

# Play for Wales

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Play news and briefing from the national charity for play



**A healthy childhood**



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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)

## Guest Editorial

Leanne was 13 years old when I first met her. She was lying in bed in the children's ward of my local hospital, x-rayed, scanned and blood-tested for the aches and pains that had taken her out of school. 'NAD' was written in her notes – nothing abnormal discovered. But there was a lot that was abnormal about Leanne's life.

Her mother was fraught with anxiety, and her anxiety had overwhelmed her daughter. Teachers had already noted that she still brought Leanne to school and collected her every day, even though they lived close by, that Leanne seemed to have no friends and found all sorts of excuses to stay in at playtime. The nurses told me that Leanne was up and about when her mother wasn't there, but leapt back into bed when she

was. In other words, Leanne had translated her mother's anxieties into her own, physical symptoms.

What they needed was not a diagnosis, but the space to explore their story, to come to terms with where it had gone wrong and to re-tell it with a different ending. Leanne's mother told me that, as a child, she had been left in charge of her sick little sister while her mother went to the shops. But she had gone off playing with friends and when her mother returned the baby was dead. She had been banned from playing from that moment on. Play was dangerous and she would protect her own children from it in turn. She cried as she told me her story. 'I've been cheated out of my childhood,' she said, 'and I'm cheating my daughter out of hers'.

There are three lessons to be learned from that story. Firstly, that play is essential to healthy child development. It is the vehicle through which we form secure attachments, encouraged to take risks and master them within an envelope of parental approval. It is the means by which we make relationships with the outside world, learn how to communicate

with others, to cooperate with them and make compromises. It is the canvas for our imagination, the stage on which we rehearse our role in life and learn to cope with its frustrations. And it is through free play that we develop physical abilities in childhood and lay down cognitive pathways of social competence in adolescence. In short, it is essential to the development of our self.

The second lesson, of course, is that the consequences of not being allowed to play are dire – Leanne and her mother, locked together in a mutual, isolated and suffocating anxiety. And the third, it is our duty as adults to make sure that the child's right to play is realised. Am I optimistic about all that? Yes I am. Because I live and work in Wales, a play-friendly country predicated on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, because our politicians are held to account by organisations like Play Wales. And because few things are irreversible. Leanne and her mother, encouraged at last to play, were able to re-tell their story. And were healed.

**Dr Mike Shooter,**  
Chair of Play Wales



## News

# Support Play Wales

Play Wales' application for funding for the next three years under the Welsh Government Children and Families Delivery Grant (CFDG) has been unsuccessful.

In the letter informing Play Wales of the Welsh Government's decision, Martin Swain, Deputy Director Children, Young People and Families advised Play Wales that the application was not regarded as suitable for funding.

It is widely recognised that since devolution Play Wales has supported the Welsh Government in the development and implementation of its play policy into practice at a local level. With immense regret Play Wales' Board of Trustees has



had no alternative but to issue all staff members with 12 weeks notice of redundancy and unless funding can be secured beyond 30 September 2014 Play Wales will not be able to continue this work.

In response to the funding decision we have established the Support Play Wales campaign. For 15 years we have successfully campaigned for children's play, now we find ourselves in an astonishing position where we have to campaign for Play Wales.

For information about how you can support our campaign visit: [www.playwales.org.uk/eng/supportplaywales](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/supportplaywales)

## Commencement of the second part of the 'play duty'

On 1 July 2014 the Deputy Minister for Tackling Poverty, Vaughan Gething AM commenced sections 11(3) and 11(4) of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010.

Section 11(3) will place a duty on Local Authorities to secure sufficient play opportunities for children in their areas, so far as reasonably practicable, having regard to their play sufficiency assessments. Section 11(4) will require Local Authorities to publish information about play opportunities in their areas and keep this information up to date.

The commencement will be followed by Statutory Guidance to support Local Authorities in complying with this duty. [www.playwales.org.uk/eng/sufficiency](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/sufficiency)

# Leopard Skin Wellies revisited

Play Wales, and the University of Gloucestershire have collaborated on a small scale action research study into the preparation undertaken by a small number of Local Authorities for the commencement of the second part of the Play Sufficiency Duty – to secure sufficient play opportunities.

The research considers progress over the past 12 months after submission of Local Authority Play Sufficiency Assessments with specific reference to Action Plans and how Local Authorities have positioned themselves to respond to the commencement of securing

sufficient play opportunities as set out in section 11 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010.

This is largely a retrospective research study/evaluation and limited by funding but it is also consistent with the 'principled pragmatism' approach that seems to have been adopted by all stakeholders in progressing to the commencement of the second stage of the Duty and this is of interest to this study.

The data collection included:

- consideration of the process of development of statutory guidance
- semi-structured interviews with strategic leads from the case study Local Authorities



- interviews key stakeholders at national level.

The full report will be available in the Summer.

The report from the first research study – *Leopard Skin Wellies, a Top Hat and a Vacuum Cleaner Hose: An analysis of Wales' Play Sufficiency Assessment duty (2013)* is available upon request – email [info@playwales.org.uk](mailto:info@playwales.org.uk) – and the executive summary is available to download at: [www.playwales.org.uk/eng/research](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/research)



# Perry Else

We are deeply saddened to hear that our friend and colleague Professor Perry Else recently passed away.

