

Issue 62

Play for Wales

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Play news and briefing from the national charity for play



Playing and
being well – revisited

Chwarae Cymru
Play Wales

www.play.wales

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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.play.wales

Editorial

Growing up in adverse circumstances can potentially have a huge impact on both the physical and mental development of individual children.

A global pandemic, cost of living worries, climate emergencies, conflict and wars mean that many children are having to cope with new or different levels of adversity. These situations have led to rises in mental health issues and in loss of physical fitness for some children. Concerns about these increases have resulted in the development of a range of policies, programmes and practice designed to alleviate the harm by working in a kinder, more trauma-informed manner.

Interventionist programmes can be useful in minimising some of the damaging impact, but they must be complemented by a focus on supporting children to be active participants in building their own resilience, through play. It is essential that the systems which underpin the provision for children living in and experiencing adverse conditions do not erode their right to explore and develop through play, as protected by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Indeed, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child notes that 'children's development can be supported by loving and caring adults as they relate to children through play. Participation with children in play provides adults

“ It is important to remember that playing is something that children do whenever they have the chance. ”

with unique insights and understanding into the child's perspectives.' Some children can rise above adversity to adapt to serious challenges and stress, and without much help. In times of uncertainty, some children might find this less easy and they will need the support of others to make the most of the environment around them.

As our recent publication – *Playing and being well: summary* – emphasises, unstructured play opportunities give children a chance to support their immediate wellbeing whilst naturally building life skills which contribute to long-term development outcomes. Qualities such as problem-solving, teamwork, and emotional regulation are being refined when children play. The research also shows that time, space and freedom to play can greatly benefit children's mental health, relieving stress and reducing the harmful impact of trauma.

It is important to remember that playing is something that children do whenever they have the chance. It is their way of supporting their own health and wellbeing. Understanding this helps all adults to advocate for a rights-based approach to support children's play and the importance it holds for them in their immediate lives and their everyday experiences.

Adults at every setting and at all levels count. From a community-based children's worker to a new First Minister taking office in spring 2024, there is a need for all of us to be more play informed to make a difference to the everyday experiences of children.

Marianne Mannello,
Assistant Director

Chwarae Cymru
Play Wales



Fundraising success for Play Wales

Play Wales ended 2023 with the good and well-appreciated news that we have been successful in securing funding to research and pilot new projects.

In the last issue of *Play for Wales*, we reported on the work of Merthyr Tydfil's Stay and play project, which supports schools to make their grounds available for after school play. Inspired by the success of this project, we sought funding to progress the work in other areas. We have secured financial support from Future

Valleys Construction's Communities Initiatives funding to continue the work in Merthyr Tydfil. Funding from the Millennium Stadium Charitable Trust will enable the piloting of similar projects in six other local authority areas. As well as supporting after school play, the funding will also allow us to review and update our *Use of school grounds for playing out of teaching hours* toolkit.

Funding from The Moondance Foundation will enable Play Wales to undertake a small scoping project looking at play for children living in temporary accommodation. We will work with local play teams and housing officers to identify the

limitations and opportunities to support play for children and families. Part of the funding will make it possible for us to provide family play resources and explore how we can help settings to better support play.



Playing and being well literature review – an update

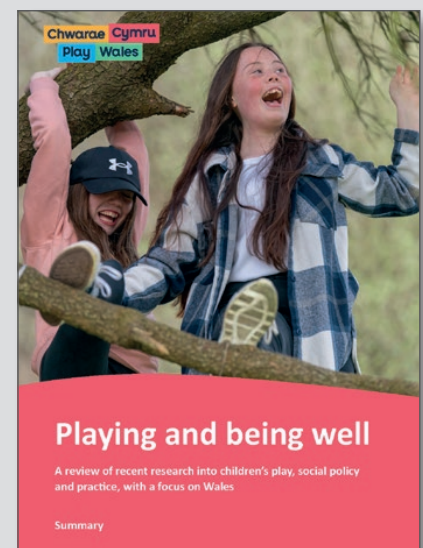
As we have previously reported, Play Wales has commissioned Dr Wendy Russell, with Mike Barclay and Ben Tawil from Ludicology, to undertake a literature review to investigate the connections between play sufficiency and children's wellbeing.

Playing and being well is a review of recent research into children's play, social policy and practice, with a focus on Wales. The review focuses on the role of play in children's wellbeing, children's play patterns, and adult support for children's play. It draws mainly on academic research, across a range of disciplines, but also draws on professional, advocacy and practitioner literature where appropriate.

