



## LOWER SHANKILL RESIDENTS VOICE

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# THE RIGHT TO PLAY FINAL PROGRESS REPORT

## INTRODUCTION

On 12th February 2009, children and adults from the Lower Shankill in Belfast hosted a pioneering event on children's rights. The event, entitled *When Kids Decide: Realising the Right to Play in the Lower Shankill*, highlighted concrete barriers to children's right to play in their community.

The children and adults presented evidence about these obstacles to local and international experts on children's rights. These included Dr. Jan Van Gils, Chair of the European Child Friendly Cities Network and President of the International Council of Children's Play, Ms Patricia Lewsley, Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, and Jacqueline O'Loughlin, CEO of PlayBoard.

The specific issues chosen by the children and parents, called human rights indicators, were as follows:

- Broken glass throughout the community;
- Broken lighting in formal play areas and parks;
- Cleanliness of play areas;
- Speed of traffic;
- Access to facilities for teenagers and young adults;
- Access to facilities for children with special needs; and
- Participation of children and parents in decisions related to play.

Local policy and international human rights standards already require all of these issues to be addressed by the government, specifically the Department for Social Development through the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the Department for Regional Development through the Roads Service, the Department of Education through the Belfast Education and Library Board and the Department of the Environment through Belfast City Council, specifically the Parks and Cleansing Services, each of which is accountable for specific indicators as noted throughout. The Office of the First and Deputy First Minister have overall responsibility for the area of play, children and young people and equality.

At the event, the group also set benchmarks for improvement in line with policy standards.

In August 2009, the Lower Shankill Residents' Voice released its first Progress Report, which indicated improvements on two indicators (lighting and access to facilities for teenagers and young adults); however, the other benchmarks for progress had not been met. The group received national attention when they launched their 'Walking on Broken Glass' Campaign at the time of the first Progress Report.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2010, THE LSRV members met with OFMDFM Junior Ministers Robin Newton and Gerry Kelly at Stormont Castle to present the results of their latest round of monitoring detailed in their 2<sup>nd</sup> Progress Report, which was released in March 2010.

Following presentations from the group, the Junior Ministers committed OFMDFM to working with the group on their human rights indicators and benchmarks through the Lower Shankill Monitoring Group. The LSMG has convened twice since then (10 March and 24 May 2010) to provide relevant statutory bodies and government departments opportunity to report on their efforts to progress the seven indicators. The Monitoring Group also provides a mechanism through which we as residents can meaningfully participate in decisions made about our community.

This third and final Progress Report outlines the results from the final round of monitoring completed in March 2010. Here are the latest results.



# Human Rights Indicator #1

## Broken Glass in the Community

For their first indicator, children and adults identified the presence of BROKEN GLASS throughout Lower Shankill as an issue which required immediate attention. This broken glass is especially prevalent in areas where children play.

### Policy Standard

“Child’s right to play space is especially at risk in many urban environments, where...noise, pollution and all manner of dangers [combine] to create a hazardous environment for young children.”

– UN CRC General Comment No. 7

### Who is accountable?

The Department for Social Development through the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Department of the Environment through Belfast City Council (both Parks and Cleansing Departments) have responsibility for progressing this indicator. OFMDFM has overarching responsibility for all issues connected to play, children and young people and equality.

### How was this monitored?

This indicator has been monitored MONTHLY by children and adult residents at 25 sites across the Lower Shankill in or near places where children play. As evidence they took photos and completed a checklist to record the presence or absence of broken glass at each site.

	Baseline Jan 09	March 09	April/May 09	June 09	Oct 09	March 10
<b>Benchmark</b>	-	20	20	10	10	10
<b>% of sites with broken glass</b>	80	72	68	64	71	60

In August 2009, the Lower Shankill Residents’ Voice launched the **‘Walking on Broken Glass’ Campaign<sup>1</sup>** to raise the profile of this issue and put pressure on those responsible for addressing it. The campaign attracted considerable local and regional press and media coverage, including numerous radio and television interviews with adult and child LSRV members. Despite this, broken glass was found on 60% of sites at the end of the monitoring

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the ‘Walking on Broken Glass’ Campaign see [www.youtube.com/PPRProject](http://www.youtube.com/PPRProject)



period. While this represents a reduction from the baseline set in January 2009, it is clear that broken glass remains a significant danger in the Lower Shankill, creating a hazardous environment for children's play. Moreover, and crucially, the benchmark set by the group is



not even close to being met.

### **What needs to be done now?**

The Lower Shankill has been blighted for decades by the remnants of housing which was demolished and never replaced; broken glass is particularly prone to accumulate on what were once walkways along streets which no longer exist. Not surprisingly, responsibility for cleansing these walkways, which now divide grassy areas where children play, is often unclear. This has proven a major obstacle to resolving the problem of broken glass.

