

Boredom Busters: Keeping Families Moving During Covid-19 Lockdown

When schools shut, many parents faced the challenge of home-schooling. How could they keep their children active and occupied during lockdown?

To the relief of many parents, Joe Wicks stepped into the role of P.E. teacher, but what about those families without access to a laptop or tablet? They couldn't click into daily workout sessions.

The LEAP team were keen to act. We were aware that other active partnerships were collating and distributing sport equipment packs. This would be a great way in which we could help families and the concept of Boredom Busters was born.

We prepared a series of activity cards, with instructions on how to set up and run physical games. These were packaged in drawstring bags with the necessary equipment, including bean bags and footballs. In total, we prepared 800 Boredom Buster bags.

Collaborating with Partners in Bucks and Milton Keynes

That was the easy bit. Now we needed a strategy for getting the Boredom Buster packs out to the families in greatest need of support. We couldn't do it alone, but we explored opportunities for collaboration.

Boredom Busters in Milton Keynes

We are grateful to Milton Keynes Council, who supported this project in two ways. Firstly, they joint-funded 400 packs, making good use of money that was available through their status as the [2020 European City of Sport](#). Secondly, they put us in contact with 4 Milton Keynes Family Centres.

These family centres are in contact with families who would find the pressures of lockdown particularly difficult. Each accepted 100 packs, which they agreed to distribute to families who would benefit the most.

"We received some great feedback from the families. The majority shared that their children really enjoyed throwing the bean bags into or through the hoops and playing with the football. They said that their children played together nicely for a change with the items and it also gave them a reason to go out to a field or park to play."

– Zoe Parkinson, Hedgerows Family Centre, Milton Keynes

Parent Feedback

Parents responded very positively to receiving the packs.

"I was surprised. Surprised by the variety of equipment and the ideas of how to use it. It gave us different things to do and is still being used now. My children are home-schooled, so when lockdown was lifted, we played the games with other children in the Home Ed group."

- Heather, Milton Keynes

Another mum, Sara, who collected a pack from Hedgerows Children's Centre, said she was really grateful:

"I have three children who are always on the go and when you can't hang out with friends and there isn't money to buy things, it can be restrictive. Something new is

always a winner and my children loved playing together, especially with the beanbags, frisbee and ball.

The activity cards were handy and the kids made up their own variations too. They cut out shapes to make their own beanbag targets. Having everything together in the bag made it easy to carry to the park.

I collected some packs for neighbours who couldn't get to the Children's Centre and know that they were appreciative too, especially the mums with little ones. That was a good thing, the packs were good for all ages, including parents!

I don't think the packs could be improved, but you might want to do a competition or something that encourages people to post and share what they are doing - #sharethefun. It might give other families ideas and it shows the packs being used, and the children will love the recognition.

We are thankful to our Children's centre for everything they do in our community. It is great that the Boredom Busters team and others work with the Children's Centres to support what they are doing. Thank you.

Frances, a mum with a younger child provided this feedback:

"Thank u for the pack, it was really great and we still use it. We don't have a garden so we had to be careful with the Frisbee, but we used the hula hoop and taught my boy to throw balloons through it. We also tried to use our kitchen table for ping pong.

My boy is only 2 so couldn't get to grips with the majority of the pack but we tried to make it work. And we don't have a garden so some of it we couldn't use properly. Maybe have another pack aimed at younger children? It still helped us during lockdown and we really appreciated it, thank you."

Another Milton Keynes mum shared her families experience of Boredom Busters:

"I have 6 kids of different age groups so sometimes it is hard to find something they all like to do together. My 3-year-old is being assessed for autism, so it is hard to get him to play and interact with others. He likes the hula hoop, pretending that it's a steering wheel in a car and he's driving. He's not, but didn't put it down, he even went to bed with it.

My 15-year-old teenager don't like doing much at all, only if it involves the TV or phone, so it was good to see her getting out and play with some of the toys. The set up an obstacle course with them all and took it in turns to complete the course. They really liked doing it. It was fun to watch them do it together; it was really nice to see them all playing together nicely.

The 15-year-old did say there wasn't much for her to do and did get bored easily, as teenagers do. The cards was a good idea, they give you lots of activities to do with the kids. They did the bean bag toss, not the 2-Year-Old. The 7-year-old played for a little while, but them was not happy when she couldn't get them in. They was taking it in turns, every time they got one in, they moved back a step. I think the 11-year-old was the winner in this. She really enjoyed playing on her own with it when the others had gone off to do something else. The 11-year-old liked the bat and ball too.

The 10-year-old likes everything in the bag. He loves the football and has not stopped playing with it, but has also enjoyed playing with the bat and ball. The 7-year-old

enjoyed playing with the bat and ball and hula hoop - when she could get it, as the 3-year-old would not let her have it.

Everyone really enjoyed all the toys, thank you. It got us out and doing more outside together."

