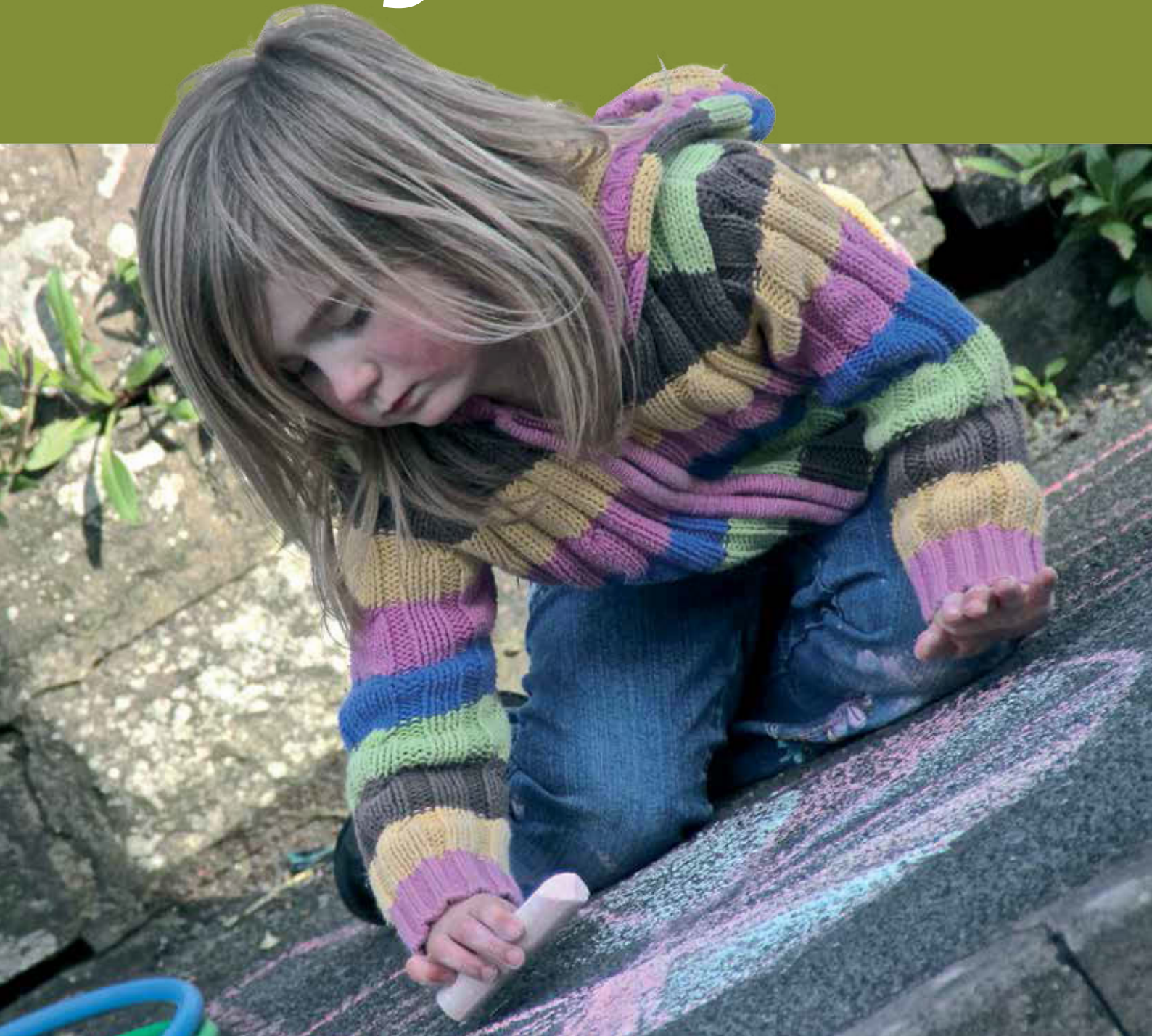


# Play for Wales

Issue 44 Spring 2015

Play news and briefing from the national charity for play



## Playing out and about



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## Thank you

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who contributed to this magazine – we couldn't do it without you.

This issue of *Play for Wales*, as well as previous issues, is available to download at [www.playwales.org.uk](http://www.playwales.org.uk)

## Editorial

In the last issue of *Play for Wales* (Summer 2014), we reported that our application for funding for the next three years from Welsh Government Children and Families Delivery Grant (CFDG) had been unsuccessful..

In response Play Wales staff and its Board of Trustees produced an action plan that identified key priorities and how we would work to meet them. Subsequently, we were delighted when Welsh Government announced that Play Wales would receive grant funding for eighteen months up to March 2016.

Of course, Play Wales is not the only organisation to face financial changes. Across Wales, as budget constraints become tighter and tighter, local authorities are ceasing support for staffed provision and play spaces. Many local community groups are facing the prospect of filling the gaps this will leave.

Very often, with support, local communities are best placed to respond to the play needs of local children. Where local groups are becoming more active, we hope that local authorities are able to offer a level of co-operation and support to community groups taking on this challenge.

