

Play for Wales

Issue 11 Autumn 2003



PLAY NEWS & BRIEFING FROM THE NATIONAL ORGANISATION FOR PLAY

PLAYING FOR THE FUTURE



For news of the National Playbus Conference see page 5

As the national organisation for children's play, Play Wales works towards a vision that one day Wales will be a country where we recognise and provide for every child's play needs.

Play Wales is a member of the Welsh Assembly Government Play Policy Implementation Group that is meeting with a brief to put forward recommendations to the Assembly next February. So in order to put forward a comprehensive list of our own proposals, we posed the following question to peers, play experts, activists, researchers and playworkers across the world this Autumn:

If you had a choice of the most important, exciting, and beneficial initiatives that would impact upon opportunities for children's play and play provision, what

would you like to see change or come to fruition in the future?

It is a thought provoking question, and one that certainly stimulates the imagination. The response was inspirational, and our thanks go out to all those who helped.

Our aim in posing it was to gather ideas and examples of good practice that support children's play in our own and other countries. Of course, we already had our own wish list, but it is always good to "ask the audience".

Based on our own vision and our research, we have put forward suggestions to the Group that we hope will make Wales a more child-aware and more child-friendly country on a par with places like Sweden and Holland.

Here are some of the ideas we have put forward:

- Public awareness raising on the importance of giving children time and space to play;
- Residential streets reclaimed for pedestrians and children's play;
- Changes in traffic law so that in accidents with pedestrians and cyclists the driver is deemed to be at fault;
- Protected habitat status for environments where children play;
- More local wheeled play areas and adventure playgrounds as requested in surveys of older children;
- Very local, developmentally appropriate play provision and play friendly street modification for children who are unable to range further than their own street;
- A re-evaluation for fixed equipment playgrounds in terms of their play value to children, and a play area strategy that is specific to the needs of Welsh communities;
- A school playground improvement scheme to provide stimulating and challenging school grounds that meet children's play needs;
- Training campaigns based on research into child development and play theory for teachers and all other professionals who work directly with children.

Many of these suggestions work well in other countries, and many of these ideas have already been mooted or tried in the past, but for a variety of reasons most of them have not received large scale Governmental commitment across all Departments.

If these proposals come to pass, there would be a real opportunity for Wales to provide innovative examples that we can share internationally. Therefore the implementation of the Play Policy ought to be accompanied by action research and the collection of data, demonstrating the effectiveness of innovative approaches.

We may be accused of idealism and utopianism, but if we don't use this

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EDITORIAL

Five years ago would any of us have dreamt in our wildest dreams that the Welsh Assembly Government would have adopted a Play Policy? Not only that, but that they would also have drawn together an Implementation Group from across Wales to produce recommendations to turn the Play Policy into a reality for children? It is, to say the least, an exciting responsibility. The challenge, for all of us who are involved, is to make the most of the opportunity.

The Implementation Group has recently been advised of the appointment of Children in Wales as consultants, who will be working with Play Wales to bring form to the Implementation Group recommendations. So, if you consider that the recommendations must be made by early February, our work is certainly cut out for the next couple of months.

The celebrations continue... the Welsh Assembly Government has demonstrated particular foresight in giving us additional short-term core funding so that we can lead the UK review of the Playwork Values and Assumptions (that underpin the Playwork NVQs and inform National Occupational Standards for Playwork). This review will inform the development of a statement that will serve the playwork profession for the foreseeable future, and also significantly contribute to making the Welsh Assembly Government Play Policy a reality.

As well as looking at the bigger picture, Play Wales is also concerned about grassroots issues, and whilst the initiatives described above are both very positive, there is one initiative that has yet to meet the purpose for which it was designed.

We understand that there is shortly to be a Welsh Assembly Government review of the Day Care Standards, which we hope will

result in some improvement in the inspection regime applied to play providers. However, Play Wales continues to receive vastly differing stories from across Wales. These demonstrate that whilst some Inspectors when evaluating play provision, are positive, objective and show a clear understanding of children's play needs and how they might be met, others are taking a much more rigid and subjective approach. They focus upon crossing the 't's' and dotting the 'i's' rather than recognising the need for flexibility in developing locally relevant play provision.

This variability of inspection experience, at its extreme, is resulting in some established play and childcare providers changing their working practice in order to fall outside of the remit of the Inspectorate, changing it to comply with the Standards but in the process providing poorer provision, or alternatively to stop working with children altogether.

In our experience there is no other issue that is as widely taxing to the play profession as the variability of the implementation of the Day Care Standards across Wales.

We might anticipate that 2004 is going to be an interesting and exciting year.

Mike Greenaway
Director

Play Deprivation Briefing

Our play deprivation briefing sheet, written by Bob Hughes of PlayEducation, is ready to be translated and printed and should be available in hard copy and on our website before Christmas. If you would like a copy please contact us at our national office, or e-mail info@playwales.org.uk

Idris Bevan

It is with sadness that I record the death of Idris Bevan, in July 2003. Idris had been Play Co-ordinator with Torfaen County Council during the last few years of his life. A key responsibility of his post was to support the development of voluntary play clubs in the locality and it was a role he relished. Although new to Playwork, Idris approached his post with enthusiasm and sensitivity, which resulted in him being well-liked and respected by the many volunteers he worked with. We extend our sympathy to Idris' family and many friends and colleagues.

