

Evaluation of
UNIVERSAL BOARD GAMES
SUPER DADS PROJECT
2015

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Introduction

Universal Board Games is a small Hackney-based charity that delivers play events for local people of all ages and backgrounds, based on its wide knowledge of traditional and modern games from around the world. The 2015 Super Dads project, funded by Awards for All, set out to research the impact of game-playing on the family, with an emphasis on improving parenting, relationships and wellbeing (particularly in relation to fathers and children) in a low-cost, supportive environment.

Research questions included:

- Can games events help build life skills, in particular effective parental engagement with children through play? This area of focus explored whether games events help develop communication skills, parenting awareness and parents' ability to help their children learn.
- How effective are games events at building stronger local communities? This area included looking at whether participating helped build happier and more stable relationships between fathers and children, with knock-on community benefits, and whether it helped parents and children feel more involved and comfortable actors within their community.
- What are the positive health outcomes of playing participatory public games? Areas for exploration included whether participants felt greater self-esteem and emotional wellbeing as a result of taking part, as well as physical fitter.

Data collection

Data Format	Event	Date	Number of respondents
Surveys with dads, children and young people, school staff	Evening session, St Thomas Abney Primary School	June-July 2015	25
Surveys with dads, children and young people, local stakeholders including businesses	Dalston Square	01/08/2015	32
Surveys with dads, children and young people, local stakeholders including businesses	Hackney Museum/public square outside Hackney Learning Trust	01/06/2015	45
Surveys with dads, children and young people, local stakeholders	Robin Hood Community Garden	01/08/2015	23
Informal interviews with local stakeholders	All sites	June-August 2015	20
Photographs from events	All sites	June-August 2015	N/A

Anecdotal data was also collected through observing events and talking with the participants to collect verbal feedback during and afterwards, including parents, children and young people, volunteers, stakeholders and venue support staff.

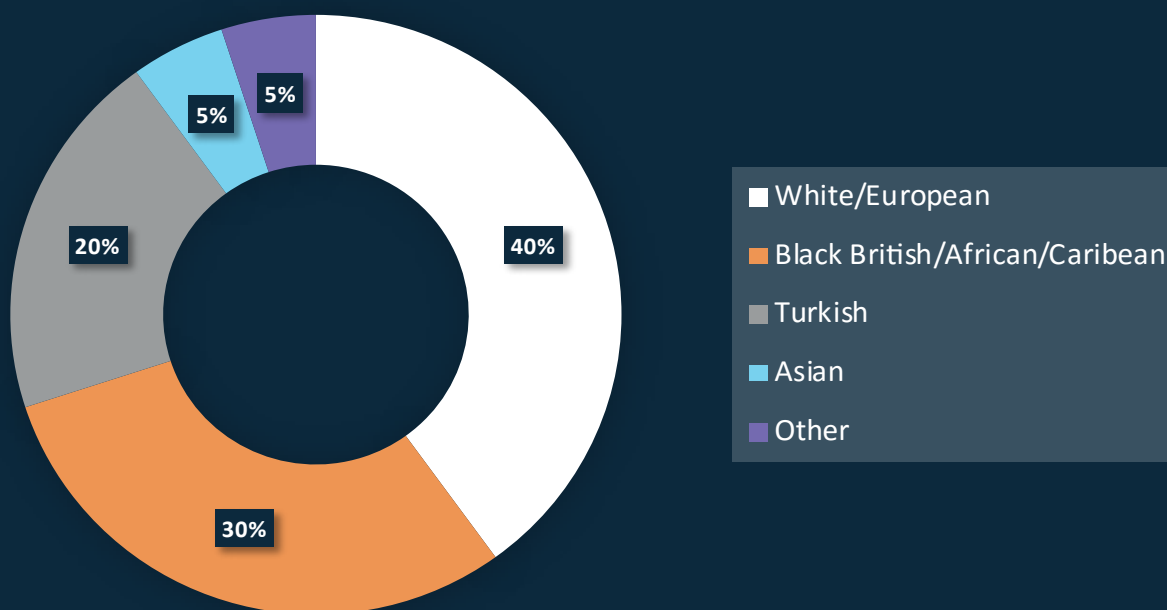
Project outputs

Event	Number of sessions	Total attendance	Average attendance per event	Number of children/ young people	Number of attendee dads/parents/family members
Large public events	4	222	55	168	54
Friday evening sessions	16	640	40	464	176
Weekday sessions	16	720	45	528	192
Total	48	1582	46	1160	422