Since the last issue, we have published a summary of the literature review. The summary includes information about:

- the scope and approach of the review
- an overview and findings from each of the chapters in the review
- the authors' proposal of a relational capability approach to children's wellbeing through actions to create conditions that support playing
- closing thoughts on adults' responsibility for children's play.

This review has been carried out 10 years after the commencement of the Play Sufficiency Duty and while the Welsh Government was undertaking



its Ministerial Review of Play. The evidence gathered in the literature review will inform this ongoing work. The full literature review will be published later this year.

The summary is available on our website: www.play.wales/play-policy-legislation/our-research

For more information about the review see article on pages 8 and 9.

Welcome

We are delighted to welcome **Diana Ariadna Wilczyńska Fiuk** to the Play Wales team.

Diana joined us in November 2023 as our Administration and Events Assistant. She is responsible for assisting our team by delivering general support and administrative tasks. She is also supporting our training programme by administering

bookings, liaising with speakers and ensuring the smooth running of events. Before joining Play Wales, Diana worked as a Festival Research Assistant at Aberystwyth University.

To find out more about our team visit: www.play.wales/about-us/our-team



Congratulations Cardiff

Well done to Cardiff for being awarded UNICEF Child Friendly City status. The Child Friendly City initiative celebrates cities in over 40 countries where children's rights, including their right to play, are being made a reality locally. Cardiff is the first city in the UK to achieve the award.

Since launching its Child Friendly Strategy in 2018, Cardiff Council has collaborated with UNICEF UK and children and young people's organisations to undertake projects that prioritise children's rights. Milestones related to promoting children's right to play include:

- 40,000 children and young people participated in Summer of Fun and Winter of Wellbeing events
- 66,324 children aged 5 to 14 have accessed local authority play provision since April 2020.

Leader of Cardiff Council, Huw Thomas, said the council's policies had

“empowered children and young people to be meaningfully involved in decisions that matter to them, enabling services to meet their needs and adults to be more accountable for the way children and young people's rights are respected, protected and fulfilled.”



Find out more about Child Friendly Cities at: www.childfriendlycities.org

Date for your diary **Playday**

Playday 2024 will take place on Wednesday 7 August

The theme for this year's campaign will be announced soon... www.playday.org.uk

Welsh Government responds to the Ministerial Review of Play report

In October 2023, the Deputy Minister for Social Services, Julie Morgan MS responded to the recommendations in the *Ministerial Review of Play steering group report*.

The response explains how the Welsh Government intends to take forward, or explore further, the recommendations and suggested milestones outlined in the steering group report. It also sets out the actions that will be undertaken to achieve the steering group's anticipated results, along with a timescale for each milestone.



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

As we have previously reported, the steering group report, published in February 2023, followed a three-year collaborative review of the Welsh Government's play policy work. It presented 15 key recommendations in relation to six themes identified in the review. The steering group emphasises that there is an urgent need to implement these recommendations to improve opportunities for children's play in Wales.

Responding to the recommendations, the Deputy Minister said:

'Recent times have shown us just how vital play opportunities are to children and young people's wellbeing, their future development and life potential. I look forward to the continuing collaboration between the Welsh Government and the playwork and other related sectors, as we drive forward together, to ensure our play policy fits the current and future needs of our children and young people.'

www.play.wales/ministerial-review-of-play

New international safety standard for play and leisure facilities

Play Wales welcomes a recently published international safety standard that will enable children to benefit from more adventurous play and leisure facilities.

The 'Benefit-risk assessment for sports and recreational facilities, activities and equipment' Standard 4980:2023 from the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) will allow local authorities and playground providers to take a benefit-risk approach when designing play equipment and programmes for children.

The standard marks a shift towards a balanced, thoughtful approach to safety in play and leisure contexts. Leading UK and global play safety advocates helped draft the standard, which is in tune with the Health and Safety Executive position on children's play, as set out in its 2012 high level statement, *Children's play and leisure: promoting a balanced approach*.

Instead of focusing only on risk reduction, the standard says that councils, businesses, and others should take a balanced approach to safety in playgrounds and other leisure facilities. Crucially, they should consider the benefits of allowing a degree of risk and challenge.



This new ISO standard adds an impetus to us all taking what is simply put, a common-sense approach.

