



“Asking At Ammerdown”

A report from a children’s consultation event about play

At the Ammerdown Centre, Radstock.



With children from St John’s and Oakfield Schools, Frome.



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Mendip District Council and Mendip Play Partnership

Consultation on project ideas that might form the basis of the Mendip Play Strategy.

Rachel Chainey
March 2007



1 Background:

- 1.1 18 children were consulted for one day at the Ammerdown Centre near Frome. Eight 10 and 11 year olds and ten 6 and 7 year olds.
- 1.2 The consultation was conducted by Barnardo's for Mendip District Council on Monday 5th March 2007.
- 1.3 The consultation consisted of practical workshop activities as follows:

Introduction

- 1.4 Children were taken into the woods to play games to enable us all to get to know each other and begin thinking about how we play outside.



Picture Activity

- 1.5 The children were shown a video of a large adventure play space in Harringey, London.
- 1.6 Children were shown 90 pictures of a variety of play spaces and play equipment (appendix 23).
- 1.7 The pictures were grouped into likes and dislikes and then children chose their favourite 6 and then their favourite 2 pictures.



Play Rangers Activity

- 1.8 The concept of a Play Ranger was explained to the children.
- 1.9 Children were asked to draw on a large picture of a play ranger a) qualities they think people need to be a good Play Ranger and b) how having a Play Ranger might make them feel safe.

- 1.10 On cards and post-it notes children were asked to write or draw a) activities a Play Ranger could do with them b) places a Play Ranger could base activities.
- 1.11 As a group the children were asked to comment on whether having a Play Ranger will make it more or less likely that they'll play outside.

Attitudes Activity

- 1.12 Children were given a large smiley face and asked to add comments describing why playing outside is good for them and why they like playing outside. They then ranked their comments in order of importance.



- 1.13 Children were given a large frowning face and asked to add comments describing what stops them playing outside. They then ranked their comments in order of importance.

We organised the next part slightly differently for the younger children due to a lack of time.

- 1.14 Older children – were given speech bubbles with comments in them and asked to place the comments on a chart according to how often their parents and other adults said that type of thing. They added extra comments on post-it notes.
- 1.15 Younger Children – discussed the things adults and parents say to them as a group and their comments were recorded on a chart.

Parent/Carer Questionnaire

- 1.16 To support the work on the day a questionnaire was distributed to the parents/carers of the children who took part (appendix 22).
- 1.17 Closed questions were totalled and charted.
- 1.18 Answers to open ended questions were grouped into common themes and then counted and charted.

2 Collecting and interpreting the data

- 2.1 Throughout the consultation notes were taken by staff as children made comments and expressed opinions. Video footage was used to record some of the results and main discussions. A selection of the video footage has been made into a short film.
- 2.2 Picture Activities – For each of the pictures shown to the children we recorded the features within it. For example for each picture we recorded whether it was a natural or designated play space, whether it contained mud, sand, water, moveable equipment et cetera (appendix 1). This

- enabled us to look at what features in the pictures the children chose the most often as well as which pictures were the most popular.
- 2.3 The pictures chosen were recorded. The number of times each feature within the pictures occurred in the selected pictures was then divided by number times the children had the opportunity to choose that feature (appendices 2 to 4) to give a ratio hit count.
 - 2.4 We should remember that although the features are recorded separately, the children may have chosen the picture for one or all of the features in it, therefore some of the results in the graphs might be misleading and should be interpreted with the video footage and the pictures to hand.
 - 2.5 Play Rangers Activities – Comments from the activities were transcribed, grouped according to common themes and counted.
 - 2.6 Attitudes Activities – For the smiley and frowning face activities (why we like playing and what stops us playing) children’s comments were scored according to their ranking order, with the most important comments gaining 5 points and the least important gaining 1 point. The points were totalled to give an overall score.
 - 2.7 When listing things adults say to them children could choose whether to place the comments as said ‘*often*’, ‘*sometimes*’ or ‘*never*’. Comments were transcribed, grouped and counted.
 - 2.8 Parent Questionnaire – The respondents are parents of those children who attended the consultation day and therefore are not a representative sample of parents in Mendip; please note the gender and geographical make-up especially (appendix 13).
 - 2.9 When asked about their local playspace comments may not be representative of all playspaces in Mendip because of the bias in geographical location of the respondents (appendix 13).

3 Results from the Picture Activities

- 3.1 From the pictures that were chosen as their **two** favourites by the children, the following features were the most popular; ball games court (1.17), bark (1.00), stones/boulders (0.87) and moveable equipment (0.87) (appendix 3).
- 3.2 Dogs/animals (0), mud (0) and bright colours (0.08) were the features chosen the least number of times among the top 2 choices (appendix 3).
- 3.3 Moveable equipment (0.80), water (0.50) and youth shelter (0.40) were the features chosen most by the 10-11 years olds (appendix 3).

3.4 Ball games court (0.83), stones/boulders (0.75), bark (0.67) and sand (0.63) were the features chosen the most by the 6-7 year olds (appendix 3).

3.5 The most chosen pictures overall are shown below, (appendix 2).



*Favourite pictures chosen by the children
NB: blue surface = water!*

3.6 From the six pictures that were chosen as favourites the following features were most popular; ball games court (1.33), moveable equipment (1.07), water (1.00) and bark (1.00) (appendix 4).

3.7 The features chosen the least number of times in the children's favourite 6 pictures are the same as for their favourite 2 pictures (appendices 3 and 4).

3.8 Water (0.90), moveable equipment (0.87), ball games court (0.50) and wide open space (0.43) were the features chosen the most number of times by the 10-11 year olds in their favourite 6 pictures (appendix 4).

3.9 Ball games court (0.83), bark (0.67), stones/boulders (0.50) and sand (0.50) were the features chosen the most number of times by the 6-7 year olds in their favourite 6 pictures (appendix 4).

3.10 The children discussed their choices:

<i>'We're gonna be Billy Goats Gruff'</i>	<i>'I like making dens and crossing over rivers'</i>	<i>'AL looks like a castle'</i>
<i>'A bridge with Billy Goats Gruff / alien thing with electric hands reaching up'</i>	<i>'Z – Rocks 'Wow I like this''</i>	<i>'AA 'It's a massive sandcastle and I like sandcastles''</i>
<i>'Is there a zip wire?'</i>	<i>'Green space'</i>	<i>'Definitely that one – a tree – we've got that (AR) in Frome.'</i>
<i>'Let's have huge monkey bars over a river!'</i>	<i>'Trees to climb'</i>	
<i>'A nature place with giant butterflies when you go in'</i>	<i>'Find special natural spaces'</i>	<i>'Have we got any football?'</i>
<i>'Rocks to climb up'</i>	<i>'Dens like being in a camp – hidden'</i>	<i>'Y – like it cos it's a jungley thing'</i>

3.11 Children prefer natural playspaces over designated playspaces (appendix 3; natural 0.46, designated 0.38 and appendix 4; natural 0.54, designated 0.50).

3.12 Landscaped features with a play value are popular (0.45 appendix 3 and 0.61 appendix 4)

3.13 Static equipment is popular compared to not having any static equipment (appendix 3; static equipment 0.68 (0.32+0.36), no static equipment 0.55 and appendix 4; static equipment 1 (0.41+0.59), no static equipment 0.55).

4 Results from the Play Rangers Activities

4.1 The characteristics mentioned most often as desirable qualities for a Play Ranger were: playful (9), good fun (5), kind (4) and willing to join in (4) (appendix 5).

4.2 The 6-7 year olds also placed importance on them being friendly (3) (appendix 5).

4.3 The children thought that having a Play Ranger will make them feel safer because they will be able to; protect from bullies (4), keep an eye on children (4) and help you if you get hurt (3) (appendix 6).

4.4 The most often mentioned issue for the 6-7 year olds was keeping an eye on children (3) (appendix 6).

- 4.5 The most often mentioned issue for the 10-11 year olds was protection from bullies (2) (appendix 6).
- 4.6 Playground games (13) and sports (12) were the most popular activities that children thought the Play Rangers could facilitate (appendix 7).
- 4.7 The local park (8) was the most popular choice as a venue to base those activities (appendix 8).
- 4.8 The majority of children think that having a Play Ranger will make it more likely that they will play outside (10:1) (appendix 9).

'I think younger children would come out more because they would feel safer'

'My Mum and Dad are usually busy and if a Play Ranger was there they would be able to come and do sports with me.'

'They will be out there and then it will be more fun to go out and play ... if their friends aren't there ... you don't have to play on your own ...'

'I think it will be more likely that children will play outside their houses because now they would have someone to play with'

'I think having a Play Ranger would encourage younger children to play outside. Their parents would be more relaxed about letting them go out to play without having to worry.'

'You could do anything you want cos they've got loads of play things.'

5 Results from Attitudes Activities

- 6.1 The children like playing outside because it; makes them fit (36), uses up energy (18) and gives them fresh air (20) (appendix 10).
- 6.2 The 6-7 year olds also like playing outside because it makes them happy (10) (appendix 10).
- 6.3 The 10-11 year olds also like playing outside because they can meet up with friends (10) (appendix 10).
- 6.4 Bad weather (14), bullying (12) and adults stopping them (11) are the main reasons that children don't play outside as much as they'd like to (appendix 11).
- 6.5 When addressed by parents while they are playing outside the comments most often said to 10-11 year olds are 'not in the road' (3), 'hello' (3) and 'smiled at' (3) (appendix 12).

- 6.6 When comments that are sometimes said by parents to 10-11 year olds are included those most often said are 'not in the road' (6), 'hello' (5), 'turn your music down' (4) and 'tut tut' (4) (appendix 12).
- 6.7 When addressed by other adults while they are playing outside the comments most often said to 10-11 year olds are 'no ball games' (3), 'hello' (3) and 'keep off the grass' (3) (appendix 12).
- 6.8 When comments that are sometimes said by other adults to 10-11 year olds are included those most often said are 'no ball games' (5), 'don't play by my car' (5), 'keep off the grass' (4) and 'alright guys' (4) (appendix 12).
- 6.9 We briefly discussed the idea of shared public space in streets. The 10-11 year olds felt that this would cause more problems because, *"You wouldn't have as much space ... say if you were playing there they could tell you off because it's not your garden 'cos you all share a garden so it's their garden too."*
- 6.10 We discussed how we might educate adults about the importance of outdoor play. The 10-11 year olds comments included;

"We could talk to them ... have a meeting ... (about) children's play."

"You could tell them that they were once kids 'cos when they were kids they must've wanted to do some things that ... might've made a bit of noise outside."

6.11 When addressed by parents and other adults while they are playing outside 6-7 year olds receive an equal number of negative and positive comments from other adults. They receive neutral comments from parents. (See below.)

	<u>A Lot</u>	<u>Sometimes</u>
<u>Parents</u>	Come in in 5 minutes	
	Mum calls me in time to see Nan	
<u>Other adults</u>	Say thank you when I do things	Older brother asks if we can share our toys
	Next door neighbour calls you round	'Get your ball off my garden'
	Swear at me	'Don't do that again or you'll regret it'

6 Results from the Parent Questionnaire

- 6.1 All the respondents were female, aged between 26 and 60. The majority come from Frome. There are an almost equal number of male and female children or young people in their households (appendix 13).
- 6.2 When asked about their local playspace 11 of the 13 respondents stated that they are able to walk to it. The majority of children in their households never visit the playspace unaccompanied, but if the children are accompanied 6 of the 13 households visit the playspace once a month and 4 households visit once a week (appendix 14a).
- 6.3 The majority of the children in the households who responded to the questionnaire play most often in the garden (10), at the local park (8) or indoors at home (6) (appendix 14a).
- 6.4 Parents who responded to the questionnaire think that their local parks are aimed at 6-11 year olds (6 of 13), 0-5 year olds (4 of 13) and 16+ years (4 of 13). No playspaces were considered to be aimed at 12-16 year olds (appendix 14a).
- 6.5 The majority of respondents consider that their local play space encourages adventure (8), encourages imagination (8) and encourages children and young people to work together (9), but does not encourage children to play with natural things (9) (appendix 14b).
- 6.6 The majority of respondents consider that children and young people do not have enough opportunities to play outside (appendix 14b).

- 6.7 Respondents consider that more children will use their nearest playspace more often if more of different play facilities are added (7), or if there are more facilities like benches, toilets, and cafes (6). The behaviour of other children and young people (4) and the lack of parent time (4) to take children to the park are also issues that prevent children spending time in the park (appendix 15).
- 6.8 Respondents consider that concerns of safety (13) and traffic (7) are the main issues that prevent them from letting their children play outside (appendix 15).
- 6.9 Parents are supportive of the idea of Play Rangers (appendix 16).
- 6.10 The majority of respondents think that after school (12) and weekends (10) are the best times for Play Rangers to work in their area. They consider that 8 to 12 year olds (8yrs=11, 9yrs=11, 10yrs=11, 11yrs=10, 12yrs=9) are the age group they should target. Respondents consider that the best place to base activities will be in the local park (11) (appendix 16).
- 6.11 Respondents consider that providing Den Building equipment will encourage team work/co-operation (8) and imaginative play (8). Their main concerns were to do with safety (11) (appendix 17).
- 6.12 Respondents consider that providing Sand will be fun for children (7). Their main concerns were to do with cleanliness and hygiene (8) (appendix 18).
- 6.13 Respondents consider that providing Water will be fun for children (8). Their main concerns were to do with a risk of drowning (6) and hygiene (3) (appendix 19).
- 6.14 Respondents consider that providing Natural Features will encourage appreciation, promotion and understanding of wildlife and the environment (11) and will be great for hide and seek (5). Their main concerns were to do with vandalism (3) and being able to watch children (2) (appendix 20).