When children are asked about their well-being, they tell us that they value friendships and the activity-based nature of their relationships, in particular having fun and playing with friends. Of equal significance is the value that children place on the physical aspects of their neighbourhood, in particular, having time, space and permission (from parents and tolerance from community members) to play.

We know that the friendlier the general environment is for children, the more they will play out. This has a tangible positive impact on perceptions of isolation and alienation, not just for children but also for the wider community. Through the freedom of choice and control they experience at play, children learn about themselves and how to interact with their surroundings,

including the natural world and the community in which they live.

Community cohesion is what happens when different groups of people get on well together, have similar life opportunities and trust each other and their local organisations. For children and their access to play opportunities, the advantage of living in a cohesive community is that they feel that their voices are heard and that their needs are being met. Children understand what is expected from them as members of their community, but more importantly, adults living and working in that community understand the impact their actions have in terms of children's sense of permission to play and sense of belonging. When adults don't understand children's play, misunderstandings can more easily develop into tensions.

A cohesive community is one that is playful – it provides children with time, space and permission to play and socialise with friends. It is a place where children are visible and we hear laughter.

**Mike Greenaway**  
Director, Play Wales



## News

# Play Wales update

Previously, we reported that Play Wales' application for funding for the next three years under the Welsh Government Children and Families Delivery Grant (CFDG) had been unsuccessful. In September 2014 we were delighted to receive Welsh Government grant funding to March 2016.

This enables Play Wales to deliver specific activities which will support key Welsh Government priorities around play and tackling poverty including supporting local authorities to meet their duties under the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 to assess and secure sufficient play opportunities.



Play Wales will develop as an international centre of excellence around play; contribute to the development of the Early Years, Childcare and Play 10 year workforce plan and participate in strategic meetings at a national, regional and local authority level.

The funding also ensures that Playwork: Principles into Practice (P<sup>3</sup>) learners already undertaking the qualification or enrolling

this year are not disadvantaged. We are currently in the process of supporting YMCA Wales Community College to establish as a SQA centre to deliver P<sup>3</sup> qualifications in its own right, contributing to the longer term sustainability of P<sup>3</sup>.

Unfortunately, the reduction in funding resulted in two posts being made redundant. Richard Trew, Qualifications Officer and Michelle Craig, Office Assistant left at the end of October 2014. Also, due to long-term ill health Tillie Mobbs, Assistant Director: Workforce Development left Play Wales at the end of 2014 after 12 years of working for the organisation.

## Join Play Wales

Play Wales promotes all children and young people's right to play and participate in their local community as part of their everyday lives. The more voices that call together with us to uphold children's right to play the louder we will be.

**Become a member of Play Wales and add your voice to strengthen the call.**

### **Play Wales' annual membership is available from as little as £10!**

As part of the membership benefits we will:

- Alert you to key consultations and seek your input to our responses
- Keep you informed of news developments and new research
- Distribute bi-monthly members e-bulletins

- Provide discount delegate places at our events and provide special deals on our publications.

**Associate membership** is open to all organisations and individuals living in Wales.

**International associate membership** is open to any organisation or individual living or working outside Wales that would like to support the work of Play Wales.

Join us today by completing our online registration form at:  
[www.playwales.org.uk/eng/membership](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/membership)

# Gypsy and Traveller good practice guide



Play Wales has worked with Save the Children's Travelling Ahead project to produce the *Good practice guide for play and early years: developing and managing Gypsy and Traveller Sites*.

The good practice guide has been designed for anyone who takes responsibility for or is involved in managing or developing new and existing Gypsy Traveller sites.

It is designed to provide clear and concise information to support local authorities to consider and include play and early years provision when developing new and existing Gypsy and Traveller sites. It contains specific information intended to help understand and address particular areas of concern. It also provides practical, step-by-step tools, templates and models of successful provision.

To develop this guide Play Wales and the Travelling Ahead project established and consulted with a focus group of providers during the drafting process and used their experiences to develop the models and address the most significant issues. The Travelling Ahead project supports young Gypsies, Roma and Travellers to have a voice.

**The good practice guide is available to download at:**  
[www.playwales.org.uk/eng/gypsyandtraveller](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/gypsyandtraveller)



## Open all Hours project

Play Wales has received funding from The Millennium Stadium Charitable Trust to pilot its *Use of school grounds for playing out of teaching hours* toolkit.

The Open all Hours project will pilot the toolkit by evaluating the effectiveness of the tools, and measuring the impact on children, schools and the wider community. Working with Cardiff Metropolitan University (Early Childhood and Education Studies) the project will identify three schools to pilot the toolkit. The project will engage with the school communities and local groups to undertake an options analysis to identify the most appropriate model for using the school grounds for playing out of teaching hours. When the best option is identified, the project will work closely with the school and wider community to facilitate the grounds being used.

Following the pilot, the toolkit will be updated and the findings will be disseminated. Also as part of the project we will promote the use of the toolkit and its benefits and support others to implement it using the methods used in the pilot stage.

