



## WHAT WILL MAKE BELFAST A HEALTHIER CITY?



Consultation Survey carried out by  
Caroline Jeffrey  
as part of the  
, “Kids Square Project”,  
St. Anne’s Square Belfast,  
23<sup>rd</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> September 2011

On behalf of Healthy Cities Belfast

## REPORT OF FINDINGS

## **Belfast Healthy Cities**

### **Our Vision**

Our vision is of a healthy, equitable and vibrant city where all sectors provide individual and shared leadership, enabling citizens to achieve their full potential.

### **Our Mission**

Our mission is, through our leadership and innovation, to inspire and utilise the collective and individual strengths of partners to *deliver the World Health Organization European Healthy City Phase V (2009-2013)* goals and requirements and maximise their impact on health and inequalities.

## **About The Project**

Kids Square was inspired by Belfast Healthy Cities' Healthy Urban Environment working group, and supported financially by the Department for Social Development, through the Laganside Events Grant. Activities at the event were facilitated in collaboration with Play Resource, Sportopps, and artist Caroline Jeffrey, who facilitated the evaluation element.

Our sincere thanks go to all facilitators, who ensured the smooth and successful running of the event. Special thanks must also go to Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, which supported the event with staff time. Special thanks also go to Belfast Healthy Cities' staff team, who helped facilitation during the event and to Jenna Monaghan in the team, who led arrangements for the event.

A full report of the event is available from [www.belfasthealthycities.com/publications](http://www.belfasthealthycities.com/publications) or by request from [info@belfasthealthycities.com](mailto:info@belfasthealthycities.com)

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## INTRODUCTION

“In view of the demographic changes taking place, policies designed to create a more conducive environment for children, young people and families should form the focus of municipal action if our cities are to be competitive and maintain their vitality in the future”. Cities for Children.

[www.citiesforchildren.eu](http://www.citiesforchildren.eu)

This report will record the findings of a three day consultation survey with children, young people and parents that took place at the “Kids Square Project” held at St. Anne’s Square, in the centre of Belfast on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> September 2011. The survey was investigating their suggestions and ideas on how to make Belfast a Healthier City.

A total of 42 children and young people, and 26 adults were interviewed during the three days.

The model for this consultation was unusual in that emphasis was placed on participants recording their opinions using Art as a medium.

There were three elements:

Small stages were provided with a variety of photographic backdrops featuring various potential “free” spaces that could be utilised more effectively in the city: St Anne’s Square; Cathedral Square; Bank Square; Custom House Square; Corn Market; Queen’s Square; outside the Waterfront and City Hall Gardens. Participants could draw their ideas on paper and apply them to the area of their choice.

Two large temporary murals were erected on shop fronts where ideas could be drawn, one featuring the pedestrian area in front of St Anne’s Cathedral, the other of the City Hall gardens.

There was also the option to just talk. The children working in this way offered a perfect situation in which to discuss suggestions, ideas and concerns with their parents, to find out how bringing their children into Belfast can be made a more inviting, healthy and family orientated situation.

Whilst there was research material available for those interested in further information, initial enquiries with participants was carried out before any reference was made to it, i.e. information was gathered without prejudice or influence.

Given the format of the investigation this report is a photographic and text based record of findings.



St Anne's Square



## EVIDENCE

The following pages contain the ideas, suggestions, comments and concerns from children, young people, parents and grandparents.

Part 1 will show photographs of the drawings children and young people made, together with some verbal comments. The photographs are collated under subject/idea headings. Each photograph includes the first names, age, and choice of outside space.

Please note, whilst it is fully acknowledged that some suggestions are unviable for practical and logistical reasons, for the purpose of parity and respect for the tremendous enthusiasm and interest everyone showed taking part in this survey, all drawings have been included.

Part 2 will record verbal/written statements from parents. Whilst every effort was made to encourage parents to also draw, (!) all apart from one preferred to just talk and/or write.

EVIDENCE

PART 1: CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

FUN – FAIRS – This was a very popular idea!

....particularly Roller- Coasters!



