

Tower Hamlets Play Charter

Play is fundamental to a child's development, helping them to learn about the world around them, make friends, be healthy and have fun.



Play helps children develop:

- Creativity
- Social, physical and cognitive skills
- Resilience
- Cultural awareness
- Risk management
- Decision making abilities
- A sense of their own identity, instincts, ideas, and interests

Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have a right to play, and places a responsibility on governments to respect, protect and fulfil the right to play for all children.

In Tower Hamlets, our Children and Families' Partnership Board, led by Cllr Danny Hassell, made a commitment to producing a Play Charter in the Children and Families Strategy 2019-2024. This Charter sets out our vision for play in Tower Hamlets. It calls on residents, businesses, voluntary organisations and charities, providers of childcare and education, the council, and developers to be imaginative and create initiatives, or build on existing projects, which embed play into the daily lives of our children and young people. No step is too small, no idea too big. By working in partnership and sharing resources, we can make Tower Hamlets a borough for children, the place to play, and rich in imagination and discovery.

Why do we need a Play Charter?

Time, space and opportunities for play, including playing out and outdoors free play, have been declining over decades. Increases in traffic and housing developments, the loss of green and open spaces, changes in culture and attitudes as well as funding cuts and a reduced recognition of the importance of play within central government have compounded this.

The loss of the ability to play is having a huge impact on children's health

and wellbeing. Government and health professional guidelines state that children aged five to 18-years-old need one hour each day of what they call 'moderate to vigorous physical activity' to be healthy and well. Eighty per cent of British children were not getting this before the country went into lockdown in March 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is creating a range of growing health problems in children, including obesity and Type 2 diabetes, as well as affecting their mental health. In Tower Hamlets, nearly 1 in 7 children in reception and over 1 in 4 of children in year 6 are obese.

The impact of lockdown owing to Covid-19 cannot be underestimated. Children and young people lost access to the ability to play outside of their



"It's great to see all these kids playing together, whatever age they are, wherever they are from. All just play together. It's great".

Parent at Glamis Adventure Playground



Glamis Adventure Playground has a long-standing record for providing Free, Open Access Play for eight to 16-year-olds in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

In recent years we have seen changes and cuts to public funding and the need for safe green spaces to play has increased as more green spaces are taken away to build homes.

At Glamis we interact with our young people, parents/carers and see the increasing need for food banks and community groups. To help combat these inner-city deficiencies we provide not only a safe green space for young people to play and positively express themselves, where play is freely chosen and self-motivated, where real life skills are learnt but we also provide a hot healthy meal to our young people. We encourage parents/carers to come and make acquaintances and share information, helping to reduce isolation. The feedback suggests that the benefits of this are that we have more confident, happier and healthier young people.

Candace Lewis, Project Manager for Glamis APG (Shadwell Community Project)

home overnight, as well as access to play professionals and resources. Children use play for emotional survival: they “play out” traumatic events, conflicts, loneliness, helplessness, all of which can be linked to the pandemic. Through play, children can process their emotions, learn how to build resilience and cope better with challenging circumstances.

Primary aged and older children are increasingly lacking opportunities to socialise outside of school in real life (not online), develop independence, problem solve, and grow in resilience, as well as have the enjoyment of free play with others. Computer games are popular and have their own value but should not replace other play opportunities.

Open spaces and adventure playgrounds, which enable children to take risks and challenge themselves physically, mentally and emotionally, are

under threat. In an era of increasing urbanisation, restricted access to nature, and therefore opportunities to play, is closely linked to the increase of mental health issues amongst children and young people.

A reduction in play opportunities has also led to an increase in inequalities for children. The loss of a child’s right to play out wherever they live – in streets, estates and open spaces, for free, on their doorstep, whether they are rich or poor – has had more of an impact on those living in social housing (whose parents have little say over their own outside space) and on low-income families with less ability to ‘compensate’ for this loss with paid-for activities or travelling to other spaces. As Tower Hamlets has one of the highest rates of child poverty in London, this may impact more on our children.

How play feeds into the priorities of the Children and Families Partnership

Aspiration to Action:



Children and young people have the skills to prepare for the future

Better communication, vocabulary and language.