**The toolkit is available to download at:** [www.playwales.org.uk/eng/schoolstoolkit](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/schoolstoolkit)



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STADIWM Y MILLENNIWM

# Children's Commissioner for Wales

Professor Sally Holland has been appointed as the new Children's Commissioner for Wales. The role of the Children's Commissioner is to act as an independent champion for children and young people, advocating their interests and making sure their voices are heard at a local, national and international level.



Prior to her appointment Sally Holland was a Professor at the School of Social Sciences at Cardiff University, and the Director and founder of CASCADE Children's Social Care Research Centre. Her areas of expertise include children's rights, Welsh children's views about citizenship and identity, looked after children, child protection and adoption. She has also campaigned for, and researched, the needs and rights of children.

We look forward to continue working with the Children's

Commissioner for Wales.

The appointment of a new Commissioner marks the end of Keith Towler's term in the role. Given the importance that children place on their opportunities to play it should come as no surprise that in response to children's expectations over the last seven years Keith has become a strong advocate for children's right to play and lent the support of his office to Play Wales' work. Keith has spoken at many events including the International Play

Association world conferences in 2011 and 2014, Play Wales' Spirit conferences and contributed to the drafting of General Comment 17 on Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

We are delighted that Keith will be continuing to support children's play by joining the Play Wales Board of Trustees.

**For Keith's reflections on the importance of play in his work see article on page 15.**

## Higher Apprenticeship for Wales' playwork sector

Following a successful bid to the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES), SkillsActive has developed a new and innovative Higher Apprenticeship for the playwork sector in Wales. This development strongly resonates with the Welsh Government Policy Statement of Skills (January 2014) and the more recent underpinning action plan and will provide a progression route from the opportunities currently available at Level 2 and 3. The development can also be considered as a response to the needs of Wales' playwork sector.

This programme, the first Higher Apprenticeship for the Active

Leisure, Learning and Well-Being sector for Wales, will support the delivery of playwork qualifications and training, and therefore, will positively impact on the sector and the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010. The Apprenticeship will provide an opportunity for higher level professional development for playworkers and play development officers and will support the future delivery of play sufficiency.



As part of the process, SkillsActive has worked in partnership with stakeholders from across the playwork sector. SkillsActive anticipates that the new framework will be available in early 2015 and it will also include a new CACHE Level 5 Diploma in Advanced Playwork.

## Social Media



[www.facebook.com/PlayWales](http://www.facebook.com/PlayWales)



[twitter.com/PlayWales](http://twitter.com/PlayWales)

# An interview with the Minister

In September 2014, Lesley Griffiths AM, was appointed as the new Welsh Government Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty – which includes responsibility for children’s play. We recently chatted with the Minister about her childhood play memories and the Welsh Government’s work to support children’s play.

## **What do you remember most about playing as a child?**

I played outside in the street with other children. I really enjoyed skipping, hopscotch and throwing a ball against a wall. I was always encouraged to go to the park that was 15 minutes away. When it was hot, it always seemed to be hot when I was a child, I wanted my paddling pool out. Over the Christmas break friends came over with their little girls and all they wanted to do was clomp around in my now grown up girls’ high heeled shoes. I remembered that I liked to clip-clop up and down the street in my mother’s shoes and liking the noise it made.

## **What are your favourite play memories?**

I really enjoyed emptying the family food cupboard and playing shop. I had a lot of cousins who used to come to play and I would rope my parents and grandparents into coming into my shop and coughing up money to buy the produce they’d already bought! I loved being out on my bike – we used to cycle up and down the road. I remember it being very safe, there weren’t a lot of cars.

## **We know that you have had an interest in children’s play over the years. What do you hope to bring to your new portfolio with responsibility for children’s play?**

For a very long time I’ve been involved with The Venture in Wrexham (but I’ve only been a patron since I was elected in 2007), which is renowned as an excellent example of the opportunities that can be provided for children to play.

I want to continue to raise the profile of play. It’s really important that we ensure all the children in Wales have high quality play opportunities. I recently visited a play session in the village I live in, and it was really interesting to talk to the play leaders about how they ensured they were providing what the children and young people wanted not what we think they want. I was very surprised that they didn’t actually want another super duper slide or roundabout, they just wanted the space so I think it’s really important that we listen to children and young people.

Certainly it was a lesson for me.

One thing I’m very keen on in all aspects of Ministerial life is ensuring we have best practice and that we share it.

## **What do you think we, as members of the community, could do to make it easier for children to play outside?**

We need to work together to make it easier and safer. There aren’t lots more difficulties but because of the media, we are made very aware of danger. But it’s really important that children are able to go out and play and get back to nature. Traffic calming is crucial. We as members of the community need to recognise the importance of speed bumps – if it saves one child’s life it’s worth it.

When I do street surgeries, I hear people complaining about children out playing football – it’s about tolerance and making sure we understand that for children play is their work. It’s really important that they’re able to play outside without feeling under pressure.