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opportunity radically and ambitiously we may never have the chance again. If we act now we can make Wales a better place for our children and generations to come.

[Other organisations who are involved in the Group include Clybiau Plant Cymru, Mudiad Ysgolian Meithrin, Urdd Gobaith Cymru, National Playing Fields Association, North Wales Play and Playing Fields Association, National Association of Toy and Leisure Libraries and the Wales Pre School Playgroups Association. The Group is chaired by Margaret Jervis of Valleys Kids (who is also the Chair of Play Wales' Board) under the auspices of the Welsh Assembly Government Children and Families Division.]

Just as the copy for this issue was being sent to the printer we had some good news ...

Children in Wales and Play Wales have successfully tendered for the contract to research and present the recommendations of the Play Policy Implementation Group to the Assembly.

Play for Wales

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Every Child Matters

The Government's Green Paper "Every Child Matters" was issued in September and the Welsh Assembly Government will be publishing its own consultation document this Autumn to indicate how the legislation should apply to Wales.

The Green Paper focuses on four main areas:

- Early intervention and effective protection
- Supporting parents and carers
- Accountability and integration – locally, regionally and nationally
- Workforce reform

The Assembly's response does not cover some of the recommendations because they relate to governmental structures in England, nor does it cover recommendations concerning the police as these are the responsibility of the Home Office.

The Welsh Assembly Government outlines action that it has already taken to safeguard children, and its plans for the future. One of the chief recommendations in the Green Paper is the appointment of a Children's Commissioner for England, and the remainder have already been addressed by Jane Hutt in a letter sent to local authorities, health authorities etc in March this year.

A summary of Every Child Matters (and a children and young people's version) can be downloaded from the DfES website at:

www.dfes.gov.uk/everychildmatters

and the Assembly's document can be downloaded at:

www.wales.gov.uk/subchildren

Play Debate in Parliament

After years of slogging away, play activists in England finally persuaded MPs to debate play in the House of Commons in early November. The visitors' gallery was thronged as play people listened to MPs talk about the value of children's play and their own play experience. While the gallery might have been packed, the floor of the House was not, but in terms of raising awareness the debate made a start.

As Hilton Dawson MP (Lancaster and Wyre) said when referring to the "Every Child Matters" Green Paper:

"If every child does matter, we must ensure that play is a central part of every organisation's work."

There are moves afoot to develop a National Play Policy Strategy for England in the wake of this year's Play Review and following the adoption of policies in other UK countries.

If you would like a pdf copy of the Hansard report from the debate please e-mail info@playwales.org.uk

Review Results Delayed Again

As I write this article we are still waiting for the results of the DCMS Play Review that took place last Spring. We even delayed the publication of this issue of Play for Wales so as to bring you the news. But the wheels and cogs of Whitehall grind very slowly.

In the meantime the Welsh Assembly Government Play Policy Implementation Group is including consideration of the responses to the Welsh Play Review (conducted alongside the DCMS one) in its proposals for a play strategy for Wales.

As soon as we have word of the results, they will be posted on our website: www.playwales.org.uk

Anti-Social Bill May Curb Play

A coalition of children's charities has commissioned research where eighty percent of 10 – 16 year olds surveyed believe that the Government's Anti-Social Behaviour Bill will create tension with the Old Bill. If it becomes law the police will have powers to disperse groups of two or more children under the age of sixteen.

The coalition (which includes The Children's Society and Barnardo's) commissioned an NOP poll, and is now requesting an amendment to Clause 31 of the Bill to make sure that the local community (including children) is involved in any decision to give police powers to disperse groups. Bob Reitemeier of the Children's Society said: "The plans are discriminatory ... Police powers to disperse groups and fast-track curfews may penalise law-abiding children with nowhere to meet."

According to Anthony Jennings QC parts of the Bill could contravene the Human Rights Act and the Children Act. It seems it would also make a mockery of the British Government singing up to the UN Conventions on the Rights of the Child.

Play Wales has recently been part of a campaign to encourage a positive response to children playing out, and to highlight the problems that children and young people face when they play in their local area. It was heartening to see the coverage that was gained in the Welsh media over the summer and we continue to campaign on the issue. So it is aggravating to see the Government introducing draconian measures that may add to the problems children already face.

Given past experience, it is unlikely that this legislation will have a positive outcome for children. It addresses the outcome of children and young people not having access to appropriate spaces and resources in which to manifest their play behaviour by giving adults further powers. It does not address the root problems in a child-centred way, and is therefore unlikely to do any more than alienate children still further from their own communities.

To view the full NOP poll results as a pdf visit www.thechildrensociety.org.uk/pdfs/view

Criminal Records Unit for Wales

Funding from the National Assembly for Wales has enabled the Wales Council for Voluntary Action to establish a new Criminal Records Unit (CRU) to act as a registered umbrella body for the Criminal Records Bureau.

WCVA CRU is based in Colwyn Bay, provides a bilingual service and is now fully operational. CRU, by providing access to the disclosure service, will help voluntary organisations to make informed recruitment decisions for volunteers and paid staff working in positions which are exempted from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (ROA). The Unit's services are open to all voluntary organisations in

Wales - community groups, self help groups, community co-operatives and enterprises, religious organisations and other not-for-profit organisations of benefit to communities and people in Wales.