Play improves speaking and understanding. It encourages imagination and promotes creativity.

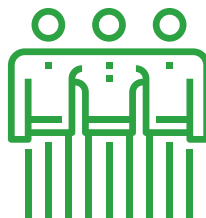
Greater impulse control and emotion regulation.

Self regulation is essential for academic and social success. Those who play have better self regulation skills. Effective emotional control benefits mental health

Greater confidence, and empathy.

Play provides opportunities for children and young people to learn how to interact socially. When playing together, they learn how to cooperate, follow rules, develop self control and get along with different people.

Healthy Families:



Families have good health, wellbeing and healthy relationships

Better Physical Health.

Play benefits physical health, motor control, strength, and endurance. Active Play in early childhood is associated with better physical health, which involves proper body posture, stronger bones and muscles, and a better cardiovascular and respiratory function. It also significantly reduces the risks of developing some diseases including heart disease, diabetes, and obesity.

Happiness.

Playful children are happier, better adjusted and have better mental health.

Playing with friends can help reduce anxiety, stress and feelings of loneliness

Safe and Secure:



Children and young people feel, and are, safe where they live, work play and study

Children and young people develop resilience through risk taking and challenge, problem solving skills, and learn how to adapt and deal with new and challenging situations.

They gain opportunities to learn about their environment and the wider community

Play increases self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-respect, thereby reducing vulnerabilities.

Supervised play provision, including youth hubs and adventure playgrounds, has workers who are trained in safeguarding and can provide support and guidance as a trusted adult

Our Charter

Our charter is based on the following five principles:

Prepared to Play: “Play is the highest form of research” (Albert Einstein)

In order to ensure that the borough is prepared to play so that play is understood and recognised by all as being critical for children’s physical and emotional health, creativity, social development, achievement and overall life satisfaction we:

- Will promote the benefits of play to raise awareness throughout the borough and beyond by sharing positive examples of play in Tower Hamlets
- Are committed to ensuring high-quality training on play is available for practitioners who work with children
- Will encourage businesses, organisations and developers to donate materials that can be used for play, such as pallets, paint and loose parts.
- Will develop and champion engagement with families around play through the Children and Families Partnership Play Working Group
- Will disseminate and advertise funding opportunities for play through the Children and Families Partnership Play Working Group

Learning through Play: “Children need the freedom to appreciate the infinite resources of their hands, their eyes and their ears, the resources of forms, materials, sounds and colours” (Loris Malaguzzi)

To encourage learning through play so that parents and professionals value play and the skills it develops we will:

- Encourage parents to take up funded places for their children in quality early years’ provision in order to increase their access to a variety of play



opportunities and resources

- Provide and empower parents with home learning opportunities to boost their children’s development and support their physical and mental health with fun, everyday activities and resources
- Encourage educational provision to embed play into learning opportunities throughout the curriculum so that real world learning is valued (gravity and friction makes sense when linked to falling off a bike or wet sand)

Inclusive Play: “The wider the range of possibilities we offer children, the more intense will be their motivations and the richer their experiences” (Loris Malaguzzi)

To ensure that all children have access to Inclusive play, we will:

- Ensure that accessible play opportunities are available for all children, including access to a range of sensory experiences for children of different abilities.
- Champion community engagement with children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), families and practitioners to identify best design approaches.
- Raise awareness of developers, architects and local authority officers to take on board inclusive approaches to play design.

Outdoor Play: “The best classroom and the richest cupboard is roofed only by the sky”. (Margaret McMillan)

Outdoor Play where children have space to explore and work out what they want to do, not reliant on screens to occupy them, will be promoted by:

- Reviewing the use of existing green and open spaces, as well as streets, to ensure that children have access to nature, fresh air and exercise through exhilarating outdoors play
- Providing safe opportunities for children to take risks and learn problem solving skills through more challenging outdoors provision, such as adventure playgrounds and climbing walls
- Encourage organisations, schools and residents to use their outdoors space for play activities all year round

Play for All: “We don’t stop playing because we grow old. We grow old because we stop playing” (George Bernard Shaw)

Tower Hamlets will become the place to play, where play is for all so that children and adults have increased confidence and initiate play by:

- Encouraging inter-generational play opportunities between early years provision, schools and services for older people
- Providing differentiated play experiences that are suitable for children and young people of all ages and genders
- Challenging negative perceptions about the use of space and resources by children and young people so that children freely engage in play without worrying about being judged, being “silly” or getting dirty
- Embedding play opportunities from all cultures and backgrounds in order to enrich the experiences children and young people currently have and promote community cohesion





How do children play?