## **How can we ensure that the poverty of experience – for instance deprivation of rich play opportunities – receives the same attention and focus as economic poverty?**

Playing is crucially important for a child’s wellbeing and development. It has an effect on their health and happiness, and how they feel part of their community. It’s important



that they don't just feel like an add-on – they are part of the community so we need to ensure their voices are heard.

The importance of play is recognised in our *Tackling Poverty Action Plan 2012-2016*, and in the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010. The UNCRC emphasises the importance of play especially for children living in poverty and advises about parks and playgrounds being particularly important in very economic difficult times – we're working closely with local authorities to make sure those facilities are there. We require them to include planning developments, parks, playgrounds, use of open space, and tackling poverty in their play sufficiency assessments and action plans. With local government budgets being stretched, in some areas of Wales they have been looking to close playgrounds but community councils are taking over some of these play areas; it's really important we support them going forward.

**Often when we talk about encouraging children to be more active the traditional response is to promote their engagement in sport in school and out of school. However, there is increasing evidence that children are more active when playing outside. How do we get opportunities for children to play to be seen as valuable as structured sport?**

It's important that we ensure that children in school have time for physical activity, but it is also important for their physical development they continue to be active outside of school. I have just become a member of the Welsh Government Physical Activity Executive Group because I recognise the importance of physical activity in relation to tackling poverty. As a group we're looking at ways of encouraging physical activity across the population of Wales. While we're

looking at having a Wales wide physical activity plan, I want play to be part of it so that it is recognised as something of great importance.

**Children tell us that there is increasing pressure on their time to play – when they are at school some playtimes and lunchtime have been reduced. Also outside school, children tell us they have to do homework and are encouraged to attend extra curricular clubs and activities. What do you think Welsh Government can do to ensure we all maintain a balance between play and an apparent desire to always see children and young people doing something organised and structured?**

When my girls were little I seemed to be driving them here, there and everywhere then sometimes you just had to stop. When the holidays came and the swimming, ballet and music lessons weren't on you realised how important it was that they had unstructured time and the ability to go out and do whatever they wanted. There is, just like there is on adults, pressure on children's time – homework and lessons – but it is really important that they're given time for playing.

It's up to schools to provide sufficient time and good quality play opportunities at lunchtimes and playtimes. Children need those breaks; they are really important for their physical activity and their social life – social skills are just as important as academic skills – and for their emotional and cognitive development. We've provided funding in the past through the Increasing Play Opportunities grant for storage and play equipment for use outside and we have schemes such as 5x60 and Dragon Sport.

**The 'play sufficiency duty' as part of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 is groundbreaking legislation.**

**What will it actually mean for children in Wales?**

It will increase play opportunities for children and it will reinforce the importance of play. We need to make sure all children have a wide range of challenging and interesting opportunities to play. We want to have safer, healthier and more play friendly communities so that children can go out with their friends and family and learn about themselves and their environment.

We've published *Wales – a play friendly country* statutory guidance which sets out our intentions for play and the requirements on local authorities to comply with the play sufficiency duty. Local authorities have completed play sufficiency assessments and action plans so that should secure sufficient play opportunities for children within each area. I'm providing funding to Play Wales to support local authorities in implementing their action plans. We're also funding Groundwork Wales to provide play opportunities for children throughout Wales.

**There is international interest and respect towards the work that Welsh Government is doing with regards to children's play. How does it feel to have the eyes of the world watching?**

It's good. We've got a lot to be proud of. I'm very proud that Wales is leading the way with regards to children's play. We're highly regarded in the international community. We were very pleased to receive the Right to Play Award from the International Play Association in 2011 on behalf of Wales as a country. We've moved the agenda ahead since then and it's important that we work with all partners to ensure play is high on the agenda. It's really important that we continue to lead the way to make sure children in Wales have good play opportunities.

# Playing out and about

My name is Oscar, I am 11 years old and I live in Prestatyn in North Wales. I like to get up to all sorts of stuff around my town and local high street such as climbing buildings, playing in the park and free running with my friends. Sometimes, children are misjudged by their parents when it comes to going outside and playing with their friends, and I want to change that.

I play at Station Road Park usually and go to the shops with my pocket money to buy fish and chips from the local chip shop with my friends April, Ben, Daniel and Nick.

I enjoy pushing trolleys around at the supermarket with my friend April where we take it in turns to push each other in the trolleys. I also enjoy free running with my older friends Callum and Tyler where we do flips on the sand dunes at a perfect long landslide that was made when the floods came in last year. I really enjoy climbing walls and buildings near the beach and we come back with amazing footage on ipods and cameras.

One day I was free running on some large bins with my friend Millie when a police officer

walked past and asked me to get down, and him being a police officer I did so, but reluctantly. If I was asked to get down from a roof it would make sense but I was hardly creating a nuisance or damaging anything and yet it's not allowed; now that just stuns me.

My school has attempted to make children's play better by allowing us on the field in winter but in the end it's only made it worse. Now if we get muddy once we get a verbal warning, twice it's a detention and three we're banned from the field for the whole term. We aren't allowed to wear our school shoes when we go on the field, which is a waste of our time when we can just wipe our shoes on a mat.

