



Donna's Journey: Playstreets Initiative

The Beginning:

Here's Donna's story, and it's a fantastic example of how much good comes from focusing on the assets and gifts within a community, rather than what's missing.

It all starts when Donna meets Harriet Smith, a community builder from Community Learning Partnerships (CLP). Harriet immediately sees Donna's potential and her innate gifts for making a real difference. With Harriet and CLP's consistent support, Donna kicks off her first major project: the Playstreets initiative.

Playstreets actively make public spaces into safe, car-free zones. It's a place where children engage in physical activity, foster social interaction, and build a stronger sense of community.



It gave the kids on the estate a safe place, creating opportunities for children to engage with others from different backgrounds, encouraging play and socialisation this also fostered connections among previously isolated neighbours - Donna



The Journey:

The first Playstreets event happened in October 2024 on Nowell Mount during the half-term break. The street closed for three hours, creating a safe space for children to play freely and for neighbours to connect. Donna's efforts were consistently supported by six volunteers who helped marshal the street, ensuring cars did not enter. The event buzzed with a variety of activities, including chalk drawing, bubbles, Connect 4, skipping, and football. Over 40 children and 30 adults participated, turning the street into a vibrant hub of activity and connection. The Playstreets initiative received a modest £16 grant from the Small Sparks Fund, used to provide hot pizzas for participants. This initial funding was a crucial first step, demonstrating the significant potential of community-led projects. Encouraged by this success, Donna continues to work closely with Harriet from CLP, leveraging their support to expand her initiatives and activate more community gifts. Donna shares that the initiative gives the kids on the estate a safe place to play, enables different children to mix with others, brings different cultures together, and brings isolated neighbours together through play.

Building on Playstreets' success, Donna turned her attention to the Nowell Mount Community Centre, recognising it as a vital community asset. She now consistently runs a group on Fridays, offering refreshments and biscuits in the morning and bingo in the afternoon. Over the past seven years, this group has become a sustainable fixture, providing a regular space for social interaction and support within the community.

The Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach plays a significant role in Donna's ongoing journey. ABCD focuses on identifying and leveraging the strengths and assets within a community to drive development. For Donna, this means recognising her own skills and passions, as well as the unique sets of skills from the volunteers. She actively mentors younger community members, helping them raise their aspirations and contribute their skills and talents, fostering a cycle of empowerment. This empowerment leads to increased confidence and a stronger sense of community ownership.

Donna's time is often taken up with the many projects she is involved with. Over the last few months Donna shared that she has lost some motivation and through their chats Harriet discovered her love of painting/drawing. It became apparent Donna has passion but is a little unsure of her own abilities. Harriet identified a 3-week beginner's painting course and felt Donna would appreciate a sidekick to support her, giving Donna some much-needed time to find out a little bit more about who Donna is...

The Impact:

One of the key successes of Donna's initiatives is the ongoing development of a regular bank of dedicated volunteers. By fostering a sense of ownership and pride, Donna is inspiring many residents to get involved and contribute their time and talents. These volunteers play a crucial role in sustaining the various projects, from marshalling Playstreets events to planning family fun days.

Donna's journey continues to be marked by numerous successes. The Playstreets initiative is creating safer, more connected neighbourhoods, while the Nowell Mount Community Centre is a vital and thriving hub for social interaction. The growing bank of volunteers ensures the continued sustainability of other projects such as The children's Christmas party and family fun days.

Looking ahead, Donna has several exciting plans. In September she will be initiating a beginners' painting course at the Nowell Mount Community Centre, believing that art can play a significant role in improving mental health and wellbeing.

Having Harriet coming in has enabled us to start up some groups, very like-minded vision as us and we feel she is working on our passions and working with us to support us to bring this community together - Donna