Essentially, the Unit provides blank Disclosure Application forms on request; acts as countersignatory and forwards completed forms to the CRB; receives disclosure statements and forwards them to the organisation.

Voluntary organisations, wishing to use the service must register with CRU to ensure that the Unit can offer the necessary advice and guidance in order to meet its umbrella body responsibilities when acting on behalf of other organisations.

'We have been delighted with the feedback and comments received

from the sector. If you were unable to attend the road show, please contact us and we will send you the information, or if you prefer, this can be downloaded from WCVA website,' said Elizabeth Flack, Head of Unit.

Registration is easy. Please phone the bilingual Registration and Enquiry Line on **0870 241 6557** or e-mail: cru@wcva.org.uk where the Disclosure Processors will be able to discuss the needs of your organisation and talk you through the registration process.

For more information please contact:

Emma Leighton-Jones
Disclosure Processor
Ffôn/Phone 01492 539894
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eleighton-jones@wcva.org.uk

SPRITO BECOMES SKILLSACTIVE

SkillsActive - the Sector Skills Council for Active Leisure and Learning was launched in October. The SkillsActive Playwork Unit, directed by Paul Bonel, is responsible for leading the development of education, training and qualifications in playwork in the UK.

So what difference will this make to those involved in the playwork sector in Wales? In a recent article in Leisure Manager, Paul says "Our funding has been very much tied to DfES and DCMS funding streams and it has always had an English bias. We have done UK work but it has been quite limited and we are hoping now that there will be a broader scope for UK relationships."

There are some changes in structure as SPRITO changes to SkillsActive. A Home-Countries Unit has been established, headed by Ashley Pringle, and within this Unit, Richard Tobutt is Programme Manager for Wales.

SkillsActive intends to build on existing relationships and to promote a constructive dialogue with UK playwork colleagues. It will continue the co-operative approach they have already taken on such issues as the Code of Practice in Scotland, and the endorsement of training courses in Wales and Northern Ireland. There will also be a review and development of National Occupational Standards in all SkillsActive sectors.

In the future, SkillsActive aims to establish a UK conference, playwork education and training centres in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and a UK strategy for playwork education and training.

The launch of Sgiliau Heini Cymru, SkillsActive Cymru, takes place in late Autumn. Jane Davidson, Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, Jane Hutt, Minister for Health and Social Services, and Alun Pugh Minister for Culture, Welsh Language and Sport, are all invited to join playwork representatives to celebrate the launch in Wales.

Ministers Meet at an Integrated Children's Centre



Play Wales and Malcolm King, the Director of The Venture and one of our Board members, invited two key Assembly Ministers to meet there in October. The Venture Adventure Playground in Wrexham is a model for the new NOF funded Integrated Centres that will soon spring up in each local authority area.

As part of our role as a critical friend of the Welsh Assembly Government, Play Wales produced a discussion paper on the plans to develop Integrated Children's Centres in Wales. So the purpose of the meeting with Jane Hutt, Minister for Health and Social Services and Jane Davidson, Minister for Education, was to encourage a re-evaluation of the strategy. The paper

attempts to set out some of the key principles and lessons from practice that need to be addressed if the intended outcomes of the Centres are to be achieved.

Whilst the elements relating to early years, open access play, and childcare, figure strongly in the plans there are some important omissions. Alternative curriculum, youth inclusion and youth offending work, outreach work and work with children and young people with disabilities, behavioural difficulties, and victims of abuse all need to be included. Unless the whole range of children and young people are included from the outset and feel the benefits of the Integrated Centre, there is a strong probability that they will feel sufficiently excluded to want to destroy the Centre in its infancy.

Adventure playgrounds provide the best vehicle to appeal to the widest possible range of children, young people and families. Every child and young person who attends the playground can be involved in building it, which is one of the key elements in encouraging local ownership. [This poses particular problems in rural areas where the families would benefit from the service may be scattered over a wide geographical area.] There is also a need for slow organic growth to meet local needs. A concept that is "parachuted in" to effect a quick solution to very long-term problems will be met with suspicion, and there is every likelihood that it will not take hold.

We have serious concerns that the local interpretation of the strategy is suffering due to a lack of concise direction to the Children and Young People's Framework Partnerships in regard to staffed adventure play opportunities. This is further hampered by a lack of knowledge and expertise of adventure play in the Partnerships themselves.

In order to address this shortfall, Communities First Co-ordinators and officers with responsibility for developing Integrated Children's Centres were invited to attend a Play Wales seminar introducing the ethos and practice of adventure playgrounds this Autumn. Those who attended visited three adventure playgrounds in North Wales and Cheshire and took part in workshops. Delegates left "buzzing".

We will run a further seminar in Spring 2004, and in the meantime it is almost always possible to speak to one of our Development Officers, or to visit the Play Wales Information Resource where we hold a range of publications on Adventure Play. We will also draw up a list of guidelines for Integrated Centre development based on the experience of The Venture.

National Playbus

National Playbus had a successful Training Conference nearly in November, when forty one member organisations (five from Wales) gathered for an intensive day of training and networking.