Freedom and adventures

Why free play matters for children's mental health



Professor of Child Psychology, Helen Dodd and Ms Gill Hearnshaw, a Research Associate and PhD candidate – both of University of Exeter Medical School – and Dr Lily FitzGibbon, a Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Stirling, tell us about the importance of giving children freedom to be adventurous and to take risks as part of their play and what needs to change to make this happen.

What is your favourite childhood memory? A time when you felt free and happy? Where were you? What were you doing?

We asked these questions as part of a UK-wide survey of children and adults. The overwhelming majority of people said they were outside, often in nature. When we explored the content of these favourite memories, we found three main themes: feeling carefree, having adventures, and feeling connected. This is what we want for today's children – the opportunity to explore, have adventures and

feel connected to the people and places around them, so that they can create happy memories to carry with them throughout their lives.

Play is a child's right – it doesn't have to be for a purpose. At the same time, play is the way that children learn about and interact with the world. It supports their social, mental, physical and emotional development. Free play is special, it is play that is not directed by adults, so children have the freedom to choose how they play as well as what and who they play with. Free play is unique to every child – it looks different for different children, at different ages, and in different places. This kind of play is important because it allows children to develop their own interests, experience a sense of control, become active problem solvers, and develop a sense of independence.

Free play also gives children space to explore the edges of their comfort zones and begin to take risks in their play. While it can happen anywhere, outdoor spaces, especially in nature, support free play by offering unstructured environments that children can interact with and interpret in many different ways.

Is there a problem? Why does play deserve attention right now?

Children's opportunities for free and outdoor play are declining. Today's children are typically allowed to play out without parental supervision from almost 11 years old – two years later than their parents' generation¹. Fewer children can access local spaces to play, in particular, fewer children are playing in the streets and public spaces close to their homes². This means that children are more reliant on their parents to take them to places to play, often by car.

Strikingly, more than a million children in England (12%) did not visit natural environments like woods or beaches at all in 2015³. Furthermore, playtime during the school day has also been cut by as much as 45 minutes per week over the last 25 years⁴ – that adds up to 30 hours less play per year! These declines are often greater for children from socially disadvantaged areas and children from minority ethnic groups, suggesting social and structural inequalities in children's access to free and outdoor play.

Why is adventurous play important?

Free play looks and feels different for each child but when it takes place outdoors, it often includes elements of adventure or risk-taking such as going fast, high, or rough and tumble. Play which involves children taking themselves to the edge of their comfort zones – that is exciting, thrilling, fun and maybe even a little bit scary (but, importantly, not distressing) – has broad benefits for children's physical, social and emotional wellbeing.

Theory suggests that children have a natural drive to engage in adventurous play, which provides them with opportunities to develop physical capabilities and learn to judge risk for themselves, thereby decreasing the likelihood of future injuries. Adventurous play also has the potential to decrease children's chances of developing problematic anxiety because it develops their ability to cope with uncertainty and helps them to learn about and understand the physical sensations that accompany being worried or scared, such as feeling their own heartbeat or 'butterflies' in their stomachs.

This theory is supported by recent research findings showing links between children's play experiences and their mental health. The British Children's Play Survey

found that children who spent more time playing outdoors and adventurously before the pandemic had higher levels of positive mood during the first lockdown and fewer symptoms of anxiety and depression⁵. In relation to street play in particular, UK-wide data collected by Play England found that children who said that they regularly played out in their street had better wellbeing, as indicated by higher levels of positive emotion. Interestingly, adults who said that they regularly played out on their street when they were children reported better mental health as adults, with lower scores on a measure of psychological distress².

What needs to happen?

There is understandable concern about children's mental health. Before the pandemic we were already seeing rising rates of mental health problems, and these have worsened as a result of the pandemic. It is essential that children experiencing mental health problems have easy access to evidence-based support. Alongside this, we need to think about the environments around children and how they might better fit what children need as they grow, to support the development of good mental health. Providing stimulating, diverse play environments and giving children independence and freedom as they get older is one important route to providing a better start in life.

Change is slow and challenging but that doesn't mean it isn't possible. There are excellent examples of positive change already happening in Wales. Some change is psychological: we need to develop a culture where play is understood, welcomed and valued within communities; and we need to adjust the default approach of minimising risk when it comes to assessing and managing risk in play.