He was a strong supporter of Play Wales and over the last decade or so we worked with Perry on a number of occasions when he regularly facilitated workshops at our annual Spirit conferences. He was an active member of the Cardiff IPA 2011 world conference Programme Advisory Group that had responsibility for selecting contributions for the conference where he later presented a well-received paper. But most notably was Perry's valued input and contribution as a member of the Scrutiny Group which oversaw the development of the Playwork Principles.

We also worked alongside Perry in his role as Communications Officer for the IPA EWNI (England, Wales, Northern Ireland) branch, and more recently when he was elected as Chair.

In 2013 we celebrated with Perry when he was awarded the title of Professor of Play Studies by Sheffield Hallam University in recognition of the significant contribution he made to the playwork profession in the UK and abroad over the past fifteen years. Perry had joined academia in 2005 and was the course leader for Children and Playwork at Sheffield Hallam University.

Perry was a regular contributor to industry publications but his most well known works are based on ideas from the Play Cycle (Sturrock and Else 1998) and the Integral Play Framework (1999); he was also the author of *The Value of Play* (2009).

As an associate of Ludemos – the home of therapeutic playwork – Perry organised the annual *Beauty of Play* outdoor conference since 2003.

At Play Wales we will miss Perry. His passing will leave a significant gap in the play and playwork sector.

# Spirit Ride 2014

The Spirit Ride 2014 took place in May with seven riders cycling over 200 miles from Holyhead to Cardiff over two days, finishing just in time for our annual Spirit conference.

The ride included over 4000 metres of ascent following much of the Lôn Las Cymru National Cycle Network route and took in the National Parks of Snowdonia and Brecon.

This year the team raised money in memory of two of our dearly missed colleagues from the play sector in Wales: Gill Evans and Nick Waller. Gill was the Communications Manager at Play Wales until her death in

2011 and Nick worked as a play co-ordinator in Powys and passed away very suddenly in December 2013. He worked closely with Gill to organise the Playworker's Forum camp that took place before the International Play Association conference held in Cardiff in 2011.

To date, the Spirit 2014 cycle ride has raised just under £1000 for the Nick Waller Memorial Fund, in both of their memories, to fund playdays and other play events for children in Wales.

To donate through Just Giving please text NWMF22 and an amount to 70070.

[www.facebook.com/spiritride2014](http://www.facebook.com/spiritride2014)

# Have a Field Day 2014

Have a Field Day is a great way of getting people outdoors and having fun. Run by Fields in Trust, it brings communities together on Fields in Trust protected sites. Last year over 30 events took place across Wales. Wepre Park in Flintshire is one of the sites that held an event last year and is holding another in 2014.

They worked in partnership with many local groups and stakeholders to provide a day with a huge range of activities for local people. From wall climbing, water slides and craft workshops, the range of activities you can get involved in on a Fields in Trust site were shown in all their glory.



If you want to get involved this year you can put your postcode into the Fields in Trust website [www.fieldsintrust.org](http://www.fieldsintrust.org) and look for the Have a Field Day rosette to find an event happening near you.

Or why not organise your own? Visit [www.fieldsintrust.org/family\\_day.aspx](http://www.fieldsintrust.org/family_day.aspx) for more information.

# Project Wild Thing – community screenings



RECONNECTING KIDS WITH NATURE



A grant from Environment Wales for our Wales - A Play Friendly Place project, enabled Play Wales to fund ten community screenings of the documentary *Project Wild Thing*, which promotes the importance of the provision of accessible natural green space in urban and semi-urban areas by showing how this supports children to play. We developed community screening packs which include various resources to support discussion and promotion.

Several of the screenings held outdoor events with children and families as part of their events, which supported greater awareness raising.

The screenings have galvanised support and identified local volunteers who have agreed to work together to identify local solutions which will enable more children to access the outdoor environment.

Professionals who attended the community screenings have been in contact with Play Wales for information on how they might use the film to increase awareness in terms of health, wellbeing and the environment.

Chantelle Haughton, Lecturer and Teaching Fellow at Cardiff Metropolitan University, said, 'We were delighted to work in partnership with Play Wales to stage a community showing of *Project Wild Thing* on campus. The event provided opportunity for a synergy between a number of stakeholders from different generations and disciplines within our "University community"; lecturers, researchers, practitioners, teachers, parents, grandparents and local school children came along. The documentary ... stirred up thought and debate about a range of experiences and perceptions'.

[www.projectwildthing.com](http://www.projectwildthing.com)

'That's what we do at our Wednesday club, go out into nature. I didn't used to like it before; now I even like mud and finding out about trees and creatures around us, the sound of the birds makes me feel peaceful. I'm glad my mum came today, we need to take my little brother out to the woods.'

**Mohammed aged 9  
whilst watching the film**

## New risk-benefit assessment form

Commissioned by the Play Safety Forum and written by Professor David Ball, Tim Gill and Bernard Spiegel, with input from the Health and Safety Executive, the new risk-benefit assessment form is a short guide on implementing risk-benefit assessment (RBA) in play.

### Purpose of the form

The form is designed to support a balanced approach to risk

management using the process of risk-benefit assessment. It aims to make the recommendations in *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation guide* more accessible and easily implemented by people involved in the everyday creation, maintenance and inspection of where children play.

### Who's it for?

It is aimed at those involved in

## play safety forum

providing play opportunities in a range of contexts, including play areas, public parks, green spaces, out-of-school childcare settings, playwork settings, schools and early years services.

The form is available to download at: [www.playwales.org.uk/eng/managingrisk](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/managingrisk)

# An interview with Vaughan Gething

Back in June we spoke to the Deputy Minister for Tackling Poverty, Vaughan Gething AM about his own childhood, the importance of children's play and commencing the Duty on Local Authorities to secure sufficient play opportunities.