The theme for the day was Inclusion and members were given the opportunity to participate in workshops covering everything from Makaton (a sign language) to Working with Travellers, to Raising Awareness of Asylum seekers and

refugees. Seven projects displayed their buses and these included a sensory bus, playbus, youth bus and community bus.

Hannah White, Development Officer

If you would like to find out more about National Playbus, e.g. future events and our involvement within Wales, please call 0117 916 6580, or you can email playbus@playbus.org.uk.

Supporting the Rural Child's Right to Play

There is a high level of interest in the value of play, and concern that this valuable dimension of a child's development is being lost. These concerns are also felt in rural areas - although we hear less about the fears experienced by children, parents and play workers in rural Wales.



It has been claimed that children spend more time playing than any other waking activity (35% at play, 15% at school, 50% at home including sleeping). Yet little data exists on the role of children's play in rural areas and how urban models of play provision may be inappropriate or unworkable.

As a Community Worker in the voluntary sector involved in integrated playschemes, play training, a county Play Strategy and both static and mobile toy library/play resources for 15 years in Powys, I offer the following observations and comments:

- We need to challenge the assumption that today's children who live in rural areas have open access to the countryside.
- Environmental hazards and dangers – mechanisation and the use of chemicals on farms can make unsupervised play unsafe.
- Concerns about safety from strangers/visitors mean that children have to be accompanied to activities and parents/carers stay to supervise. It is often not worth a parent's while making four journeys for a two hour play session.
- Opportunities for play are limited by being "bussed" to a school outside the family's own community and therefore social interaction with peers is limited to school hours only on weekdays and may be missing altogether in school holidays. For children with special needs who go to school miles from where they live, holiday play may be sporadic, even non-existent.

- Nearest toy shops may be 50 miles away or more. How do parents learn about the value of play and toys as some of the "tools" for play?
- Costs and accessibility are a problem because of the lack of public transport. For example, for children living in Talgarth (there are 160 children on roll at school) to get to a supervised swimming pool and other leisure facilities involves a round trip of 20 miles with no public transport whatsoever available after 6pm.
- The decline in the size of families has heightened the need for children to play and build relationships with adults and children outside family members. With playgroups meeting perhaps just once a week in small communities, opportunities for social interaction, friendship and support for both children and parents may be severely restricted.



- There has been no study as far as I am aware of the effects of Foot and Mouth Disease on children living in families who were cut off from normal community life for many months due to fear of the spreading the infection. Parent and Toddler and Playgroups for children were closed and these groups play a vital part in preparing a young child for entry to school at just 4 years of age.

It is important that we register the play needs of our rural children as distinctive and separate from their more urban peers. Based on practical experience of initiating and sustaining organised play provision in Powys, I offer the following suggestions –



- Common sense in building on existing services and local community initiatives.
- Combining different functions within one service. For example the mobile book library can also carry some toys and play props or a playbox for group hire, art and craft materials for sale.
- Building and expanding the services of childminders, schools, parent and toddler, playgroups, toy libraries and playbuses to maximise the opportunities and choices for children's play
- Taking into consideration the transport issue for many families when planning services. Often large centre based provision is inappropriate.

As a member of the newly convened Welsh Assembly Government Play Policy Implementation Group, I hope to include and credit the particular needs and rights to play of children living in rural areas.

Janet Matthews
Director, National Association of Toy & Leisure Libraries in Wales

Most of this article first appeared in *Play Matters Summer 2003*.

Dear Editor

I am sending you a write-up about a project that I am involved in, and which may be of interest to some of your readers.

The Howey Community Playing Field Project was founded in July 2001 in response to an awareness by local people of a lack of facilities for the younger members of the community of Disserth and Trecoed in rural mid-Wales (population 1,200). The landscape around is beautiful but there is nothing for children to do – the land is closed to them. This is a district that has a high proportion of single parents, unemployment, residents with long-term health problems and it contains three times more temporary housing than the Wales average. There is also a high incidence of child poverty.

The area is also geographically restrictive in terms of children's play because five housing estates feed into a dangerous trunk road which literally divides the community into different areas, each with its own distinct problems.

Children living on a housing estate in the village wished to form a football team but had nowhere to play matches; the local primary school wanted somewhere to hold sports events, the only few pieces of playground equipment on a council estate had fallen into disrepair and could not be replaced by the local authority, and a youth club had to be closed because there weren't enough voluntary helpers to run it.

Disserth and Trecoed Community Council offered to lease a new open site to the community at peppercorn rent, and a small group of local people formed a voluntary management committee to steer forward the development of the site.

The young people in their community gave their ideas about best usage of the site through involvement in art and design competitions, and by playing a role in the major consultation exercise that was carried out by the Committee, who were determined to ensure that every resident in the district had an equal opportunity to share the vision of how the project would develop.

Consultation was thorough, and lasted some months, but when the Committee was satisfied that every local resident had

been given their say, all the ideas were collated and processed before being returned to the community for further comments. An environmental architect drew up draft plans for the site's development.

The ethos of the project is to encourage social inclusion and community participation while employing sustainable environment friendly practices. The young people here are very excited that they have not only had the opportunity to say what facilities they feel are needed in the village, but they are also looking forward to implementing these aspirations at the actual construction stage – they will help to build their teenage shelter, and lay paths and create a wildflower grove and artwork – there are plans for a graffiti wall and provision for BMX bikers. We have secured a successful bid for funding from the Enfyf Green Spaces and Sustainability Fund, and hope to complete the work within two years.