6.15 Many respondents made additional comments. The majority of these were positive about the ideas in the questionnaire (9) (appendix 21).

'More back to basics outdoor activities, walks, youth clubs which all seem in the past.'

'I'm so glad these issues are being considered as I think modern children have very constrained lives with not enough independent outdoor play.'

'I think dens, sand and water are positive play developments – have lived near parks with water and sand which have been very well used and positively seen.'

'At the moment I don't let my child go to the park unsupervised but if there was a Play Ranger there then I would be happy for her to go.'

'It would be great to see some of the things you've mentioned on offer.'

'The children would be much more likely to use their imaginations and work together.'

'Current playground equipment is more about children taking turns ... '

'Putting someone to watch or help or even play with children would be a great benefit to most parents.'

'Water creates a serious danger but den building would be great.'

'If, however, we had all the above in the park we would spend much more time there as a family.'

'More creative play with an enthusiastic adult would be good, although there are risks of leaving the sand, water, sticks etc around. Could the play rangers have ball sports equipment with them to arrange informal games of football, hockey etc?'

Key Messages

Play Spaces

- Landscaped features with play value are a popular choice.
- Children prefer natural playspaces to designated playspaces.
- Static equipment is popular.
- Ball courts are important as a space for playing sport.
- Additional features such as water and moveable equipment are popular choices for inclusion in a play space.

Play Rangers

- Children have clear ideas on the type of person they think will best suit being a Play Ranger, the type of activities they could do and venues for those activities.
- Children think that Play Rangers will make them feel safer when playing outside.
- Children think that having a Play Ranger will mean that they will be able to play outside more often.

Attitudes to Play

- Children are aware of the benefits of playing outside and enjoy it.
- Children are prevented from playing outside as much as they'd like because of fears of bullying, bad weather and by adults.
- When playing outside children receive more negative messages about their play than positive ones from parents and other adults.
- The children think it is important that adults are educated about the value and importance of outdoor play but are unsure of how this could be achieved.

Parents' Opinions

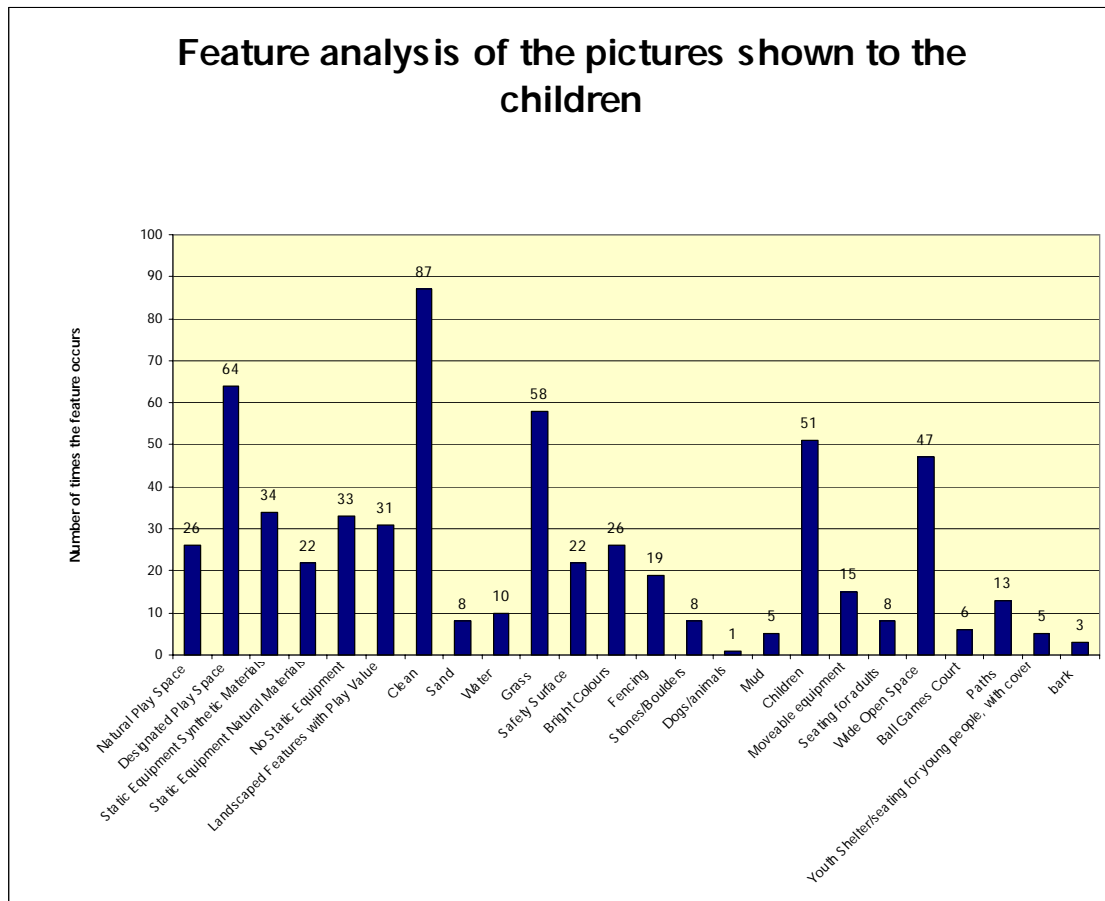
- Parents are supportive of the ideas of encouraging children and young people to play outside more.
- Parent's opinions of what stops children and young people playing outside are similar to those that the children identified.
- Parents are supportive of the idea of Play Rangers and believe that this project will result in more children and young people playing outside more often.
- Parents are supportive of the ideas of including different types of play experiences in playspaces.
- The key issue for parents is safety; this was mentioned almost every time they were asked to identify problems.

Recommendations:

- Play Rangers are supported as a project to be promoted through the Play Strategy.
- Including additional features and different types of play experiences in playspaces are promoted through the Play Strategy.
- Parental concerns over safety are considered seriously during the development of any projects and ideas.
- More work needs to be carried out to develop a project that will change attitudes to play. However, the two recommendations above might result in a change of attitudes if they are successful and have positive results.

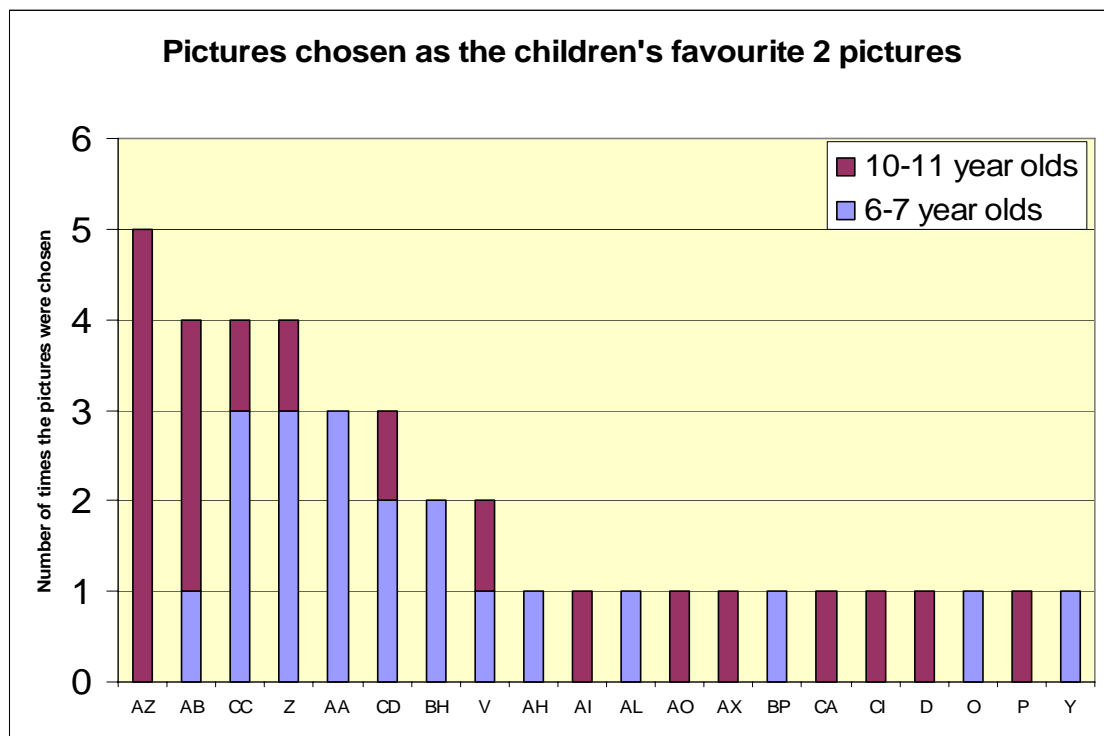
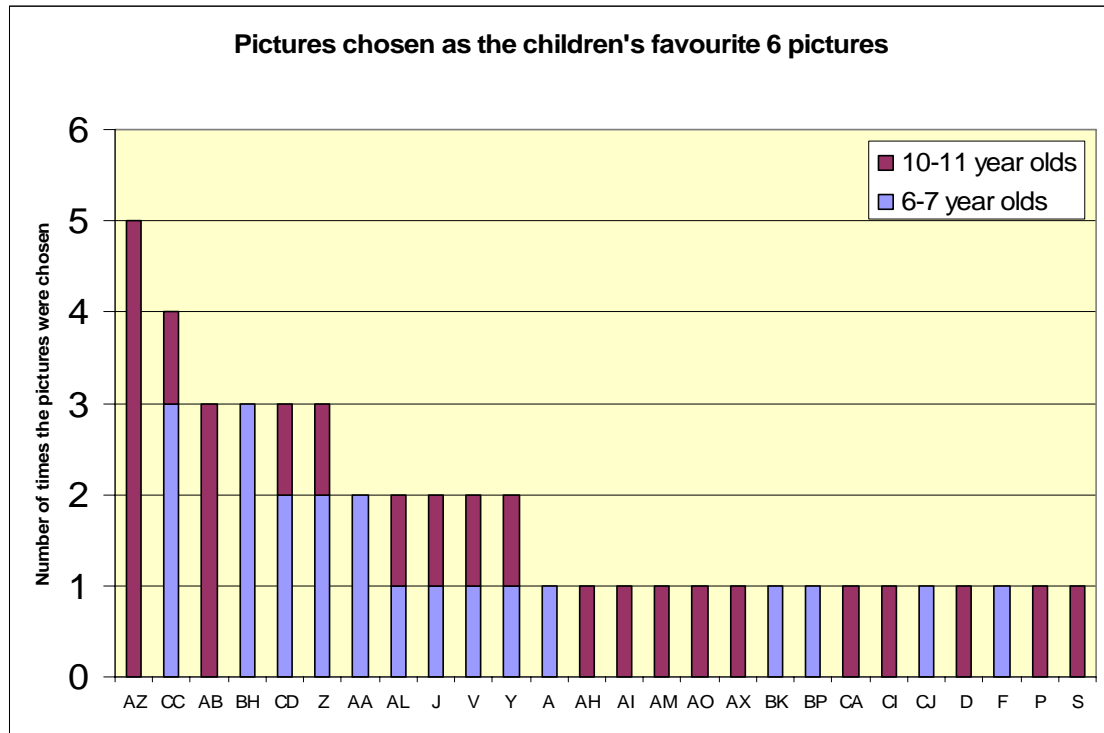
Appendix 1

Chart to show the number of times each feature occurred in the pictures that the children had to choose from.