Play means different things to different people. For some, play might mean being outside and kicking a football, or having fun at an adventure playground. For others, it may mean painting or building the latest LEGO. Individuals or groups can play. Play can be organised and led by an adult, such as a teacher setting up a game of cricket and umpiring. Other times, adults may create a play opportunity but not get involved, such as an early years' practitioner putting out arts and crafts materials for children to create something. The best play is often play in which children take

the lead by choosing what and how to play and who to play with. There are opportunities for play to take place within educational settings which allowing children to extend what they are learning. However, this play is often outcome focused and follows what the adult wants them to achieve. It is not always child led, where children are free to express themselves.

Play England defines play as "What children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way, and for their own reasons," adding: "What children and young people do when they are not being told what to do by adults." Play isn't just for young children – older children need opportunities to play as well, often in a safe space with a trusted adult available.

If children are to enjoy the full benefits of play, we need adults to ensure that children have time, space and permission to play. We need to promote the importance of play to professionals and parents. In order to ensure the conditions are right for play, we also need to provide a range of opportunities, including safe, quality play spaces, that meet the needs of children of differing ages, abilities, interests, and cultures. By offering opportunities for children of all backgrounds to play together, for example in parks, in youth clubs or in out of school activities, we can help them to develop social skills and learn about the wider community.

There are around 16 types of play, as defined by Bob Hughes: he is a life-long champion of play being a fundamental part of human development. Children and young people should be able to experience all types in their lifetime. Parents and professionals can use the Ferris Wheel of Fun for inspiration and ideas on how to embed play into daily life.

The Ferris Wheel of Fun



Click on the ferris wheel illustration above to access a printable version.

Social

Children build or create something together, learning to negotiate and develop rules

Socio-dramatic

Children play at house, being parents or teachers, or play shopping. Adults can provide real life objects to trigger play and allow children to explore real life events

Symbolic

Children use an object, such as a flag, to symbolise a group or tribe, or jumpers for goal posts

Communication

Children mime, tell jokes, use facial expression, gestures and poetry. Adults can teach backslang, or share jokes and riddles

Creative

Children have access to lots of different creative mediums, plenty of time and are able to make mess. Adults can provide resources but should take a step back

Deep

Children take risks, feeling a rush of fear followed by the joy of success – climb trees, balance on planks, learn how to light fires. Boys may dress as princesses, challenging gender stereotypes.

Dramatic

Children create a drama such as a TV show, religious event or a wedding. Adults can be the audience

Exploratory

Children explore objects or areas. Adults can link up boxes or furniture to create a new environment or introduce new items

Fantasy

Play that is purely a product of the imagination. Children need time and space, dressing up clothes and loose parts, with minimal adult intervention

Imaginative

Where children eat pretend food, play with animals that aren't there or sing into a pretend microphone. Adults can provide loose parts, sand and water.

Locomotor

Children chase, play tag, hide and seek, off ground touch and tree climbing. Adults should encourage physical activity by providing equipment such as tyres, ropes and tubes

Mastery

Children dig holes, construct shelters and engage in safe fire play. Adults can provide digging tools, leaves, conkers and twigs, as well as trays of soil, sand or sawdust if no spaces are available

Object

Where a child examines and makes use of almost any object. Give children a box of loose parts and let them see how they can be put together or pulled apart

Recapitulative

Children transform themselves using paints and masks, build dens or grow food. Let children play in the dark or give them materials to build their own village

Roleplay

Children re-enact something they have seen, heard, read about or experienced. Adults can provide props or even create paper telephones with string

