

Toyhouse Impact Report 2023



Listening to the
Community
For over 44 years

Enabling service delivery

Message from the Chair

In 2023 Toyhouse has been focusing on delivering the refreshed TOYHOUSE STRATEGY 2022-2025 which we launched at last year's AGM.

Our strategic goals were established in consultation with service users, staff, volunteers, management committee & 'Listening to the Local Community' as we have developed these services in line with our strategic goals. We are all aware that we are living through a cost-of-living crisis with more families being forced to use Food Banks and finding it increasingly difficult to manage on fixed incomes. In these circumstances it is vital that we are listening to our service users and responding to their needs. So, we continue to develop and deliver our services like the 'Meals and Deals Cook Course' that focus on cooking healthy food and sharing ideas to make the budget go further.



Families tell us not only how helpful courses like this are at this difficult time, but also having a friendly supportive place to go and meet other parents. Responding to the needs of local families is an important feature of Toyhouse services, therefore 'Listening to

the Local Community' is the theme of this year's AGM and will continue to be a key focus for TOYHOUSE in 2024.

This year's Impact Report highlights how the hard working and dedicated team at TOYHOUSE continues to deliver a range of services that 'Make a Difference' for local families. All of which is made possible by the Trusts and Funders who support Toyhouse.

Sue Cox Chair

Management Committee

Members:

Patron: Cath Armstrong
Chair: Sue Cox
Treasurer: Val Whitehead
Vice Chair: Sian Harris
Secretary: Joy Hastings
Kalsoom Khan
Toby Evans
Zenith Rahman
Halon Iqbal
Hasina Khatun

Senior Staff Members

Pip Pinhorn: Manager
Julie Morgan: Deputy Manager
Mohammad Selim: Finance Officer

Co-ordinator: Supporting Young Families: Service & Strategy
Tugela Barnes

Play & Family Support Team

Afia Begum, Dilara Begum & Natasha Forbes

The Toyhouse Centre



Message from the Patron

The Toyhouse Centre was opened in January 2007. Prior to that, from its inception in 1979, it had operated from three different locations, none of which allowed for services to be offered directly to families. In addition the buildings were shared with other organisations, which resulted in limitations on *what* could be offered & *when* services could be delivered.

When planning and fundraising for the building it was always referred to as The Toyhouse Centre. When nearing completion and reflecting about the name our architect said 'Why change it - Toyhouse is at the centre of the community' He was right. That is what the Toyhouse team, supported by the Management Committee, strives to do on a daily basis.

The chance to be able to hold play sessions for children and their parents, training sessions for both staff and volunteers and, not least, answer the door to an interested or anxious parent enquiring about sessions or toys, was made possible by working in the centre of the community. Right from the early days Toy libraries were based on the concept of community ownership. Toyhouse has ensured that it is at the centre of the community and for the benefit of those who live there.

Cath Armstrong Patron



Some interesting Stats about Toyhouse & our services:

- 3850 total users across 28 Member Groups
- 396 users declare they have SEND: 43% are boys
- 2279 child users, 58% boys & 42% girls

Community Toy Libraries

Toy Libraries

Toyhouse was founded 44 years ago when the first community Toy Library was established in Shadwell, as a response to the wishes of local residents, who wanted safe & stimulating indoor space to meet with others. They said they wanted their children to have access to good quality toys & play resources - and then the families hit on the idea that, if their children could borrow the toys they could take them home & extend the play across the week, engaging other family and friends in the fun!



The idea of toys being owned by the Toy Library community, rather than by individuals, is a great way to "Reduce; Re-use & Recycle"! Ask any child in the Toy Library & they will tell you they want to choose a toy to take home!

As the economic challenges intensify, this is now a great way to avoid unnecessary expenditure *and* to have fun and playful learning.

Following the successful reopening of 6 Toy Libraries in the North West locality of the Borough via an **Innovation grant from Save the Children Fund** during the post pandemic school year 2021 - 2022, it has been a challenge to maintain their level of operation through the last year as Toyhouse received no funding to support them and the 6 other Toy Libraries across Tower Hamlets. Added to this, our youngest children, together with the parents & carers, have been more hesitant than used to be the norm, to come out and join in communal activities. For many, there has been a noticeable reduction in social skills & quite a few have delay in language acquisition. Harnessing this information, Toyhouse applied to the **Mayor's Community Grants Programme** to support early learning & we understand funding has been agreed **Supporting Toy Libraries: Pip & Julie**



Partnership Working

Following conversations with local families, Toyhouse has been lucky enough to work in partnership with 2 other organisations, offering more varied opportunities for families at the Toyhouse Centre.