Information provided to the Lower Shankill Monitoring Group by the NIHE Grounds Maintenance Supervisor and local Belfast City Council Cleansing Services managers should help ascertain ownership of those areas which seem to residents to never be cleansed. LSRV members also are working with NIHE inspectors and BCC enforcement officers to identify broken glass 'black spots' and develop methods for ensuring that children, pets and other residents are no longer put at risk. LSRV members recently undertook a 'walkabout' with the relevant authorities to identify ownership of sites in the Lower Shankill which have been monitored by the group so that the appropriate duty bearer can be held accountable for the broken glass in each site. Although this work to identify ownership, and through this, accountability, has begun, this must be matched by action to rectify the problem. Towards this end LSRV makes the following recommendations:

- Following identification of areas for which they are responsible, the relevant duty bearers must make concrete moves to clean up these areas and keep them clean in line with their international human rights obligations. This action should be reported to the Lower Shankill Monitoring Group.
- In addition to the relevant Departments, Belfast City Council, Belfast Education and Library Board and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive should be conscious of their further obligation under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to make the contents of the Convention widely known to adults and children alike.<sup>2</sup>- This could include undertaking initiatives with local schools and businesses, including pubs, clubs and off-licenses, to increase awareness of the dangers of broken glass and how this impedes the child's right to play.

Finally, the experience of many local youth workers who work with LSRV bears out academic research which suggests that much of the anti-social behavior which adds to problems such as that of broken glass in the Lower Shankill, is a result of under-resourcing for detached youth work and other youth service provision. LSRV calls on the relevant duty bearers to engage with the community to find creative solutions to improve the situation of young teens. Particularly, **LSRV supports the call from other groups in the Lower Shankill for the installation of floodlighting at the Dover Street all-weather pitch, so that its hours of use can be extended and its value as a resource for local children and young people is enhanced.**

Given the extent of the problem currently, the group is likely to retain this issue when the next set of indicators is selected for monitoring in 2011.

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<sup>2</sup> UN CRC Article 42: "State Parties undertake to make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike."



# Human Rights Indicator #2

## Lights working in parks

For their second indicator, children and adults chose the issue of broken lighting in parks and playgrounds in the Lower Shankill. Children cannot play safely if the lighting in these areas is damaged or not working. It is also more difficult for parents to supervise their children under these conditions.

### Policy Standard

“Lighting in certain areas of a park is essential for safety, especially of children at nighttime: whilst the application of lighting also plays a major role in helping to deter many forms of anti-social behaviour in outdoor locations.” –Official Lighting Guide, Belfast City Council.

“Child’s right to play space is especially at risk in many urban environments, where...noise, pollution and all manner of dangers [combine] to create a hazardous environment for young children.” – UN CRC General Comment No. 7

### Who is accountable?

The Department of the Environment through Belfast City Council (Parks and Cleansing sections) is responsible for progressing this indicator together with OFMDFM which has overarching responsibility for all issues connected to play, children and young people and equality.

### How was this monitored?

This indicator has been monitored MONTHLY by children and adult residents who record the number of working lights in Hammer Park, Dover Street (Millennium) Park and Brown Square Park.

	Baseline Jan 09	March	April/May 09	June 09	July 09	Oct 09	March 10
<b>Benchmark</b>	-	80	80	80	90	90	90
<b>% of lights working in parks and playgrounds</b>	32	35	96	96	96	92	89

When baselines were set in February 2009, only 32% of the lights were working in the Lower Shankill’s playgrounds and parks. In response to pressure from the group, by April this figure had risen to 96%, and remained well above the benchmark for the next three months.



By October of last year, however, the figure had begun to decline, and when last monitored (in March 2010), the percentage of working lights had fallen to 89%. While this figure is just shy of the benchmark set for the period, residents are concerned by the steady decline in performance since July 2009.



### What needs to be done?

Belfast City Council's Principal Parks and Cemeteries Development Manager addressed the meeting of the Lower Shankill Monitoring Group in May, and has subsequently provided additional information in response to further questions from residents. The group makes the following recommendation:

- **Belfast City Council Parks staff should introduce, and Parks Committee approve, policy requiring ALL new light installations in parks and play areas in the Lower Shankill and throughout the city to be CAGED to protect them from malicious damage. LSRV feels that this measure would not only protect the investment made by the Council in installing and maintaining new lights but also help to ensure that Council remains fully committed to fulfilling its obligation to promote, protect and fulfill the right to play. Moreover, this measure would help ensure that retrogression doesn't occur, i.e., that the situation does not worsen.**

# Human Rights Indicator #3

## Cleanliness of Play Areas

For their third indicator, children and adults chose cleanliness of play areas in the Lower Shankill. Cleanliness relates directly to the accessibility of facilities for children. If an area is unclean, not only is it unattractive, but it creates physical barriers and presents potential risks to children attempting to realise their right to play.

### Policy Standards

“Play areas in the Lower Shankill area of Belfast are cleaned daily.”  
–Belfast City Council response to Freedom of Information Request from the group.

“Child’s right to play space is especially at risk in many urban environments, where...noise, pollution and all manner of dangers [combine] to create a hazardous environment for young children.” – UN CRC General Comment No. 7

### Who is accountable?

The Department of the Environment through Belfast City Council (Parks and Cleansing sections) is responsible for progressing this indicator, together with OFMDFM which has overarching responsibility for all issues connected to play, children and young people and equality.

### How was this monitored?

This indicator has been monitored MONTHLY by child and adult residents using a checklist to record whether or not there is rubbish on the ground or graffiti on the equipment in each of the three play areas in the Lower Shankill. Local views of the cleanliness of these areas also were monitored twice during the monitoring period by surveying children and adults.