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

Playing with my brothers and friends. What I remember most is that most of our play was outside. Although we did a lot inside too – we played board games like Monopoly. There was quite a lot of play – we had a fairly large family.

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

Playing sport; we'd play football and cricket in the garden, or when we got too big for the garden we'd go down to the local village green.

## **Nowadays, where do children play in your community? How does this differ to where you grew up?**

Some of it is different but that's because I've moved. I lived in a rural village and there was a fairly open attitude about children being able – and allowed – to play outside in the street because there wasn't an awful lot of traffic. In parts of my constituency I still see children playing in the street, for example in Grangetown you can still see children playing football or cricket in some of the blocked off streets where cars can't go down and in Llanrumney the 'rec' is very well used. There are differences because

attitudes have shifted among parents about increased traffic and perception of risk and there's been a shift from giving children the freedom to go out and meet friends and play together.

## **Has your understanding of play changed since working with the play and playwork sector in Wales?**

It has because I didn't have the same relationship or contact with some of the organisations but my broad perception of the importance of play and opportunities is still the same. There are some differences in how I see things, in particular the way voluntary organisations organise opportunities for children to play and the way local authorities facilitate some of that and the variance in different parts of Wales.

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

This is about how adults view their children and the perception of anti-social behaviour – unfortunately some people see a minority of young people as representative of a whole group of young people. I think some members of the community see every young person as a threat so I

think it would be healthier if adults had a different perception of the importance of play and opportunities for children to go and do things for themselves but also there's got to be a shift in attitudes particularly for older children. It's about reinforcing the point that having opportunities to play is an important part of a child's development.

## **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?**

It won't receive the same focus as economic poverty because we know economic poverty is such a big indicator of a whole range of other opportunities and for us to try to deal with play opportunities on their own doesn't make any sense. But there is a clear recognition of the importance of play in the development of the child socially, emotionally and for speech and language. Looking at Flying Start, admittedly some of it is structured, but there are play opportunities. There are opportunities to play in the Foundation Phase as well – we recognise that play is part of that learning journey within a structured environment as well as what happens outside.



## What do you think commencing the second part of the 'Play duty' as part of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 will actually mean for children in Wales?

I have just signed the Commencement Order so the Duty will be in place by early July. What has been really positive about commencing these Duties with local authorities right from the outset is the way they positively engage overall. There's been a willingness to try to do this – local authorities have found that being required to look at all the opportunities that already exist within different communities has been helpful. They have a better overview as a result of having to engage with this legislation.

In particular, for the second part of the duty it has been very helpful to have low cost and no cost options so the guidance we've consulted on and will publish will reinforce how those opportunities can and do exist. We know that local authorities are under huge financial pressure but this duty doesn't require local authorities to spend lots of extra money. In some aspects they need not spend any money at all but they could still make a difference in the way that those play opportunities are available for children and young people so I do think the duty will make a difference.

It should and could be a part of Wales genuinely taking a lead across the UK and on a wider international level on reinforcing the importance of play and what we can practically do about it.



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

If you think about where we are now, compared to where we were 15 years ago at the start of devolution, the landscape has changed significantly and for the better. However, there is still more work to do on how we encourage opportunities outside of that structured environment, how adults perceive playing outside, our attitudes to traffic and transportation and open spaces and opportunities for children to go and do things without someone telling them to clear off because they don't like the noise that's being made.

All these things are a balance – you can't have an absolute that children can do exactly what they want at any time of the day but at the same time we don't want to say that every single aspect of a child's life should be controlled and measured because that isn't any of our lived experiences.

**Children tell us that there is increasing pressure on their time to play. 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?

Balance is crucial. A lot of structured and organised opportunities have great benefits for children and young people. But we need to make sure that isn't the only thing we expect children to have an opportunity to do. Going back to my own childhood and being able to play outside with my friends – we'd go and get a cricket set and we'd go and play so that's structured because there's rules to the game but it didn't have anyone coaching and teaching us. It was a choice we were making – we were able to exercise that choice and we enjoyed doing it.

We need a balance so we don't say it's all got to be unstructured, child-led or that it's all got to be led by an adult and organised.



# What did you do today? – Play and Health

This article is based on the Chief Medical Officer, Dr Ruth Hussey's speech at the Spirit conference in Cardiff, 14 May 2014

Do you remember your first favourite playtime? Skipping, climbing trees, building a den... Memories of childhood and play are deep in our memory and are an important part of our identity. We instinctively know how vital play is to a child's development, learning, family life, school friends, and general health and wellbeing.

The rights based approach allows us to emphasise the child's right to play as a primary and desirable end in itself. This commitment to play as a right in itself also allows us to explore the responsibilities towards children that flow from it, as government, but also as local public services, working cooperatively as communities and individuals, to promote and support good quality, safe play for all children.

The health services in Wales use principles of prevention, health protection, and therapy to support play as part of the Welsh Government commitment to play, as one of the seven core aims for every child.

Children's play is by definition self directed, so health services need to promote the circumstances that allow children to play well and safely. Child deaths due to road traffic accidents have decreased enormously over the past 20 years, not just due to advances in hospital management of major trauma, but also from public health approaches such as using information to guide neighbourhood planning to improve road safety.

Action on home safety has been taken. A recent example is to

reduce the risk of children being inadvertently strangled by blind cords. Home safety information and advice given by Health Visitors and Flying Start now informs parents about a new industry standard to secure blind cords, to help them protect their children when playing.