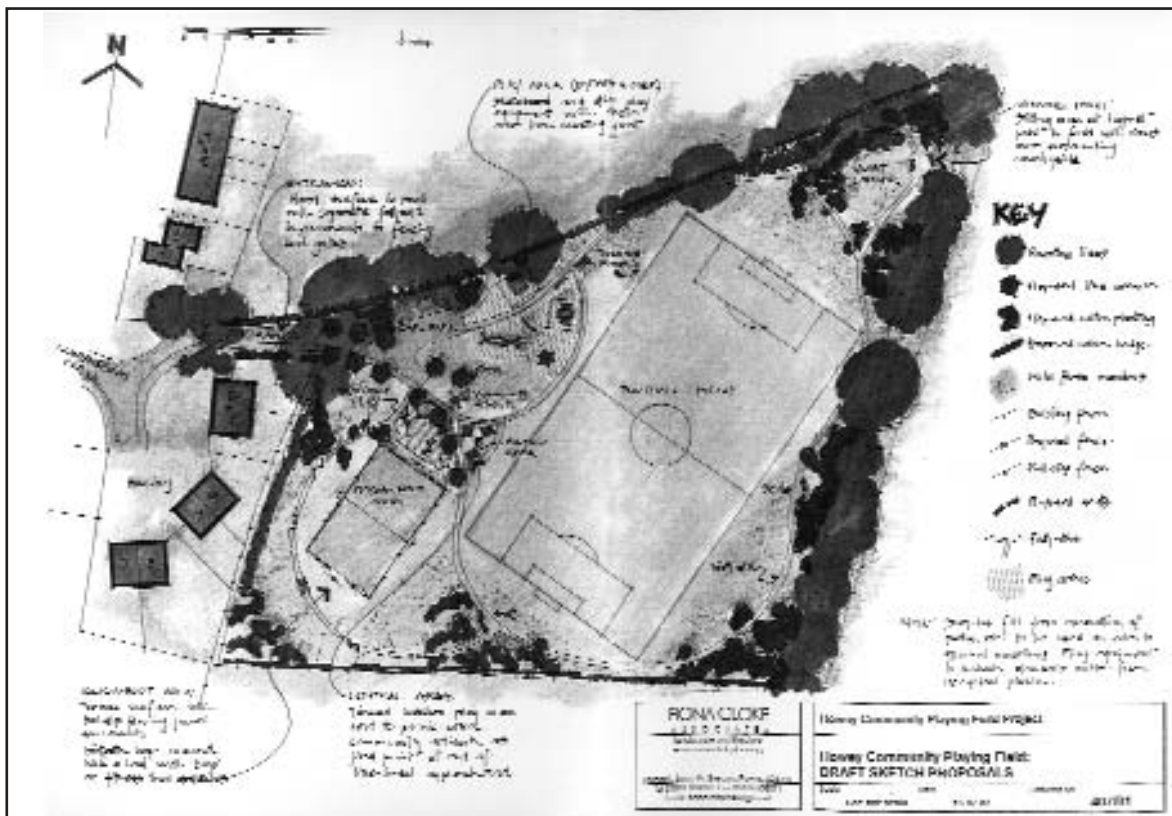
As a Committee we hope that the project will help develop a sense of belonging to the community, and give birth to a feeling of empowerment. At the same time the Committee wanted to reduce the social barriers between the different age groups in the village and the consultation has seen an amazing positive change in attitudes towards children and young people. Channels for social integration have historically been very impoverished, but there is now a real sense from many local people and organisations (such as the school and community council) that things must change in order for the community to survive – we hope that the project will continue to play a role in this.

I would be interested in learning from you of any other similar projects to ours, to share information and offer support.

Yours sincerely
Alison Walker

The Howey Community Playing Field Project was the first voluntary project in Radnorshire to receive New Opportunities Funding for informal recreation.

You can contact Alison on 01597 824301.



Do the Dutch love their children

This Autumn's gatherings of the Welsh Assembly Government Play Policy Implementation Group are a real opportunity to change our approach to the way children are provided for in Wales – from the design of highways to the planning of new housing schemes. Some European countries have a refreshingly positive and proactive child-sensitive and child-inclusive approach when it comes to planning and policy making – here Perry Else outlines his experience of the way children (and their play) are valued as part of the community in Holland.

There have been many policy developments aiming to improve children's opportunities in the UK recently, yet children's lived experience and their playful opportunities remain poor. We have many excuses for this in the UK, but in Europe they don't have excuses, they have good play opportunities!

Experiences of Holland

I visited Holland for the first time two years ago and was struck by the quality and use made of the outdoor environment. I've made a return journey and have decided that the Dutch approach to the environment significantly enhances play opportunities for children.

Everyone knows that Holland is flat and has lots of waterways. What I did not know till I visited was the prevalence of cycling and how it impacts on everyday life in the Netherlands. In Holland (as in other parts of Europe), cars must give way to cycles and pedestrians in many inner-city traffic environments. In a road accident between a bike and a car, it is automatically assumed that the car is to blame. This attitude creates a positive approach to cycling that contributes to over 85% of the population in Amsterdam having a cycle.

