

How children feel about their local housing estates

Eleanor Frank, aged 11

Introduction

My research is based around the way children feel and think about two estates in Milton Keynes- Fishermead and Springfield. The main reason I chose this topic is because I live on Fishermead, and I think that it is somewhat disappointing if young people do not like their own estate.

I am seeing less and less children going outside in Fishermead and Springfield. One of the school governors for Springfield Middle School believes that children in their catchment area are afraid of walking to school on Springfield, so they do not come. My main goal is to find out if this is the case, and try to rectify any problems.

Methodology

I wanted to find out what children from years 4 to 7 (8 years old to 13 years old) felt about Fishermead and Springfield. I used a questionnaire to find out in a very basic form what children felt of the two estates. The questionnaires were anonymous, so that the children would feel safe giving away their opinions. I got permission from the teachers to hand out the questionnaires, and offered reading help to some children. By going into each class and ensuring that the questionnaires were filled in, I got a 100% response rate. I wanted to find out how children felt going outside on their own, or with someone else, and at what times they felt comfortable, and what they did on the estates. I was still happy to include people who didn't live on Fishermead and Springfield, because their opinions are still valid and useful. 88.6% of the children I asked lived on Fishermead and Springfield.

I also used in-depth interviews with a small group of children (4). I interviewed one child at a time. The children were picked randomly from the register, and luckily I got a good mixture of personalities and lifestyles. I interviewed one girl and three boys, and got the chance to interview one boy who used a wheelchair. There was a basic layout of the questions asked in the interview, based from the questionnaire, but also I thought of questions related to some answers children gave to further reach into their feelings and thoughts of Fishermead and Springfield. I had to ensure that the children I interviewed felt comfortable and safe giving the answers, and had to get their permission to use their answers in my research. I told them all about what I was doing, and was as friendly as I could be towards them, especially the younger ones who didn't really know what was going on, because they probably hadn't been interviewed before. After a short while, the children were open and confident. They seemed to be very interested in the research, and asked questions about it.

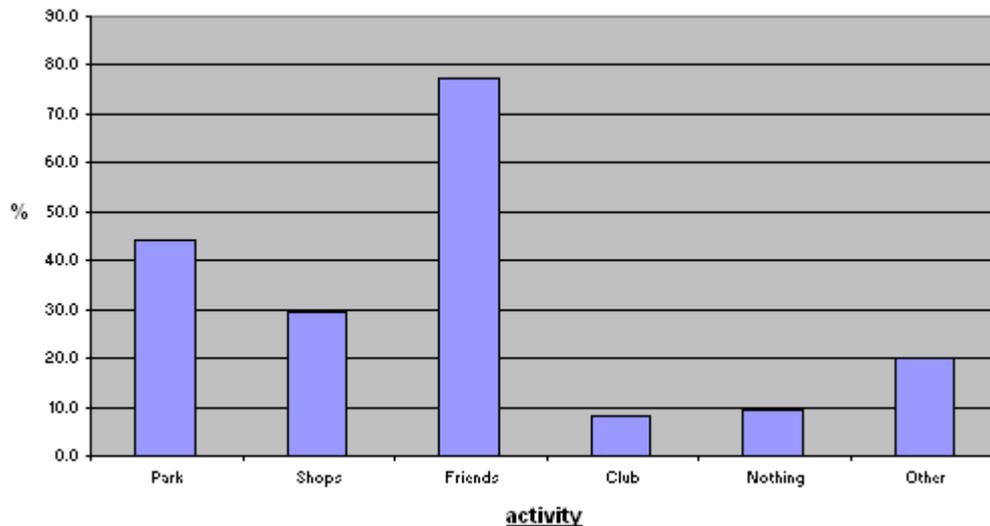
I used a video to pinpoint what it really looked like in Fishermead and Springfield, to show the litter and graffiti, and in my video I had an unplanned interview with two girls who lived on Fishermead, and I got a chance to discover how it felt for other children who lived on the estate. There were places where I knew I was going to record, but also parts that just happened to be there at the time I was videoing. I used a storyboard to plan it. The video doesn't really say anything about my feelings of living in Fishermead, because it wasn't intended to. My feelings about living on Fishermead are rather strong, and I feel somewhat safe, but also disappointed that

children don't want to go outside because they don't feel safe, or that there is nothing to do, and I know that many other people feel the same. I've lived there all my life.

