

COME INTO PLAY 2019-2022

Evaluation Summary

”
UNTIL PLAY
TORBAY CAME,
I WAS AT MY
BREAKING POINT

LIFE WITHOUT PLAY
TORBAY WOULD BE
REALLY, REALLY BAD,
I WAS AT THE POINT OF
GIVING UP



wonderful
space fun
informative
passion
play
accomodation
creative
care
structured
commitment
support
grounds
PASSIONATE
FRIENDLY
inclusive helping
people
staff volunteers
UNDERSTANDING
activities

I WOULD PROBABLY
HAVE CRACKED UP
WITHOUT PLAY
TORBAY





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Words on front cover from a survey asking -
What would you say Play Torbay's strengths are?

This report has been prepared by Clarity CIC for Play Torbay
www.claritycic.org
April 2022

Come into Play 2019-22 Evaluation Reflections



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Executive Summary

Come into Play is a three-year programme run by Play Torbay and funded by the National Lottery Community Fund which seeks to build a supportive “ecosystem” for disadvantaged families in Torbay; in particular, for families whose children have additional needs and challenging behaviours. Clarity CIC was commissioned by Play Torbay at the outset of Come into Play in 2019 to evaluate the programme’s impact for beneficiaries and capture the lessons and learning for Play Torbay itself and other stakeholders. This report provides Clarity’s analysis of and reflections on the evidence of the programme’s impact, relationships and organisation over its three years.

Key highlights

- 1419 children and young people were supported during Year 2 and Year 3^[1]
- 419 children and young people (28%) engaging with Come into Play in Years 2 and 3 had additional needs, with some activities (e.g. ASRUS) being specifically aimed at SEN children & young people
- 117 volunteers contributed over 10,000 hours to running and organising Come into Play activities


Pandemic delivery

- Despite the pandemic, Play Torbay have been able to support children & young people throughout the period
- Play Torbay responded quickly and flexibly right from the start of the pandemic, re-designing services, finding new ways of delivering activities and support - including online - and developing new services. Play Torbay committed to ensuring that vulnerable families and children/ young people still had support.
- Over 600 families received Play Packs in 2020 and 2021, during the height of the Covid pandemic.

Impact

- The parents surveyed report Play Torbay has made a difference for them across a range of outcomes.
- The evidence shows that parents and carers are better informed about the challenges their child faces, and the services and support available to them; are making positive changes and managing better.
- There is strong evidence that Play Torbay is playing an important role in helping parents and carers feel less isolated.

[1] We didn’t look for a total for the 3 years, as Year 1 data is in a different format and not easily comparable

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- Play Torbay’s play-based approach and activities are enabling children and young people to grow in confidence and achieve in ways that would not have been expected.
 - Play Torbay has been able to adopt a co-design and co-production approach across a range of initiatives.

Quality

- Over 70% of partner organisations believe Play Torbay supports children and young people with additional needs and their families “very well”.
- The overall quality of Play Torbay’s services and activities is highly rated by a range of stakeholders; thirty-five partner organisations rated the “quality of Play Torbay’s provision” at an average 4.9 out of 5; sixteen families with one or more children with additional needs gave Play Torbay an overall rating of 4.7 (out of 5) and 4.8 for its response to the Covid pandemic.

Strategic involvement and representation

- Play Torbay plays an important role at a strategic level; the organisation is “at the table” and is a valued and respected partner in planning support for vulnerable children and young people and their families.
- Play Torbay developed existing and new partnerships locally as part of Come Into Play to ensure families were supported during the pandemic
- Partners value the role of Play Torbay in enabling children and young people to have a voice and be engaged in influencing provision.

A separate Organisation Development Report sets out key recommendations for further strengthening Play Torbay.





1 Introduction

Play Torbay is a registered charity, established in 1999, which aims to improve the quality, quantity and scope of play provision for children and young people living in Torbay. It also seeks to raise awareness of the importance of play in children's lives. The organisation runs three adventure playgrounds as well as providing a range of other activities, services and training and learning opportunities.

Since 2019, Play Torbay has been running Come into Play, a three-year programme, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, which seeks to build a supportive “ecosystem” for disadvantaged families in Torbay; in particular, for families whose children have additional needs and challenging behaviours.


Clarity CIC was commissioned by Play Torbay at the outset of Come into Play to evaluate the programme's impact for beneficiaries and capture the lessons and learning for Play Torbay itself and other stakeholders.

This report summarises the data, our analysis of these data and our overall reflections on Come into Play over the three years it has been running. It particularly considers the impact of the pandemic on delivery and the challenges and innovation this prompted. The report includes data gained through interviews with parents and young people; discussions with staff; observation of sessions; interviews with representatives of key local organisations; and online surveys with parents and with partner organisations. More detailed evaluation reports are available for Year 1 and Year 2 of the programme.

2 the Torbay context

Torbay is an area with high levels of deprivation and disadvantage. The “Developing Well” profile for Torbay, part of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, highlights the following key characteristics of people aged 5 to 25 in comparison to England and nearest neighbour authorities.

- There are higher levels of dependent children living in **lone parent households**.
- Torbay has a higher ratio of **under 18 conceptions**.
- Around 1 in 5 children have a **special educational need**.
- 4.4% of the Torbay pupil population have and **Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP)** compared to 2.9% nationally.
- More children provide levels of **unpaid care** and support.
- Levels of **statutory children's services** support are significantly higher in Torbay.
- Children in schools in Torbay have higher levels of **absenteeism**.
- **Hospital admissions** for injuries, self-harm and alcohol misuse are significantly higher.



Torbay is ranked within the top 20% of most deprived local authorities in England and when compared to statistical neighbours, Torbay has the second highest levels of multiple deprivation. According to the End Child Poverty Report (2019), 31% of families in Torbay were living in poverty. An Experian report for The Guardian in 2012 identified Torbay as the local authority area in Britain with the highest proportion of households, 37%, at risk of falling into poverty.

It is likely that the social and economic impact of Covid-19 will have pushed more families into poverty. The Torbay economy is heavily dependent on the tourism, leisure and entertainment sector which have been especially badly hit by the pandemic. It is also reasonable to assume that the prolonged period without access to education, childcare, leisure and play opportunities and normal family and social networks will have resulted in deteriorating mental health and wellbeing for parents, carers and children – particularly where there are additional pressures associated with children with special educational needs.

Torbay's Children's Services were inspected in 2021, to judge effectiveness in implementing the special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) reforms as set out in the Children and Families Act 2014. The Inspection stated that "A Written Statement of Action (WSOA) is required because of significant areas of weakness in the area's practice", including a lack of joint working between statutory services and parent and children's voices not being listened to consistently, high rates of school exclusion for SEND pupils and slow assessment for ASD.

3 Come into Play – the approach

Come into Play seeks to build resilient networks, reducing isolation and upskilling parents and carers, so that families have increased agency and community connections to help their children to thrive.

To achieve these goals, Come into Play is designed as an integrated programme of play-based activities that engage with children, young people and families, with different entry points according to individuals' needs and interests. The model predicts that gradually, and based on positive experiences, families will engage more deeply in activities, and parents will develop confidence to become part of a 'community of practice', finding solutions together.

