



- Play is crucial to disabled children’s learning and development
- Toyhouse Libraries improve access to toys and play in Tower Hamlets
- Private funding will allow it to grow its mobile and soft play services
- NPC views this as a way to enhance access to play for disabled children

Issue: Play is crucial to disabled children’s learning and development

There are 700,000 disabled children in the UK. Many are excluded from accessing play and leisure facilities that other children enjoy. This is a major cause of loneliness and frustration in their lives. There are many barriers that prevent disabled children from activities:

- Lack of appropriate equipment and toys, due to high costs, plus a lack of local information on services. This is exacerbated in Tower Hamlets.
- Physical inaccessibility to play groups, play grounds and other facilities.
- Too few staff to meet the additional support needs of disabled children.
- Negative staff attitudes, due to lack of training and support.

Overcoming these barriers will provide disabled children with immensely valuable opportunities to play, make friends, learn and develop. At the same time, the children’s families are often isolated and excluded from activities such as play grounds and activity centres. This can result in family breakdown, and often means little social contact with other families. Providing play services for entire families and services in homes, where appropriate, reduces their sense of isolation.



Many disabled children cannot access play and leisure facilities.

Case study:

Child B, an only child, has been coming with his mother to the Family Play Project (FPP) on Saturday mornings for two years. He was referred to the project because he has communication difficulties due to his autism.

In the beginning, B stayed very close to his mother but after a while he began making friends with his peers and used a larger area to play in. He is now very confident in his play, both inside and outside the project. He has benefited from the opportunity for ‘big muscle’ play that FPP affords. B has built a strong friendship group, and his communication skills have developed considerably.

B’s mother is very positive about the sessions. She feels that B has benefited enormously from being in a safe environment that is well-resourced, and where he can develop his social skills.

For herself, FPP has been beneficial too. B’s mother has had fun making friends with other parents and has enjoyed being able to share experiences, and exchange information, about having a child with special needs.

Response: Toyhouse Libraries improves access to toys and play in Tower Hamlets

Toyhouse Libraries Association of Tower Hamlets was established in 1979 and has grown to provide many services including:

- **Soft play:** weekly play sessions in community centres provide opportunities for around 30 families with young disabled children to play together in a safe, soft, environment (see box).
- **Mobile services:** affordable (20p a toy per month) toy lending service for families with disabled children. Vans home-deliver a library of appropriate, durable, toys and provide support to around 20 families (see photo).
- **Toy library services:** advice, support workers and coordination of a purchasing group (which researches and buys new toys) for 65 semi-autonomous member toy libraries in schools, children’s centres, community centres and health clinics across the borough.
- **Training:** annual course on toy librarianship as well as in-house training to staff, volunteers, and librarians.

In 2005, 5,092 children (of all abilities) and 2,863 families accessed Toyhouse services. At any one time, 1,906 toys were out on loan. The largest number of child users was Bangladeshi (51%), followed by White UK and Somali. Each week, 338 disabled children, their siblings and parents, accessed Toyhouse services.

Toyhouse Libraries employs 2 full-time and 21 part-time staff, who together speak a dozen languages. In 2005, the charity had a total income of £390,265, the majority of which came from statutory sources (96%). However, most of these sources were grants programmes with uncertain futures. The remainder of its income was made up of a grant from BBC Children In Need, corporate donations and subscription fees.

Results: Private funding will allow it to grow its mobile and soft play services

The benefits of play are extremely important, and are a crucial part of enjoying a happy and fulfilling childhood. Play is a critical part of learning for young children. It helps them develop and express themselves, use their imagination and understand how things work. For older children, leisure helps them build confidence, giving them skills to make friends and develop relationships.

Mobile services illustrate the success Toyhouse Libraries has had with disabled children and their families. The service was initially set up for pre-school children and, following its success, was extended to a Saturday service for primary school children and their siblings. The service costs just over £1,000 per family per annum. Take-up has been overwhelmingly positive, with families reliably being at home at a pre-agreed time. There are now families on a waiting list. The organisation employs a number of bilingual workers to ensure families receive appropriate support and services in their home language. This helps reduce the social isolation of families.

The soft play sessions, which cost around £1,000 per family per annum, also reduce isolation by providing a forum for social interaction with other families (see box). In addition, Toyhouse's paid membership base (£15 per annum) of toy libraries and play services has steadily grown to 85, indicating satisfaction with the support offered.

The number of children accessing services has more than doubled since 2001, despite little marketing by Toyhouse. Further growth is constrained by funding rather than demand.

Feedback from users:

'The thing I like is coming and playing with different people, also it's great fun.'

Soft Play project child

'Soft Play is a great way to start the weekend – it brings us closer together as a family.'

Soft play project Parent

'The children look out for the yellow van and love to climb aboard to choose what they want to borrow today!'