But not only does the law help with cycling, the road layout also helps greatly. On many town roads, cycle paths are built alongside the roadway for other traffic. They have their own traffic lights and crossings for major roads. Cars cannot park in the cycleway (as they often can do in the UK). As a result, it is quite common to see children riding round town with parents, friends or by themselves. Parents will often carry one or two children with them on the bike, and no one wears a 'safety' helmet, such is their confidence in the system. This ability to travel round independently gives children a great freedom that significantly enhances their play opportunities.

The other key policy decision that affects children's lives is that all children are taught to swim by the time they are seven years old. Holland is a country that has many waterways cutting across it; access to water is therefore an everyday occurrence for all children. However instead of choosing to fence off every watercourse or make prohibitions for children near water, the Dutch have taken this policy decision to help ensure their children's safety – and so their freedom.



These two policy actions allow many children to make their own play across the town. They cycle around, go fishing, go swimming (sometimes in the waterway) and do other playful things. By themselves, these experiences create an advantage for Dutch children over their UK peers, however the Dutch take their playful approach even further.

A case study – Goes

The town I visited was Goes in Zeeland. Goes is a town with a population of 35,000, equivalent to Cheltenham or Stirling in the UK. Four hundred metres from the heart of town is a large sporting complex, directly accessible to people in the town by a ten minute cycle ride. The sport centre has a variety of sports halls and activities but what sets it apart from similar UK sports centres is its water features. For such an average sized town, the centre has six different water spaces to cater for the various ages and abilities of Dutch swimmers. In the corner of the water area is a café selling cooked snacks, drinks and ice cream. The café helps children and their families stay in the pool for in excess of three hours (no rubber bands or tags to get you out here). This is helped by the number of chairs set around the edge of every water space to create family and friendship groups who often socialise all day long.

But what really sets Goes apart (and it is special though not unique in Holland) is the nature area immediately adjacent to the sports centre. The area was created with a variety of landscaped features that combine to create an excellent playful environment with many opportunities for interaction for children.

There is the obligatory café/restaurant selling beer. I say obligatory, as you find these cafes throughout Holland selling hot snacks, which encourage families to go out and stay out. Next to this café are a crazy golf area, an animal farm, local craft centre and heritage centre. Then there is the 'official' play area, well stocked by our standards with a wide range of equipment. But the best bit is the waterway a little further on where children are encouraged to play.

Planted directly in the water is a large pole with a chain and rope attached. On each side of the dyke is a landing platform and a little further along are a series of stone stepping stones. Children take it in turns to swing across the dyke, then run across the stones to have another go. No-one supervises them, no one tells them to share the rope or be careful near the water (all the children can swim!) It is a wonderful example of the playful opportunities that the Dutch make freely available for their children.

A little further on is a raft ferry across the water that the children use freely and without apparent fear. This whole area is bounded by woods and small hills and appears to be in the deepest countryside, though it is close to an industrial area and only 800m from the heart of town.



The playfulness encouraged by the Dutch is not just limited to formal play areas. They also were a major developer of "woonerf," what we call homezones; streets especially designed to encourage play and discourage high speeds by motor vehicles. Special road layouts, street furniture and the law that 'blames' drivers, means that children and parents can use the streets without worry.

en more than we love ours?

The Dutch also provide 'formal' playspaces for children; many were placed at the heart of the estate, where the traffic flow was slowest. These small neighbourhood play areas, which usually had a sand or loose fill base (rather than 'safety surface') were often used by children without supervision. One site I saw had a makeshift den that the children had added to the equipment. However, no children were present; they had left their toys and gone home for lunch – confident that their space would not be disturbed.



Of course not everything I saw and heard was trouble free. Playworkers I spoke to were concerned about 'youth nuisance'. Other workers spoke of problems with young people and I heard similar cases later at a European conference. It was also reported¹ that cycling was declining in some parts of Holland with working parents choosing to use their cars rather than their bikes. This was contributing to a city/town difference that was creating worse play opportunities for city children. In summary, the Dutch environment offers lots of spaces that children can occupy and use freely to create their own play frames,² playing by themselves, with others or with the environment.

Play spaces in the UK

In comparing these experiences with the UK, it is tempting to look at the worst cases of municipal provision where the

space provided for children seems designed to prevent their play rather than encourage it. There are many of these spaces around, still in existence after many years of growing awareness about the play value of such spaces. It seems that as a society we are attached to the old 'recreation areas' and often fight to keep them in our area long after the safety inspectors have removed all the 'fun' equipment in an attempt to make playgrounds 'safe.' It was reported at the conference 'Designs on Play' in Portsmouth that over £200m had

been spent on playground safety surfacing in the UK over the last ten years, but this had produced no discernable effect on the incidence of playground accidents.³

In one large northern city that I know, the Council has arranged for the city's formal sites to be independently assessed for their play value and safety. The sites are graded on whether they have safety surfacing, meet different play types, have a separate games area, fencing/dog free area, signage and whether they are overlooked by others. The playgrounds often scored less than 50%. Overall the impression is of a paucity of provision compared to what I have described in the Netherlands.