Appendix 2

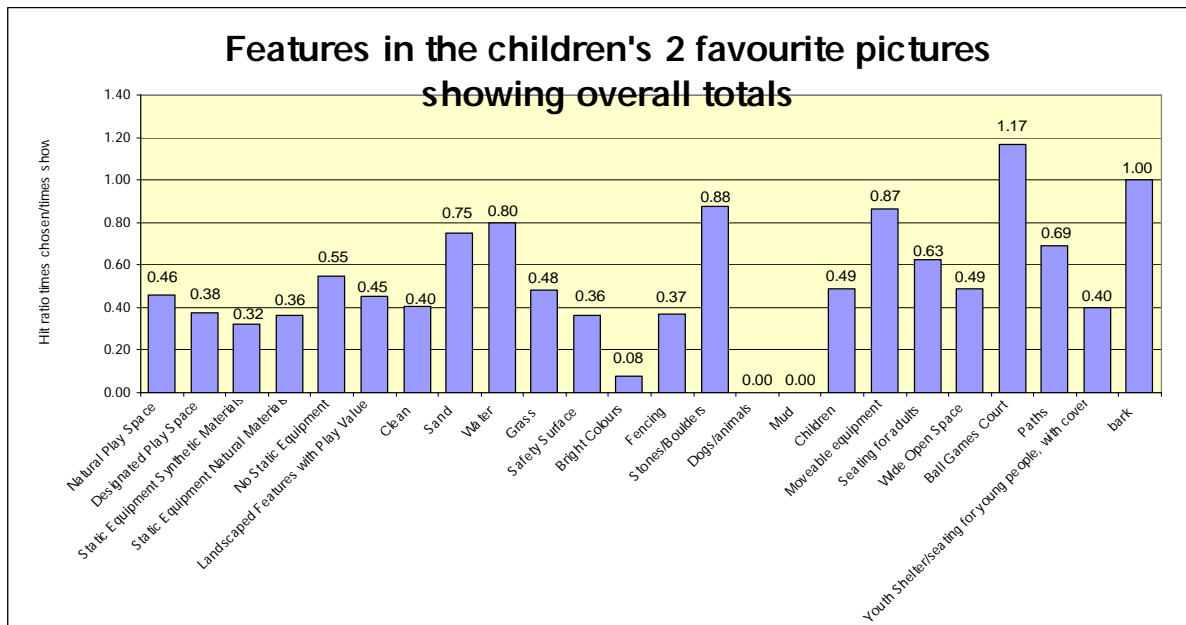
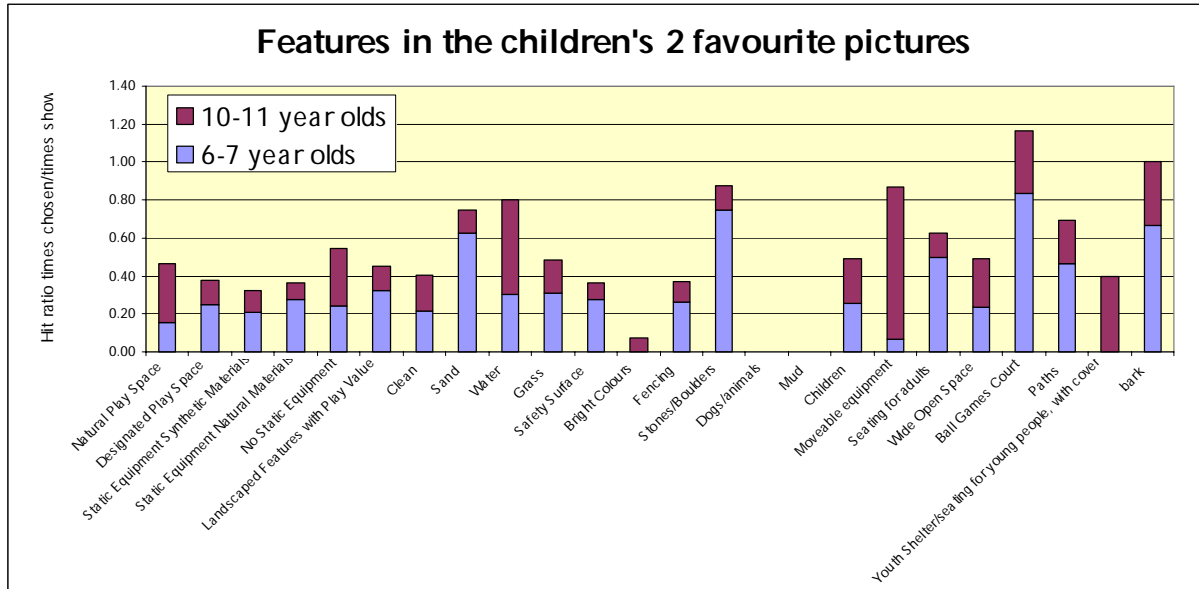
Pictures chosen by the children as their favourites.



Appendix 3

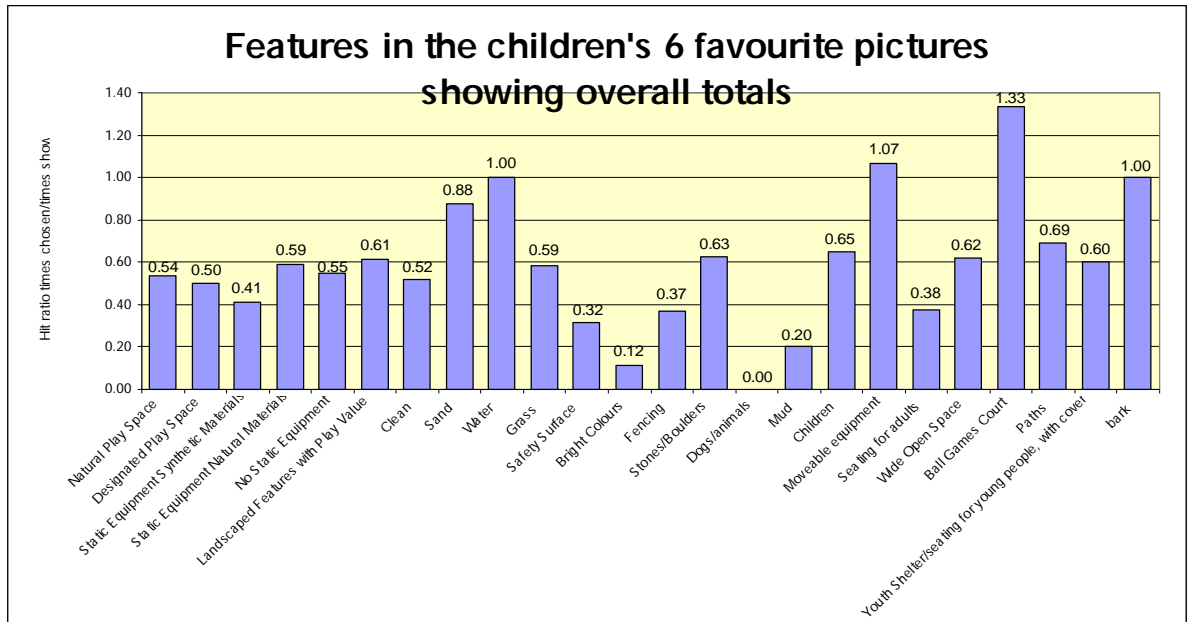
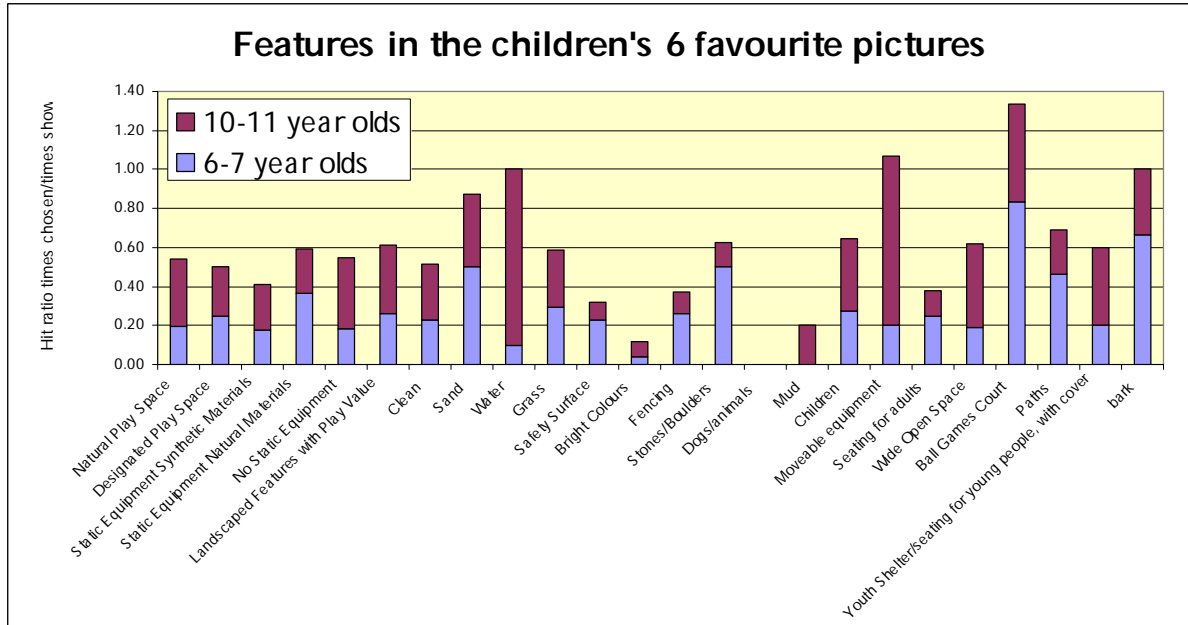
Results from the Picture Activity

Chart to show how often each feature occurred in the pictures chosen as the children's favourite two pictures.



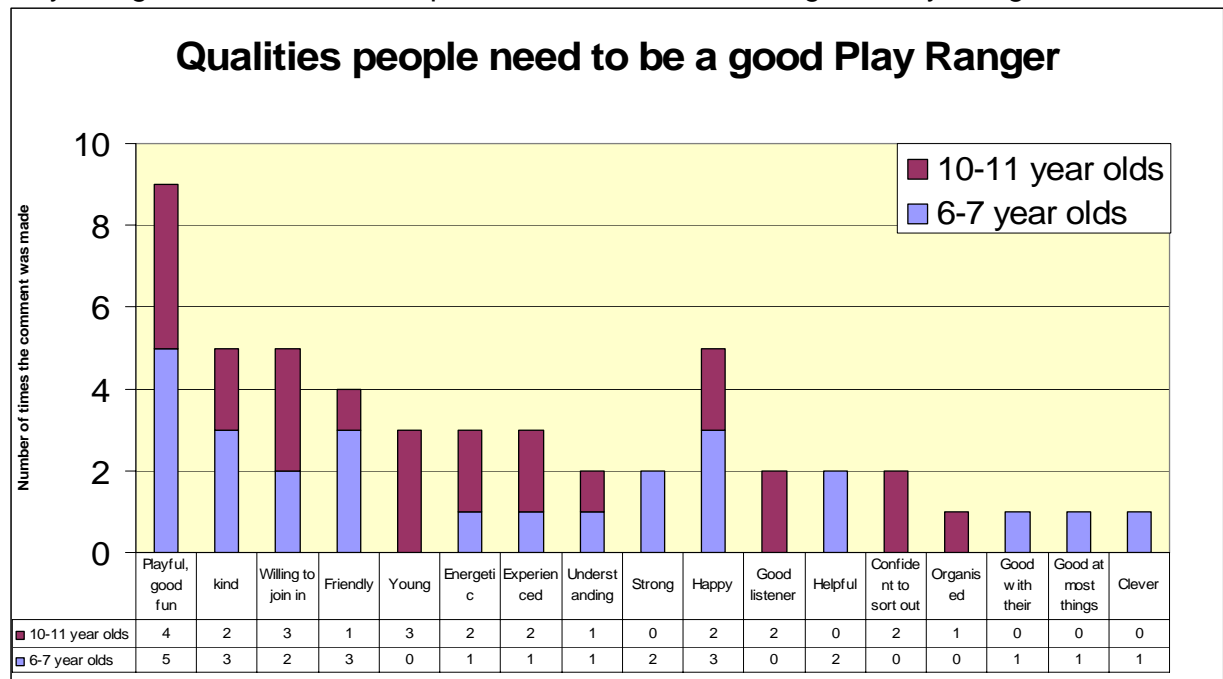
Appendix 4

Chart to show how often each feature occurred in the pictures chosen as the children's favourite six pictures.



