



Save the
Children

MANCHESTER

2023 INNOVATION PROJECTS

Impact and Findings



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Why Manchester?

Manchester is a cultural powerhouse, known the world over for its musical exports and two football clubs, but it's also one of the most deprived local authorities in England. Data from the DWP and HMRC show 32.5% of children in the city were living in relative poverty, defined as living in a household with an income below 60% of the median. The wards with the highest levels of children living in relative poverty are Cheetham at 51.2% and Longsight, just south of the city centre, at 47.1%.

That's why, since 2022, we have been developing partnerships with local organisations in Longsight to hear from families and build on the community's strengths. This led to us, alongside local organisations, establishing the Longsight Early Years Partnership to bring together the knowledge of local families and early years practitioners.

We aim to improve speech, language, and communication and social-emotional outcomes for children, aged 0 – 3, growing up in poverty in Manchester. We're working to make the early years count by supporting families and providing opportunities for them to play and learn together with their children.

Through our co-design approach, we work with families to identify local issues and create solutions that meet their needs. We provide opportunities for families and practitioners to take part in training, research, and co-design to drive forward the direction of our work. For example, in 2022, we established a working group of practitioners and parent/carers to explore ways that we can encourage playful parent-child interactions and work together to strengthen the early years system around local families.



“Longsight has a fantastic, vibrant, multicultural community and although there is poverty, which has been heightened in the last few years by the pandemic and the cost of living crisis, it also has incredibly hard-working and generous people.”

- Paula Carley, Longsight Library

**from Roxana Alison's
'Hope, Despair and
Miracles'**

Why Early Years?

The first five years of a child's life, and in particular the period encompassing pregnancy to age two, are a significant and influential phase of development.

Every child has the right to be as healthy as they can be, to learn and develop to their full potential. Alongside these fundamental rights of all children in the here and now, what happens during a child's earliest years lays the foundations for the rest of their life.

Evidence clearly shows that positive experiences early in life are closely associated with better performance at school, better social and emotional development, improved work outcomes, higher income and better lifelong health, including longer life expectancy. Conversely, less positive experiences early in life, particularly experiences of adversity, relate closely to many negative long term outcomes: poverty, unemployment, homelessness, unhealthy behaviours and poor mental and physical health(1).



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.

(1) <https://www.health.org.uk/publications/reports/the-marmot-review-10-years-on>

2023 INNOVATIONS





Highlights

What we did

In 2022, using co-design as an approach, we held a series of exhibitions, activities and workshops to enable us to understand some of the challenges and barriers to play in the community and to identify solutions together. The findings identified Parental Voice in decision making and Play Skills as local priorities.

In 2023, we invited local partners in Longsight to submit proposals for projects that would address these themes and support embedding play in the community. Longsight Children's Centre (LCC) and 422 Community Hub were selected to pilot projects from April and to December and Better We from October to December. This report outlines the findings from these projects.

Key takeaways

Parent empowerment: All three innovations empowered parents to play pivotal roles in their delivery. At 422 Community Hub and Better We, parent champions played a key part in changing the culture of play through modelling play activities during "stay and play" sessions. At LCC, parent champions supported the planning and delivery of the outreach activities.

Community insight: The innovation at LCC produced valuable insights into the community's needs, particularly among Bangladeshi families. Language and childcare were identified as the primary barriers to accessing services.