Conal 9

City Hall



Rosa 7

Cathedral Square



Oscar 10

Queen's Square



Kitty 7

City Hall

Oscar would also like to see more fireworks in Belfast.



Tom 8

City Hall



Unknown

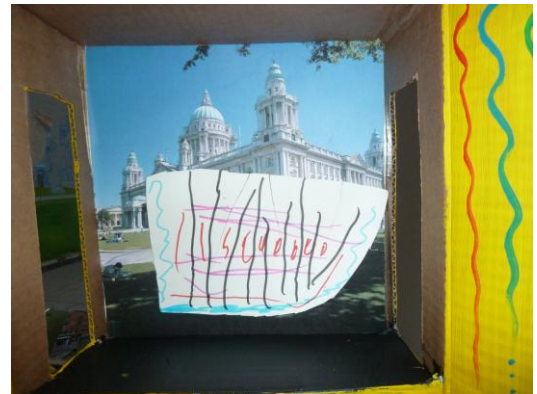
Bank Square

## PLAYGROUNDS



Rose 10

Cathedral Square



Anna 7

City Hall



Unknown

Queen's Square



Hannah 6

Bank Square

## SPORTS:

### FOOTBALL



Rory 9

St Anne's Square



Adam 6

Bank Square

Conal (from page 5) also suggested a supervised football pitch in front of St Anne's Cathedral, using a soft ball, with different age groups playing at different times of the day. Paintball was another idea!

PAINTBALL



Custom House Square

BASEBALL



Fintan 7

City Hall

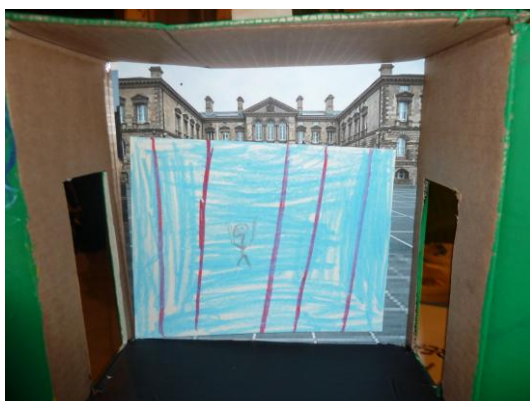
MULTI – SPORT FACILITY



Adam, 6 & Ella 9 Queen's/Custom House Square

Ella suggested creating a multi-purpose all-weather surface pitch in the Queen's/Custom House area which could cater for a variety of sporting activities such as football, basketball, tennis etc. There could be a dry storage area handy for equipment, or a "Club House".

OUT DOOR SWIMMING



Kelly 8 Custom House Square



Alysa 5 Water Park in Custom House Square



## SKATE PARK



Anna 7

Cathedral Square

Speaking to 2 young people Jason 14 and Michael Lynch 16, they felt very strongly about the lack of suitable facilities for skate-boarders. The following is a written quote from Jason:

“Central zones of which are generally not in use that skate boarders have been skating in have now been deemed not acceptable to use, with no tolerance for the youth”

The “zone” he is referring to is Custom House Square which has been a favoured skate-boarding area by young people for some time, where there was an understanding to not be there if public events were taking place. Now they are always moved on by local security even if there is no public event. According to Jason and Michael, this was a brilliant outside space for them where they were not getting in anybody else’s way. They have been provided with an alternative site in Little Patrick Street, however this is most unsuitable: it is too small and it is potentially dangerous as it involves having to cross a very busy road to get to it.

Is it feasible for this feedback to be presented to the City Council Youth Forum?

Michael is happy to be contacted on this matter at [mlynch812@gmail.com](mailto:mlynch812@gmail.com)

## GOLF



Erin 6

Cathedral Square

## DANCING



Kori 7

Cornmarket



Alisha 7

City Hall



Alana 7

Waterfront



Keela 10

St. Anne's Square

Alisha's idea was that there could be a stage set up with a dance tutor and children could come to join in throughout the day. Alana thought it would be good to get a make-over as well! Keela thought it would be good to have a seasonal disco especially for kids, maybe every 4 months.

