

# Play for Wales

Issue 36 Spring 2012

Play news and briefing from the national charity for play



**Play:** places  
and spaces



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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 from our website news section at [www.playwales.org.uk](http://www.playwales.org.uk)

## Editorial

Ensuring that all children have access to lively and stimulating places to play is an important way of supporting their wellbeing and their essential enjoyment of their childhood. It also fulfills our responsibility under Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – the right to play.

Good environments for playing are assets to our communities, but planning, designing and maintaining exciting play spaces can be a challenge. Spaces dedicated to play need to be well designed and of high quality to attract children and parents and to become a valued part of the local community.

Children continue to ask for more time and space to play, outdoors, with their friends. Although what children want from play spaces varies with age, interest and circumstances, they generally ask for places that offer variety, flexibility, natural elements, challenge and opportunities to socialise.

Boring and sterile spaces for play do not foster playing and are unattractive to children. They give an implicit message that they are not valued; that we don't care about the children who could be using them. How often have we all passed a children's playground and wondered where the children are? Children deserve better.

Additionally, yet another UNICEF report highlights that playing is an important component of healthy development, stressing that 'there is no effective right to play without a safe place to play'.\*

However, the commitment to children's play at both local and national level has never been stronger. More and more parents and community members are contacting Play Wales looking for ways to improve their local play areas. And, in commencing the Play Sufficiency Duty (see page 4) the Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services, Gwenda Thomas AM, has outlined her intention to further deliver on the Welsh Government manifesto commitment to 'continue to improve opportunities for all

children and young people to play in safety and, in particular, to support improved access to play for children with disabilities'.

This issue of *Play for Wales* explores ways in which we can depart from a traditional and structured approach and start to provide play places that meet the play needs of children and young people. It aims to show that with imagination, planning and an understanding of play needs, it is possible to create and maintain exciting play spaces, sometimes by making small changes to existing provision.

See page 6 for an example of a successful play project and another example of where a play project is under threat. Use the Wales – a play friendly place Facebook page to update us with what's happening locally to either protect or prohibit children and young people's right to play.

<http://on/fb.me/playfriendlyplace>

\* UNICEF's newly published report *The State of the World's Children 2012: Children in an urban world*, can be downloaded at: [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

# A tribute to Gill

Our dear friend and colleague, Gill Evans, passed away on 15 October 2011 after having cancer for a number of years.



Gill worked at Play Wales since 1998, working her way from an administrative assistant to Communications Manager. Her achievements in championing children's right to play are many. Gill was part of the group that developed *The First Claim ... a framework for playwork quality assessment* and *The First Claim – Desirable Processes* and she supported the work of the Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group. Gill led the development of the *Play for Wales* magazine; edited, and wrote sections of the *Playwork: Principles into Practice (P<sup>3</sup>)* level 2 course materials; and over many years worked with cartoonist Les Evans to develop Play Wales' trademark cartoons and posters.

She was most proud of her role in organising the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary International Play Association Conference, which was an incredible success. Gill set herself a target to dance at the conference with colleagues from around the world. Amidst the flurry of meeting delegate's needs, she danced at the Twmpath.

We will particularly remember Gill as a talented communicator and writer. Colleagues around the world will agree that many of the publications produced by Play Wales were a testament to her ability to present accessible information.

Gill's approach to her work with colleagues was one of collaboration and co-production. She had a no nonsense approach which fitted her Yorkshire roots, recognising that if there was a problem it needed sorting, and she didn't mind who

she needed to tell. Our office was a cheerful place with Gill in it – her big laugh, sharp intellect and bright smile made it a rich and wonderful place to be.

Gill will be greatly missed by everyone who worked with her, touched by her passion for life, her own children, other people's children and their play, the creative arts and lemon drizzle cake.

*Gill was a joy to work with and an inspiration ... A great loss to the play community in Wales.*

Tracey Bancroft,  
Ezeeplay Children's  
Services/Play On The Move Ltd

**Thank you to colleagues and friends for all the messages of condolences we received at Play Wales – many of which mention Gill's professionalism, helpfulness and infectious smile. This is a small selection of the kind messages we received:**

*Gill had a huge inspiring impact on me the first time I met her, that infectious smile, always so lovely. I will remember Gill as always making time for you, ready to help, welcoming and professional.*

Dafydd Myrddin Hughes,  
Dewis Chwarae

*Gill has made a great contribution to the work of Play Wales and to championing children's right to play. She did a wonderful job in her role in organising the IPA Conference, for which she was rightly proud. Gill was appreciated and respected by the wide range of colleagues that she worked with.*

Mary Nicholls, Childcare and Play Policy Team,  
Welsh Government

*She was a wonderful, multi-talented, rich personality with a great sense of humour. We enjoyed her tremendously and will miss her deeply.*

Board of Directors of IPA (International Play Association)

*Every encounter with Gill was like being bathed in the warmth of sunlight. I was lucky enough to be on one of the Advisory Groups for the IPA conference. Gill came in the room, notwithstanding having been not well some days earlier. It was typical Gill, waves of warmth combined with a clear focus on the need to make the conference a massively good one. Which it was.*

Bernard Spiegel, PLAYLINK

*Words cannot begin to express the sorrow of hearing the sad news of the loss of a wonderful woman – Gill. It is both an honour and pleasure to have known Gill, and remember her fondly with her big warm smiles and ability in helping people, me being one!*

Maria Austin, Carmarthenshire

## Play Sufficiency Duty update

The Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services, Gwenda Thomas AM has agreed to commence section 11, Play Opportunities, of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 in two parts. Part one will place a duty on Local Authorities to assess for sufficient play opportunities for children in their areas in accordance with regulations. The Welsh Government, with the support of stakeholder organisations, has drafted the regulations and statutory guidance that will set out the detail on what should be taken into account in the assessments.