Demographic make-up

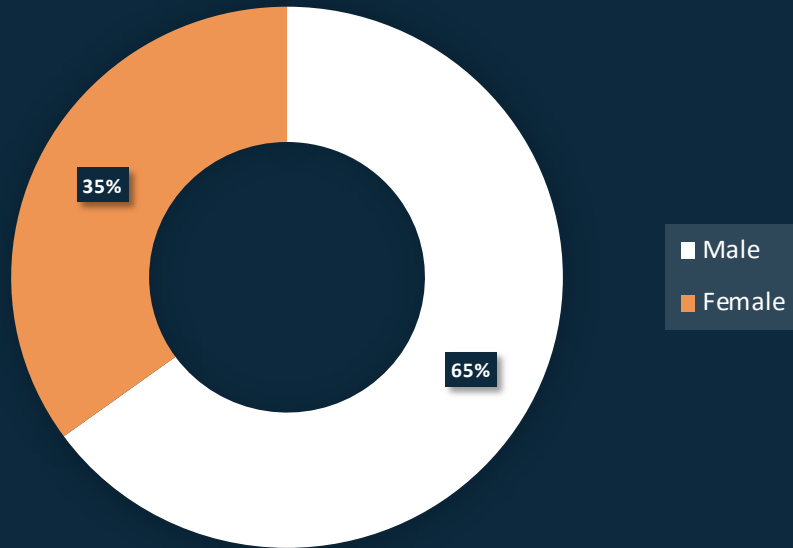
Ethnicity

Large public events / Friday evening sessions / Weekday sessions

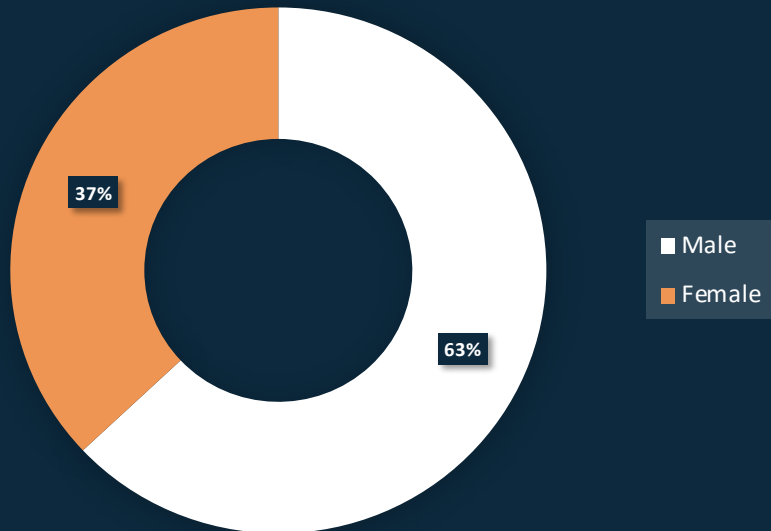


Gender

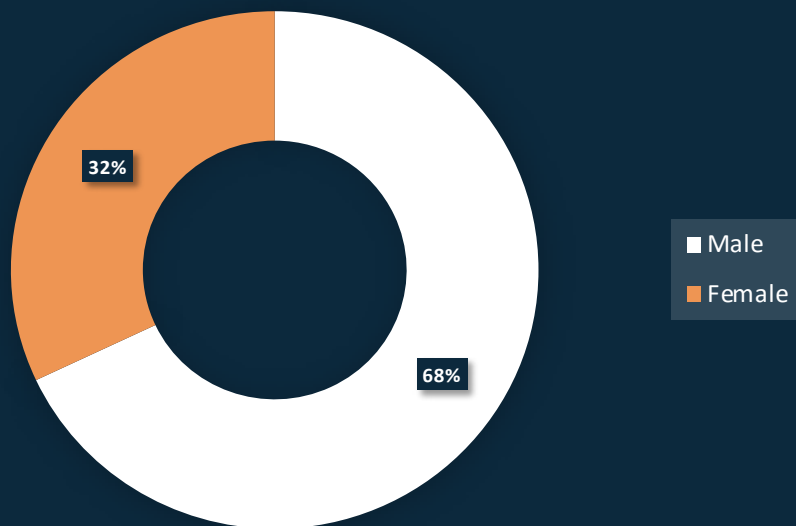
Large public events



Friday evening sessions

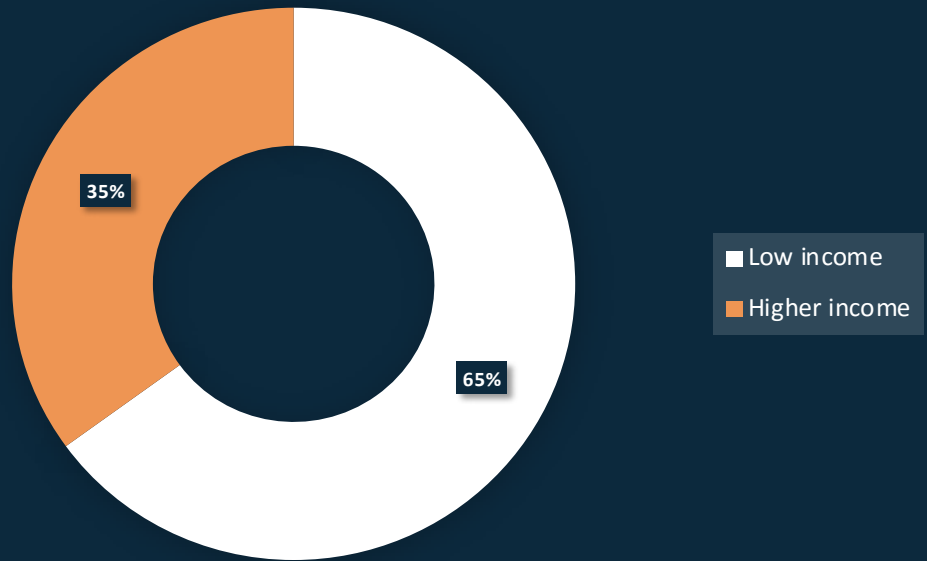


Weekday sessions

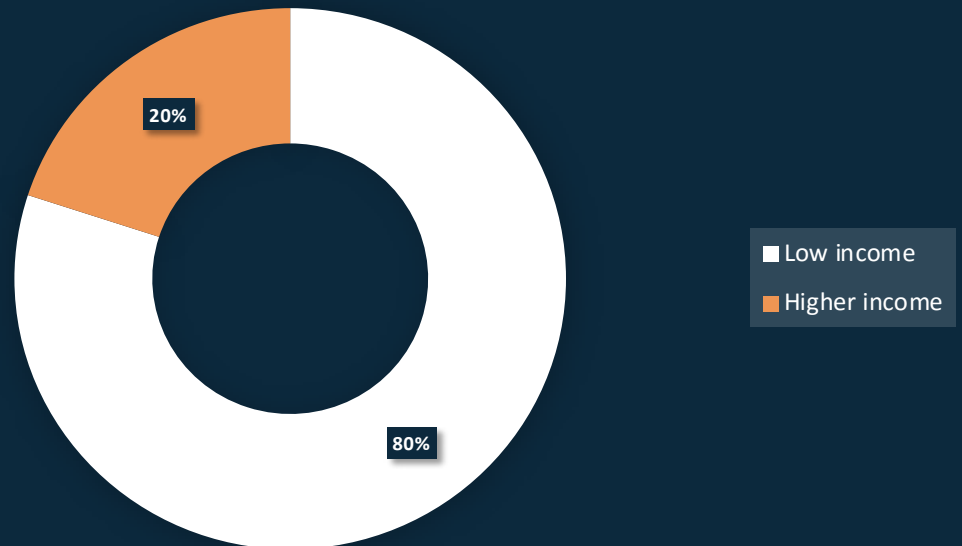


Income

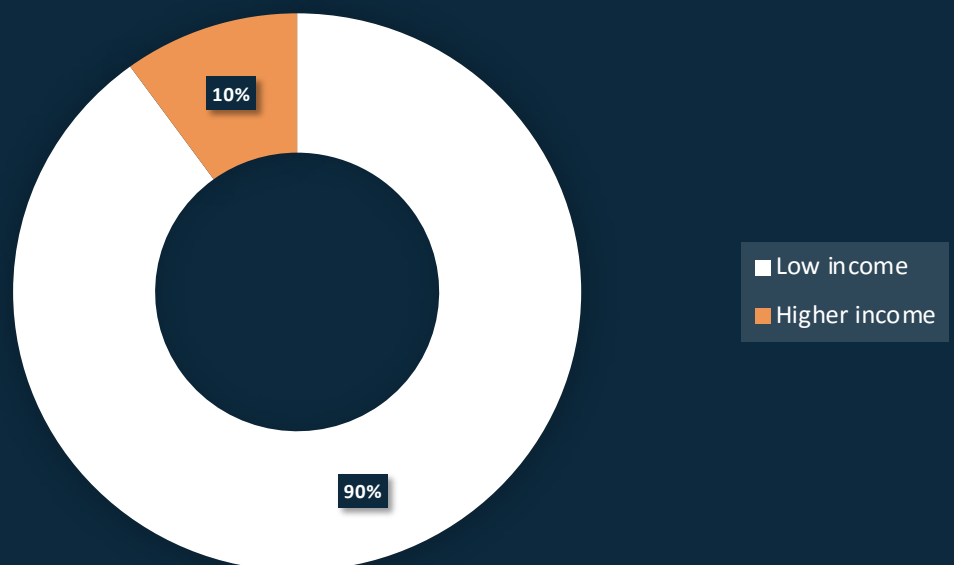
Large public events



Friday evening sessions



Weekday sessions



Attendance and participation

"I normally just collect them at the gate, but my kids saw the games and begged me to stay and play with them. I'm really glad I did"

Spanish father, Sir Thomas Abney School

- There was a 100% positive response from all participants in questionnaire and interview data
- Parents and young people learned together
