

Play for Wales

Play news and briefing from
the national charity for play

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**Play and
place**



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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

Editorial

Adults are concerned that there has been a decline in children playing out. A common contemporary statement is 'children have forgotten how to play'. However, children in Wales tell us otherwise – they still want to play out, and when the conditions – enough time, good space and tolerant adults – are right, they do.

This issue of *Play for Wales* explores how access to space and the way it is organised can support more children to play in their neighbourhoods more often, so gaining a sense of belonging and attachment to place.

There is a range of social policy that influences how children can be better represented in society. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child calls for children to have a right to be heard and taken seriously on all

matters affecting them (Article 12) and to gather in and use public space (Article 15). World-leading legislation puts Wales in a unique position to place children at the centre of community planning. Legislation such as the Well-being of Future Generations Act and Play Sufficiency Duties have created greater awareness around the need for communities to work for children's health and wellbeing.

The General Comment on the right to play, (written in support of Article 31) emphasises the importance of children having opportunities to play in their own way, stating that '*children play anywhere and everywhere*'. This statement is both simple and thought provoking. It reminds us that playing doesn't only take place in designated spaces and at certain times. It also implores us to think explicitly about how spaces work for all children and how we can improve them. Better design is one aspect, but, often, positive attitudes to children being seen as legitimate users of public space is the greater issue.

The pandemic has had a significant impact on children. We know that the restrictions on playing out and playing with friends has contributed to a rise in mental health issues and in loss of physical fitness for some children. Although professional support might be needed in some cases, we need to trust children to know what they need.

It is vital that we remember that they can support their own mental and physical health if they have plenty of opportunities to self-organise their play. For children to feel that they belong, they need everyday opportunities to be able to play and gather with friends in and around their neighbourhoods, and a bit further afield, when they are old enough.

Children most certainly haven't forgotten how to play. It would serve all children well if adults were better at paying attention to their play and how to support it better.

Mike Greenaway
Director



News

This year's Playday theme is...

Playday is the national day for play in the UK, and this year's theme is **All to play for – building play opportunities for all children**. This year, Playday will take place on Wednesday 3 August.

Following the challenges children have faced over the past two years, play is more important than ever, so we are calling for more play, better play, every day.

This year's theme aims to highlight that play is for everyone. Play happens everywhere, every day, and is the right of every child. Playday encourages families, communities, and organisations large and small, to consider how they can build better opportunities for all children to play.

After two years of restrictions across the UK, we are looking forward to hearing about the exciting ways you plan to celebrate Playday this year. Visit Playday's Facebook and Twitter for the latest updates.

www.playday.org.uk



Summer of Fun 2022



The Welsh Government is providing £7m of funding to support a 2022 Summer of Fun.

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Building on the success of last year's programme and Winter of Wellbeing, the funding will be used to offer free activities for children and young people, up to the age of 25, across Wales. The activities will support children and young people's social, emotional and physical wellbeing to help re-build their confidence to integrate back into the community.

Last summer, over 67,000 children and young people enjoyed a range of free indoor and outdoor activities including music, theatre, sea-based sport activities, climbing and zip lining – offering inclusive opportunities to take part in activities to engage with society again.

Announcing the 2022 funding, the Deputy Minister for Social Services, Julie Morgan MS, said:

'We are building on this success, offering another Summer of Fun this year of free activities to support our young people and help families across Wales with the rising cost of living over the summer months. I look forward to seeing more of our children and young people enjoying their summer again this year in Wales.'

www.gov.wales

Capital of play

In late 2021, Wrexham set itself the challenge to become the 'capital of play' for the UK.

This came as part of Wrexham's bid to be named the UK's City of Culture 2025, having been shortlisted alongside

Bradford, County Durham and Southampton. The City of Culture competition is run by the UK Government's Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport every four years.

There is a strong history of play and playwork in Wrexham. Following a play conference organised by The Venture in January 2022, the playwork

network in Wrexham busied itself and collaborated with the UK's City of Culture steering group to plan a range of playful events to coincide with the all-important visit from the advisory panel.

Although Bradford was the successful bidder, the inclusion of children's play as a key feature in Wrexham's bid should be celebrated and maintained.

Community Focused Schools investment



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

The Welsh Government is investing almost £25m in Community Focused Schools between April 2022 and March 2023 to tackle the impact of poverty on young people's attainment.

The funding will be used to ensure more schools are able to operate and develop as Community Focused Schools, which engage families and work with the wider community to support all pupils and particularly those disadvantaged by poverty.

Of this funding, £20m will be invested in delivering Community Focused Schools, to fund practical ways of improving school facilities to enable greater community use. This includes providing equipment storage for community groups running extra-curricular activities and introducing security measures to segregate school and community use areas.

www.gov.wales

Announcing the funding, the Education and Welsh Language Minister, Jeremy Miles MS said:

'Community Focused schools develop partnerships with a range of organisations, and make services accessible locally to families and the wider community. They use their facilities and resources to benefit the communities they serve, improve the lives of the children, strengthen families and build stronger communities.'

Welcoming the funding, Play Wales said:

'This investment greatly supports our Wales – a play friendly place manifesto call to the Welsh Government to make better use of school grounds, for play. Our research on use of school grounds demonstrates that encouraging children and their families to "stay and play" when the teaching day ends has tremendous benefits for children and families. These include positive effects on children's health and happiness, family engagement and wellbeing, connection with school life, and the enhancement of a local sense of community.'

Children's Commissioner for Wales



Comisiynydd
Plant Cymru

Children's
Commissioner
for Wales

In April 2022, Rocio Cifuentes MBE began her new role as Children's Commissioner for Wales. The Children's Commissioner promotes and protects children's rights and ensures that the Welsh Government's policies and legislation benefit children and young people.

Rocio was the chief executive of the Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team, since its inception in 2005, and she previously worked for the Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations, Swansea Young Single Homelessness Project, Gower College and Swansea University.

On her appointment, the new Commissioner said:

'To all the children and young people of Wales, I make the commitment today to ensure your voice, your views and your future is at the heart of everything we do.'