Three engagement events will be held in May, to provide the opportunity for further discussion about the documents. The 12 week formal consultation will start at the beginning of April. All responses will be given full consideration in developing the final regulations and statutory guidance.



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

It is anticipated that this part of section 11 will be commenced at the beginning of November 2012. To assist Local Authorities in conducting the assessments, the Welsh Government is working with Play Wales to develop a toolkit to provide further detail on what should be covered.

Part two of this section 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 assessment. This will be commenced when full consideration has been given to the assessments and plans for securing sufficient play opportunities.

<http://wales.gov.uk>

## Professor of Playwork

We are delighted to report that Fraser Brown has been awarded a Professorship in Playwork at Leeds Metropolitan University – the first in the UK.

Professor Fraser Brown is a lecturer on the BA (Hons) Playwork course at Leeds Metropolitan University and is the author of numerous publications including *Foundations of Playwork* (2008, with Chris Taylor), *The Venture: a Case Study of an Adventure Playground* (2007) and *Playwork: Theory and Practice* (2003).

Fraser is a keynote speaker at Play Wales' forthcoming Spirit of Adventure Play conference – see enclosed insert for more details.

## Smokefree playgrounds in Wales

Wales's first comprehensive strategy for tackling the harm caused by tobacco to Welsh communities, *the Tobacco Control Action Plan*, outlines plans to reduce children's exposure to secondhand smoke by promoting smokefree playgrounds, homes, and cars.

The Plan details how local authorities will be encouraged to introduce smokefree policies for children's playgrounds, and work with schools to adopt smokefree policies for school grounds and sports grounds.



The Plan can be downloaded at: <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/health/improvement/index/tobaccoplan/?lang=en>

ASH Wales is continuing the campaign to see all children's playgrounds smokefree. Visit their dedicated campaign page at: [www.ashwales.org.uk/smokefree-playgrounds](http://www.ashwales.org.uk/smokefree-playgrounds)

## Social networking

You can now follow Play Wales on Twitter and Facebook



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



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



# PLAYLINK's role in London 2012 Olympics

PLAYLINK is part of the winning consortium appointed to design Olympic Park South, part of the Olympic Legacy.

The aim is to create 'a compelling destination for Londoners, national and international visitors... a beautiful active park'. The vision is for 'a place where everyone, from local residents to international tourists, feels welcome and comfortable, and enjoys spending time' and 'a public, democratic, fun place.' This vision will only be achieved if children and families are successfully catered for, through

playful offers in the public spaces of the park.

The aims of the brief include creating a major international, national and local visitor destination park, a venue that will host large (attracting 30,000 people at any one time) and small scale paid-for and free events and attractions, whilst at the same time creating a 'playable' park, one that serves local neighbourhoods in a deprived area of London.

For PLAYLINK, involvement in this project represents challenges that are at once both practical and ethical. Stated succinctly, they

revolve around the question: to what degree can play – for children and teenagers – be secured as integral to the park as a whole in ways consistent with PLAYLINK's well-established values and general approach to design? A project of this scope will necessarily involve trade-offs and compromises, many prompted by the stark realities of budget limitations and technical demands.

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

**PLAY LINK**

## Indoor play centres health and wellbeing benefits

The Play Providers Association (PPA) is working with researchers at York University to investigate the contribution indoor play centres makes to children's health and wellbeing.



play has in developing and building movement skills and how they can be used to support children with DCD.

Andy Buckton, Senior Lecturer in Sport at York University, will measure physical activity of children during free play and hopes

to develop an understanding of the contribution that indoor play provides in reaching Department of Health (2004) recommended levels of physical activity. Andy said:

*'This is a great opportunity to examine the physical activity that occurs during visits to play centres and helps to identify the role PPA members can have in enabling more children to engage in sufficient physical activity, addressing immediate health benefits and establishing longer term health related behaviour.'*

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

Reflective practice and observation shows us that play is great for a child's health, however without the necessary data and research it is difficult to convince commissioners that play is a viable investment and indoor play centres a resource worth sustaining.

Evidence shows that approximately 4.9% of children have Developmental Co-ordination Disorder (DCD) that restricts successful participation in school-based physical education, play and leisure activities, where co-ordination is paramount. The study focuses on the role that indoor

## Free Range Kids campaign

Sustrans' Free Range Kids campaign aims to ensure future generations of happy, healthy and independent children have the freedom, confidence, skills and opportunities to get around from their front door.



Sustrans has launched an Early Day Motion (EDM) to bring issues regarding children's freedom to Members of Parliament's attention. An EDM is a formal proposal submitted for debate in the House of Commons, and allows MPs to draw attention to an event or cause.

Over 125 MPs have signed the EDM but a minimum of 200 are needed to make an impact. If you would like to ask your local MP to sign the EDM a simple email template is available for use on the Free Range Kids website – [www.sustrans.org.uk/freerangekids](http://www.sustrans.org.uk/freerangekids)

# The Land

## Plas Madoc Adventure Playground

Claire Griffiths, Project Manager at 'The Land' in Wrexham, tells us about the challenges and triumphs of developing a new open access adventure playground in one of Wales' most deprived areas.

Given the current financial climate it is uplifting to share a triumphant story of development and achievement, although the journey has been complex, challenging and problematic at times. The trials and tribulations that have accompanied the project to develop a new adventure playground on the Plas Madoc estate could never have been foreseen, some so serious the grant was in jeopardy of being lost. Funding for the project lay dormant for nearly two years as fear and uncertainty gripped hold of a community that was at risk of losing something they had worked so hard for.

Issues that arose include failure to advertise disposal of land which resulted in a community objection, resulting in redesigning of plans; all of which inevitably delayed the project, in addition to the ticking time bomb of compliance to the funders.

Determination, passion, belief and hard graft finally resulted in the project coming to fruition and on 17 February 2012 'The Land' adventure playground was declared officially opened.