Appendix 5

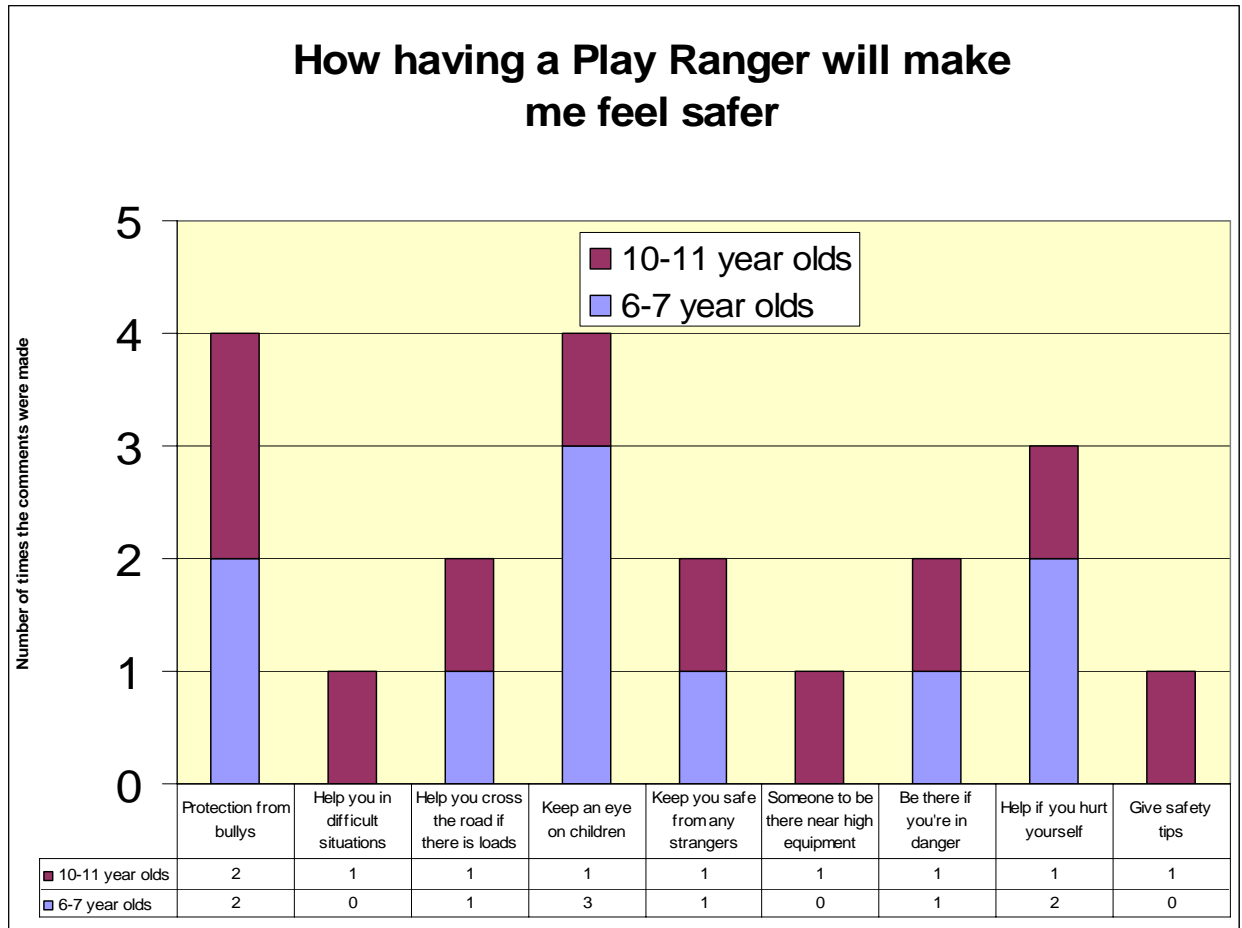
Play Rangers – chart to show qualities that would make a good Play Ranger.



Comment	Overall total
Playful, good fun	9
kind	5
Willing to join in	5
Friendly	4
Young	3
Energetic	3
Experienced	3
Understanding	2
Strong	2
Happy	5
Good listener	2
Helpful	2
Confident to sort out problems and fights	2
Organised	1
Good with their hands	1
Good at most things	1
Clever	1

Appendix 6

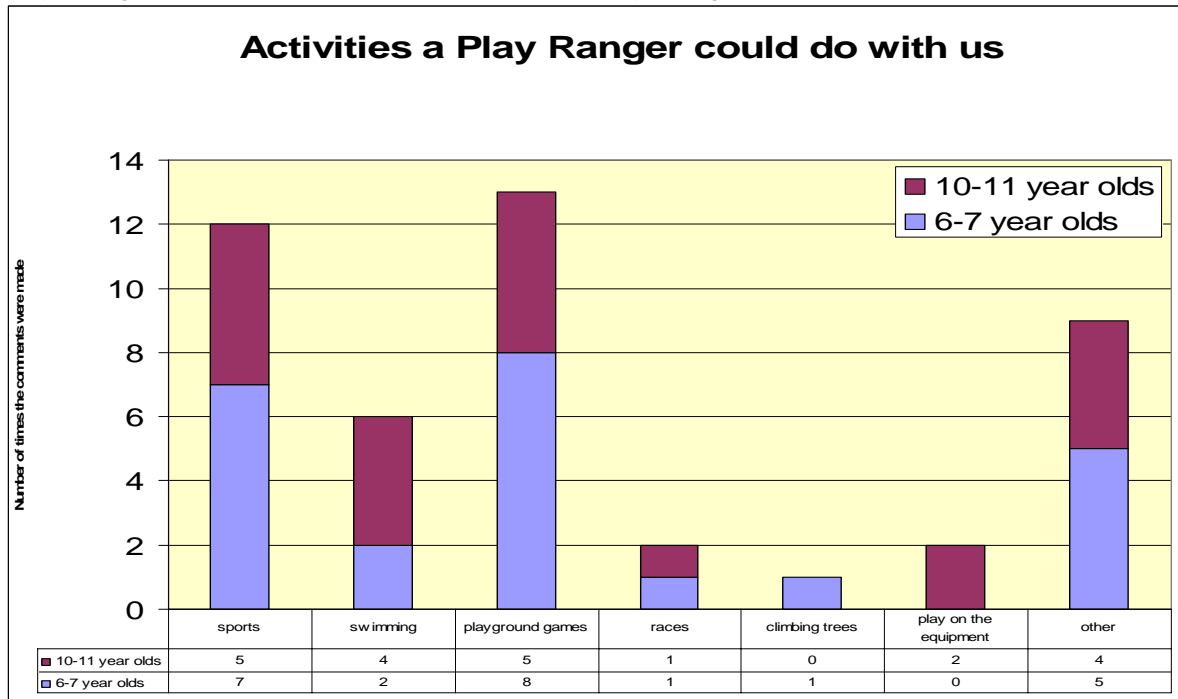
Play Rangers – chart to show how having a Play Ranger will make children feel safer.



Comments	Overall total
Protection from bullies	4
Help you in difficult situations	1
Help you cross the road if there is loads of traffic	2
Keep an eye on children	4
Keep you safe from any strangers	2
Someone to be there near high equipment	1
Be there if you're in danger	2
Help if you hurt yourself	3
Give safety tips	1

Appendix 7

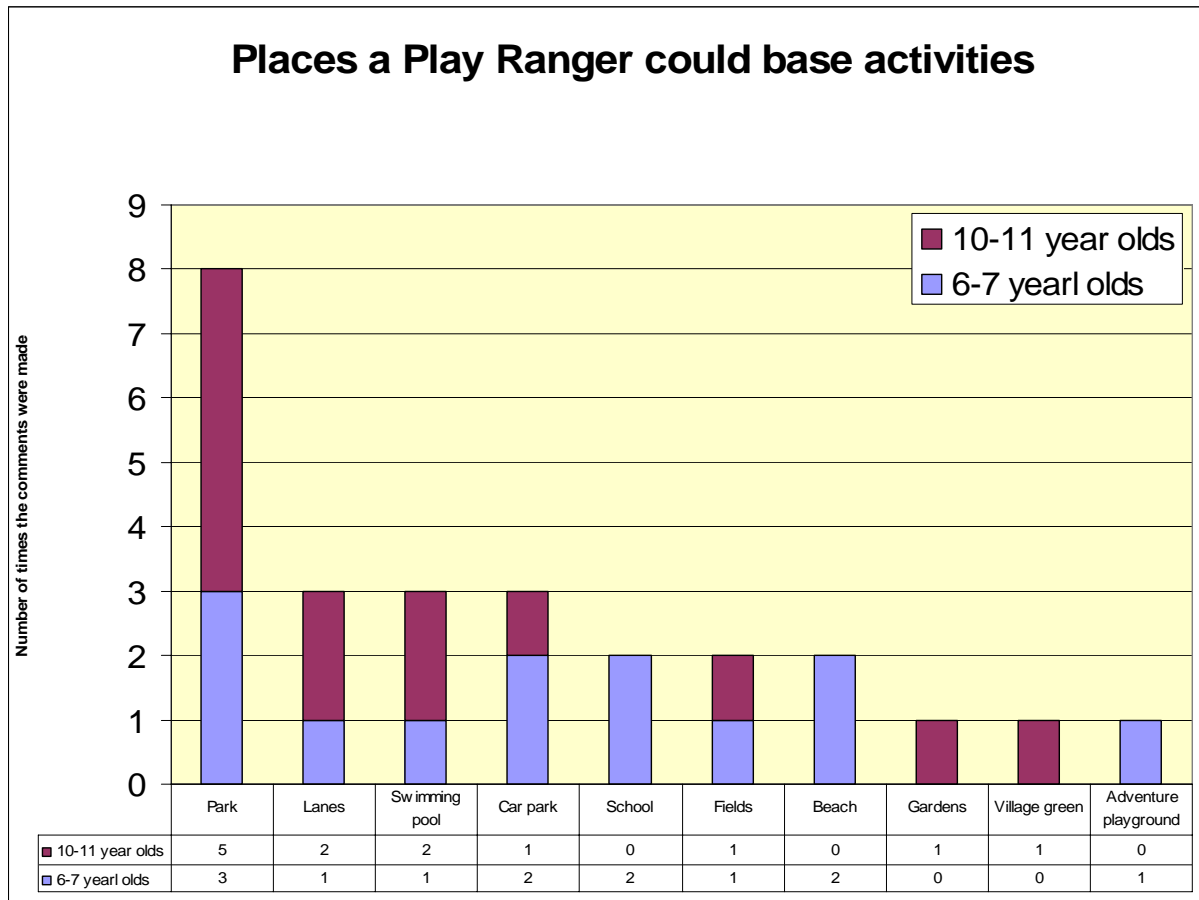
Play Rangers – chart to show what activities a Play Ranger could facilitate.



Sport	Swimming	Playground Games	Races	Climbing Trees	Play on the Equipment	Other
they could provide different types of sports equipment then they can play with us	swimming x 6	organise big games between kids in the park	running games, sports games	climbing trees	support you when you climb climbing frames	help to fly remote control plane
act as a referee for sports games on the astro turf pitch		playing hide and seek x 2	races		play on the swings	make sure everything is safe to go on
		help with outside games				help us play with fire safely! (teach us)
						be playful to people
hockey		tag x 3				help with flying kites
sports x 2		hide and seek x 2				look after people
football x 4		wild games				skateboarding
basketball x 2		tug of war				lego
tennis		star wars				ice skating
		take you to the park				
12	6	13	2	1	3	9

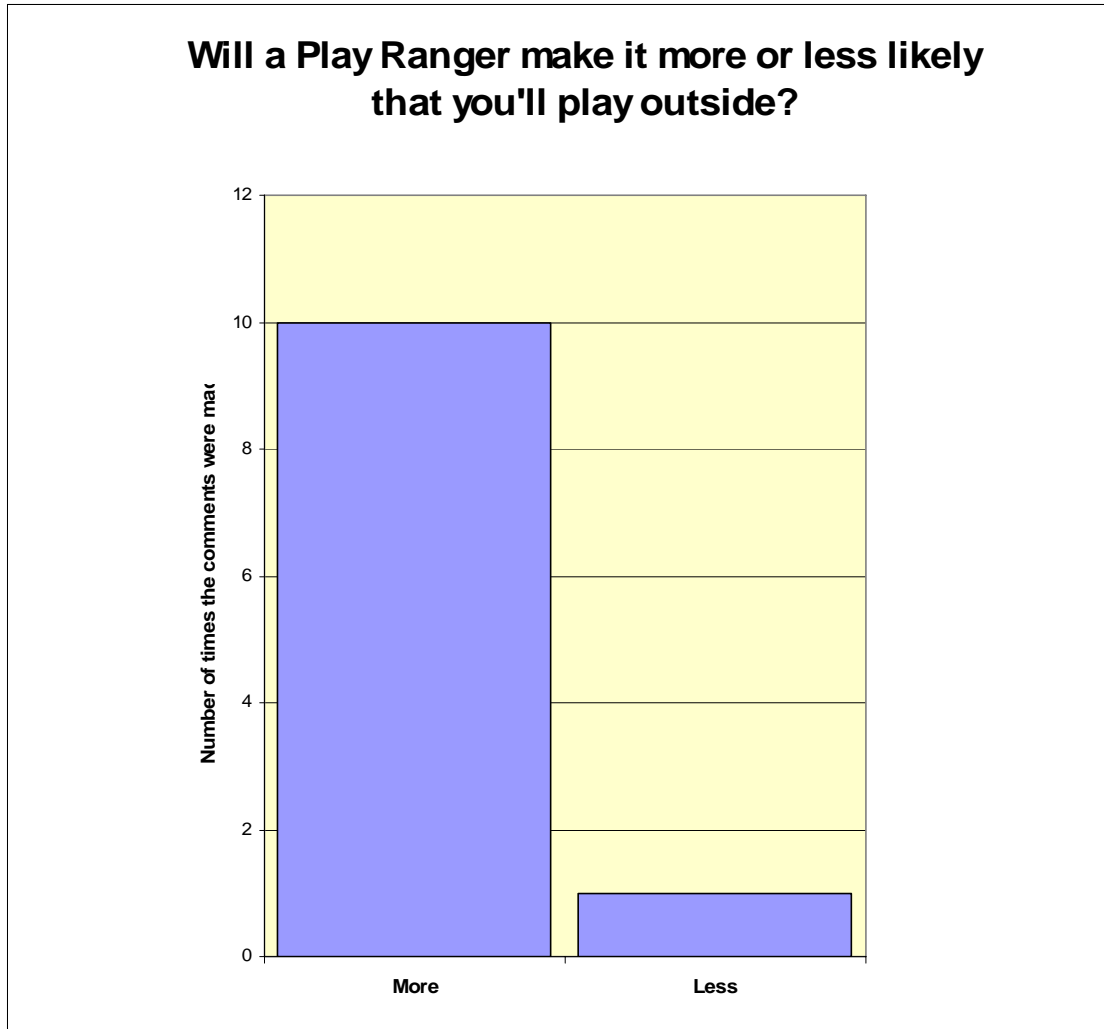
Appendix 8

Play Rangers – chart to show where Play Ranger activities could be based.



