

Play for Wales

Issue 17

WINTER 2005



In 2006 Play Wales becomes a membership organisation

Play Wales has always tried hard to engage with all those with an interest in children's play and to promote quality play provision, playwork and play opportunities for children and young people across Wales. So while many similar organisations in the UK charge a membership fee, for the past eight years most of Play Wales' services have been provided free of charge.

However the world moves on and the Trustees have determined that Play Wales will be better able to undertake its representative role and offer a range of services and benefits, with the development of a general membership.

We intend that our membership will inform our responses to consultations and initiatives, and whilst the process will initially be relatively informal, we believe it will enable us to respond more effectively to the needs of children and play providers across the country, and also increase the authority with which we negotiate and lobby both locally and nationally.

We are now in a position to offer a broad range of benefits to everyone who chooses

to join Play Wales and they include:

- Expert support and advice;
- Access through the Wales Council for Voluntary Action Criminal Records Unit, to free Criminal Records Bureau checks for regulated voluntary sector play provision;
- Reduced newsletter advertising rates;
- Reduced conference and seminar fees;
- Reduced rates for Play Wales publications;
- Reduced consultancy fees;
- Extended use of our well-stocked play information resource for students and researchers;
- The opportunity to nominate and to be nominated to the governing body of Play Wales;
- And the opportunity to make your voice heard as part of a national consultative forum.

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EDITORIAL

Our colleagues within the Welsh Assembly Government assure us that the long awaited national play strategy is due to be made public by the end of January. At the same time Big Lottery schemes that potentially make money available for play related projects are starting to process applications, and there will be a dedicated scheme for children and young people's play to be announced in 2006. So in order to help play providers to make the most of these opportunities we are planning to extend the support and the services offered by Play Wales, and it has been a natural step to review the way the organisation is constituted.

At the same time Big Lottery schemes that potentially make money available for play related projects are starting to process applications, and we are still anticipating a dedicated scheme for children and young people's play to be announced in 2006. So in order to help play providers to make the most of these opportunities we are planning to extend the support and the services offered by Play Wales, and it has been a natural step to review the way the organisation is constituted.

As trustees, the decision to change Play Wales to a membership-based organisation was not an easy one – indeed we have managed to put it off for a number of years! We oversee a small team with a big job to do, and our argument has been that the time taken to administer such a scheme could be better spent engaged in promoting quality play opportunities on behalf of children and

young people. We are also very aware that many of those listed on the Play Wales database are unlikely to have surplus cash to pay a membership fee to a distant organisation. Until we had made significant achievements and were able to offer tangible benefits to a wide range of members, we were unhappy to charge for the services Play Wales offers. We are also very clear that people and organisations that do not choose to become members will still have access to information and guidance. So this newsletter, for instance, will continue to be distributed free of charge.

As an organisation that strives to reflect the views of play providers in Wales we have always been uneasy about taking on a representative role without referring to a consultative body. Of course, we always try to keep our ear to the ground, but our intention is to consult our membership

informally, so that we can respond more effectively to the needs of play providers across the country, and also have the authority to negotiate and lobby at national level.

Of course children and young people's play needs are at the core of our work so it seems right to ask members to subscribe to documents that put play first. Links to the Welsh Assembly Government Play Policy and the Playwork Principles are available on our website.

We sincerely hope that this is a positive step for us all as play people in Wales, and that many of our colleagues and colleague organisations will feel moved to join.

Margaret Jervis
Chair, Play Wales Board of Trustees

In 2006 Play Wales becomes a membership organisation (cont.)

Play Wales will continue to lobby for children and young people's play and playwork at a national and UK level and to support play professionals locally and some of the services we provide will continue to be free for those on our database who live in Wales – for instance the distribution of our newsletter, and job advertisements on our website. However in future we anticipate there will be some 'members only' pages on our website and e-bulletins and e-forums for members only.

In addition to the extremely reasonable fee, and in order that we better share an understanding of what Play Wales is about, we are also asking that all Members agree to endorse what we believe are two particularly important statements, the first being the Welsh



Assembly Government Play Policy and secondly the Playwork Principles which establish the professional and ethical framework for playwork and describe what is unique about play and playwork, and provide the playwork perspective for working with children and young people.

For the first year, in order that we might gauge the demand and response to this initiative, and also to minimise the administrative burden, we have set a straight membership fee of £25 for all those who wish to join as general members. This fee applies to everyone from national organisations and local authority departments, to community councils, colleges, play projects and individuals. And over the forthcoming year we will be asking members for their views on how membership fees might be developed to reflect an element of equity.

DEVELOPMENT OFFICER (NORTH WALES) JOB VACANCY - SEE PAGE 12

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Big Lottery Funds Play in Wales

At the end of November The Big Lottery Fund (Big) announced its Active and Healthy Families and Children's Play programme. The programme will provide £20 million to promote the health and well-being of children and young people by supporting the development of children's play, and promoting a joined up approach to nutrition and physical activity through work with families.