Throughout the development playing and playwork continued on and around the space, the land was never prohibited to the community.

'The Land' is subject to constant change, evolving in response and at the request of a child's subjective needs and desires. 'The Land' is a space surrounded by trees, water, grass and earth, somewhere to hide, run, climb, be noisy, be messy or just a space to escape to.

The space offers endless play possibilities and opportunities which filter into the wider community, ensuring local residents are better informed therefore more accepting of playfulness and the behaviour that surrounds children's play.



For more information 'like' Play on Plas Madoc on Facebook

## The Pop-Up Play Shop Project

Morgan Leichter-Saxby, Pop-Up Adventure Play's Managing Director of Playwork Training and the Global Network, tells us about the threat of closure facing Cardiff's Pop-Up Play Shop.

Pop-Up Adventure Play UK has been working with Re-Create Scrap Store and Cardiff and Vale Play Association to transform a long-empty shop into a community play space, right in the centre of Cardiff.

The pilot Play Shop is completely free to access, open to all, and sells nothing. The project received Cymorth Small Play Grant funding, but now fights an appeal against the Business Rates department – who are charging us more than half of that grant in business rates.

Our project campaign has had a tremendous response from local residents and organisations, with hundreds of petition signatures and letters to the Council from Assembly Members Eluned Parrot and Leanne

Wood, and MP Jenny Wilcott.

Eluned Parrot AM says 'Schemes such as the Pop-Up Play Shop play an important role because they enable children and families to have access to constructive play, which helps children to learn in a positive environment and gives parents the confidence to initiate play activities with their children'.

You can find out more on the project at [www.popupplayshop.org](http://www.popupplayshop.org)

# Spaces for playing

To children themselves, playing is one of the most important aspects of their lives – they value time, freedom and quality places to play.

Consultations with children and young people show that they prefer to play outdoors away from adult supervision – in safe but stimulating places. In this situation children tend to be physically active and stretch themselves both physically and emotionally to a greater extent than they would if they were supervised.

Most children will play without the need for adult intervention, even in the most barren of environments, but an environment rich in possibilities supports their play best of all. A rich play environment is: a varied and interesting physical environment that maximises the potential for socialising, creativity, resourcefulness and challenge; and a place where children feel free to play in their own way, on their own terms. To make the most of a play space, children need to be able to adapt and shape it to meet their play needs and it needs to change over time and provide new opportunities for play.

Quality play environments offer a variety of opportunities:

- **challenge and uncertainty** – both on a physical and emotional level
- **loose parts** – natural and man made materials that can be manipulated, moved and adapted, built and demolished
- **movement** – running, jumping, climbing, balancing, rolling
- **other children and young people** – with a choice to

play alone or with others, to negotiate, co-operate, fall out, and resolve conflict

- **rough and tumble** – play fighting
- **the natural world** – weather, trees, plants, insects, animals, mud and the four elements
- **the senses** – sounds, tastes, textures, smells and sights.

## Planning play spaces

*Design for Play* (Play England, 2008) explains how good play spaces can give children and young people the freedom to play creatively, while allowing them to experience risk, challenge and excitement. There is also advice on how play spaces can be affordably maintained.

*Nature play: Maintenance guide* (Play England, 2009) is aimed at those responsible for developing, delivering and maintaining innovative natural play spaces within parks and similar spaces. It helps identify procedures for the ongoing maintenance of these play areas, ensuring that consideration is given to on-going revenue funding for maintenance, repairs or replacement.

## Risk management

*Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation Guide* (Play England, 2008) builds on the Play Safety Forum's position statement, *Managing Risk in Play Provision* (2002). The guide shows how those responsible for play provision can develop an approach to risk management that takes into account the benefits the provision offers to children as well as the risks.

## How Play Wales is using the guides in Wales

The Tri-county Play Association, in partnership with Chwarae Plant, received funding from the Heads of the Valleys Programme in September 2010 to design and build natural playable spaces across the region. The project will create natural play spaces that are rich in play opportunities for children and teenagers, providing a wide range of play experiences that are accessible to disabled and non-disabled children and provide for the needs of the local community.

Play Wales is currently contracted to co-ordinate this project, which will result in new spaces in Sirhowy Woodlands (Blaenau Gwent) and Maerdy Community Primary School (Rhondda Cynon Taff). The project is based on the principles in *Design for Play* and *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation Guide*.

As part of the project, Play Wales has produced two information sheets to support local communities to improve local play spaces. *Play Spaces: common complaints and simple solutions* and *Play Spaces: planning and design* information sheets are available to download at – [www.playwales.org.uk](http://www.playwales.org.uk)

Play Wales is also working with the Community Foundation in Wales and the Fair Share Panel on Ynys Môn to 'provide greater opportunities for all children and young people on Ynys Môn to access their right to freely chosen, accessible, quality play opportunities in their local communities.'

As part of this project Play Wales has been funded to develop a community toolkit that fills a gap in support for groups that manage play areas in the County, in order to ensure the development of quality play spaces that are accessible. The *Developing and Managing Play Spaces* community toolkit is intended to provide a single source of support and signposting for community groups to navigate some of the challenges of managing or developing a play space.

# Developing and managing play spaces

The Big Lottery Fund Fair Share Programme on Ynys Môn began in 2002 with a view to improving opportunities for children's play.

A key objective in the Fair Share Business Plan is to develop a community toolkit to provide support for groups that manage play areas in the County, to ensure the development of quality play spaces that are accessible.

The *Developing and Managing Play Spaces* community toolkit has been designed for anyone who takes responsibility for managing or developing a play space in a community. This may be a community council, local play association or a residents group.

This toolkit is divided into two sections:

**DESIGN** – focuses on new play space design and includes topics such as participation, procurement, design, health and safety.

**MANAGEMENT** – focuses on the mechanics of managing an existing or newly built play space and includes topics such as maintenance and inspection, risk management and insurance.

