



ISLINGTON
PLAY
ASSOCIATION



2019-20
ANNUAL REPORT

From July 20th to December 15th 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Islington Play Association adventure playgrounds were used by 469 children for a total of 6,202 visits.

Of the children who attended, 45% were from BAME communities, 44% white and 11% from unrecorded ethnicities.

58% were female and 42%, male.





Islington Play Association has been working in the borough for 50 years since 1971. Over the years the organisation has seen many ups and downs, but nothing can compare to what we've experienced this year.

COVID-19 has changed everything for everyone, but no sector of society has been hit like the young have, and those living in challenging circumstances, with issues predating the pandemic have been harder hit than most.

Children with no access to green space have been unable to play outside. Children living in small homes have been unable to play freely inside. All children have been unable to play with friends at many points throughout the various lockdowns. Children have been forced onto screens rather than encouraged off them. Their access to nature, the elements, the outside world and people they do not know is completely restricted and the constant warnings of the unseen risk, will have an affect on their mental wellbeing and development.

We are, only now, starting to get more research and evidence about what these affects are and will be.

IPA has been part of many conversations about what will mitigate those affects.

Here at IPA we believe, as we have for 50 years, that open access play; where children get to choose what they do, choose who to play with, and get to work things out for themselves, is the best way for them to feel happy, develop resilience, independence and self-confidence.

We also believe that these skills are the ones that will help them recover from whatever the pandemic brought to them in their lives.

IPA as an organisation is good at adapting, working flexibly and changing according to needs and we have tried to be as responsive as we could as have many other charities. This report is our attempt to showcase some of what we have done to keep playing through the pandemic.

Anita Grant
Chief Executive

RESPONSE TO COVID-19

In July, Islington Giving awarded Islington Play Association (IPA) a Wave 2 grant from the London Community Response Fund. The grant paid for the building of temporary and permanent outdoor hand-washing stations, new waste disposal systems, digital registration and recording systems and some temporary structures for shelter. The money was used to make our playgrounds as resistant as possible to the spread of COVID-19 whilst we continued to deliver our summer play services on five adventure playgrounds in the outdoors.

Islington children who had not been able to attend school or access other important services due to COVID-19 limitations were able to play freely in five child-led outdoor spaces across the borough. This meant that they developed new relationships, learnt new skills and were able to involve themselves in physical, playful and creative activities of their choice. All children who attended IPA adventure playgrounds throughout the summer were given free, healthy lunches from Islington Council's 'Lunch Bunch' initiative.



Research has shown that outdoor free play improves children's social and emotional health, while encouraging resilience. As well as providing the possibility of strengths for children's futures, their days of adventure playground play provide happiness in the present moment. These happy childhood moments are integral to our work.

Parents and carers also benefited through being able to work, study and continue with projects of their own while their children played in playgrounds alongside qualified adults.



Just as lockdown begun in March 2020, IPA was proud to win the Raising the Profile award at the 11th Annual Play Work Conference to 'honour an organisation who, through their tweets, Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram, blogs, podcasts, or books and chapters in books, has helped to spread the word and tells people that what we do is important'.

CASE STUDIES

It is through play that children make sense of the world in ways that matter to them.

The children were welcomed back to the playground after lockdown. All the children were very excited and keen to show how important it is to be safe. Without prompt they explained how washing hands and social distancing, was the best way to be safe. All children were encouraging each other to stay safe.

A group of children were playing with the hose in the sand pit using it to dig holes, destroy tunnels, flood dams, and to spray each other. Eventually they had buried the hose under a pile of sand making a jet of water skim across the top of the sand pit. One of them started throwing sand into the jet of water which would then be blown away, they yelled 'it's the NHS vs the virus!' and they all cheered and began throwing big clumps of 'the virus' to be blown away by the 'NHS'. At one point a big clump of sand hit the hose directly causing it to come shooting up out of the sand. They all ran towards it yelling 'oh no the NHS is under attack!' and 'quick protect the NHS'. One child grabbed the hose and returned it back under the sand. They continued to watch the water blow 'the virus' away celebrating the victory of the NHS.

Some of the children wanted to repair the den at the back of the playground, they organised themselves into teams with specific tasks. They spoke about how quiet the playground was and how they missed everyone, but they understood why, given the pandemic. They then decided that the den should be a COVID-19 hospital and that they should clear as much space as possible and clear a pathway to it. They shared great ideas and the play appeared the same as always, apart from the subject matter. I felt that they were 'playing out' some of their anxieties through building the den and that through this experience they were able to feel more in control and less anxious.



Breaking down the barriers to play

A child came to Lumpy for the first time in the summer. English wasn't his first language and in the first couple of days he struggled to interact socially with the other children. The other children were becoming frustrated with him and leaving him out of games.