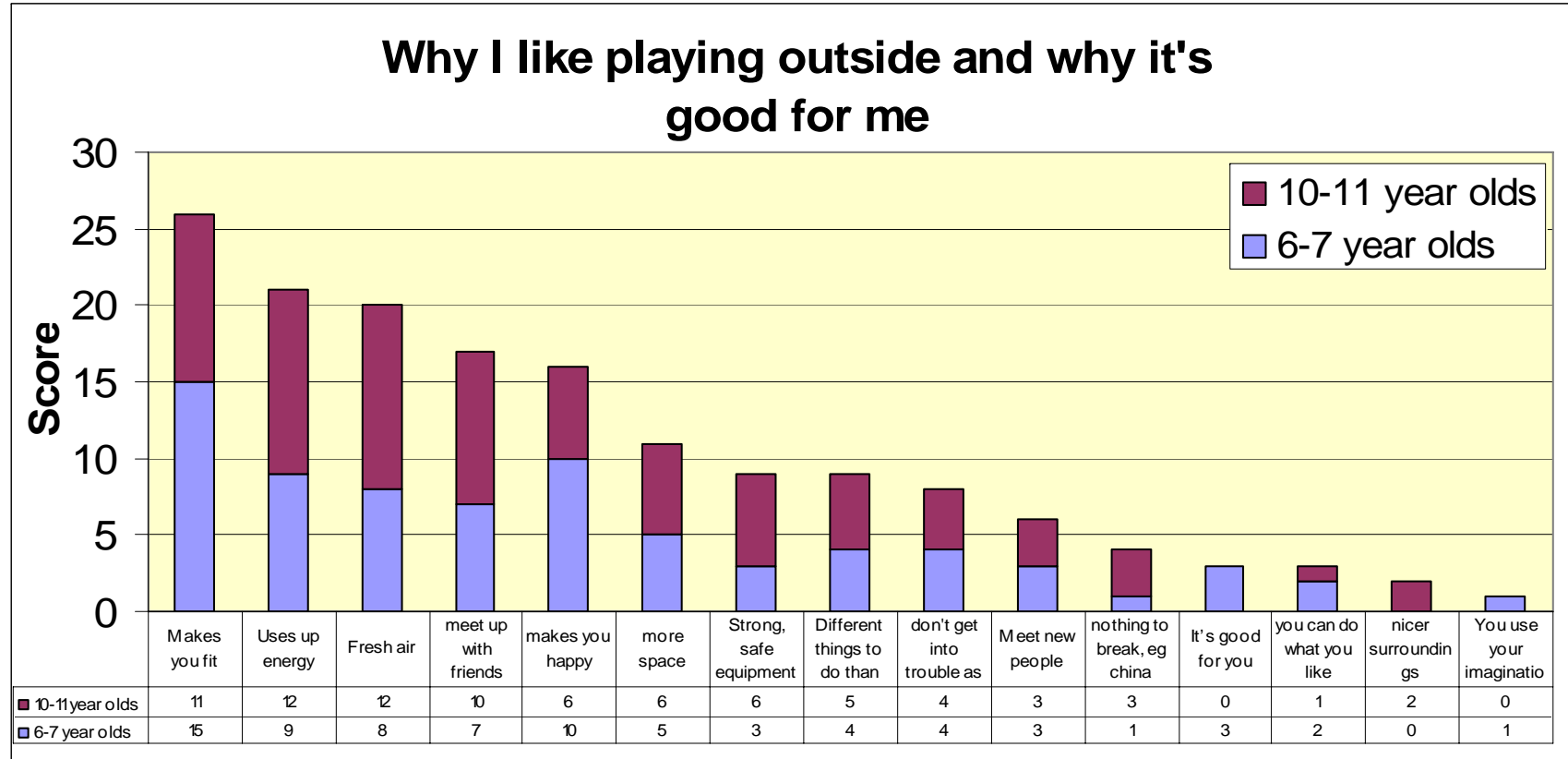
Appendix 9

Play Rangers – chart to show the effect Play Rangers could have on children’s frequency to play outside.



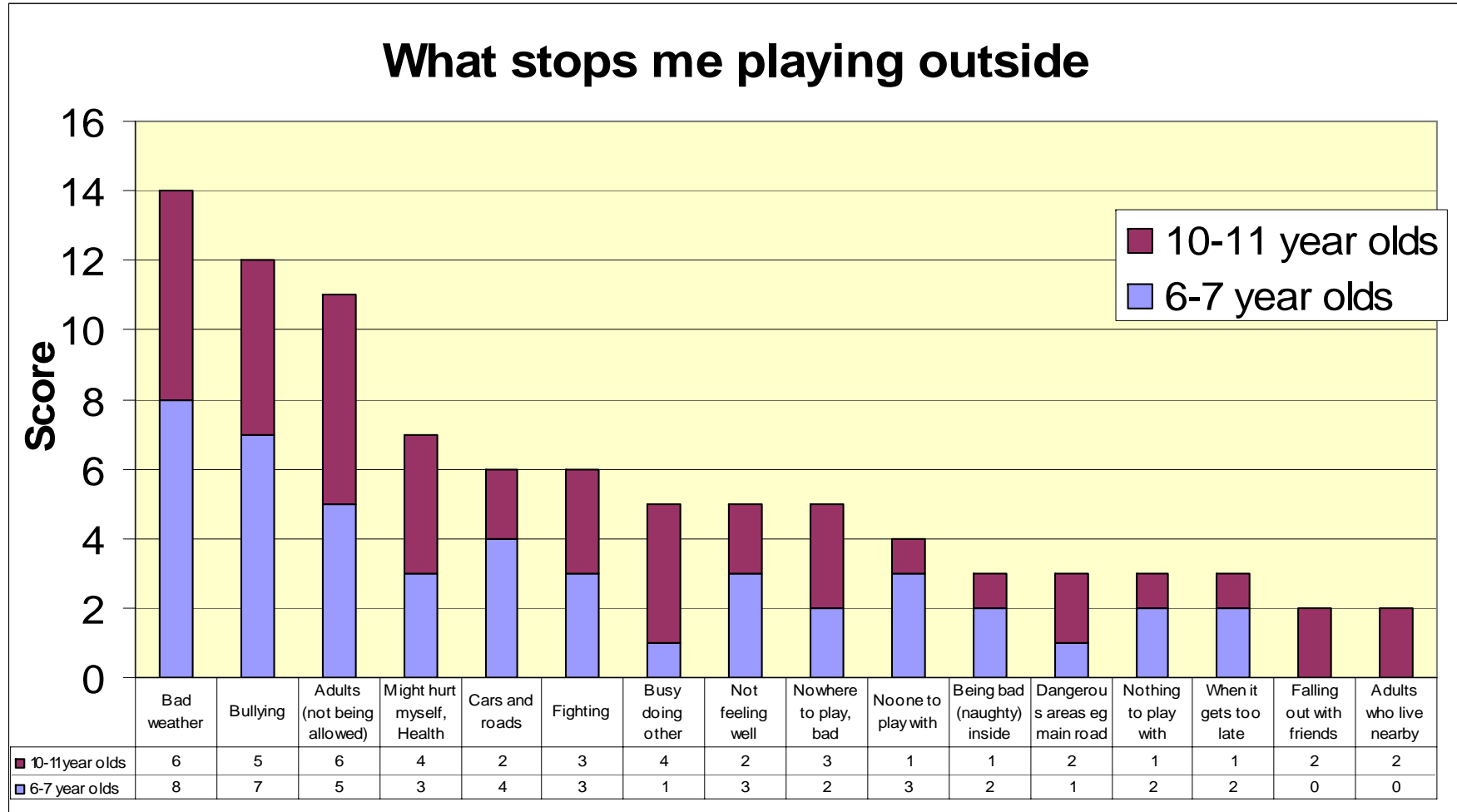
Appendix 10

Attitudes – chart to show why children like playing outside.



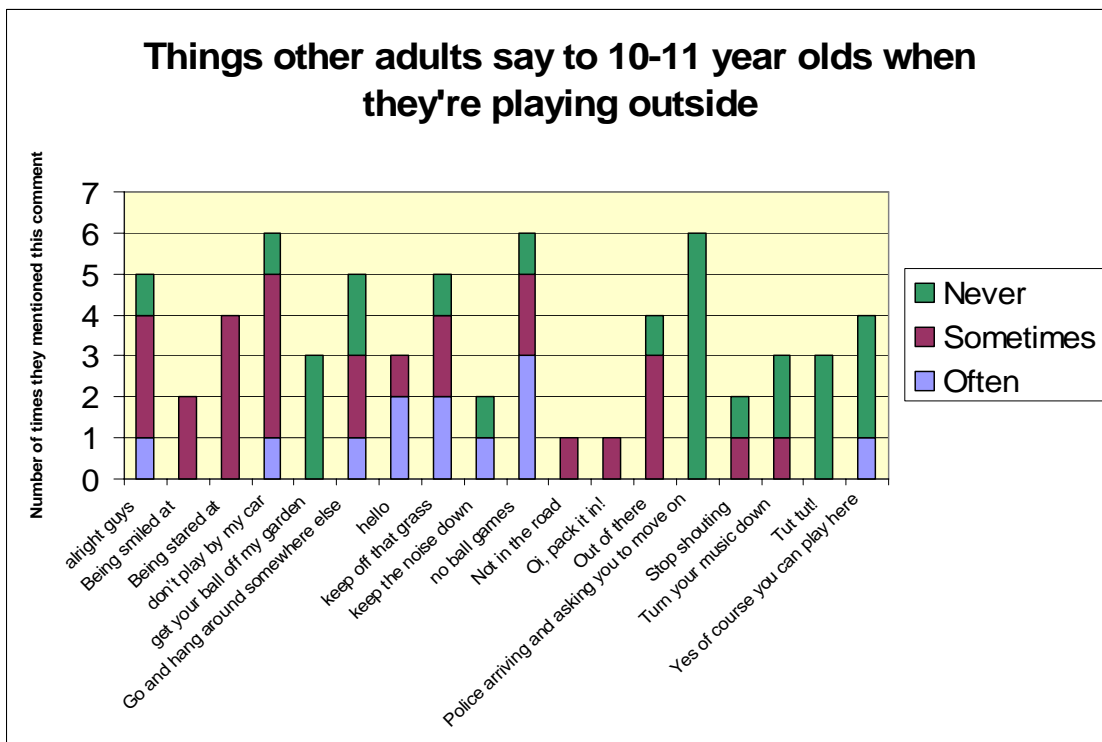
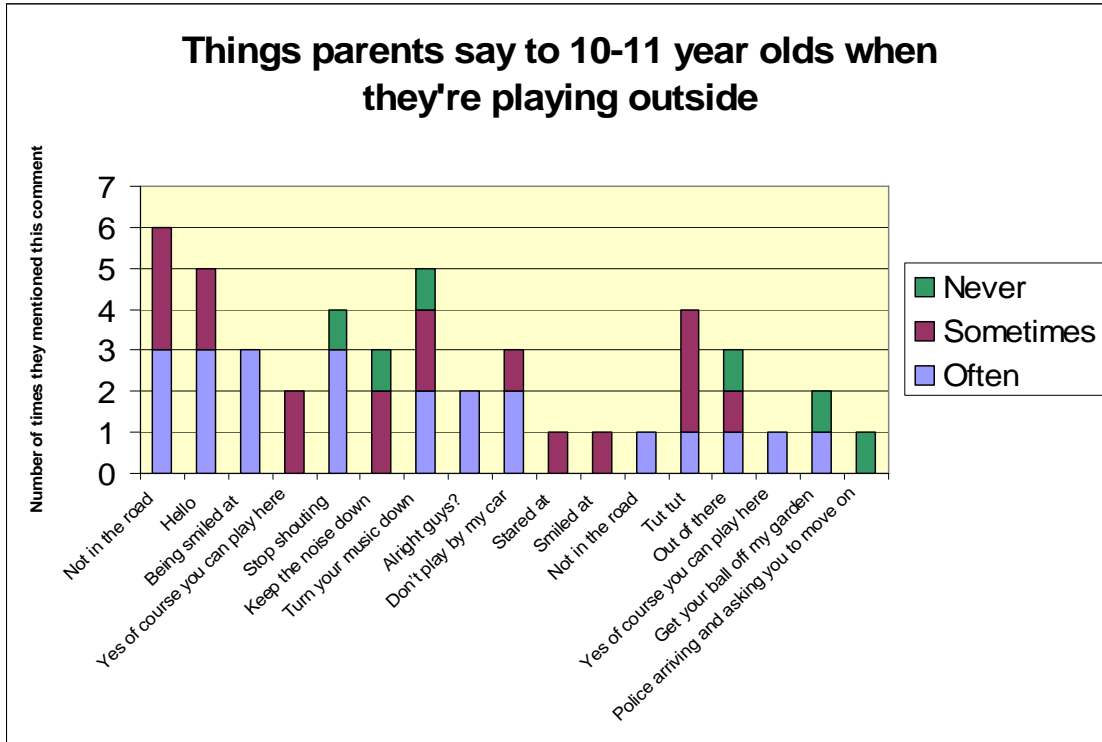
Appendix 11

Attitudes – chart to show what stops children playing outside.



