

HACKNEY PLAYBUS



# DELIVERING DIFFERENTLY



2020-2021

# PROJECT OVERVIEW



Hackney Playbus is committed to our charitable aims to provide play and learning for babies and young children, to support parents in their parenting confidence, to link families into support services, and to foster a sense of community. In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, we adapted our mode of delivery to achieve these aims in new and creative ways to deliver a programme that has made a positive difference to the lives of families during an exceptionally challenging time.

The Covid-19 pandemic drastically reduced opportunities for children to play, learn, and socialise with others. Families were forced to stay at home under three national lockdowns, with libraries, playgroups, and even playgrounds closed for a significant part of the year. Hackney Playbus responded by putting together a programme that supported families to play and learn at home, while also creating opportunities for families to play and connect virtually. We ran online Zoom sessions for families, produced videos demonstrating play-at-home activity ideas, signposted families to play resources both online and in real life, and delivered Bookstart packs to families with care and support needs.

We also provided support to families who are particularly marginalised and disadvantaged by keeping our outreach and referrals programme active through the pandemic. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Hackney Playbus stayed abreast of developments across the statutory and community sectors, maintaining a high profile by playing an active role in forum and neighbourhood meetings, fostering closer collaboration with organisations who support marginalised Hackney families, while keeping our partners informed about our service.

We nurtured relationships with existing referral partners, including health visitors, hostel managers, and organisations supporting disadvantaged new mothers and organisations supporting migrants, and we also established new referral pathways, with social prescribers in particular. Over the course of the year, 23 referral partners from 15 different organisations referred 51 families to Hackney Playbus from diverse backgrounds. Of these families, 73% were socially isolated, 67% struggled with financial hardship and 47% with mental ill-health.

Although most community outreach was suspended in the light of Covid-19, we have continued to focus on reaching families who are experiencing homelessness. At the start of the pandemic, we offered 1:1 telephone support to all families we knew from our previous outreach to hostels, and have since established closer links with services supporting families who are homeless, as well as using our platform to bring attention to the digital exclusion of families in temporary accommodation. We also partnered with Hackney Libraries to deliver Bookstart packs to 237 homeless families living in temporary accommodation.





95%

Parents and carers said that watching Hackney Playbus play videos gave them more ideas about ways to play with their children at home during lockdown.



93%

Parents and carers said that Hackney Playbus play videos helped them understand that play is important for children's learning and development.



## PLAY AT HOME ACTIVITY VIDEOS



Hackney Playbus supported families to play and learn at home by developing an extensive video catalogue of simple play activity ideas. We focused on activities that can be easily done with little or no resources, using items that can be found in the home or in nature. Our play videos inspired families to try new activities at home and were well received by families who had been struggling to find ways to keep their children stimulated and engaged during lockdown. Our video catalogue also included stories and songs for children aged 0-4 years old to enjoy at home with their family.

During Zoom sessions we have also been able to see how our play-at-home videos have inspired families to try our activity ideas. Parents talk about the videos they have watched, sharing their favourites with one another and with the Playbus team; children proudly show off the creations they have made based on our activity ideas, showing them on camera to other children and to Playbus staff.

“It’s hard to come up with enough ideas as well as energy to keep toddlers busy in normal times, but add lockdown to this and you start to lose ideas. The videos helped by encouraging me and my son to try different activities at home. It gave me reassurance that I can keep him entertained and learning at the home without other children. The videos and support are so important not just for kids, but us parents too.”



