



## #SpeakUp: Pitsmoor Adventure Playground

### What is #SpeakUp?

#SpeakUp is Healthwatch Sheffield's micro grants programme, offering funding of between £500-£1000 to not-for-profit, voluntary, and community groups. The purpose is to run a project which will reach out to people across Sheffield, and hear what matters to them in relation to health and social care. By working with groups which are already trusted partners in their communities, we can make sure we're hearing from even more people, including those whose voices aren't often heard by decision makers.



### Pitsmoor Adventure Playground

Pitsmoor Adventure Playground is run by a charitable organisation which was set up by local people in 2014. We offer play opportunities for children up to 13 years old. Qualified staff are on site during opening hours to ensure a safe and welcoming environment for local children and their parents. Our aim is to support children and young people to improve their health and wellbeing, to learn new life skills and to become active citizens.



### Healthwatch Sheffield

Healthwatch Sheffield Healthwatch Sheffield helps adults, children and young people influence and improve how NHS and Social Care services are designed and run. We're completely independent and not part of the NHS or Sheffield City Council. We want to understand your experiences, and help your views to influence decision-makers in the city.





## Background

### Who do we work with?

We work primarily with children living in Burngreave and Pitsmoor. These neighbourhoods are among the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in the Index of Multiple Deprivations 2019. The children who play at Pitsmoor Adventure Playground reflect the characteristics of the area - many are vulnerable, from impoverished households with high levels of unemployment, poor health and housing and low educational achievement.

We want to help children achieve positive mental and physical outcomes by participating in structured and unstructured play activities.

### Why did we carry out this project?

Improving the health and wellbeing of the children we work with is one of our key aims. We wanted to assess the children's current level of knowledge about health and wellbeing - what they think is important, whether they know how to maintain good health, and what they would do if they were worried about their health.

We also wanted to understand what made the children feel happy, and whether this could link to healthy practices in the playground and at home.

### What did we do?

During the summer we chatted with the children to find out what aspects of health and wellbeing they considered important and to discover if they knew how to maintain good health. We focused on our senses (eyesight and hearing), eating healthily, looking after your teeth, and staying active.

About 20 children participated in these activities throughout the days.

### Covid-19 disruption

We originally applied for #SpeakUp funding in 2020, and this was awarded shortly before the first lockdown. This disrupted our original plan, which was to hold more focused activities with the children to talk about specific aspects of health and wellbeing. When we completed the project, we had to incorporate these topics into the more regular play that children were taking part in around the playground.

## Findings

### Looking after your senses - awareness of hearing and eyesight

We sat under our new build which has a platform and a tree going through the roof. It's an ideal spot to discuss the different seasons so a realistic place to start an activity about what the children can see, hear and feel.

The children dropped in and out of the wooden structure throughout the afternoon session whilst playing with their friends.

We talked about how different it looks under the trees and asked what they noticed, to get them thinking about how they engage their senses. The children commented on the sunshine shining through the gap in the trees and how it lit up the area. They commented on the wind and rain and how much darker it was in the winter.

We asked the children if they could think of an example that displayed their awareness of their 5 senses:

*"I love the sunshine. It makes me happy and it's warm", age 8*

*"My fingers get cold in the snow and go pink. I blow on them to make them warm", age 9*

*"I can hear the owls at night in my garden", age 7*

*"I can see for ever at the top of the slide. I would fly if I had wings!", age 8*

*"Leaves are crunchy in the Autumn", age 11*

*"When I hide I can hear when my friends are close. I can hear their voices", age 6*

*"Sometimes I slip when running around the playground. I zoomed down the slide and went off the bottom into the mud", age 9*



We then moved into a conversation about what they children would do if they were worried about their eyesight or hearing:

*“I would tell my mum”, age 5*

*“When I was at school I sat away from the teacher’s white board. I couldn’t see. I told my teacher. I have worn glasses for 4 years and I go to the opticians”, age 12*

*“If I couldn’t hear I would tell my mum”, age 6*

## Eating healthily

We chatted about healthy choices and how food gives us energy and helps us grow. We shared information about making healthy choices and talked about the food we eat at the playground and at home. The children added the following comments:

*“It gives you energy”*

*“It stops my tummy making noises”*

*“Sugar makes your teeth sore”*

*“Food makes me strong and have muscles like [our play worker]”*

*“I like Pizza”*

*“I like tasting different fruit”*

*“I like McDonald’s”*

## Looking after your teeth

We asked the children what they knew about looking after their teeth:



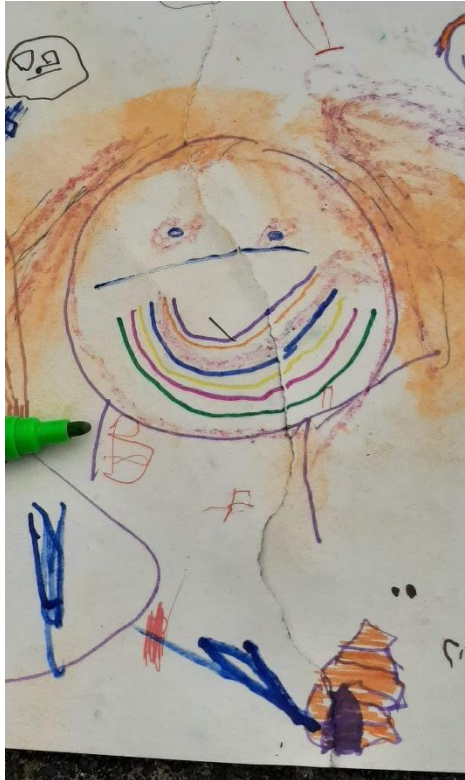
*“I go to the dentist, I have to have a brace soon”, age 12*

*“My mum says to clean my teeth 2 x a day. I had tooth ache. It was horrible”, age 8*

*“Lots of sweets are bad for your teeth”, age 5*

*“Apples are good for your teeth. When my tooth fell out I saved it and I got a pound”, age 6*

To reinforce the messaging about looking after your teeth, we also ran an activity where we spread large strips of paper outside. We asked children to draw themselves with a happy smile. We gave all the children toothbrushes and toothpaste and chatted throughout the session about how to maintain healthy teeth.



## Being happy and staying active

When we asked the children what made them feel happy, they put small comments on post-it notes onto the tree. Most children told us that playing with their friends made them happy, and many mentioned active play as a key part of this:

*“Running around and playing on the big slide”,  
age 6*

*“Playing with my friends and I like swimming”,  
age 9*

*“I like roller blades and I can dance in them. I do a routine with my friend”,  
age 9*

*“I like riding my bike. I crashed down my street but I was OK”,  
age 6*

*“I like playing on the tyre swing and making it go faster. If you bend your body it moves and goes higher. I'm really good at it now”,  
age 7*





## Conclusion

The children's play at the playground is self-directed, and our opportunities for capturing specific ideas and thoughts are spontaneous and brief. However, this project and the other work we've been doing with the children led us to the following conclusions:

- Giving the children opportunities for active play helps them to think positively about this in terms of its relationship to happiness and socialising;
- We were able to talk to the children about keeping healthy, staying active, and eating well through our wider play activities. Friendly competition has been a useful tool to reinforce the need for healthy food choices and daily exercise;
- We can provide important information to the children about ways to keep well (like brushing your teeth) alongside creative exercises to keep their attention;
- Building stronger relationships with the children and their families allows us to spark particular conversations as we know more about their lives and interests. These relationships have been growing since the pandemic, and we will be able to engage with them more effectively in the future.