



Overview

We ran eight Fun Days in total over February half term and three consecutive Saturdays in March. I felt it was necessary to run the Fun Days over half-term as time is very important and it was an opportunity to have several Fun Days in rapid succession.

Having been in post since September much of my time had been spent networking with professionals and gathering information and resources on existing services available in the County. The Fun Days represented the first opportunity for me to meet with families *en masse* and save me making individual contact.

The aims of The Fun Days were as follows;

- TO HAVE FUN ☺
- To consult with children and young people about what THEY want out of THEIR Saturdays.
- To offer a taster to children and young people of how a Saturday Club *may* operate.
- To meet with Parents and discuss the project, how it came about and how it will be offered to them.
- To consult with parents about THEIR needs for short breaks and address any concerns they may have.
- To offer one Fun Day per district to ensure that families can access something close to them and also to emphasise the community nature of this project.

Invitations were sent out to families in January addressed to, and aimed at, the child or young person. Separate invites were sent out, designed to appeal to under 13's and over 13's. They included information for parents/ carers, a response/ photo consent form, map of the venue and a tick sheet for the child/ young person to tell us about the kinds of activities they like.

We ran several activities on the days including; Painting, Scrap models, Clay, Board Games, Table Tennis and Balloon Modelling. In addition we booked Drumming, Drama and Graffiti Workshops. We also had the involvement of Sports Development at our Mansfield Fun Day who ran Boccia skills and table top games.

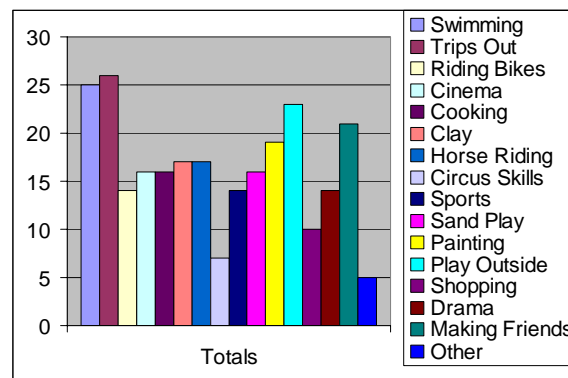
It should be noted that we were also led in a number of activities by the young people attending including; hide and seek, football (with juggling balls!), piano playing, invisible basketball, painting with hands and **feet**!, a performance on stage, the jungle game, an impromptu ball pool, movie making, glitter tubes and Face Painting (them on us!)

What we Found Out

Responses from Parents/ Carers and Children/ Young People were very positive about the introduction of this service. Below you will find a mixture of Quantitative and Qualitative data, showing the kinds of information we have gathered during the consultation.

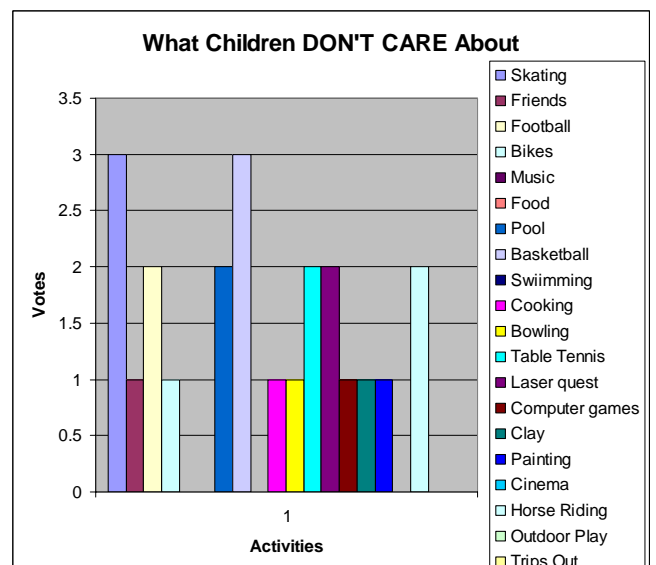
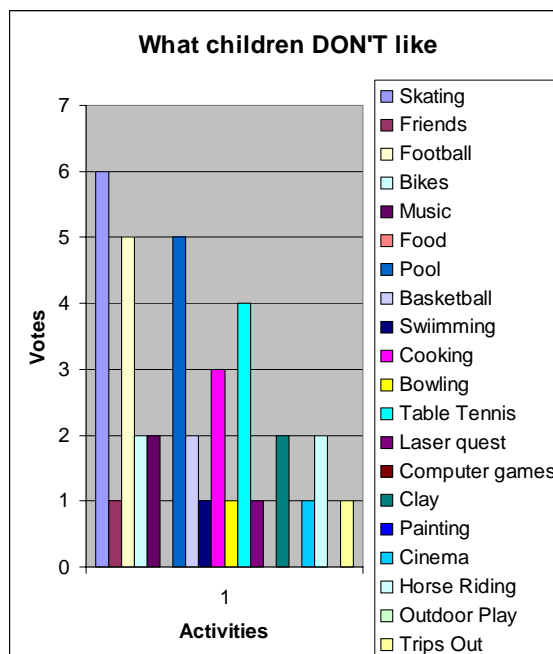
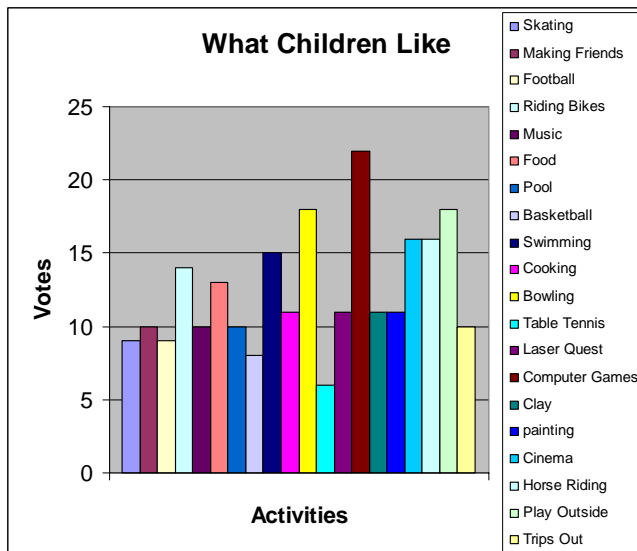
What Children Said:

The chart below shows the kinds of things that children/ young people are saying they enjoy. The information was gathered from the returned sheets that went out with the invites. It is clear from this graph that Trips Out, Swimming and Play Outside are top priority with Making Friends coming in close behind.



Similar questions were asked at the Fun Days, results of which can be seen on the next page. The results are comparable with the above chart except computer games were added to the list!! We also asked children to let us know what they *don't like* and also what they *don't care* about. The hope being that we would get a more rounded view of what children want.

Once again we see Play Outside in the top three and it doesn't appear in either the 'Don't Like' or 'Don't Care' charts. Bowling is also popular while Skating, Football and Snooker/ Pool are the most disliked activities.



Workers were also asked to be mindful of comments made by children and the kinds of responses that children were giving to different activities.

Below are some of the comments made by the children and young people and observations by staff.

**"I want
Beyblades and
Computers"**

**One child enjoyed
making videos and said
he wanted us to provide
cameras**

**"Ice skating, go and
see wildlife, visit the
park, go and see a
farm."**

**"Going to
cafes/
restaurants"**

**"them trips out in
the zoo"**

**(at the beginning)"...She took a
while to settle herself into the
Fun Day. She was wary about all
around her, children and adults.**

**(at the end) "She had thoroughly
enjoyed her day and was
incredibly vocal with her
goodbyes. All the way out of the
hall, into the car park AND when
she had got in the car!!!"**

What Parents Want

We also used these Fun Days to consult with parents. The aim was to introduce this project to them and give them an idea of how it will develop and how it will be offered to their child. We designed questionnaire's to find out about parents opinions of the project, to address any concerns they may have and to canvas support for the steering groups which will hopefully empower parents to be involved in how this service will develop.

The results below show how parents responded and also give an idea of the kinds of responses that were coming back re their feedback and concerns.

Cost: When asked about how much parents were willing to pay for a regular Saturday Activity of this kind **89%** said £5.00 while **11%** said £4.00. No one voted for £3, £2 or £1. This was very positive as £5 was the highest charge.

Transport: Transport was also raised as we only have a limited budget for assistance with transport. This will have to be prioritised to families who are particularly isolated as in the Bassetlaw area which is a large and very rural area. The majority of parents were happy to provide their own transport with only 1 family expressing particular concerns. This of course does not take into account families who did not come and may have had transport issues over attending the Fun Days.

Of those asked **39%** were willing to travel up to 15 miles, **28%** were willing to travel up to 10 miles and **33%** wanted to travel less than 5 miles.

How sessions are offered: Due to the anticipated need for this service as the waiting list for Sitting and Befriending grows and changes we will need to offer families this service for a limited period. This can then be reviewed depending on what other services families are accessing. We asked parents what they thought was a 'fair' number of sessions if they were being offered one Saturday a month. **26%** said 6 months, **26%** said 9 months, **42%** said 12 months and **6%** wanted more.

ALL parents said that one Saturday a month would make a real difference.

Steering Groups: We wanted to introduce the concept of steering groups for each area including parents, local professionals and children. The response was fantastic; parents seemed very keen to be able to make a difference and shape the way this service develops. **68%** said definitely yes while **26%** would be involved depending on regularity and other commitments. Only 1 person said definitely not.

