

# Play for Wales

Play news and briefing from  
the national charity for play

Issue 60 Winter 2022



## Playful places



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## Thank you

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

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

# Editorial

**In this issue you will find inspirational articles on play practice in hospitals, prison visitor areas, zoos, museums and schools.**

Remarkably, it's ten years since General Comment no. 17 on Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was published in April 2013. The International Play Association (IPA) invited me to be a member of the working group tasked with drafting the General Comment.

I was Children's Commissioner for Wales at the time and in nearly all my meetings with children, in various settings, they spoke to me about their play experiences. How important play was in their lives, the extent adults prevented them from playing outside in particular, and how important play was during the school day.

When we met as a group in Geneva to talk through what

the General Comment should contain, the importance of this opportunity felt exciting and daunting. Exciting because if the UN Committee published the General Comment, it would have the status of an almost legal document providing countries across the world with a set of actions for governments to take to ensure every child's right to play. And daunting because if the UN Committee didn't agree with our draft it would be an opportunity lost. In the end, such was the quality of the work taken forward by the IPA, the UN Committee published the General Comment and it is still held up as a good example in terms of working process and final product.

The extent to which the General Comment has driven government action varies across the world but here in Wales we have seen real progress. There is always so much

still to achieve for children, which is why the Welsh Government took the welcome step of undertaking a Ministerial Review of Play. Given the challenging times for children as austerity continues to take its toll, the importance of emphasising their right to play remains a priority.

It's quite a time to take over as Chairperson of Play Wales but I'm looking forward to contributing as best I can. Many of you will know Mike Shooter and the fabulous way he has chaired Play Wales over the last ten years. Mike has always advocated strongly for children's play. It feels a little odd to be stepping into the role he has held for so long but I'm sure you will join me in thanking Mike and wishing him all the very best.

Play Wales has a great team of staff and a strong Board of Trustees. I'm looking forward to working with them and learning more about the work you do in bringing the right to play alive for children.

**Keith Towler**  
Chairperson – Play Wales



# Ministerial Review of Play report published



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Following an in-depth and collaborative process, the Welsh Government has published the Ministerial Review of Play steering group report. The report presents key recommendations to the Welsh Government for taking urgent action to improve opportunities to play for children across Wales.

## Background

The Ministerial Review of Play aimed to assess the Welsh Government's work with respect to play policy and to inform how the Welsh Government develops and progresses the play agenda. The review considered the progress made in achieving the Welsh Government's vision for play, as put into words in its *Play Policy*.

The review process led to the emergence of six themes, which have been used to frame the report. The themes are:

- Cross-policy working
- Play Sufficiency Duty and funding
- Spatial justice and societal involvement
- The regulation and registration of playwork settings
- The play and playwork workforces
- Play and education policy.

The *Ministerial Review of Play steering group report* provides an overview of the review process and sets out key recommendations that are seen as important to achieve progress. The report is informed by a background paper which provides key literature, reports on the impact of COVID-19 and the rationale for the recommendations.

## Collaboration

From the outset, the Welsh Government took a collaborative approach. The review was managed by the Welsh Government's Play Policy Team within the Early Years, Childcare and Play Division. The Play Policy Team established an internal project board of cross-policy officials which provided overall scrutiny in the early stages of the review.

The team set up a cross-professional steering group of play and playwork specialists, and policy officials from across the Welsh Government and independent academic advisers to support the review.

In the later stages of the review process, the Welsh Government tasked Play Wales with coordinating the writing of the report on behalf of the steering group. During the writing stage, steering group members were invited to provide feedback and further information about the six themes. Play Wales also identified and met with additional stakeholders and policy colleagues to explore the findings and consult on the review recommendations.

## Children's voices

To inform the review, Children in Wales, through its Young Wales initiative, consulted with children and young people about their experience and thoughts on play. Young Wales, in partnership with providers across Wales, undertook 21 online and face-to-face consultation sessions, engaging with 201 children and young people up to the age of 18. Their views are discussed throughout the report and the background paper.

## Recommendations

The report includes 15 key recommendations for the Welsh Government from the steering group. These recommendations have been considered across the six themes and each is supported by a number of suggested milestones to ensure change. This involved more detailed engagement with key stakeholders in each theme, to ensure that all the recommendations are seen as achievable by those who would be involved in implementing them.

The steering group emphasises that there is an urgent need to implement these recommendations to improve opportunities for children's play in Wales.

The Welsh Government has taken a global lead in play through ground-breaking policy development, enactment of legislation and the allocation of funds for play. There is now a real need to maintain this momentum and to build on this work by addressing the issues raised in this review.

## Next steps

We anticipate a response from the Deputy Minister for Social Services, Julie Morgan MS, in Spring 2023. This response will be followed by an action plan from the Welsh Government for making the recommendations a reality.

Play Wales' Director, Mike Greenaway said:

*'We welcomed the decision of the deputy minister to commission the ministerial review in 2019. It demonstrates the continued value and importance the Welsh Government places on opportunities to play in children's lives and a recognition of its role in contributing to leading change.'*

*This review sets out how we can strategically improve opportunities for play with recommendations for the next steps on the journey to making us a truly play friendly country. We look forward in anticipation to the deputy minister's response.'*



## New Chairperson

We are delighted to announce that Keith Towler has been appointed as the new Chairperson of Play Wales' Board of Trustees.

Keith has been a Trustee of Play Wales for a number of years. He was Children's Commissioner for Wales between 2008 and 2015, and more recently chaired the Welsh Government's Interim Youth Work Board. He is a respected children's rights expert with over 30 years' experience in social work, youth work and youth justice roles. He works as an independent consultant.

Welcome Keith

Keith's appointment comes following the retirement of our long-standing Chairperson, Dr Mike Shooter. Mike was appointed Chairperson in 2013 and since then has steadfastly supported Play Wales, supporting the team through many highs and a few lows, whilst sharing a wealth of wisdom, compassion and stories to advocate for children's right to play.

Thank you Mike

To find out more about our Board of Trustees visit:  
[www.playwales.org.uk/eng/governance](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/governance)

## Play Wales events and training

Thank you to all those who joined us for a busy season of free online events over the summer and autumn.

Over 400 professionals and parents joined us for webinars covering topics such as: play for health and wellbeing, building playful communities, planning and designing spaces for teens, building a playful workforce and playful parenting.

We also welcomed friends and colleagues back to face-to-face events with our annual Playworkers Forum in Rhayader in June 2022. The autumn saw us welcome health practitioners to the popular Distraction, pain and guided imagery workshop, held in partnership with Starlight and Dr Bernie Whitaker of Top Down Pain Control.