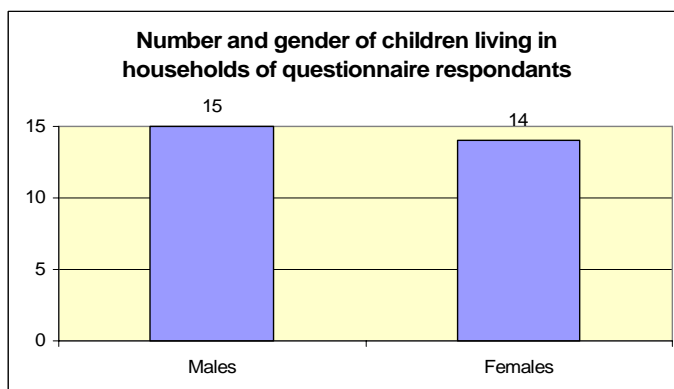
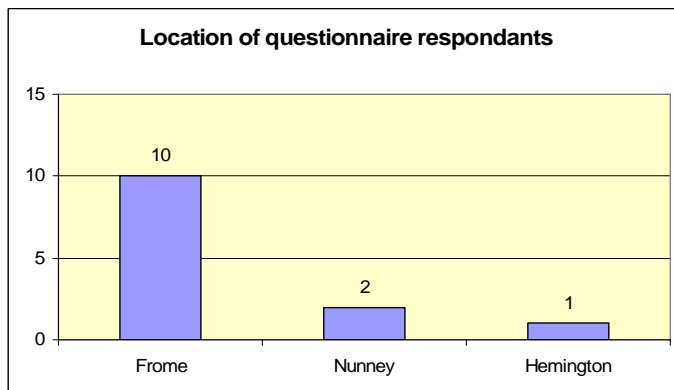
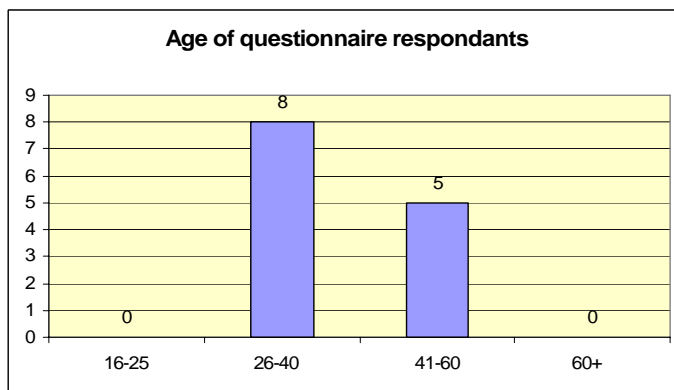
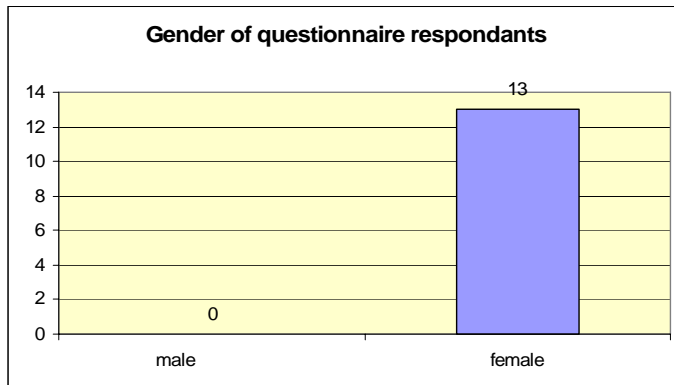
Appendix 12

Charts that show comments parents and other adults make to 10-11 year olds while they are playing outside

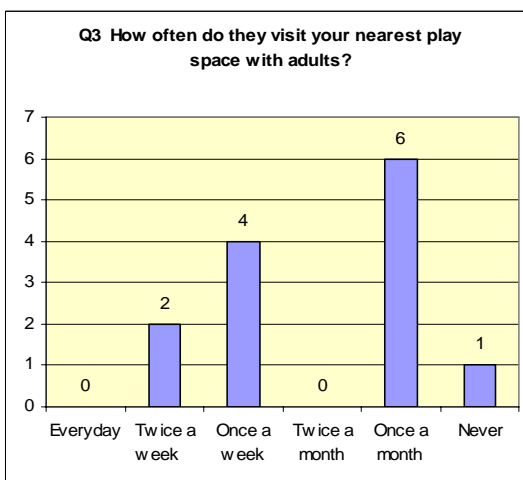
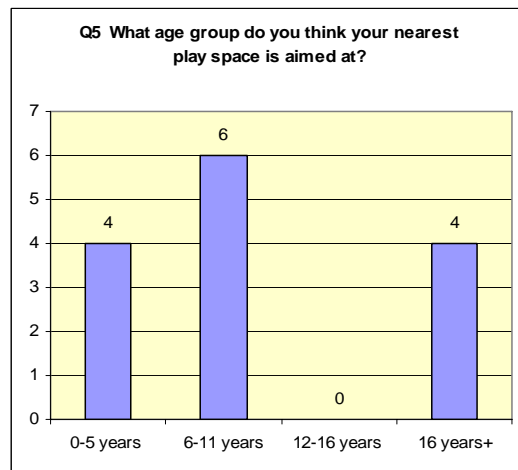
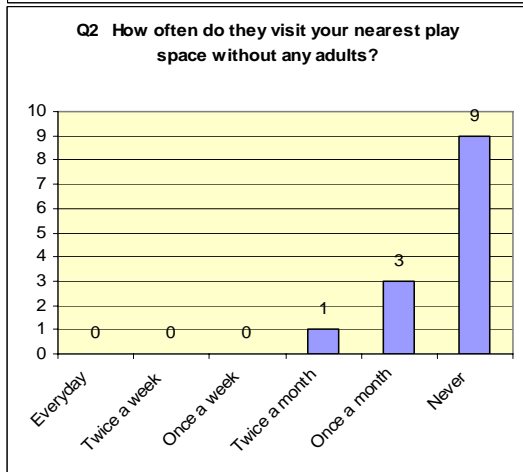
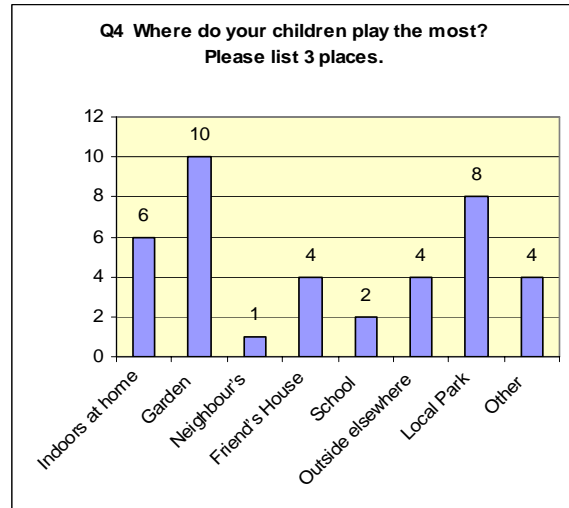
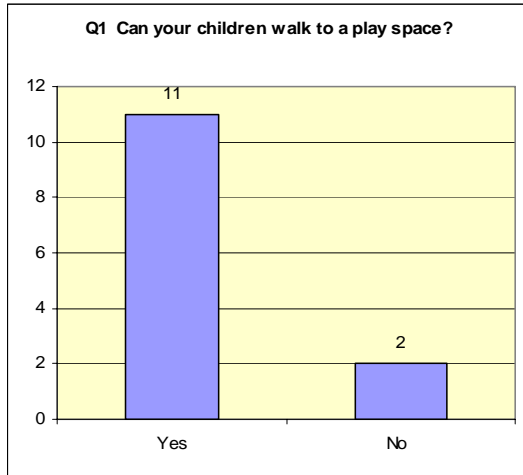


Appendix 13

Respondents for the parent questionnaire.

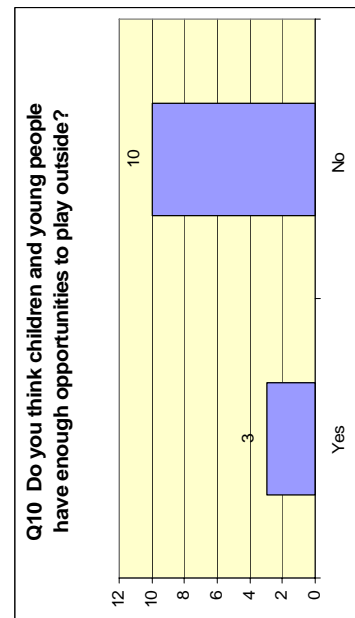
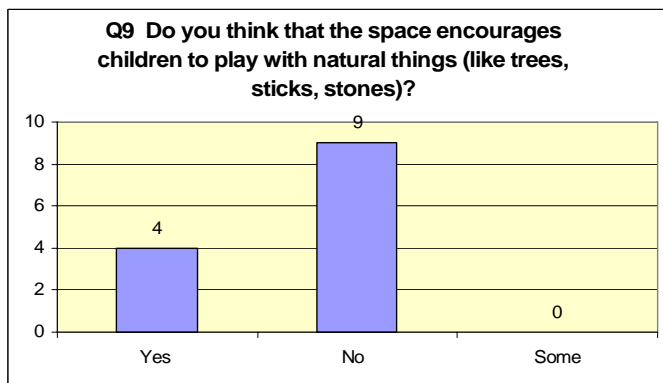
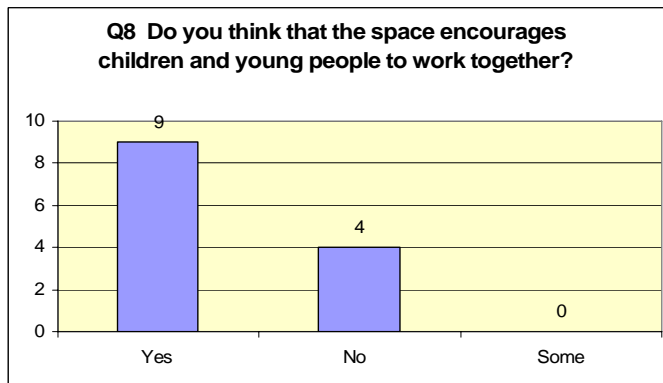
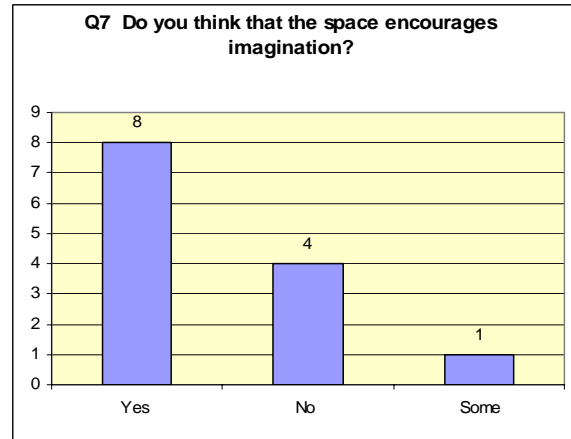
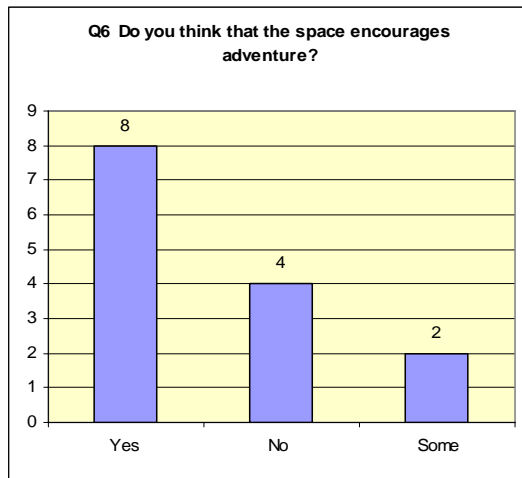


Appendix 14a
Opinions on their local play space.



