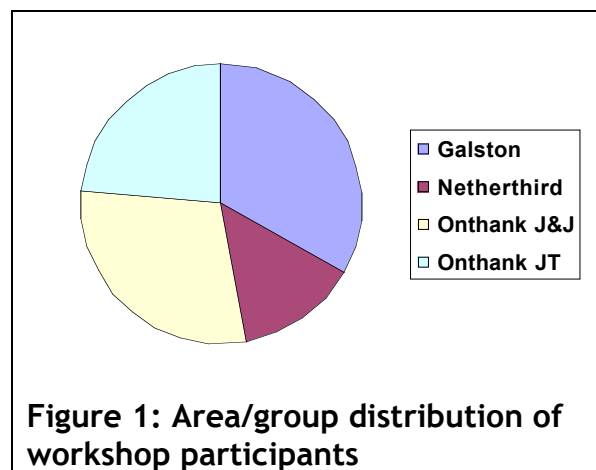
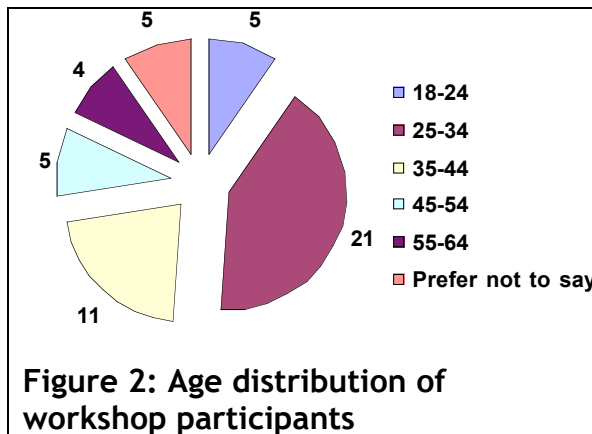


Figure 1: Area/group distribution of workshop participants

All participants were women and the majority a significant proportion were aged between 55 and 64 years old (Figure 2). It should be noted that this profile reflects the sample groups

¹ Urban area with a population of between 10,000 and 125,000
² Settlement with a population of between 3,000 and 10,000 and within a 30 minute drive of an area with a population of more than 10,000
³ Settlement with a population of less than 3,000 and more than a 30 minute drive of an area with a population of more than 10,000.

which participated in the evaluation. These groups are not understood to present a true reflection of participation by age profile in EA Positive Play.



Play Forum workshop

An interactive session was held with Play Forum members. The evaluators attended the June meeting of the Community Play Forum and conducted the workshop as part of the meeting.

The Play Forum workshop was a mix of participative exercises and focus group questions designed to explore issues surrounding the development of the Play Forum, its current position, and possibilities for its future development.

Staff workshop

In order to explore the experiences of staff and volunteers working with the project, a staff group session was facilitated and involved the:

- Play Development Manager
- Play and Activity Motivator
- Play and Recreation Officers
- Play Development Assistant

The staff workshop was participative and explored how the project had evolved and operates.

Observation at Play Day

The final element of the evaluation involved the researchers attending Play Day in August 2009 as participant observers. The focus of this work was to reflect on an example of EA Positive Play that provided opportunities for free play for children and families in a manner embedded in the ethos of the child's right to play and the partnership approach.

Observation criteria for Play Day were developed following the initial

analysis of the data emerging from the workshops. An observation grid

was developed by SPIU to support this process.

Key Findings

Introduction

The evaluation is structured to address each of the *EA Positive Play* objectives in turn. Evidence from each of the five evaluation work programmes is brought together in each section to ascertain whether each of the three project outcomes and (and ten project milestones) has been met. Additionally, some concluding reflections are drawn on the EA Positive Play staff and how their work is received by users.

Facilitating and applying increased awareness, knowledge and understanding of the benefits of play.

The first objective comprises an output and an outcome; the ultimate goal of the output is to achieve the outcome. The output in the first objective is 'to increase awareness,

knowledge and understanding for 300 parents/carers of the long term benefits of play'. This output is to achieve the outcome of 'increased confidence and skills of parents/carers to enable positive interaction with their children to take place by 2010'.