Other things parents are saying: Parents are keen to know more about activities in their area and also find out more about local support groups. These are all things that we can offer to them when the groups start up and the steering groups present an opportunity for us to continue the consultation process with parents.

Concerns: We asked parents about specific concerns they have about this or other projects they have experienced. The overriding concern is over their children's safety. They want to be sure that staff are appropriately experienced and are fully police checked and also what kind of ratios of staff to children there will be. Many parents have **never** been able to leave their children all day in this kind of environment because other providers won't meet their child's needs.

Parents wanted to know if we would be able to meet personal care and medical needs. Again they have usually experienced groups like ours not being able to meet these particular needs. We need to work closely with families to address these needs and ensure staff are appropriately trained. This will require a high degree of 1:1 work with families.

Hopes: Parents want their children to feel as though they belong to a group that will accept and understand them. They are keen for their children to explore their play and particularly develop more independence, social skills and confidence.

Parents Needs: Parents responses to this project have been extremely positive. It is generally seemingly simple things that this project will provide for them. For example, going shopping and trying clothes on, spending time with other siblings and being around other parents who have similar experiences. One comment was "Our family is very isolated, you need families who have the same life as you."

Evaluation

Attendance: While responses from the families who attended the Fun Days has been very positive there has been an issue over a large proportion of families not attending. There may be several reasons for this:

- Lack of trust in a new project
- Families being 'hard to reach'
- Uncertainty over who The Play Centre are and what this project means
- Other family commitments (holidays etc)
- Issues/ illness coming up at the last minute
- Feeling that these kind of groups will not suit their needs
- Some families are already accessing other activities (particularly in half term but also Saturdays)

There could also be numerous other reasons. I have already had some contact with families who were unable to attend and sometimes it is just that families are so busy coping with everything else that things like this just get put to one side. The next process now that the Fun Days are over, is to follow up all the families who did not attend to complete the consultation process and ensure that families are clear about how this project will work.

This will involve improving our partnership working with Social Workers, Family Centres, APTCOO in the north of the county and other agencies who work with these families to get their support in making contact. APTCOO have already fed back that Bassetlaw in particular is a difficult area to gain trust from families as many of them are so isolated. This reinforces the need to get this scheme up and running in Bassetlaw as soon as possible so we can start working with these hard to reach families.

Venues: In some districts (Newark, Mansfield, Rushcliffe, Broxtowe) the venues we have used for the Fun Days have been potentially okay for a regular Saturday Group and responses from parents and children have been good. It is clear from the consultation that one of the most important factors in providing activities for these young people is appropriate outdoor space. This means space that is reasonably secure, attached to the main building and suitable for children to play on.

There are at least two other very important factors when selecting venues; community focus and availability: So that we can encourage the local community to be involved and so that these children aren't hidden away in some kind of 'special' building it is vital that any venue we use is at the heart of the community and ideally that other groups for local children run there. This gives us a greater chance to work with the community to include these children in other local activities. Also a main problem in selecting venues of this sort is that Saturday is a very popular day for weddings and often suitable venues are able to create more revenue from hosting wedding receptions.

Activities: As well as providing outdoor play and having a venue which is suitable to provide these activities, children and young people are also telling us they want to get out and about. Bowling, swimming, trips out and laser quest have all been popular options. These are the things we will have to bear in mind when planning each Saturday Group.

It is also possible, from those that didn't attend, that this kind of group will not suit certain children. It is highly unlikely, for example, that this kind of Saturday Group will be appropriate for a young person of 17 or 18. It is then that we will have to do more 1:1 work with the family to establish the kinds of things that they would like to do and how we can facilitate that. We may be able to offer support from The Play Centre's Inclusion or Advocacy Service for a young person to access a local youth group or even just go shopping or to the cinema.

Conclusion

The Fun Days have been a success and of enormous value for finding out what it is that children, young people and parents want out of a project like this. While the attendance has not been high this gives us new avenues to pursue in finding out how we can best provide Saturday Activities for disabled children and young people while ensuring that parents get a proper break (ie not having to worry about their child's care needs).

The consultation process has really just begun and through regular contact with the children and young people accessing this service and through steering groups we hope to remain aware of the whole family's needs. What is clear is that parents of disabled children have concerns

about leaving their children in an unfamiliar environment and understandably want to protect their children.

The success of this project depends on us being able to work flexibly and creatively with families individually to ensure that we can meet their needs. These families are desperate to receive a service, from the Parents need for respite to the child's need to explore social relationships, gain independence and confidence, be somewhere they can play freely and above all have the kind of Saturdays **they** want.

Martin King-Sheard
Development Worker (Saturday Activities)