Children with challenging behaviour can cause vital family support relationships to weaken; parents may move away from established support systems, becoming increasingly isolated. By working with the family, friends, school and community around a child, Come into Play sets out to create a tangible shift in how families experience themselves, reducing adverse childhood experiences and improving young people's life-chances as they move towards adulthood.

Working collectively with partners, the Come into Play programme aims to develop a new user model of self-sustaining provision for families 'on the edge' where the experience of parents and carers themselves are valued and their ideas are integrated into ongoing practice. This aspect of the programme aims to build capabilities for sustainable practice in the long term – both in terms of Play Torbay's resilience and in terms of sustainable community-held activity. The key strands of the Come into Play programme and its outcomes are illustrated in the graphic below.

Come into Play an integrated approach



With the aim to create - more resilient support systems around the child, happier families, more connected communities and better organisations.

4 Come Into Play – activities and attendance

The main Come into Play services and activities delivered during the period of this report are summarised below. Soon after the programme got underway in 2019 the Covid pandemic hit with major implications for both the need for support from Torbay’s children, young people and families and how Play Torbay could deliver such support. In practice, Play Torbay had to radically re-think how it could deliver its pre-Covid support and put in place new forms of support. The descriptions below reflect the key changes made in response to the pandemic.

Play Areas - Holiday and after-school provision

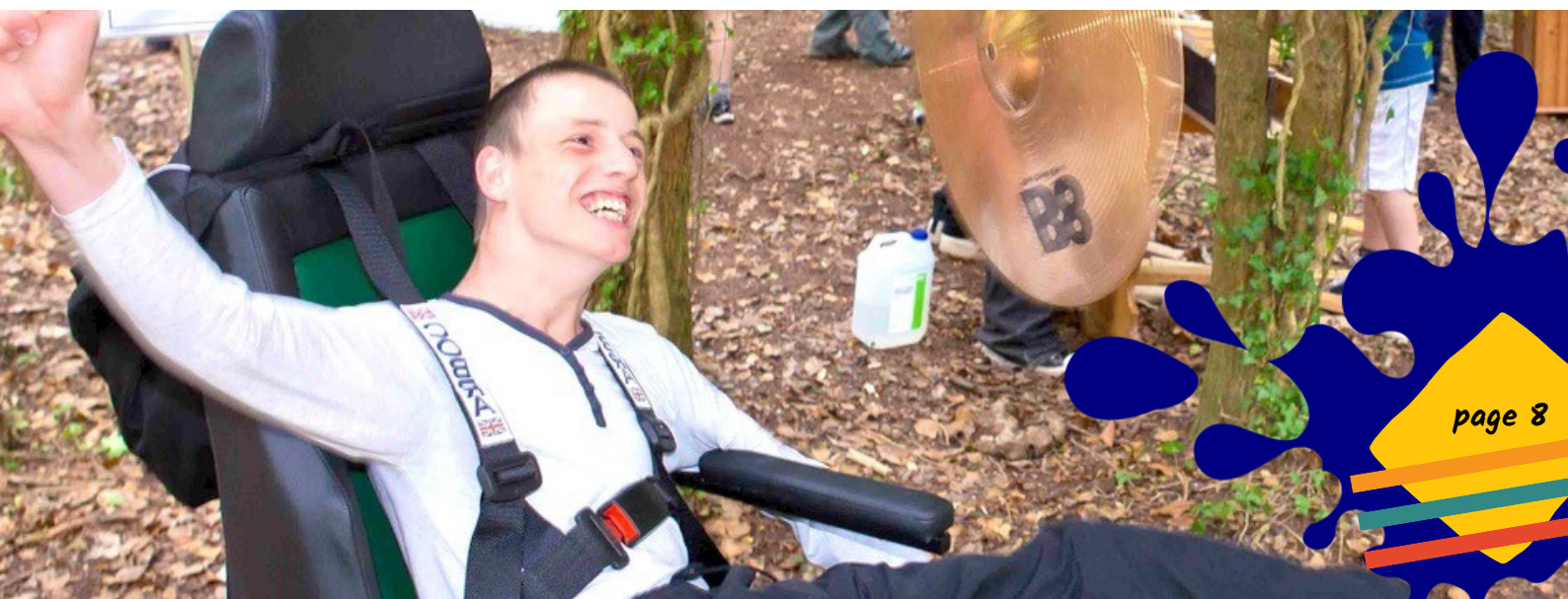
Play Torbay provide open access play sessions on their three adventure playgrounds. During the pandemic, they delivered as often as possible, including running sessions in small groups.

- 100 face-to-face play sessions were run during holidays
- 22 livestream sessions were delivered from play areas during lockdowns
- 2 ‘Quests’ – 9 sessions each, were run in Year 1
- 12 after school play sessions were run in Year 3

ASRUS

ASRUS is a play session run weekly for children on the autism spectrum and their families. When sessions could not take place during lockdowns, families benefited from play packs and online sessions.

- 57 ASRUS sessions were run with over 50 individual children attending in each year



Play Packs and play pack zooms

During the pandemic, Play Torbay developed play packs that could be sent out to families, giving children activities including cooking and crafts. These were accompanied by live videos to demonstrate the activity and talk children and young people through them.

- 9 play packs were developed – 605 families in Year 2 and 626 in Year 3 received at least one pack
- 82 online sessions were delivered to support the play packs (42 in Year 2 and 40 in Year 3) – with over 400 children attending at least one of the sessions (357 - 81% with SEN and 228 - 52% living in a disadvantaged area)
- Playpacks were also used at face-to-face sessions



Afterthought and Night Packs

Afterthought is a facilitated series of free, evening Zoom sessions aimed at parents and carers (but also attended by playworkers and other professionals). Afterthought has delivered sessions on a range of topics including autism, non-violent resistance, managing children's anxiety, sensory processing and sleep. Play Torbay distributed 50 Night Packs to participants – including resources for wellbeing sessions.

- 36 online 'Afterthought' sessions were run during Year 2 and Year 3 attended by over 130 individuals each year (parents, staff and other professionals)
- 50 night packs were distributed to parents/carers attending wellbeing Afterthought sessions



Torbay Community Helpline

Play Torbay were a key provider of the helpline during (and beyond) the pandemic – providing 1:1 advice and support for families in Torbay.

- 108 families were supported through the helpline, 31% of whom were living in disadvantaged areas.

Family activities

Weekly family sessions were run in Year 1 with over 300 attendances

3 trips were run in Year 1 for SEN children and their families

Numbers engaged

During years 2 and 3 of Come Into Play, the project supported or provided activities for:

- 1,494 children/young people
- 419 of these children/young people (28%) had additional needs
- 234 of the children/young people (16%) lived in deprived geographical areas of Torbay

Engagement across activities

The data suggests that Come into Play beneficiaries are generally engaged in a single service, rather than engaging with a range of programme activities. The data, summarised in Table below, shows that there has been a slight increase in the numbers of children & young people using multiple strands between Year 1 and Year 3. We have not included Year 2 as most of this year was during full lockdowns and other restrictions. NB other family members (parents / carers) may have engaged in other activities.