Big is keen to make the strategic link between physical activity, nutrition and play and will explore ways of facilitating children's play to promote physical activity and to look at how nutritional issues can be considered as part of the play agenda.

Big recognises the diverse support and development needs of the two areas targeted by the programme. £13 million will be made available to build the infrastructure that supports the development of children's play and to

create play initiatives and facilities. The programme will take a strategic approach aimed at addressing the key developmental priorities for play in Wales.

People and Places is another Big programme recently launched in Wales that may prove useful for mobile play provision, play resource centres and adventure playgrounds.

**The Big Lottery Fund, 2nd Floor,
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SY16 1JB**

Telephone: 01686 611700

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enquiries.wales@biglotteryfund.org.uk

**For application packs and information
on these programmes please ring:
08454 10 20 30**

Play Denbighshire re-launched

Play Denbighshire, has been relaunched following a meeting of interested parties held at Rhyl Adventure Playground.

A presentation by our Senior Development Officer, Tony Chilton, prompted an enthusiastic response and Denbighshire County Councillor Bob Barton was delighted at being able to form a new committee. Although established as an independent body

seeking charitable status, the organisation will seek to work very closely with Denbighshire County Council and other agencies, with every intention of implementing a Countywide Play Strategy.

New officers for Play Denbighshire are Bob Barton as Chair, Jonathon Bentley, Vice Chair, and Carol Holliday, Secretary, supported by nine other committee members.

Play Wales on the Maes



Last summer Play Wales joined forces with Children in Wales and the Children's Commissioner's Office to share tent space at the National Eisteddfod.

The event, the largest and oldest celebration of Welsh culture, was this year held at the Faenol Estate in Bangor and it gave us the opportunity to spread the Play Wales' message, network with people from other organisations and meet the public, and view the kinds of play provision available on the Maes (Eisteddfod field). It was also a great opportunity to engage with the media to publicise Playday aided by Play Wales' trustee Marc Phillips (Director of BBC Children in Need in Wales and a member of the Welsh Language Board).

We met and chatted with a wide range of people and distributed questionnaires relating to play, as well as adding our Children's Games posters to the bags and bags of collectibles that most children carried around with them as they scurried from stall to stall in search of the best freebies. Nearly seventy surveys were completed by children aged 6-16, which included questions about the types of activities that they like most when playing and the best thing about where they play. The results showed that the top three places children play are "in the house", "at school" and "in the garden" with some of the favourite play activities listed as playing with friends, making up games, trying new things and playing with water. Time and time again children referred to "space" as the best thing about where they play, one response saying simply "lots of space, football fields, benches and trees".

Overall the trip was a great success and we are already planning for next year's Eisteddfod in Swansea.

If you would like more information about the National Eisteddfod 2006 you can visit their website www.eisteddfod.org.uk

Good News for Caerphilly ICC

As part of our series of articles about the development of Integrated children's centres (ICCs) around Wales, Mike Allman, Adventure Play Development Worker, tells us what's happening in Caerphilly.

I have been employed as the Adventure Play Development worker since May 2005 to develop the open access play element of Caerphilly's ICC, which was the first NOF/Big Lottery funded Centre, opened in September 2004.

The ICC is based in a large newly built primary school in New Tredegar, a traditional mining district, with a population spread out along two sides of a valley. It is the ninth most deprived community in Wales (Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation) and a Community First area. One of the difficulties of working in such an area is that it is made up of distinct and separate communities each with their own sense of identity, which can lead to what may be seen as insularity.

When I first started work, as well as the usual round of meetings and starting to build relationships with people in the community, I decided to carry out a consultation with children and young people in the area. It took place in two schools and in the public library. This helped me to find out where they played, what they did when they went out to play, and any ideas they may have for improving play opportunities in the area. Also it helped me to introduce myself and to explain my role to children and young people.

Another approach was to work with the ICC After School Club. This was particularly useful as I see part of my function as introducing adventurous play opportunities into all areas of a child/young person's life. Through doing this I can support other professionals to acquire the skills and confidence to facilitate freely chosen play and adventure play opportunities.

Our summer holiday play sessions – organised in partnership



with the Caerphilly Creative Play project - were great! I was even able to tempt the local Community First Co-ordinator out of the office to join in and play with us. Children and young people enjoyed den building; changing and adapting the environment to create rich and challenging playscapes – for example hanging tyre swings from empty swing frames, creating rope walks built onto climbing frames and fixed play equipment; and elemental play including a 50 metre water slide!

During the October half term I organised an Elemental Playday in the ICC grounds, supported again by Caerphilly Creative Play and also Sarah the ICC Co-ordinator and the ICC childcare staff, local Community First Youth Workers and we also got the local Community Safety Wardens to come and play with us. The Playday included a fire area staffed by the local countryside rangers, kite making, and a local artist mixing water and earth to make a natural modelling clay and also mud; copious amounts of mud, everywhere!