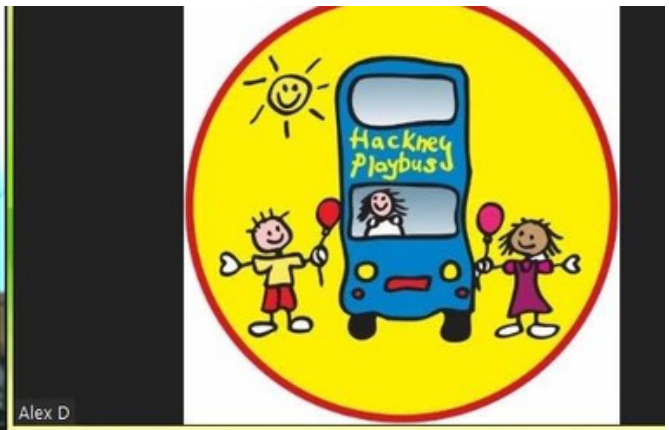
96%

Parents and carers said that their child has tried new activities or ways of playing because of Hackney Playbus play videos



89%

Parents and carers said that attending Zoom sessions helped them feel more connected with others during the pandemic.



96%

Parents and carers said they learned new songs because of Hackney Playbus Zoom sessions



## ZOOM SESSIONS



Hackney Playbus developed a programme of virtual online groups for parents and carers and their babies and young children during the Covid-19 pandemic. We ran a programme of 5 weekly Zoom sessions, focusing on sharing songs, games and stories for children aged 0-4 years old. These online groups were also a lovely way for parents and carers to bond with their children through song, and to connect with other families through sharing parenting experiences, including celebrating children's developmental milestones.

Children thoroughly enjoyed participating in Zoom sessions and showed a high level of engagement in the sessions. Babies and toddlers responded to music and song by joining in with actions, moving and wiggling their whole bodies, clapping, laughing, smiling, and even blowing kisses. Analysis of session reports shows that Zoom sessions particularly supported children in their personal, social and emotional development and contributed to their sense of happiness and wellbeing.

“ My daughter loves to sing with others. She knows the routine and songs, and now likes to join in. She is gaining confidence and likes showing off! She likes to see children she knows on the Zoom chat. ”

“ They feel happy any time when I tell them we are going on Zoom for Hackney Playbus. ”

“ I enjoy learning new songs with her. ”

“ We enjoy the chance to see other families that we're currently unable to see and the feeling of community this gives us. Also just very fun and reminds us about singing and how good it is to do together! ”

66%

Parents and carers say that their child(ren) sing more often than they did before attending Hackney Playbus Zoom sessions

## BOOKSTART DELIVERIES



We partnered with Hackney Libraries to help distribute Bookstart packs to families. Bookstart aims to encourage a love of books, stories and rhymes in children by providing free packs including new books for babies, toddlers and preschoolers, as well as other resources to encourage reading from an early age.

The free gift of books took on a new significance during the pandemic, with families spending more time at home and in hostel accommodation. Bookstart packs gave families an important and lovely way to spend time together in a time when providing enough stimulation and activity for babies and young children was particularly challenging.

Our Bookstart deliveries formed a key element of our outreach efforts during the pandemic. We included information in every pack about how to

including our e-newsletter, play videos and Zoom sessions. Our friendly volunteers also took the time to chat to families on the doorstep about the Hackney Playbus offer.

We distributed packs to 237 previously unknown families living in homeless hostels and domestic violence refuges, as well as migrant families and families affected by problematic substance use, and families who have been particularly hard hit by the pandemic, many of whom are digitally excluded and are less able to engage with our online offer.

*“Thank you for the books she loves them especially the ones with the black and white shapes. It is amazing to see her face now that she is more attentive to the words. She is starting to turn the pages.”*

*“It was such a lovely surprise. Having some lovely books arrive was so lovely, thank you.”*

*“I love watching my daughter read this book to my son. She talks him through the images and the patterns draw him in.”*





*Volunteers preparing Bookstart Packs for delivery*



*Making Bookstart pack deliveries by cargo bike*



# VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME



During the Covid-19 our volunteer programme needed to be flexible, dynamic and quick to respond to change, and our volunteers have risen to the challenge. Though originally coming on board the Hackney Playbus team for a specific role, our volunteers have moved flexibly from activity to activity, fulfilling the need whether there was one.