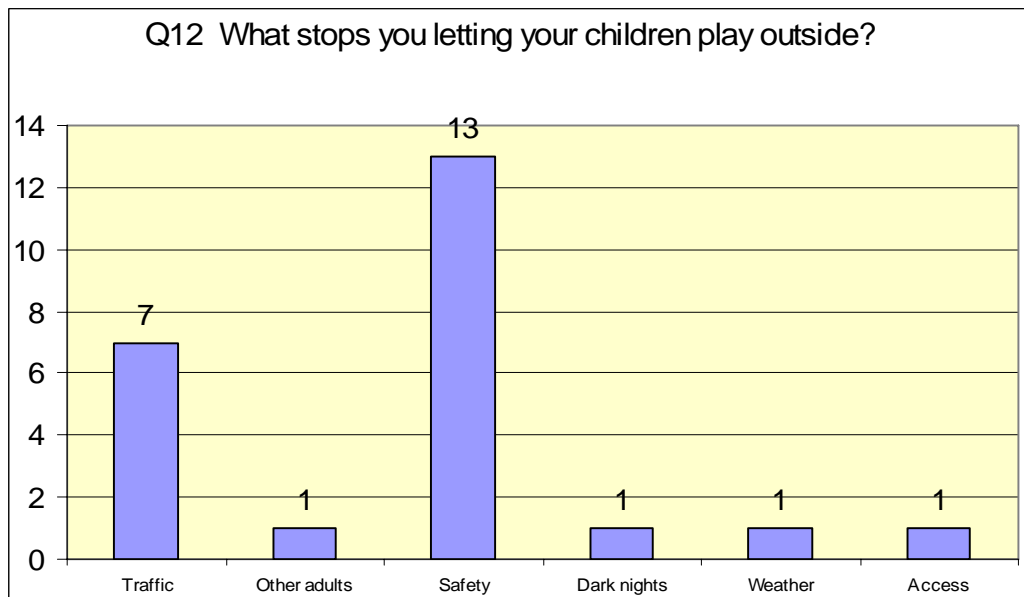
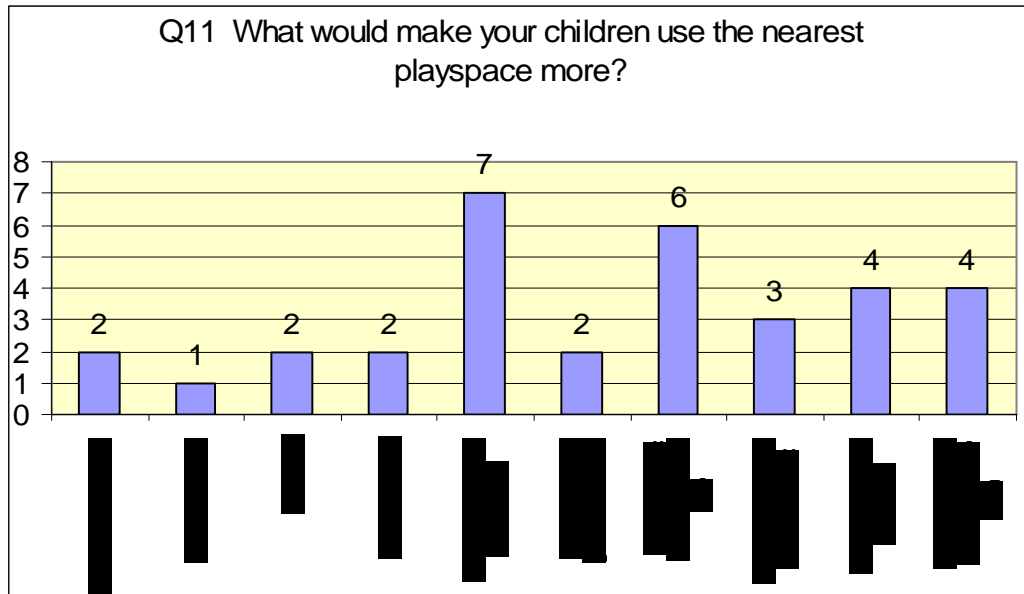
Appendix 14b

Opinions on their local play space.



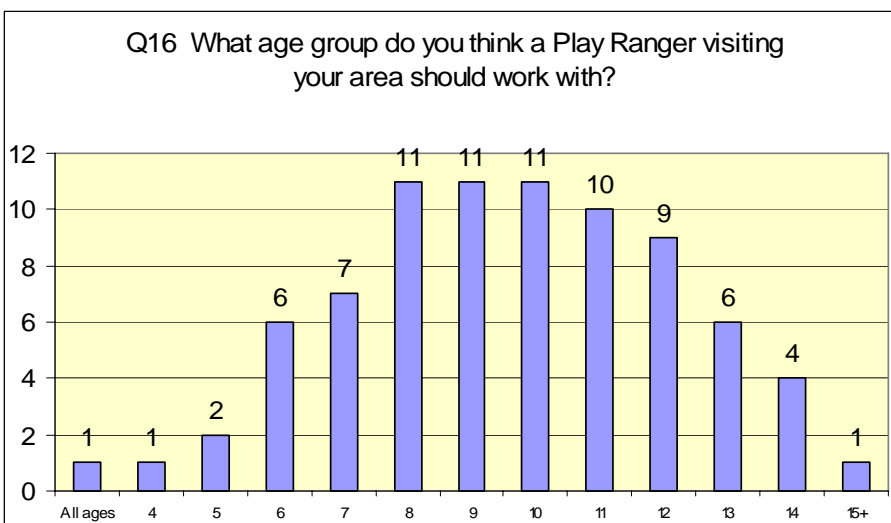
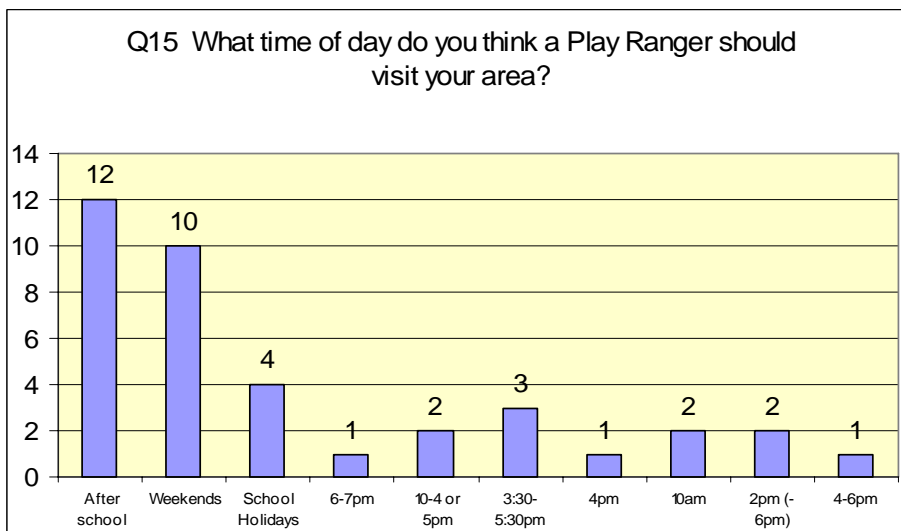
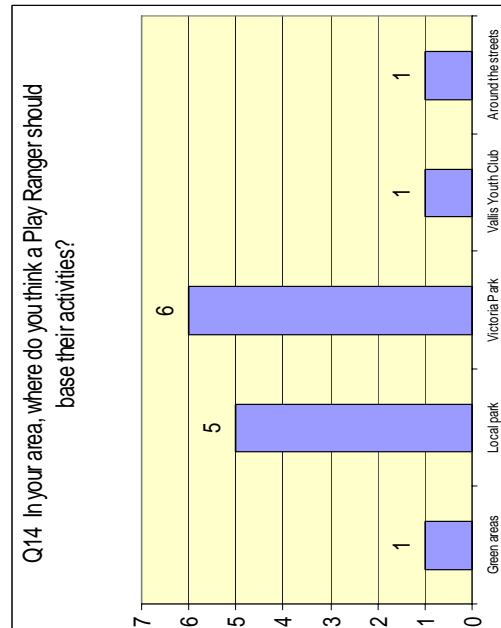
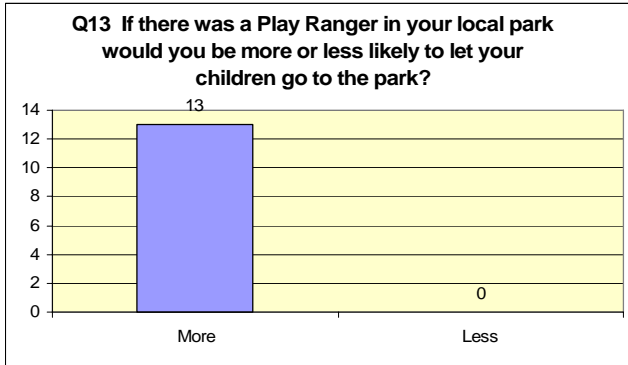
Appendix 15

What would make your children use their local playsapce more and what stops you from letting your children play outside?



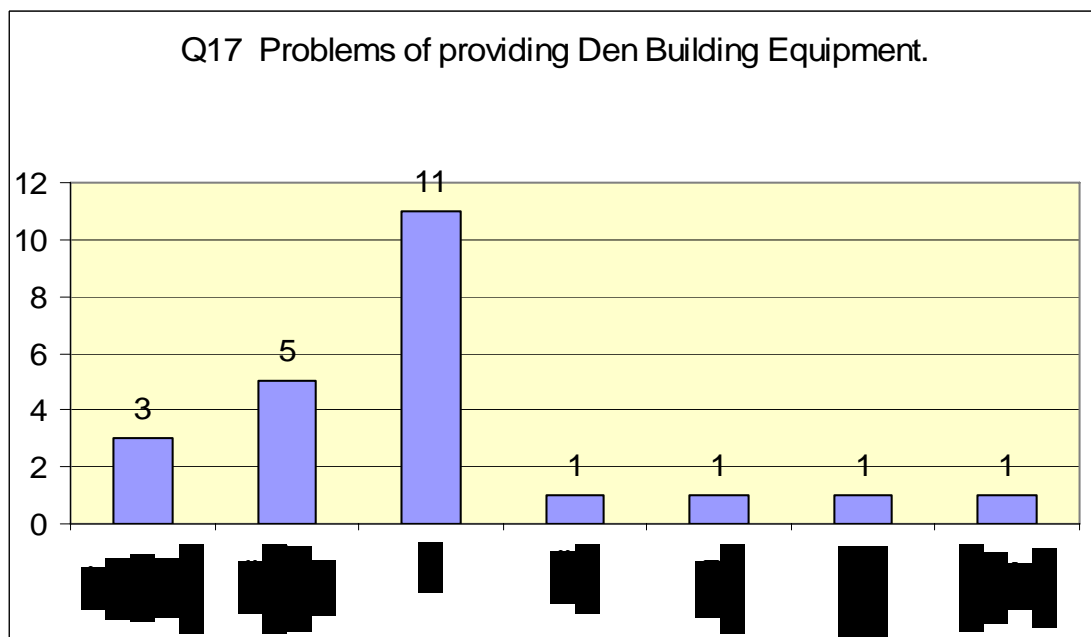
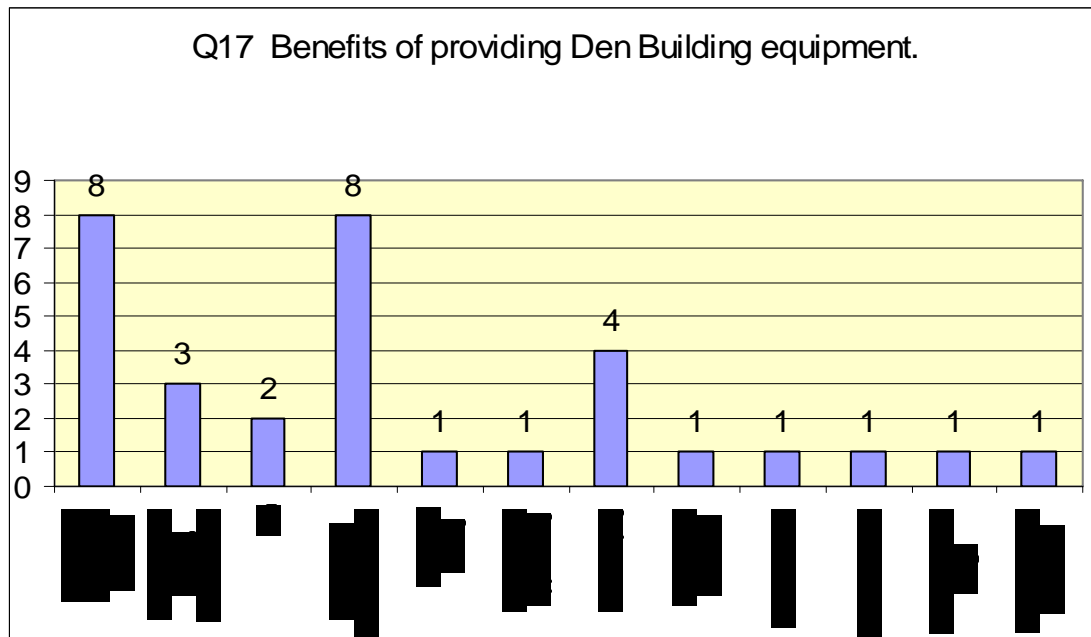
Appendix 16

Parent's opinions on the idea of play rangers.