The First Minister, Mark Drakeford said:

'Now, more than ever, the decisions we take as a Welsh Government must have the voice of children and young people at its very core and I'm proud that Rocio Cifuentes as our new Commissioner, will carry out this very important role.'

Rocio takes over the role from Sally Holland, who undertook the role from 2015. See page 7 for our thank you message to Sally.

www.childcomwales.org.uk

New team members



Welcome to Play Wales' new team members – Danielle Beattie, Rachel Pitman and Emma Butler.

Danielle joined us in June 2021 as our Operational Manager and recently oversaw Play Wales' move to a new office in Cardiff. Danielle leads on operations support for the organisation.

Rachel is our new Communications Officer and is responsible for keeping our websites up to date, co-ordinating social media activity and marketing.

And last but not least, Emma is our new Events Coordinator who is leading on the administrative and technical aspects of our online and in-person seminars and conferences.

Rachel and Emma both joined us in May 2022.

Find out more about the Play Wales team at: www.playwales.org.uk/eng/team

IPA Play in Crisis: for Parents and Carers – new resources

For several years, the International Play Association (IPA) has committed itself to raising awareness of children's play needs in situations of crisis. This included the publication of the *Access to Play for Children in Situations of Crisis toolkit* – which was written by Play Wales' Martin King-Sheard and Marianne Mannello.



The toolkit supports people and agencies working in crisis situations so that they are better able to understand and support children's everyday play. It also supports children's everyday, community-based play opportunities.

The toolkit is part of the IPA's Access to Play in Crisis project which also includes an international research project. The project defines situations of crisis as humanitarian, natural, and man-made disasters.

In response to the coronavirus pandemic, IPA's Play in Crisis series was further developed to include resources to help parents and carers support children's right to play. Topics in the resources include the importance of playing in times of crisis and how to respond to children's play needs.



IPA has now updated the resources and created translations in Ukrainian and Polish. The advice is suitable for playing at home, in temporary accommodation, shelters and playing while staying at the homes of friends and relatives.

www.ipaworld.org

Play, rights and place: making the links

All children have the right to play as recognised in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

In 2013, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted a General Comment that clarifies for governments worldwide the meaning and importance of Article 31. A General Comment is an official statement that elaborates on the meaning of an aspect of the UNCRC that needs further interpretation or emphasis. It also aims to increase accountability among countries.

Public space

Through the General Comment, the UN Committee raises concern that children and teenagers are not always being considered in policies and practices that affect the organisation of the built environment. The way that public spaces are designed and organised tend to provide little that meets the needs and rights of children and teenagers to play and meet with friends. The Committee encourages policy development that considers opportunities to play including access to public spaces for children and teenagers, especially those living without opportunities for play in their own homes.

The General Comment stresses that children need access to inclusive spaces that are free from inappropriate hazards and close to their own homes, as well as opportunities for independent mobility as they get older and more confident being out and



about in their neighbourhood and wider community.

The Committee is also concerned about the difficulties faced by particular groups of children to access opportunities to play, including teenagers, girls and disabled children.

Teenagers

The General Comment reinforces the needs of teenagers stating that they need places that offer opportunities to socialise, be with peers and to explore their emerging independence. Teenagers also want to explore graduated opportunities involving risk-taking and challenge. These are important aspects for the development of a sense of identity and belonging.

Girls

The General Comment identifies a range of barriers for girls, such as parental concerns for safety, lack of appropriate facilities and cultural assumptions imposing limitations on the expectations and behaviour of girls, particularly in the teenage years.

Also, it is concerned that gender differentiation in what might be considered girls' and boys' play is often reinforced by parents, caregivers, the media and in the instance of space, project managers. Noting the widespread barriers impacting on girls' opportunities to play, the UN Committee urges governments and policy makers to take action to challenge gender stereotypes which heighten discrimination and opportunities for girls to have equal access to opportunities to play and gather with friends.

Disabled children

The UN Committee also highlights a range of barriers that disabled children face regarding space for play. These are widespread and include not having access to informal and social places where friendships can be made and where playing happens, negative stereotypes and attitudes facing disabled children and inaccessibility of public spaces, parks and playgrounds and lack of accessible transport.

These concerns are supported further by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which emphasises the obligations of governments to ensure that disabled children have equal access with other children to opportunities to play. There is a need to pay attention to both of these international agreements.

Removing barriers will promote accessibility to and availability of inclusive opportunities to play. This will support more disabled children to have equality of access, independence and confidence in using public spaces.

Conclusion

The Play Wales analysis of local authority play surveys with children in Wales presents evidence of inequalities for particular groups of children with regards to their opportunities to play. For example:

- Boys tend to play out more than girls
- Girls felt more restricted than boys in terms of where they can play
- Disabled children report being even more restricted.¹

Tim Gill uses the term 'everyday freedoms'² to refer to children's ability to move freely around their neighbourhoods and to what neighbourhood public space 'affords' for playing. Building social ties and developing attachments to place helps children develop independence and resilience. Public spaces potentially offer children and teenagers space for exploration, socialisation and the opportunity to feel connected to a place and wider neighbourhood.

As the UN Committee rightly points out, the growth in intolerance to children's use of public spaces and the need to provide 'everyday freedoms' must be addressed. The exclusion of children has significant implications for their sense of belonging and overall wellbeing. Shared experience and use of public spaces by different groups – children, teenagers and adults – promotes a sense of cohesion and helps children of all ages see themselves as rights holders.

www.playwales.org.uk/eng/generalcomment

¹ Dallimore, D. (2019) 'I learn new things and climb trees' – What children say about play in Wales. Cardiff: Play Wales and Bangor University.

² Gill, T. (2021) *Urban Playground: How child-friendly planning and design can save cities*. London: RIBA.

Thank you Sally

In April 2022, Professor Sally Holland's tenure as the Children's Commissioner for Wales came to an end.

