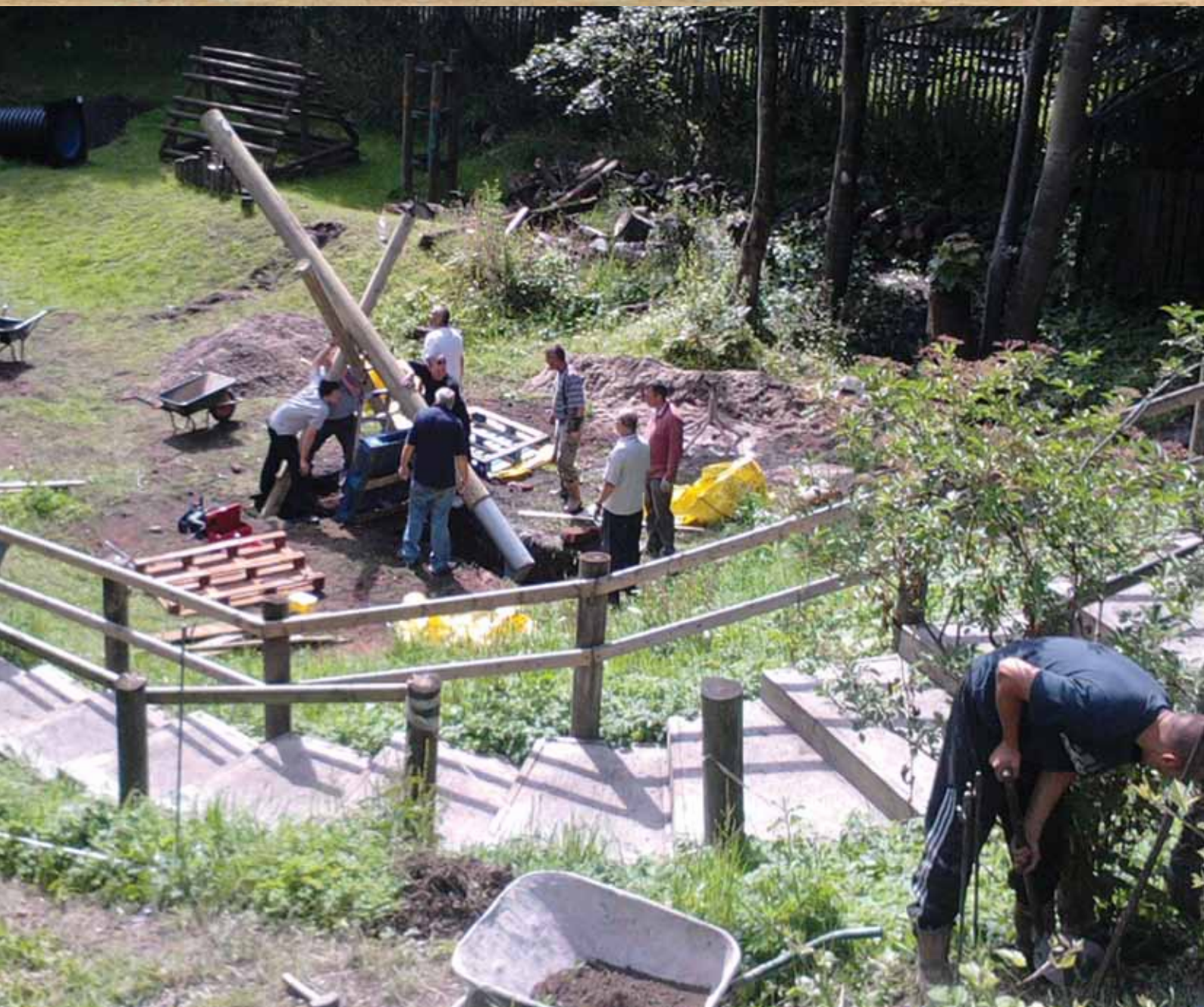




Adventure playgrounds: Built by communities

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Play England aims for all children and young people in England to have regular access and opportunity for free, inclusive, local play provision and play space.

Play England provides advice and support to promote good practice, and works to ensure that the importance of play is recognised by policy-makers, planners and the public.

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Had a great day doing work for the Garston Adventure Playground. It was good to see all the old people that used to come to the GAP when I was a kid, everyone got really stuck in. In my opinion there should be more days like that.

Local resident volunteer, Liverpool



Introduction

A grants programme, funded by the then Department for Children, Schools and Families, and managed by Play England has helped community-run adventure playgrounds to transform their play areas.