Many more free webinars are planned for the months to come so keep your eye on our website or sign up to our mailing list to receive details.

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

# IPA Wales



The International Play Association (IPA) is an international non-governmental organisation founded in 1961 to protect, preserve and promote children's right to play.

IPA has a wide and diverse membership with active branches around the world. IPA branches are the basis of a worldwide network and support IPA's international activities and programmes of work.

Until a few years ago there was an IPA EWNI (England, Wales, Northern Ireland) branch. Colleagues in England and Northern Ireland have now established branches in their respective countries and Play Wales is keen to support the same process in Wales.

IPA recognises national representation where 10 or more members agree to form a branch.

In Autumn 2022, Play Wales convened an inaugural meeting of existing Welsh members. The meeting unanimously agreed with the intention of establishing IPA Wales and an Agreement of Association has been submitted to IPA.

In early December 2022, we were notified that the forming of IPA Wales has been agreed and we will soon be promoting membership widely. In the meantime, please contact Play Wales for more information.

[www.ipaworld.org](http://www.ipaworld.org)

# International Play Association World Conference 2023

*Play: Rights & Possibilities*, the 22<sup>nd</sup> International Play Association (IPA) Triennial World Conference is being held at Glasgow Caledonian University from 6 to 9 June 2023.

The conference will examine how the United Nations General Comment no. 17 on Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has impacted policy and practice worldwide, to improve children's right to play and to create possibilities for the future.

Co-ordinated by IPA Scotland, the conference will have five sub-themes:

- Play and the realisation of other rights
- Play and the creation of environments
- Play and the quality of childhood
- Play and children's entitlement to optimum development
- Play and resilience.

As well as keynote presentations, workshops, and posters, delegates can find out about children's experiences in Scotland through a programme of facilitated visits.



As in previous years, IPA World will also announce the winners of the IPA Right to Play Awards at the conference. The programme was created to recognise and celebrate projects that use innovative and practical ways to implement the right to play.

For the latest information about the conference, visit: [www.ipaglasgow2023.org](http://www.ipaglasgow2023.org)

# Giggle Games



Opportunities for play, laughter, and humour are vital ingredients for healthy and happy childhoods.

Sharing humour is also linked to the development of other important skills in childhood, including the ability to understand the emotions and thoughts of other people and to pretend play.

Play Wales has worked with developmental psychologists

at Cardiff University who are interested in the importance of humour and laughter in children's play, to develop resources for schools.

The new Giggle Games resources aim to give teachers and children more opportunities to share humour and play in the classroom. The free, bilingual (English and Welsh) resources and classroom games are for primary school teachers and children in south Wales.



To request the Giggle Games resources for your classroom, please contact Cardiff University: [play@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:play@cardiff.ac.uk)

# Celebrating the anniversary of **General Comment no. 17**

Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) recognises the right of every child to play, rest, leisure, recreational activities and free and full participation in cultural and artistic life.

To support greater understanding of the UNCRC, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child produces General Comments. These are designed to help people understand how the UNCRC works in practice and how policy changes can help more children realise their rights. They are official statements that elaborate on the meaning of an aspect of the UNCRC that needs further interpretation or emphasis.

A decade ago, in February 2013, in recognition of the value it places on children's right to play, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted a General Comment on Article 31 rights. General Comment no. 17 clarifies for governments and others worldwide the meaning and importance of the rights highlighted in Article 31. It stresses that every child should be able to enjoy Article 31 rights regardless of where they live, their cultural background or parental status.

Ensuring that the child's right to play was included in the UNCRC was achieved in part by advocacy from the International Play Association (IPA). In 1979, it produced its *Declaration of the Child's Right to Play* in preparation for the International Year of the Child. A decade later, in 1989, the right to play featured in the UNCRC, which has since become the most adopted international human rights agreement.



Historically, however, the IPA was growing concerned that actions and policy following the Convention had not addressed children's right to play. Determined to address what many had referred to as a 'forgotten right', IPA began the work of requesting a General Comment on Article 31.

#### **To support the case for a General Comment, IPA:**

- Established a group of international cosignatories to the request
- Commissioned a literature review
- Commissioned a Global Consultations Project involving partners in eight nations, which identified major global trends in barriers to children's play.

This work informed the Committee on the Rights of the Child's decision to progress with a General Comment on Article 31 rights. IPA was invited to manage the drafting process.

Perhaps the strongest policy implication of General Comment no. 17 is about legislation and planning. The Committee proposed legislation that

recognises that all children must be given sufficient time and space to exercise their Article 31 rights. In 2012, Wales was the first country in the world to introduce legislation relating to children's right to play. The legislation places a requirement on local authorities in Wales to assess and secure sufficiency of play opportunities for children, through the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010.

Past issues of the *Play for Wales* magazine have highlighted the achievements at local authority level, celebrating and featuring articles that discuss new and experimental responses in accounting and planning for children's play.

General Comment no. 17 also stresses that the rights expressed in Article 31 are related and, while they often overlap and enrich each other, they have distinct characteristics. It provides guidelines for all individuals working with children, and notes situations where opportunities for play, recreation and participation in cultural and artistic life may be limited or denied. It notes that these challenges can be addressed

by supportive and caring adults who create opportunities and places where children can play freely and with confidence.

This issue of *Play for Wales* highlights the efforts being made by institutions and organisations who do not fall within the scope

of the statutory play sufficiency duties and requirements in Wales. It celebrates children having access to playful moments in public spaces, family attractions such as zoos and museums, as well as places of uncertainty like hospitals as patients and as visitors in adult prisons.

The articles celebrate places where children are allowed to encounter a wide range of opportunities to play and where the adults involved understand the nature and importance of all aspects of children's play and work to support it.

## Play as defined in General Comment no.17

- Any behaviour, activity, or process initiated, controlled, and structured by children themselves.
- Takes place whenever and wherever opportunities arise.
- Is non-compulsory, driven by intrinsic motivation and undertaken for its own sake, rather than as a means to an end.
- Involves the exercise of autonomy, physical, mental, or emotional activity and has the potential to take infinite forms (which will change and be adapted throughout the course of childhood), either in groups or alone.

- Key characteristics of play are fun, uncertainty, challenge, flexibility, and non-productivity.
- Caregivers may contribute to the creation of environments in which play takes place.

## Resources to promote Article 31

As part of the celebrations to launch General Comment no. 17, IPA commissioned Play Wales to produce a range of child-friendly resources to promote Article 31. These resources help children and adults understand the key messages of General Comment no. 17 – and remain popular to this day! The resources include a postcard and posters – visit our website to download them.