Another thing that gets in the way of us playing outside is

the traffic; the speed people drive at is horrendous so please be careful when driving.

I'm always happy to play with my friends and I can't say no to playing out. We usually decide where to meet over text or Xbox Live. Nothing could possibly stop me from playing out other than my own responsibilities like homework and cleaning my bedroom!

Sadly some of my other friends can't play out because their parents are concerned about their safety. I think playing out should be like baby steps – one step at a time so eventually a bond has been created between you and your child where you both trust each other so much that he or she are doing things that they can pass onto another generation.



*Oscar playing out and about in his younger days*



# Tips for supporting children to play out confidently

We all have a responsibility to support and prepare our children to play out confidently in their community. Playing out benefits children as well as their parents, carers and the wider community. Supporting children to play out in their community contributes to creating a play-friendly and cohesive community.

To encourage parents and carers and local communities to support children playing out confidently these top tips may help:

## 1. Prepare children to be road safe

Streets make up the major part of public space within communities. We can prepare children from an early age by telling them and showing them ways to keep themselves safe on and around roads.

## 2. Look to our own driving habits

Parents are often concerned about traffic when giving children permission to play out. As drivers, we can drive at safe speeds in the same way we would wish others to drive in the residential streets where our children play.

## 3. Help children get to know their neighbourhood

If we are less reliant on travelling by car ourselves in our local communities, children will get to know their local streets. Walking to and from local facilities such as the shops, school and the park can help us identify solutions together with our children to keep themselves safe.



## 4. Be community friendly

We can get to know local people, neighbours and other families, and agree with each other to keep an eye out for children. This fosters a sense of a safe community, allowing more children to play out more, and to be safer doing so.

## 5. Trust children

We can make agreements with children on where and how long they go out to play. If they know their local area, their address and phone number, whom they can call on, and tell the time, it helps to make those arrangements.

## 6. Be realistic

Keeping our worries in perspective and knowing neighbours and local residents on which you can call if you have any concerns will help. The benefits of playing out far outweigh the risks.

## 7. Make a change

We can join with others locally to campaign for changes to our neighbourhood that may make our local areas places where children can play out confidently. We can promote the importance of playing out to other people within our neighbourhoods by word of mouth or holding community events and letting others know about them.

# Fostering outside play

*Looked After Children and the Natural Environment* is a briefing paper produced by BAAF (British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering) for Learning through Landscapes (LTL) with support from Play Wales.

Aimed at foster carers and social care professionals working with looked after children, the briefing paper:

- outlines why it is important for looked after children to access outdoor play in nature
- discusses the benefits and rights of children to play, offering ideas on types of outdoor play in nature
- promotes a risk-benefit approach to care, as opposed to a risk-averse approach.

It has been developed as part of the Fostering Outside Play Project, which aims to improve the physical and mental health outcomes for looked after children through supporting foster carers and social care professionals to provide high-quality, frequent and regular activities and play outside and in the natural environment. The project is managed by LTL, with funding provided by the Welsh Government and The Waterloo Foundation. Play Wales and BAAF Cymru are partners in the project.

As a taster here are excerpts from the briefing paper.

## Introduction

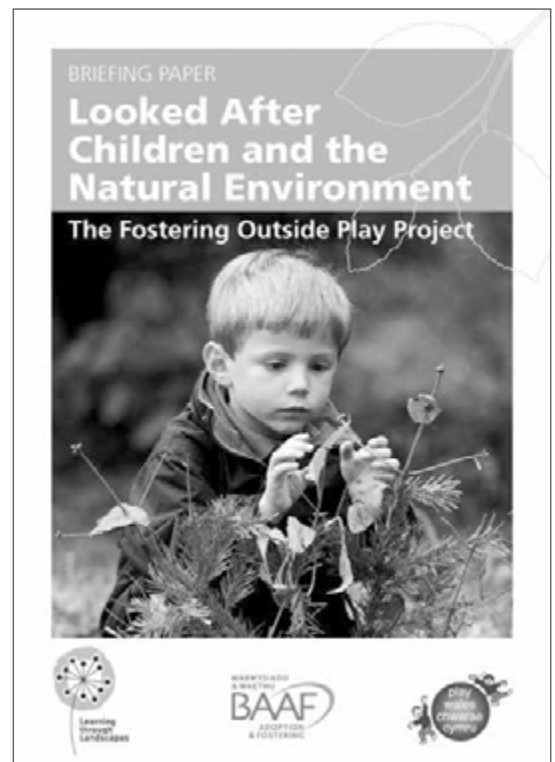
Many looked after children are affected by trauma, caused by their experiences of abuse and neglect. This may also be combined with an increased occurrence of loss and change in the life cycle, which can be in relation to the separation of sibling groups or placement disruptions. Whilst there is an enormous focus on the vulnerabilities of looked after children, it is, however, important to recognise that all individuals are both vulnerable and resilient at the same time<sup>1</sup>. It is essential that the systems which underpin the provision for looked after children do not erode their right to explore and learn through play, including outdoor play in nature.