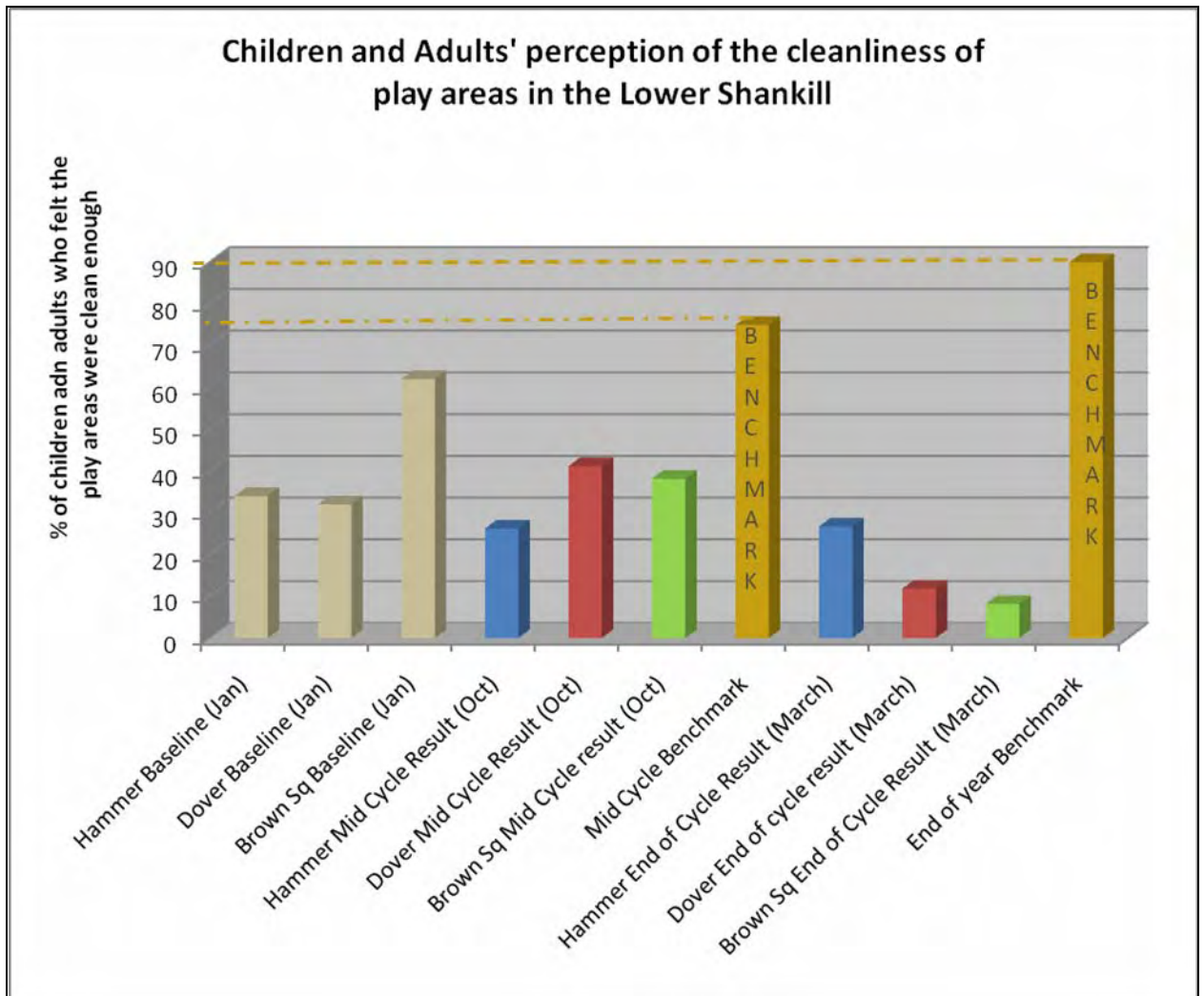
### MONTHLY MONITORING

	Baseline (Feb 2009)	Apr/May 2009	June 2009	Sept/Oct 2009	Mar 2010
<b>Hammer Play Area</b>	Broken glass in play area Rubbish around equipment Rubbish in open areas Graffiti on equipment <i>(note: bottles and rubbish on grassy area)</i>	NO RUBBISH in play area or pitch  A lot of Graffiti on equipment	Some rubbish  Graffiti on equipment	Rubbish around the equipment and graffiti on the walls	NO BROKEN GLASS, NO RUBBISH, NO GRAFFITI ON THE EQUIPMENT
<b>Dover Play Area</b>	Broken glass in play area  Rubbish around equipment	NO RUBBISH in play area or pitch NO GRAFFITI on equipment for small children	Rubbish, especially around the play area.  NO	Some rubbish around the equipment.  Graffiti on the equipment	NO BROKEN GLASS OR GRAFFITI on the equipment  Some rubbish



	Rubbish in open areas Very little graffiti	Some graffiti on rocks, etc. <b>No bin in play area!</b>	GRAFFITI on equipment for small children		around the equipment and in the open areas
<b>Brown Square Park</b>	NO GRAFFITI Broken glass in play area Rubbish around equipment Rubbish in open areas	NO GRAFFITI NO RUBBISH in play area. Some rubbish in open area	NO RUBBISH IN PLAY AREA OR IN OPEN AREA NO GRAFFITI	NO GRAFFITI NO RUBBISH IN PLAY AREA. NO RUBBISH IN OPEN AREA	Rubbish in the open areas and chewing gum litters the play park, especially under the play equipment

**RESIDENT SURVEY RESULTS**



	Baseline	Oct 09	March 2010
	Jan 09	Benchmark: 75%	Benchmark: 90%
Hammer	34%	26.2%	26.69%
Dover	32%	41.15%	11.83%
Brown Sq	62%	38.15%	8.13%



Results of the latest round of monitoring suggest that rubbish collection and graffiti removal in Lower Shankill play areas have improved since baselines were set in February 2009. When last monitored in March 2010, graffiti, broken glass or other rubbish were not found in Hammer Park, nor was broken glass or graffiti found in Dover Park.