HALF MOON THEATRE: Creative workshops for families with pre-school children were a great success. They were able to explore, themed movement, story &

songs. All were given the chance to attend a theatre performance.

ARTBURST: Families were able to try out lots of different art based activities, with even the youngest children able to take part. Again, each session was themed and used songs, movement and art to build a story. Everyone involved found this to be a very positive experience and we hope to be able to repeat it again very soon. **Julie**

Benefits for Early Learning

Stories, Songs & Rhymes

Held at the Toyhouse Centre, families with children, from babies to pre-schoolers, came along to join a fun hour of interactive storytelling, parachute games, songs, music, rhymes and more. Recent research has revealed the detrimental effects that the pandemic and restriction measures have had on young children's speech, language and communication.

The session has been designed to meet needs raised by local parents. Encouraging skills, and provide simple ideas for parents to use at home. Parents have told us they have enjoyed learning new songs to sing at home, and discovered new books and stories from the session. Families of older pre-schoolers said that it was good practice for getting ready for school, and a great opportunity to practise listening, joining in and socialising.

Facilitator: Tugela



Stories, Songs & Rhymes was piloted in the summer term via Toyhouse reserves. We were delighted when **Wakefield & Tetley Trust** then awarded us a "Fast Track Grant" to run this weekly session for the upcoming year.



Invited 2 Stay and Play

This weekly session, for invited and referred families, provided an opportunity to play and make social connections in a smaller group, bringing parents from across communities together.

Sessions enabled manageable, small-group socialising between parents and children when many remained nervous of larger social gatherings post-Covid. It provided valuable opportunities for babies and young children to interact, developing speech, language and play skills supported by parent and a variety of play resources. Parents received consistent, emotional and psychological support from the facilitators. Crucially, parents were able to support each other, sharing advice and experiences. This session has been particularly valuable for families who have faced additional challenges during the first years of parenthood, who have benefitted from the consistent and sensitive support of Toyhouse workers and trained Peer Support Volunteers.

Tugela & Mumtaz PSV

Listening to the youngest Children

Baby Sensory & Rhyme Time

This remains a popular group for parents and carers in the early stages of parenthood, with many returning weekly for many months. Facilitators provide a variety of toys and sensory experiences for parents and babies to enjoy together, which change each week to respond to and encourage babies' interests. Families tell us that they especially enjoy our songs and rhymes, which are often full of laughter and baby giggles! Our cosy community room provides a welcoming space - for both parents and babies - to begin to socialise and make connections during the vital First 1001 Days. Families say they value the chance to meet other new parents and share



their experiences in our friendly, relaxed environment. Many have now formed firm friendships, and one parent set up a 'Toyhouse Babies' WhatsApp group for families to connect outside of the session. We are delighted to hear that, for many families, this is their favourite baby group in the borough!
Tugela & Mumtaz PSV

More than 50 families enjoyed learning how to massage their babies

"Thank you for all you've done, R absolutely loves it here and is always singing your praises" - Dad at baby group about his partner

Baby Massage

Touch is the first sense to develop and the last to leave us.

Encouraging parents to use "nurturing touch" on their baby strengthens the bond between them; Baby Massage courses show parents the strokes for a full massage, discussion time builds peer support networks and friendships, with many finding this the first time they are able to meet other local parents and build social networks.

Toyhouse has 3 members of staff who hold the International Association of Infant Massage qualification. Funding permitting we aim to run Baby Massage classes 6 times per year.

**Julie, Pip & Afia
(Baby Massage Instructors)**



"I had a lovely time doing the Baby Massage sessions, having time to bond with my baby, meet lots of new friends and share ideas. I'm so glad I discovered Toyhouse and it's friendly atmosphere"
Mum on Baby Massage course

Sure STEPs Peer Support

SURE STEPS & THE PEER SUPPORT VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME

Whilst the majority of Toyhouse services are universally available for local families to access, we have long been aware there are some people who need a more individual response before they are able to engage.

Not everyone finds parenting easy & we have heard many families only talk of their struggles *after* their difficulties have eased. It was to address these obstacles *early* that the SureSTEPS programme was initially developed, in response to articulated need.