## CLUBS

Speaking to Orlagh 13, Courtney 14 and Rebecca 14, they felt the city centre needs a Drop-in Centre for young people of their age that could have a dancing/disco area, a café, pool etc. They quite often watch and do beat dancing at the bandstand area in Corn Market when the weather is dry, but there's nowhere they can go if it's raining. They would like to be able to have a place where they can sit and relax with their peers when they're in town shopping. Interestingly enough these three young people went on to "create" their "club" at the cardboard city activity that was happening during the weekend event:



## CLUBS



Alice 9

City Hall Gardens

## ZOO



Lucas 12

Alice also wants to see more clubs in the city: camping, art activities, book and comic stands. Lucas would like there to be a Zoo at the Botanical Gardens in Belfast, like the Botanical Gardens in Paris.

## MORE GREEN!



Neisha 8

City Hall



Erin 7

St Anne's Square



Erin 4

St. Anne's Square

Neisha, Erin (7) and Keela 10 (from page 9) had a lot of ideas! They thought that the city centre needs a lot more trees and that fruit trees would be good – more fruit and flowers! They would like to see much more of the kind activities that are taking place this weekend in St. Anne's Square, happening more often e.g. art and gardening workshops, juggling workshops, a roller blade area where the roller blades can be available to hire, sandpits. Maybe these events could happen once a month. Erin (4) wants more sunflowers in the city.

## COSTUME DAYS



Robyn 13

Cathedral Square

Robyn thought it would be a good idea to have period costume theme days in Belfast, e.g. on the theme of the Titanic. They could take place all over the city, not just in Cathedral Square

## BELFAST EYE, HOT AIR BALLOONS & OTHER MATTERS AT THE CITY HALL.....



This picture, of one of the murals, includes ideas from four people:

“Bring back the Belfast Eye!” was drawn by Leo 9, however many people who saw the picture were very much in favour. The hot air balloons were drawn by Colleen 7, and her Mum (name unknown) Mia 10, drew the big book tent. She initially said she wanted to see a giant bookshop as she feels the book shops in Belfast are not adequate, but as we chatted she came up with the idea of a book fair taking place in the City Hall Gardens

...AND DISPLAY EVENTS



Michael 11



Michael drew both of these pictures. The first depicts the Royal Marines Combat Display Team. He thought the City Hall Gardens would offer a good outside venue for a variety of display and re-enactment events like this, also abseiling and a mini air show such as spitfires or the Red Arrows. He would also like to see more open air music events, both Rock and Opera. He felt very strongly that such events should be freely available to everyone. This particular young man wants to be a politician when he grows up so watch out!

PUBLIC ART



Eve 8

Waterfront



Tom 8

City Hall Gardens

More Public Art needed for Kids! Their Dad, Ryan added that in St Louis, America, interactive art is exhibited on the streets that kids can play with.

From a different perspective, another parent made the point that for all the new public art that has come to Belfast, there hasn't been a single extra climbing frame for a child! (David, father of 3 children under 5).

## EVIDENCE

### PART 2: PARENTS

#### STREET PLAY

Marlene Mc Kiernan wrote:

“When I was a child I played outside all afternoon and it was quite safe to play on your own unsupervised. Unfortunately where I live now, my daughter cannot play outside at all. Even though we live in quite a quiet street, some cars come through very fast and the footpaths are parked up. I would love her to play outside without having to go to a park in the car and have somewhere safe to play.”

We discussed the “Playing Out” project featured in the research notes where families sharing streets are organising “no car” times and letting the children play out on the street.

#### USE WHAT WE HAVE MORE EFFECTIVELY

Karen (Kori & Alisha’s Mum from page 9):

Let the kids play in the fountains at Custom House Square. There was a Harley Davidson event there 2 summers ago where they were able to do this. However at events her family have attended since, the fountains have been switched off – this year was a scorching hot day and it would have been an ideal opportunity. When parents are there supervising their own children they can make their own judgements regarding safety, and are there to supervise their children while they’re having fun.

Another parent, Ryan, mentioned that Nottingham City Centre have water features that children are allowed to play in.

