

# Play Gloucestershire's SUMMER PLAY 2 RECOVER REPORT

## September 2020



### **Overview**

Play Gloucestershire, a local children's charity, has been unable to deliver open access, community-based play activities since the end of March 2020 due to Government restrictions and public health directives to prevent the spread of Covid-19. Continued restrictions over the summer holiday period prevented us from delivering our usual mass community play gatherings in public spaces. This meant that more than 1,000 school-aged children living in 33 disadvantaged and rurally isolated communities were not able to enjoy the multiple health and wellbeing benefits that outdoor play brings to them, their families, their schools and their communities.

### **Project Rationale**

Play Gloucestershire has experienced a huge loss of income since April 2020. The charity was put into 'survival mode' by the senior management team. 15 staff were furloughed, leaving just three people to steer the charity through the Covid-19 storm.

Concern for the most vulnerable children in Gloucestershire created an opportunity for us to contribute to Gloucestershire County Council's working group for 'Out of School Holidays Planning'. Our challenge was to adapt our open access services into a more targeted way of working that complied with the Government guidelines, would keep staff and beneficiaries safe and that could support Gloucestershire's most vulnerable children first as we move into the Covid-19 recovery phase. Invited to submit a project proposal, we were delighted when Wendy Gray, Head of Service for Early Help and Prevention told us:

**"GET YOUR PEOPLE [PLAY RANGERS] OFF FURLOUGH, WE NEED THEM!"**

Time was of the essence but extraordinary times call for extraordinary action! Commissioning was approved in mid-July leaving just under three weeks to un-furlough the play team, train them to work in a new Covid-19 safe way, create six 'Play Nurture Bubbles' in six venues across six districts and invite, via referrals, up to 90 vulnerable children and young people to join us for some therapeutic outdoor play.

## **The Project**

The project used our award winning Play Nurture approach - a non-clinical intervention using playwork for the therapeutic benefit of children experiencing challenge, trauma or crisis. Play Nurture is our way of providing targeted support. Our lead practitioners have additional qualifications in Play Therapy and Place 2 Be Counselling. Rafa and Steve, our Play Dogs, have passed their Pets As Therapy assessment and are an important part of our nurture work.

Six Play Nurture Bubbles were created in all six Gloucestershire districts. Each bubble supported up to 15 vulnerable children who met with our play team for one day per week throughout August. It provided a safe and nurturing space for children to experience a respite from life's difficulties and a place to relax, recharge and build resilience.

The aim was to provide a safe and nurturing space where vulnerable children could connect with our Play Rangers and thrive physically, emotionally and socially through active and creative outdoor play. It would provide respite from life's ups and downs and will be a place where children go to relax, recharge and build resilience.

The Play 2 Recover sessions took place throughout August 2020, with weekly sessions in each district at:

- Saracens Football Club, Cheltenham
- The Wild Oaks Children's Centre, Cotswolds
- Berry Hill RFC, Forest of Dean
- Oxstalls Campus, University of Gloucestershire, Gloucester
- Severn View Primary Academy / Parliament Children's Centre, Stroud
- Queen Margaret's Primary School, Tewkesbury

## **Referrals**

The referral process had to be fast and effective to ensure that as many places as possible were filled. Places were offered in three stages – firstly to Social Workers, then to Family Support Workers and finally to community organisations. 30 referrals came from social workers; 15 from family support workers; 11 from community based organisations; 10 from Play Gloucestershire; 7 from Head teachers and 1 from a health professional.

**“IT HAS BEEN GREAT TO BE ABLE TO HAVE REFERRED LOCAL FAMILIES WHO WE KNOW STRUGGLE AND DESERVE SOME POSITIVE ACTIVITIES PLUS A BREAK FOR THE MUMS!  
...IT WAS ALL LAST MINUTE SO THE FACT WE GOT THE NUMBERS WE DID WE SHOULD ALL BE REALLY CHUFFED. YOU HAVE DONE AMAZING THINGS WORKING WITH THESE FAMILIES.  
I KNOW WE WOULD BE KEEN TO LOOK AT ONGOING PARTNERSHIP WORKING WITH YOU.”**

**KELLY PATTERSON, PROJECT COORDINATOR AT ST PETERS AND THE MOORS BIG LOCAL PARTNERSHIP**

## **Evaluation**

Setting up a project in such exceptional circumstances made a structured evaluation with external input impossible. However, on-going comments and feedback from both children and parents / carers were captured by the play team, detailed log sheets for each session recorded, photos taken, case studies written and feedback from all stakeholders gathered.

