

Choose Play case study



Tribute to fallen trees – highlighting children's connection to the natural world and their community

Over the past three years, Choose Play has been running play sessions from a shipping container creating an informal community hub in an overlooked greenspace in Tranent, East Lothian. There are no play parks in this part of Tranent, and this is one of few greenspaces in the area to gather and play. In that time, the local authority began to plan a new play park in the area under the Scottish Government's Playpark Renewal scheme. Ongoing feedback collected at Play Ranger sessions and consultation by Choose Play is informing the development, complementing work by the local authority.



The Choose Play approach highlights the caring relationship children have with the natural environment and their local community. The trees are a particular favourite in the space – the children have shared that they love climbing and hiding in the trees and playing in the natural hills and dips. They have contributed ideas to improve the space and planted flowers. What was once a neglected space, has been shown to be loved, a space to play, meet friends and linger.



Sadly, one of the trees was badly damaged in a storm. A large branch lay on the ground; several others were split and had knocked over other trees. The damaged tree was a loved and large tree that had hosted generations of climbing children.

The local authority announced on social media that it was necessary, for safety, to take down the row of trees completely. We knew children would be devastated, but also that they were unlikely to see the council's announcement or understand the reasons for the felling, so to see the trees being felled would be a shock. We worked quickly to provide child friendly information through the local schools and to highlight to local authority workers the connection children have for these trees in their community.





We created a child friendly, visual version of the local authority information. This explained why the trees had to be taken down and what would happen next. This short presentation was shared at school assemblies and in classes.

We spoke to the tree surgeons and local authority Tree Officer, who had no idea children would care so much. They readily agreed to cut some of the branches into small log “pennies” as tokens and to leave some of the branches for the children to play with. One of the branches had been rubbed smooth because it was the perfect spot for children to sit, cooied into the tree.



Our Play Ranger team designed a play session to enable children to make keepsakes of the tree with the log pennies and clay to make imprints from the branches. We also provided chalk boards for the children to leave messages and drawings. With word sent out through local schools, many more children attended this session than usual, and adults also came to take part of the tree home with them.

At the end of the session, several children chose to leave their decorated log pennies in the space, making a visual tribute to the trees. Choose Play shared the story on social media, with a positive local response, highlighting the children’s passion and connection to the trees.



The proposed play area, which contains log stump trails, accessible features and natural elements such as a seat around a willow tree responds to local use and ideas. The relationship Choose Play has built with the community through the Play Ranger project enables us to advocate for children’s views and rights within community improvements, making a visible and lasting difference.