The SureSTEPS programme provides Peer Support via trained volunteers (PSVs) to referred vulnerable families during the First 1001 Days of life, but recently there has only been small amounts of funding to support this service. An LBTH Small Grant under the "Loneliness" Theme plus a small grant from Wakefield & Tetley Trust has enabled us to offer a weekly session for invited families, often assisted to come along by the support & encouragement of their previously trained PSV. This has provided a safe environment for a small group of families to come together, build friendships, & feel supported. The team of active PSVs have previously been recruited from across the range of ethnicities resident in the Borough, completing the 8 session training course we deliver. One of the many strengths of the SureSTEPS programme is that we can usually match referred people with a trained PSV who speaks their Mother Tongue language, and has understanding of shared cultural issues.

Toyhouse has been involved in discussions with other local professionals about developing services to support "The Start for Life" initiative and we hope this will result in securing funding to deliver the SureSTART programme more fully to vulnerable local families.

Pip, Julie & Tugela

1001 Days

The **FIRST 1001 DAYS** of a child's life, from conception to age two, is a window of opportunity. It is a time of particularly rapid growth and brain development. Leading child health experts agree that the care given during the first 1001 days has more influence on a child's future than at any other time in their life.

Toyhouse is committed to delivering a range of services that support positive attachment, early learning and development. Toyhouse aims to support parents / caregivers to be the very best they can be and for their children to thrive.

For 44 years—Based in and

Reaching the community

- 2279 child users, 58% boys & 42% girls
- 1491 total adult users with 10% of these being male carers
- 1535 total users are of Asian origin - 40%
- 647 users are White British; 17% total users
- There are 80 Facilitators (many are volunteers)



Mellow Parenting Training

In July, Tugela attended three days of Mellow Parenting training. The course, attended by a variety of professionals working with families with young children, provided a thorough, practical grounding in how to deliver a suite of Mellow Parenting's highly regarded evidence-based, trauma-informed courses (including Mellow Mums, Mellow Dads, Mellow Babies and Mellow Toddlers).

"Toyhouse is so friendly, it always feels like coming home" parent

A local parent volunteer, Shakara, suggested started a **Sewing & Knitting Group**.



We support her to run this every week in the Toyhouse Centre. The group made us the most amazing Banner

"Thank you very, very much for the handouts. I have found myself referring back to them more than once and have found them to be extremely useful. Forever grateful for meeting you!"

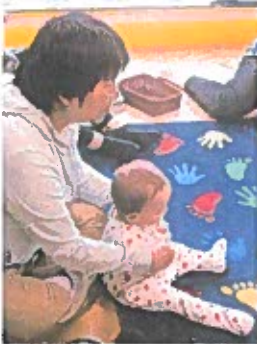
Mellow Bumps participant, after the birth of her baby



'The Invite Only Stay & Play sessions have been lovely for us. They are well-organised and welcoming, we always feel welcome to come back each week. The smaller session works well for us and we really enjoy it. It's part of our routine every week, it's in Mummy's diary! The twins look forward to it, they know everyone really well and they can't wait to see them. They get so excited when they know we are going to Toyhouse! We need to get out of our small flat and go somewhere we know, somewhere with different toys, otherwise it's too much. I have no one to talk to. Coming here feels like seeing friends for me. The children are happy, I'm happy.

Thank you so much! Parent M

Listening to the Community



"The Monday 10am sessions have been a godsend for me. A sanctuary and safe space for new mums and their babies. I have loved the sessions and the camaraderie here, an engaging sensory space for the babies." - from a mum

The Toyhouse Centre is based in a busy area of the community, alongside shops, schools & a Health Centre

Resulting in many callers & conversations at the door and interest in our services.



*"Thank you so much! We need to come & see you - I don't forget about you and all the amazing work you guys did for me and K
Former service user, supported via SureSTEPS*



the in Creative Cook After School Club

120 children benefited and over 45 healthy dishes were prepared & cooked by children



"It's nice to know I can knock on the door of the Toyhouse Centre & just have a chat. And they remember our names." Local parent.



"I first used Toyhouse with my son who is now at college. I still come with my 3yr old daughter" A Dad

*"The Mellow Parenting course is perfect! It teaches positive parenting and includes the children in the learning"
Mellow Parenting course participant*

I've been a volunteer at the Bow Toy Library for about six years. It's been a really nice stint opening the toy library for about an hour every Tuesday at the Bow Idea Store. The highlight for me is seeing the excitement and joy when little children go to pick toys to play with. The expressions on their little faces is priceless! " Reene, Bow TL



Family Wellbeing-Physical

Active Physical Play

The opportunity to access a free indoor physical play session in the borough is very important for the youngest in our community. Active Physical Play offers under 5's and their parent/carers the chance to enjoy this session held in a very large hall at St Hilda's Community Centre in Bethnal Green. We have heard from local families, many living in restricted accommodation, without gardens, how this session offers them opportunities & their children a chance to 'let off steam'. They also learn new skills & enjoy the challenges the equipment offers throughout the year, whatever the weather.