Here are excerpts from the **Participation and engagement** section of the toolkit.

*Children have a right to be consulted on matters which affect them.* (UNCRC Article 12).

Participation and engagement take many forms. Asking children 'What do you want in your play area?' is a method that generally receives a limited range of responses based on that child's experiences of play areas (a swing, a slide, a roundabout) or a list of improbable or impractical items (fast food outlets, swimming pool, an Xbox for every child in the area).

There is a range of methods that can be used with children to gather their views and involve them in planned developments.

Crucially, if we do not have previous experience of participation with children or do not feel it is a skill we have within our organisation or partnership there will be people locally who can provide direct support:

- Play Officer
- Participation Officer/Team
- Children and Young People's Partnership Team
- Local school or school council
- Early years or nursery provision
- Youth club or outreach provision

## Blast Off! Guides

Participation Workers Network for Wales has produced a series of good practice guides on

children and young people's participation. They can be downloaded for free at: <http://participationworkerswales.org.uk/resources.aspx>

Guide 6 *Working with Under 11's* and Guide 7 *Ensuring Inclusion* – are the two that are most relevant for work relating to developing play spaces.

*Participation – Spice it Up!* is a publication developed by Dynamix and provides a range of games and workshops to run with children and young people to gather their views in a fun and inclusive way. [www.dynamix.ltd.uk](http://www.dynamix.ltd.uk)

## Participation and Engagement Methods

Participation can happen in a number of ways:

**Games, activities, workshops** – Games and physical activities, art and craft activities, story telling, small group discussions, drama, role play, puppets, one-to-one or peer interviewing.

**Observations** – Providing opportunities for children to play in an area and making observations of their preferred play behaviours gives a good indication of what children like to do without taking them away from playing.

**Play Audits** – provides evidence of how children already use a particular space and can be used to shape a plan based on evidence from observations as to how the space can be developed.





**Building, planting, clearing –**

If there are elements of the play space that can be developed by the community, getting children and young people involved can help them shape the space and give them a feeling of ownership. Planting trees/ bulbs, digging, painting, building and clearing rubbish are great ways of involving the community in the development of the play space and raising awareness of the developments being made. Children and young people may input their ideas during informal chat at community events – make sure there is a way of recording their ideas.

**Allow for change as part of the design process –**

Children and young people like to be able to change their environment. This is why children build dens and knock them down, constantly adapting them. Providing elements of a play space that children can keep changing ensures that they can have a direct role in the evolution of the space over time. This can be an area that is allowed to grow wild that is entirely for children's use or a BMX dirt track that they can adapt.

**Questionnaires –** Targeting questionnaires to a particular group of people is the most effective way of ensuring a response. One way to do this is through targeting the local school and working with teachers to encourage children to complete questionnaires about where and how they like to play in their community. As with all participation methods the questions asked need to be open but specific enough to avoid unrealistic responses. The results of the questionnaires can help ensure the play space provides for the wider range of things children like to do – surprisingly the responses will not all be about swings and slides!

**Myth-buster****We should discourage teenagers in play spaces**

If there are teenagers in the community and we are developing the play space, they will naturally be interested in it and want to hang out there. Design provision for teenagers into the space and get them involved in how it looks.

Here are excerpts from the **Principles of inclusive play space design** section.

When developing a play space consider the needs of children in the community who will, or may in the future, be using the play space. This means we need to think how children who have a range of impairments can access the play opportunities provided.

Remember that wheelchair accessibility is an important factor but that the space should be accessible to a broader range of children too. For example, purchasing an expensive wheelchair roundabout will allow children who use wheelchairs to experience the roundabout but take into account some practical considerations:

- What proportion of our budget would one piece of specialist equipment cost – could we purchase several smaller items that provide a range of opportunities at the same cost?
- Do we want to segregate children to pieces of specialist equipment?
- Do we know if there are currently any wheelchair users in the community who would make regular use of such a feature?
- Do we only want to provide one play opportunity for children who use wheelchairs or would we rather have several nonspecific items that can be used in a number of different ways by wheelchair users and non-wheelchair users?

Remember that purchasing items that can be used by more than one person means that the child can be supported by a parent, carer or personal assistant. Also, 'inclusion' is a social term – it is essential to ensure access to the social experience of playing with and around other children, not necessarily to every piece of equipment.

Below is a list of examples of traditional equipment and natural features that can be included in a play area that offer play opportunities to a wide range of children.

**Slides –** a wider slide provides more flexible options than a traditional narrow slide. If the slide is built on a slope, an accessible pathway can be built to make access to the top easier.

**Swings –** basket swings take away the need for a child to be able to support their own weight as they can lie down or take someone else with them for support.

**Ladders, ropes, climbing walls and ramps –** we shouldn't avoid providing these in an effort to be inclusive. Providing a range of ways for children to use equipment gives more options to access it.

**The surrounding area –** lighting, parking, accessible toilets, width and operation of gates/grids and dropped kerbs are elements that make entering the space easier. We may not have control over some of these elements but they are factors to consider influencing in the longer term.

**Natural Features –** logs, boulders, loose materials – remember that these items are 'non-prescriptive' in that they do not have a right and wrong way to play and interact with them – this allows children to interpret how to use them in their own way.

We are currently seeking funding support to make the *Developing and Managing Play Spaces* community toolkit more widely available.

# play spaces

## common complaints and simple solutions

The following excerpts are from Play Wales' new information sheet *Play spaces: common complaints and simple solutions*.

Children playing out in local communities will access a wide range of places where their play is supported – the local street, a patch of open ground, car park, lane or playground.

Many parents and community members often see the playground as the most appropriate place but see it as inadequate as a space for playing in. A number of the aspects that cause parental concerns relate to the safety of the space and the state of play equipment if it is broken and in disrepair.