The output: increasing awareness, knowledge and understanding for parents/carers of the long term benefits of play

Documentation

One of the primary ways awareness, knowledge and understanding is increased is through the production of relevant, user-friendly documentation to advise parents/carers on the benefits of play. A range of documentation is published by EA Positive Play, with each product attending to a specific information

need in support of the goal. For example,

- Positive Play leaflet: tri-fold leaflet highlighting all the services and activities provided by the Positive Play Team (including those funded through Big Lottery). The leaflet also provides a brief overview of the project and contact details.
- bE-Active Guide (previously What's On guide): Quarterly booklets providing information on the programme of activities available across East Ayrshire (including those funded through Big Lottery). These provide in-depth information on activities available and are disseminated via nursery schools, primary schools and in local business and community venues.
- Project Newsletters. Four project newsletters have been produced; two in 2008 and two in 2009. These provide an overview of project activities, highlight important themes and issues relating to play, and promote any upcoming training/initiatives in the community.
- EA Play Directory. Although too early to evaluate its utility, it should be noted that a directory detailing play opportunities in East Ayrshire is currently being developed. The aim of the directory is to provide information on play for community groups and organisations across East Ayrshire area. It will also provide information on national and local strategies as well as provide links to relevant web sites and documents.
- Web page. A web page with information on the Community Play Forum and contact details for the members has been established. This includes information on all play services and accessible training opportunities.
- Email dissemination. Since the inception of the Play Forum, the Play and Activity Motivator (Communities) has ensured that information is disseminated to all Community Play Forum members by e-mail.

Activity to engage

Documentation serves a useful role in raising initial awareness or reinforcing understanding. Increasing awareness, knowledge and understanding is also achieved through EA Positive Play activity which directly engages parents/carers. For example,

- Positive Parenting workshops
- Training workshops. The Early Years Motivators visit each group on either a fortnightly or a monthly basis (based on the frequency and needs of the group) with a rolling programme of activities which encompass:
 - Messy Arts
 - Fun Fitness
 - Active Play
 - Music & Movement
 - Road Safety

Documentation and training are the primary strategies used to increase awareness, knowledge and understanding. However, the mere provision of opportunity does not, *per se*, demonstrate that the goal has been achieved. In particular, there is a need to assess whether the numerical targets have been met. This evaluation found quantitative and qualitative evidence to support the

conclusion that this goal has been achieved.

Quantitative evidence

Quantitative evidence on user participation and user service evaluation demonstrates that EA Positive Play has been successful in achieving its goal of increasing awareness, knowledge and understanding. For example, in the 12 months leading to September 2008:

- 4862 people used EA Positive Play services (442 parents/carers, 3777 young people and 643 staff/volunteers)
- 79 organisations used EA Positive Play services.
- 422 parents & carers have increased awareness, knowledge & understanding of play (exceeding project outcome 1 target). This was achieved through receipt of packs and attendance at events.
- 3 practical play training sessions were delivered to parents/carers of children aged 0-5 years (achieving milestone 1 of project outcome 1 target). One of these sessions was creative arts and the other two were music and movement.

- Home based play resource packs distributed 3 times per year to a minimum of 100 parents & carers (achieving milestone 2 of project outcome 1 target)

For example, in the 12 months leading to September 2009:

- 4 practical play training sessions were delivered to parents/carers of children aged 0-5 years (exceeding milestone 1 of project outcome 1 target). These focused on outdoor play, play and health awareness, parent play and interactive parent play
- 207 parent/carers received home based play resource packs thrice (exceeding milestone 2 of project outcome 1 target)

Furthermore, the Play Day 2009 internal evaluation provides further quantified evidence of participation. An internal evaluation was completed by 122 people on the day.

- 119 people visited the park specifically to attend the event
- 65% had visited the event for the first time
- 95% intend to visit the event next year

- 44% rated the activities as excellent, 41% as very good and 12% as good

Qualitative evidence

Qualitative evidence of service user evaluation lends further support that the goals of increasing awareness, knowledge and understanding have been achieved.

In particular, the Community Play Forum was valued as a mechanism through which to receive information that could, in turn, be cascaded by representatives to members of their community group.

'I work for a voluntary organisation working with children and young people from a large age group and sometimes we don't get access to resources as readily as other groups but through attending the play forum we are able to receive information and take it back' (Community Play Forum workshop).

Changing attitudes - how (in addition to how much) knowledge, awareness and understanding is enhanced

More fundamentally, EA Positive Play has not only sought to provide training and documentation to meet outcomes that can be evidenced in terms of participation and experience. EA Positive Play has been premised on the understanding that existing

attitudes toward play need to be challenged. That is, the way in which the message is delivered is as important as the reach of the message. This evaluation established that staff were keenly aware of the need to challenge attitudes - in a supportive manner - if the project goals were to be achieved.

One of the most important aspects of the work of the project is challenging attitudes towards play and highlighting how important play is for children's development and for family relationships. The passion and commitment of the staff to this vision was demonstrated through the evaluation in a number of ways.

We want play to be seen as natural, we are trying to stop kids being hindered, parents don't want kids to perhaps play outside in case of risks of harm although these risks are small.

Within Early Years what we were trying to do was to promote the benefits of play and why we do what we do ... there are actually reasons behind it and very good reasons why we do it for the development of the child. It's trying ... therefore to encourage them to actually come up and join in.