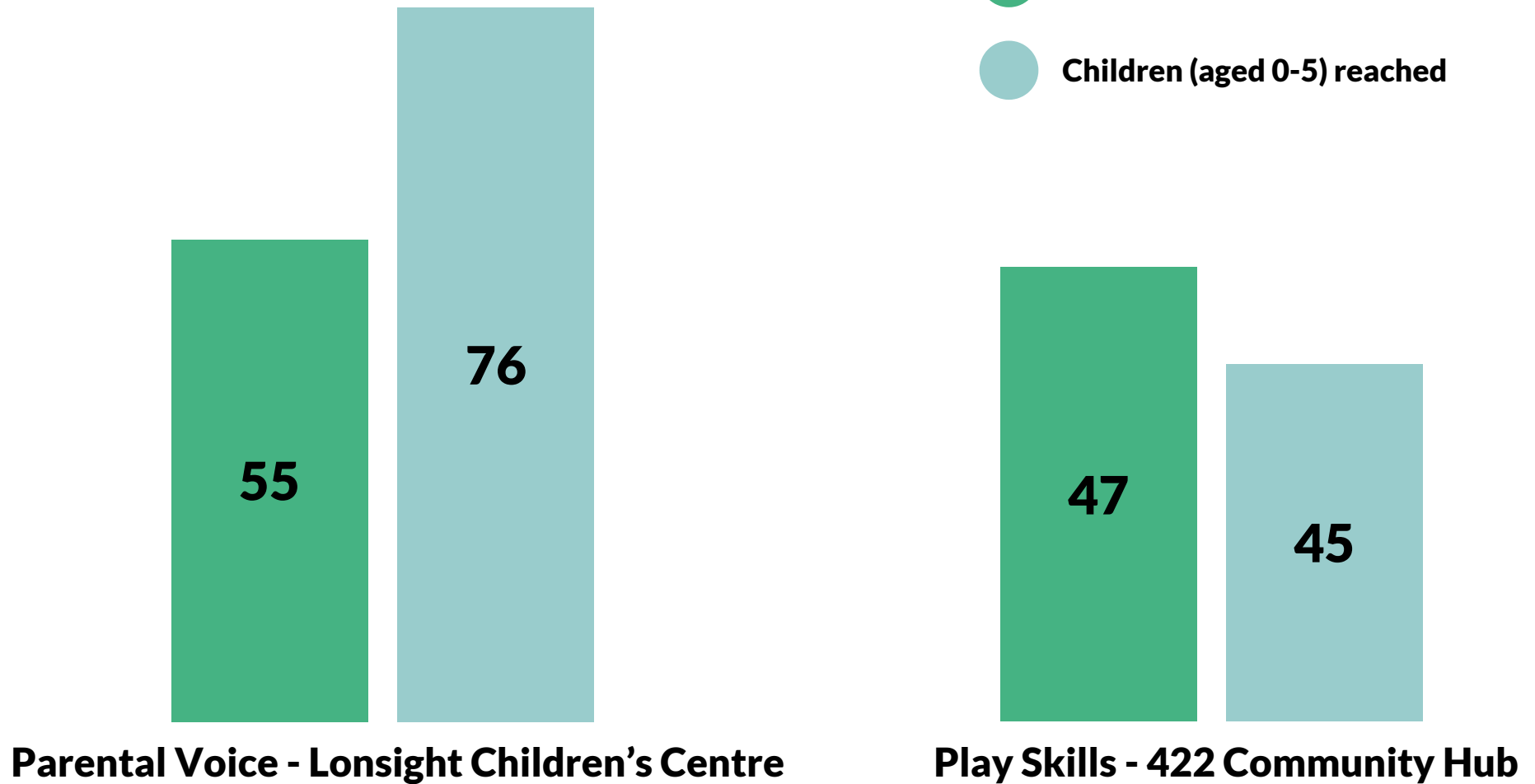
Increased access to high quality play provision: The stay and play projects at 422 and Better We increased their reach to more families and extended play into people's homes. Practitioners reported that parents and children were interacting more and the families who took part gave positive feedback.