Volunteers have been busy collecting, packing and distributing Bookstart packs, preparing and delivering song props for families to use during our Zoom sessions, creating marketing materials, and doing a whole host of activities to support our crowdfunding campaign, from delivering posters to our supporters, putting up posters (and taking them down!), to filming content for our social media channels.

We would not have been able to reach so many families with Bookstart packs without the amazing support of the volunteer team who distributed over 1,000 books across the borough.

“ I was thinking into how I can help with the local community and found out about the Hackney Playbus. I love the concept and the work they do and wanted to help where I could. They are such a lovely team that I know bring much-needed support and fun to many kids and families around Hackney. ”

“ I've been able to meet great people along the way but the best thing would have to be reading the feedback from the families receiving the book bags, to know you've helped to make a positive difference in someone's day, it's the best! ”

# OUTDOOR PLAY SESSIONS



In September and October 2020, when Covid-19 lockdown restrictions had eased, we ran a series of outdoor family play sessions in Shoreditch Park and Rowley Gardens with a carefully considered Covid-19 risk assessment in place. The sessions were small groups, no larger than 6 families, and offered a lovely opportunity for children to play and explore both their local park and the resources and activities we have on offer.

Parents were especially grateful for the chance for their children to play and interact with others after such a long period of isolation. Many parents expressed concerns that their children's social skills had suffered due to lack of opportunity to meet and play with others. Our sessions offered some respite to parents as well, who have been struggling to occupy their children during lockdown. The opportunity to play, connect, laugh and to celebrate the small but wonderful achievements of very young children together felt really worthwhile and beneficial to everyone's wellbeing.

Demonstrating easy play-at-home activities during these outdoor sessions gave parents ideas for things that they could do at home with their children. It was useful to be able to reinforce this by linking parents to the play videos we developed during this time. For example, we provided an open-ended activity using dried pasta for young children to explore mixing, pouring and posting. One mother had never seen her child so engrossed in his play before, and had never tried an activity like this at home. She was able to take the resources away with her to use them some more at home, and we later followed up by sending her our play videos on this theme.

“*Thank you so much for the invite! I honestly felt really safe and comfortable. The children loved having different things to play with and it was lovely that you had tailored the toys to things that they would like.*”



## TELEPHONE SUPPORT

This year Hackney Playbus provided support to families over the telephone in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. We offered this support to families who are experiencing difficult issues such as poverty, homelessness, domestic violence, and poor mental health. We were able to check-in with families to see how they were getting on, and we responded to some important and urgent needs including sourcing food, nappies, and buggies for families who cannot afford these items. Connecting with families in this way allowed us to provide much needed emotional support for families who have been feeling isolated, anxious, and uncertain about how to provide for their babies and young children during the pandemic, and to signpost families on to specialist support where necessary.

## SUPPORT SERVICES

Throughout the pandemic we helped families access support services by providing 1:1 consultations over the phone, as well as highlighting services through our e-newsletter, our information text messaging service, and through our Zoom sessions. During April 2020 - March 2021, we signposted families to over 127 different support services or resources, including 19 services or resources focused on play, learning, and child development, 24 different children's activities and sessions, both online and in real life, as well as 84 other services to support families on a range of issues from food provision, housing, and health, to support for domestic abuse survivors and financial hardship.

“It has been great working more closely with Hackney Playbus and it has impacted the lives of our clients significantly. During lockdown, our service has been unable to meet with our clients face to face which has meant that we are unable to provide as much social interaction for our clients. The [Hackney Playbus] Zoom sessions and telephone support has been a real lifeline for those that we work with who are often living in cramped and unsuitable accommodation and haven't been able to take the children out and about. Sending books to our clients made such a difference and our families really benefited from online stories. They have felt part of the Playbus family and haven't felt so alone during this difficult time.”

*Catherine Govier, Family Support Worker  
Shelter Hackney Family Service*

Throughout this work, we continue to be alert to the barriers we observe in attempting to access support for families, cataloguing our experiences in the hope that we can offer some assessment of how services can improve their accessibility to families.