During the last seven years, the Children's Commissioner and her team have championed children's rights – including the right to play – and raised awareness of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Thank you Sally for your work to help respect, protect and fulfil children's right to play across Wales. Play Wales particularly wants to highlight these aspects of your work:

- Consulting with over 450 children and young people about the way they play and how they spend their free time. Your 2018 *Spotlight Report Article 31* report informed public bodies on how they can address the barriers which impede on children's opportunities to play.
- Leading on the *UK Children's Commissioners' Joint Written Statement* to celebrate Playday 2018. The four Children's Commissioners called for everyone to work together to support the importance of children's play as an essential aspect of childhood.
- Featuring questions about children's opportunities to play in the *Coronavirus and Me* research surveys undertaken in 2020 and 2021. As well as raising awareness of children's needs and worries during lockdowns the results helped to inform Play Wales' advocacy work.
- Celebrating Playday 2021 and Summer of Fun by publishing a play ideas and games e-book with Play Wales. To develop the *Summer of Fun* e-book, children and teenagers in Wales were asked to share their favourite game to play.

We look forward to continue working with the office of the Children's Commissioner and the new children's rights champion Rocio Cifuentes MBE to ensure every child in Wales receives their right to play.

www.childcomwales.org.uk



Including disabled children in play provision



In a joint position statement, the Children's Play Policy Forum and the UK Play Safety Forum call for action to improve play opportunities for disabled children in the UK. Supported by PlayBoard Northern Ireland, Play England, Play Scotland, Play Wales and the Association of Play Industries (API), the statement calls for accessible and inclusive play spaces to uphold every child's right and need to play.

Published in March 2022, *Including Disabled Children in Play Provision* states that society has failed in producing enough accessible and inclusive places for children to play within a reasonable distance of their homes. It makes clear that:

- a positive, solution-focused attitude is essential to include disabled children
- it is possible to make adaptations to increase accessibility and remove barriers to participation by engaging with and prioritising the needs of disabled children and their families
- there is an urgent need to change public attitudes
- more welcoming spaces must be created which maximise the range of play opportunities offered by the equipment and the environment.

Good play provision will make everyone – children and adults of all ages – feel welcome and comfortable in the space, with a wide range of opportunities and experiences for all abilities. Playgrounds and play spaces have huge potential to provide important opportunities for disabled children to be included in their communities, breaking down barriers and building relationships. This brings benefits for non-disabled children too, as they learn through their interactions and engagement with disabled friends and peers.

Sadly, in the UK, many disabled children, disabled parents, and their families are still excluded from local play spaces. Barriers include lack of accessibility, poor understanding of disabled children's needs and wishes, negative public attitudes and a limited range of play opportunities.

In the statement, the Children’s Play Policy Forum and the UK Play Safety Forum emphasise *‘that everyone can help disabled children and their families feel welcome and included in their local play spaces. Those involved in designing and managing play spaces have a key role to play in leading change, in partnership with disabled children, their families and the local community.’*

The statement is accompanied by three case study examples of disabled children’s experiences accessing play opportunities that meet their needs.

Terminology

The forums recommend the following definitions when using the terms ‘accessible’ and ‘inclusive’ in the context of play space.

An **accessible play space** is a space which is barrier-free, allows users access to move around the space and offers participation opportunities for a range of differing abilities. Not every child of every ability will be able to actively use everything within an accessible play space.

An **inclusive play space** provides a barrier-free environment, with supporting infrastructure, which meets the wide and varying play needs of every child. Disabled children and non-disabled children will enjoy high levels of participation opportunities, equally rich in play value.

The statement highlights the distinction between ‘accessible’ and ‘inclusive’ play spaces. It acknowledges that, although all play spaces should be accessible, not all play spaces can or will be inclusive. The terms ‘accessible’ and ‘inclusive’ should therefore not be used interchangeably. Confusion around this terminology contributes to a lack of appropriate provision.

Audience

The statement aims to support those involved in play spaces, playgrounds and adventure playgrounds in making these facilities more accessible and inclusive. It is aimed at local authorities, voluntary organisations, housing associations and schools, amongst other play providers – including private providers, such as pubs, holiday parks, camp sites, service stations, theme parks and zoos.

Tim Gill, Chair of the UK Play Safety Forum, said:

‘Just like any child, all disabled children need and want to play. But for decades, they have been left poorly served. This statement makes a powerful case for change, while acknowledging the challenges. Perhaps most importantly, it sets out a clear vision for new and improved play spaces that will engage children of all abilities.’

Nicola Butler, Chair of the Children’s Play Policy Forum, added:

‘This statement will help build a better understanding of the barriers which keep many disabled children and their families excluded from local play spaces. Overcoming these barriers will bring benefits for non-disabled children too, as they learn through their interactions and engagement with disabled friends and peers.’

Marianne Mannello, Play Wales’ Assistant Director and member of the statement working group, said:

‘When we design spaces that get it right for disabled children, more children can play alongside one another, developing a better understanding of the full range of abilities. These early experiences shape our tolerance and understanding of difference. We hope that this statement supports stakeholders to take reasonable steps to ensure that all children make good use of playgrounds and play spaces, enabling them to benefit from all the positives playing brings to a happy and healthy childhood.’

www.playsafetyforum.org.uk

www.childrensplaypolicyforum.org.uk

Key messages

The statement includes five key messages to ensure disabled children are included in play provision:

1. A positive and solution-focused attitude is critical to creating inclusive play space design, based on understanding and prioritising the needs of disabled children and making adaptations to include them.
2. Children and their families want play spaces which include the range of features and facilities they need.
3. Play spaces should offer a balance of high to low challenge opportunities and a good mix of play features.
4. All children deserve to be able to enjoy play spaces that work well for them and their families within a reasonable distance of their home.
5. All play spaces should be developed through community participation, co-design and co-production.

Opening grounds for play

Serennu Children's Centre in Newport is managed by Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and supported by Sparkle, a charity that works with children and their families living in Gwent.

The Centre provides assessment, treatment, care, information, support – as well as play and leisure services – for disabled children, all under one roof. This provides a more child centred and coordinated service for families.

The centre's guiding principle is to ensure that disabled children, or those with developmental difficulties, and their families are fully supported to participate in valued childhood experiences and have access to the same range of opportunities, services and facilities as other children. It does this by not only providing treatment for the child, but also by offering family centred services to accommodate the needs of parents and siblings too, as well as onsite leisure and social facilities. This eases the burden on families and provides continuity of care for the children.