Families reached April - July 2023

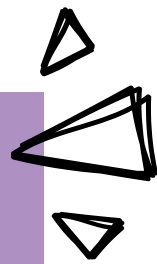


Phase I: Parental Voice & Play Skills

- Parents or carers reached
- Children (aged 0-5) reached

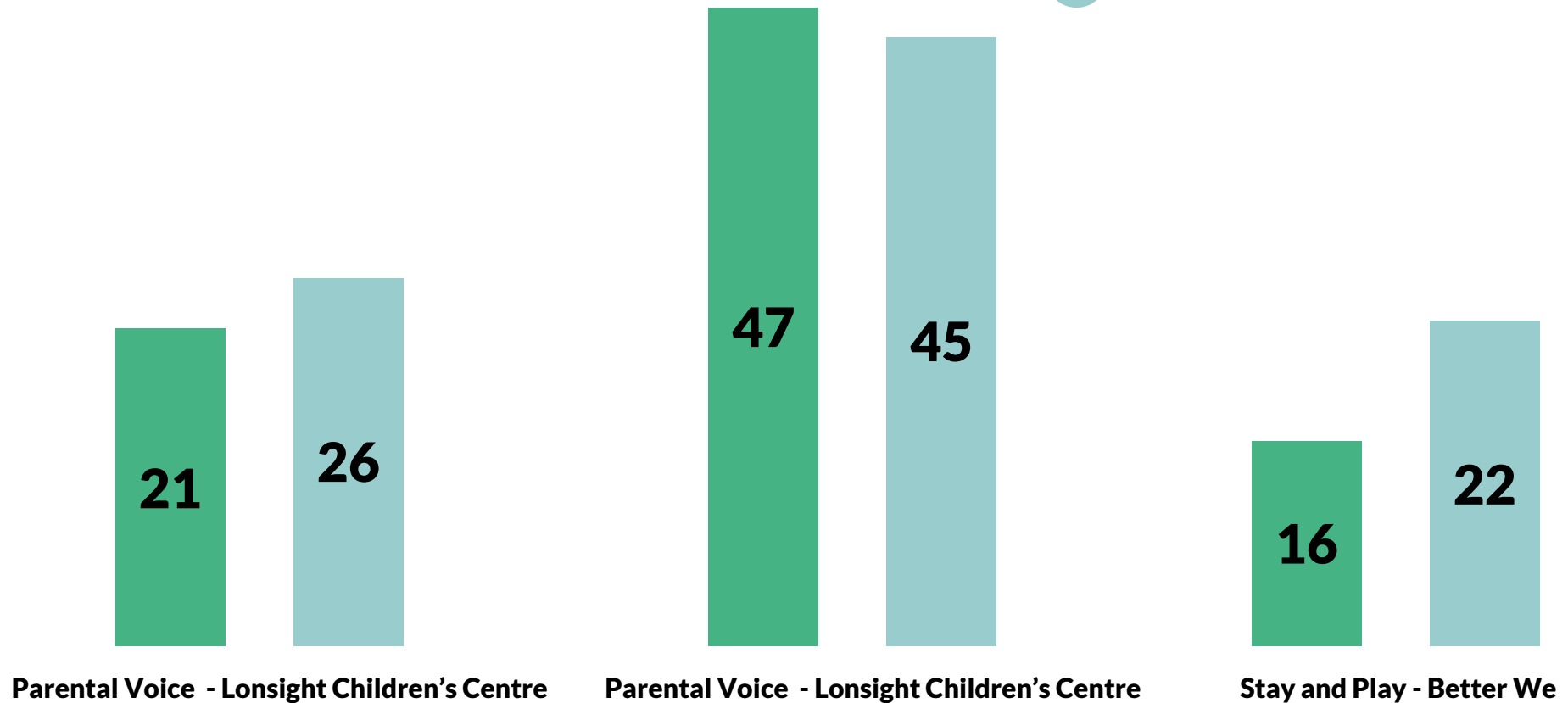


Families reached September - December 2023



Phase II: Parental Voice & Play Skills

- Parents or carers reached
- Children (aged 0-5) reached



Longsight Children's Centre (LCC)

Parental Voice Innovation

Phase I (March - July)

The Parental Voice innovation project aimed to strengthen connections between parents facing challenges in engaging with services and those who could offer support. With assistance from the outreach service, volunteer parent champions were linked up with families not currently using the service.

Understanding the challenges families face in the local community and exploring their needs were vital aspects of the project. The team included parent champions with lived experience and a dedicated volunteer from the Bangaldeshi community with 40 years of experience.

Families were visited at home and strengths-based conversations were used to identify key areas of need, assess barriers, and address immediate financial and support needs.