- Intergenerational play: grandparents, older people and older teenage boys were observed taking part together
- Children particularly liked playing games with their dads, family, friends and other children
- Events and games proved inclusive and accessible to diverse communities
- Participants were observed to mix with local community peers from diverse cultures
- Particularly enjoyable games highlighted by participants included Le Passe-Trappe, Kubbolino, Weykick, Blokus, Crokinole, Ricochet Robot and Kamisado

"I love to come and play chess with my daughter"

Caribbean father, Hackney Museum/Learning Trust

Key themes expressed in user feedback included:

- The activities' social aspects
- Enjoyment and happiness
- Love and attention
- Spending time together as a family
- Learning
- Community spirit and cohesion

Location and atmosphere

"It was a rare treat to play in a public space – I had a great day with my stepson"

Father, Dalston Square

- 100% of the fathers surveyed agreed that the venues were great
- Feedback from partner organisations was resoundingly positive: for example, Hackney learning staff and the Hackney Museum staff loved it
- The events raised awareness of and interest in the venues involved: for example, a woman leaving the town hall was observed to notice the event and immediately tweet about the workshop
- Events were observed by all to bring a positive, peaceful, energised, supportive, inclusive and fun atmosphere to the venues

"What an amazing, beautiful space to spend time together"

Unemployed Kurdish man, the father of three daughters, Robin Hood Community Garden

“It was so refreshing to see people playing together”

Hackney Museum security staff

The venues’ positive aspects:

- Busy public spaces close to shopping areas such as Dalston Square and Hackney Museum were very visible, accessible and inclusive, ensuring high footfall at play events and a multicultural diversity of participants
- The beautiful, natural and community-led Robin Hood Community Garden proved welcoming and encouraged people to stay longer. The venue also had a good community network for promoting events
- Sir Thomas Abney School ensured immediate access, a readymade audience and advertising networks
- Positive and mutually beneficial relationships with Hackney Museum and the school ensured access to indoor space, furniture and staff support
- Outdoor public spaces (for example, Dalston Square and the Robin Hood Community Garden) provided sufficient space for games and facilities such as seating areas useful for family activities
- Good transport links serving the public spaces enabled visitors to come not just from the local area but from all over London
- Dalston Square attracted other organisations to participate and co-host events (for example, the ‘Mind Your Language’ youth group, Tea Herbal and Hackney Council Strategy and Environmental Teams promoting their agendas)
- Dalston Square had the advantage of good parking access

Challenges with regards to the venues included:

- Public spaces were weather dependent and could be noisy
- Previous negative associations (eg, public drinking at Dalston Square)
- Dealing with rare anti-social behaviour occurrences in public spaces
- Limited space for tables and chairs at Hackney Museum

“We fully support this community initiative, it’s innovative and inclusive”

Dalston Tenants and Residents’ Association

Project outcomes

Research question 1

Do Super Dads games events help build life skills, in particular effective parental engagement with children and their learning through play?

"I am really surprised to see so many people playing and enjoying themselves in the square and learning new skills too"

Security guard, Dalston Square

"I love it, it's great to get more parents engaging in school and seeing their kids in a different light"

Ivan, support worker, St Thomas Abney Primary School

- 100% of CYP surveyed said they had improved their skills and knowledge of a range of games. One child expressed what many voiced: "I have got much better at chess and other games and learned lots of new skills"
- 99% of the children agreed they had learned a new game and 98% agreed they had improved at a game
- 100% of dads surveyed agreed that they had learned a new game or picked up new ideas at the workshop
- Many parents and CYP said the session gave them lots of ideas for making and playing games at home together: "We will go home and play this as a family"; "I learned to play a game from my home that I inherited years ago"
- Dads reported feeling pride in seeing their children's thinking develop. One dad said: "I have never known him to be so focused and concentrate for this length of time"
- 65% of child respondents showed their dads how to play a game and 35% agreed that their dads showed them how to play: "My dad is teaching me how to play chess better"
- Parents and children learned about one another: survey data showed that 90% of dads agreed they had learned something new about their children – "Watching my children taking turns, sharing – it was fun and unexpected"
- 100% of child respondents agreed they had learned new game rules. The observed progression of some children and young people in terms of learning to share, take turns, etc, was remarkable
- Parents learned about the benefits of not just letting their children win. Many dads reported that it was good to learn to win and lose together, yet for children to know they were supported by their parent
- Local partners including school staff observed the benefits of parents and children learning together through play

"[We] recognise that this is beneficial to education and learning and would like to see this included in out-of-school programmes"

Hackney Learning Trust staff

"It's great to get dads involved and it's what we need to give all the children a better chance"

Geraldine Fitzmaurice, head, St Thomas Abney Primary School

Research question 2

How effective are games events at building stronger local communities?

"It's great to see older boys and men from all different backgrounds playing together"

