

LOWER SHANKILL RESIDENTS' VOICE:

The Right to Play

1st Progress Report

Introduction



Introduction

On 12th February 2009, children and parents from the Lower Shankill area of 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 parents presented evidence on seven specific issues they had chosen in their community 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 in the community;
- Broken lighting in 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.

At the event, the group also set specific benchmarks for these problems to be improved in line with policy standards.

Since the event in February, they have been monitoring these human rights indicators to see if there has been any improvement from the government on the problems in their community. This report details the results of the group's monitoring over the last three months.

Human Rights Indicator #1 Broken Glass in the community.

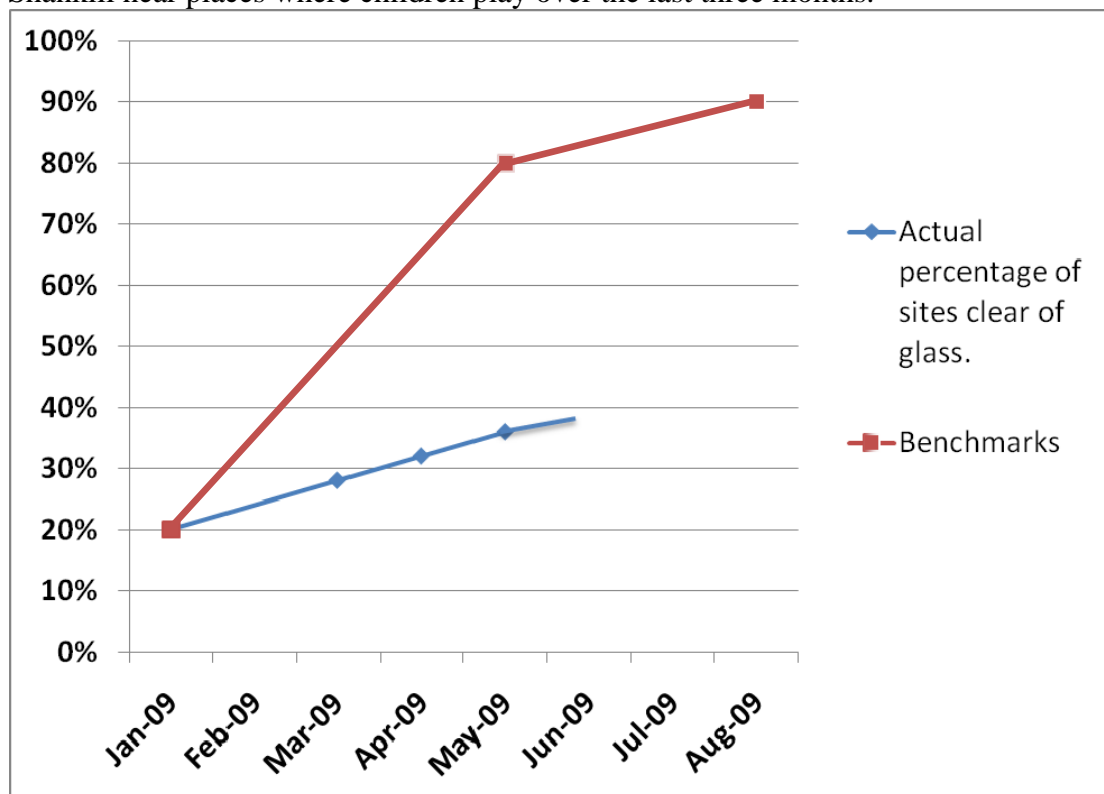
For their first indicator, children and parents identified broken glass that has been left lying across the lower Shankill as an issue which required immediate attention. This broken glass is especially prevalent in areas where children play.

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

How was this monitored?

This indicator is monitored on a monthly basis by children and residents. Using checklists and photographs, they monitored the same 25 sites across the lower Shankill near places where children play over the last three months.



What has been done?

In February 2009, at the time of the group’s event, 80% of these 25 sites had broken glass on them, leaving only 20% free of broken glass. There has been slight improvement on this issue, but children are still left unsafe because of the broken glass. Many of the sites in the community have never cleaned since the group started their monitoring.

The group's benchmark of 20% of sites with glass and 80% free from glass is far from being met.

Despite being told that the issue would be addressed and despite having requested a joint meeting with both Belfast City Council (BCC) and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), the group has not met with them. They have been told by both BCC and NIHE that the problem is that one or the other is not accepting responsibility for the land they own or have responsibility for.