As well as having state of the art treatment rooms and specialist facilities, the centre has an accessible playground and grounds. Situated at the back of the Serennu Centre and surrounded by lovely scenery, children have access to a Multi Use Games Area (MUGA), sensory garden, sensory walk, woodland walk and playhouse. The area includes swings suitable for all ages, an integrated wheelchair trampoline and swing and a cycle/wheelchair track running all the way around the grounds.



In addition to providing an interesting outdoor space for children and families who use the centre during opening hours, the grounds are open for use by families who use the centre and the wider community every day of the week.

Donna Colwill, Children's Centre Manager, provided a guided tour of the large and varied space. She said:

'We want to go beyond providing treatment for the child and so aim to provide family centred services to accommodate the needs of parents and siblings too. Our onsite play and leisure facilities offer families using the centre and those who live nearby the opportunity to socialise in a safe and supportive environment.'

Families use the playground in the evenings and weekends and before or after treatment. Having access to the play area before or after medical treatment means that those procedures are more bearable for children as the overall experience is positive. Allowing families and children to use the space when the centre is closed means they can make full use of the facilities, in a place where they feel comfortable and know well.'

Providing those opportunities to local children and families helps everyone develop a better understanding of the range of abilities. This can help develop tolerance and an understanding of difference. The inclusive environment makes it easier for children to help one another, which reduces the need for adults to be overly present.'

'When I was your age'

Playing or hanging out, relaxing and socialising are important parts of teenagers' lives.



They contribute to teenagers' sense of identity as well as their development and wellbeing. Every child is entitled to space to play in their community – including teenagers.

Playful Childhoods' latest campaign, 'When I was your age', aims to challenge misconceptions around teenage behaviour in public spaces. The campaign is encouraging us all to be more tolerant of teenagers in shared spaces.

While playing, or 'hanging out', might look different today thanks to the introduction of technology and changing social habits, 'When I was your age' inspires nostalgia around how adults played when they were teens and encourage them to share their memories of play from their teenage years.

It reminds adults of the similarities between generations, because as it turns out, we're not so different after all...

Teenagers' voices

Teenagers across Wales have been sharing their experiences of playing and hanging out with their friends, and the challenges they face in their communities.

Twelve-year-old Celyn told us:

'We'd just like adults to be okay with us being in the park when we want to be, and know we're not doing anything wrong. There usually ends up being a big group of us, and we all like to have fun together after school.'

Celyn added:

'I talk to my parents about what they did when they were my age, and it's not that different! I spend a lot of time in the park with my friends and hanging out on the benches like they did. We just have phones and stuff now, so we make TikToks and use SnapChat.'

Cerys, Celyn's mother, said:

'While it can be hard to let our teenager go out and play with her friends without us being around, it's all part of growing up and allowing her to find herself. I spent much of my teenage years hanging out in parks and on the streets of my village, staying out well beyond my curfew and pretending I lost track of time, so I am learning now as a parent how to accept my teenager is the same!'

Why it's important

Reports show that today's teens are more sensible than previous generations, and yet the majority of teenagers feel like they are unfairly represented in the media.

Mental health conditions amongst teenagers are also on the increase – particularly during the pandemic – so, it is more important than ever that teenagers can play and socialise in their communities with their friends.

By remembering our own teenage years, we can better understand and be more tolerant of teenagers' playful behaviour today and every day.

Playful Childhoods

Support for parents

Understanding teenagers' need to play and hang out, relax and socialise can help parents to manage the challenges and rewards of being a parent or carer to teenagers.

To support parents and carers of teenagers we have recently added content to our *Playful Childhoods* website. The new web pages, intended to support parents and carers to give teenagers the freedom to play and hang out with their friends in public spaces, include:

- **Hanging out** – what teenagers are doing and what they get from it, and tips for parents to manage possible concerns
- **Helping teenagers stick up for themselves** – five ways to help teenagers stand up for themselves in their community
- **Sticking up for teenagers** – five ways parents and other adults can show support for teens when they're often portrayed negatively
- **Scary stuff teenagers do** – why teenagers experiment with stuff parents may find challenging and how teens learn from these risky experiences, and some practical tips.

If you'd like to get involved, or for the latest updates, follow the #WhenIWasYourAge hashtag on social media or visit www.playfulchildhoods.wales

Teenagers' play needs and why we should care

In this article, social, place and play researcher and practitioner, Claire Edwards talks about her research with teenagers in Wales as part of play sufficiency work, which focused on teenagers' use of and participation in adaptations to public space.

Lacking in funds and seeking greater independence away from home, teenagers are reliant on public space as a free of cost place to hang out with peers. However, a consumer culture can disenfranchise those without money to spend, as is often the case for teenagers.

Consequently, they may not be seen as legitimate users of town and city spaces where the primary concern is economic. As a result, they are often designed out of spaces, ostracised to designated or peripheral spaces and generally expected to be elsewhere¹.

Defensive architecture and prohibitive signage are used to curtail activities such as skating or sitting. These circumstances can lead to a sense of alienation and placelessness, which can inhibit identity formation and socialisation^{2,3}. Peer influence and developing a sense of belonging are critical issues for teens, as teenage brains *'register the impact of social exclusion more acutely'* than adults⁴.



Teenagers' views of play sufficiency

To establish why one Welsh town's teenagers reported an insufficiency of play, site tours and place and play mapping were undertaken with primary and secondary school children. These methods were used to assess, for example, perceived safe and unsafe places and to identify provision that appealed to different ages.

Beyond poor maintenance, teenagers reported issues related to fear of adults and a lack of permission to spend time in public spaces, even though some of these spaces were central and easily accessible. Having established a lack of tolerance towards teenagers' play and an insufficiency of safe, accessible spaces for them, the local authority's play development team and I decided to try and address these issues with an experiment.

