

KaBOOM! – Building Communities One Playground at a Time

Executive Summary

Asset-Based Community Development Institute
Northwestern University

Overall Findings

When implemented appropriately, the KaBOOM! Community-Build process creates a lasting impact on the communities it partners with, both in terms of building capacity, enhancing community pride and cultivating KaBOOM!-leadership, as well as enhancing the play experience of neighborhood children.

Purpose and Methodology

Beginning in May 2007, KaBOOM! engaged the Asset-Based Community Development Institute (ABCD) of Northwestern University to conduct an evaluation of its Community Build process and the impact the projects are having on local neighborhoods.

In Phase I of the evaluation, 32 communities/playground builds were selected by KaBOOM! Project Managers as examples of groups that could contribute good information in response to the general research question, *When implemented well, what lasting impact does the KaBOOM! Community Build process have in communities?* In Phase II of the evaluation, 68 individuals were randomly selected for participation from among KaBOOM!-led, Do-It-Yourself, and Challenge Grant projects, in addition to ten projects selected because their implementation was considered problematic in some way.

The data were produced through site visits (all conducted in Phase I) and telephone interviews with a total of 110 playspace builders, as well as a review of secondary KaBOOM! data. The interviews were conducted as open-ended discussions guided by a set of specific questions, which were refined for the second round of interviews. A set of common themes emerged from Phase I, and these were used to create a ratings system for Phase II. Text analysis was conducted to determine overall attitude about working with KaBOOM!, to glean examples of impact, and for recommendations for improving the KaBOOM! Community-Build process. Analysis also included comparisons of how different groups rated their project on the common themes.

Key Findings and Implications

Ninety-four percent of KABOOM!-led respondents, and 90% of Do-It-Yourself respondents believe that their playground project helped strengthen relationships among neighborhood residents and among community partners. Ninety percent of both groups reported that their project increased their collective confidence and transformed skepticism.

Over half of all KABOOM!-led and Do-It-Yourself groups (56% and 60%, respectively) reported that their project expanded their capacity to address other community issues.

Nearly 100% of all groups believe that their KaBOOM! playground positively impacted the quality and quantity of children's play.

Regarding community desirability, 34% of all groups voluntarily stated that their playground project brought visibility and credibility to the community, but a majority (70%) responded positively when asked directly about how their playground affected their community's credibility. Over half of all KABOOM!-led groups (53%) indicated that their playground produced a signal for other investment in the community. Fewer Do-It-Yourself groups believed that their playground

produced that kind of investment, but this could be explained by the higher socio-economic status of the Do-It-Yourself project neighborhoods.

Over three-quarters of interviewees (78%) voluntarily stated that the KaBOOM! model works and that they have either used or plan to use the practices and principles that they learned during their project for additional projects. Ninety-one percent of all groups who were asked directly about the KaBOOM! Community Build model and tools responded positively that they work.

Ninety-four percent of all groups' attitudes toward KaBOOM! were positive with an average rating of 3.8 out of a 4, 4 being the most positive. In terms of impact among different types of projects, Do-It-Yourself and KaBOOM!-led projects have very similar positive results across all common themes. This indicates that the community build model supports the KaBOOM! Theory of Change: we can activate powerful citizenship by pursuing common goals toward collective causes that result in achievable wins through the act of volunteering.

The following comments illustrate how respondents describe the impact of their projects:

"We maintained the momentum from the playground build, and are doing lots of things now with some of the energy from KaBOOM! I became an ad-hoc community relations person for all for neighborhoods that were part of KaBOOM!. We created a Coalition for Better Neighborhoods and we meet once a month. Yesterday we had second annual clean up of the area. KaBOOM! was a good kick-off event, and since then we've done a bike rodeo with the City Police Department, and a food drive in December where all the donated food went back to people in the communities that got it together."

"A major ripple would be that the strip where the school was dilapidated and an eyesore before the playground. When the school did this redevelopment work and got the playground, the grounds came alive. It was so much more beautiful to look at, vibrant and new and clean. There has been a definite change in what the neighborhood looks like all around the school. People responded to the new look of the school and now lots of other things in the neighborhood look much better. There is new development in a commercial strip nearby, things are generally brighter."

"Kids who never felt that the community cared, saw everyone come out on their behalf, and were able to feel safe about being kids. If they are healthier, they learn better, they make new friends, are more engaged, have more faith in their community. The playground helped break some mental barriers; before, everyone felt that they were powerless and couldn't do anything to help their own kids, this showed them what they could accomplish together."