He then began getting into fights with other children, and whilst I wouldn't normally interrupt the children's play, I thought it was important to explain his situation to the other children. We sat together and I explained that he didn't speak English at home and that he is learning English. I asked them to imagine how difficult that must be.

What I saw in the following hours was a lot of compassion towards the child, children began encouraging him to join in with games and he became less argumentative and grew in confidence. This continued over the weeks he spent with us and at the end of the summer he brought a massive chocolate cake in for all his new friends.

Trauma informed practice

We are deeply concerned about how the lockdowns, isolation and bereavement are affecting Islington's children, many of whom were already suffering from trauma before the pandemic. In order to support Islington children, four members from our Adventure Play Team are in the process of taking a modular Trauma Informed Practice (TIP) course with Whittington Health NHS Trust. This small team of staff at all levels will embed TIP practices throughout the organisation, so that all staff are able to give informed and meaningful responses to children who are experiencing trauma. We have found that the values of TIP are a natural fit with the adventure play ethos.



PARADISE PARK CHILDREN'S CENTRE AND NURSERY

Whilst some Early Years services stopped, the nursery at Paradise Park remained open. Staff were of course anxious, but they were also committed and determined, and continued to provide nursery spaces to vulnerable children and the children of key workers throughout. Our nursery team have been amazing, working hard to ensure the service was COVID-19 safe, and to provide the children with much needed fun, learning, and plenty of outdoor play!

Although the children had a lot of fun, they were clearly aware of the pandemic's impact on their day to day lives, with reduced numbers of children attending, one child said "Nobody can come in our nursery cos the Coronavirus." The need for social distancing was also understood by children, "When the Coronavirus is over, I'm gonna give you a hug" and there was a clear visual image in children's minds "The Coronavirus has spikes and is like a ball its different colours it's alive." For some children it's been a very personal experience "it happened in my house, it's the red bug."

Parents have been supportive and appreciative of the efforts the nursery team have made and have said repeatedly "You guys are doing an amazing job working through this difficult time." Nursery staff have had their spirits lifted throughout, by the wonderful children they have worked with on a daily basis, one member of the team said, "What with everything that's going on, and how difficult it's been, I come in and see the happy faces and curiosity of the children and it just makes me smile and reminds me how important it is and gives me a sense of normality."

The Children's Centre being at the heart of the community, worked in partnership with the Felix Project to provide healthy nutritional food on a weekly basis, to local families most in need, throughout the year. This has given real and much needed support to many families struggling through an unprecedented period of great uncertainty and social isolation.

‘With everything that’s going on, and how difficult it’s been, I come in and see the happy faces and curiosity of the children and it just makes me smile’

- Nursery Staff Member





KITCHEN SOCIAL

IPA has been working with The Mayors Fund for London on their Kitchen Social program since 2016 to help combat food poverty and holiday hunger. We have provided free self-cooked lunches on our playgrounds since 2013. This work is enhanced by the Felix Project (FP) who supply surplus food to IPA's Adventure Playgrounds and our Children's Centre.

During Lockdown we could no longer cook food with and for children, but at Timbuktu Adventure Playground and Paradise Park Children's Centre, we used the deliveries of surplus food from FP to hand out to disadvantaged families.

This also enabled us to hand out play materials with the essential food packages. We did this from day one of the lockdown in March 2020, and have continued to the present date. In May 2020 Kitchen Social gave us 100 boxes of high quality arts materials to give to children. The pictures they created were wonderful. In October we received 150 more arts packs which have enhanced the lives of the families of disadvantaged children in Islington.

Throughout the summer holidays Islington Council's Lunch Bunch Project provided hundreds of lunches handed out to all of the children who attended our playgrounds. In July, we partnered with St Luke's Community Centre to provide food for struggling families through Toffee Park Adventure Playground and have continued this project throughout 2020 and into 2021.

LONDON PLAY

During the summer, IPA were awarded a grant by London Play to run weekly, evening sessions for two extra bubbles of 15 children. This allowed an extra 30 children to benefit from our services at our adventure playgrounds Timbuktu and Lumpy Hill.

The children built dens, cooked food on bonfires, shared pizzas and created shows and 'dance-offs' amongst a myriad of self-chosen activities.

One mother of four children who benefited from the grant commented:

[My children] have loved Lumpy Hill and it has given me time to spend with my baby. They come home happy.



PLAY PACKS

In 2019, IPA worked with The Museum of London (MoL) and Culture Mile in partnership on a series of events which won a Developer Meanwhile Prize for finding new ways to work in the public realm. In 2020, in light of COVID-19 and lockdown, we quickly diverted the work that we were planning for more outdoor events into packs that could be delivered to children's homes. From April to July, IPA worked alongside these partners to create content for thousands of play packs that were delivered to children and families throughout London.