Other changes that we need to see are physical: we need to create spaces for play that are easily accessed and engaging to children of all ages. We need to protect spaces that are used formally and informally for play, and we need road and traffic systems that are considerate of how children travel through and use public space.

References

¹ Dodd, H.F., FitzGibbon, L., Watson, B.E. and Nesbit, R.J. (2021) Children's play and independent mobility in 2020: results from the British Children's Play Survey, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(8), 4334.

² Dodd, H.F. (2023) *Trends in Children's Street Play: Play England 2023 Playday Report*, Play England.

³ Hunt, A., Stewart, D., Burt, J. and Dillon, J. (2016) *Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment: a pilot to develop an indicator of visits to the natural environment by children – Results from years 1 and 2 (March 2013 to February 2015)*, Natural England Commissioned Reports, Number208.

⁴ Baines, E. and Blatchford, P. (2023) The decline in breaktimes and lunchtimes in primary and secondary schools in England:

Results from three national surveys spanning 25 years, *British Educational Research Journal*, 49 (5), 925-946.

⁵ Dodd, H.F., Nesbit, R.J. and FitzGibbon, L. (2022) Child's play: examining the association between time spent playing and child mental health, *Child Psychiatry & Human Development*, 1-9.

Playing and being well: Towards a relational capability approach



Dr Wendy Russell, Mike Barclay and Ben Tawil introduce a relational capability approach to wellbeing and how it can be used to shape a more play-friendly environment for children in Wales.

When commissioned by Play Wales to investigate the connections between play sufficiency and children's wellbeing, we spent many months buried in the research on childhood, policy, play benefits, contemporary play patterns and actions in support of play. A briefing paper and summary of our *Playing and being well* review are available on the Play Wales website, with the full review anticipated later this year.

In the review, we combine insights from diverse fields including evolutionary studies, neuroscience, psychology, sociology, geography, policy studies and philosophy, creating an original political commentary, influenced by our own research into the Play Sufficiency Duty. In doing so, we introduce the concept of a 'relational capability approach' that can inform policy and practice.

There are many different and contradictory ways of understanding childhood, play and wellbeing. Our review reports on adult concerns about children today, including safety in public and online spaces, mental health, obesity, neurodiversity, youth crime and violence. The research paints complex and contradictory accounts of definitions, trends and causes. Often, problems are attributed to children and their families, with interventions aimed at changing individual behaviours.

One example is Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), where parents are portrayed as both cause and solution. These concerns are very real for those affected by them. Nevertheless, seeing such adverse experiences only as something that individual families can and should address ignores how they are also tied up in broader sociopolitical issues such as poverty, class, race, gender and dis/ability. Additionally, the seemingly ever-growing list and rising incidences of problems create a picture of childhood in crisis, a deficit view of damaged children.

This is where a relational capability approach comes in.

A relational capability approach

A *relational* capability approach emphasises the dynamic and reciprocal relations between children and the various dimensions of their lives – physical, affective, economic, political, social. What emerged from our review was a significant shift towards seeing life as relational. We are not separate from our experiences and encounters with other bodies (such as human, animal, institutional, elemental), objects, landscapes, social systems and so on.

Based on the works of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, the capability approach to wellbeing emphasises social justice. It defines a good life as one where people have the capabilities to pursue what is valuable to them. Nussbaum includes play in her list of ten core capabilities. Capabilities are mutually dependent on sociopolitical and environmental as well as personal factors. Such a framework allows for a strengths-based approach to playing and being well that places a collective responsibility on adults to ensure the necessary resources and opportunities are available and accessible to all children.

Playing and being well

We use the terms ‘playing’ and ‘being well’ to emphasise that these are ongoing and fluctuating relational processes, rather than activities bound by time and space or fixed personal traits. While we caution against over-romanticising play, acknowledging its potential for cruelty or harm, the research shows the many benefits that accrue when children can play in ways they value.

Play matters to children. The pleasure of playing underpins many of its benefits, motivating further playing, reducing anxiety and protecting against depression. Playing with strong emotions like fear, shock, disgust or anger gives a sense of vitality and exhilaration.

Deliberately creating uncertainty can prime neural networks to respond flexibly and creatively to new situations without over-reacting. Moving and engaging all the senses helps children to build physical health, strength, agility and sensory integration. Playing both requires and helps to develop social skills, emotion regulation, balance, attention, memory, spatial awareness and more. Through playing children develop attachments to caregivers, friends, animals, places and objects, giving a sense of belonging and security.