[www.playwales.org.uk/eng/article31resources](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/article31resources)



## Certain conditions need to be assured if children are to realise their rights under Article 31 to the fullest extent

- Freedom from stress and social exclusion
- An environment secure from social harm or violence and sufficiently free from other physical hazards
- Availability of rest and leisure time, free from adult control
- Space to play outdoors in a diverse and challenging physical environment, with easy access to supportive adults, when necessary
- Opportunities to experience, interact with and play in natural environments
- Opportunities to invest in their own space and time to create and transform their world
- Opportunities to participate with other children in games, sports and other recreational activities
- Opportunities to explore and participate in the cultural and artistic heritage of their community
- Recognition by parents, teachers and society as a whole of the value and legitimacy of Article 31 rights



# Designing for play: creating resilient play spaces



Playspace after re-design

Landscape Designer, Matt Stowe shares his experiences of creating natural play areas that meet the needs of playing children. Matt works for Cartrefi Conwy, a housing association based in Abergele.

Children are at the heart of every community, and play is in the heart of every child. So, when ensuring that play is at the heart of every community, how can we make sure that our play spaces are designed to be as resilient as the children who use them?

For my part, there are three main characteristics. Firstly, a resilient play space needs to be valued by children – a place they love, somewhere they feel safe and comfortable, somewhere that is ‘theirs’. Secondly, it needs to be space that is inclusive to everyone regardless of age or ability, a place that welcomes both grown-ups and wildlife, somewhere that children want to share with both friends and family. Thirdly, it needs to be somewhere that blends into the neighbourhood, like it belongs. Not a sterile, fenced-off play space that looks the same as any other across the country, but somewhere that is unique and bespoke to that community, a place for that community to be proud of.

Sounds easy, right? Well, it can be with a bit of planning, thinking outside of the box, and of course most importantly by involving children in the process!



Playspace before re-design

Generally, there are three different approaches to play spaces: traditional, natural, or a hybrid approach between the two types.

The most common and familiar in the UK is the traditional play space. This is typically a fenced in area, full of man-made equipment and synthetic materials. Because of this, it usually comes with higher initial investment and tends to be tailored to meet the needs of a budget rather than to meet the needs of children’s play. In most instances, there will be specialist maintenance required and ongoing safety inspections for ‘fixed’ equipment that will need to be considered. Play opportunities in the traditional play space are often prescriptive – each piece of equipment has a specific function, for example a swing to swing on or a slide to slide down. Both are excellent for movement play but don’t really offer anything else to children in terms of creative, imaginative and developmental play.





The second, less familiar approach is natural play. This method incorporates elements of the natural environment within the play space. So, if you've ever climbed a tree, balanced on boulders, rolled down a grassy bank or played in the leaves, then you've experienced natural play. On the whole, natural play spaces:

- have lower initial investment – less expensive equipment
- are more resilient to vandalism – the right choice of grass and plants will always grow back
- can be maintained as part of the usual grounds maintenance regime, such as mowing grass and litter-picking
- are tailored to meet the needs of children's play rather than the needs of a budget
- can support biodiversity by being naturally better for the environment.

Now, whether you are a designer or you're employing a designer, it's crucial that an accurate design brief is created from the outset to help guide the design process and make sure that the end result meets the need. This starts with consulting the users – the children who will use the space.

There are a few fundamental steps to help this process and key to this is involving play professionals. Within your local authority there will be someone responsible for play, preferably a team of experienced, qualified playworkers who can help with talking to the children to tease out what's important to them.

Here in north Wales, the Conwy Play Development Team has been instrumental in helping those conversations take place. Combining the friendly faces of skilled playworkers with a structured approach to consultation will get the best results. For me, this is not about asking people what equipment they want, but more about asking what activities they like most (like running, balancing, climbing, exploring, hiding) and what are the most important things in a play space (having trees and plants, spaces for dens, structures, or a dry place to sit and talk with friends). The answers to these questions will provide the designer with an

invaluable insight into what children value the most and how best to design a space for them.

Whatever the design layout eventually looks like on paper, it's essential to incorporate opportunities for creative, developmental play, and wherever possible – risk (managed risk that is!). Try to remember that a play space which doesn't offer risk, is a play space that doesn't support children's personal growth and resilience. Don't be afraid to challenge your designer throughout the process to achieve this.

Nowadays however, even managed risk can make some people nervous, and this is no different in the social housing sector that I work in. The way to responsibly incorporate risk is to include it purposefully and mitigate it as best you can. Fortunately, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has issued a written statement on play that promotes managed risk in play spaces.

Every play space I design is accompanied by a Designer Risk-Benefit Assessment that clearly sets out the risks, what the benefits are, and how serious injury is mitigated. For example, by using irregular shaped, glacial boulders as a climbing structure, children can develop their sense of balance and risk awareness. If we incorporate existing safety design guidelines (from RoSPA for example) and use grass as an accepted safety surface (ensuring that the maximum height of the boulders is no higher than 1.2m) we can mitigate the risk of serious injury should a child fall. We consider this an acceptable level of risk given the child will learn that natural materials behave differently under different weather conditions – such as some boulders might become slippery when it rains. A useful skill to have when walking up Snowdon for the first time!

It's through play that children learn to cope with the world and each other, and I'm a firm believer that our play spaces should reflect this – so go on, create somewhere resilient, and dare I say, risky!

[www.cartreficonwy.org](http://www.cartreficonwy.org)



# Research and experimentation at Chester Zoo

Six years ago, Chester Zoo started a project to improve its provision, practices and policies in respect of children's play. Here, Mike Barclay and Ben Tawil from Ludicology tell us about the work they undertook with staff to evaluate how the zoo environment supports play and to develop guidance for the future development of play.



## LUDICOLOGY

advice, research and training for all concerned with children's play

In 2016, as part of a broader campaign to improve children's experiences of play, Chester Zoo was preparing to re-develop a large space in the centre of the zoo. Staff were conscious that the space designated for development held some existing value for play for children and families. The staff wanted to extend and enhance the play affordances within this space without losing what was already working. Keen to ensure that any developments made were evidence based, we were commissioned to carry out the evaluation based on the zoo's previous knowledge of our work researching children's play and playable space.

Together with the staff, it was decided that any investigation of the designated space (formerly known as Fountains Lawn) couldn't happen in isolation of other provision available across the zoo. Visitors to the zoo were engaging with opportunities across the whole site and as such it was essential that any investigation of a specific site's current and potential affordances for play, be considered in that context. Our investigation took a mixed methods approach – a combination of observation, spatial audits and semi structured interviews. It considered how children, their parents and other adults moved through and made use of the proposed space, the zoo as a whole and other designated 'play spaces' across the site.