The findings

Discussion

In my questionnaire, I mainly wanted to find out how children feel on the two estates, and what they do on the estates. This is a graph on the results I got for the question 'What do you do on Fishermead and Springfield?'



I found from this question that so few children go to clubs on the estates, because there are so few to go to. As you can see, a lot of children play out with their friends, possibly because they do not feel safe on their own, as the in-depth interviews proved.

"My friend used to go out on his own, but he got picked on and can't go out on his own now." –James.

Billy in year 4 said that he feels safer going outside with a friend who is older than him, because he gets bullied by other children.

22 children say they go to the shops, but I would like to find out if they go to the shop because they want to, to spend their pocket money, or if they have to go because their parents want them to buy necessities. I would like to find this out because it is crucial to my research to find safe places for children to be, where they feel comfortable. So far my interviews have shown that children do not feel safe on the estates, other than when they are in their homes. Children have the right to feel safe wherever they go, and they also have the right to have fun, be it at the shop or not, and taking away these two rights is something that should never happen.

All of the children I interviewed thought that there should be more clubs on the estates and more things to do- a point that I made in my video is that children may graffiti on the estates because of lack of anything else to do.

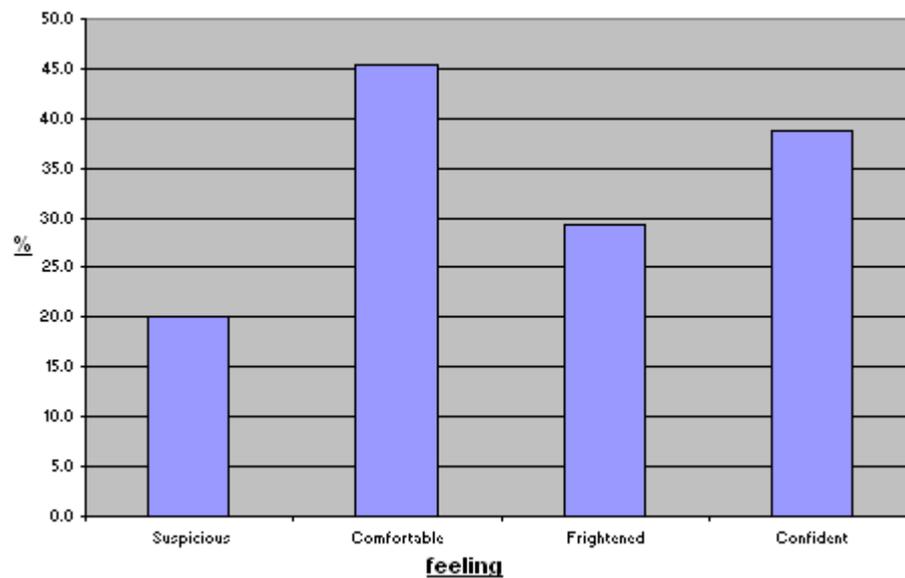
The younger children all seemed to want the same thing- a quiet club to go to, to feel safe and away from bullies. Sports club were also an issue. Emily in year 4 says that

the youth club on Springfield starts too late, and the only clubs she does on Springfield are school based. The younger children wanted clubs that started straight after school.

There are parks to play on in Springfield and Fishermead, but the interviews proved that children feel unsafe going to them. Billy from year 4 says he only ever goes to the park if his mum is watching. James from year 6 says his park is full of broken glass and plastic, and he makes a point that if anybody were to fall over, they would be cut by all the glass. In my video, all the equipment at the park had been vandalized.

Jessica in year 6 says that “There are good parks, but they get vandalized.”

The next question I asked was ‘How do you feel about walking around in Fishermead and Springfield during the day?’



As you can see, by comparing the graph seen above and the graph seen below, there are far more children who feel frightened and suspicious when walking around during the day, as opposed to walking to school. This may be because children are alone during the day, and are often accompanied by others walking to school.

Billy in year four, for example, only plays at the local park when his mum is watching because he sees it as a dangerous yet fun place.