The theme for my work as you may have spotted has been very much about working in partnership with others already working in and with the community. This has been useful in helping me to be able to deliver services and also to raise the profile and awareness of what play and adventure play actually is and what it feels like to work as a playworker.

And last but not least, the good news is that from April '06 we have secured Cymorth funding for four playworkers to deliver the Open Access Play service.

Minister on Play Tour

There can be great benefits for everyone when politicians witness the value of play projects – they gain a better understanding of children's play environments, and therefore make better informed contributions to decision making processes concerning play. So come on – get writing the invitations!

Since the cabinet reshuffle that added play to the Education Minister's brief, Jane Davidson has shown continued commitment to our national Play Policy and to the importance of play in general. This is no surprise since she was involved in setting up play provision in a former career. Nevertheless, we were delighted when the Minister volunteered time to make a tour of staffed open access play projects around Wales.

Jane spent National Playday 2005 in Swansea where, accompanied by other Welsh Assembly colleagues, she visited a holiday playschemes in St. Monica's School and Bishopston. She also visited Swansea Integrated Children's Centre (ICC) adventure playground in Penlan;

"It was good to have recognition of the work we've been doing in Penlan," said Ben Greenaway of PlayRight, "The Minister seemed very impressed that children are able to play in a natural environment with access to all the elements".

The Minister's South Wales itinerary also included Ely Play Centre (part of the Integrated Children's Centre development in Cardiff) and an outreach playscheme in a youth centre in Ely – both projects are

supported by Cardiff Children's Play Services. From there, Jane travelled to her constituency to see Rhondda Cynon Taff's Llan Community Centre which is a base for the Rhydfelin Integrated Children's Centre Project, supported by Valleys Kids.

In North Wales the Minister was warmly welcomed by the management committee, staff and children at Rhyl Adventure Playground, where she even tested the play value of various items! The site contains some pretty interesting features, many of them designed and built by children and staff over recent years, and the Minister was clearly impressed.

Play Wales is delighted that Jane Davidson gave so much of her time to visit community based staffed play provision, and we are confident that she enjoyed a trip down memory lane in the process!!

Buddies at Flintshire Summer Playschemes

The Flintshire Buddy scheme was developed to further children's right to play by enabling those with special needs to access local playschemes. We formed a partnership between The Flintshire Play Unit, Flintshire Children's and Young Peoples Partnership and The Children's Integrated Disability Service, using CYMORTH funding from the Welsh Assembly Government specifically for 'open access play'.

There are sixty-eight summer playschemes in Flintshire, and all are open access and based on a 'child's right to play'. We have a child-led agenda that seeks to cater for children's play needs, (as opposed to an adult agenda, for instance where there is provision of structured sessions to meet adult needs for childcare).

Play-workers are employed and trained on the basis that children are free to make their own travel arrangements, to come and go as they please, and to attend as many sessions as they want. HOWEVER, this often unintentionally excludes children with disabilities because their parents and carers may not feel comfortable allowing their child to attend on that basis. So in reality the service isn't inclusive because children with special needs can't attend.

We were clear that we wanted to establish an "inclusive" service, so we identified the problems, difficulties and barriers that prevent some children accessing play opportunities. We decided to set up a pilot scheme to so we could gain the respect and trust of parents so that their children could attend.

'Buddies' from the playwork force were employed this Summer to work with a small group of children with special needs. Some parents needed a great deal of persuasion to allow us to work with their child. However the end result has been fantastic with us all involved learning a tremendous amount so that we can progress and extend the scheme.

Buddies worked on a one to one basis with the children, and were on site to offer support without making a 'big song and dance' about it. They wore the same playworker T shirts as other workers on site and were under instruction to allow the child the freedom to play with other children on site. The buddies liaised with parents on a daily basis. We employed one of our Community Playworkers to supervise and co-ordinate the buddies and she spent hours talking to them and parents to maintain the vital communication that was needed. The buddies were all asked to keep reflective diaries of their experiences and these proved to be wonderfully informative very honest accounts of their work with the children.

For this pilot scheme we set up specific meetings/play-sessions at Catherine Gladstone House (Children's Integrated Disability Service) to meet with children and parents. To develop and enhance future schemes we plan to introduce the Buddies to the families well in advance of the schemes, so that they could get to know the individual child, and the level of support required in order to move towards a holistic approach to their play needs.

If you would like to know more about this scheme please contact Janet Roberts, Play Development Officer for Flintshire County Council on 01352 702469

Play for Health Bryn Gwalia & Flint Castle Ward

The 'Play for Health' projects that started in our area in 2004 are faced with many challenges in the modern world of play stations, out of town shopping facilities and the perceived increase of stranger danger. Yet the two projects have successfully challenged parental attitudes and modern day trends aimed at children. Both projects have actively engaged children in stimulating, challenging and exciting open access play opportunities aimed at developing children mentally, physically and socially.