Table 1 Engagement across services – children and young people (YP)

Number of services attended (children/YP)	year 1	year 3
One service / activity only	595 (88%)	1,200 (82%)
2 services / activities	63 (9%)	221 (15%)
3 services / activities	14 (2%)	30 (2%)
More than 3 services / activities	7 (1%)	3 (.2%)
Total individual children/young people	679	1,454

Skills bank, Volunteering & learning

Play Torbay have run a skills bank for many years. Volunteers donate hours which earn them credits for training. Play Torbay actively encourage parents/carers and young people to get involved in the organisation.

- 117 individuals volunteered over 10,000 hours during the 3 years
- 97 children / young people engaged in learning with Play Torbay (through alternative education, arts award and volunteer related training)
- 23 young people were involved as volunteers or junior play workers in Years 1 and 3, with a small number involved in delivery of livestreams during Year 2 (lockdowns)

A note on Come into Play data

Play Torbay has faced a number of challenges in collecting, managing and analysing beneficiary monitoring data through the life of the Come into Play programme. As a result we do not have accurate consistent data on beneficiary involvement in all activities across all years of the programme. The Covid pandemic had a major impact on Play Torbay's capacity, which was already under-resourced, and it is understandable that the organisation's resources focused on getting support, in new and innovative ways, to the children and families who were most severely impacted. Play Torbay has made efforts to improve its beneficiary monitoring data, adopting the Apricot CRM with support from Torbay CDT, and improving the consistency of data collection at sessions. Year 3 data is more consistent than previous years, and going forwards, Play Torbay should have much improved monitoring data available to inform delivery and strategic direction.





5 The difference Come Into Play Makes

Overview

The following project outcomes were agreed with The National Lottery Community Fund as part of the grant agreement:

- Parents, carers and disabled young people are more informed to make positive change and manage complex challenges.
- Families of children with ASC feel less isolated with increased mutual support, improved access to facilities, guidance and learning opportunities.
- Parents, carers and young people have increased self-belief, improved social networks which empowers them to actively contribute.
- Involvement of parents and carers in a community of practice leads to 20 practical, co-produced new ideas.

Data

We present data in this section which shows the overall impact of the programme on individual families; and wider feedback which shows how others view the success of the project.

It is clear that despite the impact of the pandemic, Play Torbay have been able to deliver against the originally agreed outcomes. Feedback from two surveys undertaken as part of the evaluation show that Play Torbay's support has made a difference across a wide range of outcomes, including reducing isolation, increasing confidence and improving ability to cope. The two surveys were as follows:

- Partners Survey distributed by Play Torbay to organisations with whom it worked (35 responses).
- Parents Survey sent out through Play Torbay's social media and mailings to parents seeking responses only from parents of children with additional needs, who live in Torbay (16 responses).

Feedback from these two surveys is summarised in the Tables on the next page.

Table 2 Feedback from other organisations/workers

How well Play Torbay supports

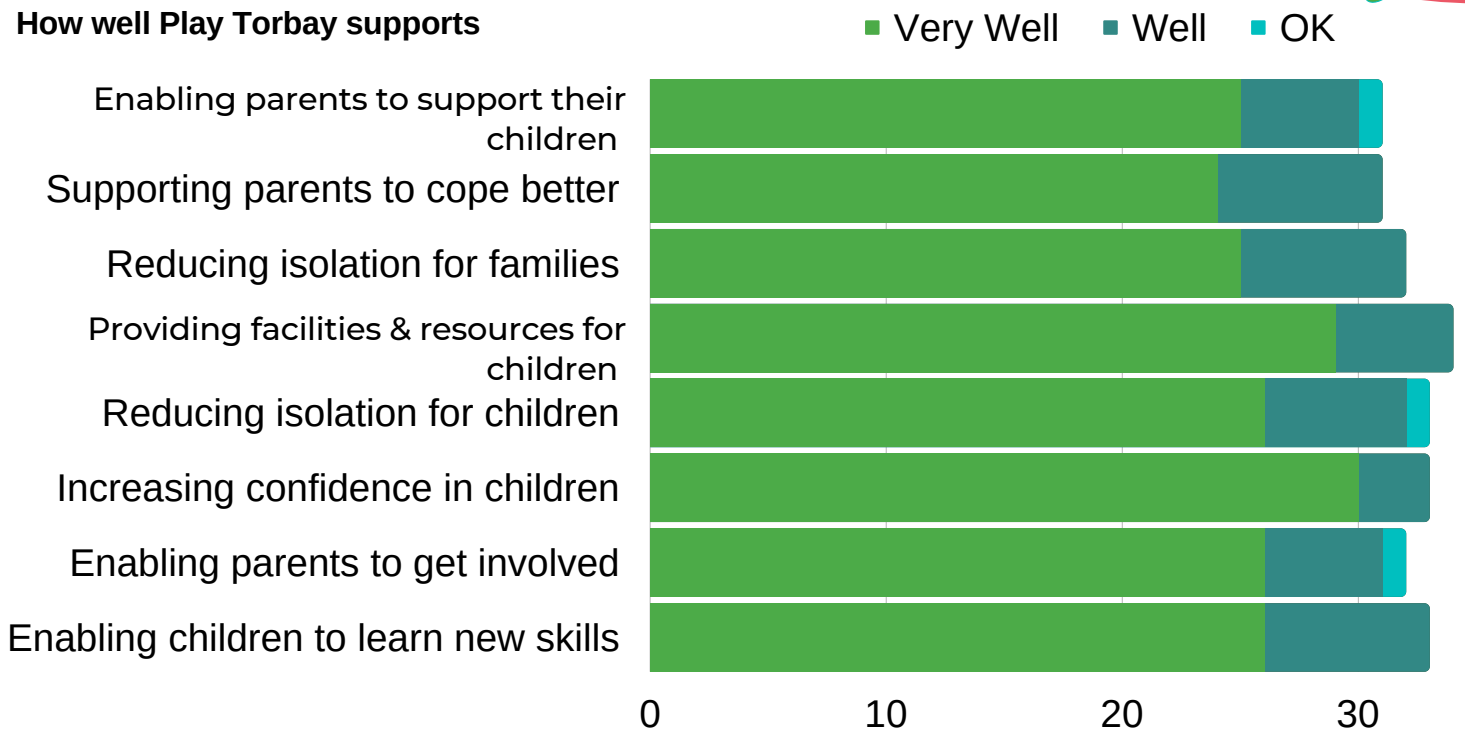
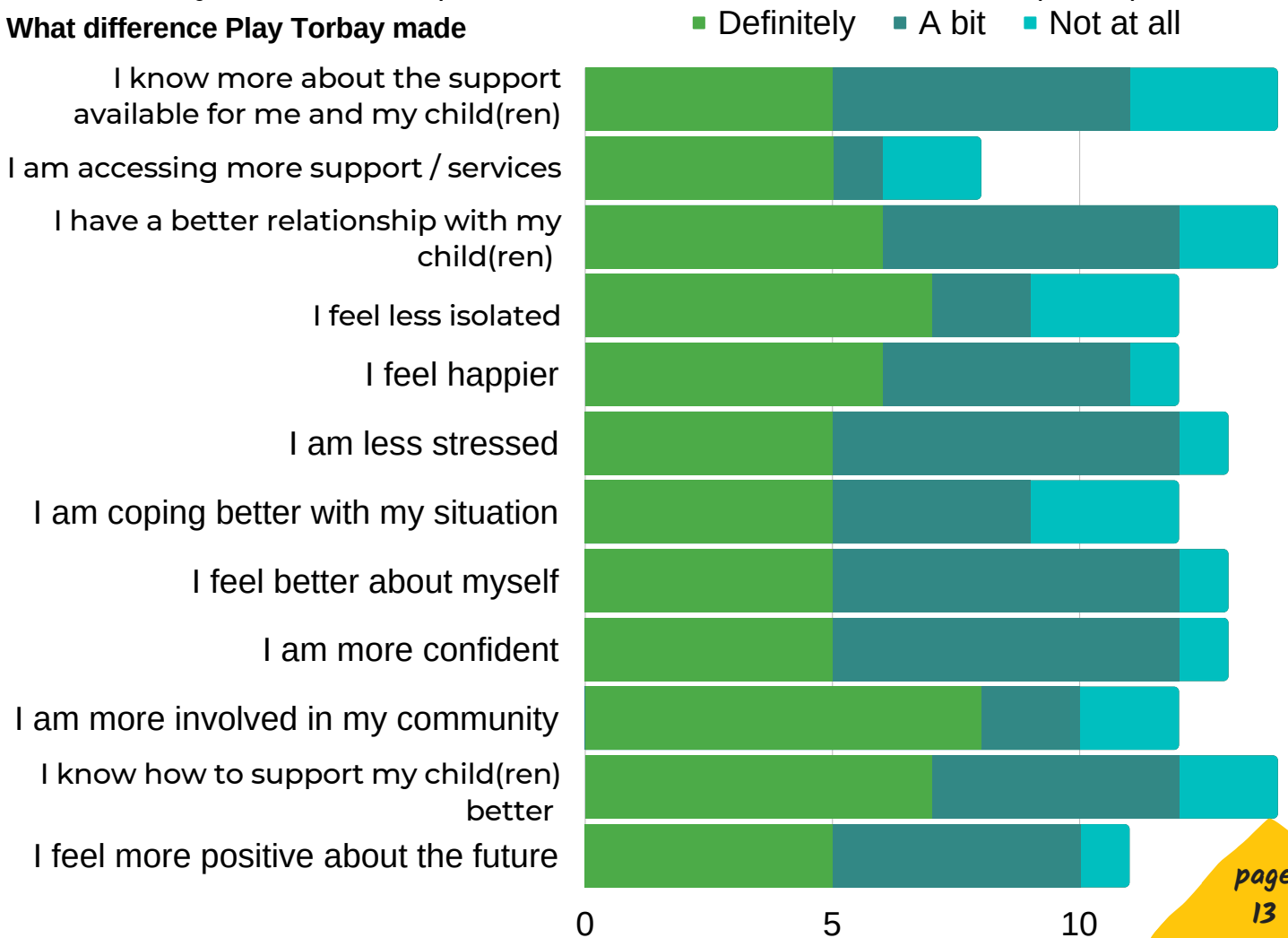