The programme ran from April 2009 to March 2010 and 57 playgrounds received up to £19,000 each to update and improve their playground structures and features. A list of the playgrounds with amounts awarded is on page 11.

Communities taking the lead

Managed by local volunteers who act as charity trustees and employing playworkers to supervise and maintain the indoor and outdoor play areas, the playgrounds are at the heart of their communities. These neighbourhood assets are shaped by the children that use them and have been supported and championed by generations of local people, many of whom played on them when they were children.

The playgrounds continue to be treasured by their communities because they are exciting and challenging places for their children to play in the neighbourhood, while being perceived as welcoming and safe by parents because they are staffed by skilled playworkers.

Children 'vote with their feet' because of the spaces' open access neighbourhood drop-in ethos. In adventure playgrounds children can play in ways not normally condoned in other space – digging holes, building camps and dens, making fires and changing aspects of their play space.

The impact of relatively small grants exceeded our expectations, with many playgrounds

creating popular and truly magical spaces that exemplified the Play England briefing *Developing an adventure playground; the essential elements* which is available online at www.playengland.org.uk/adventureplay

Several playgrounds returned areas for children to use for camp/den building, while others focussed on nature play through creating planting and children's allotments or opportunities for water and fire play. A number used part of the funding to encourage healthy eating and develop cooking skills by refurbishing kitchens or creating outdoor ovens and cooking areas. Many of the playgrounds concentrated on involving local residents and other volunteers in the improvements to add value to the grant.

Trusting local decision making

A key factor in the success of the programme was that the adventure playgrounds could decide for themselves the mix of revenue and capital funding, as long as there was a clear tangible outcome. This meant that they could tailor spending on their projects according to the local circumstances and specific needs.

Playground staff and volunteer management committee members were positive about



This project was a huge success, but without the help of volunteers and the support of the local community it would not have been possible. It was great to see past users coming back to the playground to help.

Playworker, Garston Adventure Playground, Liverpool





The application process and monitoring has been tailored towards the children being active participants in the whole process [and] has been pleasantly straightforward and practical.

Playworker, Charlie Chaplin inclusive adventure playground, London



the 'playground-friendly' nature of the grants programme application and reporting requirements. Feedback from children and parents was also very positive about the improvements.

Some playgrounds needed more revenue to extend existing staff hours, employ temporary staff or specialist contractors, while others wanted to spend more on materials or equipment. There was a strong focus on creating more adventurous play opportunities through more challenging structures and features, based on what children said they wanted. There was an equal focus on making sure that disabled children, girls and children from ethnic minority communities had a say in the plans.

A catalyst for change

When asked about the impact of the grant programme, playgrounds reported that:

- The numbers of new children had increased significantly and existing users stayed longer or attended on more days
- Children and communities became more involved because they'd had a say in how the money was spent
- Local residents helped out on 'community days' and several continued to volunteer
- Networking and learning from other playgrounds increased following visits to get ideas
- There was a clear impact on parents' perceptions of the playgrounds as being more exciting and challenging as well as being safe
- More parents and carers joined volunteer

management committees and several donated play items

- Some suppliers donated or gave discounts on equipment and materials.
- In a third of cases the grant attracted match or additional funding from local authorities and other funders
- More corporate volunteers helped to build and install equipment and features
- The playgrounds are better known within their communities, for example among new residents who have made friends with other people through their children's shared use of the sites.

Our analysis of how playgrounds spent the grant supports other evidence of factors affecting community-run adventure playgrounds over the last two to three decades:

- The ready supply of free demolition timber, second-hand telephone poles and other recycled or scrap building materials has greatly reduced or is no longer available. This is mainly due to the growth of the architectural salvage industry and refurbishment rather than demolition of traditionally-constructed buildings.
- Most adventure playgrounds had to pay for timber and building materials, though in many there was still a strong tradition of recycling other materials for children's play.
- Around half bought in manufactured equipment or external contractors and agencies to design and build structures and features because of an actual or perceived lack of staff design and build skills.



The results so far have been amazing. We are now reaching out to over 50 children each night which is double the number of children who attended before Christmas. A testament to the importance and value of the playground in the local community.

Playworker, The Old Quarry Adventure Playground, Wakefield



Notting Hill Adventure Playground: 50 years a community hub

One of London's first adventure playgrounds, Notting Hill is located in a part of the Golborne ward in north Kensington, London that ranks within the worst 5% Index of Multiple Deprivation areas. In the sixties the playground was a catalyst for local community action that now provides a wide range of family and community support services and has built cohesion in a very ethnically diverse area - nearly half of the population is from ethnic minority communities.