Such examples of projects have been:

- Open Access out of hours play provision
- Maes Gwyn Art project
- Taster days for children and parents
- Environmental Play Project
- Trips to adventure playgrounds and skate parks
- Play consultations
- Including Dragon Sport in play sessions
- Dance Sessions and other activities which many children do not ordinarily have the opportunity to experience.

The projects have developed through identified need. Bryn Gwalia has the most incidences of child poverty in Flintshire, and Flint Castle Ward is tagged as having the most "anti social behaviour". Both are Communities First areas. But through consultation with children, young people and parents both areas were identified as suffering from play deprivation and as a direct response to this two unique posts have been created.

The past 18 months has witnessed developments in both areas and the projects are actively engaging children and young people with exciting play opportunities that allow children to play freely, to express themselves in an environment which is free from inappropriate risk.

The projects have also helped engage parents with wider community activities which can have a perceived effect on reducing stress levels on families and increase family support. A number of parents have become volunteers at the projects and have attended the Level Two playwork induction training run in conjunction with Flintshire County Council. This can play a role in improving their self confidence and self esteem.

The foundations have been set for developing play in Bryn Gwalia and Flint Castle Ward. The partnership approach to this work has begun tackling play deprivation on a number of levels. Future collaboration will provide children and young people with further opportunities for healthy futures.

**Liz Hughes, Youth and Play Development Worker
Castle Ward, Flintshire
Contact: 01352 734485**

PLAY IN PARKS AND OPEN SPACES

Playday Fever

in Merthyr Tydfil

This year's playday celebrations in Merthyr Tydfil were held in one of the largest community parks in the borough. The event was co-ordinated by Merthyr Tydfil Play Forum with the help and support of various play and childcare agencies across the borough.

A playday steering group was formed prior to the event, to organise and co-ordinate activities, with Merthyr Tydfil Play Forum taking the lead role in this steering group. With very little money and resources, it was decided that we would call in as many agencies as we could to provide activities and resources on the day. The co-ordination of this event was a long process, taking many weeks and meetings, although all the hard work did pay off, the event was a great success and thanks goes out to everybody involved.

On The Day

The event was borough wide, open to everybody. As the theme was "Fit for Play" we thought it would be appropriate to provide as many active and outdoor activities as we possibly could, these activities included: waterslides, den building / loose parts / environmental play, circus skills, inflatables, dragon sport and lots more.

What an awesome day! On average there were around 800-900 visitors. Children from numerous summer playschemes attended, along with many visitors from outside the borough. Also joining in with the celebrations was the Mayor of Merthyr Tydfil, who joined in and got soaked ... who we thank for his support.

Feedback from parents and children was very encouraging and supportive:

"Can we have a playday every month?"

"This is the best playday I have ever been to!"

"This is what the children in Merthyr need more of....."

What can I say? It was a delight to see so many Children smiling, having fun, getting muddy and wet, that was the main aim of the day. Not only was the event fun and exciting for the



Below: Children play outdoors at an inclusive play scheme in Cardiff



children but it helped raise the profile of play in Merthyr Tydfil, raising awareness as to how important play is to the development of children, how good outdoor play space and physical play activities are both crucial factors in the development of healthy and active children.

**Sarah Williams, Event Co-ordinator –
Playspace Development Worker, Merthyr Tydfil Play Forum
Contact Sarah on 01685 353960**

PLAY IN PARKS AND OPEN SPACES

Cruisers Talysarn – a skatepark is born

Cruisers Talysarn is a community volunteer-led group, formed in May 2001 in response to a need expressed by young people in the communities of Talysarn and Nantlle in Gwynedd to establish a skatepark. Eventually, funding came available through the Welsh Assembly Government's Communities First scheme to develop facilities for children and young people.

We set about identifying a suitable location – a derelict patch of land on the old Cloddfa Glai Quarry site in Talysarn was ideal; within easy sight of the village, but not too close for noise to be a problem. With a grant of £64,000 secured via



Antur Waunfawr Open Day 2005

Gwynedd Council our skatepark was open by Summer 2003. In order for us to look for further grant funding to improve the site and to take ownership of the skatepark, we had to form as an accountable body with a constitution and bank account. In addition we had to agree to a 30-year lease of the site from Gwynedd Council, whereupon ownership of the site passed to us.

We have developed a five-year plan to develop the park as a focal point in the community, and were fortunate to receive a £35,000 Cist Gwynedd grant to improve the facilities and environment of the skatepark. The site has altered significantly with the completion of this first step, and we are hoping to attract further investment in the near future to develop a garden area with picnic benches and seating for people to sit and watch our young skaters.