We wanted to focus on children's right to play, to participate in a design process, and to highlight that their best interests should be of primary concern in all policies related to our built environment. *Co-creating a temporary space to support the rights of young people* – a practice-based research project – also sought to illustrate children's capacity to provide local knowledge, transform a space to meet their needs, and empower them by increasing their confidence to engage with practitioners.

Nineteen teenagers participated in a series of artist-led workshops supported by a playworker and a youth worker. The teenagers took project participants on a tour of the areas they spent time in within the town centre. They chose to situate the project in the main town square because it was easily accessible and to emphasise their frustration to the community about being historically moved on from it⁵. The location also afforded them some degree of privacy, with trees surrounding the site, and safety due to its proximity to the council offices.

Psychological and social issues were a pervasive and consistent focus during workshop discussions. Teenagers spoke of their need to be in a group to avoid being verbally harangued and of their fears that anything they created would be vandalised.

The group's initial needs were quite simple – somewhere to sit, hang out, shelter and preferably with access to toilets. Apart from the toilets, the other requirements were reflected in the final design – a pavilion*, which included a raised platform with different levels to afford seating and a corrugated roof to provide shelter. The artists, inspired by playwork, also adapted tyres using brightly coloured bungee cord to provide flexible seating. Children and adults used the tyres for playful activities both on and away from the site but during the six-week installation all were returned. The structure, with scaffolding, increased the affordances to play by providing opportunities to climb and swing.

The participants readily took ownership of the pavilion, indicating it held value for them. Despite generalised opinion, the tyres were not permanently removed, nor was the pavilion vandalised. This suggests that developing projects, where the intent is made known to the community and that are 'embedded in the local' may increase levels of ownership and respect for the project⁶.

Understanding how young people use and want to use space is critical

Findings from the local authority Play Sufficiency Assessment and the co-creation project show that meeting the rights of teenagers isn't just about provision, it's about societal change.

By perceiving teenage play positively rather than negatively and recognising that young people want to be welcomed in our public places, not ostracised from them.

Our public spaces should support teenagers' sense of belonging and their healthy development by providing for their social activities and the ways they play. Provision that can support this includes:

- Multiple seating options so teenagers can hang out with friends, jostle, talk and cajole
- Stages and pavilions to provide opportunities to perform – dance, create shows, play music, as well as space to retreat
- Structures that support physically challenging forms of play – parkour, climbing, acrobatics and physical fitness
- Different topographies to support activities like skating and parkour and, for younger teenagers, imaginative play
- Swings, see saws and play equipment to suit their age, and that are large enough to share, like basket and snake swings
- Space for and permission to play informal sports and games, such as chessboards and ball games.

This article is edited from a blog post published by Ludicology in December 2021.

References

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² Tuan, Y. (1977) *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

³ Freestone, R. and Liu, E. (Eds.) (2016) *Place and Placelessness Revisited* (1st ed.). New York: Routledge.

⁴ Blakemore, S. J. (2015) *Sarah-Jayne Blakemore on Teenage Brains*, The Life Scientific, BBC Radio 4, 24 March, 09.00. www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b05mnr29

^{5,6} Edwards, C. (2017) *Cocreating a temporary space to support the rights of young people*. Arts Council of Wales: Oriol Wrexham.

* *Platform for the Magical Recovery of Community – named by artists Simon and Tom Bloor due to the strong sense of community among the project participants and their altruistic attitude of inclusivity*

RPlace too!

A new app that allows children and teenagers to rate and help improve communities has been developed by the National Centre for Population Health and Wellbeing Research (NCPHWR) team, alongside Play Wales.

Research undertaken by NCPHWR projects, ACTIVE and HAPPEN, shows that children and teenagers report that they want to be active in their local communities, but they feel there is a lack of facilities that they want, they cost too much or that they feel unwelcome to spend time in these spaces. As well as this they say there is too much traffic, too much rubbish and that sometimes they don't feel safe.

In response to these findings, ACTIVE has recently been co-developing, alongside teenagers, a mobile app which can be used by children and teens to review their local neighbourhoods. The app has been developed in collaboration with Play Wales.

The app aims to give children and teenagers a voice to make change to their local communities to overcome the barriers. Using the app, children and teenagers can review their local areas to help empower them and advocate for their wants and needs to help make changes to the places they live, play and go to school. It allows children and teenagers to get involved in mapping their community by letting them rate, recommend, upload photos and add locations of places they want to see change happen.



Once the app has been downloaded, reviews can be added in six different categories:

- play/physical activity
- green spaces
- pollution/clean
- safety
- meet friends
- accessibility.

Local communities are important contributors to a healthy childhood. In particular, access to green space, active travel infrastructure, opportunities for play, physical activity opportunities and safety have been linked to better wellbeing and mental health. Older children typically spend a large proportion of their time within their communities due to lack of independent mobility, so, local community design is significant in supporting their mental health.

Momentum is gathering for calls and guidance around involving children in community planning policy and practice. However, this momentum has yet to be facilitated by existing research methods.

Play Wales is committed to ensuring children's views about their spaces are gathered and heard. But, developing an app is not a quick or simple task. We are looking forward to supporting the next phase of development which includes working with an intern to establish and support teams of children to rate their neighbourhoods in a meaningful way, so that we can capture information beyond places children favour and enjoy spending time in.

We will also be working with NCPHWR to identify the best ways to generate local reports and data with local councils, police and other bodies which have the power to act and enhance communities, making them better spaces for children and teenagers to play and hang out in.

RPlace has been designed and developed by Suad Ahmadieh Mena, a software engineer and Swansea University graduate. Suad said:

'I designed it to be a user-friendly fun app that allows young people to express their views on a familiar, easy to use digital platform. It is a perfect way for young people to communicate their views in a way that suits them and share information on the places that are important and relevant to them.'

Lead researcher for RPlace, Dr Michaela James added:

'RPlace can help empower young people and advocate for their wants and needs. The data gathered will be shared with decision-makers across Wales to help improve an area's safety and show just what young people value and what they would like changed.'

Abbie, aged 15, said RPlace was a great way for young people to share their feelings about their communities:

'The app is really useful for solving problems by identifying where people use drugs and alcohol in the area. It also helps highlight good parts about the area and those that need work and what can be done.'