Next Steps

- Belfast City Council & the Northern Ireland Housing Executive should immediately complete a thorough cleaning of the Lower Shankill community – especially the area in and around the Lower Shankill Estate. This must include picking up broken glass. This should be sent to lsrv@live.co.uk and info@pprproject.org.
- Belfast City Council & the Northern Ireland Housing Executive should send a brief update to the Lower Shankill Residents' Voice during the first week of every month. This must include information on when during the month (including the specific dates) that the land they owned was cleaned of broken glass and other hazards.
- Belfast City Council & the Northern Ireland Housing Executive should meet to define who owns what land in the area. Once that is defined, a clearly marked map should be sent directly to the Lower Shankill Residents' Voice.

Human Rights Indicator #2 Lights working in parks and playgrounds.

For their second indicator, children and parents chose the issue of lights not working in parks and playgrounds throughout the Lower Shankill. Children cannot play if the lighting for their areas is damaged or not working. Furthermore it is more difficult for parents to supervise their children in these conditions.

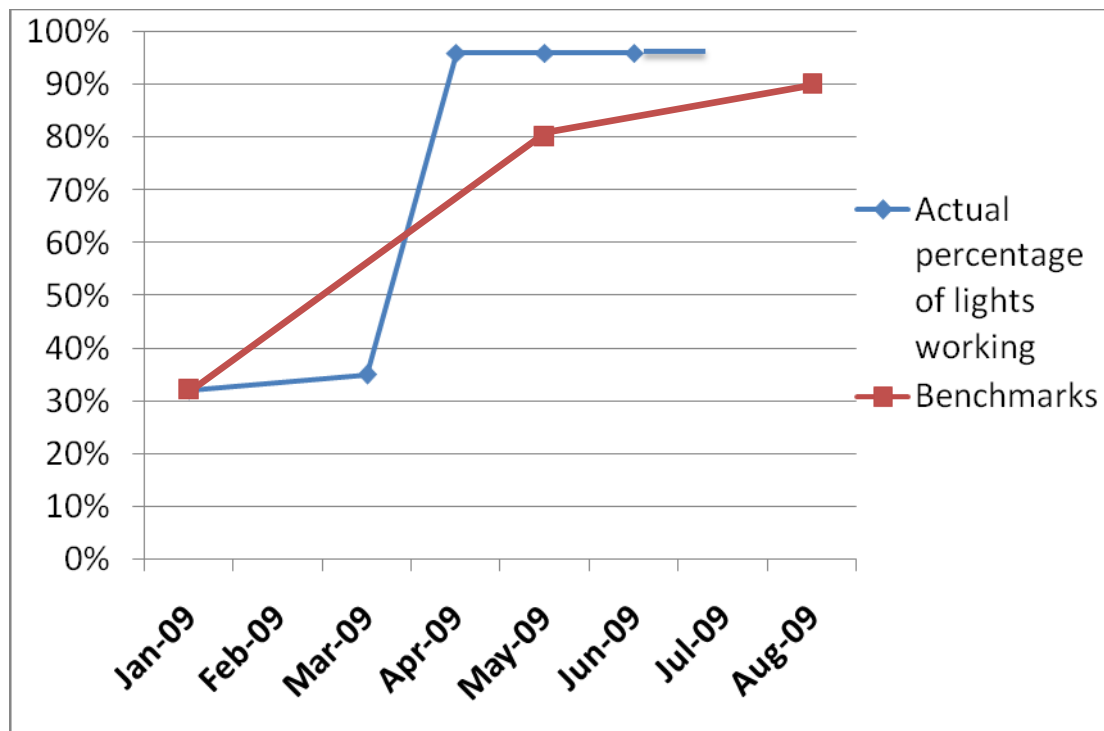
Policy Standards

“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

How is this monitored?

This indicator was monitored on a monthly basis by children and parents in the lower Shankill. Over the last three months, they monitored the percentage of lights working in Hammer Park, Dover Street Park and Brown Square Park.



What has been done?

In February 2009, only 32% of the lights were working in the Lower Shankill's playgrounds and parks. After pressure from the group, 96% were working in June 2009.

Next Steps

- There must be continuous monitoring of lighting in play areas and parks in the Lower Shankill every day. If lighting is not checked (i.e., which bulbs are on and which are not) Belfast City Council will need to do this once per month. Information regarding the above arrangements should be sent by email to lsv@live.co.uk and info@pprproject.org.

Human Rights Indicator #3 Cleanliness of Play Areas

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

How is this monitored?

This indicator is monitored monthly using a checklist. The checklist allows residents and children to monitor whether or not there is rubbish on the ground or graffiti on the equipment. It will be monitored using a survey of parents and children after 6 months of monitoring.