Our main responsibilities as a committee are to ensure that we have sufficient funds to pay for our Public Liability insurance, which is a constant drain on scarce funds, and to conduct weekly safety inspections of our equipment. The responsibilities of running the skatepark do not stop there, however. In order to keep our young people involved, we have actively sought funding to provide related activities; 2004 saw grant funding from the Welsh Arts Council, Mantell Gwynedd and the Communities First Trust Fund to employ an artist-in-residence for six weeks. The children and young people (ranging in age from 6 -21 years old) who use the park are very much involved and they selected Bryce Davies to conduct Street Art workshops – culminating in spray-painting the designs onto the skatepark ramps. We have also visited skateparks further afield, and a First-Aid course was also organised which was of great benefit to two of the members, who were able to successfully help a young person who suffered an epileptic seizure. In 2005 the group was invited to display at the annual Antur Waunfawr Open Day, and for three days at the National Eisteddfod at the Faenol Estate, demonstrating Street Art at the Gwynedd County Council display tent.

As volunteers, it is not always easy. Unsympathetic employers can refuse permission for both making and receiving telephone calls during working hours, and of course most people you need to contact work those same hours. Trying to garner support from parents is a constant and disappointing struggle. However, improving the facilities for the children and young people in our



Setting off on a trip to the Boneyard Indoor Skatepark



Street Art at the Faenol National Eisteddfod 2005



community is a reward in itself, in particular seeing their enjoyment and the amount of use the skatepark gets. The fact that it has to date received no damage from vandalism speaks volumes, and there are fewer complaints about groups hanging around on street corners.

The biggest difficulty facing us is the need for annual Public Liability Insurance. This year it cost us £850, and we have been told to budget for an annual 10% increase irrespective of whether a claim is made. In a deprived area this is a huge sum and with no financial support from the local authorities, failure to raise this money could in the long run prevent us from keeping the facility open.

For more information please contact Carys Pritchard on 01286 881103 or e-mail caryspritchard@aol.com

An International Conference

plays outdoors

FEZ

Members of the Play Wales team who visited the International Play Association Conference in Berlin bumped into Dr Ute Navidi, Director of London Play, at a truly inspirational park. Here she gives us her thoughts and observations as part of our series of international articles:

Play professionals from around the world gathered at the 16th International Play Association Conference that took place in Berlin last summer. There was an interesting and varied programme of lectures, workshops and visits, but mid-week many delegates jumped at the chance of a change in proceedings. After all, Wednesday was themed the day when 'the conference plays'. We took a coach trip to the FEZ Wuhlheide, passing through East Berlin, and for some of the route along the few remaining original parts of the Berlin Wall. The city is amazingly green: one fourth of Berlin's surface is covered by rivers and lakes, forests and parks. Nature within this urban environment is never too far away.

While mysterious at first for IPA conference participants, the letters FEZ have become a recognized brand for active leisure and recreation for Berlin's children, young people and adults alike. Each year the recreational park welcomes more than one million visitors, inviting the whole family to an active outdoor stay. With its philosophy of developing young people's critical capacities, and their ability to make decisions, take responsibilities for their own actions and social participation, it is not surprising that FEZ was given top

marks in the 1999 campaign 'Kinder testen Berlin' ('children test Berlin'). Made me wonder whether to put our own towns and cities through the same test.

The history of the place provides the context for today's activities. It originates in the 1920s when the 'forest park' idea was developed by the people's parks movement. It is 290 acre fusion of intensively used park and natural forest. During the Second World War, the park was used as an anti-aircraft area and shelter, as well as a concentration camp. This is why much of the park and its buildings were destroyed in war actions. After 1945 the northern park area became a military camp of the Soviet City Commander. After the division of Germany, it was part of East Berlin, capital of the German Democratic Republic. In 1951 the park was home to the 3rd World Festival of Youth. Following German reunification gradual reconstruction began.

Steeped in so much history, the People's Park today is still largely left to grow wild. The FEZ, in its south-eastern corner, is Europe's largest not-for-profit recreation centre for children and young people. It comprises a large park with woods, lakes, wildlife enclosures, an open-air theatre, play areas, a market garden, BMX track, skateboard pipes, sports fields, cycle tracks, calm areas and "Liegewiesen" – meadows to lie down in. Older children can drive a steam train through the park and act as ticket inspectors. There is an eco-friendly tropical greenhouse, and a 13,000 square meter sized leisure and recreation centre with an indoor swimming pool and space for exhibitions and other events, a Children's Museum and a unique Space-Centre. Much of what I saw would probably appear unsightly to adults with a traditional view of how a park should look – but this was not a park for adults and it was obvious that children saw it as wonderland. They regarded it as their environment, their territory.

FEZ staff have professional qualifications in cultural, pedagogic and technical areas, and participate in continuous professional development. They work in flexible project teams according to the needs of children and young people –



Children cooking lunch over open fire, FEZ



Wonderland, FEZ



Olympic boat racing, here we come, FEZ



Fixing ropes with scissors and tape, FEZ

there is an ever-changing range of freely chosen play opportunities on offer.