For children to have a choice to play outdoors, they need environments which are accessible, tempting and safe.

Professor Sir Michael Marmot has in recent years summarised the evidence on health inequalities, and has strongly endorsed the importance of play. He has noted how impoverished environments reduce the opportunity for children to play outdoors, and his recommendations include better play facilities.

Childhood obesity information shows that children in poverty are less active and more likely to be overweight. They need safe outdoor environments and attractive open spaces near to their front door to offer a real choice about playing outside. The benefits to the NHS in improving child obesity and overall health are secondary to the main aim of the every child's right to play, but we know that girls and boys levels of exercise start to differ from the early teenage years onwards. We need to encourage non-competitive physical play.

What if kids just want to play computer games or watch TV? We make recommendations to limit screen time for children, because excessive screen time is related to health problems like sedentary

behaviour, obesity, and inadequate sleep. We need to encourage alternative play options.

Are disabled children included in play? Recent findings show that disabled children may have poor vision that goes uncorrected, thus excluding them from everyday activities including play. NHS Wales is working with the Welsh Government School Pupils Eye Care Scheme (SPECS) to ensure that children in special schools have onsite testing and spectacle provision so removing visual barriers to play and interaction.

The role of NHS Wales in promoting healthy play includes:

- providing play specialists in large A+E departments to reduce pain and distress for sick children
- encouraging reading with toddlers through the Bookstart programme
- promoting language and social development through the Healthy Child Wales programme
- promoting mental health through the Talk to Me programme
- ensuring early diagnosis of hearing loss through the new-born hearing screening programme.

None of these services include 'play' as an outcome – but all contribute to each child's experience of play.

It is evident that we all have a role and responsibility to enable children to play.

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/health/cmo/?lang=en>



# Internet access for children in hospital

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states that all children have the right to education, information, play and friendship.

The Internet plays a pre-eminent role in society today, with almost all older children using the Internet for these activities.

General Comment number 17 emphasises that State parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that all children have the opportunity to realise their rights under Article 31 of the UNCRC without discrimination of any kind. Particular attention should be given to addressing the rights of certain groups of children, including children in healthcare institutions.

The General Comment also makes a link between Article 31 and Article 24. It states, 'not only does the realization of the rights provided for in Article 31 contribute to the health, wellbeing and development of children, but also appropriate provision for children to enjoy the rights under Article 31 when they are ill and/or hospitalized will play an important role in facilitating their recovery'. The quality of the hospital environment is important to wellbeing. Prolonged absence from school is acknowledged to affect social functioning and friendships.

The General Comment also recognises the growing role of electronic media. It states, 'children in all regions of the world are spending increasing periods of time engaged in play, recreational, cultural and artistic activities, both as consumers and creators, via various digital platforms and media,

including watching television, messaging, social networking, gaming, texting, listening to and creating music, watching and making videos and films, creating new art forms, posting images. Information and communication technologies are emerging as a central dimension of children's daily reality. Today, children move seamlessly between offline and online environments. These platforms offer huge benefits – educationally, socially and culturally – and States are encouraged to take all necessary measures to ensure equality of opportunity for all children to experience those benefits. Access to the Internet and social media is central to the realization of Article 31 rights in the globalized environment.'

Dr Elspeth Webb, a Reader in Child Health at Cardiff University and Consultant Paediatrician with Cardiff and Vale University Health Board supervised a study of hospital Internet access in children's hospitals and district hospitals with paediatric beds<sup>1</sup>.

The study showed that while most hospitals allowed Internet access to children and young people, this was inconsistent, with some providing Internet for education alone, and varying restrictions were found.

1 Rees, T., Brooks, R. and Webb, E. Internet access for inpatients. *Archives of Diseases in Childhood* 98(9): 746-747 September 2013. Available at: <http://adc.bmj.com/content/early/2013/06/12/archdischild-2013-304453.extract>

Elspeth reports,

*'There did not appear to be any justification for this lack of consistency. In three hospitals patients have to pay for play and socialising, which seems particularly inequitable.'*

*'Hospitals have a duty to protect their paediatric patients, so it was unsurprising that inappropriate use was a concern. However such incidents are rare. Inappropriate use should be a problem to work around, not a reason to prevent access; it would seem reasonable for hospitals to share good practice, with safety advice, combined with controls, a pragmatic way forward for all.'*

*'By denying Internet in hospital, we are compromising access to education, information, friends and play at a time when children are scared, anxious, isolated and often in pain. Providing safe Internet access could help to normalise admissions and minimise the impact of hospitalisation on education and peer friendships. Hospitals need to respond to this change in children's cultural worlds and adapt the environment accordingly.'*

# All we need is play

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As Roman satirist and poet Juvenal put it so memorably, the good life's most important attributes are *Mens sana in corpore sano*: 'A healthy mind in a healthy body.' For our juveniles to achieve this Juvenalian state of grace, all we need is play.

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Let's start with the body – or to be more precise, what's gone wrong with it. A variety of sources state that the UK is facing an obesity crisis: for example, the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, an independent global research centre based at the University of Washington in the US, has found that we suffer Europe's third-highest obesity levels. A variety of competing theories have been formulated to explain the problem (including antibiotic overuse), but surely the crux is an input-output problem: too many calories in, not enough activity out.

Play has a vital role to perform here: hard data show that outdoor play is the most active way for children to spend their days. For example, a recent peer-reviewed University of Bristol study, part of the Personal and Environmental Associations with Children's Health project, worked with a sample of 427 ten to eleven year olds from the local area. The intensity of their activity was measured with accelerometers, while GPS tracking determined whether they were indoors or outdoors.