In 1971, 80% of English seven and eight year-olds were allowed to travel to school on their own or with other children.⁴

Summary

So in conclusion am I arguing that we copy the Dutch way of life? No, but I do feel we need to choose the way we live our life in the UK. I am certain that the way we conceive of children affects the way we treat them. If we think of them as delicate objects that we must care for, we provide 'safe' ways to play. If we see them as 'small people'⁶ with individual needs and rights we provide differently.

We need to challenge our current acceptance of the state of our cities, towns and villages and commit to change in making things better for children. We need to be brave enough to dream a better future for children (and for ourselves).

As a society we have made a commitment to nursery education for all three year olds (and in Wales you are going further still). We need to think about the real freedoms our children need to develop their minds and bodies, within and engaged with the environment and their culture. We should engage young people in sharing their visions for the future; so that together we can make a better place for all of us.

Perry Else
Ludemos

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- ³ Robin Sutcliffe, [Managing Risk for Children's Benefit](#), paper for 'Designs on Play' Playlink/Portsmouth City Council 2002
- ⁴ Quoted by Tiffany Jenkins, August 7, 1999 [Are we over-protective towards our children?](#) The Guardian, UK
- ⁵ Innocenti Research Centre, Unicef, Italy <http://www.childfriendlycities.org>
- ⁶ Gisela Eckert, 2002, [Changing Childhoods](#), paper for 'The Child in the City', Bruges, Congress Proceedings 2002.

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Opening Our Doors To All Children

James Mulenga is part of the award-winning Ethnic Minority Play Development Team at Cardiff Play Services. He and his colleague Parveen Ahmad gave the keynote speech at the JNCTP conference in November, and have presented workshops at our Spirit conference and at the recent Play Education conference in Belfast.

Are anti-bias, positive action and anti-discriminatory approaches in playwork idealistic and unrealistic when it comes to the way playworkers and play development workers deal with the overwhelming reality of providing play in a diverse society? Levels of play deprivation can be made worse if we make inappropriate approaches within communities, so it is important to be sensitive in attempting to overcome the barriers that can prevent children from accessing play provision.

The first issues we need to consider are apparent before a child is even immersed in the setting and the play process. This is an important starting point as many would argue immersion in the play process sees no division whether it is by culture, race or religion. However, if a child's culture stands in the way of them even crossing the threshold, the play process is stalled from the outset.

In many cultures play is not valued in comparison with formal education, cultural/religious studies and structured adult-led commercial activities. Some communities may prevent their children from attending because the provision does not reflect their own culture - they may require gender segregation, the celebration of community festivals and holy days, and the employment of staff from their own community who speak their mother tongue. There may also be a fear of racism.

Other barriers may include: a negative perception of play provision within the community: the sense that it is not part of their community; the awkward geographical location of the facility; a lack of communication or the lack of a relationship between play staff and the community. It may even come down to the fact that the play provision's opening times clash with cultural or religious schooling. All these factors can lead to parents ordering their children not to attend.

We need to raise the awareness of play provision using a more community focused approach - creating a work-in-context profile is a tool for auditing local children's/youth provision as well as community groups in the area. This gives contact points, while a comparative analysis of local Census data is also effective in recognising under-representation of children from different cultural communities in our play centres.

Awareness of your provision's existence is an important factor in attracting interest from a community, here is where effective publicity and promotion comes in. Within Cardiff Play Services, multilingual information has been produced, promoting not only purpose built provision but also holiday



play schemes. Other methods of promotion also include Play Taster Days - targeted events for families to visit play provision they don't already access, where play opportunities are facilitated for both children and adults.

We also run introductory level play training for members of the community. Our first community focused play-training course started in June at Riverside Playcentre and was over-subscribed. This targeted training encourages relationships with individuals in the community and we hope it will aid the increase in participation. It also encourages members of minority ethnic communities to be involved in both voluntary and paid playwork. This outcome can have positive effects for many children, in terms of providing positive role models and encouraging positive self-identity. Our work is currently developing with children from refugee and asylum seeking communities, Gypsy Traveller communities, Muslim communities, and the Yemeni and Somali communities.

This is relatively straight forward if we are working in ethnically diverse populations, but for those working in less diverse communities this approach may seem trivial and unnecessary. All children have the right to play, and I think we can take positive steps to meet the needs of even the smallest communities that don't currently access our play provision. If we want to provide a truly inclusive service we have to take up this challenge.

For further information on Ethnic Minority Play Development in Cardiff, please do not hesitate to contact James Mulenga on 029 20873978.



FUNDINGFUNDINGFUNDINGFUNDINGFUNDINGFUNDING

Here is a brief list of websites of charities and foundations who invite applications for funding:

Allen Lane www.allenlane.demon.co.uk

Grants for start up projects, equipment etc for example for community development, refugees and asylum seekers and others, mostly for organisations working nationally or at a regional level.

Carnegie UK Trust www.carnegietrust.org.uk

Supports, among other things, village and rural community development and the wider use of village halls.

Children in Need www.bbc.co.uk/cin

One year grants for projects involving disadvantaged children and young people under 18 to cover capital projects, seasonal projects (including play schemes), holidays and outings, and equipment. Application forms for 2003/04 are available from September and deadlines are 30 November 2003 and 30 March 2004.

