



Save the Children

Tower Hamlets

Parent Power Project

2019 - 2023

Musa, 2, plays with a giraffe puppet at a Toy Library in Tower Hamlets, London. Credit: Dan Dennison/Save the Children.

Why Tower Hamlets?

Across London, a third of children are living in poverty and **Tower Hamlets is the worst affected borough with a 51% child poverty rate (1).**

Children growing up in poverty are most likely to miss out on support, experiences and opportunities that stimulate their learning and development in their early years. **One in five children in England start school without the language skills they need to succeed, but for the poorest children this is one in three (2).**

Since 2019, Save the Children UK (SCUK) has worked in Tower Hamlets alongside local parents and caregivers, services and children themselves to support the next generation to succeed.

Our approach in Tower Hamlets has focused on **Parent Power**, recognising the vital role parents and caregivers play. We set out to promote positive parental engagement in the earliest years of a child's life at home, at school and nursery and out in the community.

However, we recognise that transforming the experience of children in their earliest years goes beyond the delivery of one-off programmes. Instead, **a systemic approach is required. This looks like deep partnerships with local organisations to identify gaps, the development of high impact interventions, and embedding of new learning which strengthens the early years system.**

(1) Poverty & Inequality Data For Tower Hamlets | Trust for London

(2) Early Language Development and Children's Primary School Attainment in Maths and English | Save the Children



What did we do?

Through the project we took a three-pronged approach to systemic engagement:

- Delivery of SCUK's evidence-based parenting programme Families Connect which supports parental engagement with children's learning.
- Development and delivery of innovation projects by local organisations to trial new ways to support children's learning and development.
- Building a network of partnerships across the borough with those passionate about making changes to the lives of children in their earliest years.

Impact

IN NUMBERS

470 households and **850** children received essential funding through SCUK's Early Years Grants to alleviate the financial pressures and challenges of living in poverty, providing food and products to meet children's basic needs. They also provided opportunities for children to learn and develop at home through the provision of age-appropriate learning resources.

85 parents reported increased skills and confidence to support their children's early learning both through engagement with the school and learning activities undertaken at home through participating in Families Connect.

We developed and delivered innovation projects with local partners and parents which had positive outcomes on children's early development. Key examples include:

2,000 local families

received increased resources and advice to support their children's early learning and development through the distribution of an early learning magazine created by local parents and caregivers.

415 children

participated in the Toy Libraries innovation which evidenced that children who participated had improved learning attainment through increased social interaction and play.

185 health visit reviews

were successfully piloted with a local NHS health visiting team. This led to 36 children with suspected learning and development challenges receiving early referrals to local development services.

**50 children and
their parents/
carers**

benefitted from a creative play project with Half Moon Theatre. Parents who played with their children on a daily basis increased from 62% to 100%. Parents and carers reported spending more time engaging in activities like singing and socialising. Encouraging children to sing supports the development of their oral communication and helps children to bolster their listening skills.

**15 adults
and 20
children**

took part in an innovative trial of the Exercise and Sound in Education (EASIE) programme. This is an early-years based developmental, movement and listening programme that supports children's neuro-physical activity. An improved understanding of how to help their children, and their confidence in supporting their child's development was reported by parents because of the training they had received in the programme.

**13 adults
and 28
children**

took part in the adapted pilot delivery of Your Child's Life 2gether parenting course to meet the needs of parents of children aged 22 - 26 months. The course allowed parents to reflect on the importance of communicating with peers about their children and their struggles as parents. They left with an increased understanding of their child's development and opportunities for them to support play in the home.



Hanna, 1, and her mum Nargis during circle/singing time at a Toy Library in Tower Hamlets, London. Credit: Dan Dennison/Save the Children.

We have been able to use the partnerships built across the borough to deliver initiatives which have had a positive impact on the Tower Hamlets early years system. We have:

Distributed over **1,000 gifts in kind** to support Tower Hamlets' children's learning and development including Penguin books to develop a local school library.

800 Hasbro gifts for Christmas 2022 and

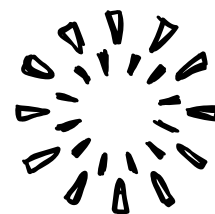
50 play and learning packs for families.

Facilitated over **6,000 families** to participate in Summer of Play activities.

Reached almost

10,000 children & parents/carers

in our four years working in Tower Hamlets and built a network of over **50 local organisations.**



Legacy

We are ending the Parent Power Project knowing that:

- Parents don't always recognise their role as their child's first educator and can struggle to feel confident to engage in play activity such as storytelling and how to talk to their child. **The rising toll of the cost of living and other factors on parental mental health is exacerbating this for Tower Hamlets families.**
- **Access to people, spaces, and resources to promote play continues to be important to families and service providers**, with an emphasis on facilitating child-led and parent-involved play.
- There is an increasing cultural deprioritisation of play in favour of more formal education, with some **parents struggling to see their role in supporting play and its important role in children's early learning and development.**
- **More work needs to be done to bring education services together to eradicate existing silos between early years and primary education** to facilitate school readiness and transition. The enduring impact of the pandemic continues to reduce opportunities for children and families' socialisation and creativity, and this is particularly prevalent in terms of delays in speech and language development.
- Building upon the role of our Parent Power advisory group, more needs to be done to encourage and **create space for organisations in the early years to share best practice at a programmatic and organisational level** with each other.

Next Steps

We can continue to use **our role as a trusted connector** of organisations to support willing but stretched Tower Hamlets services. We can continue to work to make changes in the way the different parts of the early years system work together whilst continuing to encourage opportunities for parents to positively engage in the lives of their young children.

These focuses are at the core of our next phase, and we are excited to be working on our Community Power and Power of Play projects across 2024 and beyond.