Identified families were signposted to the successful 'Me Time' programme providing wellbeing services through arts and crafts. Supported referrals were made to other services such as CAPS (Child and Parent Service), ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), and REAL (Read, Enjoy, and Learn), along with signposting for financial advice. Additionally, families were referred for needs assessments for their children and parent-child sessions. Every family who took part received home learning packs to support playful interactions between parents and children.

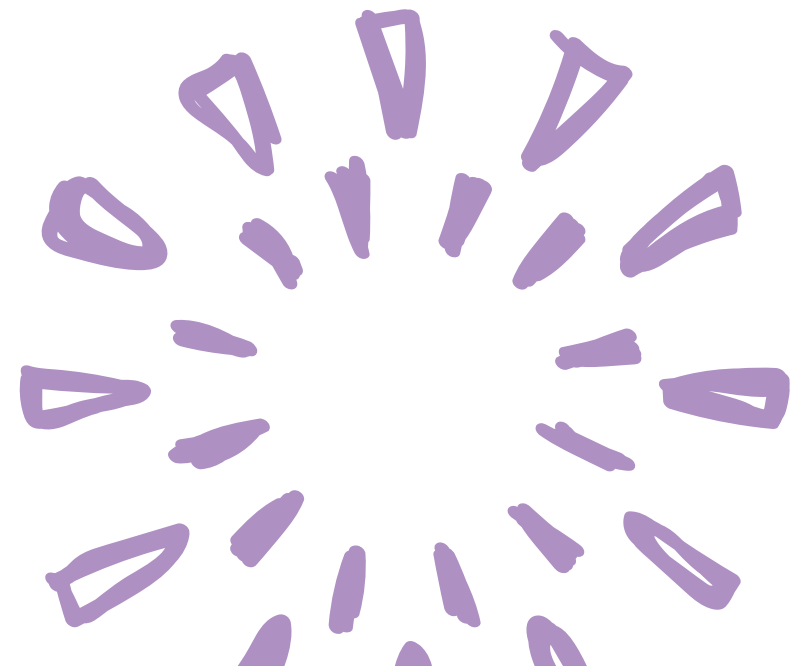


Faiza Butt, Outreach Officer and volunteer, and key worker, at a children's community centre in Manchester. Credit: John Owens/Save the Children.

Phase II (September - December)

In phase II, the innovation project was refined to include additional features:

- A creche service enabling parents to access 'Me Time'.
- Enhanced data collection to include information on mental health, home learning and immigration status to ensure that LCC is providing the right support to parents.
- Increased collaboration with child/parent services like health visitation and midwifery to raise awareness of their offer. The project prioritised supporting parents through the self-referral process.
- Supported referrals to the Stepping Stone Course (ESOL for babies), allowing parents to learn English with their children present. This was crucial for parents of very young children who felt more secure having their kids nearby and for those without access to childcare. The objective was to minimise barriers and ensure that parents could access support.



Which families were reached in Phase I?

- Between April – July 2023, LCC engaged 34 parents and 50 children in conversations around their support needs.
- The parents involved were predominantly from a Pakistani (37%), Bangladeshi (37%) or other ethnic minority background, including Arab, African, or Afghani background.
- The majority of parents were British Nationals (56%), but ten per cent of the parents were asylum seekers or refugees.
- The majority (63%) had never accessed children's centre services before.
- The most significant barriers to accessing services were childcare (87%), health (87%) and language barriers (67%).

Total reach so far



Parents/carers: 34

Children 0 - 5: 50

Quote

**“Once you have built a relationship
you can actually help them.”**

- Outreach worker

Which families were reached in Phase II?

- Between September – December 2023, LCC engaged 21 parents and 26 children in conversations around mental health, home learning and immigration status concerns. Parents also wanted to access the Stepping Stone Course (ESOL for babies) where they have their children with them while they learn English.
- The parents involved were predominantly from a Pakistani (43%), Bangladeshi (19%) or other ethnic minority background, including Arab, African, or Afghani background.
- The majority of parents were British Nationals (38%), but fourteen per cent of the parents were asylum seekers or refugees.
- Most of the parents were in some form of employment (57%) but 86% of parents had issues around childcare. A lack of funded places and no extended family means that childcare is increasingly a challenge.
- Only 35% of children were attending nursery.