	Baseline (Feb 2009)	April/ 2009	May	June 2009
Hammer Play Area	Broken glass in play area. Rubbish around equipment Rubbish in open areas Graffiti on equipment (note: grassy area covered in bottles and rubbish)	No Rubbish in play area or pitch Much Graffiti on equipment		Some Rubbish. Graffiti on equipment
Dover Play Area	Broken glass in play area. Rubbish around equipment Rubbish in open areas	No Rubbish in play area or pitch No Graffiti on equipment for small children Same graffiti		Rubbish, especially around the play area. No graffiti on equipment for small children

	Very little graffiti	on rocks, etc. No rubbish bin in play area.	
Brown Square Park	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 Graffiti. No Rubbish in play area. No rubbish in open area

What has been done?

In February 2009, surveys found parents and children were not satisfied with the cleanliness of play areas. 34% thought Hammer Play Area was clean enough; 32% thought Dover Street Play Area was clean enough; and 62% thought Brown Square Park was clean enough.

The group has seen improvement since February. Two of the parks have been cleaned of most of their graffiti and they have largely been kept clean of rubbish and glass during the group's monthly monitoring. The group looks forward to seeing the results of the survey that will be carried out at the end of the summer.

Next Steps

- Belfast City Council should ensure that graffiti is removed from the equipment in the Hammer Play Area near Agnes Street within one month.
- Belfast City Council should continue to closely monitor the cleanliness of local play areas both in the Lower Shankill and across Belfast.

Human Rights Indicator #4

Speed of Traffic

For their fourth indicator, parents and children in the Lower Shankill chose the speed of traffic as an issue which required immediate attention. The speed of traffic in the Lower Shankill, particularly in places close to where children play, has been a long standing issue in the community.

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

How is this monitored?

This indicator is monitored every 6 months using a survey of children in the area. However, following the implementation of a traffic calming scheme on Shankill Parade, Denmark Street and North Boundary Street, the group carried out a short survey of parents and children living on or near these roads. They wanted to test how effective the traffic calming scheme was for making children safer from cars and lorries.

Traffic Safety	
June 2009 (interim survey of effectiveness)	44% think traffic calming has made a difference in speed of traffic.
So far...	24% think traffic is going slow enough.
38% surveyed = youth 62% = adults	21% think area is safe for children as a result of traffic calming.

What has been done?

In February 2009, 92% of children surveyed reported that traffic was going too fast. In March and April 2009, a traffic calming scheme was implemented on Shankill Parade, Denmark Street and North Boundary Street. The group plans to seek a meeting with the DRD to discuss the traffic calming effectiveness survey.

Next Steps

- Meeting to be held between Lower Shankill Residents’ Voice and Roads Service to discuss the results of their traffic calming effectiveness survey. Steps must be taken to address these problems.

- Initial study to be carried out for the following streets in the Lower Shankill that run by playgrounds, schools and nurseries:
 - The “rat run” from Shankill Parade to Crumlin Road: Malvern Way, Malvern Street, Hopewell Crescent, Hopewell Avenue.
 - The “rat run” from Northumberland Street to the Shankill Road: Beverly Street, Carlow Street, Cumberland Street, Percy Street, Percy Place, Dover Street.

Human Rights Indicator #5

Access to Facilities for Teenagers and Young Adults

For their fifth indicator, parents and children chose access to facilities for teenagers and young adults as an issue which required immediate attention. They focused their indicator 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. This resource centre is a multi-million pound facility and should play a pivotal role in ensuring local children gain access to recreation and play in a structured and organised environment.

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-centred, secure, supportive, stimulating and stress free environments.”

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

How is this monitored?

This indicator is monitored both through a biannual survey of parents who have children who are teenagers or young adults as well as through monthly monitoring of how often the Hammer Youth Resource Centre is open.

Hammer Youth Resource Center (Access for Teens & Young Adults)	
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	Conversation with BELB. Officially agreed to open 5 nights / week as open youth facility Current plan: open 3 nights / week by September. Open 4 nights / week by December. Open 5 nights / week by January.

What has been done?

In February 2009, 74% of parents with teenagers said they do not use the Hammer Youth Resource Centre because it is not open at the right times. At the time of that survey, the centre was only open 1 night per week.

After pressure from the group and others, there is now an agreement to have the Hammer Youth Resource Centre open 5 nights per week by January 2010. As of today, it is open 2 nights per week. By September 2009, it will be open 3 nights per week. By December 2009, it will be open 4 nights per week.

