



A Head for Heights at Heart

A new outdoor climbing frame has enhanced provision for physical development

Heart Preschool CIC opened in June 2018 and is a small Christian setting based in Nottingham and located in the church at Rise Park. The children who attend the setting have been relishing every moment outside. 90% of our day is spent outdoors. We intend to stay safe as much as possible during a pandemic and take advantage of the beautiful weather. Most importantly, the children seem to be a lot happier outside, surrounded by the natural environment.

The outdoor space to which we have access is a hidden treasure for which we are truly grateful. The garden has been developed over time, and we are constantly reflecting and improving the environment to meet the needs of

the individual children who attend. The whole area is grass, and over time we have added resources and different equipment to ensure the children continue to explore, and experience curiosity and motivation. Through observing and reflecting on children's play, the staff have gained insight into the child's purposes and how best to support them.

We want all our children to be included in meaningful play. We felt it was essential to have a well-resourced garden to allow children to have freedom and time to play in a stimulating environment. So purchasing our mini sheds and filling them with construction equipment, small world resources, games, and literacy and numeracy equipment enabled children to

access continuous provision.

In the early days, a mud kitchen was built that allowed the children to become deeply involved. It encouraged them to experiment with texture, and most of all, it allowed them to get dirty! We recently had a substantial wooden gazebo installed, which has allowed us to be out in all weathers and has promoted positive well-being for both staff and children during the pandemic.

Physical play has been of paramount importance, as we understand that it underpins all other areas of children's learning and development. Extensive physical experience in early childhood puts in place the neurological sensory and motor foundations necessary for feeling



good in your body and comfortable in the world¹.

Our new geometric dome-shaped climbing frame was obtained with Early Years Pupil Premium funding and has benefited all the children. Its frame is a teal colour with a textured finish. We noticed the children were climbing a lot, and we didn't have an area where they could do this safely outside. This purchase has given the opportunity for children to practise their physical skills. They have been able to climb, risk assess and become skilled and confident using their whole bodies. They have found different ways to weave and travel through and across the frame.

The climbing equipment is suitable for all our children from the age of 2 to our rising 5s. It has allowed all the children at varying stages of development to be physically active and try out new ways of working. We have observed our 2-year-olds stretching, holding on to the lower bars, pulling themselves up and dangling whilst smiling and laughing. Some of our

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3-year-olds have practised grasping the frame and swinging their bodies back and forth. We have seen the children challenge each other to do things such as hang upside down or climb to the top. It has been exciting to watch as 4-year-olds have demonstrated risk taking, climbing to the top and challenging each other to stand on the top bars. The practitioners have supervised and allowed the children to risk assess for themselves and explore and identify their capabilities.

One day it started to rain, and a 4-year-old girl suggested we made a den. One of our practitioners asked, "How could we make a den?" The girl's reply was, "We could use some tarpaulin and put it over the climbing frame". Another

staff member went to fetch it and some large pegs to fasten the tarp onto the frame. The children spent time with each other and a member of staff making connections, telling stories and having conversations. We added mini torches to enhance the play experience and create awe and wonder. The children led the play. The adult was there purely to extend any learning and introduce new vocabulary.

The children have shown a 'can do' attitude and often shouted, "Look at me!" as they proudly balance at the top with no support. We have witnessed the children challenging and then praising each other for their efforts. These have been such wow moments.

¹ *Birth to 5 Matters* (2021), Early Education, St Albans, p44

