



1 THE VALUE OF TOY LIBRARIES

Toy libraries are an exciting and flexible resource for children and families offering toy and equipment loan, play opportunities and family support. There are many different types of toy libraries and they can be located in a wide variety of settings and organisations. Some toy libraries may offer their services to the wider local community; others provide services to specific client groups e.g. childminders, teenage parents.

There can be many reasons for parents and carers of young children to feel excluded in their local communities. Toy libraries have proven to play a vital role in supporting families, by providing a place to meet and socialise, a neutral and accessible space, and a cost-effective way to access play resources and activity ideas for children.

Within many toy libraries in Scotland, users are encouraged to stay and play and to 'get involved' with the project offering the opportunity to build confidence in children and also in parents. Activity days celebrating different cultures or dealing with key topics are increasing features in toy libraries, using the services of specialist play workers to facilitate sessions. Most projects carry information on other local services and hold leaflets for key local agencies for parent and family support.

Toys for loan are carefully chosen for durability, safety, educational and fun value. Toys can be borrowed which are often too expensive for individuals to buy, including large outdoor equipment, and specially designed items for children with a learning or physical disability.

Play is the mechanism where children find out about their world and learn how to interact with others, which is vital for overall development and wellbeing. Through play, children develop social skills, confidence and resilience. It is a child's right to play – this is set out clearly in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Toy libraries support children's rights but also our Scottish Governments priorities outlined in their regularly published National Outcomes.

Toy Libraries lend good quality toys to encourage play, promote the benefits of play and the important role of parents, carers and families in engaging in play with their children regularly.

Toy Libraries support our fight against climate change and our journey to net zero. Each year, toys from toy libraries are played with on average 300 times more than a toy purchased for one child even if the toy is passed on or donated to a charity shop. Many toy libraries consider their stock carefully, taking in to account the robustness of the toy, but also play value, desirability and the sustainability of the material used in manufacture.

Toy Libraries are adept at growing and adapting to the needs of communities which has since 2020, been a furthering success factor since the Covid 19 pandemic in 2020. Cost of living challenges for many families can be supported by the provision of new toys each week without spending money, but also by providing a new focus for play each week that parent and child can explore together.

Friendships are made at toy libraries, both between children and parents. Isolation, both rural or cultural can prevent some parents meeting other parents experiencing similar challenges. Toy libraries can provide a neutral, supportive space for such vital peer support, particularly for young and new parents.

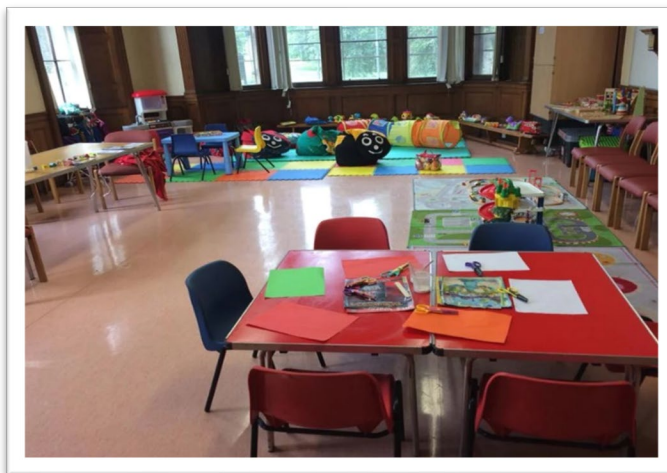




Logic Model for Toy Libraries

We have developed a logic model for toy libraries. This is a useful tool which demonstrates the link between the activities of a toy library and the outcomes for children and families. Using this as a basis, toy libraries can adapt it for their own project following the 'logical' steps to demonstrate their impact.

Smart Play Network can support your group to be smarter at evaluation and telling your story for existing and potential funders. We run our Get Evaluating Training and can offer a bespoke course in your area if required.