It's to try to get across that play is more than just kids playing but it's the things they actually learn from that ... we want it to be seen as natural but something we can't forget about and something we have to input to.

There was also a general feeling among Community Play Forum

members that being part of the forum gave individuals and organisations an opportunity to challenge attitudes to play. The uniformed organisations in particular were able to share experiences and views on challenging perceived risks and raising awareness of issues around risk management.

The Scouts are already beginning to challenge that ... why can't children climb trees or build bonfires or have a hammer and nails as long as they are properly supervised? That's not risky play.

... also to let people know that risky play isn't illegal as most small groups have heard so much hype about it they think that they aren't allowed to do it and that's not true if it's properly risk assessed and supervised.

On a wider note, there was some feeling that being part of the Community Play Forum also had a role in challenging risk at strategic level and parental levels and in highlighting the issues that can arise from not allowing children to play freely as it is related to a perceived level of risk.

It's about reminding people, because people get caught up in that side of things [taking legal action against organisations where injury occurs] - it's about reminding them what play deprivation can mean to children and young people - what we are doing to them by not allowing them to take risks in play. That's one of the things people forget that side of things and focus on the legal aspect of risky play

Facilitating development of the whole healthy child (and whole healthy family/community)

Finally, although beyond the tight remit of the EA Positive Play project, it should also be acknowledged that the goals of the project facilitated the participation of other organisations promoting healthy -living agenda for families.

For example, as well as providing play opportunities, the Community Health in Practice (CHiP) van and the Health Team were in attendance on Play Day providing messages about healthy living in East Ayrshire for parents/carers and children. There were various catering outlets including a healthy eating stall. Therefore, while the event was geared towards making time to play, it also provided an opportunity to get other important health messages out to children and families attending the event.

The outcome: increasing confidence and skills of parents/carers to enable positive interaction with their children to take place by 2010

Although it is generally less straightforward to demonstrate that outcomes than outputs have been achieved, there is sufficient evidence that EA Positive Play has increased the confidence and skills of parents/carers to enable positive interaction with their children.

Skill oriented activities for parents/carers

First, it is acknowledged that many of the activities that EA Positive Play has supported have explicitly sought to move beyond increasing awareness, knowledge and understanding to directly enhance the confidence and skills of parents.

For example, a range of activities are carried out by the Play & Activity Motivator (Early Years). The focus of the work is on providing opportunities for parents and carers to interact with their children through play to encourage physical activity and to increase their knowledge and skills relating to play as opposed to parental skills. In addition, the benefits of active play are highlighted through the activities provided.

The Play & Activity Motivators (early years) have been delivering the service since September 2006. As Table 1 demonstrates, a significant number of children, groups and parents/carers have experienced these services.

Year	Term	Vacation			Total
		East	Sum	Oct	
2006 (Sep-Dec)					
Groups	63	-	-	10	73
Parents/carers	443	-	-	36	479
Children	638	-	-	51	689
2007					
Groups	155	12	37	2	176
Parents/carers	1395	44	218	59	1716
Children	2149	63	309	117	2638
2008					
Groups	166	10	47	2	225
Parents/carers	1578	75	467	75	2195
Children	2487	174	579	124	3364
2009 (Jan-Apr)					
Groups	47	4	TBA	-	51
Parents/carers	624	159	TBA	-	783
Children	916	284	TBA	-	1200

Table 1: Attendance at Early Years activity sessions

However, to ascertain that this outcome has been achieved requires more than identification that activity has been designed and targeted to effect positive interaction. This evaluation also found quantitative and qualitative evidence to support this claim.

Quantitative evidence

In December 2007, the Play & Activity Motivator (Early Years) conducted a

practical evaluation exercise with the Jack & Jill Parent and Toddler group in Onthank. Practical evaluation of the activities were common practice within the project such as using a game with children and parents participating and asking them to put their hands up or stand up if they really liked the activity. Photographs were then taken of the group showing how many children had their hands up and how many were standing up. The photographs show that the majority of the parent/carers and the children enjoyed the activities. Although the veracity of this internal evaluation might reasonably be questioned, what is clear is that the mode of evaluation - using techniques that are appropriate and comfortable for both parents and very young children - create an environment which engenders self-confidence and promotes the self-worth of participants (opinions being evidently valued at the point of service delivery).

Similarly, home resource packs (see are routinely evaluated after each distribution. For example, the Messy Arts Pack was evaluated in January

2008 using a more traditional questionnaire approach. Eight parents completed the questionnaire. Although the small return necessitates caution in interpreting the results, the strength of the positive results suggests that these resources were user-friendly (Figure 3), although the children’s skill development that was acknowledged by parents was less clearly understood across all domains (Figure 4).