The findings from our investigation recommended a range of issues to be addressed by the design brief, developed by Chester Zoo as part of the tendering for contractors who would be commissioned to design the space. These recommendations included:

1. Conserving what was already good about the space
2. Making parenting in the space as easy as possible
3. Creating more distinct spaces and places to sit
4. Maintaining a variety of spaces that offer different opportunities for play
5. Increasing the flexibility of spaces by incorporating natural elements and loose parts
6. Using signs, symbols and signifiers to create a sense of playfulness
7. Creating 'defensible' spaces that balance a sense of security with a perception of privacy
8. Introducing playable features along the edges of paths and other spaces
9. Providing accessible routes enabling those with limited mobility to have similar experience to those of other children
10. Using planting to establish different spaces and create further opportunities for exploration
11. Being sensitive to children's use of the space when supervising and maintaining it.





Throughout the remainder of 2016 and 2017, Chester Zoo implemented the full re-development of the Fountains Lawn, now called the Madagascar Play Space. They also invested both financial and human resources in activities that included:

- play training for zoo staff
- significant capital developments of other designated play spaces
- a range of playful environmental disturbances across the site
- substantial marketing campaigns.

Early in 2018, we were re-commissioned to evaluate the influence of these play interventions across the zoo. We carried out an interpretive evaluation working with zoo staff and visitors (including children and adults), as well as making detailed spatial audits and naturalistic observations of people's use of and engagement with space. The research enabled us to explore what was working for who, why and in what ways, thereby establishing existing strengths and opportunities for further development.

Our research report documented the influence of these play interventions across zoo staff, different user groups and within the various environments in which they took place. This resulted in the development of two models. The first aimed at enabling the zoo to consider future environmental interventions along a continuum of playfulness. The second, representing the range of factors influencing staff engagement with children and their play.

Finally, we were able to make three recommendations for Chester Zoo:

1. Develop a play and risk management policy and associated procedures for implementation, including a framework to support risk-benefit decisions.
2. Continue with a professional development programme that supports staff to develop their theoretical knowledge, practical skills and understanding in respect of children's play.
3. Develop a strategic approach to spatial planning for play, paying particular attention to the playfulness of interventions.

It was an absolute pleasure to work with an organisation so committed to affecting change and improving opportunities for children's play and visitor experience for families. It was also gratifying to establish that all the efforts that the zoo staff made and continue to make are welcomed by both children and adults alike. We were pleased later in 2018 to be commissioned to work with the team at the zoo to develop their Play and Risk Management Policy.

To read more about playfulness at Chester Zoo, visit: [www.chesterzoo.org/news/serious-about-play/](http://www.chesterzoo.org/news/serious-about-play/)

Ludicology supports those interested in play and playfulness to develop evidence-based play centred policies and practices through advice, research and training. This article is based on blog articles which are available on Ludicology's website: [www.ludicology.com](http://www.ludicology.com)



# Play as medicine



Starlight's Head of Play, Laura Walsh, tells us about the benefits of giving children in hospitals opportunities to play and the value of Hospital Play Specialists. Starlight – a national charity dedicated to the protection of play for children in healthcare – is currently supporting some health boards in Wales.

Play is children's normality. Even more than language – which it precedes in their development – play is children's main way to communicate, make sense of the world and engage in their lives. It is a human right for every child. Although it can require additional support to exercise that right, it is our duty as adults to protect and support the conditions of time, space and opportunity for children to play.

Every year, approximately three million children and young people across the UK are admitted to hospital. Children who are sick may require additional support to access their right to play because they are restricted by their illness, disability, or the constraints of their treatment and care.

The emerging findings from Starlight's ongoing (unpublished) literature review on the impact of childhood illness and hospitalisation indicate that these can have severe long-term impacts on the mental wellbeing of both children and their families, but that play can be a mitigating factor against the trauma,



anxiety, and distress of many children's experiences. Our own research and evaluation, undertaken in 2021, show that simple play resources engender calm – that sense of normality – in children otherwise fearfully waiting for treatments and procedures. Console games and virtual reality (VR) can lessen anxiety, reduce pain and, for some children, even remove the need for sedation or anesthetic.

Yet, although play resources and play practitioners within the healthcare system are clearly valuable assets for the NHS, promoting resilience and aiding recovery, our recent research finds that 83% of settings have no budget for play. Of those that do, 70% have less than £50 per year to provide toys, games and materials for all the children in their care.

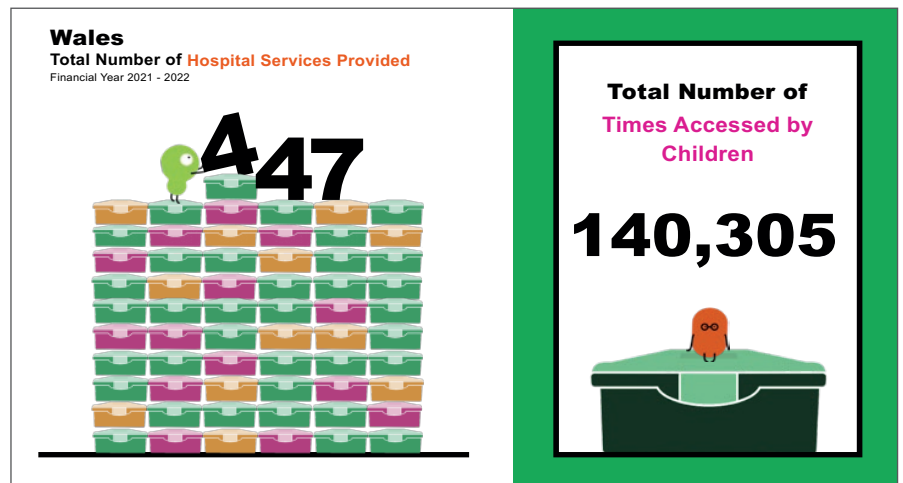
## Starlight

At Starlight, we fundraise extensively to enable the power of play to make the experience of illness and treatment better for children. Our practical services for younger children include toys, games, arts, and crafts – all carefully selected to provide optimal distraction value – and ‘story boxes’ to feed their imagination and creativity. For older children, science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) toys, craft packs, and large portable gaming and sensory units are provided by our teams on application from healthcare staff, at no cost to the NHS. We work with health professionals to ensure children’s emotional, mental, and social wellbeing is supported by play opportunities and play interventions throughout their healthcare journeys.