As well as creating content, we distributed packs along with food packages at IPA's adventure playgrounds and children's centre. We also enabled hundreds of packs to be circulated throughout the borough by connecting with contacts in Islington. Initial partners in April to June included Islington Bangladeshi Association, Hilldrop Community Centre and Parent House. From our own playgrounds alone, we have given out 720 Culture Mile packs throughout 2020. The last pack went out in the month of September.

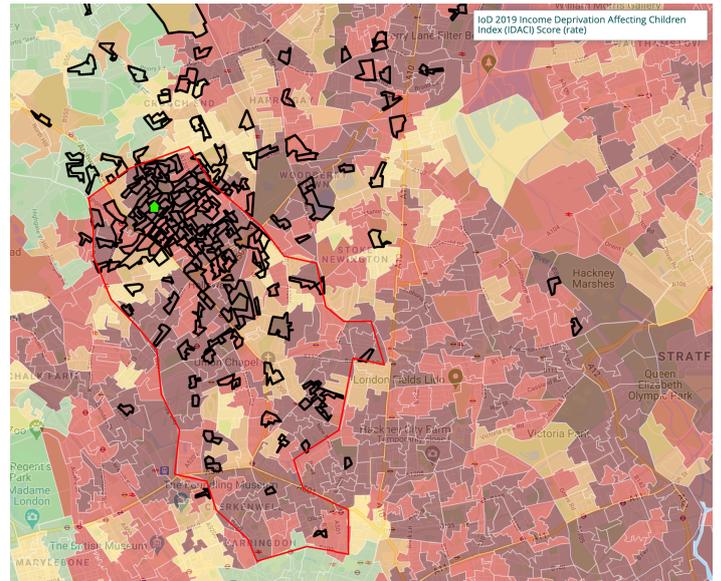
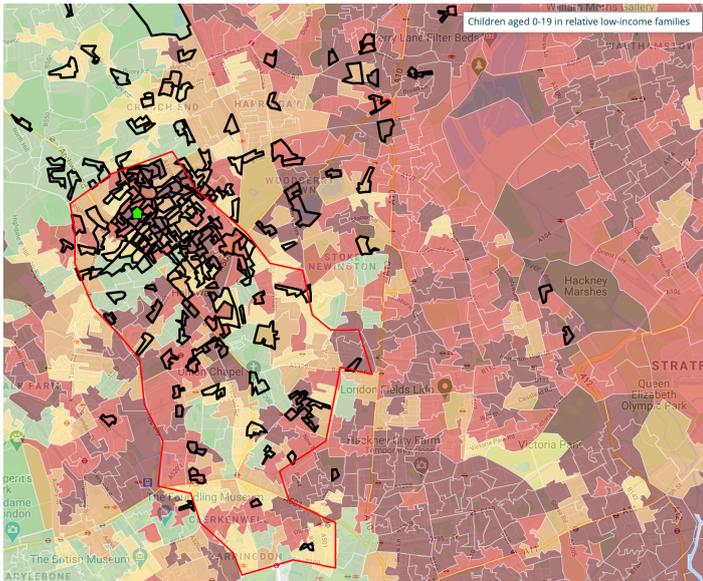
Children from Timbuktu playground are working with an artist supported by MoL to build a structure and to create more content for other children for play packs which will go out to families in February 2021.



LOCKDOWN GROWERS

IPA and Overgrown East created food growing packs for families local to Caledonian Road during July. This was part of our work with Cally Fest and Islington Council to engage with local people to create a green space in Freeling Street. We distributed 150 food growing and nature packs which included soil, a tomato plant, wildflower seeds and methods to make pots. This was linked to a YouTube page where children could watch videos specially made by other children showing how to plant seeds and make pots and seed bombs.

We distributed packs with the help of a myriad of partners including Copenhagen School, Islington Bangladeshi Association and Bemmerton Children's Centre. Our plan is to come together in safer times, and put balcony-grown flowers and vegetables in a new, self-built communal space in Freeling St.



TIMBUKTU ATTENDANCE

These maps show our Timbuktu adventure playground and the black outlines represent the postcodes of the children that attend. The small, bright green section towards the top-left signifies the postcode of Timbuktu.

The maps themselves are coded to show:

- 1: children aged 0-19 in relative low-income families
- 2: IDACI - income deprivation affecting children index

The darker the red, the more families living in the challenging circumstances being measured.

It is clear that the majority of those accessing the adventure playgrounds come from the areas of the darkest colour. This is replicated for all the sites and shows how important the access to green space and play is for those children, some of whom will travel some way to attend. Those families have been able to access other services through the playgrounds this year and that has worked well. We will look to build on that as we go forward.



MAYOR OF LONDON



ISLINGTON