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**Save the
Children**

Case studies from

our work in

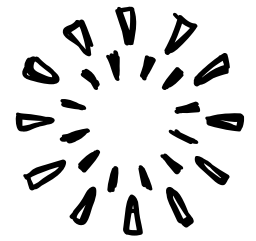
MANCHESTER



Salma playing with her son, Ahmad, two, at a children's community centre in Manchester. Credit: John Owens/Save the Children.

Partner case study

COMMUNITY HUB



Bonita is Project Coordinator at a community hub in Manchester. In her role, Bonita works with parents from the local area and helps them understand the benefits of taking a more proactive role in playing with their children.

“We just felt like this [the community hub] is such a good space”, Bonita says. “There was so much potential benefit for the parents if we used the space to be able to do things like messy play, which they may not have space for at home.” And so the idea of regular Stay & Play sessions was born. Parents initially used the weekly sessions as a means of meeting one another and relaxing while their children played in a safe, supervised space.

While peer-to-peer support remains an important aspect of the sessions, Bonita is delighted to see that many parents are now also, with some gentle encouragement, spending more time interacting playfully with their children.

“We just wanted them to understand the importance of play and how their children can learn through play” she adds, “and empower parents to increase their confidence in playing creatively at home.”



Bonita, Project Coordinator, tidying up at the end of a play session at the community hub in Manchester. Credit: John Owens/Save the Children.

Bonita is also excited about developing the role of Parent Play Champions. In this role, parents spread word throughout the community that the sessions are happening and the benefits that can be unlocked around play and early years education. Such champions have really helped to “model” interactive play during sessions, Bonita explains, “meaning other parents have followed and engaged in a similar way”.

One champion, Summaya, echoes Bonita’s enthusiasm. “You can learn through play - it gives so much to small children,” she says. “For me, playing is educating them in a different way.”

Thanks to funding from Save the Children, the community hub has been able to employ Bonita to test new ways of working and strengthen parents understanding of the power of play.

“It’s been incredible,” she enthuses. “Making sure everything’s ready, and also planning activities beforehand takes a long time and needs to be done well, and I don’t want to do it in a half-hearted way. Without the staffing you just can’t do that on the same level.”

Bonita says she’s had great feedback from parents, and highlights as an example the increased uptake of messy play packs. These contain a range of creative play-related resources parents can take home and use, such as seed planting and hat-making kits.

“It felt like an incredible win,” she adds, “because it shows a shift [in thinking] that they understand there’s value in this stuff.”



Bonita outside the Community Hub in Manchester. Credit: John Owens/Save the Children.



Family case study

COMMUNITY HUB



Narges and her family have lived in Manchester for five years. Narges has been attending English courses, however the mum of four had little awareness of the services available in the area. “The problem is, when you come from a different country you come here and it’s hard to find out the things that are going on.”

Narges also struggled with depression, which was compounded by the pandemic. “I didn’t want to go outside. I was depressed and wanted to stay at home, and we also had Coronavirus so everyone had to stay home,” she recalls.

It was a year and a half ago, through her daughter’s school, that Narges discovered the community hub and the services it offers. Through the community hub she found out about Stay & Play, which she now attends every Friday with her children.

“This is like my second home,” she says “because we are always here with the children and they have such a good time playing here. They also learn more by sharing [the space with other children]. It really is a good benefit for me and my children.”

The weekly sessions give the 32-year-old a chance to relax and it’s made her more confident in playing with her children. “The volunteers here are so kind,” she adds, “and they always give us a warm welcome and encourage us to ask questions.”



Narges and her children (left to right) Othman, three, Marwan, two, and Sara, seven, at a Stay & Play session at a community hub in Manchester. Credit: John Owens/Save the Children.

Narges highlights the importance of meeting other parents and building mutual support networks. “I think some people are really shy or scared, or have depression and don’t want to come out, but I’d encourage other parents to come to Stay & Play as I can really see the benefit,” she says.

Access to a space that fosters play and learning has been valuable, too. “When I play with my children I’ll often like to talk to them about the colour or the shape [of the object they’re playing with], or what we can do with it. If they can create something new with it they’ll be happy, and play with it more and more,” Narges explains.

Narges has also attended coffee mornings and sewing sessions and met fellow Syrian parents at the hub - together they celebrated the religious festival of Eid. When it comes to hopes for her children, she asks simply that they grow up healthy and happy.