#### SUPERVISED / FEE PAYING PLAY SPACES

Lorraine (Anna’s Mum from page 8):

There is a desperate need for indoor and outdoor soft play areas for under 5’s in the city. As a Mum with toddlers, the absence of play/relaxation spaces actively deters her from coming into the city.

There could be supervised play areas in shopping malls/ big stores etc. She would be willing to pay, and suspects there would be many parents who would feel the same. She feels this kind of facility should be incorporated into planning legislation of new buildings: “shopping facilities with children in mind”.

There could be permanent play structures set up throughout the city, which would create family orientated spaces. Barcelona, for example, has permanent outdoor table tennis tables and sand pits.

Interactive sound and play boards around the fence of the City Hall gardens?

More nature, more greenery.

## UNSUPERVISED FREE PLAY AREAS

Anita, a parent, recounted her experiences of visiting Berlin where there are lots of small play areas dotted throughout the city. The idea originated in East Berlin where there were lots of bomb sites areas that had been left to become wasteland after the war – trees had grown and become tall enough to be transformed into structures that could hold swings, be used to climb etc. Children came to play, their parents would sit and relax, and then small cafes were set up, a few stalls. These little enclaves became established as spaces where people were welcome to hang out and relax – “family ecosystems” as Anita put it – a very effective phrase. Rather than trying to build one large play area, a great deal can be achieved through setting up a few of these small unobtrusive spaces....

Jolene, parent:

In Turkey there are, what could be described as inter-generational play parks: there are outdoor playgrounds for children with permanent gym facilities set up alongside so that parents (it tends to be mainly women that use them) can exercise at the same time as their children.

Another parent I spoke to added that something like this has recently been set up in Larne here. Also in Copenhagen they have elder generation play parks.

Rachel, Mum of Kitty & Alice:

Given the option, kids want to be outside, but given the weather in Northern Ireland, it would be good if outdoor play areas had some kind of tent like canopy. She thinks St Anne’s Square is an excellent venue in which to have activities for children because it is enclosed and safe (can it have a roof on it?!)

Michael, Dad and Patricia, Grandma:

There needs to be indoor space made available for play. They very much liked what was going on at this weekend event, and that there was access to indoor space where lots of children and young people were able to play freely out of the rain as these pictures show:



Les & Abbie, Mum & Dad to Zak (7) and Teddy (7) wrote “More play things in the City Centre please!”

## THEME PARKS

Leslie: There is a "Nursery Book Land" in Yorkshire, a themed free play park where all the climbing frames, swings, play objects have been designed to look like characters or objects out of nursery rhymes. She also suggested a miniature train ride that could go through parts of Belfast, like one she went on in Bulgaria.

She would like to see more family orientated events going on in Belfast, like the one being run this weekend.

## MORE FAMILY ORIENTATED EVENTS

Lorraine (different to the Lorraine mentioned earlier): There needs to be more events organised for children. This would encourage more families to come into the city. St Anne's Square and Custom House Square are both very good venues as they are relatively enclosed and safe.

Anne McVeigh, a Grandma: She normally doesn't come into Belfast, but came in specially today because of this event. She would love to see Trampolines, gymnastics and tumble mats that children could play on.

Rebecca, Mum, and Maggie, Granny to Hannah (from page 6) are from Newcastle Co Down. More events like this weekend's Kids Square would actively encourage the whole family to come into Belfast. They were highly complimentary about the new Ulster Museum – designed to be interactive so that children can use it without needing direct assistance.

On a different note: Rebecca is a wheel chair user and commented that what disabled toilet provision there is in Belfast is not really fit for purpose as they're not big enough. Public transport outside Belfast does not cater well for wheel chair users.

Una and David, parents to three children under 3 were very positive about there being far more family orientated festivals and events in Belfast than there used to be. (Although David also made the comment mentioned earlier regarding all the new public art that has appeared with "not a single climbing frame for children").

Colleen's mum drew a picture of a hot air balloon on one of the murals (see page 11). We had quite a big chat about the Hot Air Balloon Festival that takes place every year in Bristol. That would be a lovely sight in Belfast and would definitely attract a lot of people.

