

Dream Networks: A Story of Play, Purpose, and Possibility

Dream Networks is a not-for-profit community interest company dedicated to co-creating sustainable play areas in marginalised communities. Their mission is to empower children, schools, businesses, and local communities to collaboratively design and build inclusive play spaces that foster creativity, social interaction, and early childhood development.

Their unique approach places children at the heart of the process, using STEAM-based workshops and computer-aided design tools to give young people agency in shaping their environments. Dream Networks champions sustainability, using local, safe, and reusable materials to ensure long-term community ownership and environmental responsibility.

Tony Gee partnered with Dream Networks on their Love Plays Programme to life—a mission to co-create sustainable play areas in communities where play had become a luxury. This collaboration exemplifies how engineering expertise can be harnessed to deliver meaningful social value and inspire future generations.

Birmingham: Where Dreams Took Shape

In the heart of Ladywood, Birmingham, a group of children gathered in a classroom, their eyes wide with curiosity and excitement. They weren't just there to learn—they were there to dream. With clay in their hands and ideas in their minds, they began shaping the future of their playground, guided by volunteers from Tony Gee and the passionate team at Dream Networks.



This was no ordinary project. It was the beginning of a journey where children became designers, engineers, and storytellers. At St John's and St Peter's C of E Academy, the children's imagination ran wild. They sculpted swings, slides, and secret huts from clay, presenting their ideas in a "Dragons' Den" style competition. Their peers became judges, choosing a winning design that would soon become a real playground.

Tony Gee's engineers transformed the children's models into 3D plans, explaining concepts like



sustainability and design thinking along the way. As the playground took shape, the children saw their ideas come to life—each beam and bench a reflection of their creativity.

"It was great to be so involved and see the children's understanding change as the project developed from concept to design." – Sam Bolton, Design Engineer

"We are enriching the students' play time by providing them with brand new equipment to explore." – Chris Ellis, Design Engineer

By June 2021, the playground was open. Laughter echoed through the space, a testament to what happens when children are given the tools to shape their world.

Manchester: Nature in the City

A year later, in Longsight, Manchester, the story continued. At Crowcroft Park Primary School, Year 5 students embarked on an 8-week adventure in design and engineering. With guidance from Tony Gee volunteers, they explored sustainability, safety, and teamwork—learning to think like engineers and dream like artists.



Their challenge was unique: to design a space not just for physical play, but for creativity and connection. The result? A playground themed “Nature in the City,” featuring:

An agility course with stepping stones and a wooden bridge

A games hut with a chalkboard wall and sensory play equipment

A willow sculpture, planters, and paved paths for muddy feet

Spaces for outdoor learning—from wind chimes in art class to planting crops in science

“The children had a hugely valuable, real-life learning experience!” – Juliet Francis, Headteacher

Despite the northern rain, the games hut became a warm refuge, and the gardening club bloomed. The school plans to celebrate the space with an opening event in spring, when the grass is greener and the sun stays longer.



The Bigger Picture

Dream Networks doesn’t just build playgrounds—they build futures. Through their Love Plays Programme, they’ve shown that play is not a privilege, but a right. Their work fosters:

STEAM Education: Children learn design, sustainability, and engineering in hands-on workshops.

Community Ownership: Local builders and artists bring designs to life, using safe, sustainable materials.



Social Value: Volunteers from businesses like Tony Gee contribute their time and expertise, enriching lives and communities.

Marie Williams, CEO of Dream Networks, captured this vision in her TEDxLondonWomen talk, “How We End the Play Emergency and Make Play Possible for All.” Her message is clear: when we empower children to dream, we create spaces where imagination, learning, and joy thrive.