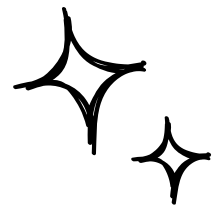
“Maybe they’ll become conductors, or teachers, or lawyers, but the most important thing is that they are healthy and safe.”



A portrait of Narges, 32, at a community hub in Manchester. Credit: John Owens/Save the Children.

Partner case study

A CHILDREN'S CENTRE



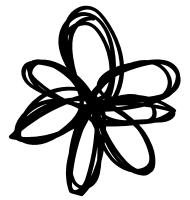
Faiza, Outreach Officer, volunteer and key worker, at a children's centre in Manchester.
Credit: John Owens/Save the Children.

Faiza is an Outreach Officer at a children's centre in Manchester. Faiza's key role in running an innovation project that fosters parental voice and decision-making is testament to her deep roots within the local community.

One of the key aspects of the project, which was supported with funding from Save the Children, was connecting with hard-to-reach families in Manchester, many of whom are Bengali and Pakistani. "Many families are new to the country and just don't know what to do," says Faiza, whose ability to speak Urdu has been critical in building bridges.

One of the elements of the project was to link families who had never accessed services with parent champions to boost their confidence. 'Once you have built a relationship you can actually help them,' Faiza says.

Once contact was made, Faiza made weekly visits to families to share information on services in the community. She also offered activities and resources to encourage play between parents and children.



A portrait of Faiza outside a children's centre in Manchester.
Credit: John Owens/Save the Children.

Vital to her efforts was a well-established collaborative approach between the centre and a range of local services, such as food pantries. Over the course of the project around 40 families were introduced to the wide variety of support services and sessions available - including Stay & Play - at the children's centre and other local organisations.

Building connections was not always easy. Through the course of the project Faiza learned to meet parents on their own terms and encourage behaviour change only at a pace that worked for each family. This might mean gently encouraging parents to send their children to nursery, or giving them the confidence to book appointments with their local GP.

“You need to respect their opinion, cultural views and whatever religious belief they may have” she adds. “Because you respect them it becomes a case of give-and-take. You are giving them information but also listening to them, too.”

Faiza's work, and that of the children's centre, doesn't stop here. “We need to make sure we carry on providing support to parents and helping the community by working in partnerships and with other communities,” she says.

Family case study

A CHILDREN'S CENTRE



Salma, 45, may have been a lecturer in her birth country of Pakistan, but upon arriving in the UK she found that, as a parent, services and support were challenging to discover and access. Now, as a key figure in the Parent/Carer Panel recently launched by Save the Children, the mother-of-two is not just getting a better understanding of what is available but advocating for change, too.

Salma is a Parent Play Champion, and among her many other roles, she discusses the challenges of parenting in and around Manchester with a rapidly-expanding panel of parents/carers which meets monthly in the local community. "It is very informative. They give us awareness. I get information and I am able to share that with others."

She then feeds their concerns and questions to an Early Years Working Group which consists of local professionals, including figures from the city council. The goal, she says, is to improve awareness of what is already available, and offer parent-led feedback for what can be improved in the future.



Salma and her husband Naveed playing with son Ahmad, two, on a slide at a children's community centre in Manchester. Credit: John Owens/Save the Children.



**Salma with her son Ahmad, two, and daughter Hafsan, eight, at a children's community centre in Manchester..
Credit: John Owens/Save the Children.**

For Salma, the experience is a rewarding one. "At first I was really shocked when I met the panel," she says. "Whenever I give some suggestions or opinion about my needs or the needs of my kids they listen, and appreciate the things I have to say."

This opportunity to express her views and have her voice heard means Salma's confidence has grown significantly. "I felt like, okay, what I have to say is important," she adds "and that is not just my feeling - it is the feeling of all the parents."

As the parent of two-year-old Ahmad, who has Down's Syndrome, she is acutely aware of the importance of accessing the right services and support. Having an impact on the provision of local services, is clearly important to her. Quick to smile, her grin only broadens when her husband and children appear.

"It is very positive here," she says of the Parent/Carer Panel and Early Years Working Group, adding that a supportive environment also helps her mental health, relieving the stress of parenting. "I feel like Save the Children are really working for me now," she says, "I feel that they care for me, and my kids, in the same way that I care about my kids."





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