**The focus for project evaluation was:**

- To help vulnerable children to start to re-connect to their wider world after lockdown
- To improve children’s physical and emotional wellbeing
- To ensure children experienced lots of adventure, friendship and fun

**Project Outputs (the numbers)**

There were 74 project participants - 67 were regarded as vulnerable. The age range of the users was from 7 years old up to 16 years old. 48% of all attendees were female.

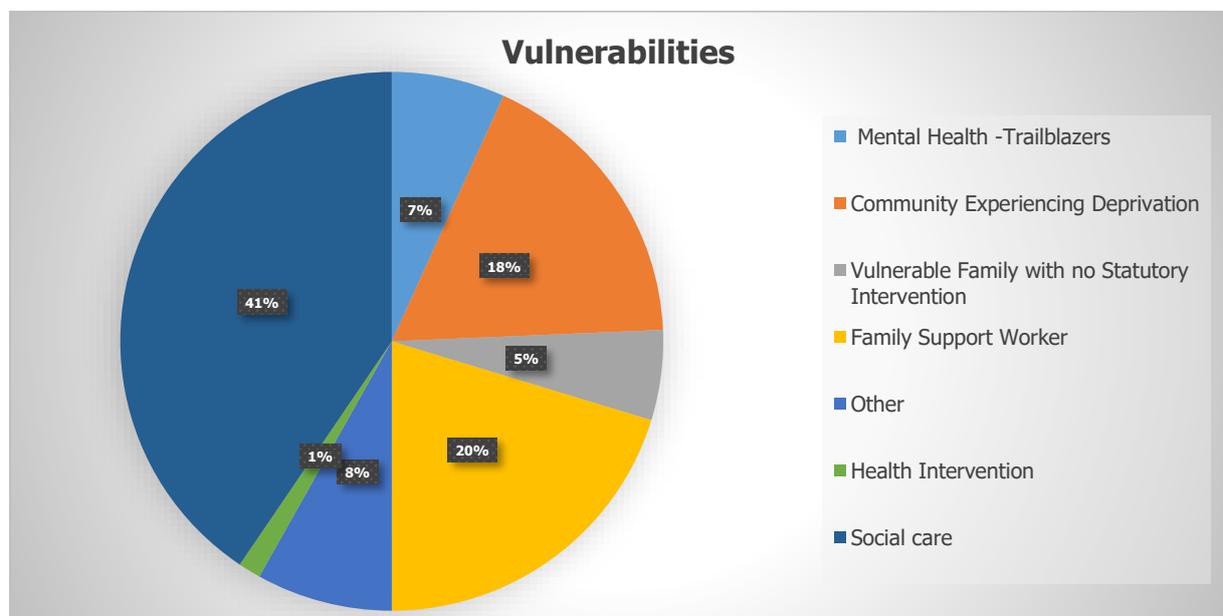
Total Number of Participants	Vulnerable Participants	Age Range
<b>74</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>7 – 16 years old</b>

Each of the 24 Play Nurture sessions ran from 10.30am to 3.30pm, making a total of 120 hours of play on offer.

Weekly attendance figures:

Week commencing 3 <sup>rd</sup> August	Week commencing 10 <sup>th</sup> August	Week commencing 17 <sup>th</sup> August	Week commencing 24 <sup>th</sup> August
<b>53</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>62</b>

This chart shows the ‘vulnerabilities’ of the participating children. 41% of children had a Social Worker. Some of these children were children in care. 20% of children had a Family Support Worker including those from Barnardos and the Early Help Team. 18% of children lived in a community experiencing social and economic deprivation.