## Health Play Specialists

Although toys and games are important resources for children’s play in healthcare, we know that it is people, not things, that make the biggest difference. A vital role within the multi-disciplinary teams around children in healthcare is that of the Health Play Specialist (HPS). These are qualified, registered practitioners<sup>1</sup>, dedicated to ensuring that children have appropriate access to time, space, and resources for play during their time in healthcare. A HPS also ensures that playful preparation and distraction is an integral part of children’s treatment. As well as the more general play resources and gaming units for use on wards and in playrooms, we provide vital preparation and distraction tools for HPS’ to use in assisting children through their treatments and procedures.

Well-resourced, well-supported practitioners can better advocate for children to access their rights: to play, to know what is happening to them, and to have a say in their treatment and care. A HPS can assess very quickly a child’s readiness to cope and, through their playful rapport, can identify



strategies to help explain to a child what is happening to them – and what is coming next. They give children as much information as they need about their own health and treatment, at a level of communication they can cope with. Play accelerates relationships, and by offering manageable choices and advocating for them in the healthcare setting, the HPS quickly builds trust and rapport.

## What we have been doing in Wales

As part of our ongoing research, we discovered that one in four settings in the UK that receive Starlight services have no HPS. So, while we are committed to supporting all health practitioners to understand the importance of play and the need to create playful spaces and interactions for children in their care, we also want to help increase the number of these specialised roles, including in Wales.

We have recently secured funding for four HPS posts, and with the support of Play Wales, we scoped what health play people thought and felt were the areas of need. Practitioners generously gave their time to talk about their work: what works well, what they wish they could do more of, and what might be added. Speaking with practitioners working in the community was an all-important part of planning the work, as they see children and families’ experiences firsthand.

As a result of this engagement, we have created two new HPS roles in

Wales, to take on referrals within the community, bridging the gap between home and healthcare. The community-to-hospital journey can be an anxious one and starting the preparation before children step inside the hospital can do much to make it easier and avoid potential trauma.

Working in partnership with the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, the roles are securely funded for an initial period of three years. They will be supported to learn and develop, while extending the health play offer for children and families in the area. We will continue to invest in CPD training for all health play staff, as well as opportunities to share practice at forums and seminars.

In 2021-22, Starlight developed a new strategy for policy and public affairs. Work that, in England, has already begun to bear fruit, with NHS England inviting us to co-chair with them a new taskforce on children’s play in healthcare to explore ways in which the system could be improved. Alongside the HPS programme in Wales, we are beginning to explore the devolved health policy landscape for a similar opportunity. With Wales’ strong tradition in both advocacy and policy for play, we are optimistic that much can be achieved.

[www.starlight.org.uk](http://www.starlight.org.uk)

<sup>1</sup> Article 7 of the European Association of Children in Hospital (EACH) charter: [www.each-for-sick-children.org/each-charter/](http://www.each-for-sick-children.org/each-charter/)

<sup>2</sup> [www.cavc.ac.uk/en/courses/health-care/foundation-degree-in-healthcare-play-specialism](http://www.cavc.ac.uk/en/courses/health-care/foundation-degree-in-healthcare-play-specialism)

# Creating play friendly museums and attractions in Monmouthshire

Karin Molson and Rachael Rogers from MonLife Heritage, and Becky Hall, MonLife's Play Development Officer share their story of aiming to offer the best free play-friendly heritage sites in their county.

We are at the start of our exploration to see if we can create amazing playable spaces and lively, free opportunities for play at all of Monmouthshire County Council's museums and attractions. During 2020-21 and restrictions due to COVID-19, it became evident that we needed to start developing opportunities to play and be playful across our museums and attractions, with the aim of improving wellbeing and giving people something to look forward to in difficult times.

We started to work closely with officers responsible for play locally and helped to create play packs for home to help fill a gap in summer playscheme provision. We also worked at the hubs for children of keyworkers. The more we became involved with other teams, and learnt more about play, the better we understood the Play Sufficiency Duty and the importance of play as a right of the child. We realised the importance of embedding play across our sites and how it could benefit both our visitors and our venues.

Our focus previously had been on formal learning and family learning, not play. We thought we were being playful, but, we were running fixed and family activities. We realised we weren't being inclusive to all ages of children, or as open-ended in what we provided as we could be. We set about exploring how to change this – we participated in play training and awareness sessions, undertook research into play theory and then applied for funding through the Welsh Government Winter of Wellbeing programme. This enabled us to commission Charlotte Derry from Playful Places to:

- Undertake play audits across all our sites
- Facilitate play training for our staff
- Work with Karin Molson to develop recommendations for playful ideas and site interventions.



At Spring 2022 half-term, we started with simple stuff – providing cardboard boxes and other loose parts play materials, putting out chalk, hoops and bouncers (borrowed from the play team) outside the entrance area at Shire Hall Museum in Monmouth. Free play happened and we found passing children couldn't resist coming over – children that hadn't previously engaged with our space.

Funding from the Welsh Government's Summer of Fun 2022 programme enabled us to implement some of the playful recommendations. For example, we:

- put out play equipment in the grounds of Abergavenny Castle
- set up a life-sized Play Shop in an old shop space at Caldicot Castle – offering potions, dragons and spells to play with
- set up some challenge games connecting to our stories, including racing like horses and throwing toy salmon through leaping salmon nets at Chepstow Museum.





We have gathered extensive feedback from the young people and we know things have been working. We also watched some wonderful moments of extended self-directed play. It hasn't just been young ones, teenagers have been playing too, including a group who stayed for two hours and did every single play prompt and challenge through the museum. And, despite some initial reservations about noise and safety and the impact on older visitors, our visitor staff have generally been eager to report how things are going and to suggest improvements or additions. They've been overjoyed that families are staying longer at venues, and that there is more laughter.

Parents have said they are relieved at the realisation that our museums and attractions are places where children and families are welcome and can make a noise. One parent told us that she managed to read the displays and had time to wander the museum as her children were so engaged. Staff reported that there seemed to be more confidence to play when invited to do so by the play prompts. Whiskey (our toy dog at Abergavenny Castle) has been taken for many walks all over the museum!

*'We weren't aware of your other museums and attractions and now intend to visit them. We hadn't seen the museums as play friendly before, and hadn't visited at all.'*

Parent, Summer 2022

It's been a lot of extra work with little additional resource but lots of dogged determination! Putting some of the strategic recommendations in place has worked. For example, we have written a brief guide to play in our museums (the why and how we are doing it), so that expectations of the front of house role and play are clear. We also invited feedback from our front of house staff about the new play interventions:

risks, what works well, what doesn't, how things could be improved, and encouraging them to suggest new ideas for play.