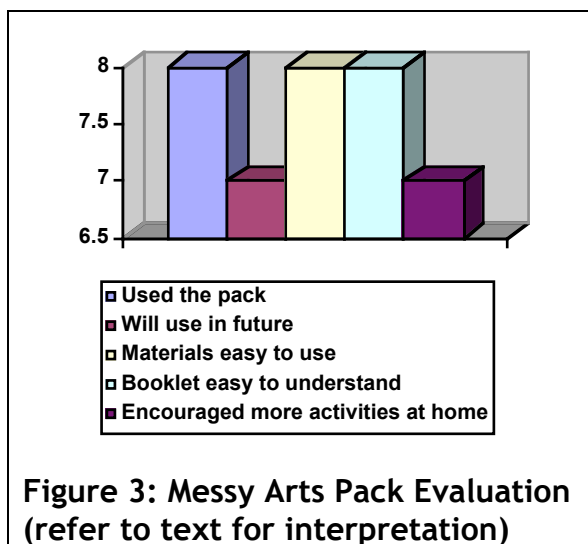


Figure 3: Messy Arts Pack Evaluation (refer to text for interpretation)

Parents/carers felt that their children had developed a number of skills as a result of using the pack with them at home (Figure 4).

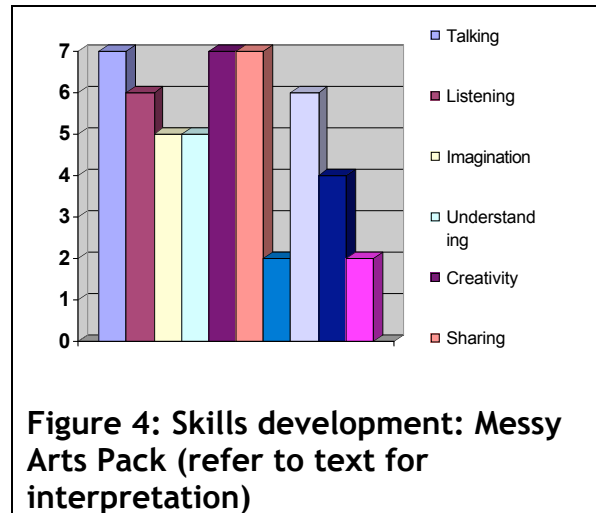


Figure 4: Skills development: Messy Arts Pack (refer to text for interpretation)

Qualitative evidence: impact of activity on children’s skills (and their capacity for fruitful interaction)

Second, although the outcome is focused on supporting the skills development of parents/carers, the objective is to enable positive interaction with their children. In this sense, the direct interventions *with children* are also pertinent to achieving this outcome (see also Table 1 and Figure 4 above).

Parents recognised that the activities had a positive impact on the self-confidence of the children.

Initially my child was too wary and did not want to participate despite my best efforts to involve her. In the last few weeks she has loved joining in and talks about it all day to her dad and her big brother. (Area group workshop)

Encouraging group work and team skills was also valued by the parents/carers.

Children get to socialise as a group, as all the children are involved in the activities. (Area group workshop)

Children are learning to share, play as part of a group, making friends, social interaction. (Area group workshop)

[It is] great team building, getting involved with other children and learning new skills. (Area group workshop)

Parents also clearly understood that their children were learning as well as having fun.

(It is) good fun and encourages development mentally and physically. (Area group workshop)

He is getting structured socialising before he gets to nursery as well as learning new songs, games etc from other kids. (Area group workshop)

Reaping the rewards of increasing opportunities for active play and physical play

The second objective also comprised an output and an outcome; once more, the ultimate goal of the output is to achieve the outcome. The output in the second objective is 'to increase opportunities for active play and physical activity at home and within the community'. This outcome is to achieve the outcome of

'improving interaction and bonding for 750 children aged 0 - 5 years and 450 parents/carers and extended family'.

The output: increasing opportunities for active play and physical activity at home and within the community'

Evidence that EA Positive Play has increased opportunities for active and physical play at both home and within the community can be found from the content of work programmes and participation statistics.

Direct provision of play opportunities

There is ample evidence that EA Positive Play has increased such opportunities within the wider community. For example, in the 12 months leading to September 2008:

- 177 play sessions were delivered to 14 communities during term-term (exceeding milestone 1 of project outcome 2).
- 57 play and physical activity sessions were delivered during school holiday periods (exceeding milestone 2 of project outcome 2).
- Two new free play open days were delivered (achieving milestone 3 of project outcome 2).