## Project Outcomes (the difference it has made)

- Participating children have started to re-connect to their wider world after lockdown

This was the first opportunity for most children to take part in organised play activities since lockdown began at the end of March. Understandably, there was considerable anxiety from both children and parents and carers. This was discussed in depth at our pre-summer training day and consequently the play team was well prepared and invested much time and energy into warm welcomes and lots of support to settle in. Particularly effective was the orange tents:

### **Case Study - The Orange Tent Villages**

**“ALL WE’VE HEARD ABOUT OVER THE LAST THREE WEEKS IS ABOUT HIS ORANGE TENT!”**

**PARENT**

**“I DROVE PAST YOUR SITE IN STROUD THE OTHER DAY, AND SEEING ALL THOSE ORANGE TENTS SET UP, KNOWING WHAT THEY ARE BEING USED FOR, MADE ME PROUDER THAN EVER TO BE A TRUSTEE OF OUR CHARITY.”**

**PLAY GLOUCESTERSHIRE TRUSTEE JENNIE WILSON**

*In the project development stage, we identified an issue. How were we going to provide our attendees with shelter from the rain or shade from the sun? In ‘normal’ times we would build a communal shelter as well as providing den building equipment for individuals or groups to create their own spaces. With physical distancing restrictions we knew this was not an option. We couldn’t cram 15 young people under a shelter safely if the weather turned bad. Our solution was to purchase 90 pop-up tents thanks to a grant from Gloucestershire Community Foundation. These tents became the property of the young people attending, and actually formed a vital part of our welcome and our agreement with them.*

**“THIS TENT IS YOURS, YOU CAN SPEND AS MUCH OR AS LITTLE TIME IN IT AS YOU WISH. YOU CAN USE IT FOR SHELTER AS IT IS DESIGNED FOR BUT ULTIMATELY THIS IS YOUR SAFE SPACE TODAY AND FOR EVERY SESSION, NO ONE ELSE IS ALLOWED IN IT. YOU CAN SET IT UP ANYWHERE ON THIS SPACE. IT IS YOURS TO DECORATE (WITH MARKER PENS) AND AT THE END OF THE FOUR WEEKS IT IS YOURS TO TAKE HOME WITH YOU.”**

**PART OF THE PLAY RANGER WELCOME ON THAT FIRST SESSION.**

*We witnessed the most anxious of our attendees set their tents up far away from the other members of the bubble. Slowly as the day progressed, confidence grew, play had been observed and processed and these tents would be moved closer and closer to the group.*

*Siblings coming along together positioned their tents facing each other, a support network for each other, and just another way of helping them create their own coping strategies.*

*Friendships formed through play led to messages or images being scribed on a new friend’s tent. These ‘home for the day’ shelters would be moved next to each other so they became friendly neighbours and we saw lunch times become a social moment for these newly forged alliances*

*Play Rangers kept to our side of the deal too, we left them in their tents if that is where they wanted to be (after an initial check that they were ok). Several times we saw children take a nap in their tent, clearly feeling safe enough to find time to rest and feel at ease.*

**“THE CHILDREN I HAVE WORKED WITH HAVE ENJOYED MEETING OTHER YOUNG PEOPLE, ALONGSIDE BRILLIANT STAFF WHO HAVE BEEN ENGAGING AND ATTENTIVE TO THE CHILDREN’S NEEDS. ONE CHILD ESPECIALLY, PRESENTED AS SHY AND APPREHENSIVE ABOUT THE GROUP HOWEVER SOON BECAME COMFORTABLE IN HER SURROUNDINGS AFTER SOME ENCOURAGEMENT FROM STAFF. FEEDBACK FROM THE CHILDREN WAS THAT THEY ENJOYED THE ACTIVITIES, THE IDEA OF HAVING THEIR OWN TENT, AND FRIENDLY STAFF.”**

**SARA ABDUL-MAJID, SOCIAL WORKER“**

**“I AM SO PROUD OF HER, YESTERDAY SHE SAID SHE PROBABLY WOULDN’T COME BECAUSE OF THE RAIN, SHE IS A GIRLY GIRL AND I HAD EXPECTED HER TO WANT TO STAY HOME. I JUST LEFT IT AS HER DECISION AND THIS MORNING SHE TOLD ME THAT SHE REALLY WANTED TO COME TO PLAY WITH HER FRIENDS AND THAT IT WOULD BE FINE.”**

**PARENT**



- **Participating children have improved physical and emotional wellbeing**

It has been well documented that children have particularly adversely affected by the pandemic:

“Many children have been or continue to be unable to play or socialize outside the home. Adolescents especially can suffer when deprived of social stimuli, since peer interaction is key to their development. Many children and adolescents are spending more time online, allowing social interaction for some but also increasing the risk of exploitation, bullying, and intensified commercial marketing. The most vulnerable children are those who have been separated from caregivers; in past health-related disasters up to 30% of such children met the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder. Parents may also struggle to provide the responsive parenting needed to help children thrive during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

\*After COVID-19, a future for the world’s children: [www.thelancet.com](http://www.thelancet.com) Vol 396 August 1, 2020

This comment from the parent of young carers shows the positive effects of play, as part of the Covid-19 recovery process, both during play and at home afterwards:

**“FOR MY CHILDREN IT ALLOWED THEM TO BE CARE FREE AND HAVE FUN. WHEN THEY CAME BACK, IT WAS GOOD TO SEE THE SMILES ESPECIALLY K WHO WAS STRUGGLING WITH LOCKDOWN. IT GAVE ME A GOOD BREAK KNOWING THEY WERE HAPPY AND IT WAS NICE TO HAVE SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT WITH THEM. I REALLY DO APPRECIATE YOU HAVING THEM, IT’S MADE ALL THE DIFFERENCE”**

**PARENT OF YOUNG CARERS**

It is also well documented that child centred and child led play in the outdoors has a vital role in a happy and healthy childhood and can effectively support young people in this Covid recovery phase. Our Play Nurture approach is good for mind, good for body and good for soul. Play Nurture provides constant opportunities for active and creative play. Over the summer, children were able to choose what they did and how they did it, building their sense of agency and being in control of their lives, at least for a day each week:

#### **Play Builds Resilience - Case Study from the Forest of Dean**

*As expected, there were some nerves on our first day, but G was by far the most anxious. She struggles with her confidence and is part of the Trailblazers mental health programme. She resisted getting her temperature taken (part of our new covid regime) and stuck close to mum, only agreeing once we’d checked mum and little brother first. After quite a time G’s mum was still trying to say goodbye. I grabbed two pens, some paper and sat down (physically distanced) outside her tent I proposed that we both drew one thing, without talking, that we LOVED. Once finished we could tell the other person what we had drawn and why. As this was happening mum and brother managed to slip away, G noticed but carried on drawing. We bonded as we chatted about our images – she drew a delicious looking doughnut.*

*Over the weeks G grew more confident, she had control, she could choose what to do and for how long. This sense of agency helped her to feel more comfortable; and little moments like asking me if I would like to sit and have lunch with her, and joining in games of Frisbee showed this. Friendships developed along with confidence and by week 3 G and her friend were whizzing head first down our water slide (tarpaulin covered with water) screeching with laughter.*

*G ran up to me in our last week and demanded her temperature be taken so she could get on with play as quickly as possible, no longer fearing the unknown, embracing every aspect of it. It rained non-stop and even this didn’t deter her, in fact it led to G becoming part of a large puddle that formed on site, sitting in the middle of it splashing her arms up and down. She was the last to leave that day, wanting to soak up every last moment of play (not just the puddle).*

**“SHE HAS ABSOLUTELY LOVED COMING EVERY WEEK, SHE HAS GOTTEN SO MUCH FROM IT, THANK YOU”**

**G’s MUM**

**“WHATEVER YOU HAVE BEEN DOING HAS WORKED. SHE IS A DIFFERENT GIRL TO THE ONE THAT STARTED FOUR WEEKS AGO.”**

**PARENT OF DAUGHTER EXPERIENCING SEPERATION ANXIETY**

### Hot Potato Tennis - Case Study from Gloucester

Through the years of working with children and young people, particularly in our Play Nurture settings, there have been numerous moments where what we call a 'hot potato subject' comes up out of the blue. These are those moments where a child share's a story of huge importance in their life and then forensically observe your reaction. It can often be a test to see how this new adult in their life responds. React positively and you become a trusted adult, react in a way that doesn't suit the child, then you may have an uphill battle ahead.