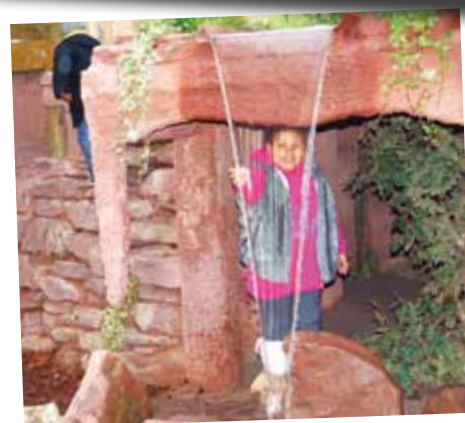
In addition to the adventure playground, the Venture Centre hub hosts an after school care service collecting children from local schools, an early years drop-in service and crèche, plus a range of community clubs and learning opportunities covering all age ranges including healthy cooking, keep fit, dance, drama, computer training, English and literacy classes and the world-famous Glissando Steel Orchestra.

The Venture Centre acts as an umbrella organisation, managing and sharing the central resources so that the semi-autonomous projects can focus on developing and delivering services for their specific users.

When consulted as part of the grants programme, children using the playground came up with the idea of a cave with a waterfall and an outdoor cooking area. Working with a landscape architect, the playground delivered exactly that - with an extra touch of magic in that the cave leads to a grotto behind the waterfall. It has become one of the most popular areas of the playground with children of all ages.



Outdoor oven



Waterfall and grotto



The cave



Challenge built in

- Only a few used part of the grant for training in playground design and construction techniques, mainly because of a lack of suitable training providers outside London and time pressures.

Sharing the learning from the programme

Play England held an exhibition of 'before and after' photographs of completed projects at our Playable Communities conference in March 2010 and ran a workshop to demonstrate what could be achieved with a relatively small amount of money. The exhibition attracted a large proportion of the 250 conference delegates throughout the day.

There was strong agreement from workshop participants that Play England should continue to support existing and develop new adventure play networks, including existing and new play pathfinder playgrounds. This should be backed by a national online resource on the model of the successful Play Ranger Network:

www.playwork.co.uk/index.asp?page=rangers

Participants said that the resource should include:

- an image bank of tried and tested as well as innovative adventure play structures and features
- how to further involve local communities through volunteering and other support
- information on design and build training
- how to source free or low-cost materials from local businesses.



This has been an excellent grant programme and we only wish that it could be continued. We have been able to fulfil a real and present need for many of our children. Without this grant it most certainly would not have been possible.

Playworker, ELHAP special needs adventure playground, London



We recruited an inclusive playworker, who worked very closely with the children in the local community, listening to their views and how they can be implemented into the designs of the new structures. The project is giving a sense of ownership to the children, as they decide what structures are built.

Playworker, Somerville Adventure Playground, Southwark, London



A number of play pathfinders and design or delivery partners visited community-run playgrounds participating in the programme and elsewhere to get ideas, give children and parents new to the adventure playground concept first-hand experience of what could be offered or to learn about models of community management and sustainability.

A third of playgrounds in the programme received additional or complementary funding from the playbuilder and pathfinder programmes, adding value and providing support to community-run provision.

Pathfinder and playbuilder authorities, especially where there wasn't a tradition of adventure playgrounds, benefited greatly from visits to adventure playgrounds in the grants programme.

Children were able to try out challenging play opportunities beyond their previous experience, which helped them to inform designs for the new playgrounds in their areas. Parents gained an understanding of the adventure playground concept - in several cases they became champions of the adventure playground model in their local communities after having spoken to local residents and neighbours on their visits.

Play pathfinder programme leads and their design and delivery partners gained an understanding of the evolving nature of adventure playgrounds and the need for them to become embedded in the community for long-term sustainability. As a result, several used part of the capital to purchase materials



Garston Adventure Playground: Mobilising local residents

Garston Adventure Playground is located in a housing regeneration area of south east Liverpool. Built in 1978 by local long-term unemployed people on a government training programme, Garston employs three playworkers who played on the playground as children.

The playground management wanted to make the most of the grant by mobilising the local community to help out. This enabled more of the money to be spent on equipment or materials and also brought together again local residents who used the playground as children.

They advertised a 'community day' inviting local people, businesses and services to come together to install the equipment and clear the play area of undergrowth and the games area of accumulated debris. The local Fire Brigade agreed to bring their high-pressure hoses to 'jet-wash' the games area, while South Liverpool Housing lent brushes to scrub away the debris.