Despite this, public perception continues to be that play areas in the Lower Shankill are not clean enough. In fact, the percentage of residents satisfied with the level of cleanliness in all three parks has fallen since local opinion was first surveyed in February 2009. The most dramatic drop has been in relation to Brown Square, which only 8% of those surveyed in March 2010 felt was clean enough.

### What needs to be done?

Information provided to the Lower Shankill Monitoring Group by Belfast City Council's Principal Parks and Cemeteries Development Manager (by email, 9<sup>th</sup> August 2010) indicates that litter is collected from Council-run play areas daily, though 'fly-tipping' can take up to 2 weeks to remove. Similarly, damaged play equipment is repaired and graffiti removed within one day if classed as a priority, while routine repairs and the removal of non-priority graffiti are carried out within 10 days.

The group makes the following recommendations:

- **Belfast City Council should ensure that graffiti and rubbish are removed from play areas within the timescale set out in BCC guidelines.**

- **Belfast City Council should ensure that rubbish bins are available (and regularly emptied) in all three parks in the Lower Shankill. LSRV also urges Council to consider the introduction of recycling containers in Hammer Park.**

Young adult members of LSRV also note the lack of play provision for their age group in Council-run play areas in the Lower Shankill. To this end LSRV feels that the relevant duty bearers should engage in constructive dialogue with them and other community members to ensure that age-appropriate play and leisure opportunities are provided so that the right to play is made real for all.

The group will explore this and other suggestions for improving the safety of Hammer Park further in the coming months.



# Human Rights Indicator #4

## Speed of Traffic

The speed of traffic in the Lower Shankill, particularly in places close to where children play, has been a long standing concern of area residents.

### Policy Standards

“We will work to create a fairer society and look after our most disadvantaged by...reducing by 33% the overall number of people, and by 50% the number of children killed or seriously injured on our roads by 2012.”  
–NI Programme for Government 2008-2011

“Child’s right to play space is especially at risk in many urban environments, where...noise, pollution and all manner of dangers [combine] to create a hazardous environment for young children.” – UN CRC General Comment No. 7

### Who is accountable?

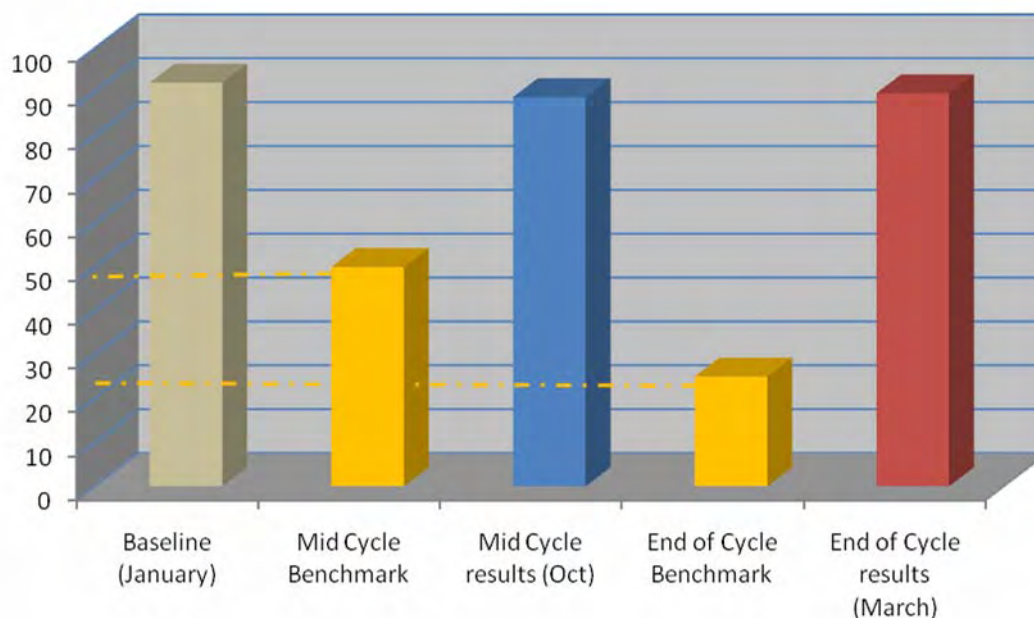
The Department for Regional Development through the Roads Service as well as OFMDFM which has overarching responsibility for all issues connected to play, children and young people and equality.

### How was this monitored?

Local perception of the speed of traffic in the Lower Shankill was monitored twice during the monitoring period through a survey. Additionally, following the implementation of a traffic calming scheme on Shankill Parade, Denmark Street and North Boundary Street in March/April 2009, the group carried out a short survey of adults and children living on or near these roads to test how effective the traffic calming scheme appeared to be in protecting children from passing cars and lorries. The indicator is based on the children’s views of the speed of traffic.