Similarly, in the 12 months leading to September 2009:

- 201 play sessions were delivered to 10 parent and toddler groups during term-term (exceeding milestone 1 of project outcome 2).
- 50 play and physical activity sessions were delivered during school holiday periods, with a total of 310 children and 134 parents participating (exceeding milestone 2 of project outcome 2).
- Six new free play open days were delivered, two in October and four in Easter, with a total of 408 children and 234 parents participating (exceeding milestone 3 of project outcome 2).

Enabling home play through community intervention

Not only have opportunities been provided in the wider community, but the goal has often been to provide training in the wider community in order to facilitate play within the home.

For example, there was evidence that both parents and children were

playing the games and carrying on with the activities at home.

My husband takes pleasure in hearing all about the activities that my sons have taken part in during the Positive Play session. He gets involved in recreating the activities at home (Area workshop)

She participates with her older sisters, they join in and she also enjoys showing her grandparents. (Area workshop)

(Workshops) help give me ideas of activities to do with my child at home. (Area workshop)

Directly facilitating home play

More directly, resources have also been produced to directly support active and physical play at home. The Play & Activity Motivation Initiative have developed a range of training resources for working with parents. These include booklets covering:

- Let's Play Puppet & Mask Template
- Painting and Drawing
- Play Dough
- Colouring Book
- Active Play

Each resource is colourful, free from jargon and easy to use. All include a message on the importance of parents/carers and children playing together, an outline of developmental stages and skills regarding the activity, how parents can help with the activities, why they are useful,

safety hints, how to discuss the activity with the child and contact details for finding out about play opportunities in the area.

Training opportunities

In addition, a number of training opportunities are available to groups and individuals who are working in organisations where play may form a large part of their work. The following training courses are available to organisations operating in East Ayrshire:

- Active Play
- Fun Fitness
- Health Games & Activities
- Arts & Crafts
- Wannabe Popstars
- Tri-golf & New Age Kurling
- Drama
- Introduction to Fun4Hire
- Bouncy Castle Operation and Supervision
- Face Painting and Badge Making
- Balloon Modelling

These courses promote the development of a wide range of skills for those working with children. The range of courses available represents an important resource in the

promotion and dissemination of the message about the importance of play, and provides support to community and voluntary organisations that would not otherwise be able to access or afford this type of training.

Qualitative evidence

Qualitative evidence is also forthcoming to support the contention that more opportunities have been provided.

It should also be acknowledged that participation stimulates participation, i.e. availed of the knowledge and experience of activity, play in one setting makes it more likely that active play will be taken forward in other domains. Indeed, this is one of the cornerstones of the EA Positive Play project - to facilitate active and physical play across community and familial settings. Participants report that the 'snowball' effect of experiencing active play in community settings is carrying forward into the domestic realm:

my husband takes pleasure in hearing all about the activities that my sons have taken part in during the Positive Play session. He gets involved in recreating the activities at home (area workshop)

she participates with her older sisters, they join in and she also enjoys showing her grandparents (area workshop)

helps give me ideas of activities to do with my child at home (area workshop)

Play Day represents another important aspect of outdoor play in East Ayrshire. There was clear support for outdoor play activities on the day and the internal evaluation highlighted that the people attending would like the outdoor activities to be available all year round: indeed, one of the suggestions was that there should be “more than one Play Day” in the area.

The outcome: improving interaction and bonding for 750 children aged 0 - 5 years and 450 parents/carers and extended family’

Evidencing whether interaction and bonding has ‘improved’ is not straightforward.

Starting points

First, there is the need to take cognisance of differences in competencies at the outset.

For example, the Play & Activity Motivator - (early years) service was

generally well-received in all of the areas visited and it was evident that the Play & Activity Motivator - (early years) had established a positive rapport with group members.

However, observation of the Play & Activity Motivator - (early years) in action highlighted that the success of these interventions was uneven. In particular, success depended on how well established the group was, the make up of the group in terms of childminders and parent/carers and the relationship with the Early Years Motivator (Play & Activity Motivator - (early years)).

Leaving aside the challenge of accounting for baseline status, evidence of interaction and bonding can be evidenced through the content of training programmes and in the reflections of users.

Training programmes

Although strictly speaking an output, it is reasonable to assume that those aspects of the workshops and supported activity that explicitly seek to enhance interaction and bonding will have positive effect on families.

Qualitative evidence

More directly, ample qualitative evidence was generated to support the contention that the work of EA Positive Play was positively shaping bonds between children and their families, as the following

(aforementioned) extracts illustrate:

My husband takes pleasure in hearing all about the activities that my sons have taken part in during the Positive Play session. He gets involved in recreating the activities at home (area workshop)

She participates with her older sisters, they join in and she also enjoys showing her grandparents (area workshop)

Developing play for the benefit of the community

The final objective also comprised an output and an outcome; and once more, the ultimate goal of the output is to achieve the outcome. The output in the final objective is for '60 community groups/organisations and associated individuals empowered to build and develop sustainable play related infrastructures through increased skills and confidence'. This output is to achieve the outcome of 'impacting positively on community cohesion and capacity building by 2010'.