## Outside play and contact with nature – why is it important?

There is evidence to show that children's relationship with nature is an essential part of development which supports them in reaching their full potential. There are many reasons why children are now experiencing less time in nature, for

example, parental fears of traffic or of 'stranger danger', and a loss of green spaces for public access<sup>2</sup>.

There are concerns that children and young people are spending significant periods of time engaging with media technologies. Many people have observed that this is diminishing the time spent on outdoor play in nature, which in turn is reducing imaginative play and social interactions. A study by the University of Cambridge<sup>3</sup>





demonstrated that children were more able to identify Pokémon characters than British wildlife species (78 per cent compared with 53 per cent respectively). Whilst it is acknowledged that technology brings many benefits to children and young people, there is a need for balance and for carers to create other opportunities for learning and play.

Every carer and professional supporting looked after children has a responsibility to promote their health and emotional wellbeing<sup>4</sup>. Whilst more research into the benefits of accessing nature is needed, the findings so far support what many people feel, that being in nature is good for us! The findings so far suggest that contact with nature can be an effective component in:

- the treatment of children with poor self discipline
- hyperactivity and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
- coping with anxiety and stress
- strategies to reduce crime and aggression
- concentration levels in children
- reducing stress
- healthy cognitive development of children
- strengthened communities
- increased sense of wellbeing and mental health.<sup>5</sup>

Whilst it is important for children to access specialist services to address their needs, a holistic perspective is required. The role of the foster carer is critical in promoting exercise, a healthy diet and opportunities for outdoor play. This includes spending time in nature.

## How can we promote this?

There are some essential components which need to be in place to promote looked after children's access to nature and outdoor play.

**Permission** – Children need permission from carers to play outdoors. The looked after child's specific circumstances need to be considered in relation to safety and risk. However, this should not result in a child not being allowed access to outdoor play in a natural setting. Agencies should support foster carers in this endeavour by recognising the value that outdoor play brings to the looked after child's life experience.

**Time** – By making time for children's outdoor play in nature, we promote and value children's freedom, independence and choice, and these characteristics perform a crucial role in children's resilience, ability to deal with stress and anxiety, and general wellbeing.

**Space** – Characteristics of quality children's spaces include opportunities for wonder, excitement and the unexpected, but most of all opportunities that are not overly ordered and controlled by adults. These spaces are crucial to children's own culture and for their sense of place and belonging. Children's spaces are preferably outdoor spaces. Given the choice, children prefer to play outdoors and value the independence and opportunities for discovery that it offers.

**Materials** – While children can and will play anywhere and with almost anything, there are resources we can provide that can facilitate and encourage play. Such materials can be cheap and accessible – simply leave a pile of them for children to explore and you will be amazed at the motivation and intensity of children's play. Children who play outdoors with others do not need many toys.

## Conclusion

The briefing paper considers the importance of promoting outdoor play in nature for looked after children. Several studies have shown children's preference for natural or wild spaces for play opportunities<sup>6</sup>, and there is no evidence to suggest that looked after children would feel any different. It could also be suggested that looked after children have more to gain than their peers in relation to the stress of experiencing abuse, removal from parents and subsequent placement moves whilst in care. In today's world of technological advancements, rapid communication and diminishing play settings, it is important that we provide children with opportunities for outside play in nature. The Fostering Outside Play project works with foster carers and social care professionals in Wales to promote such opportunities for looked after children.

**The briefing paper is available to download at:**  
[www.playwales.org.uk/eng/information sheets](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/information sheets)

## References

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2. Bird W. (2007) *Natural Thinking: Investigating the links between the natural environment, biodiversity and mental health* (1<sup>st</sup> edition). London: RSPB.
3. Ibid.
4. Looked After Child Health Exchange (2012) *Supporting and Promoting the Health Needs of Looked after Children in Wales: A practice guide*. Cardiff: Children in Wales.
5. *Natural Thinking: Investigating the links between the natural environment, biodiversity and mental health*.
6. Ibid.

# Looking back on a BIG journey



The Big Lottery Fund (BIG) has made the biggest single investment to date in children's play provision in Wales, through a strategic programme that aimed to make a positive impact on children's play. Play Wales supported the delivery of the BIG Child's Play programme and as it comes to an end, we reflect on the difference the programme has made.

## Background

In late 2006, BIG launched the Child's Play programme, which aimed to:

- Develop new play spaces for children in their communities
- Develop play opportunities that provide space for children to choose how they play
- Develop 'staffed open access' play opportunities.

A year later BIG announced Round One funding of £2.2 million to create an infrastructure to provide and plan for children's play provision across all the regions of Wales – 10 infrastructure projects were created, some based within existing play associations. Key stakeholders for each infrastructure project identified gaps in provision for playing children, agreed priorities for investment

at a local level and planned projects to meet them through Round Two of the programme.

The infrastructure projects completed regional audit exercises mapping play provision (for example local play spaces, inclusive open access play schemes, adventure playground sites, and mobile and outreach play projects). The audits helped identify local priorities and



they provided the evidence for the development of the applications, for play projects in Round Two.