Total reach so far

Parents/carers: 21

Children 0 - 5: 26



Family case study

- Mum and dad have a new baby.
- Both are Bengali speakers with limited English.
- They are struggling financially, living in poor quality rented accommodation.
- Mum is suffering from isolation and depression.



- Outreach worker visits family at home for a strengths-based conversation.
- Outreach workers supports family to access: food bank, Healthy Start, Infant feeding team, GP, Sure Start maternity grant, ESOL course for mum and helped to report housing repairs and applied to move.



- The applications were all successful.
- Family received financial support to buy baby essentials, as well as help with their rent.
- Family moved to a new property which is a better environment.
- Mum has attended the Children Centre with the baby and is pleased with the support.
- Mum and dad both feel confident seeking support



422 Community Hub

Play Skills Innovation

Phase I (March - July)

The aim of the Play Skills innovation project at 422 Community Hub was to enhance parent-child interaction during play.

The project's objectives were to help parents understand the link between play and learning, boost parents' confidence in engaging creatively with their children and inspire additional ways to play at home. They aimed to enhance the Stay and Play group's impact through quality resources and activities.

Play Skills was delivered through weekly open access Stay and Play sessions for local families. Every family who attended received weekly home learning packs, including activity sheets explaining the benefits of each activity, to extend learning into the home.

The team planned and delivered sessions with parent champions. Parent champions led on modeling child-parent interactions through play and contributed to the continuous improvement of the project.



Bonita Whitaker-Shaw,
Project Co-ordinator for
Stay & Play, outside the
Community Hub in
Manchester.
Credit: John
Owens/Save the
Children.

Phase II (September - December)

Building on the successes in parental confidence and engagement in play, Phase II goals included continuing and developing the project, increasing parental involvement, ensuring sustainability and building partnerships with other organisations. Refinements included:

- Adjusting session timings to make volunteering more sustainable and stabilise family attendance.
- Increasing group activities, with volunteers leading story or song times, encouraging engagement
- Expanding existing resources to support parents in reading and singing nursery rhymes with their children. Expanding resources with story sacks, sensory activities and books to encourage reading at home
- Increased opportunities for parental involvement: encouraging parents to take ownership of leading or modeling engagement in various sessions
- Establishing a termly rotation of themed activities to reduce weekly planning time and provide a foundation for future sessions
- Building a library of activities and resources offering a variety of ideas for use at home
- Seeking opportunities to collaborate with local organisations, such as Longsight Family Hub to improve outcomes for children and parents, providing access to a wide range of services and support
- 422 partnered with Better We to exchange best practices and contribute to the development of Better We's new Stay and Play group. Teams from both organisations volunteered at each other's projects, offering valuable insights into different approaches and meeting the needs of attending families

Which families were reached in Phase I?

- LCC engaged 32 parents and 26 children in structured stay and play sessions (many of whom were new to the service)
- The parents said that they felt more confident in playing with their kids in many creative ways
- Parents reported trying out new ways to play in the home
- Parents reported social and emotional benefits for all the family by attending regularly

Total reach so far



Parents/carers: 32

Children 0 - 5: 26

Quotes

“[Using the Crazy Foam at home]we made spaghetti, cakes, buried his firefighters, bathed them, blew it at each other, made hats for the animals...”
- Parent

“This is like my second home... 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.” - Parent

“I love to play with the toys!”
- Child aged 2

Which families were reached in Phase II?

During the second phase, the project was led by the mum of a one-year-old with a background in behavioural intervention for children with SEN and sleep support for families.

The parents said that they felt more confident in playing with their kids in many creative ways.

Parent involvement in the project increased. Parents were invited to take part in the planning and setting up of the sessions and parents led on different activities. A few parents identified activities that they wanted to take ownership of, such as leading song and story times.

Total reach so far



Parents/carers: 47

Children 0 - 5: 45

Quotes

“My baby is mainly at home because I am here in UK on my own. My child loves coming here every Friday, she loves the tricycle.”