Other parental feedback included:

"Good quality, especially the football"

"Every age can play, and it's been something we can do together"

"Information leaflet was helpful to show how to use equipment; they have played some of the activities from cards and enjoyed the bean bags the most"

Boredom Busters in Buckinghamshire

[Restore Hope](#) is a Christian charity based in Chesham, Buckinghamshire. They were already playing an active role in supporting families, by preparing food parcels. Working in collaboration, they helped us to pack and distribute 200 Boredom Buster bags to local families.

"We loved the Leap Boredom Busters bag, as did the 200 vulnerable families we delivered too! Whilst we have been delivering fresh food on a biweekly basis to our local families, it was brilliant to be able to offer them something extra and practical, and as a complete surprise to many of them.

These bags came at the perfect time as lockdown restrictions eased and there was more freedom to get out and about over the summer holidays. Many of these families had been indoors without gardens, so these bags encouraged them to get outdoors, exercise and to enjoy all the items as a family and with friends. They were not only a joy for the children to receive, but the adults too, some of whom commented they had been using some of the items themselves. Thank you so much Leap for reaching out and for providing these to us! We look forward to working with you again in the future!"

—Nina Cooke, Restore Hope

One of the parents who received a Boredom Busters bag via Restore Hope provided the following feedback on the impact it had on her family:

"When I received the pack, I was curious to see what was inside, then excited to see the different equipment. I thought there was a great mix and it was well chosen to get the family playing together.

It was great seeing the boys enjoying something we wouldn't normally do and they really liked that I joined in with them. The football pump was a great addition and much appreciated. We enjoyed the bean bags and did a bean bag toss. Catching the bean bags with the racquets and passing them to each other to catch. It's been great to take with us out of the house and means we spend longer out.

Information cards were really good and added a different way of playing. We liked the variety of equipment in the bag and helpful cards with different games to play with the bits in the bag. The bag was great. I wouldn't change anything!"

Learning from our partnership with Milton Keynes Council, we also contacted family centres in Aylesbury, Chesham and High Wycombe. They agreed to help us deliver bags to families who would benefit the most.

“Thank you, the kids and I were blown away when we received such a good quality pack. The kids were delighted and it was touching. Our family did school work in the morning and then spent the afternoons in the garden, all through the summer. We turned our garden table into a table tennis table and I had a net that I bought in Aldi for 99p, which we put up for games of badminton with the shuttlecock.

We used the activity cards; the children really liked the obstacle course, but we also tried different things. The chalk was used on the patio to draw lots of artwork and I photographed it all. The stretchy blue band helped with my son’s physio too. We like that everything can be easily packed away into the bag, so nothing gets lost or damaged and we can play with it all again next year. It was amazing and I can’t think of any way the packs could be improved.”

– The Garside Family, Buckinghamshire

The final collaboration was with Buckingham Young Carers. Young Carers were under even greater pressures trying to look after other family members during lockdown. Being able to provide them with fun resources was a small gesture to help make a difference.

We delivered 50 boxes to Young Carers Buckingham, which meant that they could be delivered to the majority of families that the organisation works with.

“We delivered the Boredom Buster bags mid-lockdown and saw them being opened and used within minutes. They were unexpected and very well-received. The resources provided a useful and enjoyable way to occupy children and encouraged people to go to the park.

I believe that the impact of the packs extended beyond the target families, as children played with friends as restrictions were lifted.

My suggestion for future packs is to better use the opportunity to promote Leap and it’s objectives. Most recipients have not heard of Leap and there was nothing to tell them more. The packs could include signposting to other resources, such as the Fix your Bike Voucher Scheme, that would encourage families to explore other options for getting active. There could be healthy eating tips or a daily exercise routine with a focus on reducing childhood obesity.

I do think that the Boredom Buster bags were well thought through, with a good range of equipment and additions such as the football pump. There were clear benefits for the families we delivered to.”

— Simon Wells, Buckingham Young Carers

The Future of Boredom Busters

Undertaking this project helped our team to recognise an opportunity for the future.

Ideas to get Families Active Indoors

With the threat of Covid-19 still enforcing social distancing measures, most clubs, sports facilities and opportunities to get active are on hold. Through winter, the opportunity and motivation to get outside also dips. In response, we are preparing Winter Boredom packs.

These will consist of a pack of new activity cards, that are suitable for indoor play. Our plan to distribute these to the same families in the hope of reigniting the excitement and novelty of receiving the initial packs. The cards will encourage them to use the equipment in different ways. We also intend to extend our reach, by providing packs for other families.

Ambitions for Summer 2021

Our team are also thinking ahead. Every summer children are home for 6-weeks. Not every family can afford to sign their children up for holiday clubs. There are also families with special needs children who may also find it hard to access activities.

The LEAP team are now fired up to find funding streams and willing partners who could help us to source, prepare and distribute activity packs for Summer 2021.