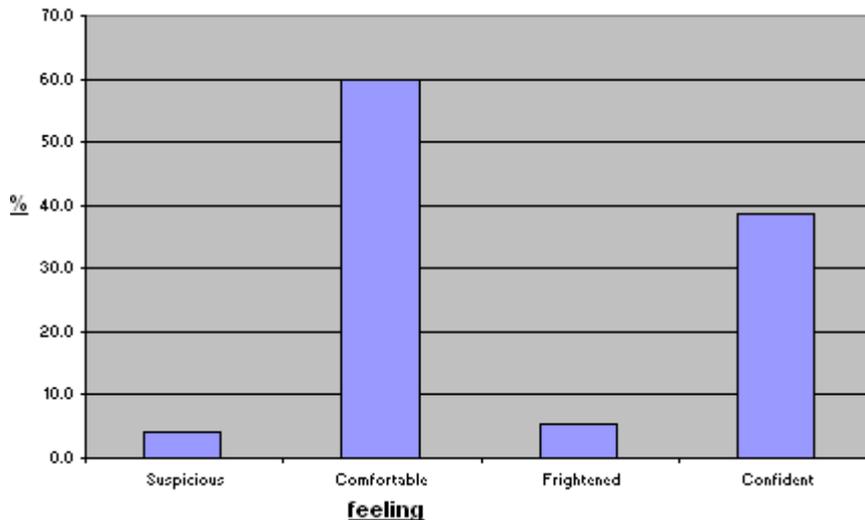
Emily from year five says that she feels relatively safe outside on her own, but more comfortable with someone else. “I don’t feel one hundred percent safe... I feel a bit safe, but not quite safe.” She would feel safer if there were police patrolling Springfield, and she feels safe at school, which may show that children feel safe in an environment where they are being looked after, so more clubs on the estates for children would be a good idea.

Even James, who is in year six, still doesn’t go outside on his own on Springfield. He feels safe walking to school, but he finds that older children pick on the younger ones. He will play outside straight after school, and at the weekends, but he doesn’t feel safe on his own. He seems doubtful that other children feel safe on Springfield.

“There are other children who feel comfortable on Springfield. Most do. They seem alright.”

The statistics show that more children do feel comfortable than suspicious, but all of the children I interviewed do not feel this way on their own.

The next was ‘How do you feel walking to school from Fishermead and Springfield?’



As you can see, very few children feel suspicious and/or frightened walking to school. Some of the interviews prove that children feel more confident walking to school with somebody else, or children may feel more comfortable walking with other children who are going to school. Younger children would most probably fall into the comfortable or confident categories, as many other children walk to school with them, possibly reassured that nothing bad would happen with so many people around. For example, Billy from year four says that he feels safe in the mornings when his mother can walk with him to school, but other times he feels less safe. “I feel safe in my own house, but outside there are people who beat me up.”

He also said that at night there may be people who want to hurt him, such as drunkards, and he thought that this was a large threat.

Conclusion

My research has shown how children feel and think about living, walking around and playing on Fishermead and Springfield.

I used questionnaires, which provided a small insight into how children felt about going outside in the mornings, on their own and to school. For the in-depth interviews I used more flexible questions to get a better and deeper opinion. The video showed just how bad the litter and graffiti were on the two estates, because it is a rather large problem. Several children from the interviews said there should be more bins on the two estates.

This research has shown, first of all, what children do on Fishermead and Springfield. The questionnaires showed that there was, and still is a very small amount of children who go to the clubs. It would be beneficial to add more clubs to the estates, because children feel safer in a place where they are supervised and with older children.

The research also showed how children felt on the two estates on their own during the day, and how they felt walking to school. Children feel frightened and suspicious on their own during the day, but as they walk to school, probably because there are more people around during school morning walking their children to school, and children walking on their own to school, children feel much safer, because they feel safe in a large group.

Children feel very slightly safe on their own on the estates, but far more comfortable with someone they trust.

Continuity

The next step of this research is to contact the Milton Keynes Council Youth Workers, and see if they can do anything about the lack of clubs on Fishermead and Springfield. Hopefully this will mean a brighter and safer future for young people on the estates.