Table 3 Survey feedback from parents of children with additional needs (Year 3)

What difference Play Torbay made





Outcomes

The following section summarises evidence gained throughout the three years of the programme for each of the original outcome areas.

Outcome 1: Increased awareness and understanding

Parents, carers and disabled young people are more informed to make positive change and manage complex challenges. They have improved access to facilities, guidance and learning opportunities.

The evidence shows that parents and carers are better informed about the challenges their child faces, and the services and support available to them. The evidence also shows that parents are making positive changes and managing better. Play Torbay's support also enables children and young people to make positive choices about their own behaviour and decisions. For example:

- Afterthought and training courses run by Play Torbay give parents and carers the skills and confidence they need to better manage challenging behaviours and build better relationships with their children / young people.
- The opportunity at ASRUS to seek advice and have informal conversations with independent professionals are valued. The SENDIASS Manager commented that ASRUS provided the only opportunity in Torbay for SENDIASS staff to meet and advise parents out of “normal” office hours in a familiar environment and with their children. Regular attendance enables staff to build up relationships and trust with parents over time. As a result, parents feel confident and comfortable about raising difficult issues and challenges.
- The PILOT (alternative education) programme shows strong evidence of children and young people making positive changes in their behaviour, with a large proportion successfully re-integrating into education settings, decreasing levels of anti-social behaviours and an increased ability to take up wider positive engagement opportunities.
- Parents/carers of children with ASC / SEND consistently comment on the benefits of linking up with other parents who are facing similar challenges to themselves, and how much they learn from other parents/carers

Individuals attending Afterthought (evening training and information sessions run online), were asked for feedback on their experience of the sessions. Table 4 below shows their responses around how well the session was supporting them feeling informed.

Table 4 Feedback from Afterthought Participants

Change from Afterthought attendance	Number Respondents	% Respondents
More informed about the issues	43	69%
More informed, to make positive changes in the way you do things in the future	39	63%
More informed, to understand why children may respond in different ways	28	45%

The following comments highlight the difference Play Torbay makes:

"I try to be a bit more understanding of her difficulties and to give her the support she needs." [Parent feedback]

"I am trying to empty my children's 'Anxiety Bucket' each evening, to allow them to feel relaxed and ready to face the next day and hopefully this will enable them not to 'overspill' their bucket in the day." [Parent feedback]

"I'm making eating and meal times a happy environment, less stressed. And having more of a conversation around food " [Parent feedback]

"I will certainly think about supporting their sensory needs across a whole day rather than at the point of a meltdown." [Parent feedback]

"It gives me a break, gives me time for myself to recharge. After that I feel okay, feel that I can do more and feel more confident. They have been my saviours to be honest! " [Parent interview]

"I didn't know anything about autism before, I've learned all about it now and understand it." [Volunteer interview]

"It has really helped me with contact with other families. It's definitely helpful in talking to other parents – it's the best knowledge. You can talk to parents who are maybe 3 years ahead of you and they say we did a, b and c and now we don't have that problem. That's helpful. It's definitely good to hear other people's stories. " [Parent Interview]

Outcome 2: Social inclusion and reduced isolation

Families of children with ASC feel less isolated, with increased mutual support.

There is strong evidence that Play Torbay is playing an important role in helping parents and carers feel less isolated. The ability to meet and share experiences with other adults who are facing similar challenges is clearly hugely important. This has been especially so during Covid lockdown when “normal” opportunities for social interaction were so severely curtailed. This is illustrated in the following user comments.