**% of children who feel traffic goes too fast in the Lower Shankill**



	<b>Baseline January 2009</b>	<b>October 2009</b>	<b>March 2010</b>
<b>Benchmark</b>	-	50%	25%
<b>% of children who feel traffic goes too fast</b>	92%	88.7%	89.6%

In February 2009, 92% of children surveyed felt that traffic in the Lower Shankill was going too fast. By October 2009, the percentage of children who felt traffic in the area was going too fast had fallen only slightly, to just under 89%; five months later (March 2010), it had actually *risen* to just under 90%. These statistics are all the more startling given the recent publication by the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee which concludes that “Child pedestrians from the most deprived areas remain four times more likely to be killed or injured on the roads than those from the least deprived areas” and that “speed is an overwhelming factor in the incidence and severity of injuries.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> House of Commons Public Accounts Committee (October 2009), “Improving road safety for pedestrians and cyclists in Great Britain” HC 665, page 5.





### What needs to be done?

Information provided by the Roads Service in response to a request from the Lower Shankill Monitoring Group indicates that the traffic calming scheme introduced in March/April 2009 has succeeded in significantly reducing the volume and average speed of traffic travelling along North Boundary Street. Despite this, the community's view of the problem remains virtually unchanged.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2010, members of the Lower Shankill Monitoring Group and the Lower Shankill Community Association (LSCA) met with representatives from Roads Service's Parking Enforcement Management and Traffic Management units at Tennent Street PSNI station, during which a number of issues were raised. Since then, Lower Shankill residents and community workers have been working with the PSNI and Roads Service to address those concerns.

LSRV intends to continue to monitor this issue and will develop a specific focus on identified 'black spots' where the problem is particularly bad as well as liaising with the relevant stakeholders. To this end, the group recommends that:

- **The Roads Service, as a statutory agency of the Department for Regional Development, take concrete steps towards improving the situation relating to speed of traffic in the Lower Shankill, whether this be through the introduction of traffic calming humps or other measures. Any action should be delivered through the meaningful participation of residents in the area, including children.**

- While information provided to LSRV by the Roads Service indicates that speed of traffic has decreased in recent months, this has not been matched by the children's perception and the reasons for this should be examined.
- Immediate action should be taken to prevent the further worsening of the situation and the retrogression of progress towards meeting the benchmark set out by the group.
- The monitoring of the effectiveness of the traffic calming humps in the Denmark Street/Boundary Street area which were installed last year should engage those residents who have been directly affected by the issue and any proposed further measures of vehicle speeds should be carried out in conjunction with LSRV.



# Human Rights Indicator #5

## Access to Facilities for Young People

For their fifth indicator, LSRV focused on access to the only free, public youth facility in the Lower Shankill – the Hammer Youth Resource Centre on Agnes Street. This centre is designed for teenagers and young adults. It is a multi-million pound facility run by the BELB and should play a pivotal role in ensuring local young people have access to recreation and play in a structured and organised environment – and yet, when baselines were set in March 2009, it was open only one night per week.

### Policy Standard

“Yet, realising the right to rest, leisure and play is often hindered by a shortage of opportunities to meet, play and interact in child-centered, secure, supportive, stimulating and stress free environments.”

–UN CRC General Comment No.7, para 34.

### Who is accountable?

The Department of Education through the Belfast Education and Library Board has responsibility for this indicator, together with OFMDFM which has overarching responsibility for all issues connected to play, children and young people and equality.

### How was this monitored?

This indicator has been monitored MONTHLY through direct contact with Hammer Resource Centre staff who updated LSRV members about ongoing developments in the Centre’s opening schedule and programmes. Public perception of the Hammer’s accessibility also was monitored twice during the monitoring period through a survey of both parents with teenaged or young adult children, and of young people themselves.