The researchers found that for every hour spent outside playing with friends, the children did an

extra 17 minutes of physical activity. Unfortunately, this is not the reality for most children in the UK. As Angela Page, reader in exercise and health science at Bristol, put it: 'We found that children spend most of their after-school time indoors and little time outdoors playing with other children, which makes the biggest contribution to the amount of physical activity they get.'

The findings, recently published in the *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, are echoed by North American sources. For example, Mark Tremblay, chief scientific officer of Active Healthy Kids Canada, has described play as the 'overlooked sibling' of the exercise family and vital to ensuring children's physical wellbeing.

Back on this side of the Atlantic, Guy Ker, managing director of Super Camps, the UK holiday childcare provider, said the emphasis on sport over play was detrimental to the nation's health.

'The key is to get children to enjoy being active – and that means having fun playing physical games,' he said. 'When sporting disciplines are introduced too early it puts many children off.'





Once they decide that being active isn't fun, the path to obesity has been set.'

So much for physicalness: what of the mind (and the squishy matter that generates it)?

As the late, Perry Else, professor of play studies at Sheffield Hallam University, noted: 'as brain functions increase, the variety and complexity of play increases – is it any wonder that the animals with the largest brains are among the most playful? There is strong evidence that one reason for the evolution of playing is to develop more efficient brains by enhancing cortical connections; that when we play, the nerve signals our bodies generate create pathways that aid brain development.'

Since play is so important to neural growth, it is hardly surprising that being deprived of it has a variety of negative mental effects.

As Sergio Pellis, professor of neuroscience at the University of Lethbridge in Alberta, Canada, emphasised: 'the growing absence of play experience in childhood appears to be correlated with a variety of psychiatric disturbances and loss of social skills'.

Despite such consequences, over the past 50 years Western societies increasingly have restricted opportunities for free play and replaced them with school and school-like activities. As Peter

Gray, professor of psychology at Boston College, pointed out in his *Psychology Today* blog: 'Children today spend more hours per day, days per year and years of their life in school than ever before. More weight is given to tests and grades than ever before.'

This is leading to higher levels of childhood anxiety, depression and narcissism, he has argued.

So there you have it. For healthy minds and bodies, children need access to free play. Depriving them of it has grievous consequences for them as individuals and society as a whole.

**Written by Rob Parr, a former sub-editor at *Times Higher Education*. He is an associate at A5cend, a fundraising and advisory body that works in partnership with charities including London Play.**

Rob has also written an extended article on the importance of play in the *Times Higher Education*. In the article he notes that 'recreational deprivation has been linked to criminality, obesity and declining creativity' so seeks to address 'why having fun is not taken more seriously'. The article is available on the *Times Higher Education's* website.



# Design in urban settings

with children and nature in mind

By Helle Nebelong



As we become more urbanised – living in towns and cities and spending more individual time in front of screens and smart phones – the provision of natural environments and contact with nature should be part of all governments’ political agenda to ensure that children, young people and their families have access to nearby green spaces and opportunities to play, hang-out and socialise.

Lack of daily contact with nature can be damaging – access to natural environments can greatly contribute to our mental and emotional wellbeing. Stress is one of the biggest threats to public health in our part of the world.

American scientists Rachel and Stephen Kaplan developed the Attention Restoration Theory (ART) theory, which emphasises the restorative benefits of nature. The theory asserts that people can concentrate better after spending time in nature, or even looking at scenes of nature.

They state that we all have two different types of attention:

**Directed attention;** used when we direct ourselves to focus and concentrate on a specific task that requires mental effort – to achieve this we must eliminate unnecessary noises and other distractions that interrupt our concentration. The

human capacity for directed attention is limited; according to the Kaplan’s theory we may suffer with directed attention fatigue if we keep trying to go beyond the limit by trying to solve more and more complex problems. Access to natural green spaces can contribute to overcoming this type of fatigue.

**Involuntary attention;** instinctive, automatic attention which emerges when we are under the influence of nature’s sounds, smells and changes of temperature. We use this type of attention when we are in natural environments or are connected to nature. It demands no special mental effort and it helps to make us calm.

It follows that when we are developing good, sustainable solutions to providing urban play spaces we may need to address some potential challenges to

create an environment that fosters involuntary attention.

In many communities, public playgrounds are becoming more and more artificial with fixed equipment made of plastic and steel placed on synthetic turf and rubber surfacing, which is the opposite of providing natural environments and giving children natural experiences.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states that decision makers should always think about what is best for the child. When it comes to play spaces, what are children’s preferences?

All children, regardless of age, gender, ability, disadvantages and competencies want to take challenges and enhance their skills, which can increase their independence and courage, through play and practice. At the same time it is essential that children are



Play space designed by Helle at a daycare centre in Copenhagen

connected with nature from a very young age. Children enjoy playing with elements such as water and soil and natural loose parts like sand, sticks, stones, cones, leaves, flowers, berries and other natural elements that stimulate the senses and develop creativity. Playing in a natural setting with stones, tree trunks and water encourages children to practice their motor skills, stimulate their senses and it contributes to developing the kinesthetic awareness of muscular movement and position.