"They've been a huge support to me and my son."
[Parent interview]

"These things have really helped me expand my network – it's easy to get in a rut and I think I had become a bit of a hermit. It helped me get out and meet people."
[Parent interview]

"Knowing that he's safe, engaged, looked after at the playground, meant I could sit, have a hot coffee and a conversation with another adult; I feel looked after and know that he is too. I have made friendships networks, have a community around me; I have daily or weekly interaction with those friends" [Parent feedback]

"Play Torbay, ASRUS, became an essential part of our life. Somewhere to socialise. And social life for us is difficult. H doesn't have the physical ability to go to soft play, i-bounce and places like that. ASRUS is also good for my mental health, I am single parent I don't have much chance to socialise. So, going to ASRUS, the chance to have a coffee, talk to other adults; it's essential, it's a massive part of both of our lives."
[Parent Interview]

"Those parents won't go to the average toddler groups, because they are frightened that their children will kick-off, but at ASRUS they can help each other, by discussing their problems. At ASRUS and Play Torbay generally, people don't feel judged, so they feel safe to come." [Volunteer]

There is also strong evidence that Play Torbay is supporting young people with ASC to feel less isolated, to make friends and to learn to interact with others, as reflected in the following comments.

"It's been a life changing experience! I would hate to imagine how life would be without it. My son isn't invited to play at other children's houses, but Play Torbay gives us activities in the holidays, gets us out of the house together, away from screens! I meet adults I can talk to; without all of that life would be lonely and stressful; I would still be searching for ways to make life better. ."

[Parent interview]

"I just want to say thank you for this group. This evening for the first time in his whole 7 years of his life, my son actually left my side and went and initiated play without me! This is just huge!!! Massively, massively huge and I'm crying as I write this. The play ranger was playing basketball with him, and it was amazing to see him interact without having his usual massive anxiety attack. So thank you, thank you, thank you!"

[Parent feedback]

"Socially, my son is happier now to interact with other children outside of those he knows at school. He is happy now to switch between settings – school, after-school and ASRUS with children of all ages. Before, he would growl at any child who came near him when he was on the swings. The last time he was at Indigos he went up to another boy and said, "Let's play in the sandpit" and they played really well together; he was then able to say goodbye and not become obsessed with that child, as his "best friend".

[Parent Interview]

"I was choked to tears with the whole Quest and finale at Dartington Hall. To think my son could not speak a word of English and you got him to act, sing, communicate and make so many new friends is extraordinary. I cannot thank you enough!"

[Parent feedback]

Outcome 3: Increased confidence, self-belief and empowerment

This outcome has two elements:

- Parents, carers and young people have increased self-belief, improved social networks which empowers them to actively contribute; and
- The involvement of parents and carers in a community of practice leads to 20 practical, co-produced new ideas.

Building confidence

Play Torbay's play-based approach and activities enable children and young people to grow in confidence and achieve in ways that would not have been expected. Interviews with service users provided examples of individuals, both adults and young people, who have gained confidence and self-esteem from their participation in Play Torbay activities. Evidence from PILOT (alternative education scheme) also highlights increased self-belief in the children and young people attending

"The Play Torbay activities make a big difference for me and my kids. It's good for all of us. It has helped boost my – and their confidence. I needed to do this with my little one and with my oldest who can be a bit clingy and unconfident." [Parent Interview]

"My son has also learned a lot; he's been a major part of "the team". He's learned a lot of skills, and often gives me advice on how to do things. The confidence I've gained has rubbed off on him; he can deal with whatever comes our way." [Parent & volunteer]

Volunteering and engagement

It is clear that Play Torbay and the Come into Play programme is committed to building the engagement of parents and carers in delivering and designing support for children and young people and taking an active role in development and leadership. The organisation involves a significant number of adult and young volunteers and encourages them to come up with and implement ideas for new activities and re-designing existing services.

"One young person chose Play Torbay for DoE volunteering and is still volunteering at ASRUS; and started as a paid Junior Playworker at Great Times, supporting children with very complex needs." [Example provided by staff]

"One young person became part of our Junior Maintenance Team, discovered great carpentry talents and has their mind sent on further carpentry learning at College" [Enabler]

"The children feel valued, and their voices are heard. Sometimes we need feedback from them, and we do that through a fun questionnaire, or sometimes we just ask them what they want to do, or to eat next week. We do what they say they want and that gives them a sense of ownership, they feel empowered, and they say, "Oh so we are having chicken curry today" It makes them feel valued and special, it really does boost them." [Volunteer]

Co-production

Play Torbay's co-production activities with parents/carers and children and young people during Come into Play have included:

- A co-produced 'Brixham in Bloom', delivered with parents, carers and staff, for which Indigoes Go Wild won an 'Outstanding' award
- A co-produced Quest at Westerland Valley Country Park, proposed by and developed with parents, carers and children as part of Great Times in Paignton.
- A new 'composting toilet' at Fort Apache adventure playground proposed and created by parents and young people with staff support
- A parent and young person led music-initiative supporting ASRUS and Play Days.
- An initiative to raise funds for Come Into Play's wider community of practice led by four parents. This involved a mini-marathon, cycling challenge, 'burpee' training and donations.
- One parent and their young person started a Recipe Page on Facebook to raise funds
- Continued development of an online community of practice where parents and carers' experiences and solutions were valued and integrated into on-going practice. This resulted in funding to sustain and refurbish the playgrounds as safe, green community spaces.
- Inspired and challenged by young people, we jointly produced play packs to provide practical opportunities to protect the planet including contributing to COP26, Glasgow. Developments at Indigoes also progressed towards the first zero carbon playground in Torbay.



6 Case studies

The following case studies in this section were developed from interviews carried out with parents and young people using Play Torbay's services. They demonstrate the difference that Play Torbay makes for these families.

Young people's involvement

“ I heard about Play Torbay through a play therapist who knew Tanny, when my son was about 5; we've been going now for over 5 years. We've been involved in everything! We've used the playgrounds, he's gained Forest School skills, made friends with the staff and other people. It's made us part of the community. Two years ago, I became a trustee. You just find that you're getting pulled along, dragged in, you don't know it's happening – it's absolutely brilliant. We've got so much from it; I really want to put something back.

It's made a massive difference to my son; his confidence has grown. He feels that he is part of Play Torbay, has a sense of belonging - now he wears the uniform which he pushed for, jumpers and T-shirts. Even during lockdown Play Torbay did online sessions; and my son helped deliver them after a couple of sessions; he did them weekly with a couple of girls; designed and delivered the sessions which were streamed online. It's given my son a huge amount of opportunities. My son was also very involved in putting the packs together during lockdown and delivering them to people's houses. He has designed his own activity for the next set of packs that will be going out and he's now putting packs together with his enabler.

As a trustee, I feel I'm part of something, that I can give back, that helps my confidence. I've even delivered training to some other parents through Play Torbay – that was a real boost to my self-esteem. ”

Getting involved

“ Play Torbay’s part-time manager was at school, and she told me about Indigos and Play Torbay. I’ve been involved for about 8 – 9 years; I’ve progressed from being a parent to being a Level 3 Play Worker, come up through the ranks, it’s been really good, an exciting time.