It was one of the hottest days of the summer and we were extremely lucky to have a stream running through our play site, so it wasn't long before a small group of us were ankle deep wading through the cool water. **"I don't live with my mum anymore; I live with my Aunty"** P stated. I echoed his statement to show I heard him. Before he could follow up H, who was stream walking with us exclaimed **"My brother doesn't live with us anymore and my dad is dead"**. What continued then was in reflection a sense of 'hot potato tennis'. Both shared their difficulties, me in the middle using all my counselling skills to show active listening, echo statements and to allow the conversation to flow – it is easy at this point to feel uneasy and want to change the subject or to add in your own thoughts and feelings, however this often moves the point of focus on to you. I knew my reactions would be analysed and all this happening in the first 30 minutes of our time together it was a make or break point.

This rally continued for a while before H said **"oh, that's a cool pebble"** picked it up and left the stream. Both P and H flourished at play, making new friends and trying new things supported by the Play Rangers who quickly became trusted adults to these young people by providing emotional support during play.

**"THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR HAVING HIM. HE HAS LOVED COMING TO YOU. I WANT TO THANK YOU AND YOUR TEAM FOR THE KINDNESS YOU HAVE SHOWN HIM."**

**PARENT**

**"MY DAUGHTER ABSOLUTELY LOVED IT. SHE CAN'T WAIT TO GO EACH WEEK."**

**PARENT**

- **Participating children have experienced adventure, friendship and fun**

The range of play that we have offered this summer has been developed over the last thirteen years. The Play Rangers arrived in a customised van and set up a day camp in each location. Activities included informal sports such as tennis, cricket, football and golf; games such as tag, hide and seek and skipping. Active play such as den building, waterslides, rope swings, kites, stomp-rockets and giant bubbles and slack-lines. Creative play such as junk modelling, clay, painting and gloop.

### Adventure, friendship and fun - Case Study from Stroud

The Stroud Play Nurture bubble comprised of children with high need. H is experiencing PTSD and utilising all our skills and experience we worked hard to connect with her. She warmed to both us and the group quickly. Using the slackline (a tightrope between trees) to encourage teamwork, they supported each other with positive comments and feedback as they queued and attempted crossing the tightrope. H stood back watching but not wanting to try it out. Her referral form told us of her dyspraxia and I wondered if this was holding her back, so I openly (and loudly) chatted with Play

Ranger Josh *"This takes me back to that play session when we had that little boy with dyspraxia come and try the slackline and he mastered it within a few tries didn't he?"*

*H took the cue and exclaimed "I have dyspraxia!" "Do you?" I replied, "If you wanted to give it a go, we can help you"*

*A combination of Play Ranger and peer support led to H giving it a go. Later she came to find me on the other side of the field and demanded I come back to the slackline area to observe her not only having a go at getting across, but this time with no physical help from anyone only a stick for support as she crossed the tightrope, jumping off the end with a huge smile and elbow high fiving me as she walked off with her head held high having achieved what she thought was the unachievable.*

**"HAVING WORKED OVER THE SUMMER WITH THESE CHILDREN, I FEEL CONTENT TO HAVE MADE CONNECTIONS THAT I IMAGINE WILL NOURISH THOSE CHILDREN, EVEN THOUGH IT HAS COME TO AN END. I FEEL THIS WORK WILL HAVE REALLY SUPPORTED SOME CHILDREN TO TRANSITION BACK TO FULL CLASSES AND NORMAL SCHOOL ROUTINES. IT WAS LOVELY TO SEE FRIENDSHIPS DEVELOP BETWEEN THEM AND SEE THEM ALL BECOME MORE RELAXED AND ABLE TO HAVE FUN AND BE THEMSELVES AS TIME WENT ON.**

**IT FELT QUITE LIBERATING AND EXCITING AT FIRST TO BE OUT PLAYING AGAIN, AND REFRESHING AFTER MONTHS OF LOCK DOWN. IT ALSO FELT SPECIAL TO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SUPPORT THESE YOUNG PEOPLE. THERE IS A LITTLE SENSE OF SADNESS HAVING BEEN SOME SUPPORT AND FOR A SHORT TIME CREATING A SAFE COMMUNITY AROUND THESE YOUNG PEOPLE, AND I REALLY HOPE THAT THEY CONTINUE TO RECEIVE THE SUPPORT THEY NEED IN TO THE FUTURE."**