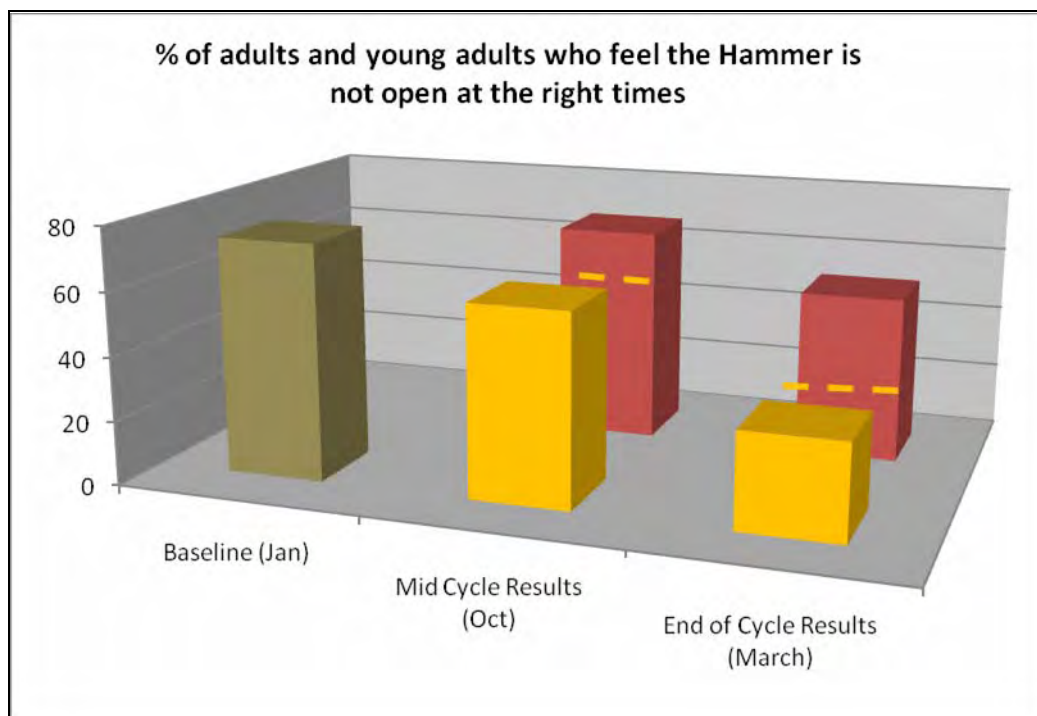
### MONTHLY MONITORING

Hammer Youth Resource Center (Access for Teens & Young Adults)	
BASELINE: March 2009	Open 1 night per week
April/May 2009	Open 2 nights per week Plans to open for 5 nights a week in near future.
June 2009	Engagement with BELB: <b>Officially agreed to open 5 nights / week as an open youth facility</b> Current plan: open 3 nights / week by September Open 4 nights / week by December. Open 5 nights / week by January.
October 2009	<b>Hammer now open 4 nights a week as follows:</b> Mon/Wed: Kids Club 3pm – 5pm for ages 5 – 11 Mon/Tues/Wed: Youth Club 6.30 – 9.30pm for



	<p>ages 12+</p> <p>Thurs: Football Coaching 5 – 7pm for ages 5 – 9</p> <p>Thurs: Judo 7pm – 9.30pm for all ages</p> <p><b>Centre will be open 5 nights per week by December hopefully</b></p>
<b>March 2010</b>	<p><b>Hammer now open four nights per week with plans to open five nights a week by the end of the month.</b></p> <p><b>New programme added on Friday nights which targets 16+ year olds and is linked to a programme of detached outreach.</b></p>

### SURVEY RESULTS



	<b>Baseline Jan 2009</b>	<b>Oct 09</b>	<b>March 2010</b>
<b>Benchmark</b>	-	60%	30%
% of parents who feel Hammer not open at the	74%	67.9%	52.17%



right times			
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The Hammer Resource Centre currently offers Centre-based programmes 4 nights a week (Monday – Thursday). It is also open on Fridays, when it supports a programme of street-based, detached youth work, through which Centre staff members engage with ‘hard-to-reach’ youth in the places where they congregate and encourage them to use the Centre. Despite this, the percentage of parents who feel the Hammer is not open at the right times, whilst having fallen, still does not meet the benchmark set by the group. This requires further examination.

### **What needs to be done?**

LSRV members recognize that not all teenagers and young people in the Lower Shankill will want to use the Hammer Resource Centre, no matter when it’s open or what is on offer there. LSRV welcomes the progress made in increasing quite substantially the opening hours of the centre from one night per week when monitoring began a year ago to five nights per week. However, despite this there has been no progress in the indicator overall, with the percentage of parents who feel that Hammer is open at the right times actually falling over the monitoring period and the benchmark not being met.

LSRV therefore:

- **encourages BELB to undertake an examination into the reasons why, despite significant improvement in opening hours at the Hammer, the views of adults with teenage children in the area as to whether or not the Centre is open at the right times has not improved to the same extent.**



# Human Rights Indicator #6

## Access to Facilities for Children with special needs

Because play areas perform a social as well as a recreational function, formal play areas should be sites which all children in the community can access equally. Properly equipped, such play areas can fulfill an important role in ensuring that children with disabilities and special needs are fully included in the life of the community. For this reason, residents chose access to facilities with special needs as their sixth indicator.

### Policy Standard

“The attainment of full inclusion of children with disabilities in the society is realised when children are given the opportunity, places and time to play with each other (children with disabilities and no disabilities).” –UN CRC General Comment 9, para 70.

The United Kingdom needs to “strengthen its efforts to guarantee the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child...[with] particular attention to provide children, including those with disabilities with adequate and accessible playground spaces to exercise their play and leisure activities.” –Concluding Observations on the CRC for the United Kingdom (3 October 2008)