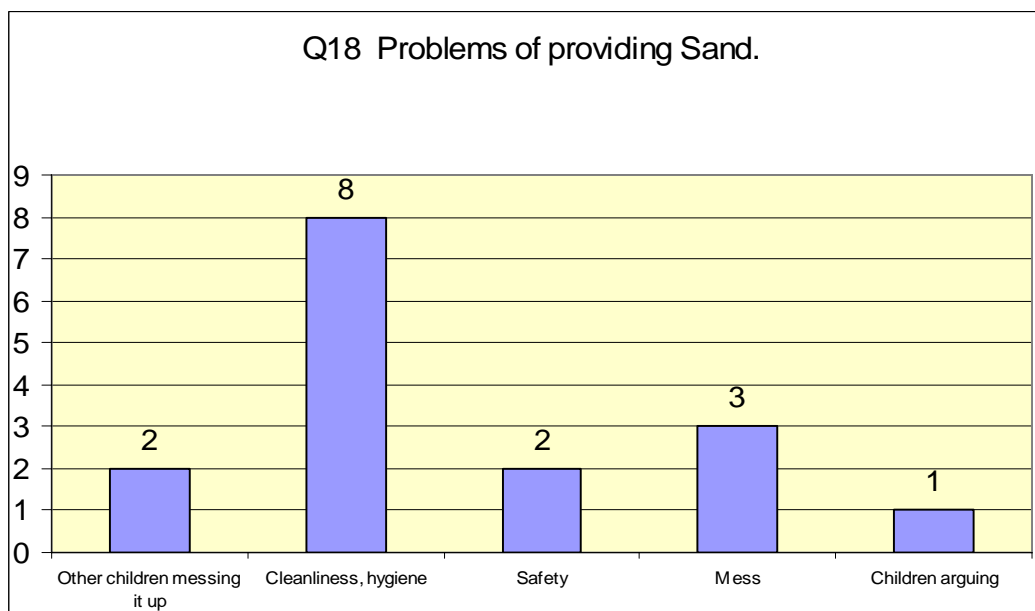
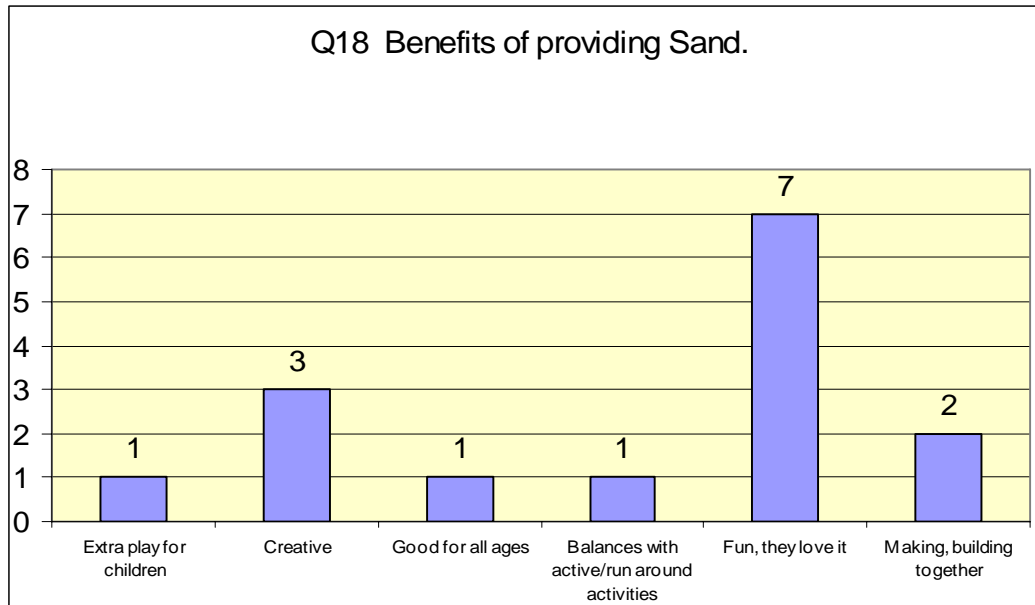
Appendix 17

Parent's opinions on the idea of Den Building equipment.



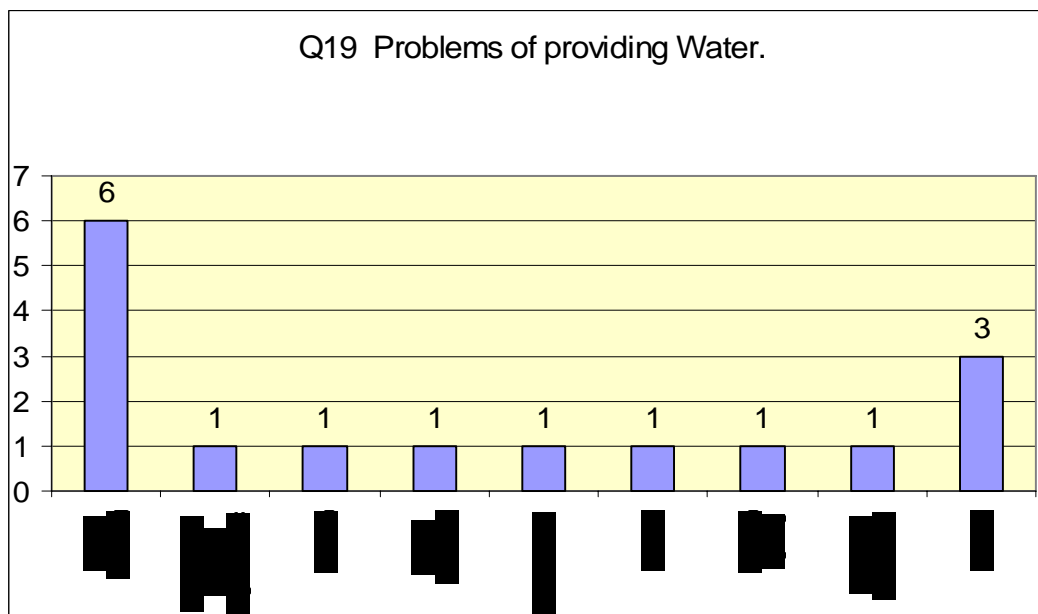
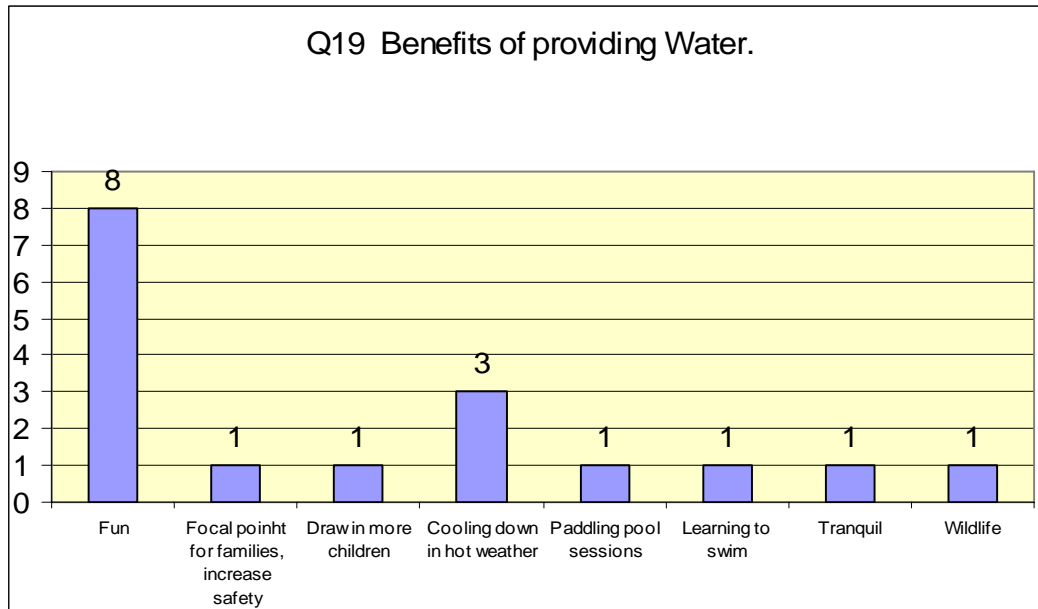
Appendix 18

Parent's opinions on the idea of Sand.



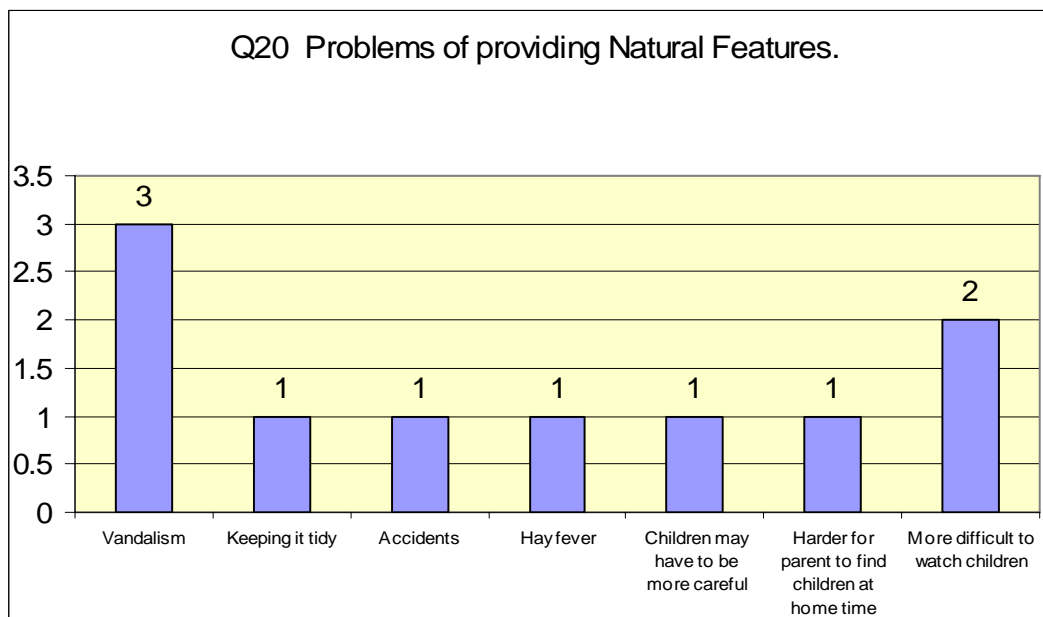
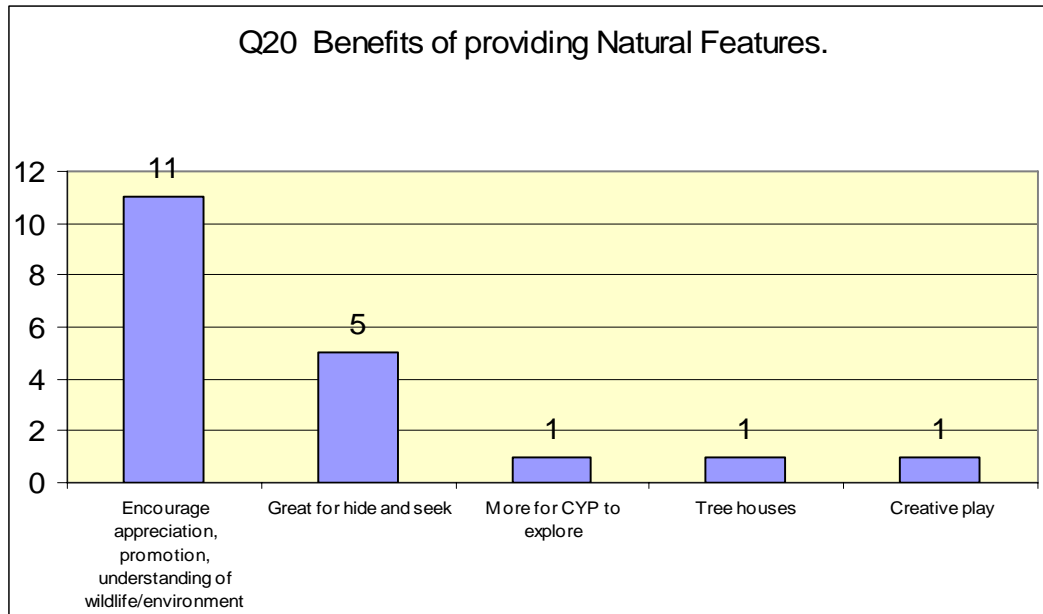
Appendix 19

Parent's opinions on the idea of Water.



Appendix 20

Parent's opinions on the idea of Natural Features.



Appendix 21

Additional Comments.