#### REFLECTIONS FROM PLAY RANGER BECCY



#### **Making Friends with Steve the Pug - Case Study from the Cotswolds**

*I could tell that J was anxious about joining us before he came through the gate. J has autism and I was unsure how much support he would need. His Mum told me that our play offer was full of challenges for him - noise, colour, unstructured, with constant movement but she was desperate for him to try new things and to build some resilience to the triggers he encounters daily.*

*After setting up his tent and decorating it we had an amazing day. J held back from joining in with activities spontaneously. He would watch for a while and then choose to join in or not. It was good to be able to let him control his own play, developing his sense of agency.*

*I didn't bring our Pets As Therapy Dog Steve in straight away as his mum wasn't sure how he would be as "he doesn't really like dogs". Later Steve came in on his lead and said hello to those interested. I saw him but wasn't too fussed. We kept Steve on the lead until after lunch when he was released. Some of the children were hugging him and asking for a 'selfie' with him. J came up to me and asked for a photo with Steve; he wanted to be close to Steve in his safe space, his tent and have a photo taken, wow! As the weeks went on they became firm friends, Steve nudging for hugs with J and J confident enough to tell Steve 'No' when he didn't want him in his tent.*

## **What Worked Well**

### **Our Play Nurture Approach**

There is increasing recognition that a combination of child centred and child-led play with nurturing interactions in the natural environment can help vulnerable children to build their resilience, cope with adversity and support wellbeing. Playing outdoors in all weathers builds resilience in children, and many have both benefitted and enjoyed the chance to do this over a summer of extreme weather – hot, thunder storms and torrential rain. The outdoor play provided has clearly had a positive effect on both mind and body, and contributed to a sense of wellbeing for those taking part. For some children it had created a desire for more outdoor play.

### **Staff training and preparation**

Our Play Team had been furloughed since April, so the face to face pre-summer outdoor training day and on-line training in Covid-19 safety and child protection refresher was vital to get us ready for the challenges of working with so many vulnerable children and the new way of working.

### **Attending with a sibling or friend**

Some referred children were not confident enough to attend on their own, or wanted to share the opportunity to play outdoors with a sibling or friend. This really helped those experiencing high levels of anxiety.

### **Therapeutic Playwork Skills of the Play Rangers**

The Play Rangers are highly skilled at developing friendly relationships, building a rapport, enabling children to express themselves, accepting children as they are, and being 'present' throughout the play sessions. The Play Rangers presented themselves as positive role models and quickly became

trusted adults in these children's lives. Due to the level of need, extra Play Rangers were drafted in on sites where particular children required constant supervision – this was an essential step to keep everyone safe. The play team coped with this extra pressure extremely well.

### **Coping with difficult situations**

The participants were all children facing challenging circumstances, and child-led unstructured outdoor play provided many opportunities for them to explore their feelings in a supportive environment. On multiple occasions, young people who usually struggle to manage their anger, managed to do so effectively in the outdoors with support from the Play Rangers. Some young people joined us for one or two sessions and this sometimes affected the group dynamics and presented the play team with some challenges. It all contributes to the development of vital life skills.

### **Venues**

All the venues met our needs really well. They had good natural environments to explore and restricted access so that we had private space for our activities when we needed it most. We had excellent support from the Early Help and Prevention Team, using their contacts and influence to enable us to use Wild Oaks Children's Centre, Queen Margaret Primary School and Severn View Academy / Parliament Children's Centre. Our existing links with University of Gloucestershire, Berry Hill Rugby Club and Berry Hill Primary School and St Peter and The Moors Big Local helped us secure use of these venues.

### **Strong Attachment**

A key part of the project was creating the space and conditions for participating children to develop attachment with each other and the Play Rangers. Strong and developing attachments were observed throughout. We overheard sleepovers being negotiated amongst new friends!

### **Photos Sent Home**

The Play Team shared stories with the families from each day's play by sending home text messages with images of play. These messages formed an important part of building relationships and trust with the families attending our Play Bubbles and it also prompted discussions at home about the day, about the new experiences and friendships formed.

### **Appreciative Parents and Carers**

There was a lot of positive feedback from parents and carers. Not only were they delighted to see the positive effect that Play Nurture had on their children, but they also enjoyed some respite and downtime at the end of lockdown, which has been stressful for these families. Many commented on the kindness shown by the Play Rangers.

