

Case Study

Engaging with Disabled Children and their Families

Choose Play (East Lothian Play Association)

and Can Do are key providers of play opportunities for children and young people in East Lothian. Choose Play supports play in a range of school and community settings including regular Play Ranger sessions in local spaces such as parks and green spaces. Can Do is a parent-led charity providing play, recreation and social opportunities to children and young with additional support needs. The two charities together deliver the 'PlayCan' inclusive outdoors play project and were commissioned by Play Scotland to undertake Play Sufficiency Assessments in East Lothian.

Their report focussed on the useability and play value of play areas in East Lothian, highlighting the perspectives of disabled children, and

families where any member of the family has additional support needs (ASN).

They found using the Play Sufficiency Assessment Tool a useful way to gain an objective sense of how play spaces rate on accessibility and inclusion. The play opportunities section however really underlined how the play needs of children and young people with ASN are frequently overlooked. It is possible to score 'yes' to the majority of play opportunity criteria while there being next to no play opportunities available to children with ASN particularly older children, and children using wheelchairs and mobility aids.

It is therefore vital we engage with these children, young people and families as part of the Play Sufficiency Assessment.

Bleachingfield Play Space, East Lothian

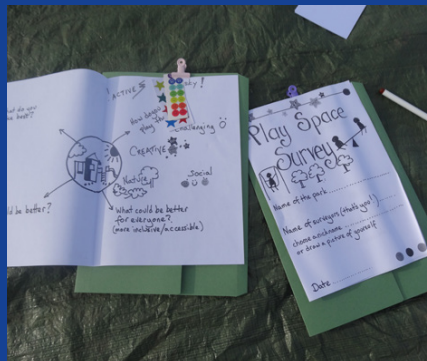
An assessment of the play area at the Bleachingfield Centre, Dunbar was undertaken at the location with 18 children and accompanying adults during a PlayCan session.

After an explanation, children and families were invited to complete a play survey. The survey was adapted to be inclusive and child friendly, children were invited to write, draw, talk, or use stickers to share their views. Some children did this independently, some completed the survey as a family, or with other children. Choose Play and Can Do staff facilitated the process.

A consultation pack was created by Choose Play and Can Do which included:

- a fold-out child-friendly survey sheet based on the Play Opportunities Assessment Tool

- a cardboard folder with a bulldog clip so it could also be used as a clipboard
- pens and stickers in each folder
- notes for volunteers and staff facilitating engagement.



The packs created a consistent basis for the engagement. The Choose Play and Can Do teams actively facilitated participation by:

- supporting participants to fill out the survey forms
- encouraging them to offer views to be recorded, while being respectful of children's play
- recording their views on their behalf (e.g., adding captions to drawings using their own words)
- capturing views expressed non-verbally
- adapting their practice to the needs or preferences of participants as they went along (e.g., adapting games to capture views and preferences).

In this way the engagement was fun, creative and appropriate to the participants.



General findings

The social elements of play and social value of play spaces – being with friends, playing with siblings, meeting other families – were emphasised by children, young people and families.

Carefully considering the social dimensions of play at design stages would increase the value of play areas as important community spaces.

Instead of narrowly focusing on physical play through equipment, other types of play and a wider range of play are highly valued by children, young people and families. Opportunities for sensory play, creative play, social play, role play etc. can be brought in through good design and natural elements in the environment. Where there are opportunities for natural and sensory play it is important that they are looked after and are accessible.

Safe, accessible routes to play parks are important to allow children and young people freedom to explore their local area. Ensuring these are accessible benefits a wide range of people. Lighting on these routes is important especially for children and young people who have to travel back from a school out with their local area.



Picture: Flying Fox