All this means that, **when conditions are right for them to play, children can create their own wellbeing.** This strengths-based account presents a strong ethical, moral, economic and social argument for adults to work towards producing those conditions through both policies and practices.

Children’s play today

Thinking about children’s play through a relational capability approach entails evaluating the conditions of their everyday lives and how these facilitate or limit opportunities for playing. Children play anywhere and everywhere, and we reviewed research on play in the home, in childhood institutions like schools and playgrounds, in public and digital spaces. Whilst in many ways, children continue to co-create a lively culture of play, we also found stark inequalities and injustices in children’s capability to play stemming from:

- increasing commercial inroads into children’s play lives, including digital technologies, toys, commercial play and entertainment venues and out-of-school activities, many of which are beyond the reach of some children
- austerity measures and cuts to community services including playwork provision
- traffic (including parked cars) and privatisation of public space which, alongside issues of neighbourhood safety, have led to a decline in children playing out, particularly in economically poor neighbourhoods.

When asked, children continue to express a strong desire to play out with their friends, and where conditions are right, they still do. Playing out is a form of participation in everyday life. It fosters a sense of belonging, and neighbourhoods where children play out have more social connections, contributing to community cohesion.

Those children least able to access commercial opportunities are also likely to be those without gardens and living in economically poor neighbourhoods. We see this, together with the removal of children from residential streets more generally, as a matter of spatial justice. Rather than blaming children or their parents for the decline in playing out, a capability approach pays attention to creating conditions that make playing possible, appreciating the benefits that will follow for children, families, communities and the economy.

Our review gives several examples of changes made to children’s environments in support of their capability to play. These encompass actions in line with the movement towards child-friendly cities and other settlements (including traffic calming and street play initiatives), involving children in the planning system, and animating public spaces through playwork or community action. In Wales, the Play Sufficiency Duty offers an organising framework for such changes, which rely heavily on partnership working and community co-operation.

These responses resonate with key policy agendas, including Planning Policy Wales, Active Travel, and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Ultimately, our findings point to the transformative potential of a relational capability approach in shaping a more inclusive, just, and play-friendly environment for children bringing benefits for all.

The *Playing and being well* publications are available at: www.play.wales/play-policy-legislation/our-research

Therapeutic playwork on an adventure playground



The team at Meriden Adventure Playground (MAPA) share their experience of taking a therapeutic playwork approach in their setting and the difference working with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) is making to the children and families.

Meriden Adventure Playground is based in Chelmsley Wood, a highly deprived area just outside Birmingham. MAPA offers a six-day-week programme of open access play, youthwork, forest skills, parent groups and specific 'reduced numbers/high staff to child ratio' sessions for children who most need this support. Since 2020, MAPA has also run weekly sessions in partnership with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and employed a therapeutic playworker as part of the team.

The partnership with CAMHS was first suggested by a parent who had been through a serious domestic violence situation with her son. He was receiving support from CAMHS but had also started attending MAPA at a time when the family was still under police protection and spaces to go to, and to feel safe enough to play, was hugely problematic. The mum had noted the different ways her son had been able to express his trauma at the playground – climbing to the top of structures and shouting across into the air for example – and how this was helping him to build his confidence again. She felt that other children using CAMHS could similarly benefit. Following a meeting or two, the first pilot sessions started in the summer of 2020.

The first summer ran with the kind of wonderful chaos common to adventure playgrounds and we planned to continue with a weekly after-school session. Another lockdown was announced and so these sessions were put on hold until the following Spring. At that point CAMHS told

us that all of the children who had attended the playground the previous summer were no longer on their waiting list – amazing! We knew that something important was happening that needed further work and so weekly sessions were again planned and continue to this day.

It is well documented that play can be intrinsically therapeutic and a natural outlet for children to explore and overcome their anxieties but adventure playgrounds can also be very big and busy spaces (MAPA averages 250 visitors a day during holiday periods). We found that we were often necessarily being drawn into ‘the big stuff’ – the building play, the high swings that needed constant observation. The result being that the detail was getting lost and every day playfulness was being unintentionally overlooked, or at least the play ‘offer’ for these children was not as good as it could be.