- Parent

“The space for children to run around [is a] good environment, lots of toys to choose from. [There are] sensory as well as ordinary toys, there’s a wide variety of space for mums to talk.”

- Parent

Parent Champion case study

- Parent Champion has three children, one older, a two-year-old and a one-year-old.
- The family are living in a flat without much indoor or outdoor space. Limited opportunities for their children to play, and limited resources to buy toys.
- The Parent Champion wants to make more time to play with children within normal routine.



- The Parent Champion is part of a group who plan the weekly play sessions together, and who also gather feedback from families.
- During the play sessions the Parent Champions (alongside all the families) get ideas on how they can use low-cost resources to help their children learn through play.
- Parents are given takeaway packs to do activities with their children at home.



- Parent feels more confident in supporting their children to learn through play.
- “[My kids] had never experienced plants growing so the seed planting activity was amazing for them! They plant the seed, water it daily, take care of their plants and eagerly wait for it to grow. Now their plants are growing, they still take care of them.”



Better We

Play Skills Innovation

In October we provided funding to Better We to test play skills ideas.

The aim of the Stay and Play innovation at Better We was to empower parents to provide opportunities to support their child's development through play. The innovation focused on helping parents understand the intrinsic link between play and learning, boosting parental confidence to creatively engage their children in play, inspire parents with ideas for play at home, and enhance the impact of the Stay and Play group through quality resources and activities.

This was the first project at Better We aimed specifically at families with children under five and Better We were excited to learn from other organisations and build on what was working for families in Longsight.

As part of the innovation, Better We were linked up with 422 Community Hub's play skills project to share learning and swap ideas.

Better We ran 16 sessions between October and December, creating a supportive environment for parents and children aged 0 - 4.



Tahera Khanam,
Founder of Better We in
Manchester.
Credit: Hanna
Adcock/Save the
Children.

Which families were reached?

- Better We engaged 16 parents and 22 children in structured stay and play sessions
- The Better We CIC project aimed to enhance parent-child engagement through a variety of play activities while empowering parents to replicate these experiences at home
- Takeaway packs including materials for activities along with instructions and benefits, empowering parents to confidently engage in creative play at home
- Parents received activity sheets suggesting play scenarios throughout the day. The sheets highlighted the benefits of each activity, fostering inspiration for play at home
- The new toys and activities introduced each week received positive feedback, with parents expressing gratitude for the impact on their children's development
- Observations during sessions indicated improvements in fine and gross motor skills, creativity, and social interactions

Total reach so far



Parents/carers: 16

Children 0 - 5: 22

Quote

"We created a magical forest at home with leaves and twigs. It became our special storytelling place."

- Parent

Parent Champion case study

- Parent champion reported low confidence in playing with her children.
- The parent champion was worried playtime wasn't supporting her child's development. She was intrigued by messy play but was unsure.



- Parent champion became involved in the facilitation of stay and play and modelling messy play.
- Parent champion reached out to other parents, encouraging them to come along.



- Parent champion discovered new activities both her and her child love and describes playtime as the highlight of the day.
- "I play more creatively, with a better understanding of how each moment contributes to my child's learning. The impact has been profound."



Our Impact

Across all projects

- Increased number of (often isolated) families able to access play facilities and support.
- Increased opportunities for parental voice to be included in decision making and for parent champions to participate in project planning and delivery.
- Facilitated modelling of high-quality parent-child playful interactions, resulted in a positive shift in parent engagement and culture of play, inspiring parents to incorporate different types of play into their daily routines.
- All participating families were provided with home learning packs, supporting ongoing parent-child interactions.



Quotes

“Many families are new to the country and just don’t know what to do.”
- Outreach worker, Longsight Children’s Centre

“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.”
- Parent, 422

422 Community Hub

- Planning and working collaboratively with Parent Play Champions increased their confidence and skills.