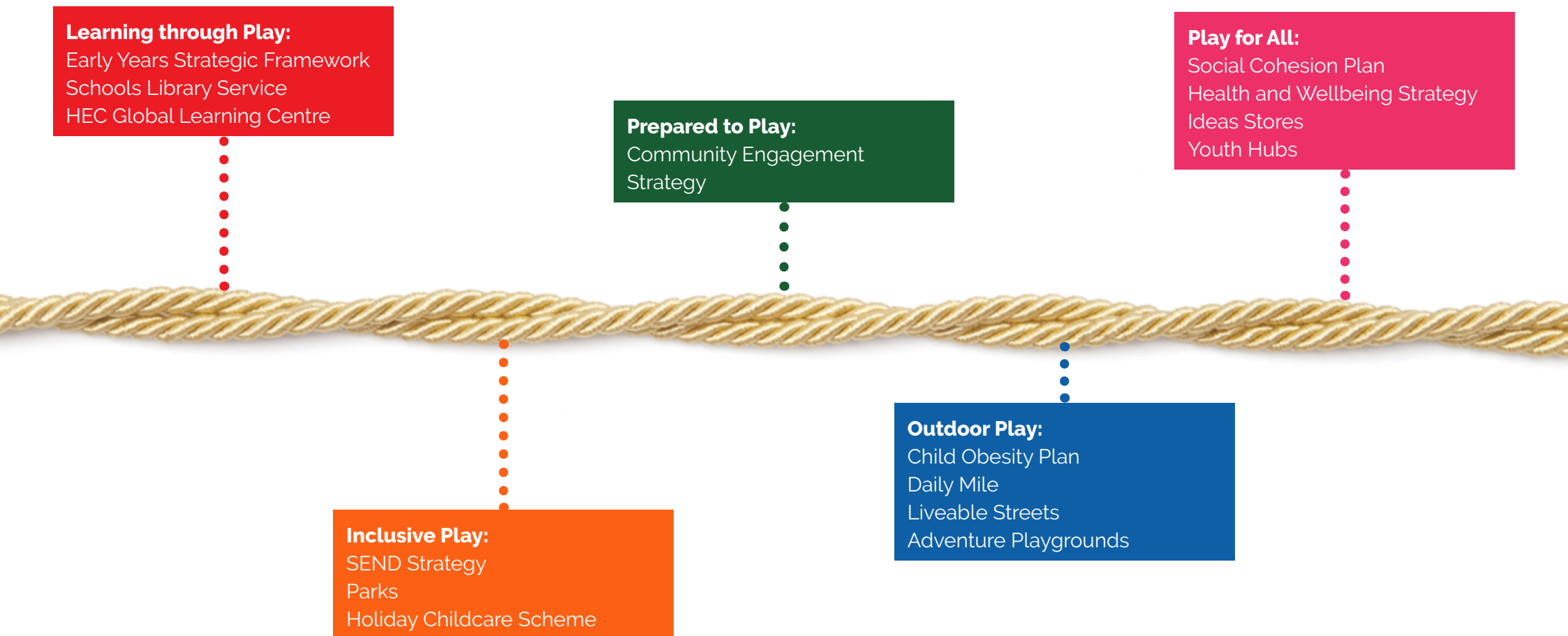
Rough and tumble

A child may play-fight, wrestle and chase. Adults can create assault courses.



Play: The Golden Thread

Play is a tool which can bind communities together, which can help unpick problems and which should form part of the rich tapestry of life. Play can be used as a “golden thread” in Tower Hamlets, to weave the values and visions outlined in the strategies, initiatives and policies in Tower Hamlets to its goals.



Do I need to pay to play?

Play should be fun and not a financial burden for families. Therefore, if you would like to use your imagination, and have any of the resources below, then a world of play awaits you and your children. The following activities are for everyone but some may be more suited to certain age groups.

Babies, Toddlers and Pre School

Sensory Play:

Sensory play is any play activity which involves touch, smell, taste, sight and hearing. This can be provided with a plate of jelly, aqua beads, ice, rainbow rice, or even small world tubs. Sensory play stimulates exploration and the building blocks of science and investigation.



Sand:

Sand play is a fantastic opportunity for the foundations of scientific learning and developing self-confidence and physical development. Scooping, digging, pouring and sifting, teach children how things work, whilst also building their muscles and coordination. Done alongside a friend, and it becomes about teamwork, sharing, and social skills.