Comic Relief www.comicrelief.org.uk

Offers grants to cover core costs to registered charities (mostly) concerned with (among others) local communities working for change, refugees and asylum seekers, and supporting young people.

Community Fund www.community-fund.org.uk

A Lottery funder that has in the past provided grants to PlayRight Play Resource Centre in Swansea and the Nantyglo Community Project for young people.

Tudor Trust www.tudortrust.org.uk

Provides grants for local groups working within their community in marginalised areas or areas suffering from social exclusion, to set up community resources or provide green areas providing a community focus.

On the beach in late October - Patrick, Morgan and Rob at Rest Bay



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By 1990, it was down to 10%. During that period, risks did not increase but fear did. In the UK now, it is quite common for the streets around primary schools to be choked with the cars of concerned parents taking their children to school.

I heard recently of adolescents from a 'well-off' part of one city telling their parents they were sleeping over at each other's house, but then choosing to sleep rough in local parks. It struck me that this was answering a desire to engage freely with the environment in a direct and visceral way that may be a response to the impoverished play they had experienced.

Child in the City – Conference

Yet there is cause for optimism. A conference held in Bruges, Belgium 2002 called for the right of children to be given their place in today's cities. The conference spoke of the growing need for those charged with developing children's play spaces to work more closely with sociologists and landscape designers. There was by no means a single voice speaking for all at the conference but there was a genuine desire to examine current practice and

move towards improving the child's experience in the city.

The discussion centred around two main topics, concepts and practice:

Concepts – frameworks for thinking

- Differing perspectives on childhood
- Need to involve everyone
- Community development approaches
- Holistic approaches

Practice – making a difference

- Participation and networking
- Planning effectively
- Research into benefits
- Dissemination of findings to all audiences

It was highlighted at the conference that how you thought about the problem led to the solutions you would put in place to make things happen. Several people spoke about the need to 'dream a little,' to create a vision of the future that we would work towards for all our children.

A European network of supporters of child friendly cities was established at the conference. Its presence on the internet is hosted by The International Secretariat for Child Friendly Cities,⁵ which defines a child friendly city as follows.

A Child Friendly City guarantees the right of every young citizen to:

- Influence decisions about their city
- Express their opinion on the city they want
- Participate in family, community and social life
- Receive basic services such as health care, education and shelter
- Drink safe water and have access to proper sanitation
- Be protected from exploitation, violence and abuse
- Walk safely in the streets on their own
- Meet friends and play
- Have green spaces for plants and animals
- Live in an unpolluted environment
- Participate in cultural and social events
- Be an equal citizen of their city with access to every service, regardless of ethnic origin, religion, income, gender or disability.

These are fine aspirations that need to be converted into action if we are to give children the experiences they need and deserve.

EVENTS

Play Wales is planning the following events for 2004, dates and venues to be confirmed.

January

A follow up to **Ludostrategin** specifically designed for play development staff working in Wales.

March

Another Introduction to Adventure Playgrounds

A seminar for newcomers who are involved in the development of adventure playgrounds in Wales, and people who attended the 2003 Introduction seminar who wish to further develop the concept.

11/12 May

The Spirit Conference 2004, Cardiff

A UK conference exploring playwork and the ethos of adventure playgrounds.

June

Wheeled Play Area Seminar, South Wales

Autumn

A follow up to **Ludostrategin** specifically designed for play development staff working in Wales.

We are also planning further good value playground inspection training linked with RPII examinations.

JOBS ON THE NET

Play Wales advertises any play job based in Wales on its website at no charge.

If you would like to advertise a relevant job free of cost, please e-mail us making sure to include all relevant details, your contact details, and a closing date for applications. Adverts are posted the Monday after they are received and removed the Monday after the closing date specified.

Contact mail@playwales.org.uk to post an advert or visit www.playwales.org.uk/jobs to look for vacancies.

PLAY RESOURCE CENTRES

• APOLOGIES TO THE ARTS AND SCRAPS
• PROJECT IN BRECON WHO RECEIVE FUNDING
• FROM THE SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGE
• FUND AND THE BRECON BEACONS
• NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY.

• IF YOU NEED TO CONTACT THE PROJECT
• PLEASE RING

• **MICHAEL EISELE ON 07977 447543**

Goodbye to Claire

Claire, our wonderful Irish office worker, is leaving Play Wales in December to travel the world.

Among the countries on her list are Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, Peru, Brazil, America, Canada and then home (maybe!).

Her Mum has given her two sets of rosary beads - just in case - and we're sending her with all our love to be a roving ambassador for play in Wales.

Playful Learning e-bulletin

The LEGO Learning Institute has launched an electronic newsletter Playful Learning. It provides a regular summary of international research and debate on children's play and learning. Based in Denmark, the LEGO Learning Institute is a network organisation that aims to raise public awareness of the importance of play, learning and creativity as part of children's growth and development. If you would like to subscribe to the newsletter email playfullearning@europe.lego.com

You can read the current edition and previous editions at the following website www.legolearning.net



Is a Bell on a Bicycle?

Bells are to be made compulsory on all new bicycles in a drive to improve pedestrian safety.

Police are also to be given the powers to confiscate bikes if they are being ridden on the pavement. The new regulations will take effect from May 2004.

For more information contact the Department of Transport 020 7944 8300.