Our initial work has shown us that with continued time and effort we might just become some of the best sites for children and teenagers to visit and play! Future ideas include a games and dressing up hangout or cafe for teenagers at Shire Hall and for the Play Shop to continue to change, with children in charge, creating and making things to sell, price up and play with.

The strategic and practical recommendations from the play audits are now integrated into the council's Play Sufficiency Action Plan. We feel we are now very much sharing the responsibility for making a play-friendly Monmouthshire. We encourage any museum to get involved in supporting the Play Sufficiency Duty and for officers who manage play sufficiency to reach out to museums and attractions and get them more involved in their work. If we can do it, anyone can!

*'The benefits of play have seen increased footfall to our sites, endless self-led entertainment and further exploration of our collections and history. It feels particularly important at this time of increased financial hardship that the activities are free of charge. Feedback has been very positive and through this, good news spreads, which will make our sites and services more resilient for the future.'*

Tracey Thomas, Workforce Development and Heritage Attractions Manager, MonLife

[www.monlife.co.uk/heritage](http://www.monlife.co.uk/heritage)

[www.playfulplaces.tumblr.com](http://www.playfulplaces.tumblr.com)

  
Ar gyfer meddwl, corff ac enaid ein cymuned  
For the mind, body and soul of our community

# Prisoners' children design outside play area

In this article, G4S' Invisible Walls Family Services team members, Hayley Morris (Senior Manager) and Julie Williams (School Zone Coordinator), tell us about the development of a new family area at HM Prison and Youth Offender Institute Parc, Bridgend.



Every week at HMP Parc an average of 350 children will visit their fathers to undertake family interventions or carry out a social visit. Some of these children and young people will visit the prison over many months and years from across south Wales and further afield.

Invisible Walls Family Services has been working closely with prisoners and their children in targeted interventions since 2010. Research indicates that maintaining close family relationships helps reduce intergenerational offending, as well as reducing the likelihood of fathers reoffending. It also promotes social inclusion for the family unit.

From Spring 2023 onwards, a great number of these interventions and visits will take place in safe and needs-led outdoor play spaces currently being created within the prison grounds. Children of prisoners will benefit from the development of the garden, enhancing their wellbeing, resilience and skills-based play experiences. They often report missing playing football with dad, going to the park together and simple activities like picking up leaves or experiencing the changing seasons.

In April 2022, two other staff members from the Invisible Walls Family Services team – Chance Morgan (Veterans Coordinator) and Jodie Rackley (Family Integration Mentor) – travelled with us to Denmark to experience and learn



about the Danish judicial system and in particular their approach to outside play and its vast benefits. Erasmus, the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe, funded the group and as a result of the positive trip, the garden project became a focus.

Representatives from the Children's Commissioner for Wales' office, Jordan Doherty and Sophie Williams, brought their experiences to work closely with the team at HMP Parc and facilitated sessions with prisoners' children to gather their thoughts and hopes about the impending garden. The children and young people had a great time in designing their own vision of the garden and there were many common themes including ball sports, animal images, shrubbery, swings, slides and places to sit and eat together and do homework.

Veterans and their families will also have the added benefit of a memorial bench providing a quiet space to reflect.

Using the prison's internal contractors, maintenance team and landscapers, the project was due to start in Autumn 2022 with a view to it opening in Spring 2023. The garden is to be named The John Thomas Family Garden in a tribute to John who sadly passed away in 2022 and who jointly pioneered the family-led services at HMP Parc with Corin Morgan-Armstrong, Head of Family services across the wider G4s jails.

To learn more about the Invisible Walls Family Services, or how you could support or visit the garden project, please contact [Hayley.morris@uk.g4s.com](mailto:Hayley.morris@uk.g4s.com) and [Julie.Williams@uk.g4s.com](mailto:Julie.Williams@uk.g4s.com)





# Research with children

Play Wales has been involved in a range of research projects to gather children's views about their play.

Working with population data science researchers at Swansea University, we supported a study that explored 20,000 children's opinions about play before and after school closures associated with COVID-19. The research included children aged 8 to 11 in Wales who participated in the HAPPEN Primary School Network survey between 2016 and 2021.

Researchers examined how open-ended responses have changed over time in relation to play, before and after the enforced school closures. The key recommendations from children are that they would like more space to play, more time with friends, and protected time to play with friends in school and at home.

Additionally, through the Wales Children's Omnibus Survey, we asked 379 children in full-time education a range of questions about their experiences of school playtime. We are still examining the results, but early analysis shows that 82% of children like playtime as it enables them to be with

friends. However, the data raises concerns, with 61% of children reporting that they have missed playtime. The most frequent reasons are to catch up with work or because a teacher felt that they misbehaved.

Finally, we have worked with an independent researcher, Dr David Dallimore to pull together data from surveys completed by nearly 7,000 children across 15 local authorities in Wales as part of statutory Play Sufficiency Assessments, which were submitted to the Welsh Government in June 2022. The research report will be published in spring 2023.

## *Fun in the playground* storybook

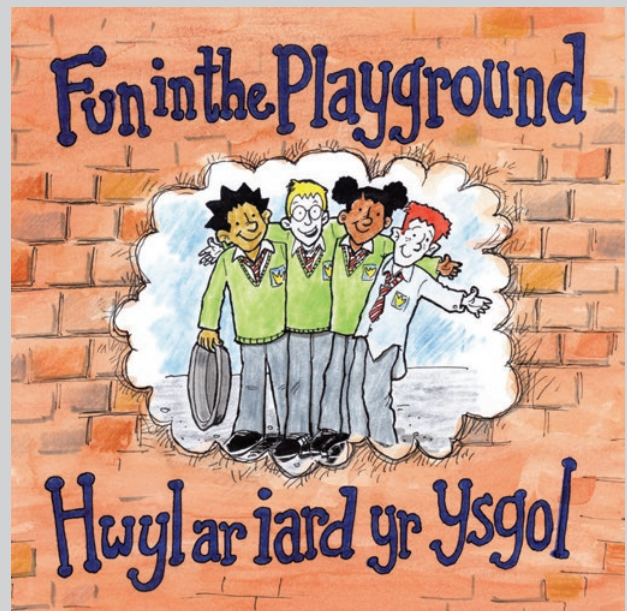
To celebrate International Children's Rights Day on 20 November 2022, Play Wales launched a new storybook about children's right to play.