Fellow RPlace user Lucia said:

'It is really fun to use. I would use it to highlight issues round climate change and for pointing out areas that should be left alone.'

And Ali added:

'It's a great app for young people to get their voice heard and improve local facilities.'

Director of Health and Care Research Wales, Professor Kieran Walsh added:

'Research that is taking place through apps like this one is vital in ensuring young people are heard when it comes to their health and wellbeing needs. The RPlace app is a fantastic tool which will inform and improve services and spaces for children in Wales.'

The RPlace app is available to download for free on Android and Apple devices.

For more information about RPlace, including how to use it, visit the HAPPEN website:

www.happen-wales.co.uk/rplacesteps/

About NCPHWR

The National Centre for Population Health and Wellbeing Research studies ways of improving young people's lives. Its ACTIVE (Active, healthy Communities through Teenagers Voices and Empowerment) research project strives to engage with children in an innovative way and is informed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child using Article 12 and Article 15 explicitly.

**Canolfan Iechyd y Boblogaeth
Centre for Population Health**



**Canolfan Cenedlaethol ar gyfer Ymchwil ar Iechyd a Llesiant y Boblogaeth
National Centre for Population Health & Wellbeing Research**

www.ncphwr.org.uk

Making space for girls

Make Space for Girls campaigns for facilities and public spaces for teenage girls. Here, Susannah Walker, who co-founded the charity, discusses how planning for the needs of teenage girls will help them feel a better sense of belonging in public space.



People who design and build parks don't think often enough about play for teenagers, but within that there is one group whose needs are almost entirely ignored, and that's teenage girls.

The problem is set out in all too many play and green space strategies, which define facilities for teenagers as being 'Multi Use Game Areas (MUGAs), skate parks and BMX tracks'. These areas are almost entirely used by boys. Which isn't to say that girls don't want to play football or skateboard, but for a whole heap of reasons, including their design and the behaviour of the boys who do use them, they don't often get a look in.

Make Space for Girls was founded not just out of a burning sense of injustice, but because the current situation goes against the law. Co-founder Imogen Clark, a solicitor for many years, pointed out that under the Public Sector Equality Duty, any public

body must proactively consider how any decisions they make may impact on disadvantaged groups, and how to redress those inequalities. The duty was created under the Equality Act 2010.

We identified clear-cut discrimination, and councils are legally required to consider it. On that basis, we had a campaign, and Make Space for Girls – after quite a bit of research – came into being.

Our work is focused on the need for parks and other public spaces to be designed with teenage girls in mind. This isn't about painting things pink or telling girls to be more confident. We want landscape architects, councils, developers and equipment manufacturers to plan teenage spaces which are more creative and inclusive and so work for everyone – including the very many teenage boys for whom the current provision isn't working either.

This matters for a whole host of reasons apart from just the law. Inactivity in teenage girls is a serious health problem, with teenage girls consistently less active than teenage boys, but somehow this is never connected with the fact that they have nothing to be active on. Their mental health is worse than that of boys, and it's proven that going out into green spaces improves wellbeing.

There's also a fundamental question of social justice. To be in public space is to be part of the community,

but all too often our places tell teenage girls that they are not welcome. And that's a lesson they learn for life.

Most importantly of all, teenage girls have a right to play. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child includes everyone under the age of 18, but older girls are often forgotten. One problem is that teenage play, to adults, often looks like 'loitering' or 'hanging around', something to be stamped out rather than encouraged. But this has to change.

How can we create spaces in every town and city which allow teenage girls to play?

The good news is that we have some answers from abroad – projects in Austria and Sweden show how design can create spaces which work for teenage girls.

Einseidler Park in Vienna is a large urban space with play areas, but researchers noticed that girls were passing through without ever lingering to play. So, some small interventions were introduced – hammocks and wooden structures which could be seating or performance areas – and the girls started to use the park more.

The researchers talked to the girls about what the issues were and then altered the space. In particular, the MUGA was made much less enclosed, with more entrances and one wall of fencing separated off, so that it felt safer for the girls. The pitch area was also divided into two by a multi-use concrete structure so that a game of football didn't have to dominate the entire space. Girls used the space more and stayed for longer.

Rösens Rodda Matta in Malmö took a different approach, creating a small urban park as a co-design project with a group of girls. The resulting space contained a stage, a climbing wall and exercise bars, and was also broken up into different areas to prevent one group dominating the space.

From these projects and others, it's possible to see common themes around changes which can make parks and other public spaces more welcoming to teenage girls. These include:

- Offering a range of smaller spaces, social seating, exercise bars and swings
- Improving safety with better lighting, good sightlines, making sure paths have no dead-ends and putting facilities in well-frequented areas
- Providing facilities, such as public toilets.



These are all great and important, but even so they wouldn't be our number one recommendation. The most important thing we need to do to improve inclusivity is to talk to teenage girls.

This matters for so many reasons. All parks are different and so are the needs of their users. You could build the perfect park, but if teenage girls have to cross a dual carriageway and then use a dodgy underpass to get there, it's a waste of money. Teenage girls are experts in their local areas – they know where's safe, they know what they like and how it could be made better. Engaging with them takes time and effort, and it means listening to and respecting the voices of teenage girls, something which as a society we are not used to doing. But it can change everything.

What's also important is that these ideas make parks better for everyone. A safer park with better toilets for example benefits women and older people too. Creative, more playful and more inclusive spaces work for all teenagers. But most of all they address an injustice which has been hiding in plain sight. It's time to make space for girls.

www.makespaceforgirls.co.uk

Community Play Ambassador project

Community Play Ambassadors is a Play Wales partnership project funded by the Healthy & Active Fund. As we enter its final year, we reflect on the implementation of the project during the COVID-19 pandemic, following an independent evaluation.



As we've previously reported, the project aims to prepare young people, aged 14 to 19, to become 'play ambassadors' in residential areas across Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan.