Without Play Torbay I wouldn’t be a qualified play worker, I wouldn’t have run the crèches and I wouldn’t be qualified to run the playground – I’m at quite a high level now. It’s an achievement that I’ve made; it makes me feel really proud of myself. I’ve got this network of people around me and vast knowledge of what’s on offer locally. I can put the names to faces of professionals; I can do so much now.

My two eldest daughters have autism, although that wasn’t diagnosed until my oldest daughter was nearly 14. She had been branded as “naughty” throughout her time at school before. When you have a child with a special need, as a parent you can become quite isolated; you end up being told what to do, your voice isn’t heard. But now I can voice my opinion, I can say “Stop, this is what I think should happen...” and get heard. Parents generally are not heard, so decisions are made that aren’t in the best interests of the child or the parent. Now I know lots more about the system and I have a different relationship with those professionals; it’s professional to professional rather than parents to professional.

The training staff get is outstanding. As well as being trained in Basic First Aid, I’ve done a Level 2 Food Course: Certificate in Play. I’ve done courses on Safeguarding, Introduction to Play, How Play Works, Playwork Principles, Inclusion; what’s on offer in the local authority, how the MASH system works (the multidisciplinary team), Children’s Mental Health, Children’s Behaviour, Types of Play – the theory behind the practice. I understand what I’m doing and what I’m preaching. ”

Confident parenting and volunteering

“ My son was diagnosed with autism aged 3½, and we were just left to get on with it - I felt all at sea and was looking for people to help. SENDIAS recommended ASRUS; and Play Torbay were there as play workers that was 5 years ago.

As a parent, there's been huge value to seeing my son be so accepted and welcomed by the staff and other children. It was stressful at other playgroups taking my son to them. ASRUS was autism friendly, staff were very welcoming, always remembered his name. Indigos is the same staff, who have knowledge and expertise. It gave us some way to be sociable when I was at a very low point. It opened up our social circle – I was able to make friends. ASRUS gave us 2 – 3 hours a week on Wednesday evenings - that was the only time that we left the house because we had no friends or family in the area.

The first time I was at ASRUS I couldn't take my eyes off him or leave him to go for a coffee with another mum. Now I know that I can leave him, others will keep an eye. I'm happy to let him play with other children. I'm also more relaxed about what I let him do – e.g. I let him use scissors. Now we go places, and we do new things. At the zoo, when I lost sight of him for a minute I didn't panic. The rest of the family are also more relaxed, less stressed, with fewer meltdowns. Seeing the experience and wisdom of other parents and staff, I feel more like a natural parent now, think that I can do this, can make it fun; I'm more confident. I enjoy being a parent now, I feel lucky rather than resentful; I couldn't really understand what was going on before because of the autism.

As well as being a parent, I have been volunteering for a few hours a week in the office. I did some courses for parents that they put on a couple of years ago too – meditation and well-being. ”

Young people's voice

The person reflecting on her experience in this case study was the first young person to be a Trustee of Play Torbay (in 2020). She has been involved with the organisation since she was five years old.

“ At the time I joined in with Play Torbay, my mum was unwell. There was lots of stress. And there was no one else in our family. It was hugely helpful to have that support – from people who knew our situation; people who could talk to me outside the school setting. I went to Wild Fox for a while – did a junior play worker course then progressed to being an enabler. I started to experience some difficulties with my mental health when I was around 13 and the daily responsibilities of other jobs would have been quite difficult. But there were great opportunities at Play Torbay. I was a Play Worker at Quest in half terms and holidays. Most summers I would work for Play Torbay, volunteer and so on.

As I grew older and more mature, I gained more respect from playworkers and people around me. It was hugely rewarding, to know I had earned their respect over the years. And having the opportunity to go out and volunteer – even now if I wanted to go out and volunteer, I know I could.

I think my Mum would say my confidence has increased hugely, massively – not many children have had the opportunities I have had to push my skills as far as I was able. I went from very shy, unconfident, reluctant to talk to anybody – now I am comfortable doing this interview and standing up to speak at the AGM. I feel so lucky and so privileged to have had the opportunities I have had – to have built my confidence, make so many new friends, learn new skills. It's a privilege to help other children, a huge, massive privilege. Having had playwork training from such a young age has trained me to be so much more empathetic. ”

Feeling listened to

“

My daughter, has been attending ASRUS for almost a year now. She has complex needs – including medical ones. She spends quite a lot of her time in a wheelchair. And she has anaphylactic reactions to some foods and due to a build-up of stress, temperature, lots of different things. She has been diagnosed autistic, has Irritable Bowel Syndrome and separation anxiety. However, she is a very bright, very bubbly, very happy girl generally.

We were having troubles with school. At school they would say she was fine– but at home she would be volatile, violent and having anxiety to the extent of vomiting. I fought for two years to get her a plan. I went to an additional needs fair which is where I found out about Play Torbay. They suggested ASRUS. I said but at ASRUS they do cooking, and they said but we are inclusive – we can make changes. It was like a breath of fresh air – just to feel like someone had heard what I was saying.

So, we went along the very next week. They very kindly let us look around - so we could see how the session would fit. We talked at the end about anything that wouldn't work – which was mainly the cooking. We went back the following week. They were making cakes and had devised a little area to make sure there was no risk of contamination– and changed the recipe so it didn't incorporate eggs. And from that day forward I thought – this is a place we can feel safer.

And when we came out of the second session, she said “Mummy I feel like another child there”. It was such a beautiful thing to hear. For us it was huge, for them to find a recipe without eggs. Those little thoughts can be life changing. In all our visits to Play Torbay they make those little changes. It's that feeling of being included – not excluded. And being in a place she could flap her arms – and other kids wouldn't say ‘what are you doing?’.

Play Torbay, ASRUS, became an essential part of our life when she had to be taken out of school. Somewhere to socialise. It would be devastating if Play Torbay closed – its impact would be massive. There is no other service like Play Torbay. The playworkers are amazing. It's the fact that they are so accepting – and make everyone feel so welcome. Everyone is treated like an equal – just as important for the parents as it is for the children.

”

Connecting with others

“ My son was diagnosed with autism at the age of 4 but he had always had difficulty with social interactions. He has a younger sister and, in the past, we haven't been able to leave him to play with her. He was, at least in our eyes, quite violent. He joined primary school but didn't really make any friends, it was quite worrying really. Every half year or so we would have the meetings with SENDIASS, the school SENCO workers and so on. At one meeting, they mentioned ASRUS, so we started taking him over there. Straight from the off he enjoyed it. I think he realised the children were a bit similar to himself. The first weeks we went there he was really only interested in the swings. So, we just went down to the woodland area, and we spent our whole time down at the swings. Then after a few weeks he went inside. He was really interested in the cooking area – so for the next maybe 5 to 6 weeks he would just get into the cooking.

After a while he was going on to the hard court with the basketball – he got to know the other kids, started to make bonds. It makes him so happy to have that connection with other children. He has learnt to interact socially. We are getting some really nice play between him and his sister now. Even the teachers, particularly the TA at school, has said that since he has been going to ASRUS he has been wanting to go out into the playground to play. All the things he does at ASRUS, like basketball, he wants to do at home too. I think one of the big things is how patient the workers are there – their understanding and letting the kids be themselves as far as they can.