The output: sixty community groups/organisations and associated individuals empowered to build and develop sustainable play related infrastructures through increased skills and confidence

This output primarily concerns the building of sustainable play-related infrastructures; the mechanism through which this is to be achieved - increased skills and confidence - was considered earlier. Evidence that EA Positive Play has achieved this goal can be found from the work of the Community Play Forum, quantitative evidence on participation statistics, evidence of the role of East Ayrshire Council in facilitating work and qualitative evidence of training being cascaded beyond primary recipients.

Community Play Forum

Although the Community Play Forum might be considered a means to an end, i.e. a mechanism to support communities to develop sustainable play infrastructures, the work of the Forum is, in itself, evidence of a sustainable infrastructure to support play.

For example, although the constitution of the Community Play Forum provides a framework for sharing information and good practice, in reality the forum also works as a partnership which is evident in particular in relation to the sub group which organises the annual Play Day event:

... in terms of benefits I think it's about trust in your partners around the table so that although the co-ordination is a massive task you know that each element of it is in good hands. You know that they have the same vision of it that you have and that everyone who is involved wants the day to go well. That is one of the major benefits of having a group as you start to build trust and build up relationships with those you might not have before (Community Forum workshop)

The East Ayrshire Community Play Forum was established in 2008 and plays an important part in the development of play opportunities in East Ayrshire. The creation of the Community Play Forum has encouraged a network of organisations which provide play services or work with children and young people and their parents/carers.

The Community Play Forum was established with the following aims in mind:

- Assist community groups to access external funding
- Set up a play directory
- Develop sustainable play opportunities
- Provide training and resources for groups involved in play
- Influence the attitudes of children and parents by promoting the benefits and importance of play
- Provide advice regarding national strategies and policies
- Representation at local and national forums

A total of 37 representatives attended the Community Play Forum meetings between November 2008 and June 2009. A range of organisations and sectors are represented including:

- Pre-school
- Childcare
- Community groups
- Uniformed organisations
- Art Groups
- Youth support groups
- Parent & Toddler Groups
- East Ayrshire Council
 - Quality Improvement Team
 - Early Education & Childcare Services
 - Library & Information Services

- Outdoor Amenities
- Countryside Ranger Service
- Leisure Development Services

The Community Play Forum is a particularly valuable vehicle for influencing the knowledge and understanding of the benefits of play at a number of levels:

- Forum members share information and experiences and take their learning about good practice back to their organisations. This will have a positive impact on how they interact with the parents/carers with whom they engage.
- A number of forum members have a strategic role in their organisation and can ensure that the benefits of play are promoted and that play remains a priority within their organisation and in the other networks and forums they are members of.
- At policy level, the forum has clear links with Play Scotland which has a strong role in the making of policy on play and play related issues in Scotland.

Given the expanse of East Ayrshire and the remoteness of some of the smaller rural communities it serves in the south-east, it is to be expected that there are challenges in ensuring that the Community Play Forum reaches all groups and organisations working with children; a considerable degree of effort is expended in reaching these groups. It may be that the play directory and web page will go some way to supporting this work through increasing awareness of the existence of the Community Play Forum and promoting the work that it does.

Quantitative evidence

More directly, EA Positive Play can present quantitative evidence of the development of sustainable play infrastructures. For example, in the 12 months leading to September 2008:

- 4 Positive play training events were provided for 32 teachers, support staff and parent helpers (exceeding milestone 1 of project outcome 3).
- An East Ayrshire wide community based Play Forum was established with 37 organisations represented

(exceeding milestone 2 of project outcome 3)

- 15 taster events/training sessions were provided for staff and volunteers from play-related organisations (exceeding milestone 3 of project outcome 3).
- Four community volunteers were recruited to assist the delivery of community-led play programmes (partly achieving the objective of milestone 4 of project outcome 3)

Furthermore, in the 12 months leading to September 2009:

- 6 Positive play training events were provided for 52 teachers and support staff (exceeding milestone 3 of project outcome 3).
- 17 training and awareness sessions were provided for staff and volunteers from play-related organisations (exceeding milestone 1 of project outcome 3).
- Six community volunteers were recruited to assist the delivery of community-led play programmes (achieving for the first time, the objective of milestone 5 of project outcome 3)

East Ayrshire Council support

Although it is highly probable that East Ayrshire Council would have been motivated to provide on-going support for the development of a play infrastructure, there is clear evidence of beyond-project interventions by the Council to support the EA Positive Play work. In this regard, the level of intervention by East Ayrshire Council should rightly be regarded as evidence of the development of a play infrastructure.