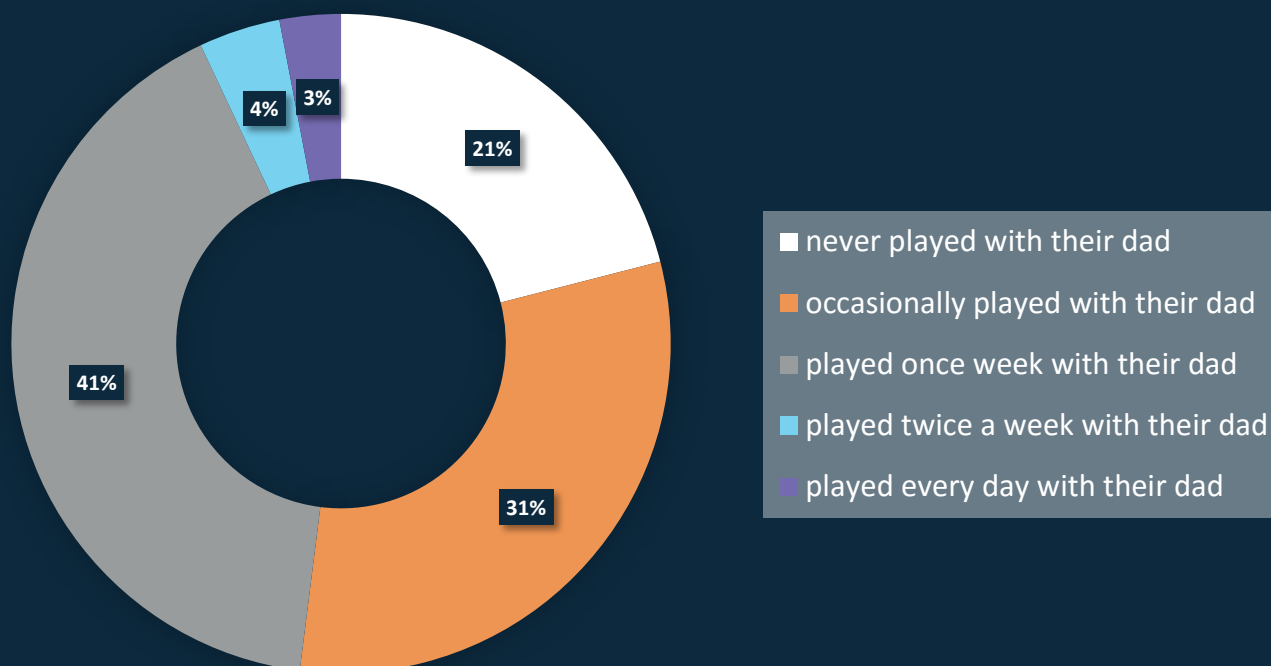
Emma Winch, heritage manager, Hackney Museum

"This project has given us ways to attract more dads and children into our libraries by reaching out to them. The Universal Board Games project has shown that dads are more likely to get involved in a public space"

Children and young people's manager, Hackney Libraries, Heritage and Culture

- 100% of the children surveyed agreed that they had fun with their dads during the games events
- The space offered dads and children the opportunity to stay and play together. Many dads were observed communicating and engaging with their children through play. Children explained games to adults and peers, dads were seen listening to their children, watching and learning with them in a relaxed and social atmosphere. The dads present were very engaging, they communicated and related well with everyone. Many children played with other dads, too
- Super Dads events helped increase the amount of quality time fathers and children spent together each week: 98% of child respondents said they talked and listened more with one another than they normally did at home. 62% of dads did not live with their children, 85% reported rarely having time with their children. There was a clear need and desire from children and young people to engage with their dads more often. Some who did not spend enough time with their dads or no time at all were unhappy and felt like they were missing something; dads who didn't spend much time with their children concurred

Child participant responses in relation to how often they usually play with their dad each week



- 98% of child respondents stated there was a difference between the time they usually spent with their dads and playing together at Super Dads: the latter was described as more active, a new experience, a much bigger environment, more space, and most importantly, dads were less distracted. CYP reported that they felt their dads were really listening to them and actively interested in their lives

“When I play here I communicate more with my 11-year-old”

Dad with his son at Dalston Square

- Many dads expressed their thanks for the opportunity to have something to do with their children that was fun, engaging and promoted learning development. This was particularly valued at weekends, which for many was their only access time. One dad said: “I did not know what to do with them today, but when we found this was happening, it’s just perfect”
- Children and mothers who were there without dads in attendance said they would encourage them to come the following week. Couples said that when they have children, this is where they would bring them

“My child loved it and we had the best time together”

Dad with daughter

“I bonded with my child more”

Dad with son

- 100% of dads strongly agreed that it was a rare treat to play with their children in a public space
- 90% of dads felt more included in their children’s lives and the everyday life of the local community
- Everyone who attended or watched said the events made a big impact on the local community. They called for more events of a similar ilk as Super Dads offered them the opportunity to interact with a diverse range of local people whom they would never normally talk to
- Engaging with Super Dads increased local volunteering opportunities and provided valuable experience: one young person volunteered after coming to one of the sessions. A Hackney Museum volunteer from Goldsmiths, University of London said: “This is one of the best volunteering experiences I’ve had. I’ve learned a lot about people...keeping it fun, and interesting”
- Super Dads drew more residents into local public spaces:
- Super Dads staff observed that the spaces were totally transformed through creating a relaxed environment for people to come together