*Fun in the playground* tells the story of one of the most important parts of the school day for many children – playtime. Supported by author and poet Mike Church, the story has been written by school staff working and living in the Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board region.

This timely story reminds us beautifully about how all adults in children's lives can either support or hinder the right to play. It captures the importance of supportive and tolerant adults and environments in helping children to realise their right to play.

The book is for primary school children and their parents – as well as teachers and school staff. It aims to support children to make sure they have the right to play at school. It's also a useful resource to support those working with children and families.

This is the final book in our *Fun in the...* children's storybook series.



Like our other two books – *Fun in the dungeon* and *Fun in the garden* – our newest storybook has been developed in partnership with Petra Publishing, an established community-based publisher.

If you are living or working in Wales, you can request a free copy of *Fun in the playground* by emailing [storybook@playwales.org.uk](mailto:storybook@playwales.org.uk)



# “I’d rather be playing”

## New Play Wales survey finds children want to play more

In July 2022, a survey\* commissioned by Play Wales found that children want to play more, but having no one to play with, TikTok and uninspiring places can stop them.

**Playful**  
Childhoods



We asked 500 children aged 5 to 15 and 500 parents with children under 15 in Wales what they thought about play, and this is what they told us.

- Over 55% of children play three to four times a week according to the parents surveyed, but over 60% of children said they would like to play more than five times a week.
- Over 30% of children said scrolling on TikTok and watching YouTube videos is stopping them from playing. The other main barriers reported by children were: not enough time due to homework or other activities and sports (30%) and not being able to get to a place where they could play (18%).
- Almost 70% of children said playing makes them feel happy and excited. A further 20% said playing makes them feel free and creative.
- Over 20% of children said having no one to play with stops them from playing. Almost 20% of the parents said the same about their children.
- Of the children surveyed, 90% said they’re generally happy with the places they play, from playing outside in nature to playing on the street or on

the pavement, to playing at a play centre (such as an afterschool club) or a school playground, to a skatepark, or at home. However, 10% said they can’t do any of the things they’d like to at these places.

- Over 90% of parents said playing has a positive impact on the mental health of their children.

We also spoke to children and teenagers about their play experiences. Children told us how playing makes them feel, like 10-year-old Aneurin York from Barry who said:

*‘I really like playing because it actually helps me in life with stuff and helps me know how I’m feeling. It also shows people how to express their feelings without having to hide them from anyone.’*

Talking about why she’d rather be playing, 13-year-old Summer Pritchard from Treherbert said:

*‘Playing makes me feel free. And if I didn’t have playing to turn to, I’d just be in my room watching TikTok on my phone.’*

## Time to Play

We used the findings of the survey to inform the *Playful Childhoods* summer campaign.

On Playday – the national day for play in the UK which happened on 3 August – we launched the Time to Play campaign. The campaign aimed to encourage and support parents and carers to inspire and motivate more opportunities for their children to play – over the school summer holidays and beyond.

Following the challenges of the last two years and associated restrictions and lockdowns, the summer holidays provided an ideal opportunity for children and teenagers to reconnect with friends – and their communities – through play. So, the campaign was a call out to parents and carers to come together to support their children to play more.

During a cost-of-living crisis, and additional pressure on parents and carers, the campaign also offered a timely reminder that giving children opportunities to play doesn't have to be costly. We shared lots of free and simple ideas to help parents give their children more time to play every day at home and out in their neighbourhood.

To inspire families – and to celebrate children's right to play – we shared a short video of children playing in various play spaces across Wales. Visit the *Playful Childhoods* YouTube channel to watch the video.

To find out more about *Playful Childhoods* please visit [www.playfulchildhoods.wales](http://www.playfulchildhoods.wales)

\* The survey was undertaken by Censuswide on behalf of Play Wales.

# Summer of Fun

For the second consecutive year, the Welsh Government's Summer of Fun funding supported children across Wales to take part in play opportunities, as well as cultural and sporting activities. The programme, which took place from 1 July to 30 September 2022, was run through the 22 local authorities. The funding enabled local authorities and their partners to offer cost-free and inclusive opportunities for children and young people aged 0 to 25.

Launching the programme, the Deputy Minister for Social Services, Julie Morgan MS, said:

*'We originally launched Summer of Fun as a response to children missing out on opportunities to socialise in activities after the pandemic, but after seeing how successful it was, we chose to run the scheme again. Access to high quality play opportunities is critical for the social, emotional and physical development of children.'*

At Play Wales, the funding enabled us to produce and share 1,300 free Summer of Play packs to children via:

- Hospitals
- Hospices
- Food banks
- Women's refuges
- Housing associations
- Family fun days
- Charities offering specialist services to children and families
- A Ukrainian Welcome Centre.



**Haf o Hwyl  
Summer of Fun**

The packs included a colouring book, colouring pencils, pencil sharpener, chalk, bubbles, and Play Wales storybooks – as well as some *Playful Childhoods* parenting guides for the grown-ups.

Thank you to all our partners for volunteering to distribute the Summer of Fun packs to children and families – we couldn't have done it without you. The feedback we received strongly indicates that the packs were welcomed by all.

Emily Sayer from Caerphilly Children's Centre, said:

*'We would like to thank you so much for the play bags. The kids are loving them and so are the families.'*

Rachel Brown, a Paediatric Palliative Care Play Specialist at Glangwili General Hospital, said:

*'The packs are lovely and a nice touch with the bubbles – they have been a big hit!'*

Lowri Hills from Llamau, said:

*'... a massive thank you for the donation of play packs to Llamau! That is really kind of you, and will bring lots of joy to the children we are supporting ... On behalf of the young people, women and children we support, thank you so much for your generosity.'*



## Workforce development

# The Welsh Play Workforce Study 2021

In 2021, Play Wales commissioned Swansea University to undertake research into the current state of the play workforce in Wales. The main aim of the research study was to gain an insight into the workforce and contribute to the 2019-21 Welsh Government Ministerial Review of Play.

The six-month study was undertaken between June and December 2021. The study involved a nationwide online survey, interviews with three leading national organisations involved in play and playwork in Wales, interviews with lead play sufficiency officers across the 22 local authorities, a focus group and interviews with the play workforce.

The study was particularly interested in where our playworkers are in Wales and what are the issues in terms of recruitment, retention, continuing professional development (CPD) and qualifications. The study also aimed to identify how playwork is being used as an approach within early years and childcare settings and within other professions such as hospital play, play development work and youth work.

The online survey generated 384 responses that provided data about the demographic profile, employment and education and training of the workforce. There were 211 responses from playworkers, 90 from childcare/early years workers and 90 from other play professionals.