It's wonderful to see him connecting with others for the first time. For him, it's having that interaction every week – something regular, something to look forward to. ASRUS stands out for him as the best thing of the week. His sister really benefits too - she is not pushed around anymore, and we can leave them to play on their own. We have difficult moments but nothing like before.

We tried several things before ASRUS, but nothing compared to the impact of ASRUS. Normally when he started a new year at school it was a nightmare – up to Christmas they wouldn't get much work out of him. But coinciding with taking him to ASRUS, we didn't have any of that. Had him going to school – doing some work – actually wanted to go out and play.

It has really helped me to have contact with other families. It's definitely helpful talking to other parents. You can talk to parents who are maybe 3 years ahead of you and they say we did a, b and c and now we don't have that problem. It's definitely good to hear other people's stories. It's really helpful to have SENDIASS workers coming into ASRUS every other week. My wife worries about taking both kids out at the same time, so we asked SENDIASS about an enabler and they were very quick to respond. Anything you need to know you can get from ASRUS.”

7 Quality of provision

Overview

The overall quality of Play Torbay's services and activities is highly rated by a range of stakeholders.

Thirty-five partners responding to the evaluation survey rated the "quality of Play Torbay's provision" at an average 4.9 out of 5, with none rating it as less than a '4'.



Families with one or more children with additional needs, responding to a survey in 2022, also rated Play Torbay highly. They gave the following ratings:

- Average rating for overall service: 4.69 (16 respondents)
- Average rating for pandemic service: 4.80 (15 respondents)

All three playgrounds received awards from the Royal Horticultural Society, 'It's Your Neighbourhood Awards'. Indigos Goes Green received an 'Outstanding' Award making it one of the top ten in the West Country and was runner up in the Gordon Ford Trophy out of 500 entries in the South West of England.

Strengths

The evidence highlights the importance of Play Torbay's "whole family" approach – understanding and supporting the needs of parents and carers as well as children and young people themselves. Feedback also clearly demonstrates that Play Torbay understands "what works" for children and their parents or carers. What may appear to be a minor action or intervention to the outsider can be hugely significant for the family involved. Feedback highlighted the importance for SEND children and their families of (physical and virtual) spaces and activities specifically designed with their needs in mind. Survey respondents (parents/carers) reported that the particular strengths of Play Torbay are the staff and volunteers and the physical spaces.

The child-centred, whole family and inclusive approach and culture of Play Torbay are the key aspects that partners feel Play Torbay "does well". Partners are struck by the passion and commitment of the organisation as a whole and its staff and volunteers. Partners have a strong sense that paid and unpaid staff love what they do and will "go the extra mile" to ensure people are welcomed, involved and supported.

The comments on the next page are illustrative of the feedback received.

"I can't think of any improvements or changes they [Play Torbay] could make. I can't fault it. The kids seem very happy - it's a very laid back, calming environment. No stress. And I feel the kids are 100% safe. [Parent Feedback]

"Hundreds of Play Packs have been delivered. That really sums them up – they make something creative in response to change; they think outside the box – making a unicorn hat with lots of glitter – that's perfect for a 6-year-old, they don't want a phone call! [Parent & volunteer]

It's a really brilliant organisation – they are really passionate about what they do. It's a bit chaotic but it WORKS! [Parent & volunteer]

It's unique, there's nowhere else like it. It's a lot about the feel of it – it's a safe, outdoor place, where there is no judgement from other parents or staff. [Parent interview]

Play Torbay is inclusive, welcoming, down-to-earth
[Parent interview]

They listen to children, take their lead. They are as inclusive as they possibly can be, welcoming and open to possibilities. Embedded and respected in their communities. Passionate about play provision, so they provide the maximum benefit they can through play. Play Torbay never run out of imagination, they always seem to be flexible and able to design the best they can for the scenario.

I think one of the big things is how patient the workers are there – their understanding and letting the kids be themselves as far as they can. [Parent Interview]

Play Torbay just said "Oh, we need to think about a different way to do things next time"; they never said that they couldn't manage his needs. Other groups rejected him. [Parent Interview]

It was like a breath of fresh air – just to feel like someone had heard what I was saying. There is no other service like Play Torbay. The playworkers are amazing. Tanny is one of the most amazing people I have met. She is so empathetic, so pro the children. It's like no other service. It's the fact that they are so accepting – and make everyone feel so welcome.
[Parent Interview]

Areas for Improvement

Parents and carers highlighted the need for increased (and more secure) funding, better promotion, wider reach as well as improved physical spaces. Some feel the spaces could be safer and others report that organisation/administration could be improved.

They could do with a bit more advertising and support; need more money and advertising from the Council.

Even my doctor said he didn't know what was out there for children needing support. [Parent Interview]

I wish I had found out a lot earlier - maybe a couple of years before. More advertising would be helpful - ASRUS would be beneficial to lots of families. [Parent Interview]

There are some areas of the playgrounds where children can't be seen - that was an issue for me, because if your child is vulnerable, or could be a problem to other children, you have to think about - is there enough supervision for him? So, we didn't use the playgrounds as much. [Parent Interview]

It can be a bit chaotic sometimes - do they need better or more admin? Play Torbay work very hard, but they need more staff and volunteers; it feels like they're chasing their tails sometimes, as if they're just about managing. There's no one in the office at the moment. Play Torbay can present as a bit unprofessional at times because they need more money so they can have more staff.

[Parent Interview]



8 The Covid pandemic – learning from the challenges

Come Into Play has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic with the project covering the period of full lockdowns and other restrictions. Play Torbay responded quickly and flexibly right from the start, re-designing services, finding new ways of delivering activities and support - including online - and developing new services. Play Torbay committed to ensuring that vulnerable families and children/ young people still had support. Play Torbay have also developed existing and new partnerships locally to ensure families were supported during the pandemic.

Partner organisations highlighted Play Torbay's responsiveness to the Covid pandemic; rapidly pivoting their service delivery from mainly face to face to almost entirely on-line support at the start of the pandemic. Partners emphasised how the play packs and linked zoom sessions, live streamed holiday programme activities in the adventure playgrounds and the Afterthought zoom sessions for parents, carers and professionals all enabled Play Torbay to provide a continuity of support to people who were likely to feel isolated and may be struggling to cope. Delivery also included running sessions in 'bubbles' and limiting numbers at playgrounds.

Play Torbay worked together with the Torbay Community Development Trust (CDT) to set up a children and family's triage early help system. This connects families to the most appropriate organisation in Torbay to support their needs; providing support and information to many families at a time when accessing services was not easy.