Risk – what risk?

So what did we see at FEZ? Well, coming from Britain, some of us were surprised but hugely pleased to see children engaging in a whole range of outdoor activities often considered 'too risky' here. The photos say more than a thousand words – children cooking a stew over a medieval camp fire, chopping firewood with axes, paddling on the lake, climbing structures, swinging, working with screwdrivers and electric



Building a vehicle, FEZ

Below: 'Loose parts', FEZ



drills, scissors, and water. We were told that there has never been a serious accident. Adults were around but at a distance, parents sat back and let their children roam. Children were trusted to be able to make their own decisions and participate at their own level. It was very clear that the whole place was designed around them and to meet their needs.

So, as I was wandering around the huge site, up and down mud hills, meeting huge animals shaped from old wood, along paths where children were trying out their self-built vehicles, by stables where children of not more than four years old were mucking out with huge forks, seeing under-5s paddling on their own in dinghies on the lakes, I remembered something Prime Minister Tony Blair said earlier this year. In his speech at a seminar in May 2005, he said "we are in danger of having a wholly disproportionate attitude

to the risks we should expect to run as a normal part of life. We cannot respond to every accident by trying to guarantee ever more tiny margins of safety. We cannot eliminate risk. We have to live with it, manage it. Sometimes we have to accept: no-one is to blame." This is the kind of common sense approach that I was witnessing all around me in the park.

Visiting FEZ and the PM's remarks reminded me of the argument put forward by Bob Hughes in *Evolutionary playwork and reflective analytic practice* (2001): "Encountering and overcoming risk is a normal part of a child's day-to-day life but all too frequently now, children are stopped from undertaking risky activities, unless they, the activities, are perceived by adults as safe. In reality, they cannot be both safe and risky." He warns "not to confuse risk with danger or what some professionals call hazard". "Risk is

something children recognise. Danger, on the other hand, is unassessable to a child."

But back to FEZ and the IPA conference. A workshop on Risk in Play facilitated by Robin Sutcliffe, Chairman of the European Play Safety Forum, was treated to a number of 'tantalising' contributions from around the world. A visual presentation by Shoko Ohmura and colleagues demonstrated children's attitudes to risk-taking in Tokyo's Hanegi Adventure Playpark. They gave examples of children happily playing in situations that most adults would consider unacceptably risky, for example on the roof of the play building. Fernando Pereira of Lisbon Technical University stressed the learning experience of 'benign failures'. So this isn't simply a British preoccupation, people all over the world are building arguments for more risk taking opportunities for children and young people.

Robin introduced the new Manifesto of the European Play Safety Forum. "The extent to which we are fulfilled (as human beings) may depend on the extent that we are prepared to take risks, and our capacity to take risks will, in turn, depend on our childhood experiences in play." Like the UK Play Safety Forum Position Statement "Managing Risk in Play" the Manifesto is aimed at everyone who is concerned with the safety of children as well as the environments in which they play.

The visit to FEZ reinforced my view that we disable children when we treat them as incompetent and that a lack of challenging play opportunities in playgrounds can stop children learning how to deal with and protect themselves from danger. There is growing evidence that the rate of accidents goes down, not up, when play spaces are redesigned to provide more interesting things to do and children get to grips with managing risk themselves. We – everyone – must learn to let children take some risks while at play, and acknowledge that they are competent and intelligent fellow citizens.

The day at FEZ ended with the IPA President's barbecue beach party. Unfortunately the event was washed out – people huddled under gazebos and in a large tent – it was all very familiar to anyone from the UK. But the atmosphere was good and the opportunity to network and exchange ideas on an international level was invaluable. Yes – the conference played – and risked missing the coach back to central Berlin!

If you would like to know more about the International Play Association please visit www.ipaworld.org

¹ The 'Future Challenges – Living with Risk' Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) seminar, May 2005.

² Find this on the Play Wales website www.playwales.org.uk/factsheets or at www.ncb.org.uk/library/cpis

TRAINING TRAINING TRAINING TRAINING

What's in a name?

When I was offered the opportunity to write an article about whether there was a difference in the roles of childcare workers and playworkers other than their respective job titles, I felt quite excited by the prospect.

I have worked directly with children and young people in the playwork/childcare sector since 1970. Initially working in Birmingham as a volunteer on an adventure playground and as a member of staff of the Pre-School Playgroups Association, I moved to Wales in 1974, and was involved in setting up and managing playgroups and summer playschemes in Neath Port Talbot and Swansea. Most recently I was involved in setting up and co-ordinating one of the first out of school clubs in Swansea. During that time I have seen many changes, various strategies have come and gone, and there have been many highs and lows for the sector.

The greatest joy for me has come from meeting and learning from the many children who have enjoyed the various opportunities to play in their own way and to watch as their confidence has developed and their imaginations have been given free rein. An enduring regret has been the lack of apparent respect

that some staff working in different parts of the sector continue to have for each other.