Water Play:

Similar to sand play, water play enables children to experiment in a safe environment with basic concepts such as volume. Additionally, water play is great for learning consequences of actions. Add in some hand-eye coordination and physical strength, and water play is a firm favourite. Fill the bath or a bucket or venture into a park and jump in some puddles.

Blocks, Jigsaws, and Shape Sorters:

Playing with blocks, jigsaws, and shape sorters all lay the foundations of spatial thinking, logical reasoning, ordering, and recognising various shapes, sizes, and colours.

Play Dough:

Play dough has immense potential for learning. Not only does it strengthen fingers in preparation for a lifetime of writing, it teaches fine motor skills, creativity, and hand-eye coordination. Add some beads to the dough for a fine-motor exercise, or thread beads on to lengths of dried spaghetti held in the dough, for extra play-value.

Pre-school and school-aged children

The Cardboard Box:

The humble cardboard box is one of the most incredible invitations to play. Will it be a house, a car, a home for their teddy bear? Provide them with scraps of fabric, cushions, pencils and paper plates and watch them explore their world, enter their imagination, and begin thinking like an engineer.

Dress-Up and Role Play:

Let children loose with a bunch of dressing-up clothes and props and let their imaginations run wild. Soon you'll discover the budding doctor, vet, nurse, astronaut, chef or thespian. Dressing-up helps children to begin to make sense of the adult world, roles, and interests, as well as boosting social interaction. Not least, dressing-up helps to reinforce the self-care

aspects of self-dressing which is essential for primary school life and beyond.

Doll and Character Play:

Dolls, action figures and other characters allow children to develop their social play. They encourage imagination and the expression (and labelling) of feelings, and they teach children how to care for others. Dolls aren't just for girls, remember!

Drawing and Painting:

Letting children run wild with paints and drawing tools allows them to experience their world in a sensory way and develop self-expression, whilst also developing pre-writing skills. Furthermore, it's an invitation to learn about colours, mixing, and good-old tidying up!





Imaginative Play:

All play should be imaginative, but this type of play comes naturally to many children. Leave a small child with nothing but a random selection of objects and you'll soon find them lost in a world of make-believe. Giving a child time and space for imaginative play is essential. It develops their imagination, which is important for literacy skills and intellectual reasoning. Additionally, it increases their sense of self, and self-esteem, as well as making sense of the world around them, as well as ability to handle boredom.

Music, Dancing, and Singing:

Singing and music hugely help to develop language and form the basis of literacy skills, as well as basic mathematical concepts such as counting. Children begin to develop rhythm, whilst also refining their listening skills. Dancing helps a child develop strength and coordination, and flexibility.

Running, Jumping, Climbing, Swinging:

Many children have a compulsion to move. Allowing them to do so, and providing safe and age-appropriate challenges, allows them to increase their confidence as well as develop their resilience through risk-taking. Of course, gross motor skills also receive a mighty boost.

Nature Play:

Children's learning is enhanced when you take the play space out into the great outdoors. That's why Forest Schools are so popular and highly regarded and why Adventure Playgrounds are so important. Not only is it healthy, it teaches a respect for the environment, and the beginnings of biology. It also helps children to become more independent and inquisitive and learn how to take risks. This is especially important for older children, who tend to have fewer opportunities to play but still need access to a safe place with trusted adults.

Basic Board Games:

There are many board games available for even the youngest players, and these should be embraced – not only for their fun factor, but for their learning potential. In addition to the themes of numbers, colours, shapes, and early phonics, these games are vital for teaching children turn-taking and sharing.

Cooking and Pretend-Cooking:

Cooking, and pretend cooking, serving, and shops, are great play scenarios for kids. Cooking itself combines elements of sensory play, mathematical concepts, home safety, and following processes. Pretend cooking, serving, and toy shops also teach basic mathematical ideas as well as social interaction, and how to be thoughtful to others.

Older Children

When asked to think of a child, most people think of a young child, usually under the age of ten-years-old. However, the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) defines children as being anyone under the age of 18-years. Article 31 of the Convention states that every child has the right to play.