### Litter

A play space that is strewn with litter appears to be unappealing and unfriendly. However, the presence of litter, especially crisp packets and drink cans can be evidence that children are using the space to meet, play and hang out with their friends. Occasionally other items of litter appear such as pieces of wood, cardboard boxes, cushions that have been taken along by children to play with.

Formal play spaces will often have bins, yet parents complain about the amount of litter present and that the "council" is not dealing with the issue. A simple way to tackle this is to pick up litter and we can encourage others not to drop litter. By helping to keep a play area litter free, further littering can be discouraged.

Get together with local parents and children and organise a litter

pick. Encourage children to make posters to display in the play area, asking people to take their litter home. This not only makes the place more appealing, but by active involvement, the local community will see that the play space is important and worthy of being taken care of.

### Dog mess

A fenced play area may go some way to keeping a play area free from dog fouling, but this isn't always the case. Some children take their own dogs into a play area to play with. Where a play space is more open and not fenced, it can be more susceptible to dog fouling but maybe no more than in the street. Dog fouling is hugely unpleasant and can cause harm to children and adults alike, should contact be made with it.

In some areas, the council will provide designated dog bins. If this is a particular problem contact the local council to request one to be placed. Alternatively, work with local children to design and display posters asking dog owners not to allow their dogs to foul in the play area – reminding that it is a designated space for children to play.

### Sharps

A common perception within some communities is that play areas are full of drug paraphernalia. However, it is not as common as people think. Some may come across it whilst litter picking, and often litter picking kits include 'sharps' boxes to ensure syringes and needles can be picked up and disposed of safely. Where this is a concern

contact the local police community support to ask for assistance.

### Teenagers

There are often complaints regarding teenagers hanging out in play areas; they are seen as anti-social and troublesome. Teenagers also need to have permission to access public open space to meet their friends. Play spaces are often where children meet up with friends as they start to play outside independently, therefore it is unsurprising that as they become teenagers the space is used for the same purpose.

Unfortunately, play equipment often does not meet their needs as older children. Including equipment and facilities that better suit their needs has the potential to minimise local annoyances. For example, swings tied around frames is a common complaint. This is often a sign that the equipment is being adapted and made more exciting for use by older children, rather than a sign of vandalism. This will occur when they have outgrown or are bored with the play opportunities present, seeking out ways to make the space more interesting.

A play space that is more challenging, more exciting and better suited to including older children will give them the respect and opportunity to feel included and part of their community.

*Play Spaces: common complaints and simple solutions* is available to download at [www.playwales.org.uk](http://www.playwales.org.uk)

# book review

Ben Tawil, a Senior Lecturer at the department of Childhood and Family Studies at Glyndŵr University, reviews David J. Ball and Laurence Ball-King's new publication *Public Safety and Risk Assessment: Improving Decision Making*.

*Public Safety and Risk Assessment: Improving Decision Making* is not a title that most people would run to the book shop to buy, but believe me this is a treasure of a book.

The authors begin by providing some context, including interesting case studies to set the scene and raise the argument that too much safety can be a bad thing. Through the overzealous application of safety regimes, safety promotion loses its credibility and places people at risk. Additionally, the invasive and sometimes foolish implementation of health and safety initiatives may have significant adverse effects for public wellbeing, happiness and enjoyment.

A range of risk assessment tools are identified and described, indicating

their useful application, as well as their inappropriate application, while stressing that risk assessment is just a part of a risk management process – the thinking that informs them and the concluding judgments is the crucial part. In the 'Is Safety Paramount?' chapter a comprehensive review of evidence to the contrary is provided. Of specific interest is the evidence from the Law courts identifying the need in civil society to balance safety with liberty. The Treasury is cited as acknowledging that when making decisions both costs and benefits should be considered, and these should include the wider social and environmental impacts. Here the authors truly begin to get their teeth into an argument in which they are clearly passionate – and one that playworkers will sympathise with.

Current received wisdoms on the implementation of health and safety are having a detrimental effect on the public realm and public life in general. Whilst remaining objective they begin a robust challenge citing examples that attest to the fact that safety is indeed not paramount, in fact the

converse is true. Safety comes at a cost and that cost is something we are prepared to endure, but over and above a certain level we would rather take the associated risks over further cost.

The book closes with a look at contemporary literature and initiatives regarding play provision. For comparison purposes the adventure activities industries is used to make the case for risk-benefit assessment, before identifying emergent conceptual frameworks useful for advocating for a more realistic approach to managing health and safety in children's play and the public realm.

A wonderful book, which is both a fun and challenging read, providing access to a rich source of information for playworkers, those responsible for public safety and the broader children's workforce. If you ever feel you need more information to make an effective case for children's play and its inherent associated risk this is the book for you.

An unabridged version of this book review is available to download at: [www.playwales.org.uk](http://www.playwales.org.uk)

## Risky play research

Research published in *Evolutionary Psychology* shows that learning to take risks through play is an important way of helping children to cope with, and master, challenges and phobias that form part of their lives. The academics found that offering children opportunities for thrilling experiences through risky play helps to ensure they grow up as normal, well-balanced adults.

After analysing statistics of playground accidents from Norway,

Australia and England, they saw that injuries from children's play such as bruises, fractures and concussions, were generally temporary and rarely caused the kind of trauma that would influence normal development.

Ellen Sandseter, a professor of psychology at Queen Maud University in Norway, one of the research paper's co-authors, said:

*'Children need to encounter risks and overcome fears on the*

*playground. As playgrounds become more and more boring, these are some of the few features that still can give children thrilling experiences with heights and high speed.'*

*Children's Risky Play from an Evolutionary Perspective: The Anti-Phobic Effects of Thrilling Experiences* is available at: [www.epjournal.net/wp-content/uploads/EP092572842.pdf](http://www.epjournal.net/wp-content/uploads/EP092572842.pdf)

# Ripping up the rulebook

Bernard Spiegel of PLAYLINK calls time out on damaging assumptions and outdated approaches to designing, building and maintaining play spaces.