As a landscape architect I would recommend the following advice when considering developing a natural play space for children and young people:

- Don't waste the money on fixed play equipment
- Focus on using locally sourced materials, loose parts and plants/shrubs – which can include left over materials
- Use the EN/BS Standards in conjunction with common sense
- Don't over protect children – they have to learn about life through trial and error and experience
- Focus on the play value not on maintenance costs
- Don't choose 'egotects' (designers or architects whose main consideration and aim is the aesthetic value of a space or building rather than play) to design children's play spaces – their design may not be targeted towards children or focus on children's play needs and preferences.

Helle is a Danish Landscape Architect and is internationally recognised as a designer of natural play spaces where children thrive. She runs her own private practice specialising in health design. As president of the Danish Playground Association and European representative in the leadership of Nature Action Collaborative for Children (NACC), Helle is a strong advocate for children's right to play as well as their right to access nature and a healthy environment.

# Play and public health policy

While the benefits of how playing improves general physical health are recognised (*Start Active, Stay Active 2011*), it has been overlooked by mainstream health policy.

Play Wales has called for fundamental public health policy changes which could better support children's play in our response to Welsh Government's *Listening to you – Your health matters* Public Health White Paper which was recently consulted upon.

## Accessing places for health, exercise and play must be easy.

Action is needed to ensure that all children have access to local spaces for play and recreation. Open spaces need to be protected and promoted as good and acceptable places to play and access to them must be better.

## Children's ability to play outdoors locally ought to be promoted.

Residential roads should be reclaimed for play. It should be easier for communities to close their streets for street play sessions. Government should join the National Institute of Health & Clinical Excellence (NICE 2009) in actively promoting urban design that gets children more active, by better enabling them to travel independently and play out on their local streets and neighbourhoods.

## Efforts to improve physical activity and wellbeing in schools should focus on more than just sport and physical education.

A recent Welsh Government Task and Finish Group report on Schools and Physical Activity failed to reference the broad definition of physical activity and rather made a single recommendation that PE be made a core subject. This was a missed opportunity to encourage taking a whole-school approach to physical activity. Schools should be directed to ascertain the feasibility of opening up grounds for unstructured play out of school hours for the benefit of the community.

## Confusion and concerns over health and safety regulations

that are preventing many children from taking part in active outdoor play must be addressed. Half of children polled for a Playday survey in 2008 said they had been prevented from climbing a tree because it is 'too dangerous' (ICM/Playday 2008). Play Wales supports the Health and Safety Executive's statement on the importance of considering the benefits, as well as the risks, when assessing children's play (2012). All those working with children should adopt this holistic approach to risk assessment.

## There is an urgent need to address the negative perceptions of children and young people playing in their communities.

The intolerance of children and young people playing out in their communities is having an increasingly detrimental effect on the health of children. The restriction imposed on children's freedom of movement by the misuse of anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) has contributed to a negative view of children and young people accessing public space and made children less active.

Marcus Longley, Director of the Welsh Institute for Health and Social Care and Professor of Applied Health Policy at University of South Wales, said:

*'The evidence on the health benefits of play is overwhelming, in terms of both the physical and mental wellbeing of children. For many years we have unwittingly and progressively confined children's play, to the point where the benefits of this natural activity are starting also to diminish. Enabling children to do what comes naturally - to play - is now a public health priority.'*

# Playing and the Five Ways to Well-being



In 2008, the UK Government's Foresight project on Mental Capital and Wellbeing commissioned The New Economics Foundation (NEF) to explore the issues around mental health and wellbeing and develop actions for increasing mental wellbeing.

The resulting actions needed to be: evidence based, focused on individuals, sufficiently varied so that people can apply them to their own lives and have a universal appeal.

The resulting 'Five Ways to Well-being' are being heavily promoted by Public Health Wales and increasingly agencies are being encouraged to use the actions for enhancing individual staff wellbeing and applying them to work with their service users.

The five ways are:

**Take notice** – slow down, appreciate, recognise your own and others' talents

**Connect** – meet up, join in, phone a friend, listen

**Be active** – get up and have a go, walk, run, cycle, dance, sing

**Keep learning** – try something new, have a go, ask how, where and why

**Give** – share what you have, smile at others, volunteer.

Given the adoption of the Five Ways to Well-being by Public Health Wales and other health agencies alongside the five fruit and vegetables a day and 5x60 physical activity as positive health messages, this article considers how playing contributes to the five actions. We know that given time, space and permission children will play. We also know that playing is crucial for children's mental wellbeing, but how does it link with the five ways?

**Take notice** – When children have time and space for play, they will engage with their environment in a range of ways. When children are playing they take notice of their environment, and through playing, engage with it and adapt to it.

**Connect** – Playing has a central role in creating strong attachments to both people and places. This means that children not only connect with each other but also with adults in their environment. Equally important, they also create strong connections with the places that they live and play.

**Be active** – Increasing evidence shows that playing is the most effective way to get children physically active. All children play, whilst not all children wish to participate in sport or more structured physical activity.

**Keep learning** – Playing allows children to learn in their own way and interact with new and novel concepts in a way that is not stressful. Through experimentation, interaction and adaptation children continue to learn through playing long after formal teaching and learning has ended for the day.

**Give** – Whilst the evidence gathered by NEF doesn't point as strongly to the mental health benefits of children and young people 'giving', it is clear that children learn how to give and share with others through playing. This involves the negotiation of

shared space, sharing ideas and resources for playing and sharing with each other. For older children who are allowed to play with and around younger children, giving occurs naturally and mutually as they share games, places for playing and nurture or to extend younger children's play.