There was celebration in Spring 2010 when BIG awarded grants totalling £9.5 million to 10 play projects, covering every region of Wales. All the projects were developed to create new play initiatives and facilities in local communities across Wales. The Child's Play programme focused on new approaches to staffed play provision, and expected projects to propose creative play initiatives that offered challenge and varied opportunities.

## A shared aim

Across Wales the projects had individual and unique elements, but they also had much in common. All of the projects aimed to encourage community engagement, to support disabled and marginalised children to be included, and to build local and family confidence in all children being able to play out, whether supported by trained adults or not. The model was developed in direct response to the views of school age children who said that the places where they would prefer to play were outside and close to home.

One of the play projects' key tasks was to start to overcome some of the barriers to children playing outside. There was a shared concern that the sight of children playing outdoors was disappearing from our daily lives and this was having an adverse effect on perceptions and expectations of children and young people.

Playworkers helped community members and parents to recognise the need for children to experience a broad range of play opportunities and experiences and help to build confidence and reassurance. The projects supported children and young people to use existing local spaces to meet their play needs – helping them to become more visible through the provision of more time and places for playing within easy distance of their front door.



## Leaving a legacy

The Child's Play programme projects provided a unique opportunity to support children's right to play outside in their communities. By engaging with families and communities to develop and sustain play provision, there have been real contributions to community cohesion and the development of vibrant and resilient communities. Other beneficial outcomes we observed include:

- The establishment of new groups, centres and organisations to facilitate on-going play opportunities
- The recruitment and engagement of volunteers to help deliver play sessions or activities
- The delivery of community based play sessions
- More positive attitudes towards play
- Physical improvements to play environments
- The on-going sustainability of increased play provision
- More professionals in other sectors with play and playwork experience.

The current financial climate has meant significant cuts to services within all local authorities and third sector organisations

in Wales and sustaining staff posts has been a challenge. However, the play projects have left a significant legacy.

Across Wales, the play provision developed and delivered by the Child's Play projects has made a positive difference to the children, parents and the communities in which they live. The opportunities for children to play in public outdoor spaces have been extended and children and parents have confidence to use them.

The projects have demonstrated that staffed provision can be important to the broader network of support for children and families to live healthier and happier lives and to also feel part of their community.

The difficult financial times we currently face present both opportunity and risk for this sort of provision. The national commitment to play followed with significant investment from BIG has helped to make the case for the benefits of staffed play provision. The Child's Play projects across Wales have helped to turn outdoor spaces into places for playing, imagination and socialising.

[www.playwales.org.uk/eng/childsplayprogramme](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/childsplayprogramme)

# Wales a play friendly place

Hawk's Nest Play Area is situated in Coed Moel Famau forest in the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). For many years the site has been a popular destination for walkers and mountain bikers due to its picturesque setting and good network of trails.



In 2013, Natural Resources Wales invited Play Wales to a site meeting to discuss possible options for creating a play space that encouraged more families with young children to visit the site to enjoy and experience the woodland.

Initial ideas from this meeting were developed into a design brief and subsequently a tender exercise was carried out. Natural Resources Wales' brief was simple: to design and create a play space that sympathetically reflected and made good use of the natural resources found on the site, including a stream, native and plantation woodland and a short circular walking trail.

The plan for the play space was shared with the local community to ensure local support for the project. Match funding for the project was awarded by

Cadwyn Clwyd Cyfyngedig, a rural development agency, in recognition of the benefits the project would bring to the local tourism economy.

Before any work could commence, elements of the play space required planning permission and this was applied for to Denbighshire County Council. Although some concerns were raised, mainly relating to the potential impact of the play space on the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, these were adequately addressed by Natural Resources Wales' site manager and planning permission for the project was granted.

The play structures include a bespoke giant timber nest tower structure made of untreated European larch (a species found on site) that represents the nests of birds living within the

surrounding woodlands and offers children multiple opportunities for social and physical play as well as a bird's eye view of the woodland canopy. A giant cedar log, carved out in the middle offers younger children opportunities for crawling, climbing and congregating inside the log and visually it is the most sympathetic of the timber structures installed.

The most unique of the play features is the water play area constructed of natural stone taken from the site that utilises water coming from the stream and channels it into the play space where children can interact with the water using sticks, stones and other natural materials found in the space.

Parts of this play space, including a wobbly chestnut bridge, were put together as part of a community workshop. Overall the project has been a success and has encouraged more children to visit the woodland and enjoy the sights and sounds of nature through play.

Wales – A Play Friendly Place is a Play Wales campaign to help build a network of support for play across Wales. Share what's happening locally which is either protecting or prohibiting children's right to play on the Facebook campaign page.

[on.fb.me/playfriendlyplace](https://on.fb.me/playfriendlyplace)

# Keith Towler reflects on play in Wales



At the end of his term as the Children's Commissioner for Wales, Keith Towler reflects on the importance of children's right to play in his work.