Workers: Afia, Natasha & Dilara
Volunteers: Shazna & Sume



Funded via LBTH Children & Family Centres

Early Years Active Play



Based in Mile End Play Pavilion This session offers all the benefits of Active Physical Play, but with the added bonus of the large children's playground the pavilion is set in. Always busy, drawing families from the diverse communities living in Tower Hamlets and offering a friendly, fun environment for parent/carers and their children to mix and make new friends. The informal feel to the session provides a relaxed opportunity for staff to chat with families, hearing their views, concerns and feedback; enabling them to signpost or refer to other services when needed.



Workers: Natasha & Dilara
Volunteers: Nazmin Ayesha & Nurjahan
Funded via LBTH Children & Family Centres

Connecting with the local community

Both Active Play sessions offer Toyhouse the opportunity to reach the wider community. Being based at opposite ends of the borough enables us to listen to more families, hearing their views and ideas on what they would like to see for their young children

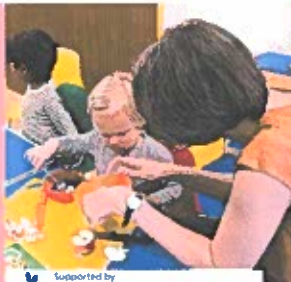
& Nutritional

Creative Cook Club & Summer Workshops

Funded by **BBC Children in Need**, Creative Cook Club offer children 3 to 10 years the opportunity to prepare, cook and eat, healthy, quick and easy recipes. Each week the children are able to explore healthy alternatives to high sugar/fat foods. The children always decide what will be prepared each week, including ways to adapt these to healthier ingredients, cooking methods. During the school holidays the project is adapted to workshops, enabling more children to access and making use of local open spaces for play and games. Cook Club has supported Toyhouse to hear the views and ideas of primary age children from the local community, helping us shape services to meet local needs and interests. This project is incredibly popular and we always have a waiting list for the courses and workshops.



Project Facilitators: Afia & Julie



Meals & Deals

In these times of rising living costs, **Meals & Deals** offer families and their young children the chance to explore creative ways to make leftovers into tasty new meals, discover and share tips on how to save money on everyday food shopping and take part in preparing and cooking a simple, quick dish.

This short course funded by The National Lottery Awards for All, offers opportunities for discussion and has enabled Toyhouse to hear first hand the

difficulties families are facing in these challenging times .

Course Leader: Natasha, Parent Volunteer: Leonilyn

New Funding

Just as we are finalising our Impact Report we received confirmation that Toyhouse has been awarded funding for 2 projects via **LBTH Mayor's Community Grants Programme**.

One is to empower diverse communities via courses to bring families together, sharing their cultures through food & experiences.

The second to offer learning experiences for young children via support to the network of Community Toy Libraries in the borough.

Mellow Parenting

MELLOW PARENTING & MELLOW BUMPS



As a result of listening to local families across the years, Toyhouse recognised the need to offer a more in depth, evidence based parenting course, supporting those who were finding parenting a significant challenge; whose own childhood experiences hadn't prepared them to nurture their own child. In 2012 two senior Toyhouse staff trained in the Mellow Parenting suite of programmes & have since delivered a full Mellow Parenting course annually.

Recently Toyhouse has been funded by Tower Hamlets Local Community Mitigation funding to deliver Mellow & our 10th annual course ran across 5x winter months. Funding has been tight, leaving Toyhouse to draw on reserves, in order to deliver the necessary ongoing support to each referred family, plus reporting & contributing to many Child in Need/Child Protection meetings.

Toyhouse anxiously awaits decisions on allocation of new Dept. of Education funding to support the "Start for Life" programme & is encouraged to know the benefits of Mellow are recognised.

This year, Toyhouse facilitated 2x Mellow Bumps 6 session courses. This is an evidence-based ante-natal course designed to decrease stress levels & encourage bonding between mums-to-be & their babies. Discussion revealed unprecedented levels of anxiety, that appear to be an ongoing ripple effect of stress & isolation caused by pandemic & lockdown. Participants said they appreciated the small, welcoming group as a safe & non-judgemental space to ask



questions & share experiences, both positive & challenging. Participants enjoyed learning about the amazing skills new babies have at birth, & found information about baby development interesting & useful. Further support was offered after babies arrived, with mums + babies encouraged to join the Toyhouse Baby Sensory sessions & Baby Massage.