Significantly, EA Positive Play has been incorporated in the East Ayrshire Council's (i) Leisure & Cultural Strategy, (ii) Community Plan and (iii) Children's Services plan.

The outcome: impacting positively on community cohesion and capacity building by 2010

Fieldwork undertaken specifically for this evaluation provides a wide-ranging qualitative evidence base to support the contention that the work of EA Positive Play is impacting

positively on community cohesion and capacity building.

Evidence of capacity building is acknowledged with respect to access to resources, funding and training opportunities.

Resources

At its most straightforward, participation in the Play Forum afforded access to resources that otherwise would be beyond the reach of small groups:

As individual groups we might not have been able to afford Stagecoach. (reflecting on the coach service provided to access the Play Day event in Kilmarnock)

Funding

There was a clear understanding among members of the role of the Community Play Forum in supporting groups to access funding:

I think there's lots of small community groups who can benefit from more funding and from being members of the forum. There's a lot of smaller community groups who are fantastic out there and would like to do a lot more than what they are currently doing. That's why we are trying to find out about the pockets of funding that is available and pass it on. The forum is the best means to do that and help localise funding a bit more. (Community Forum workshop)

[Play and Activity Motivator Communities] has been supporting Barshare Parent & Toddlers groups to apply for a Community grant for

new equipment. (Community Play Forum Minutes, May 2009)

I work for a voluntary organisation working with children and young people from a large age group and sometimes we don't get access to resources as readily as other groups but through attending the play forum we are able to receive information and take it back. (Community Forum workshop).

Training opportunities

Similarly, the value of the Play Forum in enabling staff to partake of training opportunities was readily acknowledged:

staff have been able to access training opportunities they wouldn't have if we weren't part of the play forum. (Community Forum workshop).

Children

The Positive Play Training outlined earlier also focuses on school playgrounds and aims at engaging Primary 6 children in the development of playground activities. The aim is to encourage greater use of school grounds for play activities and promoting positive behaviour. Activity Motivators initiate and support the process but the aim is for the pupil council (supported by the school) to drive it forward in the longer term. The work is accompanied by a well thought through booklet which

provides an excellent resource to guide schools through the process.

Evidence of success in supporting community cohesion is acknowledged with respect to supporting organisations, networking and bringing people together.

Supporting organisations

The Play Forum is acknowledged for the benefit of strengthening the work of community organisations. There was also a feeling amongst members that being a member of the Community Play Forum meant that individual organisations had a stronger voice in responding to developments in policy on play or effecting change or getting support with events such as Play Day.

As individual organisations if there's a problem with legislation or something we are trying to access we don't have a big enough voice as an individual organisation but bringing the issue to the table at the play forum we have a bigger voice to challenge it. (Community Play Forum workshop)

Networking

The Community Play Forum also facilitates the sharing of information and experiences and provides an excellent environment for networking

among community groups. This type of networking can be invaluable to smaller organisations and can again contribute to the development of sustainable play opportunities and challenges attitudes to play.

The information I get today I will take back to my Management Committee which is mostly parents and give it to them. I am working hard to try and get some of the parents to come and attend the play forum meetings. (Community Play Forum workshop)

Bringing people together

One of the key benefits of the Community Play Forum is acknowledged to be the bringing together of people with a common interest in play. This is embedded in the working practices of the group. For example, the central location of the venue is not suited to all groups across East Ayrshire so the meetings are occasionally held in Cumnock to make it more accessible to those operating in the south of East

Ayrshire:

It's a barrier to get all the members together at once due to the different services they provide at different times. We try to overcome that by alternating the venues between the Cumnock and Kilmarnock area. (Community Play Forum workshop)

The activities provided on Play Day in East Ayrshire were driven forward by the Make Time theme. Play Day was

held on 5th August in Kay Park in Kilmarnock. As it was an East Ayrshire wide event, every effort was made to get children from other areas to the venue. The Community Play Form was able to secure some support from Stagecoach to supply buses to bring children from outlying areas.

Excellent - community working together (Play Day 2009 evaluation)

Good to see the whole town gathering together (Play Day 2009 evaluation)

Evaluating the team and the quality of service provided

There is a strong staff team who clearly have genuine belief in the value of the work they do and it's long term impact upon children and families. They also have a clear vision of how the work should develop in the future, as the following quotes illustrate:

Within Early Years what we were trying to do was to promote the benefits of play and why we do what we do ... there are actually reasons behind it and very good reasons why we do it for the development of the child. It's trying to get them to ... therefore to encourage them to actually come up and join in. (staff workshop)

It's to try to get across that play is more than just kids playing but it's the things they actually learn from that ... we want it to be seen as natural but something we can't forget about and something we have to input to. (staff workshop)

There is also a strong partnership ethos within the project. This is evident from the way in which the Community Play Forum operates and in the partnership working with the Early Years and Childcare section of East Ayrshire Council.