# Join Hackney Playbus on Zoom to sing your favourite songs!

Here are some pictures to use when we are singing.  
Bring them along to your next Zoom session!  
Can you guess which songs they are for?

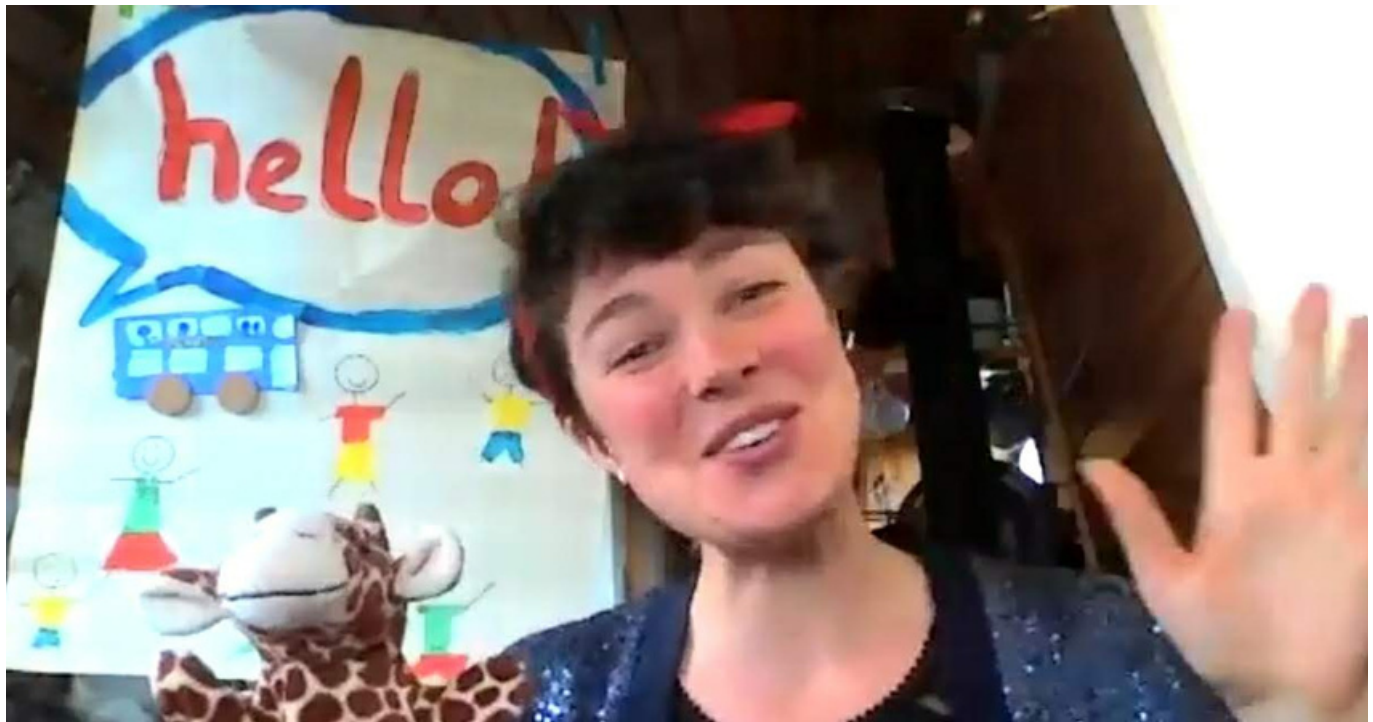


[www.hackneyplaybus.org/play-ideas](http://www.hackneyplaybus.org/play-ideas)



**80%**

Parents and carers found out helpful information about support services from the Hackney Playbus e-newsletter



**68%**

Parents and carers made use of a service/s because of information provided in e-newsletters.



# HACKNEY PLAYBUS



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CHARITY NO. 1163792

Statistics taken from evaluation surveys completed by 45 parents and carers over the course of the funded period.