Course Facilitators: Pip, Julie & Tugela
Children's Group: Afia & Natasha
Parent Volunteer: Sume

Volunteering

Volunteering @ Toyhouse Project

Toyhouse is very fortunate to have an active group of volunteers who support many of our projects, enabling Toyhouse to offer services to more local families.

All our volunteers are parents and live in the local community, providing more personal links and connections for the families we support.



A BIG THANK YOU TO:

Nazmin, Shazna, Shakara, Leonilyn, Sume, Ayesha & Nurjahan

Barclays Bank

Support from Barclays staff at Christmas helps Toyhouse make this a special fun time for more children.

Thank you all for your generosity

James Noe & Family

We continue to be very grateful to James & his family for the generous gifts, chosen by his children, & given to the children we work with.



Toyhouse current trained Peer Support Volunteers

Claire, Elisa, Halon, Iishita, Kate, Mumtaz, Zoe

East London Business Alliance

Over many years Toyhouse has been very fortunate to be allocated some toys each Christmas to distribute to

local families via the **ELBA** Christmas Appeal this has always made an amazing difference to many families

Gateway Homes

A very big THANK YOU for helping Toyhouse reduce our carbon footprint by arranging and fitting new LED lighting throughout the Toyhouse Centre.

And secondly to **Travis Perkins** who donated all the light fittings, enabling us to spend less on Electric and more on supporting families

Toyhouse makes a difference

Our Thanks to those who have helped Toyhouse this year:

Individual Donors / Gift Aid pledges
ELBA
Gateway Housing
Travis Perkins
James Noe
Ken Morgan
Family & Friends of Staff & Management Committee members
Voluntary Sector Children's Forum
Wakefield & Tetley Trust
Cath & Bob Armstrong
Postcode Society Trust
Mile End Play Pavilion

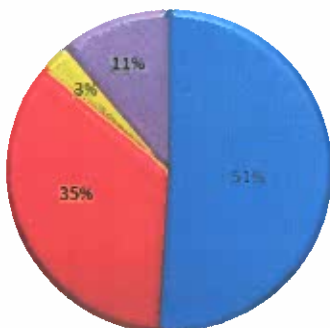
Volunteers & Peer Supporters
East End Community Foundation
TH Children & Family Centre Hubs
LB Tower Hamlets
BBC Children in Need
Virginia Primary School
National Lottery Awards for All
Save the Children
St Hilda's Community Centre
St Paul's Way Medical Centre
Donators of used toys
CAF/Give As You Earn/Just Giving
Blue Lizard
Canary Wharf

A complete set of Annual Accounts is available from Toyhouse

Message from the Treasurer: Val Whitehead

The harsh financial headwinds have continued for all charities, but we have managed to maintain our income whilst reducing our deficit and continuing to offer a full timetable of services for children and their carers. Thanks to all the hard work from our employees and volunteers which enable this to happen and to all our funders and donors who continue their generous support.

Toyhouse Income 2022-23



- LBTH
- Trust & Foundations
- Commissioned TL
- Self Generated



Partnerships & Funders



Save the Children

Save the Children
Supporting Toyhouse with
events & toy donations

**the
switch**



Funding from Postcode Society
& Canary Wharf support our
Sure STEPs Programme



BBC Children in Need funded us to run after-school sessions for children on healthy

East End
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION



Local Community
Fund.
Mitigations
Funding



Virginia School
Commissioning
Toyhouse to run
their Toy Library

ELBA: Supporting Christmas events

LBTH commissioned
Toyhouse to run
Physical Play sessions,
Mellow Parenting & a
small grant to tackle
loneliness



Awards 4 All: Funding to pilot
our new Meals & Deals course



A small "Fast Track" Grant from
Wakefield & Tetley enabled us to set
up a weekly Story, Songs & Rhymes
session, facilitated by PSVs



TOYHOUSE MISSION STATEMENT

Toyhouse makes a difference.....

by supporting the wellbeing of families locally and throughout the community. With over 40 years' experience of working with families through the medium of play, Toyhouse fosters attachment between parents and children, enabling them to interact together and share experiences. Toyhouse empowers individuals, families, volunteers and employees to develop the skills and resilience to achieve their aspirations.

.....early support for a better future



TOYHOUSE

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