Dr Pete King, from Swansea University, who led on *The Welsh Play Workforce Study 2021*, said:

*'The importance of this study undertaken identifies the diversity of the play workforce in Wales. For play to be supported by adults across different contexts, having an up to date picture will contribute to meet practice, training and educational needs of the play workforce in Wales.'*



It is the first time Play Wales has been able to commission such a study since the work undertaken by Melyn Consulting in 2008.

Play Wales will use the findings from the 2021 study to inform current planning for workforce development and our work with the Welsh Government on workforce skills. Play Wales will be reviewing *A play friendly workforce for Wales*, the current workforce plan, in light of the findings. Of particular importance is how we ensure that in the future, the workforce reflects the diversity of Wales in terms of language and culture to help towards the vision of the Welsh Government Race Equality Action Plan and Cymraeg 2050.

The executive summary of *The Welsh Play Workforce Study 2021* is available to download from our website: [www.playwales.org.uk](http://www.playwales.org.uk). To request a copy of the full research report, please email [info@playwales.org.uk](mailto:info@playwales.org.uk).

## Spotlight on ... a project officer working with parents

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 Kerstin Nott, a project officer working with Save the Children Cymru at Bettws Early Learning Community (ELC) in Newport.

### Can you tell us a bit about yourself and how you got into play/playwork.

*I first started working with pre-school children when my own children were very young. I took my daughter to a stay and play facility and I ended up helping out. The lead playworker suggested that I get qualified as a childcare practitioner as I had a good rapport with children. I went on to do that in 2002. The job worked well around school times and holidays so I would always be around for my children, and I have been working in various roles in childcare ever since.*

### What is your job title and what does it involve?

*My role is to engage with families that are experiencing poverty. We work with parents and teachers to increase confidence and skills around children's education, seeking opportunities for improvement both in and outside of school. We provide learning tools and basic household necessities – like books, toys, beds, and appliances – that make homes healthier, happier, and better places to learn and play. I support Play Wales with new projects such as an*

*after-school play session in the local primary school. This has provided access to outdoor space for playing when the school day ends. It gives children a place to play and explore and it provides me with the opportunity to touch base with parents in a place where they feel safe.*

### What are the current external issues which are impacting on your work?

*With the cost of living rising, the impact it is having on families is huge. The mental health and resilience of families are being pushed to the brink and children are feeling the stress and anxiety that their parents are coping with. A lot of families don't have capacity to engage and play with their children due to their mental health.*

### Is there anything you find challenging about your job?

*With the difficulties families are facing, it takes time to encourage some parents to play with their children or allow their children to go out and play. A lot of parents find it hard to allow their children out to play in the neighbourhood due to worries of antisocial behaviour or fast traffic on the roads. Trying to change this cycle is an ongoing challenge which I will continue to support.*

## New guide to playwork qualifications in Wales

Play Wales has produced a short guide to help playworkers, employers and managers better understand the playwork qualifications available in Wales.

We know that it can sometimes be confusing for people to understand which playwork qualification is the best option for them. The new guide aims to help playwork learners, employers and managers navigate to the most appropriate qualification for them.

It can be confusing because the playwork sector is varied and there are lots of different types of professionals that need playwork qualifications. Play Wales has worked with the Welsh Government and other partners to design different qualification routes that meet the needs of these different

circumstances. This means that there are different options available for playworkers depending on whether their role is seasonal or year-round, what type of setting they work in and whether they hold other qualifications in working with children.

The *Playwork qualifications in Wales* guide begins with a brief reminder of what playwork is and the types of places where it can happen. For those new to playwork, or working with children in other contexts, the Level 2 Award in Playwork Practice (L2APP) is often the best starting point. It provides a good introduction to playwork

and has been designed to be applicable to people who are working in youth work settings, schools and sports, as well as those entering their career in playwork.

For those who work in settings regulated by Care Inspectorate Wales there are specific requirements and this may mean that gaining further playwork qualifications is needed.

The guide clearly explains the progression route we have designed with the Agored Cymru Playwork: Principles into Practice (P<sup>3</sup>) qualifications. It also explores the other valid playwork qualifications



available from awarding bodies like NCFE Cache and City & Guilds.

The guide finishes by signposting to further information on required qualifications and who to contact for support.

The guide is available on our website: [www.playwales.org.uk/eng/qualifications](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/qualifications)



# Welcome to Wild Camp

The Blaenau Gwent Play Team has piloted its Wild Camps project to deliver outdoor play opportunities for children and teenagers. The Wild Camps are for those who are receiving support services and experienced significant changes to their lives during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The team was concerned that coronavirus and lockdowns intensified children and families' fears of being outdoors, of dirt and disease and of contact with other people. However reasonable this may be, it must be balanced against the risk to children's physical and mental health and wellbeing from being indoors and away from their friends for prolonged periods of time. By encouraging and supporting children to play in the natural environment and working with adults to explain the benefits of play for children's health and wellbeing, learning and resilience, we can take a balanced approach.

The team supports two groups a week. At the start of each camp, children and teenagers set up base camp, consider how to keep themselves and others safe during the session and are given opportunities to play freely. This provides chances for them to explore and discover new skills and developing a unique experience. The project aims to encourage each child to learn, grow and develop through the environment, capturing their imagination and at the same time embedding deep values about the natural world they live in.

The team's ethos is to follow the needs and interests of the children, wherever practical and possible. Suitable activities are offered and supported, for example:

- using the natural environment for den building, bug hunts, treasure hunts, wood whittling, mud painting, and arts and crafts
- exploring the environment through free play
- cooking on the campfire.

To meet the needs of the children and teenagers attending, groups have been kept small. This:

- encourages children to build relationships with their peers
- promotes engagement with activities
- supports children to cope with feelings and emotions in a safe environment.



Since the project launched, the team has received 54 referrals/registrations through Family Support Workers or self-referral through accessing other play provision.

Following the successful pilot, Wild Camps has become part of the core service delivered by the Blaenau Gwent Play Team. There are plans for a third group to be launched in February 2023 which will deliver a 12-week programme to support more children and teenagers.

*'I have more confidence and I like being outside instead of on my computer.'* (eight-year-old boy)

*'I get bullied in school because I am shy but I have made new friends. This makes me happy.'* (eight-year-old girl)

*'I like being outdoors and climbing trees.'* (five-year-old boy)

*'I was scared of fire but now I know that I am in control.'* (nine-year-old boy)

For more examples of playful communities in Wales visit: [www.playfulchildhoods.wales/about-playful-communities](http://www.playfulchildhoods.wales/about-playful-communities)