### Who is accountable?

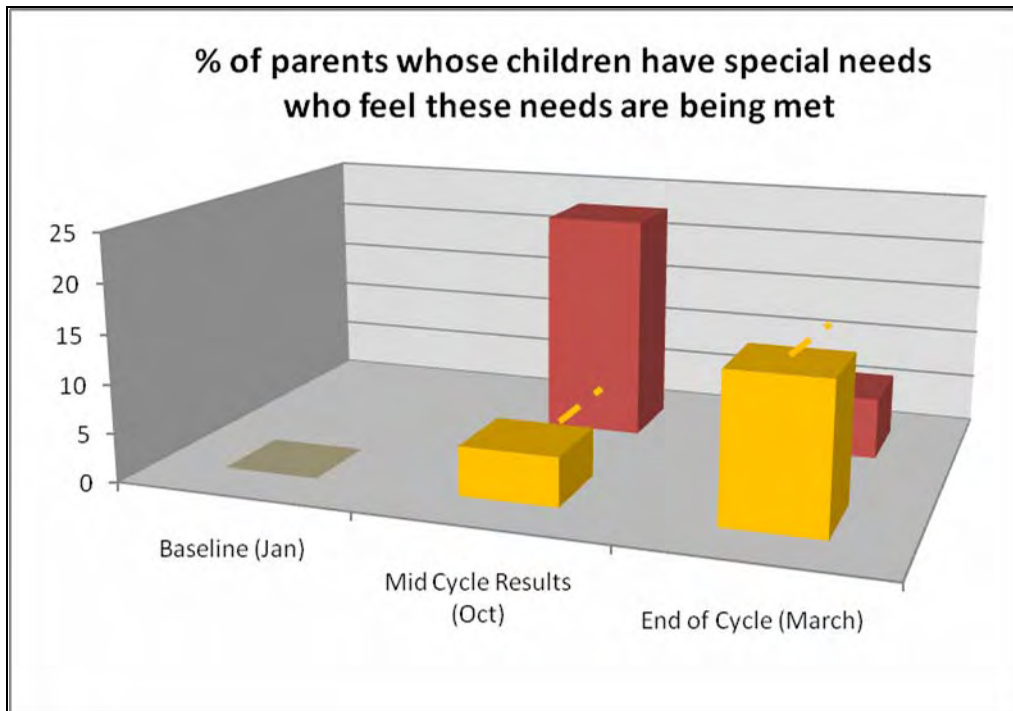
The Department of the Environment through Belfast City Council (Parks and Cleansing Services sections) is responsible for progressing this indicator, together with OFMDFM which has overarching responsibility for all issues connected to play, children and young people and equality.

### How was this monitored?

This indicator was monitored twice during the study period, through a survey which assessed the opinion of parents with children who have special needs. The survey asked parents how well the play areas in their communities meet the needs of their children.



**SURVEY RESULTS**



	<b>BASELINE Jan 2009</b>	<b>Oct 09</b>	<b>March 2010</b>
<b>BENCHMARK</b>	-	5%	15%
<b>% of parents whose children have special needs who feel local play areas meet those needs</b>	0%	23%	6.25%





Residents anticipated that this indicator could be the most difficult to progress. When baselines were set in February 2009, NONE (0%) of the parents with children with special needs who were surveyed in the Lower Shankill thought that local play areas met their children's needs.

By October 2009, however, almost a quarter (23%) of those parents surveyed felt that the play areas in the Lower Shankill were meeting the special needs of their children – even though no adaptations or any additional equipment had been introduced. While the upsurge is curious, it may reflect increasing awareness of ArtAbility, whose Agnes Street premises began to be renovated around this time. Whatever the explanation, by the end of the monitoring period parental satisfaction with local play provision for special needs children had declined significantly to just over 6%. In other words, virtually all the progress that was initially made towards this indicator has been lost in the final six months of the monitoring period.

#### **What needs to be done?**

The lack of provision for children with special needs was identified as a major concern for Lower Shankill residents when they first began exploring the potential of a human rights based approach more than two years ago. Since then, there has been no significant improvement in that provision.

Addressing the meeting of the Lower Shankill Monitoring Group on 24<sup>th</sup> May, Belfast City Council's Principal Park & Cemeteries Development Manager described how responding to the demands of one community can raise expectations amongst residents in another. While one or two sites are being considered for a possible pilot scheme through which special needs play equipment might be introduced, it has proven difficult, the Monitoring Group was told, to justify the selection of one location over another. While Lower Shankill residents appreciate the challenges of implementation, ensuring that the right to play is real FOR ALL CHILDREN is an obligation which all states bodies are required to meet.

LSRV therefore makes the following recommendations:

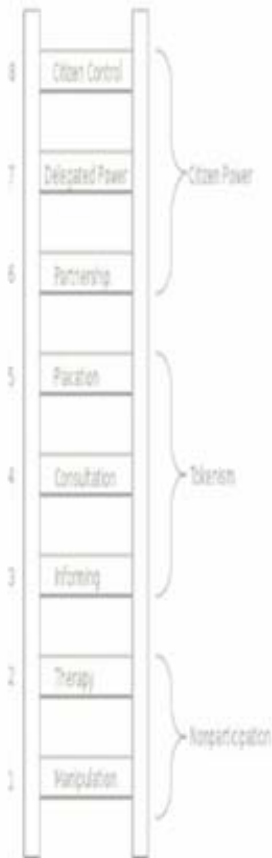
- **Belfast City Council should engage directly with special needs children and their parents in the Lower Shankill. Special needs children and their parents must be centrally involved in identifying what is wrong with existing facilities and how their needs can be addressed.**
- **In preparation for and in parallel with this initiative, Belfast City Council should explore currently available play equipment not just for the physically disabled but for those with learning and behavioural development disorders such as ADHD, autism and Down's Syndrome.**



# Human Rights Indicator #7

## Participation of Children and Parents in decisions about play

For their final indicator, adults and children chose the participation of children and parents in decision-making about play. Having an active and meaningful role in decisions made about your life is an essential human right. This applies as much to the right to play as it does to other human rights issues such as housing, work, education, and health. Children and parents from the Lower Shankill should be able to actively and meaningfully participate in designing, developing, and evaluating decisions about play in their community.



### Policy Standard

“If consultation is to be meaningful, documents as well as processes need to be made accessible. But appearing to ‘listen’ to children is relatively unchallenging: giving due weight to their views requires a real change.”

-UN CRC General Comment No. 5, para 12.