Therefore, it is as important to ensure that older children have play opportunities as well. Adolescent brains are going through a phase of accelerated growth and they are starting to experience the world as a more independent person which involves making more choices for themselves. The 11+ age range seek social interaction. Hanging out with friends and sometimes pushing boundaries is all playful behaviour, although we do not always see it this way. When this age range are in a group, the playful behaviour is loud, jokey and active and can sometimes be interpreted as being anti-social.

Risk taking in adolescent years is inevitable and whilst children should be protected from serious and long-term physical or emotional harm, they also need permission and understanding to try things out, get things wrong and make mistakes.

In Tower Hamlets, the community and voluntary sector, as well as the council, play a vital role in providing a safe space for older children to attend where they can socialise, usually with a trusted adult/s nearby, supervising but not interfering.

Adventure Playgrounds

There are several Adventure Playgrounds in Tower Hamlets where the age

range of children attending is five to 15-years-old. Varied age groups play together, often the older children support younger children and the younger ones enjoy attention and support from the older age range. Play is the most social behaviour children engage in and an Adventure Playground setting is staffed by experienced playworkers who create an inclusive environment in which all children can play.

Adventure playground sites in Tower Hamlets have kitchens and are a key part of the Holiday Hunger offer. Playworkers are trained in Safeguarding, work to Early Help Thresholds and are trusted adults to children and



families accessing their sites. Playworkers can intervene if children are bullied, adapt activities and environments to meet varied needs for children with disabilities, give daily praise and acknowledge children thus boosting their self-esteem and confidence. We have attached case studies from adventure playground sites to demonstrate the positive impact well-run adventure playgrounds can have on residents.

Youth Hubs

By attending youth hubs within the borough, young people can access a wide range of activities that support their emotional wellbeing, skills development, personal growth, and intellectual development. Activities delivered include sports activities and events, including boxing; girls' groups which are set up in response to identified needs; music project and events; gangs mediation workshops and arts and design workshops. As a result, young people are now developing their strengths, building their life skills, and going after more promising, exciting futures.

Holiday Playscheme

The Tower Hamlets Holiday Childcare Scheme offers Ofsted registered childcare for children aged three to 13-years-old.

They provide safe, inclusive childcare service encouraging all children to engage and participate in play-based activities indoors and outdoors. Highly qualified staff plan and provide a wide range of fun activities following the children's interests, including, sports, cooking, creative arts and crafts, street dance, Zumba, games, film making, and much more.

At Tower Hamlets Holiday Childcare Scheme, they recognise the importance of play to a child's development. As play/childcare workers they support and facilitate play, and do not seek to control or direct it and allow children to initiate and direct the experience for themselves. Their staff

champion children's rights under Article 31 of the UNCRC 'a right to play' and promote and support the [Playwork Principles](#).

Local daily trips are provided each day and children are introduced to new play opportunities in the borough and further afield. They share the trips on the scheme [newsletter](#) which gives parents and carers detailed information on all the fun experiences their child had and are shared on their [website](#).

The scheme ringfences a number of places for children requiring additional support. Their aim is to provide equal opportunities for all those involved in the scheme.

In August 2019 Ofsted said:

"The setting is highly inclusive, and leaders work extensively to provide additional support to families who have children with special educational needs (SEN)."

The holiday childcare scheme underwent an accreditation process in February 2020 to obtain [Quality in Play](#) status, which is awarded for demonstrating quality and value for money whilst creating and maintaining excellent staffed play environments.

Mick Conway, Quality in Play Assessor, said:

"I was particularly impressed by how children's feedback on previous schemes is built into forward planning and procurement of equipment, materials and trips out. There is a specific focus on 'non-gendering' play activities across the scheme and I noted that a number of boys were very proud of the cushions they had made and sewed."

The scheme [video](#) will give you more information about the holiday childcare scheme. The Holiday Childcare Scheme strives to be sector leading and places children at the forefront of everything they do. We are proud they are a lead partner within the Play Charter at Tower Hamlets.

Tower Hamlets Play Charter

For more information please visit www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/localoffer or contact Jill.McGinley@towerhamlets.gov.uk or on 020 7364 4946