Little did I know seven years ago that play would form such an important part of my life as Children's Commissioner. My journey on play began in my first few months in post. In fact, the first report I published as Commissioner was about children with disabilities' access to play. It was the culmination of a project which my predecessor had begun, analysing the content of local authorities' play strategies and gathering the views of children and young people with disabilities.

Seven years on I am still acutely aware of how important play is to children and young people. During my final year in post, I was lucky to be appointed to a working group assisting on the drafting of a General Comment for the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child who wanted State Parties across the world to give greater attention to children's Article 31 rights. Here in Wales and across the world, the publication of General Comment 17 on Article 31 provides an opportunity for every child to exercise their right to play.

Wales and the Welsh Government have taken great strides in promoting and implementing play as the right of every child and young person and are viewed very highly on the international stage. But I can't help but feel that this international reputation may be at risk. When I voiced my concerns around the lack of vision for children within the Welsh Government recently, the response from Welsh Ministers



was not as positive as I had hoped, on the contrary there was a reluctance to accept my criticism.

It is my role as Children's Commissioner to challenge and ask questions, so I will. I am unclear how the decision by Welsh Government to reduce the funding for Play Wales will contribute to its long-term strategic policy vision on play. Play Wales commands international respect and certainly deserves a level of resourcing to match.

I can't help but think that whilst we have groundbreaking legislation here in Wales, it's not having the immediate impact on the ground for children and young people that was hoped for. By way of an example I'm going full circle, back to children and young people with disabilities' access to play. The Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 saw Wales become the first country in the world to establish a duty in relation to play.

This Measure introduced a Play

Sufficiency Duty which includes local authorities carrying out Play Sufficiency Assessments. I reviewed them all, focusing in particular on children and young people from disadvantaged communities and households and on children and young people with disabilities. The provision of play and recreation opportunities for children and young people with disabilities, as reported in these Assessments, is diverse, with a number of local authorities even having difficulties identifying how many children and young people with disabilities resided within their authority.

There is also some wonderful work ongoing, with some authorities evidencing a framework of policy and practice firmly directed at delivering on Article 31 for children with disabilities. But, the picture remains inconsistent.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is embedded in Welsh law. This 'groundbreaking' legislation, was meant to 'make a positive change to the way in which all support and services for children and young people in Wales will be designed and delivered in the future'.

If I were to leave one message ringing in people's ears as I depart my role as Children's Commissioner it would be this: let's make sure legislation made in Wales makes a practical, positive difference to each and every child, whatever their circumstance.

# Play & Playwork: 101 Stories of Children Playing

Chantelle Haughton, a Teaching Fellow and Lecturer in Education and Early Childhood Studies at Cardiff Metropolitan University, reviews Professor Fraser Brown's latest book.

This book did not disappoint. I found myself loving the playful yet thought provoking way the author used vignettes to illuminate and connect experiences and theory which enticed me to ponder on practice and policy.

An accessible and informative text I will certainly be using with my undergraduate students from now on; playworkers and lecturers will be charged up to think by this book. Teachers in Wales facilitating playful pedagogy and planning learning through play opportunities may find this a valuable read for an alternative perspective to draw on.

Tensions between play, playwork definitions and the conflict around the role of adults exist of course so Brown got me thinking about how essential it is to pause and consider perspective in analysis, reflection and interpretation in practice.

Brown takes time to explore the differences and connections between play and playwork, looking at SPICE (Social interaction, Physical activity, Intellectual stimulation, Creative achievement, Emotional stability), an acronym ubiquitous in play related training and education, but Brown prompts critical questions and response about how and why SPICE may not be sufficient alone to analyse outcomes and quality in playwork.

Whilst Brown suggests possible value in hanging on to the SPICE



approach in play, for serious recognition of the importance and outcome related value maybe more academic research connected with practice based research needs to be undertaken and published so that playwork and its value is not underestimated.

Through real play scenarios this text explores in vivid detail eleven strands (key factors that benefits play): freedom, flexibility, socialisations and social interaction, physical activity, intellectual stimulation, creativity, problem solving, emotional equilibrium, self-discovery, ethical stance, child-adult interaction and general appeal.

This is a system for analysis recognised and used widely in the UK and the US, but not being a specialist in playwork this is the first

time I have read about it and felt I understood the roots of the ideas and maybe different perspectives on the thinking which underpins these strands. These form the structure of the book which made it hard for me to put the it down; it didn't feel like a textbook I would dip in and out of!

My teenage son Frazer asked me what was so good about the 'worky textbook' I was reading during the holidays (in between the family festivities and board games). I was hooked until the close when Brown summed up his thoughts on 'compound flexibility' and how it is central to the developmental process yet we have this contested contemporary issue of playwork being cut off at the roots with children's play environments becoming increasingly inflexible.

As he asked I took time to talk with Frazer about some of the 101 stories, he was seriously interested whilst amused by the

*'Miranda and Josh story: I'm gonna play 'til I die! That's what I'm gonna do, I never want to stop playing...'*

Brown finds a way to keep reminding the reader of the 'paradoxical nature of play' and how it's never really possible to understand the subtle nuances play may mean for a child.