9 Collaboration and partnership working

Feedback from partners points to the important role played by Play Torbay at a strategic level. Play Torbay is "at the table" and is a valued and respected partner in planning support for vulnerable children and young people and their families. Partners also value the role of Play Torbay in enabling children and young people to have a voice and be engaged in influencing provision. Specific examples include:

- Helped establish a new parent carer forum by working together with parents to build links with the local authority with the intention of developing provision for children with SEND.
- Built alliances and partnerships across the local authority to support the development of an Early Help Hub at the Indigoes Go Green (Chestnut /Mayfield/ARC) site in Brixham
- Developed an alliance with the Public Health team in Torbay Council, which enabled Play Torbay to maintain the playground provision through securing £74,000 of funding; ensuring that the adventure playgrounds stay open as critical places for children and young peoples' mental health and well-being.
- In further conversations around the importance and value of play on children's lives, Play Torbay have agreed to work jointly (with Torbay Council and others) on a play strategy that will address play across Torbay and bring contributions on the four domains of public health.
- Joined the Early Help Task Team to develop a child friendly initiative in Torbay, finding ways to put children and young people at the heart of collective thinking, planning and action



Play Torbay's collaborative approach is illustrated in these comments:

Play Torbay are at the table (often in a leading role) in local partnerships which magnify what any one organisation can do alone. They also seem to have excellent and influential relationships with key local decision makers.

They are very open, and very warm, for example during networking events. They are keen to talk and to collaborate for the best outcomes for young people. They love what they do.

Play Torbay make authentic collaborations with organisations and individuals, they support partnership working on many levels and bring some fantastic opportunities to families and young people across the Bay, and also opportunities for organisations and practitioners to work alongside them to support the needs of our community

Partners highlight the detrimental impact on children, young people and families that would result if Play Torbay did not exist and the impact and increased demands on the public sector that would result. As reflected earlier Play Torbay is seen as a key partner for both public and voluntary sector agencies and its absence would be damaging.

Play Torbay are one of our key partners. Without them we would not be able to create direct access to our offer for the vulnerable young people with whom they work. They are a vital partner to us in that they understand and have witnessed the benefit of the arts to their young people

It would be a massive loss to Torbay and no one else provides the play opportunities and creative things they do. We would have a huge gap in provision for children and young people.

A higher number of our pupils in our school would be at high risk of permanent exclusion.

They are a key part of the Torbay arts/culture and CYP ecosystem and it would be really devastating if they weren't there. I see them as a key lifeline for local families and they provide direct signposting to our provision, sending CYP to us who are theatre/arts interested, and ensuring pathways of progression. This has been super important to us and has meant that some amazing young people have made the leap from Play Torbay to Doorstep. We really want this to continue. We also value their strategic/sector leadership and Torbay needs more of this - strong leadership and advocacy for play, arts, CYP.

The absence of Play Torbay would have a profound impact on the quality of life for local families and the community. In addition, children's right to play would be severely diminished at a time when we know that play has a key role to play in children's recovery from the pandemic. We cannot underestimate the physical and mental health impacts which children and young people have experienced throughout the pandemic, and that the impacts have fallen unequally across society.

10 Play Torbay – Internal development

There is a separate Organisation Development report available summarising feedback and recommendations around Play Torbay's internal development. During the three years of Come into Play, Play Torbay have strengthened the organisation through increased partnership working (as described in Section 9) and through developing internal systems, promotion and marketing. These developments include:

- Improved representation on the Trustee board of parents and others with lived experience relevant to Play Torbay.
- Setting up and using a new CRM and transferred data onto this.
- Installed an automated booking system and integrated this onto the website for all events
- Developing a new website, launched in February 2021, which secured 8,140 hits with 6,000 unique visitors in the first year
- Achieving a 30% annual increase in mailing subscribers which now totals 2,029.
- Increasing social media reach, with impressions for the past year exceeding 2,000,000 across all the platforms, a 90% increase since the start of the pandemic. This included Facebook page likes: 4,435; page followers: 4,491; Instagram: 958 likes; Twitter: 1,984 followers

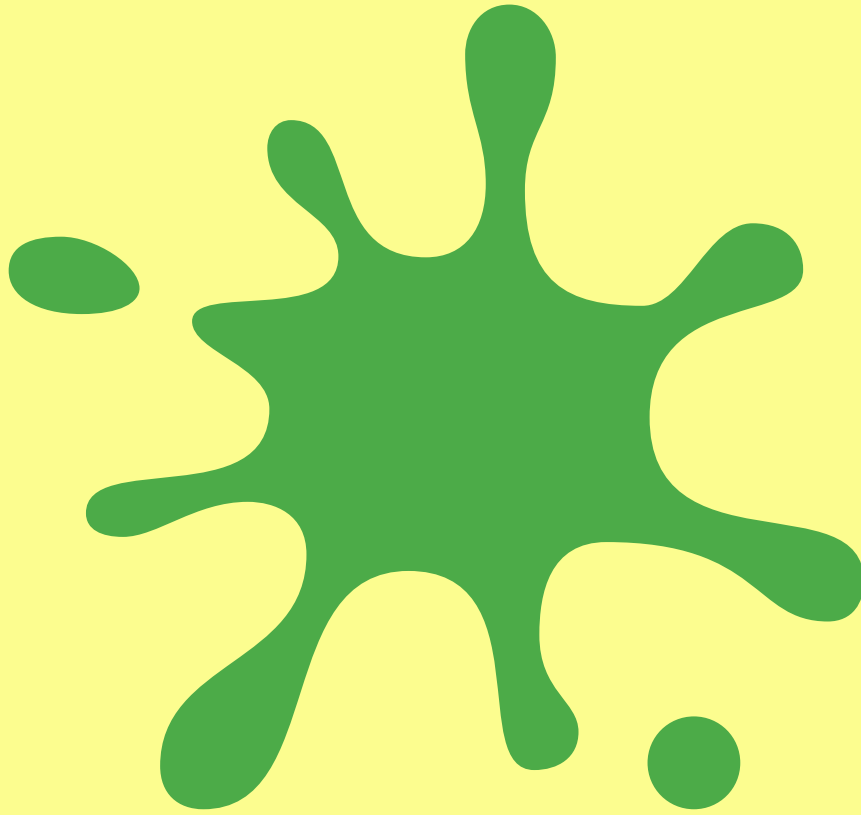
11 Conclusion

The evidence clearly shows that through the Come into Play programme, Play Torbay has engaged and supported a significant number of local children, young people and their families. Many of the children and young people involved in Come into Play activities have special educational needs and many live in the more disadvantaged parts of Torbay. Play Torbay has demonstrated it can work successfully with children and young people who are not being well supported by local statutory services; there is little doubt that the organisation is filling a gap. The three year Come into Play programme has moved Play Torbay from being a generalist play provider to a crucial provider of support for some children and young people with SEND and their families – delivering a greater depth of support than previously.

Play Torbay has developed as an organisation over the three years of the Come into Play programme. However there are areas, particularly in relation to long term resilience, sustainability and data management, that should be strengthened and these are set out in a separate Organisation Development Report.

Play Torbay responded quickly and creatively to the Covid pandemic, for example by putting in place both online activities and delivering play packs direct to families and children and received widespread praise.


Play Torbay has developed strong relationships with a range of local agencies and is regarded as an important and influential partner at a strategic level within Torbay.



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