In terms of benefits I think it's about trust in your partners around the table so that although the co-ordination is a massive task you know that each element of it is in good hands. You know that they have the same vision of it that you have and that everyone who is involved wants the day to go well. That is one of the major benefits of having a group as you start to build trust and build up relationships with those you might not have before. (Community Play Forum workshop)

As individual organisations if there's a problem with legislation or something we are trying to access we don't have a big enough voice as an individual organisation but bringing the issue to the table at the play forum we have a bigger voice to challenge it. (Community Play Forum workshop)

Finally, service users evaluated positively the EA Positive Play staff. It was not uncommon for staff to be regarded as "all enthusiastic and helpful" and for the initiatives to be described as being "well organised."

Conclusion and recommendations

EA Positive Play is clearly achieving its outcomes and milestone targets. The end of year one monitoring report clearly demonstrates that the targets are being exceeded in the vast majority of cases. Furthermore, the specific research activity undertaken as part of this evaluation provides much qualitative evidence to confirm that EA Positive Play is fulfilling its goals.

These successes are evident for each of the three outcomes:

1. Facilitating and applying increased awareness, knowledge and understanding of the benefits of play.
 - The quantitative target for each milestone was achieved or exceeded in each of the first two years of the project.
 - EA Positive Play produced a wide range of documentation and activity designed to inform parents/carers.
 - EA interventions are appropriately focused on changing attitudes and enabling engagement
 - Evaluation exercises with users - the very process and the actual results of the evaluations - suggest that positive play interactions are being facilitated between parents/carers and children
 - Parents perceive that participation in EA Positive Play is enhancing the skills and personal development of their children
2. Reaping the rewards of increasing opportunities for active play and physical play
 - The quantitative target for each milestone was achieved or exceeded in each of the first two years of the project.
 - EA Positive Play has increased opportunities for active and physical play.
 - Opportunities for home play have been increased through the provision of packs and through community interventions that aim to enable home-based play
3. Developing play for the benefit of the community
 - An effective Community Play Forum has been established.
 - Three of the four project milestones were exceeded in the first year of the project and each of the project milestones were exceeded in the second year of the project
 - East Ayrshire Council is acknowledging the importance of play in key strategic documents

- There is ample qualitative evidence that capacity has been enhanced and community cohesion has been promoted through EA Positive Play

Although clearly a success, there is always scope to further enhance the quality of service beyond the limited life and specific focus of a fixed term project intervention. In terms of specific developments to enhance the work of promoting positive play in East Ayrshire, it is recommended that the following issues might be considered:

- **Parents and carers.** There is some evidence that EA Positive Play initiatives cascade beyond those adults/carers specifically trained to facilitate physical and active play. Future evaluation and future design of initiatives should pay greater attention to the extent to which, and the ways in which, the interventions are affording secondary skill development to other parents/carers beyond those to whom training/resources are delivered.
- **Gender.** EA Positive Play uses existing community groups as the primary medium to engage parents/carers. Not surprisingly, this means that more women than men are engaged. Future initiatives might give more explicit consideration as to how fathers and male carers might be encouraged to promote active and physical play with their children.
- **Community play culture.** EA Positive Play is primarily focused on parents/carers. Future initiatives should acknowledge the wider community contexts within which active outdoor physical play sits. Ways of informing and engaging the wider community - beyond parents and carers - to embrace a community play culture is the next logical step in promoting active and physical play in East Ayrshire. This can be achieved through the community play forum also which is part of the BLF initiative.
- **More systematic focus on specific resources.** EA Positive Play systematically evaluated the individual resources that comprised the initiative. It was not possible in this evaluation, nor was it in the evaluation remit, to appraise these user reviews systematically. Future developments of EA Positive Play should pay particular focus on the merits and points for development of specific EA Positive Play resources.
- **Beyond active play for holidays and the summer seasons.** Active and physical play is not limited to the summer months. Events and play sessions are currently delivered during term time, Easter, summer and October holidays. However, the weather and daylight hours of a winter in the northern hemisphere means that strategies to embrace physical and outdoor active play must vary across the seasons. Future development of EA Positive Play should give explicit consideration to how such play might be facilitated. Embracing seasonality would be a positive future development for EA Positive Play.
- **Evaluating EA Positive Play with younger parents.** This evaluation engaged mainly middle and older-aged parents/carers, reflecting the age composition of those attending the groups that were selected for the evaluation. It would be prudent for future evaluation to pay particular attention to younger parents to confirm that they are also taking an active role in promoting active physical play through EA Positive Play.