### Who is accountable?

The Department for Social Development through the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the Department for Regional Development through the Roads Service, the Department of Education through the Belfast Education and Library Board, and the Department of the Environment through Belfast City Council, specifically the Parks and Cleansing Services sections all bear responsibility for the participation of children and parents in decisions about play. The Office of the First and Deputy First Minister have overall responsibility for the areas of play, children and young people and equality and so too are accountable when monitoring levels of participation in decisions made about play.

### How was this monitored?

Adults, children and young people who live in the area were asked in surveys conducted by the group how involved they felt in decisions made about play in their community. Children were asked if they had been asked about their play areas and adults were asked to rate their involvement in decisions made about play.

While the percentage of children who feel involved in decision making is virtually unchanged, there has been substantial decrease in the percentage of parents who feel they are not involved at all in play-related decision making, possibly as a result of the work of LSRV, which both sought their views through its surveys of residents, and reported the results of those surveys through a community newsletter, two editions of which were distributed door-to-door to every household in the Lower Shankill during the monitoring period.

		<b>BASELINE January 2009</b>	<b>October 2009</b>	<b>March 2009</b>
% of Children / Young People who had been asked about their play areas		39.4%	38.1%	39.6%
% of parents who felt				
	Not Involved	89.9%	66.7%	62.5%
	Not Very Involved	7.1%	14.4%	25.0%
	Somewhat Involved	1.0%	16.7%	11.3%
	Very Involved	2.0%	2.2%	1.3%

### **What needs to be done?**

The Lower Shankill Monitoring Group was established by LSRV members to ensure the transparency and accountability of service provision in the Lower Shankill, and to provide a structure through which residents can meaningfully participate in decision making. Composed of four resident members of LSRV of mixed age and gender, the Monitoring Group meets with representatives of Government Departments, statutory agencies and any other relevant bodies concerning LSRV's human rights indicators. Responsibility for representing the LSRV on the Monitoring Group rotates each time the Group convenes in order to provide maximum opportunity for participation by residents.

Monitoring Group meetings are open to all residents of the Lower Shankill and representatives from other groups with an interest in using a rights-based approach to tackling problems in their communities. The purpose of the Monitoring Group is to receive information from service providers and other duty bearers, and to seek clarification with regard to that information, if and when required.

While not the only measure, one way to gauge the degree of residents' participation in play-related decision making is the extent to which duty bearers engage with the Monitoring Group.

This has improved considerably since the Monitoring Group first convened on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2010. The most recent meeting, which took place on 26<sup>th</sup> May, was attended by representatives from the BELB and BCC (Parks & Cemeteries), and Monitoring Group members also were able to review information supplied in advance of the meeting by the NIHE, Roads Service, and BCC (Cleansing Services). OFMDFM did not send a representative or submit information.

To ensure that residents of the Lower Shankill are meaningfully involved in decisions made about their community,



- **LSRV calls on all statutory service providers and duty bearers to continue to liaise with residents through the Lower Shankill Monitoring Group on all issues related to LSRV's human rights indicators and benchmarks.**
- **Given that LSRV is comprised of children, young people and adults from the Lower Shankill area, the group feels that any information it receives from statutory authorities should be presented in a format which is accessible to all its members. This may include child friendly documents as well as materials for the hearing and visually impaired.**





## CONCLUSION

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2010, members of the Lower Shankill Residents' Voice met with OFMDFM Junior Ministers Robin Newton and Gerry Kelly at Stormont Castle to formally request the support of their Office for the group's work. Following presentations from group members, the Junior Ministers, who hold particular responsibility for coordination of policy relating to children and young people, including Play, committed OFMDFM to working with residents on their human rights indicators and benchmarks through the Lower Shankill Monitoring Group. Residents welcomed this commitment and looked forward to a positive and constructive engagement with OFMDFM.

It was therefore disappointing to learn that, according to correspondence received from Martin Campbell (Head of Children's Policy) on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2010, OFMDFM 'will not be in a position to send a representative' to any future meeting of the Monitoring Group, nor have the Junior Ministers been able to name the new Children's Champion who would report to the Monitoring Group. Indeed, it is particularly troubling to the group that the Department with overall responsibility for realising the right to play has refused to take part in constructive engagement with local adults and children about such an important issue. This is especially frustrating when one notes how well the Monitoring Group is operating in other respects and the positive involvement of all the other duty bearers.

Lack of participation by children and parents in decisions related to play has been identified as a major obstacle to right of children from the Lower Shankill to play in their community.

The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister has ultimate responsibility for ensuring that this right is realised. LSRV calls on the Junior Ministers to fulfil that responsibility by appointing a liaison person to attend meetings of the Lower Shankill Monitoring Group and assert the influence of their Office to ensure that statutory agencies are taking concrete steps towards meeting the benchmarks set as required by international human rights law.

In the meantime, participation by Lower Shankill residents in the work of the group continues to grow with over four hundred completed surveys returned throughout the year, over fifty percent of which were from children themselves. New human rights indicators and benchmarks are currently under development, and the next round of monitoring is due to begin early next year. Thanks to the support of Malvern Primary School, which assisted an LSRV recruitment drive earlier this year by permitting group members to present the details of their work to the entire student body, membership in LSRV's Children & Young People's wing is now larger than ever. A parallel programme of outreach to teenagers and young adults in the area has attracted new interest in the work of the group, whose most recent efforts have been informed by contributions from young adult members of the Hammer Youth Club. LSRV members have confidence that with continued constructive engagement from relevant duty bearers, including OFMDFM, the rights of children and adults in the Lower Shankill can be made real.