PLAYLINK believes, and acts upon the belief, that the local outdoors – residential estates, streets, parks and open spaces – can fulfil the vital function of nurturing informal sociability across the generations. Ken Worpole put it well: ‘When outdoors nothing stands between us and the world ... When we meet other people in this outdoor world, we are more likely to meet them as free agents and autonomous individuals than we do in the graded and contractual world of institutional or commercial life ... The park and the street give us our freedom, and the buildings, too frequently, take it away’.

Sadly and too often, however, the outdoors is experienced as fearful and unfriendly. Spaces where the overriding call is for ‘security’, to be conjured by the technology of surveillance and a web of prohibitions, can, in PLAYLINK’s view, exacerbate the illness they claim to cure. We stand, therefore, for an opposing model: a presumption in favour of a culture of permission. This value-based stance informs our approach to outdoor space.

## Challenging convention

There has been the tendency to conceptualise outdoor space and its use by mechanistically fusing the category ‘age’ with that of ‘function’. The conventional idea that children need designated play

areas; teenagers need multi-use games areas or their equivalent; adults need communal gardens and allotments. There is, of course, some truth in this. However, when this approach is deployed as a rigid template, the effect can be limiting and in practice weaken the possibility of nurturing a sense of social ease across the generations.

There is an alternative view, one that understands outdoor spaces as potential and actual venues for a range of informal encounters. Here outdoor space facilitates and encourages mixed use and informal sociability. The term ‘village green’ serves as shorthand for the approach this article seeks to promote.

## Pull up a seat

Traditionally, the assumptions governing play and informal recreation provision on residential estates have been that it should:

- Be limited to designated areas;
- Be fenced off, separate and distinct from shared, communal space;
- Have no role in engendering a wider sense of neighbourliness, more a ‘hiving off’ of a segment of the population;
- Focus on standardised, manufactured equipment, often in metal, though we now have gestures towards the ‘natural’ with more extensive use of wooden structures;
- Be focused on a particular age range;
- Be age segregated within the play area;

- Have no seating or free (‘slack’) space – indeed, seating is too often designed out, frequently in response to local consultation.

The net effect of this approach is the production of unattractive spaces that, by signs and symbols, both implicit and overt, de-legitimise the presence of children within their wider neighbourhoods. In contrast, alternative objectives might usefully be to:

- Create the conditions for informal encounters across the generations;
- Legitimise children and teenagers’ presence within shared, communal space;
- Provide play and recreational opportunities;
- Create ‘green’, more natural and attractive environments.

## Ball courts

Typically, ball courts are tamed caged areas with goal posts and/or a basketball ring.

Ball courts often seem to have been parachuted into estates with scant thought being given to the wider context of their immediate surroundings, or their visual and sound impact. Ball court provision itself is locked into a series of assumptions, for example, they:

- Need to be large enough to accommodate a five or seven a side football team;
- Must form a rectangle and require fencing uniformly at a height of 3m-3.5m;



- Cannot be aesthetically pleasing;
- Need not afford opportunities for sitting and watching the play.

Ball courts can be approached in a more imaginative way. Of course, they will always have high visual, and to a degree sound, impact. But this simply underscores the need to put effort into mitigating their negative features. For example, a lower fence on at least one side immediately changes the court's visual impact and takes a significant step toward making the area feel part of its surroundings. Seating can be provided in various ways. The aim is to make ball game areas attractive venues where people feel able to linger and congregate.

## Maintenance, health and safety

'Maintenance' and 'health and safety' considerations frequently act as inhibitors to the possibility of venturing into new forms of practice. PLAYLINK's *The maintenance of public parks, open spaces, playable spaces and designated play areas* briefing makes clear there is scope for making beneficial amendments to established habits of practice. This has been graphically demonstrated by the Islington Council's green space team: they have reduced the cost of sand maintenance by £20,000 per annum – and that's by keeping the sand, not getting rid of it!

In principle, neither maintenance concerns nor those of health and safety need impede developing a more open-hearted approach to the possibilities that the outdoors can both prompt and allow – as Ken Warpole put it '... The parks and the street give us our freedom ...'

## A case study (of sorts)

Here are some thoughts based on PLAYLINK schemes that have been in the ground between eight months and four years.

## In the beginning

Consultation has been a requirement (obsession even?) of all clients, usually reinforced by funder grant requirements. There is too often no clear idea about what consultation is for. This can lead to a version of the 'blank paper' mode of engagement, whereby the fib is perpetrated that a scheme will be the result of residents'/ children/teenagers' wishes and that consulters have no view of their own, but are simply receptacles for everyone else's.

We have a general view of what constitutes shared, communal space, and we state it – with respect and humility. But we have a view. And so, I claim, we have been able to take steps – and to take people with us – into territory previously considered out of bounds. Thus, in social housing we have paths, seating, unfenced sand and other features and, well, if not quite always beauty, then certainly attractiveness: areas where all ages might sit and linger – and they do.

## Keeping up appearances

Too much of our experience suggests that maintenance has become a defensive practice predicated on what cannot be done, rather than what might be possible. This is in part because maintenance is not sufficiently respected.

The way maintenance is costed can be an impenetrable mystery that deters analysis – and therefore control or amendment. A park we designed in which we have an unfenced and designed ball park, unfenced structures scattered throughout the park, an unfenced sand play area, plus dredged lake and general park works – had maintenance costs

pitched at a ridiculous rate by the contracted-out company responsible at the time.

However, in an alliance comprising ourselves, the developer, the local authority client, the costing was resisted, countered and vanquished. This took approximately a year. The actual maintenance costs are now a fraction of the original proposal.