It now appears that anyone who works with children and young people through the medium of play is a "playworker". I still feel that it depends which meeting you're in and with which individuals as to whether this is a generally accepted view – especially if the meeting involves distribution of funding. Personally, I have opted in the past for the hybrid term "playcarer" rather than "playworker" – hedging my bets, perhaps?

Thinking about what to say in this article has posed more questions than answers: a straw poll amongst colleagues working in clubs as to what they consider themselves to be, "playworker" or "childcarer", has resulted in answers like "That's difficult to answer..", "I haven't thought about that before.." and "I don't know, both, I guess..". Some, when asked, have said unequivocally "Playworker."

As a point of interest, not only "playworker" but also "playcarer" and "childcarer" get underlined in red as non-words when you type them into a computer.

In our Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs' training resources we have decided to use the words playworker & childcarer interchangeably. Staff who work in out of school clubs are encouraged to undertake the CACHE Level II Certificate in Playwork and Level III Diploma in Playwork.

Does it matter what we call ourselves? More important, surely, is the availability of a range of quality play opportunities for all children and young people staffed by committed, innovative and enthusiastic workers. For the staff, mutual respect and acknowledgement of worth, airing and sharing of our similarities as well as our differences is all we can hope for – especially with the likelihood of more multi-functional roles.

Jan Oliver

National Training Manager Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs
November 2005

Interested in starting a dialogue on this subject? You are invited to respond to Jan's article – please send your comments to the editor at info@playwales.org.uk

A New Team Member

The Play Wales team welcomes Richard Trew – the new Project Manager for our Cwlwm initiative. Cwlwm stands for Childcare Wales Learning and Working Mutually and it is funded by the EQUAL programme:

I grew up in Barry, where I spent much of my early childhood swimming in the sub-zero waters of Barry Lido. I come from a family of three brothers all of whom have been playworkers at some time, so I suppose working with children is in the blood.



Originally I pursued a career as a professional musician, but in 1987, finding myself broke and needing a break I took a summer job in Cardiff working with children. I'm not sure what it was about that first summer (maybe it was the blisters caused by digging holes for a play structure with Doug Cole) but I was immediately smitten (with playwork not Doug Cole!).

After working as a playworker, and then as a development worker, I eventually moved into playwork training for Cardiff Children's Play Services.

What will I be doing as Project Manager?

It is my job to oversee the development of innovative playwork training materials at induction, level 2 and 3 as well as a 'training the trainers' award.

The materials produced will offer learners an exciting experience that focuses on the child's play drive and explores wider adult agendas through this perspective. As such, the training will reflect the ethos and emphasis of the Playwork Principles and The First Claim. The training will blend the knowledge, practice and reflection that are essential for the successful facilitation of children's play.

I'm delighted to be joining Play Wales and look forward to getting to know the team and facing the challenges ahead.

Richard Trew

TRAINING TRAINING TRAINING

Mud and Sparks

Earlier this year play professionals from across South Wales gathered at Margam Park (near Port Talbot) for a day of training on facilitating play with the elements. Mud and Sparks (that's earth/water and air/fire) is a skill-sharing event supported by Play Wales, where those with the know-how set up opportunities for others to find out the joys and practicalities of offering experience of the elements to children. Lisa Williams of Caerphilly Creative Play Project explains:

With a team of advisors we embarked upon a trek through the Margam Park foliage to a secluded area perfect for experimenting in all sorts of activities and interaction, using exactly what Mother Nature gave to us (sic).

SPARKS

There were very few rules, regulations or boundaries (just as we playworkers like it!) as we engaged in building mini fires (we cheated and used matches otherwise we would have taken all day!) that we later used to cook food – it was really satisfying.

We also used tools and made musical instruments using an array of different resources. The sense of space and privacy meant we felt we could make plenty of noise – mostly laughter.

MUD

It was one of those days when the weather was unpredictable, but then you could say that nothing about our training day at Margam was predictable! Not only did we engage with the mud and soil of the earth and the running stream, we also got caught



in a torrential rainstorm. Instead of letting this spoil our session many of us decided to embrace the weather and make the most of the Welsh climate.

We made dens within the trees, as well as rope bridges and swings, which were my personal favourites – testing them out with excited screams of joy as we swung into the trees.

RESULTS

By the end of our day we were cold, tired, hungry, dirty and bruised, but I can speak for many when I say we were inspired and happy. Experiential learning reminded us of some of the wondrous feelings we had enjoyed as children and gave us a fantastic



hands-on revelation of our significance as playworkers.. It is so simple and yet so effective, and important that we as play professionals do not forget these feelings – so that we can value the experiences that create them and include them in our play environments.

Since the Mud and Sparks day our St Mellon's team has taken steps to extend and value interactions with nature within our play setting - the screams of joy now come from the children as they swing in the trees.