The vision is to enable the Play Ambassadors to support neighbourhood-based interventions to increase opportunities for playing through:

- Providing playwork training for young people (aged 14 to 19) to add capacity to the workforce
- Supporting playwork trained young people to act as Play Ambassadors in their areas
- Recruiting residents and other key stakeholders to be local Play Champions
- Working with Play Champions and other local stakeholders to form Neighbourhood Play Networks.

These initiatives combine to influence opportunities to play for children in their neighbourhoods. The Neighbourhood Play Networks are intended to enable connections to be made between residents, community organisations, schools, parents and children with a view to making sustainable opportunities for play using streets, formal play settings (such as playgrounds), parks, and school grounds out of hours. This will make whole neighbourhoods more playable and play-friendly.

The project seeks to remove barriers – both physical and psychological – to play. Specifically:

- Physical barriers – traffic, time and available space
- Psychological barriers – adult/parent attitudes, fears and values.

Partners in the project and members of the project steering group are:

- Addysg Oedolion Cymru | Adult Learning Wales
- Cardiff Council Children's Play Services
- Re-Create, Cardiff and Vale Play Association
- Vale of Glamorgan Council Healthy Living (Sport and Play Development)
- Cardiff and Vale University Health Board/Public Health Wales Local Public Health Team.

Challenges

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the imposition of the national lockdown in March 2020 had an immediate and detrimental impact on community activity and service delivery across the country and has in turn impacted on the delivery of the Community Play Ambassador project.

A substantial part of the project's original focus was to improve children's physical activity levels, general wellbeing and connectedness to their neighbourhoods through increasing the opportunities for outdoor play. This aspect was severely curtailed by the impact of homeworking, home schooling and prohibitions against meeting in outdoor spaces during successive lockdowns through most of 2020 and into much of 2021.

The impact on the Community Play Ambassador project has inevitably been delays caused by adaptations needed and on the delivery of playwork training to young people, as well as the participation of significant numbers of children and families in planned community play sessions. For example, the number of community-based play sessions taking place decreased in summer 2020.

However, the project responded to these issues by:

- Adapting training to be delivered online – with acknowledgement of the additional time taken to prepare and assess learners' work
- Delivering all ambassador induction and mentoring and other activities online
- Migrating Neighbourhood Play Network development online
- Sharing, through local partners, Play Wales home-based play activity packs for children in target areas and other resources for parents to engage in play with their children during lockdowns.

Successes

Despite the negative impact of the pandemic on the project delivery, the independent evaluation has identified a range of project achievements. These include:

- Positive influence on young people's career choices going forward with eight of the nine respondents aiming to go into child-focused

subject areas – playwork, primary school teaching, child development – and some have gone on to volunteer in their neighbourhoods.

- Training participants discussed how the course content had helped raise awareness of the value of play for health and happiness.
- Participating in the Neighbourhood Play Networks (even without training), also raised awareness of the value and importance of play both for children's development and for community cohesion. The networks raise awareness of the value of community support for play.
- The networks developed best where there is a seed corn of support in a locality – some key local people or organisations to drive the ideas forward, and a concern for children's wellbeing.
- Local play sessions in new areas have brought out new play advocates who can be encouraged to be involved with Neighbourhood Play Networks.

Some partners and participants were concerned that the 'unpredictable and inconsistent' rules around social mixing made the project difficult to implement practically in some parts. As restrictions started to ease and more events and facilities were provided outdoors, some parents 'policed' their children's interactions out of fear of COVID-19, hindering their participation in play activities provided for them as part of this project and others.

Some parents in rural areas, particularly, have been impacted negatively by the psychological effects of the pandemic and have been initially fearful of allowing their children out to facilitated play sessions. Although restrictions relating to the pandemic impeded the development of the project and delayed activity and meant a loss of initial momentum, the evaluation found that Play Wales, partners and many participants were able to find ways to adapt to circumstances.

Looking ahead, Play Wales is excited to prioritise the establishment of community-based Neighbourhood Play Networks during the final year of the project. We will concentrate on establishing the concept and role of Play Ambassadors of all ages. The Play Ambassadors will be well placed to campaign for play as a policy issue and communicate between local authorities, local organisations and funders.

Play Ambassadors feedback

'I'm now more aware of play spaces and how suitable they are and also how adults around are impacting on the play.'

'It has made me think more about what could be improved in my local area for children's play.'

Workforce development

Understanding play sufficiency

Train the trainer course

Play Wales recently commissioned Ludicology to develop new training resources for local authority Play Sufficiency Assessment (PSA) lead officers to use in engaging stakeholders in the process of conducting PSA's and action plans.

In February 2022, Mike Barclay and Ben Tawil ran three online train the trainer sessions for PSA leads to support them in running the course locally.

The new Understanding play sufficiency course is based on the principle that successful partnership working in respect of play sufficiency relies on developing a shared appreciation of the Play Sufficiency Duty and the work involved in protecting and improving favourable conditions for children's play. The training aims to support and accelerate that process by providing policy makers and practitioners with opportunities to work together, exploring their collective responsibilities in respect of the duty.

The course is intended to be of value to anyone involved in the play sufficiency process but has been designed with a focus on developing strategic partnerships that can support the assessing and securing elements of the duty. It has been developed in response to findings and recommendations from the Play Wales commissioned research, *Making it possible to do Play Sufficiency: Exploring the conditions that support local authorities to secure sufficient opportunities for children in Wales to play.*

Representatives from 16 local authorities took part and Play Wales will be offering support for authorities wishing to run the course in future. The course is supported by comprehensive bilingual resources that will be available to PSA leads and includes slides, workbooks, participant information and delivery notes.

The course is broken into three sessions that can be delivered either face-to-face or using online meeting platforms:

Session 1: What is Play Sufficiency?

Introduces participants to the principle of play sufficiency, making them aware of the scope of the duty and the many issues that influence play sufficiency, and therefore why they need to be involved.

Session 2: Account-ability

Focuses on developing the ability of adults to account for the realities of children's everyday opportunities for play and the ways adults have influence on children's opportunities for play.

Session 3: Response-ability

Focuses on developing the ability of adults to take action in response to both play sufficiency and insufficiency, encouraging a 'What if?' approach and exploring what needs to be in place to make responses possible.