### **New Partners and Collaborators**

"The pandemic's effects have underscored the necessity for co-ordination across sectors and with communities. The breadth and speed of implementation of multi-sectorial social protection measures prompted by COVID-19 show what is possible - as do the communities mobilising to care for each other."

*\*After COVID-19, a future for the world's children?" The Lancet vol 396 August 1<sup>st</sup> 2020*

When called upon Play Gloucestershire and our partners collaborated at high speed to help those that were in most need of the power of play. Statutory and third sector providers have come together to cut through red tape, to fast track ideas and to make this project happen. It has been amazing to see the drive and passion in people to get things over the line, knowing that the end goal

would provide positive impacts for the benefit of those families left most vulnerable due to the social and economic impacts of the virus.

### **What Needs More Consideration**

#### **Transport**

Transport was a barrier to attendance for some families. Where possible we liaised with lead professionals to overcome this problem and some families were helped with a taxi. With more time to build a relationship with the family via contact over the phone, email or letter we may have been able to help more people. Some parents showed incredible determination to get to play each week and for others it was too much to cope with.

#### **Referrals**

We are proud to have provided Play Nurture for 74 young people this summer. It was a challenging process to link with both lead professionals and families who we had never worked with before, and persuade them to re-connect with the world through our play offer. More time would have enabled us to fill more places, but given to overlying context, we think the referral process worked well. Some children had holidays booked which affected attendances and sometimes we were told about these at the last minute. One Family Support Worker used the referral form to give the child a voice. He was able to tell us his strengths and difficulties. We really like that. We only had 1 referral from Social Workers across the whole of Cheltenham. It would be good to develop a stronger relationship with the Cheltenham social care team.

#### **Longer relationship**

Forming short-term relationships with the children and their families is a bitter-sweet feeling for the Play Rangers. Although the project has had a very positive impact on most participants, we are also conscious that longer-term interventions would of course be of greater benefit.

#### **Clothing**

Many children were not suitably dressed for the extreme weather we experienced. Some protective clothing that we could lend to children would overcome this difficulty. A bell tent or similar could be used once physical distancing is no longer restrictive on our practice to increase protection from the weather.

#### **Food**

Normally, the Play Rangers would cook a healthy hot lunch on our fire pit with the young people. We were unable to prepare any food on site due to Covid-19 safety concerns. Some children brought packed lunches with low nutritional value. It would be good to provide a nutritious lunch for these children in the future.

#### **Volunteering Support**

Our Young Volunteers would normally providing buddying support for children attending Play Nurture. We really missed them this summer and hope that they will be able to join us again soon.