## Lessons to be learned

This is not a design issue as such. What's required is tenacity, commonality of purpose, and courage, not least to resist pressure to adhere to unrealistic timetables that take no account of the complexity of some schemes and the issues that need to be addressed.

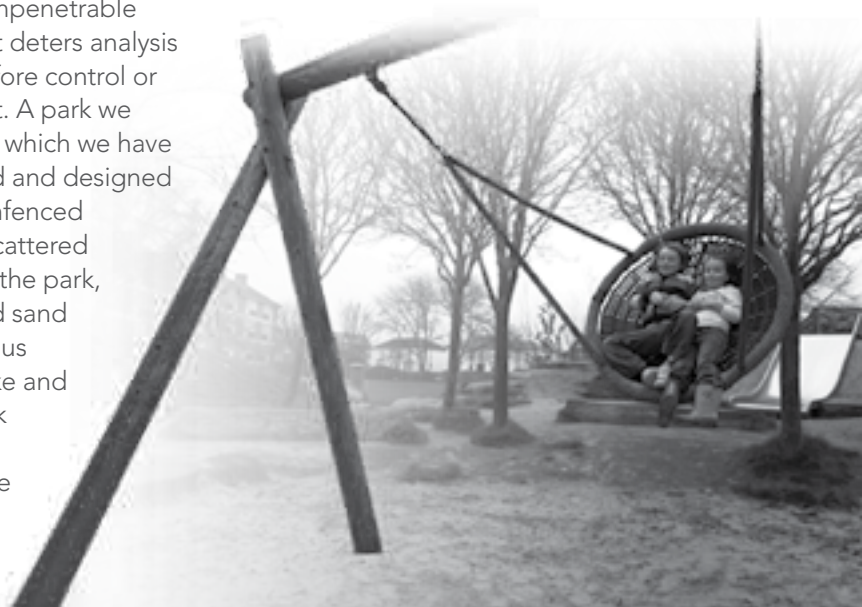
**This article was originally published in *Green Spaces* magazine (June 2011) and is reproduced with the author's permission.**

## SIGNPOSTING

'Places in common' paper by Bernard Speigal, published in the *Journal of Urban Regeneration and Renewal* (Vol. 5, 2)

*The maintenance of public parks, open spaces, playable spaces and designated play areas* briefing paper by PLAYLINK

Both papers are available to download at: [www.playlink.org](http://www.playlink.org)



# P<sup>3</sup> update

## level 3 pilots

We are very excited to announce that the first Playwork: Principles into Practice (P<sup>3</sup>) level 3 qualification is being piloted in Rhondda Cynon Taff. After a development time of only six months it is now on the framework as an approved qualification and eligible for public funding in Wales.

The level 3 qualification consists of an Award, a Certificate and a Diploma. Like the level 2 qualification it is founded on the Playwork Principles and puts the playing child at the centre. In content it substantially exceeds the National Occupational Standards and its unique design means that key areas recap and develop in depth and complexity as the qualification progresses. A comprehensive handbook for the trainer and the learner accompanies the qualification. Currently, the handbooks for the Award are complete in draft format and we hope to develop the remaining learning materials for the Certificate and the Diploma in the near future.

For learners the qualification provides the knowledge and skills to plan, deliver and critically assess their playwork provision for all

children, and develop their role as a senior playworker. It also provides the ideal preparation for those learners who would like to continue their playwork studies at higher or further education.

During the consultation period employers left us in no doubt that a high quality level 3 qualification that combined practical skills and theoretical knowledge was urgently needed. Some of our English consultants who were involved in these consultations were struck by the uniformly high level of knowledge and understanding shown by the delegates – surely an indication that we're having an impact across Wales.

Our other qualification – P<sup>3</sup> level 2 – continues to grow and develop and a further eight courses have been delivered over the winter period and many more are planned for the coming months.

2012 will also be an exciting time for level 2 as, together with its awarding body the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), we will be reviewing and improving its specification and renewing its registration as a regulated qualification.

To find out more about P<sup>3</sup> qualifications contact Tillie Mobbs [tillie@playwales.org.uk](mailto:tillie@playwales.org.uk)

## Play and the workforce

### A cross sector survey

The Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 will provide a duty on local authorities to provide sufficient opportunity for children to play. In light of this new legislation, recognising the potential changes it will bring, Play Wales is currently exploring funding opportunities to increase the delivery of playwork qualifications and training programmes on children's play. We need a clear picture of potential learners in Wales. This will include those within the playwork sector and those in other sectors who need to understand more about children's play.

To gather the required information we have put together an online questionnaire. It is specifically designed to enable us to identify where we might best source funding for delivery of qualifications to as many represented in the workforce as possible. We hope that you can support us by completing the monitoring survey.

To complete the online questionnaire please visit:

[www.surveymonkey.com/s/playandtheworkforce](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/playandtheworkforce)

Deadline: 20 April 2012

## Raising the standard of playwork training

In March 13 learners from across south and mid Wales were preparing to start a four-day course designed to improve their teaching in continuing and adult education. Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS) is a level 4 qualification that will help them plan and deliver effective learning and motivate learners.

The course has been funded by the YMCA Community College Wales who has also supported the delivery of several P<sup>3</sup> level 2 qualifications across Wales.

Another course is planned in the near future for north Wales.

# Playwork writer award

Our Qualifications Development Officer, Richard Trew, was recently nominated and shortlisted for the Playwork Writer Award at the Third Annual Playwork Awards. Bob Hughes, Morgan Leichter-Saxby and the Editor of *Ip-Dip* magazine were also shortlisted for the award.

Richard's nomination (not made by Play Wales!) reads:

*'Richard has been the backbone writer for all the P<sup>3</sup> qualifications. He is one of those people who*

*quietly get on with things in the background but his contribution is brilliant – he has put huge energy and passion into the project to write accompanying materials that really do inspire and educate learners and despite funding problems, he has refused to give up.'*

The awards set out to celebrate all that is good about the playwork sector. The awards aim to praise the work of the playwork sector by identifying people who have made

a noticeable contribution and difference to the lives of those they work with.