During the early part of 2022, Play Wales was involved in judging two sets of sector awards – the National Playwork Awards and Social Care Wales Accolades.

At a time when the sector has been stretched to breaking point due to the pandemic, a chance to stop, reflect and celebrate the sector is important and demonstrates to funders, the public and policy makers the value of provision.

It's awards season!

In March, the National Playwork Conference in Eastbourne once again played host to the National Playwork Awards. There was good representation from Wales with Siôn Edwards from The Venture, in Wrexham, compering the Awards on St David's Day. Congratulations to Simon Bazley from Playful Futures, who won the Training and Mentoring Award and to Torfaen Play Service for securing the Covid Response Award.

April saw the ceremony for Social Care Wales' Accolades take place at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama in Cardiff. Nominations were open for those working in playwork, early years and childcare. It was great to see out of school childcare getting recognition for playwork and our congratulations go to Rebecca Bennett and Gwen Vaughan for high commendations. The Accolades also celebrated the 2021 Care Stars where Joanne Jones and Julia Sky from the Vale of Glamorgan play team were recipients.

Spotlight on ... local authority Play Sufficiency Lead Officer

In each issue we talk to a professional in the world of play and playwork to provide an insight into the diversity of the workforce and the job roles that are out there.

For this issue, we spoke to Gareth Stacey – Wrexham County Borough Council’s Assistant Team Lead – Play and Youth.

Can you tell us a bit about yourself and how you got into playwork?

As with many playworkers in the field I fell into playwork whilst studying at university by taking up a seasonal, summer holiday playwork position. The training I received, in addition to the experiences I had during that first summer, impacted me greatly. I have been fortunate enough to be working consistently within the play sector for 20 years in a variety of roles across various local authority areas.

What does your role involve?

Ultimately, I have responsibility for both the community youth work team and play development team within Wrexham County Borough Council. The function of my role is both strategic and operational. As a team we deliver year-round and holiday play and youth provision as well as providing development support to communities, schools and organisations to better improve conditions for children’s play. I am the nominated play sufficiency lead for the authority.

What is the most important aspect of your work as a Play Sufficiency Lead Officer?

It is vital to ensure that you engage with the relevant

officers and adults who are able to influence the lives of children to become more playful. Therefore, I feel the most important aspect of my role is being able to identify, develop and maintain relationships with officers, service areas and organisations across Wrexham.

How has your role changed as a result of COVID-19?

Whilst under Covid restrictions our team had to adapt to respond to the ever-changing needs of children, families and communities. The focus of our service changed somewhat and forced us to innovate our playwork practice. We worked with the most vulnerable families during that time providing support and advice, however we strove to ensure that we were not neglecting the impact the pandemic had on all children in Wrexham.

Is there anything you find challenging about your job?

Thankfully, Wrexham has a strong history and culture of supporting children’s play. The established play network is a group of highly experienced and qualified professionals who are passionate about improving the lives of children. However, the most challenging aspect of my role is being able to juggle my attention and support in the most effective way to the numerous fast paced projects taking place – at times, as I am sure with most people, it’s a case of spinning as many plates as you can and hoping they stay up!

New playwork qualifications

Over the last 12 months, Play Wales has been involved in two groups working with other UK playwork organisations to update some current playwork qualifications.

The new Level 3 Award in Transition to Playwork replaces the Level 3 Award in Transition from Early Years to Playwork. The new qualification is being offered by Agored Cymru, City & Guilds and NCFE

Cache and supports progression to competence-based playwork qualifications. The intention of this Award is to provide those with existing level 3 qualifications in care, education or youth work with an understanding of the Playwork Principles and theories that underpin playwork practice. The qualification also aims to cover how applying the Playwork Principles and theories provides a framework that enables and supports children’s play, and their overall development.

NCFE Cache has also recently updated its Level 2 Diploma in

Playwork and Level 3 Certificate and Diplomas. These new qualifications have been scrutinised by the Playwork Education and Training Council for Wales (PETC Wales) and have been added to the qualification list for registered settings. The NCFE Cache qualifications can be funded as part of playwork apprenticeships.

Meanwhile, Play Wales is continuing to work with Agored Cymru and Addysg Oedolion Cymru | Adult Learning Wales to offer the Level 2 Award in Playwork Practice (L2APP) and Playwork: Principles into Practice (P³) qualifications.

Play Cube project

The Vale of Glamorgan Play Development Team wants to support children and families to make better use of neighbourhood spaces and increase opportunities for children to play in their local areas more often.



Following the ongoing success of outdoor play sessions held across the Vale, and with support from local communities, the Play Development Team is rolling out a Play Cube project across the county.

The Play Cube – a 3m x 2m lockable shipping container – is being used to store play equipment and resources, for the Play Team to run frequent inclusive play provision from the site. The first Play Cube has been sited at Palmerston Adult Learning Centre in Barry and is housing specialist play equipment and loose parts play resources, such as fabric, buckets, boxes, rope, tyres, wood and scrap materials of all kinds. Such materials are cheap and accessible and allow large groups of children to play and engage with one another.

The Play Development Team worked with Re-create Scrapstore to run Family Loose Parts Play sessions. This allowed the team to engage with residents to consult on where and how in the neighbourhood the cube could be used. Residents have been extremely supportive and provided helpful tips that will help make the project a success.

Re-create is a charity based in Cardiff that runs a scrapstore where waste and surplus materials (usually headed for landfill) are repurposed.

Next steps

Two further pilot areas have been identified – Meggitt Road in Barry and Plassey Square in Penarth.

The Play Development Team used its Community Play Provision throughout the Easter school holidays to identify further communities for additional Play Cubes, hoping to focus on areas of social housing and areas where children report less satisfaction with their opportunities to play.

In time, the team hopes to work with and support members of the community to enable communities to make the Play Cube available for children to use in their free time. Longer term, the team also hopes to train and support local community members to deliver their own play opportunities for local children from the Play Cubes.

A similar project, undertaken by Cardiff Children's Play Services, in partnership with Re-create, was reported on in our Winter 2021 Play for Wales magazine.