#### **Conclusions**

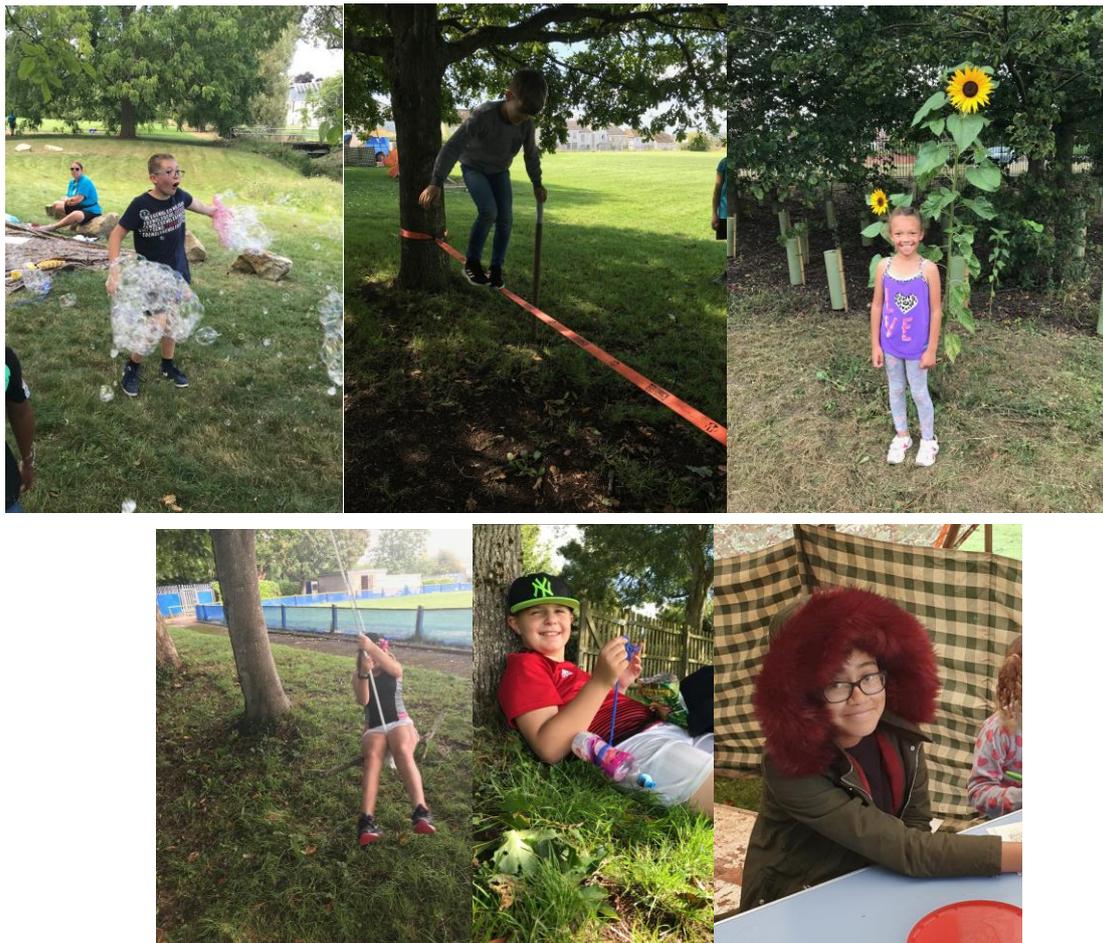
This has been one of the most intensive projects Play Gloucestershire have worked on, both in terms of setting up the project in less than three weeks following the furloughed period for most of our staff and the play sessions themselves.

It is always hard not to make assumptions about children with high need when the referral forms arrived. It can sometimes feel quite overwhelming. Our team coped really well with supporting the child in front of them, avoiding any preconceived ideas. A non-judgemental and open mind is essential.

Many of the children attending were 'thrown in at the deep end' and forced to deal with a lot of unknowns and the anxieties that came with it. Fortunately, our kind and caring Play Rangers made that first encounter a positive one and all the children that we met were keen to sustain a relationship with us.

It has been a privilege to be trusted by these children and their families and to become part of their lives. We are grateful to be given the chance by Gloucestershire County Council to showcase the power of play in these very unusual and difficult circumstances. It has been wonderful to witness so many partners and stakeholders come together to pull off the project in such a short space of time.

Above all it has been amazing to see so many smiling, relaxed and happy faces return weekly, excited about what the day of play ahead holds. The global pandemic has exacerbated the issues vulnerable people face, increased the socio-economic divide and has left a generation of school aged children on a precipice of educational, physical and mental health decline. We understand how play can help young people to make sense of the world around them. We hope that the stories and comments within this report go some way to highlight the power (and importance) of play.



## **Acknowledgments**

Our grateful thanks go to the following people and organisations:

### **St Peter and The Moors Big Local**

Kelly Patterson; Ali English

### **Saracen's Football Club, Cheltenham**

Graham Roberts; Dave Bath

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Hilary Smith; Sally Cronshaw; Jonathan Wye; Rob Wood; Ed Moulding

### **Berry Hill Rugby Football Club**

Kim Partridge

### **Berry Hill Primary School**

Sally Hunt, Head Teacher

### **Wild Oaks Children's Centre**

Carol Beard; Gwyneth Keen

### **Queen Margaret Primary School, Tewkesbury**

Sara Bennion, Head Teacher

### **Severn View Academy**

Katie Rowlands, Assistant Principal

### **Parliament Children's Centre, Stroud**

Helen Black, Commissioning Officer at Children and Families Hub

### **Gloucestershire County Council**

Early Help and Prevention Team: Wendy Gray, Head of Service

Children and Families Commissioning Hub: Liz Giles, Commissioning Manager and Heather Ellis  
Commissioning Support Officer

### **Active Gloucestershire**

Tom Hall, Physical Activity Lead for Children and Young People

### **Gloucestershire Community Foundation**

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