The awards ceremony took place during the 10<sup>th</sup> National Playwork Conference hosted by Meynell Games in Eastbourne in March. Congratulations to the winner of the Playwork Writer Award – Morgan Leichter-Saxby.

[www.playworkconferences.org.uk/Awards.html](http://www.playworkconferences.org.uk/Awards.html)

## Inspecting Play Areas Cutting the Costs with Rob Whewey

Martin King-Sheard recently attended this course in North Wales, which was well attended with 12 delegates from across the region – all with responsibility for managing and designing play spaces. The course was also held in South Wales.

Rob introduced a common sense approach to routine inspection and maintenance programmes that can be tailored to the needs of particular play spaces and thereby save money. The course covered how playground managers can make best use of annual inspection reports to ensure that routine maintenance programmes respond efficiently; provided tips

on navigating language that is used in inspection reports and looked at the use of grass as a valid Impact Absorbing Surface from an aesthetic, financial and safety point of view.

The course was extremely well received and the opportunity to network and share experience with colleagues was valued.

## Useful resources – from the four nations

### Children's play: health and wellbeing

Play Wales has recently published a new *Children's play: health and wellbeing* information sheet for public health specialists, primary care teams and healthy school co-ordinators. It provides information on why playing is crucial to children's health and wellbeing and explores ways to respond to children's need for more time and space for free play.

*Children's play: health and wellbeing* is available to download at: [www.playwales.org.uk](http://www.playwales.org.uk)

### Advocating for Play

PlayBoard Northern Ireland has launched an advocacy toolkit entitled *Advocating for Play*. The toolkit is aimed at supporting the play sector and the school age childcare sector to explore, plan and deliver the play advocacy message.

*Advocating for Play* is available to download at: [www.playboard.org](http://www.playboard.org)

### Getting it Right for Play

*Getting it Right for Play* is a set of indicators and toolkit produced by Play Scotland, to help local authorities improve the design and provision of places and spaces so that all children can feel safe and

confident playing outside in their neighbourhood. The toolkit also helps local authorities to provide sufficient play opportunities in terms of quantity and quality.

### Love Outdoor Play campaign

Love Outdoor Play was launched by The Geography Collective in 2010 to increase and improve outdoor play. Play England now leads the campaign with a new focus to reach the original aim - making sure more children can play out more often by increasing social action for children's play.

To join the campaign visit: <http://loveoutdoorplay.net>

## EVENTS

### International Council for Children's Play (ICCP) Tallinn 2012

Providing Play: Applications for policy and practice from research  
18 - 19 June 2012  
Tallinn, Estonia  
[www.iccp-play.org](http://www.iccp-play.org)

### PlayEducation – Reflective Weekend

Blencathra Centre, North Lake District  
13 - 15 July 2012  
For more information and an application form please call 01353 661294 or email [playeducation@ntlworld.com](mailto:playeducation@ntlworld.com)

### The Beauty of Play - The Essence of Play

7 - 9 September 2012  
Staffordshire  
[www.ludemos.co.uk/BOP.htm](http://www.ludemos.co.uk/BOP.htm)

### Child in the City 2012

26 - 28 September 2012  
Zagreb, Croatia  
[www.childinthecity.com](http://www.childinthecity.com)

### Children and Youth in a Changing World

26 - 30 November 2012  
Orissa, India  
[www.kiit.ac.in/iaaes](http://www.kiit.ac.in/iaaes)

## All Wales Playworkers Forum

### Diary Marker

21 – 22 June 2012  
Ystrad Farm,  
Newbridge-on-Wye

## Funding

### Greggs Foundation

Grants of up to £2,000 are made to eligible charitable organisations that are directly delivering positive change to people in need in local areas that have a Greggs presence such as shops, offices and bakeries. The Foundation prioritises small locally based organisations.  
[www.greggsfoundation.org.uk](http://www.greggsfoundation.org.uk)

### Comic Relief UK Grants Programme:

The programme welcomes applications from organisations which meet the aims of one of their programmes – one of which is local communities. Open for applications on 10 April 2012 and closes on 29 June 2012.  
[www.comicrelief.com](http://www.comicrelief.com)

### Lloyds TSB Foundation

The Foundation funds local, regional and national charities working to tackle disadvantage. Their focus is on supporting underfunded charities that can make a significant difference to the lives of disadvantaged people by helping them to play a fuller role in the community.  
[www.lloydstsbfoundations.org.uk](http://www.lloydstsbfoundations.org.uk)

### The Tesco Charity Trust Community Award

The scheme provides one off donations of between £500 and £4,000 towards providing practical benefits such as equipment and resources for projects that directly benefit children, adults and children with disabilities.  
[www.tescopl.com/tescocharitytrust](http://www.tescopl.com/tescocharitytrust)

## Playday 2012

On Wednesday 1 August, hundreds of communities across the UK will celebrate children's right to play. As well as a celebration, Playday is an opportunity to raise awareness about the importance of play in children's lives.

Playday celebrations range from city wide events, to play dates

with friends and family. It doesn't

matter how you celebrate, what's important is that we join together to stand up for children's right to play to make sure all children and young people have the freedom to play.

For advice on how to get involved visit the Playday website - [www.playday.org.uk](http://www.playday.org.uk).



Keynote presentation: Wendy Russell and Stuart Lester (University of Gloucestershire)

Workshop presenters: Ben Tawil, Colin Powell, Mike Dessington/ Gareth Stacey, Ben Greenaway, Dafydd Myrddin Hughes and Simon Bazley.

The event is being co-ordinated by a number of play organisations working in partnership. NEW Play will be administering the event on behalf of the partnership. Prices and booking forms will be available shortly.

For further information contact Simon Bazley on 01352 702487.