Next Steps

- The BELB must follow through on its commitment to the timetable describe above and to have the facility open 5 nights per week by January 2010.
- In line with international standards and best practice, children and young people should be involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of programmes available at the Hammer Youth Resource Centre.

Human Rights Indicator #6

Access to Facilities for Children with Special Needs

For their sixth indicator, children and parents chose access to play facilities for children with special needs as needing to be addressed. Designated play areas should be sites which all children in the community can access equally. Additionally, play areas provide a social as well as a recreational function. They fulfil an important role in ensuring the full integration of children with disabilities and special needs into the life of the community.

In February 2009, 0% of parents with children with special needs thought play areas met their children's needs.

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)

Steps Taken By the Group

The group has taken steps to be involved in the regeneration of the Lower Shankill. Throughout these discussions, the needs of children with disabilities will need to be at the forefront.

With Denmark Street Community Centre, the group has also approached GroundworkNI about the building of two new areas for children in the Lower Shankill. Throughout these discussions will be a focus on equal access for children with disabilities at whatever new play facilities are built.

Human Rights Indicator #7

Participation of Children and Parents in Decisions about Play

For their final indicator, parents and children chose the participation of children and parents in decision-making about play as one of the issues that needed to be addressed. Having an active and meaningful role in decisions made about your life is a necessary part of human rights. This applies equally 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 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.

Steps Taken By the Group

As part of their work to address the lack of participation from children and parents in the Lower Shankill, representatives from the group met the Children and Young People’s Unit at the Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister. They are making a number of specific recommendations for the forthcoming Implementation Plans for the Play & Leisure Policy for Northern Ireland.

Standards and requirements for participation in decisions about play must be made more concrete using this policy. A specific set of recommendations is being sent to the Junior Ministers with joint responsibility for children.

Next Steps

- OFMDFM’s Children & Young People’s Unit must make explicit the requirement for children to be meaningfully involved in decisions about play as part of the Implementation Plans for the Play & Leisure Policy for Northern Ireland. This should be in line with the requirements set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- OFMDFM’s Children & Young People’s Unit should include explicit recommendations for what participation of children and young people should be like for decisions about play. This should go beyond mere consultation and include genuine participation in issues such as those highlighted by the group’s human rights indicators.
- Children and Young People should be involved meaningfully in decisions about the forthcoming regeneration of the Lower Shankill. This regeneration is a one-off opportunity to address deprivation in the community as well as to address safety issues and lack of play facilities in the Lower Shankill.

Conclusion



Conclusion

The results of the monitoring process over the last few months by the parents and children of the Lower Shankill area of Belfast have highlighted mixed progress by the government on the seven issues identified.

With regards to the first indicator identified and monitored by the group- the amount of broken glass in the community -progress has been slow. The initial measurement taken in February 2009 showed that only 20% of the 25 sites were free from broken glass (i.e. 80% contained broken glass), by June 2009 this number had increased slowly to 36% of all sites being free from broken glass, which puts progress to the group's benchmark of 80% after three months far from achieved.

More promising results have been produced with the group's second indicator; the percentage of lights working in parks and playgrounds in the area. The initial percentage recorded in February 2009 was only 32%, measurement over the months of April/May, June and July of 2009 have consistently revealed that 96% of lights work in the designated areas, which exceeds the groups target for 90%.

The cleanliness of play areas was set as the third indicator to be monitored by the group and has slowly improved over the period of time since the indicator was set in February 2009. The upcoming survey on this indicator will be more revealing of progress achieved.

The group's fourth indicator was set around the speed of traffic at particular junctions within the Lower Shankill area with 92% of children stating in February 2009 that traffic was going too fast. Following the introduction of a traffic calming scheme in part of the Lower Shankill in March/April 2009, 44% of those surveyed felt that traffic calming had made a difference to the speed of traffic; 24% felt that traffic was going slow enough; and 21% thought the area was safe for children as a result of the traffic calming. However this is an interim survey, and the group will await with interest the results of the six month survey on this issue.

The fifth indicator was based around access to facilities for teenagers and young adults which had been identified as an issue by parents of teenagers, 74% of whom stated in February 2009, that their children and young people did not use the Hammer Youth Resource Centre as it was not open at the right times- it was only open one night per week. By April/May of 2009, the Centre had begun opening two nights per week but further monitoring of this indicator will need to

be ensured to establish whether the benchmark of being open three nights per week by September 2009 is met.

No quantitative data exists for the final two indicators relating to the access to facilities for children with special needs and the participation of children and parents in decisions related to play. Both were identified as areas of concern by the parents and children of the Lower Shankill when monitoring commenced in February 2009 and will be monitored at the six month stage.