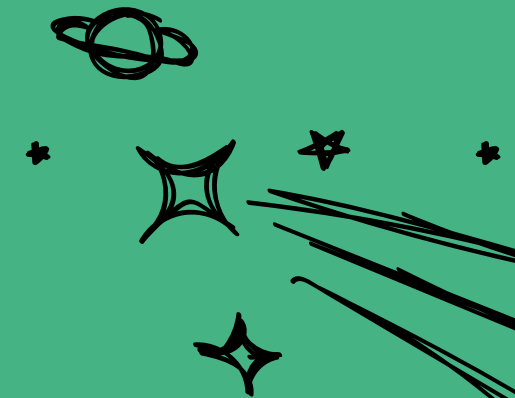
Longsight Children's Centre (LCC)

- Increased assessments, referrals and activities were offered to support children's speech and language development.
- Increased referrals were made for parents for financial support, ESOL, REAL.

Better We

- Increase in parental knowledge on the role of play in child development and confidence in engaging in creative play with their children.

“When I play with my children, I’ll often like to talk to them about the , colour or the shape [of the object they ’replaying 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.”
- Parent, 422



What We Learnt

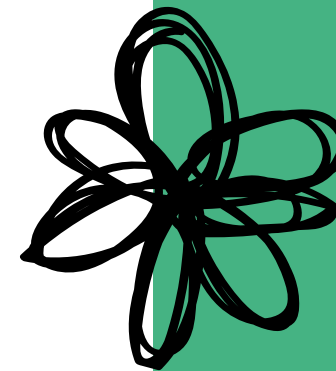
- **Meaningful connections with families** should be established at a speed and pace that works for them.
- **Design programmes that are flexible and adaptable** to accommodate the unique needs of families, as well as external factors such as weather conditions, religious holidays, school strikes and the presence of older children, all of which can impact attendance and programme dynamics.
- **Ensuring access to child care or adopting a holistic family approach** is crucial for enabling parent champions to actively participate.
- **Provide a range of opportunities** that cater to the diverse personal circumstances of parent champions, offering flexibility to accommodate parents with varying levels of commitment and capacity.
- **Understanding the community is paramount.** It involves actively listening to their needs and concerns. Collaborating with individuals such as staff, volunteers, or parent champions who have first-hand experience within the community is invaluable. These individuals are trusted members who can communicate effectively in community languages, bridging cultural and linguistic barriers to ensure meaningful engagement and support.

Quote

“You need to respect their opinion, cultural views and whatever religious belief they may have...”

Because you respect them it becomes a case of give-and-take. You are giving them information but also listening to them, too.”

- Outreach worker, Longsight Children’s Centre

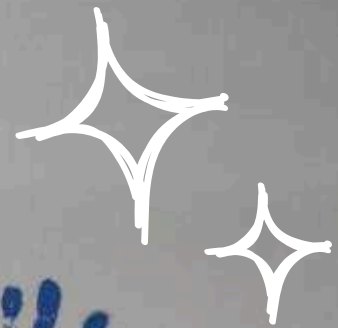


- **Engagement efforts** should extend to involve and communicate with the wider family to address cultural barriers.
- **Adopt an assets-based approach** that identifies and builds on existing strengths within the community. Provide opportunities for parents to use their skills and take a leading role in planning and implementing initiatives. Seek partnerships with local organisations to share ideas, skills, spaces and resources, to foster collaboration and maximise collective impact.
- **Use every opportunity to model play**, whether it's within the home environment, during stay and play sessions, or in everyday conversations. This consistent demonstration underscores the significance of play and helps establish a culture that prioritises its importance.
- **Peer connections**, facilitated through platforms like WhatsApp groups, planning sessions, and informal gatherings outside of scheduled sessions, can have a positive impact on group dynamics. These interactions provide opportunities for parents to connect, share experiences, offer support and build stronger relationships, ultimately enhancing the overall cohesion and effectiveness of the group.





5800



The
Future of
the World
is in
This Room



Inside the Stay and Play area of Better We in Manchester. Credit: Hanna Adcock/Save the Children.

Glossary

Co-design	Process of involving families and partners in the design and development of products, services or systems. The goal of which is to create solutions that are more relevant and effective for the people who will use them.
ESOL	English for speakers of other languages
REAL	Read, Enjoy and Learn
CAPS	Child and Parent Service

Thank you to all the families and partner organisations who have made this work possible.

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

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