Michael, a Dad, would definitely like to see more of what was happening at this weekend event on a regular basis, say once a month. There is a big problem finding things for kids to do in Belfast when it's raining that doesn't cost money. He feels children have a lot more fun at free events, such as the Tall Ships and this weekend where they can be physically active, than in controlled paid for environments (like the cinema). He goes out of his way to try to find something for the kids to do on rainy days to get them out of the house. He came here today because he saw it advertised on KidsNI.com which he normally uses to find out what's going on in Belfast (although Culture Night was NOT advertised!)



Laureen, one of the artists at the event had spoken to quite a lot of families who came specially each of the three days of this Kids Square event because their children had enjoyed it so much and wanted to come back for more....

### HEALTH & SAFETY RED TAPE

Parent, Sarah, whose husband helped design Custom House Square, drew comparisons between the provision of family friendly outdoor spaces in Belfast with those on the continent: there families are always going out because there is so much on offer for them to do, but here provision is very limited. She sees a large part of the problem as being bureaucratic: her husband gets very frustrated with the limited thinking of decision makers: "The council design out all the nice interesting aspects of design because of health and safety red tape. Areas such as Custom House Square, St. Anne's Square, Bank Square are crying out to be used as family orientated spaces".

## CONCLUSION

There was a great deal of interest and enthusiasm in this survey, from children and parents alike.

The general response from the children when asked “What would you like to see more of when you come into the centre of Belfast” was “More fun stuff to do”!

Interestingly this seemed to naturally tie into the question of what would make Belfast a Healthy City as a large number of children seemed to choose physically active, healthy options of their own accord without prompting. Fun-fairs and playgrounds were very popular ideas, as well as places to play sport, to dance and play music. In many cases the ideas they came up with were then open to further discussion when they were shown pictures of other cities that already have some of these things in place e.g. football in Amsterdam, climbing frames in shopping malls.

Many of them want to see a lot more events, like this Kids Square, taking place on a more regular basis.

A lot of children would like to see more flowers and trees.

The inclusion of photographic stage backdrops and the murals in this art based research proved to be a very effective way of enabling the children to suggest where they thought were the best places in Belfast to have all these activities. Out of the 37 drawings (stages and murals combined), and one verbal comment, the following sites were chosen:

City Hall Gardens	16
Cathedral Square	6
St Anne’s Square	4
Custom House Square	3
Queen’s Square	3
Bank Square	3
Waterfront	2
Corn market	1

There was strong feeling from some of the older age groups (13 -16), that there seems to be a general intolerance to people of their age group in the city. They would like to have space where they can just relax and “hang out” that doesn’t require them to have to go shopping (many of them can’t afford it!), that needs to include indoor venues of some kind when the weather is bad.

There was an over –riding opinion that many families are specifically put off from coming into the city centre because of the lack of provision for children, particularly under 5’s. There was plenty of evidence throughout this weekend to support the premise that families are willing to go out of their way to attend an event their children will enjoy.

Many references were made to other European countries that actively utilise space in their cities to create family orientated areas where children can play freely, while their parents sit and relax. Permanent play structures could be “dotted” around the town, with some inter-generational play/fitness areas.

Many parents pointed out the big need for indoor as well as outdoor play areas. This was born out during the weekend itself as on Sunday it rained quite heavily. Everyone was able to use the empty shopping units in the square which was transformed into an energetic hive of creative activity with families all playing together!

There was a lot of positive feedback about the increase in family orientated events that have been taking place in Belfast; however there were also quite a lot of parents and children who felt there could be a great deal more, and possibly on a more regular basis.

St Anne’s Square, Custom House Square, City Hall Gardens and Bank Square were highlighted by parents, as being particularly conducive venues for these kind of events due to the relatively enclosed, and therefore safer, nature of the spaces.

There was, without exception, a strong sense that families will definitely come in to use facilities and attend events in the city centre a great deal more than they do, if they are provided.

Belfast Healthy Cities  
22/24 Lombard Street  
Belfast BT1 1RD  
Tel: +44 (0) 28 9032 8811  
Fax: +44 (0) 28 9032 8333  
[www.belfasthealthycities.com](http://www.belfasthealthycities.com)  
Twitter: @belfasthealthy