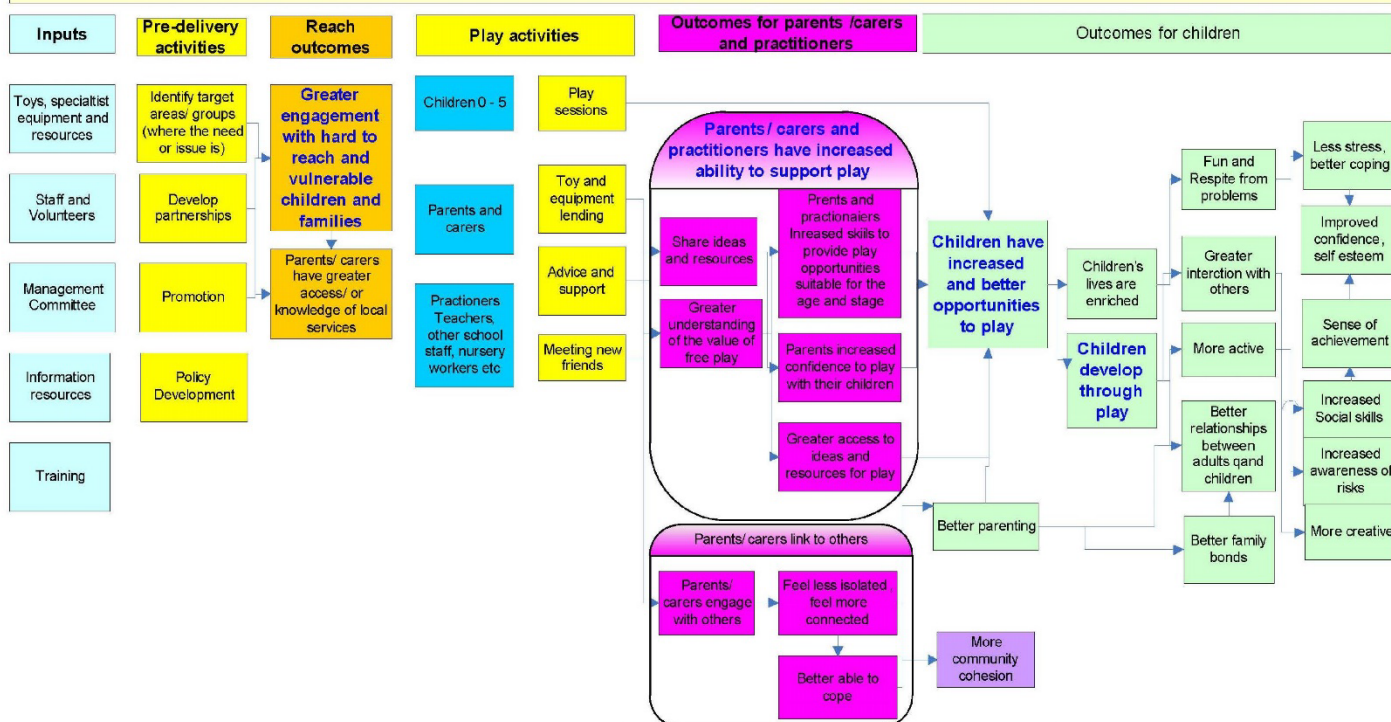


Smart Play Network Members Support

As a member you have access to telephone and email support. For more information about the topics covered in this guidance sheet, or any other queries you may have about your project, please contact us using: 0131 554 2620 or admin@smartplaynetwork.org

Situation

Children and families have limited access to play services.
Lone and young parents are vulnerable to isolation and stress. Parents need peer support and help with parenting.
Parents are spending too much money on toys. Families spend more and more time indoors.
Income deprivation is restricting access to play opportunities and increased pressures around providing resources for play.



Assumptions

Toy libraries attract families that other services may find difficult to reach.
Child led play encourages creativity, increases confidence and builds social relationships.
Quality play experiences contribute to positive outcomes later in life.
Using scrap resources and borrowing toys and resources relieves financial pressures on families.
Parents that have support from peers and professionals are more able to cope therefore are less stressed.