Parent

Geographical coverage

Local National

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Focus of approach

Indiv- Comm- Services Society
idual- unity

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Life stage

Innovation Established
or pilot approach

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Replicability or scalability

Little Considerable
scope scope

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Annual income (£'000s)

2003	2004	2005
374	397	390

Staff

Full-time	Part-time	Volunteer
2	21	35

Recommendation: NPC views this as a way to enhance access to play for disabled children

Toyhouse Libraries is committed to the importance of play in a child's early learning. It runs a Toyhouse Volunteers programme, only employs local people, and provides training and support to ensure future service delivery within communities. Its ability to adapt services to the needs of users is evident in the types of services it provides and how it has evolved eg, the times and languages of services.

Future plans include working with government to establish toy libraries and associated services in children's centres across the borough; relocating to a purpose-built, accessible building, from which family and training services can be offered; and, providing more sessions at times convenient to families (weekends and after hours).

Private funding could allow Toyhouse Libraries to grow their mobile and soft play services. It could also be used to purchase new toys (which they cannot do with statutory money) and realise some of these future plans. Specifically:

- £26,000 per annum could double the number of families benefiting from the Saturday mobile services (up to 40) by doubling the hours of the service.
- £26,000 could also double the capacity of the Saturday soft play sessions.
- £800 would buy 40 new toys that are suitable for disabled children.
- £30,000 would contribute to the fit-out of the new accessible building.

NPC views this as a low risk way of improving access to toys and play for disabled children in Tower Hamlets.

Toyhouse Libraries Association has a simple model that delivers more play opportunities for children in Tower Hamlets.

New Philanthropy Capital (NPC) is a charity that advises all types of donors on how to ensure their money has high impact. This document describes one of the charities recommended by NPC in its report on disabled children and their families in the UK. For more information see our report *Ordinary lives* at www.philanthropycapital.org.

To discuss this or any of our other recommendations, please contact Harry Charlton on 020 7785 6309.

Last revised on 14/02/2006. Cathy Langerman.

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Glossary

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Funding needed	amount or range of funding required
Results	impact of this charity's work on people's lives – NPC looks at results in terms of three dimensions: Breadth – number of people affected Depth – intensity of results for each individual affected (greatest depth means a life-saving intervention; lowest means a minor interaction) Change – degree of systemic change brought about by this work; equivalently whether it tackles causes (high) or treats symptoms (low)
Risk	level of risk threatening the delivery of specified results
Difficulty of fundraising	level of difficulty associated with fundraising for this charity (may be due to unpopularity of field of work or lack of fundraising capacity)

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Geographical coverage	charity's area of work – local, regional or national – or a number of these levels
Focus of approach	main groups with which the charity works: Individual – working directly with individuals, providing services and support to improve their quality of life Community – working with communities and/or families, providing activities to strengthen community life Services – working with organisations, funders and policymakers to improve services Society – working at a national level to change attitudes and tackle causes
Life stage	organisation's developmental stage – from pilot/start-up to mature, established organisation
Replicability or scalability	potential for replication of the charity's model, or growth of the charity itself

Good giving principles

- **Pro-active selection of charities based on results:** Donors should support charities that are achieving excellent results for the people that they serve, rather than charities that have the most effective and professional fundraising teams or the lowest administrative costs (all organisations need administrative costs in order to be effective; low admin costs may in fact be a sign of an inefficient organisation).
 - **'Light touch' engagement with charities:** In most instances we recommend that donors minimise the demands on the time and resources of the charities they fund. In practice, this means not imposing arduous reporting requirements and limiting visits and contact with charities.
 - **Funding organisations, not projects:** As a donor, it is tempting to stipulate that a grant can only be used for a particular project, because this makes it much easier to see the direct charitable impact of the donation. However, we believe that this practice can limit the impact of the donation. Firstly, it may cause charities to propose projects that meet the donor's objectives but which stray from their core mission. Secondly, if circumstances change then charities are unable to respond. We believe that the charities we recommend can and should be trusted to make decisions in the best interests of the people they serve, and so in general we recommend that donors fund organisations, not projects. Practically, this means giving unrestricted funding.
 - **'Just right' donations - not too big, not too small:** Judging the right size for a donation to a charity is an art, not a science. If a donation is too big, there is a risk that rapid growth will create significant organisational problems, particularly when the donation runs out. At the other end of the scale, if a donor makes a small donation and requires a charity to go through application and reporting processes then the administrative burden may outweigh the benefit of the donation. Of course, small donations with no strings attached are always welcomed by charities. Our researchers work with charities to understand their financial needs, and recommend a suitable size for a donation. In general, we work on an assumption that contributing more than a third of an organisation's annual income may create problems. However, if a charity is looking to grow significantly and it has a robust strategy for growth, a larger grant may be entirely appropriate.
 - **Multi-year support:** We recommend that donors should provide multi-year support for charities, rather than giving them a lump sum in a single year. Choosing the right length for a grant depends on the specific case – as a guide, grant-making trusts often give three-year grants. Multi-year support gives charity leaders the opportunity to make long term plans to improve their organisations and build projects that will create and sustain improvements in the lives of the people they serve. It also allows donors to build longer-term relationships with the charities, if they wish.
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