Dozens of local residents came to help during the community day and eight of them pledged to continue to volunteer. Those that were unemployed came in during the day, while those in work came back in the evenings. Overall, the volunteers moved an estimated 80 tonnes of sand, cement and other materials around the site.

As a result, during the summer the playground had over 100 new children registering and most stayed all day every day on the renewed site.

Local parents have now asked the playground to run healthy food workshops for them during the day while their children are at school, and funding has been secured to run another community day.



Garston community day

Toffee Park Adventure Playground: Adding value through business and other support

Toffee Park is located in a densely populated area of south Islington, London. One of London's smaller adventure playground sites, it is surrounded by a mixture of medium and high rise estates on the edge of the City.

The playground has developed corporate volunteering relationships with a number of businesses through Business Link, including Colt Telecom, John Lewis Partnership and Santander. Colt volunteers, many of whose employees are local residents, helped with installation of a large tube slide, while volunteers from Santander installed the zip wire, saving the playground several hundreds of pounds.

Sutcliffe Play who supplied the tube slide donated a prototype fire pit, which meant the playground made further savings, while the manufacturer benefited by testing their prototype in a real situation.

Toffee Park has also developed a mutually beneficial relationship with Middlesex University where design degree students have designed and installed an innovative water play feature as part of their course work. The water feature was partly paid for by the savings made through business support, and will use collected rainwater from the playground building roof for both children's play and to irrigate a newly-developed garden and children's allotment area.

A website design company based in nearby Clerkenwell is developing a website for the playground at no charge as part of a corporate social responsibility programme.



Allotment garden



Tube slide



Water play



Water play

Fort Apache: Opening up woodland for the community

Fort Apache is based in a woodland site in Torbay, Devon next to a large estate.

Over several years volunteers and a small team of paid playworkers have cleared areas of the woodland from brush and undergrowth to open them up for children's play. Because of a lack of revenue funding, the site can only be staffed for two to three days a week, but is used by children every day, which means that any structures and features created need to be suitable for unsupervised use.

Fort Apache has worked with the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers and Torbay Council's tree officer to ensure the natural environment is not degraded, while encouraging children and the community to make more use of the woodland.

The project uses timber from dead and fallen trees to create shelters and tree houses, seating areas, pathways and fences, wood carvings, signage and camp fires.

The grant was partly used to send playworkers on a Forest School training course to develop their woodland management skills and the playground intends to organise curriculum-based activities to make links with local schools. They have now recruited a volunteer on placement from the Hele Hub, an adult learning project set up by the playground and now an independent Community Interest Company. Some of the parents have also begun to volunteer.



Fort Apache tree houses



He really enjoys it... he gets up, feeds the chickens and comes straight to you and then when he finally comes home, he's stinking of smoke, covered in mud but has a huge smile plastered across his face, so it's okay!

Parent, Fort Apache, Devon

It gives me a reason to get out of bed on Saturday morning.

Her son



for on-going development of the outdoor play areas or used revenue to build community capacity to take on the management and operation of the new adventure playgrounds beyond 2011.

Conclusions

Located mainly in the most deprived areas and free at the point of use, adventure playgrounds attract children and families that many other services can struggle to reach.

They build community cohesion, firstly among the children that use them, and then across families and the wider community over generations. Some have become specific catalysts or hubs for a range of community action and development of local services, while others form part of more informal children and family support networks.

Several have developed on-going relationships with local businesses either directly or through brokering agencies like Business Link. The playgrounds are popular with corporate volunteering schemes because participants can see immediate tangible results, while businesses see them as good team-building opportunities and a way to give something back



Children seeing their playground reborn have taken it upon themselves to continue the renovations. It really is an example of an investment in the community reaping benefits and value that are double or triple the actual amount invested. Thank you.

Volunteer treasurer, Triangle Adventure Playground, London



to the community. A number of play pathfinders and design or delivery partners visited community-run playgrounds participating in the programme and elsewhere to get ideas, give children and parents new to the adventure playground concept first-hand experience of what could be offered or to learn about models of community management and sustainability.

The following quote, from the report *People Make Play: The impact of staffed play provision on children, families and communities*, written by Demos, underlines the importance of this type of provision:

Children, young people, parents and staff have many stories to tell about how play provision has had an impact on their lives.

Children mention many elements of 'learning' as a natural aspect of the play experience, and how this is about 'learning to play' and to be inventive, confident and social, which they hold as equally important to learning practical things in school.

They talk about their experience in terms of trajectories of progress: about overcoming initial difficulties, whether social or physical, about taking new risks and sharing stories with others. There is a huge range of life skills and attitudes that children say they obtain as part of this process: from caring, sharing and being kind, to standing up for oneself or asking for help.

