

## **Belfast City Council Community Services**

### **Play Club Evaluation**

#### **Purpose of the Play Clubs**

The Play Club model was developed to provide play opportunities for children aged 2 – 4 years. The aims are two fold:

1. To adopt a community development based approach to promote play. This involves play staff in the initial stages providing direct support for the play sessions and then withdrawing gradually as the local community take ownership of the project. The play service continue to provide support through programme input, resources, advice and training. The success of this project is based on development in partnership with an existing community group or parent and toddler projects.
2. To provide for a specific target group where there are few play opportunities otherwise available.

The Play Clubs generally are provided one or two mornings per week. The underlying rationale for the model is to enable the local community to acquire the capacity to take ownership of the project and thereby enable the play service to target more areas or groups.

The programme for the Play Club is based on providing a range of play opportunities. Activities in the play club include painting, crafts, games, physical activities, story telling, outdoor and indoor play. The benefits include development of social, physical and creative skills. The Play Club is not to be confused with pre-school playgroups which have a specific curriculum which focuses on specific areas of learning.

#### **Current Position**

At the meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2010, Belfast City Council agreed to run Play Clubs four mornings per week at Whiterock, Olympia and Ballysillan Playcentres.

There was difficulty in establishing the Play Club at Whiterock as there was no physical capacity in the community centre. The Belfast Health and Social Services Trust rent out both the minor and main halls five mornings for a project for adults with learning disabilities.

Endeavours to establish the Playclub at Olympia were unsuccessful. Posters and leaflets were distributed around the area. An information meeting and a registration day were publicised. Both were unattended. There were several phone enquiries but this did not result in any children being registered for the project.

The Play Club at Ballysillan started at the end of September. Nine of the sixteen places were taken up. Several meetings were held where parents were invited to attend to become more actively involved in the Play Club with the aim of taking over the project in the longer term. Ongoing support was offered from both the play and community service units, including a training programme.

Initially, there were several local community members interested in supporting the project through volunteering. Unfortunately due to other commitments, the numbers decreased. Only two volunteers initially took part – although one later withdrew. The main volunteer helps out once a week. The training programme did not take place due to lack of interest.

The main difficulty with this project was the expectation that the play club would be run on the basis of a pre-school playgroup and based on the pre-school curriculum. An information meeting was held before the project started to explain the aims of the Playclub and activities that would take place. The numbers on the enrolment have fluctuated between four and nine, with children leaving and new children joining the project.

Average attendance each month:

Maximum number -16 places

September	5
October	5
November	7
December	6
January	5
February	4
March	4
April	4
May	4
June	3

Average attendance through the year – 4.7 (29% of available places)

There have been six indications of interest for the Play Club if it is to continue for the year 2011-2012.

### **Traveller Play Club**

The Play Service established a Play Club one morning each week in partnership with the ToyBox Project for Traveller children. The project was established from an identified need in that pre-school children in the Traveller Community lack play opportunities in their own home. The Traveller culture historically places little emphasis on play. There is little room in their homes for toys or the provision of creative activities (such as painting). Some have never been away from their family.

The project provides 10 places. Although there is demand for more places, the space available in the portacabin limits the numbers. The project provides

a range of play opportunities – and most have painted pictures for the first time. One four year old child who did not want to leave his mother will now be starting school after attending the Play Club.

Average attendance each month:  
Maximum number - 10 places

November	7
December	8
January	2
February	5
March	8
April	8
May	7

Average attendance through the year – 6.5 (65% of available places)

## **Summary**

The Play Club model has had varying success at the three directly managed centres. This is partly attributable to two factors – the perception that the project would be run as a pre-school playgroup and the lack of an identified partner.

The Play Club for the Traveller project works in partnership with the Toybox project and has had consistent attendance (except in January due to poor weather conditions). There is a demand within the local community for the places and this is supported by the worker with the Toybox project who works closely with the families.

The play service has identified at least two other areas where the existing community are interested in working in partnership for the Play Club model to be developed and further exploratory efforts will continue.

## **Recommendations**

To continue to develop the Play Club model in areas of identified need and to target specific groups. The model would be run in each area for a maximum of two mornings per week. This would not be confined to the current six playcentres and would enable support for the voluntary community sector. Through this, the play service will be able to support more areas and increase the potential sustainability of the model within such areas.