Dirt can be washed off, clothes can be repaired, a cut or bruise will heal but the respect for nature and the personal development and sense of achievement and satisfaction children can gain from play with the elements is truly priceless.

For more information about facilitating play with the elements please see "THE FIRST CLAIM – a framework for quality playwork assessment" written by Bob Hughes and published by Play Wales.



EVENTS

31 January and 1 February 2006 – 6th

Birmingham Playwork Conference

Focuses on play and playwork with facilitated round table discussions.

www.playworkconferences.org/6thconference

8 and 9 February 2006,

ILAM Play 2006, Wolverhampton

Contact ILAM Services on 0491 874800

17 and 18 May

The Spirit of Adventure Play 2006, Cardiff

Put the date in your new diary. There is always a high demand for places at Play Wales' annual conference and booking starts in the New Year.

Call us on 02920 486050 or e-mail phil@playwales.org.uk to make sure you get a booking form.

FUNDING

Hanson Environment Fund

The Hanson Environment Fund has issued new guidelines for its small grants scheme, previously known as the community grants scheme. The 2005 scheme offers grants of between £250 and £4,000 to conserve or create wildlife and habitat on sites with public access, such as managed woodland. It also funds playground refurbishment. Details from www.hansonenvfund.org.

UK Villages Community Kitty

This fund provides grants of between £50 – £500 to a range of community based projects such as a playgroup needing toys, and sports equipment for clubs. For more details visit www.ukvillages.co.uk/articles.nsf/content/ukvkitty

J Paul Getty Jnr general charitable trust

The trust funds projects that help relieve poverty and favours small community and local projects which make good use of volunteers, and where the emphasis is on self-help, building esteem, and enabling people to reach their potential. The categories of funding are: social welfare, offenders, communities, homelessness, job creation, ethnic minorities (including refugees), arts, conservation and the environment. Guidelines are available from www.jpgettytrust.org.uk

PLAY DEVELOPMENT IN SCHOOLS

"We need to remind ourselves that for children playtime is simply the most important time of their school day".

Following our recent issue on play in schools, Play Wales has received these observations from a Head Teacher, Dave Underhill of Church in Wales Ysgol Trefonnen, who has been delighted with the difference that newly installed play equipment has made to children's behaviour. Since the installation of timber play equipment (following consultation with staff and children) there has been a marked improvement in the physical condition of children who now use the equipment every day.

"There have been visible benefits to children in relation to their strength, agility and coordination", he says

He also suggests that their social behaviour and concentration levels have changed for the better. Parents have been very supportive of the project, which cost in the region of £15,000.

"This has been of real benefit not only to the children, but also to the school and parents" says Mr Underhill.

THE FOUNDATION PHASE OUTDOORS – Developing quality play in schools

Play Wales has been working together with Marc Armitage of Play People to provide training for school staff across South Wales.

September training days proved highly successful in Neath and Cardiff. All participants agreed that it was an inspiring, enlightening and enjoyable course with lots of practical ideas that can be used in a variety of settings. Headteachers, teachers, classroom assistants and midday supervisors were looking forward to implementing these as soon as they were back in their playgrounds and classrooms. They were keen to review their practice and move forward, and would recommend this training to others.

Just a quick note to let you know how things are going here in Neath and Port Talbot after your visit here in September. Well you certainly inspired my staff and they have been very keen to have a go at developing a more play friendly environment.

On Monday next week we are having a whole day working with parent volunteers on improving the outdoors environment.

Jayne Loft, Headteacher Coedffranc Infants School

Other local authorities are taking up the opportunity and have booked courses for January 2006. If you would be interested in booking this course for your school, please contact our national office on 029 2048 6050 or e-mail kathy@playwales.org.uk

JOB OPPORTUNITY • JOB OPPORTUNITY • JOB OPPORTUNITY

DEVELOPMENT OFFICER (NORTH WALES)

Play Wales is an independent charity funded by the National Assembly for Wales to influence the policy, strategic planning and practice of all agencies and organisations who have an interest in children's play. We believe in and promote the profound importance of play in every child's development.

One of our senior officers is to retire Autumn 2006, and we are looking to recruit a Development Officer to work as a member of our national team to support the play development infrastructure both nationally and particularly in North and Mid Wales.

Applicants should have a current and comprehensive knowledge of playwork and be

experienced in developing play opportunities for children in the local authority and/or voluntary sectors. Good communication and interpersonal skills, flexibility and a sense of humour are essential requirements of this post.

The post is paid at PO3 points 34 – 41, starting at £29,004 p.a. with the opportunity to join the local government pension scheme. Play Wales is committed to flexible working practices.

For an informal discussion please phone Mike Greenaway, Director, on 029 2048 6050

For further details and application form please contact Play Wales, Baltic House, Mount Stuart Square, Cardiff CH10 5FH. or email jobs@playwales.org.uk

Closing date Friday 27th January 2006. Interviews will be held 2nd/3rd February.