These experiences, it would seem, can change children's perception of their neighbourhood, transforming it into a trusted place in which they feel welcome, know their peers and others, and consider themselves at home. In other words, providing 'somewhere to go, something to do' has an impact on these youngsters' positive perception of the places where they live.

Beunderman J (2010) *People Make Play*. London: NCB/Play England.

Grant recipients

A total of £998,005 was shared between 57 community-run adventure playgrounds, who were each able to apply for up to £19,000.

East

New Ark Adventure Playground (£19,000)

East Midlands

Braunstone Adventure Playground (£19,000)

Gainsborough Adventure Playground (£19,000)

Goldhill Adventure Playground (£19,000)

Mowmacre Adventure Playground (£19,000)

New Parks Adventure Playground (£18,596)

Northfields and District Play Association
(Playbarn) (£18,851)

Woodgate Adventure Playground (£18,413)

London

Apples & Pears Adventure Playground (£17,916)

Arc in the Park (£18,500)

Bethwin Road Adventure Playground (£18,000)

Charlie Chaplin Adventure Playground (£19,000)

Chelsea Adventure Playground (£18,288)

Crumbles Castle (£18,710)

Dog Kennel Hill Adventure Playground (£18,996)

ELHAP (£16,199)

Evergreen Adventure Playground (£15,500)

Grove Adventure Playground (£19,000)

Hackney Adventure Playground (£19,000)

Hayward Adventure Playground (£5,650)

Homerton Grove Adventure Playground
(£19,000)

Hornimans Adventure Playground (£19,000)

Lady Allen Adventure Playground (£8,981)

Lumpy Hill Adventure Playground (£16,978)

Marble Hill Adventure Playground (£19,000)

Markfield Adventure Playground (£18,950)

MLK Young People's Partnership (£18,920)

Notting Hill Adventure Playground (£19,000)

Oasis Children's Venture (£19,000)

Shakespeare Walk Adventure Playground
(£19,000)

Slade Gardens Adventure Playground (£18,858)

Somerford Grove Adventure Playground
(£17,938)

Somerville Adventure Playground (£18,440)

St John's Wood Adventure Playground (£16,000)

Stewarts Road Adventure Playground and Youth
Club (£19,000)

The Log Cabin (£18,949)

The Playspace - Blackfriars Settlement
(£19,000)

Timbuktu Adventure Playground (£18,970)

Toffee Park Adventure Playground (£19,000)

Triangle Adventure Playground (£19,000)

Weavers Adventure Playground (£18,784)

North West

Garston Adventure Playground (£7,809)

Longsight Adventure Playground (£19,000)

Moss Side Adventure Playground (£18,900)

North Hulme Adventure Playground (£18,850)

The Addy Young People's Centre (£18,284)

South West

Fernheath Adventure Playground (£5,000)

Forth Apache, The Windmill Centre (£18,434)

Indigos Go Wild (£13,660)

Tiverton Adventure Playground (£18,371)

White City Adventure Playground (£18,915)

Windmill Hill City Farm (£18,780)

West Midlands

Eversham Adventure Playground (£19,000)

North Staffs Special Needs Adventure
Playground (£9,002)

SNAP (£18,653)

Yorkshire and The Humber

The Big Swing (£18,960)

The Old Quarry Adventure Playground (£19,000)

Adventure Playgrounds: Built by communities

Mick Conway

A grants programme, funded by the then Department for Children, Schools and Families, and managed by Play England has helped community-run adventure playgrounds to transform their play areas.

The programme ran from April 2009 to March 2010 and 57 playgrounds received up to £19,000 each to update and improve their playground structures and features.

This report shows how the communities who run these playgrounds, often in deprived areas, provided value for money far beyond the modest revenue and capital costs of running them.

Some of the case studies demonstrate how playgrounds have become hubs for different types of community action, building community cohesion among the children who use them, extending to families and the wider community over generations.

Many playgrounds have established supportive relationships with local businesses and some have developed successful corporate volunteering schemes. These playgrounds can be popular destinations for volunteers who can see the immediate tangible results of their work, whilst the playground environment offers excellent opportunities for team building.

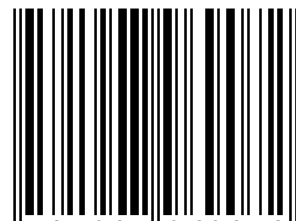


The children love having the new equipment as we rarely get the opportunity to ask them what they want, and then be able to provide it. A big thank you from everybody.

Playworker, Woodgate Adventure
Playground, Leicester



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