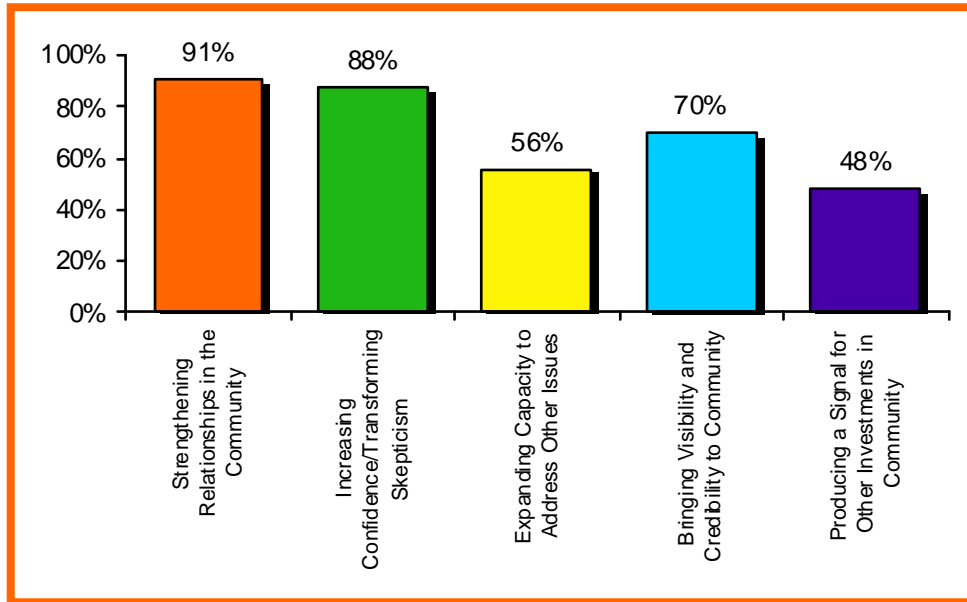
Suggestions for improvement of the KaBOOM! Community Build model followed these themes:

- KaBOOM! should work to maintain the momentum and relationships generated during the project
- KaBOOM! should work to eliminate any confusion about resource availability and work for clarity in all communications.
- KaBOOM! should make resources and information on the website clearer and more accessible.

Detailed Findings

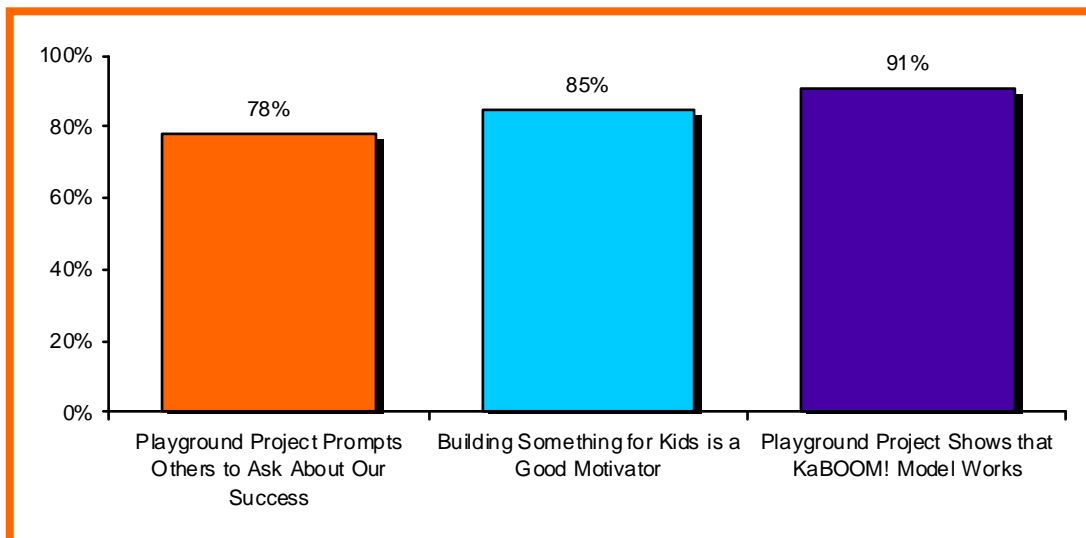
Community Capacity and Desirability

Community members generally believe their capacity for further development was expanded by their involvement in the KaBOOM! playground project



The Playground and the Community

Respondents believe in the value added to the community by the community build process and the simple fact of the playground's presence



The KaBOOM! Model

Nearly all groups said that the KaBOOM! process represents a working model that put them on the path for success.

