



Hackney **PLAY**  
ASSOCIATION

# Hackney Play Streets Evaluation

*Key findings*

**Hackney Council's Get Hackney Healthy Board commissioned Hackney Play Association to deliver a Play Streets Project as part of a programme of interventions to improve children's health and wellbeing and tackle high child obesity levels. The project encouraged children to play out of doors in streets and amenity spaces close to home by supporting parents and schools to run regular play street sessions.**

An evaluation carried out in 2014 looked at the reach of the programme, its potential impact on children, families and communities, its impact on traffic, and its sustainability and prospects for growth.



## ○ Background

Concern has been growing in recent years about the health and wellbeing of children in the UK, with child obesity and low levels of physical activity high on the list of public health concerns. Outdoor play is important not only for children to enjoy their childhoods, it is also recognised as having health and wellbeing benefits, and is an emerging focus of public policy and public health activity.

Hackney has the fourth-highest level in London of children who are overweight or obese. While Hackney has a comparatively high proportion of public open space for a London borough, this space is concentrated in some parts of the borough at the expense of others, with some areas highly deficient. Hackney also has the lowest level of car ownership of any local authority in England. Moreover, overall traffic levels have declined in the last decade or so (in keeping with the trend across London). This context provides a strong rationale for exploring street play as a public health response in the borough.

## ○ The importance of play

All children and young people need time and space to play in order to enjoy themselves, make friends and explore the world around them. In urban areas their opportunities for play can be severely restricted. Hackney has a vibrant, well used Play Service. Hackney Council works in partnership with Hackney Play Association and other voluntary organisations to support a wide range of local play services including adventure playgrounds and holiday play schemes, short breaks, play in parks and in schools. Play streets are a way of reaching even more children and providing more play opportunities.

## ○ Street play resurgence

Interest in street play initiatives is growing throughout the UK, in part as a result of the work of Playing Out, the not-for-profit organisation working to support street play, and also since street parties became popular again for the Queen's Jubilee and the London Olympics. In September 2012 Hackney Council became the first London council to support play streets, working in partnership with Hackney Play Association, as a result of local residents taking up the idea.

## ○ Evaluation methodology

A mixed approach was taken. Quantitative data was gathered to assess the reach of the programme and the amount of traffic disruption it gave rise to. In addition, semi-structured telephone interviews were carried out with people closely involved in getting play streets off the ground.

# HACKNEY PLAY STREETS



**32 Play Streets in  
February 2015**

## Results and findings

The Hackney Play Streets project has made street play a regular feature in the lives of a significant number of children and families in Hackney. In the 12-month period until September 2014 the programme has:

- Supported parents to run 380 hours of play street and estate play sessions in 29 locations reaching around 1,600 children and nearly 800 families.
- Enabled over 8,100 child-hours of physical activity – on a par with 14 additional classes of weekly term-time PE lessons. Projecting forward, this figure could rise to 13,800 child-hours in the year from October 2014.
- Shown that residential road closures for street play – or play streets – have a low impact on traffic movements; an average of nine vehicles were diverted or ‘walked through’ during a two to three hour session.
- Spread play street uptake beyond the initial pattern of the more affluent parts of Hackney to reach a broader demographic, including areas of disadvantage.
- Built an effective three-way partnership between Hackney Council, Hackney Play Association and groups of residents.
- Developed a sustainable model for improving opportunities for street play, with significant potential for growth.
- Revealed a strong consensus amongst organisers about the perceived benefits of the scheme for children, families and communities – especially in terms of social interaction, but also as a way to expand children’s freedom and choice in their play.
- Highlighted challenges when attempting to move on from playworker-facilitated sessions – an approach piloted in two housing estates.
- Uncovered significant interest from schools, early years settings and voluntary and community organisations in the idea of street play. Three schools and a children’s centre are running termly play streets.
- Demonstrated that street closures have not been contentious among residents. A total of 18 written objections have been made to the Council since September 2012 when it first adopted a play streets scheme – averaging at less than one objection per street scheme.

At the time of completing this report in February 2015, Hackney has 32 play streets.



## What participants say

“It’s great that children can meet other children who live in their street. They can form new friendship groups that reach across different schools and communities. .... My daughter got a real sense of achievement when she learnt how to ride a bike in our street, and loved it when she had a go on a friend’s snakeboard.”  
Melanie Read, resident organiser

“The scheme has strengthened the sense of community, and has been a stepping stone for other community groups, including a park user group. It is an amazing initiative with the potential to work magic.”  
Zoe Eisenstein, resident organiser

“Seeing children being playful gave permission for adults to be playful too. Some dads said that they had not played like this since they were kids.” Lorna Lewis,  
Claudia Jones Organisation

“I know virtually everyone in the road now. It doesn’t feel such a scary place, and I am happier to let my children out to play or to call on their friends.” Vanessa Linehan,  
resident organiser

“Traditional games were very popular: children loved them, and one parent asked ‘where do I buy a skipping rope?’” Jenny Lewis, Head Teacher,  
Thomas Fairchild Primary School