Responding to children's need for sufficient time, space and permission for play is intrinsic to the Five Ways to Well-being. Children themselves have helped to evidence how playing helps contribute to their overall happiness and wellbeing. In 2011, a comparative study, carried out by Agnes Nairn and IPSOS MORI compared the lives of children in the UK with those in Sweden and Spain, to uncover why the UK was ranked so poorly in relation to children's wellbeing. Using subjective indicators, the study found that children perceived spending time with their friends and family, as well as having fun and engaging things to do, as fundamental to their wellbeing.

The Children's Society has developed a guide for parents on how to support the Five Ways to Well-being with their children. [www.childrensociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/parents\\_guide\\_online\\_final.pdf](http://www.childrensociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/parents_guide_online_final.pdf)

To find out more about the Five Ways to Well-being in Wales, visit: [www.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.wales.nhs.uk)



# Wales a play friendly place

Torfaen Play and Short Break Services provide short breaks (respite) to complex families across the borough through community play clubs, projects linked to schools, therapeutic play sessions and half term and summer playschemes.

A multi agency partnership approach enables Torfaen Play and Short Break Services to support over 200 children and young people with requirements ranging from mild additional needs to complex medical needs and profound disabilities to attend community play provision. By working in partnership with health professionals they are able to offer regular play provision to children and young people who require nurses for feeding and medication. Additionally, by working with physiotherapists daily routines are maintained through holiday periods.

A robust referral process ensures that the specific individual needs of children and young people are identified. Subsequent training is put in place to ensure that the worker has the correct skills and knowledge to provide the level of support needed, which includes training in personal care and feeding as well as training linked to medication for conditions such as epilepsy and diabetes.

By supporting children and young people with disabilities to attend community play provision it benefits the child and the family as a whole. Children and young people benefit from being provided with a rich and varied inclusive play environment which allows for opportunities which promote health and

positive wellbeing as well as opportunities for testing boundaries and exploring risk which encourage social development and learning. Many of the opportunities also foster children's independence and self-esteem and encourage them to develop basic independent living skills.

Increased integration levels within community play provision have also helped to challenge and breakdown stigma associated with disabilities. Integrated play provision allows disabled children and young people to play and socialise with their non-disabled peers.

Gaining the confidence and support of parents and carers has been integral to the integration process. Parents and carers stress how vital the play provision is to allow them to receive respite and to enable them to spend quality time with their other children. A parent/carer forum was created in 2011 to enable parents and carers to share their views and support the sustainability of inclusive play provision in Torfaen.

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. Here is an example of a project that is contributing to developing friendly places for playing children.



*'I am the mum of Benjamin Stevenson who has Down's syndrome and Autism. Benjamin is 11 years old and has been reaping the rewards of inclusive play provision for some time now ... I value the service provided thus providing opportunities for Ben that he enjoys in a safe environment and supported by staff that care and are enthusiastic about what they do. Benjamin has complex needs yet can enjoy what other children of his age enjoy at "After Dark" and "Play scheme" mixing with typically developmentally children and being brought on by doing so, watching and copying their movements. Not only is the service fabulous for Benjamin it provides me with respite which is also valuable time'*

**Alexandra Hills**

# A day in the life of a playwork trainer

We recently interviewed one of our new Playwork: Principles into Practice (P<sup>3</sup>) trainers, Simon Bazley about his experience of delivering the qualification.

## How long have you been a playwork trainer?

As a freelance trainer I've been delivering play training and qualifications, specifically P<sup>3</sup>, for a year. I was developing and delivering continuous professional development (CPD) courses and workforce development strategies prior to that.

## What's your schedule for a 'typical' training day?

No day is ever the same, it's always varied. Although there's a framework of information we need to share with learners I like to mix it up to make it more interesting and responsive to each specific group's needs.

## What's your favorite part of being a P<sup>3</sup> trainer?

Getting as many people to be as enthusiastic as possible about children's play as I am. I enjoy passing on knowledge, learning from all the people we work with, gathering stories about children's play and seeing the distance travelled with the learners we work with. All the P<sup>3</sup> materials are really good and the reflective practice tools and evaluation forms are fit for purpose.

## What's your least favorite part of being a P<sup>3</sup> trainer?

The end of every course. Genuinely the worst part is saying goodbye to all the learners at the end of a course.

## Do you have a playwork training style?

Enthusiastic – I'm quite dynamic. I like to do a lot of participation and involvement. I like to listen to the issues facing the learners in practice and work within the framework of the qualification to develop solutions for them specifically in what they're doing day-to-day in whatever setting they work in.

## How does a typical playwork session go?

It's always different and always fun. I try to start with a bang and keep the momentum up all the way through but without overwhelming the learners so plenty of breaks. The key with P<sup>3</sup> is always love your learner.

# P<sup>3</sup> level 3 FREE engagement events

**10 September 2014 –**  
Cardiff Bay Creative Centre, Cardiff

**11 September 2014 –**  
The Interchange, Old Colwyn

These are the last engagement events in the series and mark the production of a brand new set of Playwork: Principles into Practice (P<sup>3</sup>) learning materials for level 3 trainers and learners. The P<sup>3</sup> Certificate and Diploma handbooks have been written by Richard Trew with contributions from Ali Wood and Di Murray and technically edited by Professor Fraser Brown. They are the most up to date, comprehensive playwork learning resources available across the UK.

The full set of handbooks will be available at the events in September.

## Workshop

According to the National Occupational Standards for Playwork a key part of a playworker's role at level 3 is to contribute to an organisational framework that reflects the needs and protects the rights of children. Part of the process recommended is to consult with children on the most effective ways the setting can meet their rights.