“Great to see the garden used by all members of the community, especially children and dads. We need more community events like this, and this is a wonderful way to get people into the garden, staying and enjoying the space...it attracts more volunteers...as well”

Committee member, Robin Hood Community Garden

- Play events transformed public perception of public spaces: for example, 95% of participants had viewed Dalston Square as an unwelcoming and desolate space prior to the Super Dads sessions, yet responses afterwards included highly positive sentiments. Many people were pleasantly surprised to see something happening in their public space. One visitor commented that it was like a fairy tale: the space had so quickly transformed into a place of magic, fun, creativity and play. There was a noticeable difference when the events were not taking place, as casual observers, local staff and businesses attested. One said: “When you’re not here this place can feel quite unsafe and aggie”

- Quotes from participants:

We have made new friends who live in our neighbourhood and normally don't get the chance to play with"

"[A good opportunity to] meet and play with my friends and meet new people"

"Parents aren't worried where you are"

"Just to see my kids and other children playing together"

"It's good to be together with lots of other kids"

"It was wonderful to see different people from the community out playing together"

- Feedback from local stakeholders points to some of the project's powerful community effects:

"We really look forward to when Universal Board Games are coming. We love helping out. It lifts the energy and engages unruly and misbehaving people who pass the space, when they normally would hang around and disrupt the space"

Hackney Learning Trust and Library security staff

"It's great to see this place alive again, our numbers at the museum have tripled with new visitors"

Staff member, Hackney Museum

"I love what you guys are doing: it's what this square needs and it helps my business"

Turkish restaurant owner, Dalston Square

"When we built this square this is exactly the type of community engagement we had in mind – accessible and intergenerational"

Hackney cultural programmes officer, Dalston Square

"I love this, it is a great way to engage with the community and I want more of it"

Library café owner, Dalston Square

"This place needs positive activities because it can be really anti-social at times"

Security staff, Dalston Square

Research question 3

What are some of the positive health outcomes of playing participatory public games such as Super Dads?

- Survey data showed that 99% of children strongly agreed that workshops were fun, and 99% said they would come again (the other 1% were visiting the area)
- 95% of dads agreed that they were more active than usual during the events
- Participants reported that they had used their brains and enjoyed the project's challenges
- Feedback points to how playing games might increase feelings of wellbeing (for example, one dad said the project had made him feel "more positive and alert")

Learning points

“Exactly the kind of activity my children and their dad need, and more of it too”

Parent committee member

- Dads asked that the project be put on more often
- What UBG does and the relaxed and informal way it does it is high quality, unique and draws people’s interest, according to participant feedback
- A future project would be in a strong position to build on the positive and mutually beneficial partnerships that have been built during the Super Dads project, and could use existing evaluation data and positive relationships to establish new ones
- Good preparation and communication with partner organisation staff is vital
- Future projects would benefit from more event advertising, especially through our existing mailing list, with participants’ contact details collected for future use
- Volunteer support helped deliver successful events. More skilled volunteers will be required for future developments, which will require training
- Super Dads workshops showed that volunteers need to be allocated more specific roles (for example, collecting data/feedback, taking videos/photos, etc). However, they should also be allowed to play and feel totally involved
- There is a need for staff to move between games and players constantly
- The charity’s safeguarding policy needs updating
- Staff noted the need to record feedback more effectively when talking to people who are playing (eg, notes, feedback forms)
- Taking photos before, during and after the events helps to highlight the transformation of the space and the people
- Conducting video interviews with participants during events would be useful
- The most popular games were chess, Blokus, Kubbolino, Weykick, Le Passe-Trappe, Kamisado, Marrakesh, shuffle board, sleeping queens and Crokinole
- The main things children did not like were losing (16%), waiting to play their favourite game (18%) and rare arguments (5%)