But how do you consult? What is the best way to involve children? If we are consulting with children are we stealing their free time?

Play organisations that are raising funds for children's play will be asked about the ways they are evaluating their work or the evidence they have gathered from children who will benefit.

We will consider the issues of how we can increase opportunities for children to play by supporting the development of freely chosen, self directed play and how we can demonstrate the value and the difference it can make for children, families and communities. We will consider different practical approaches to consultation, and assess how and when playworkers and play organisations can measure and show impact.

Book your place online:  
[www.playwales.org.uk/eng/events](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/events)

# What's P<sup>3</sup> like for learners?

**Name:** Daniel Wheelock

**Occupation:** open access outdoor playworker, Groundwork Bridgend

## Why did you decide to do the P<sup>3</sup> qualification?

Without wanting to sound too idealistic about it, because I think that play and playwork are really important and that it is important that playworkers have a good an understanding of them as possible. I thought it would be interesting and help improve my playwork, which it did, and maybe even help with future employment prospects, fingers crossed.

## What level course did you undertake and about how long did it take?

Level 3, which took about 16 months.

## What in your opinion were the key messages about play and playwork that you've learnt from the course?

I think the importance of reflection, both to understand the play process and your own practice. Also to adopt a child centred perspective on your own playwork, focusing on children's need and preferences. Another is a focus on the play space, how you're involved in creating it and influencing it through your practice.

## How challenging was the course?

### What about the assessment?

The course challenged you to think about play and your practice in different ways. There were quite a lot of different theories and ideas introduced, but you could relate them to your playwork. Similarly the assessments were a lot of work, but a lot of them involved reflecting in depth on your playwork. This made them challenging, but also meant they were relevant to what you were doing, rather than just repeating textbook answers.

## Despite this was the experience fun?

It was enjoyable because everyone on the course was passionate about play and there was a lot of chances to share ideas and discuss things.

## What was your trainer like? How did they deliver the course?

Alex Neill was really friendly and approachable. There was a lot of interaction and variety in how the course was delivered - group work and discussions not sitting and listening. We were given chances to explore ideas and relate them to our own settings.

## Has the course affected your playwork practice in any way? Has it made you a better playworker?

By thinking in more depth about playwork theory and incorporating it into observations of play for the course I think I have been able to use them more instinctively in my practice. Similarly having more terminology and more perspectives on play, gives you more tools to understand the play in your setting and how your practice is affecting it. As a result I think I am a better playworker because I can get a richer understanding of the play going on in our settings and respond to it in my practice.

## Would you recommend P<sup>3</sup> to other playworkers?

I would definitely recommend it, it's important to understand how much work is involved, but it's enjoyable and will make you a better playworker.

## Having completed the P<sup>3</sup> level 3 qualification do you have any plans to study further?

I would definitely like the chance to do more of this type of study, but the reality of funding for playwork being what it is I have no concrete plans at the moment.



# 'An excellent toolkit ...'

We asked Gareth S. Parry, Health, Social Care and Well-being Manager (Gwynedd and Anglesey Partnership Unit) to review our *Use of school grounds for playing out of teaching hours* toolkit.

When I started my previous role as Play Ranger Co-ordinator for North West Wales I quickly realised the importance of schools in providing sufficient play opportunities for children, and was therefore extremely happy to see that Play Wales had published this toolkit.

The preface is well written and includes a brief introduction as to its purpose, and extremely important information on the local and national policy and legislative context that supports the toolkit. One national initiative that comes to the forefront in my opinion is the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools programme that has the opportunity when building new or refurbishing old sites to really consider the content of this toolkit, and make play an important element of all planning and development stages.

A sentence that stood out for me in the preface was 'School buildings, their contents and grounds, often represent the largest single asset of most communities'. In my current role there is a growing need to look at supporting communities to become strong and resilient. I think play can play a prominent part in creating cohesive communities through schools and this excellent publication supports the school community to achieve this.

The remainder of the toolkit is split into two parts, the first summarising the issues to be considered for using school grounds out of teaching hours, and the second provides a range of useful tools to support its implementation.

As you can imagine there are numerous issues to be considered but the toolkit focuses on the most important and also includes useful case studies highlighting best practice. The usual suspects of vandalism, insurance and maintenance are well covered with practical solutions. One element I would have like to see included in the toolkit was support for community groups wanting to establish a constituted play association in their community but realise this may be outside its scope.

The toolkit offers excellent material, all of which being very user friendly, almost to the point of being labelled as *A Dummies Guide*... I state this from a positive perspective as I believe we need to make it as easy as possible to deliver change in this area. The only comment I would offer is that the nine sections could have been arranged in sequential order, that is what needs to be done first, as I believe that engaging with children and the community should be done before conducting an options analysis, though this could become a chicken and egg situation.

All in all I believe this is an excellent toolkit which is clear and concise and provides any school or local community with the rationale and tools to advocate for additional, suitable playing time for children.

The schools toolkit is available to download for free at:

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



Play Development Officer, Rachel Maflin tells us how GAVO in Caerphilly is putting the toolkit to use:

*'We are working with three schools and each has been given a copy of the toolkit. We have found it very useful as a backup for our discussions as they answer many of the questions that schools have about the process.'*

*'Case studies have been particularly useful in showing how the opening of school grounds can be managed successfully ... Overall we have found the toolkit to be a valuable resource which has made our jobs easier. We look forward to continuing to use it further during the development of the projects.'*