By this point we had employed a therapeutic playworker – Clair Meares, a long-standing playwork practitioner and researcher. Clair explains her role as being one of ‘attuning-with’ (Erin Manning, *The Minor Gesture*, 2016), the multiple ways that children express themselves that are often overlooked or undervalued in some way. This attuning-with, to bring to the fore things that often go unnoticed, takes time and a culture shift away from the ‘quick-fix’ responses and solutions that funders often require. At MAPA we practice modes of reflection that can help us to see beyond relatively simplistic explanations – gently pushing back against fixed ideas that put children into particular developmental boxes.

The therapeutic playworker has introduced lots of tactile and sensory materials into the play space, things that were purposefully difficult to ‘make something’ with and hence naturally avoided the narrative that ‘children’s play is most valuable when there is something to see or to take home’. Instead, children and the adults watching or taking part, receive subtle ‘permissions’ regarding the value of ‘just’ being with the materials, the calming properties of repetition, the exploration and release of feelings that is possible in play, usually perceived as ‘making a mess’.

In 2022, we talked about this work at the National Playwork Conference in Eastbourne and then at the Playworkers Forum in Rhayader later in the year.

On both occasions, we asked attendees to participate in a series of sensory encounters such as a ‘guided drawing’ exercise*. We happened to come across a video showing this exercise in action and were struck by the similarities of this (as an established therapy), and what we were seeing children spontaneously and naturally doing in the playground.

We also played a lot in these workshops in the way that we had understood it was important to do as a staff team – to play with apparent ‘nothingness’... repeated sifting, moving,



The question initially asked regularly to the therapeutic playworker by visiting adults, ‘What are you doing here?’ has become a bit of a playground mantra for the children: ‘We’re making a mess of course!’

We knew through all of this work that we had to be in it for the long haul, that the ‘tick-box’ approach to service assessment preferred by most funders was not good enough and was actually telling them, or us, very little about the therapeutic benefits that were occurring as children played. We spoke about our advocacy role in this, to gently prod unrealistic targets and outcomes and our approach to creating different forms of ‘evidence’.

The partnership sessions with CAMHS continue to take place every week at MAPA, term-time and during school holidays. The group operates a high staff to child ratio and response level to children’s individual needs and interests so that popular play, such as that using tools, can always be available and any ‘disagreements’ are playfully and subtly mediated if this becomes necessary. An important aspect of this work is that both teams take the time to meet together regularly to reflect on the provision, adjust practice, and discuss how children and families are benefitting. Twice every term the group offers a ‘family and friends’ session which has had positive off-shoots such as generating an informal parent support group.

feeling, picking up and dripping through – encountering and controlling-un-controlling at the cusp of things and possibilities. In this way, as playworkers we begin to better attune-with things like intuition, sense perception and memory, and in turn the playfulness that needs to be evidenced as such.

We asked many questions that we continue to explore ourselves: What might be therapeutic for us / the children we work with? How do we know what works for us / the children? Is it possible to talk about this? How can we evidence this work and begin to shift the ‘quick-fix’ culture?

*For more information see:

www.sensorimotorarttherapy.com

Play informed practice

Using play to support children affected by trauma

Growing up with adversity is likely to impact on the physical, mental and emotional wellbeing and development of children.

Play can help alleviate the impacts of trauma and contribute to immediate wellbeing and to long-term improvements in children's lives. Provision for play should be central to any framework or programme that aims to support the health and wellbeing of children and families.

This requires:

- Responsive practitioners and caregivers who understand the need for play
- Supportive communities where playing is tolerated and celebrated
- Policy programmes which provide play spaces and opportunities.

In its General Comment on the right to play, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child asserts that children have a spontaneous urge to play. It identifies aspects of an optimum environment which need to be present to support children's play needs:

- Time, that's free from other demands, including therapy, treatment and rehabilitation
- Freedom from stress
- Space in diverse and challenging outdoor environments with access to supportive adults, when necessary
- Opportunities to invest in their own space and time so as to create and transform their world, using their imagination.



Here we discuss some suggestions on how practitioners can use the power of play to support children affected by trauma.

Allowing children to self-organise their play

Trauma often involves a loss of control over our circumstances. Allowing children the freedom to choose how and what they play can restore a sense of control. Play that is not overly structured by adults can empower children to make decisions that contribute to their own healing and wellbeing. It reinforces their independence and can help rebuild their confidence.

Try to allow children to decide what games to play, which toys and resources to use, and how to engage with you and other children.

Observe children's play and reflect on the types of play you see – this provides a better understanding of play needs and preferences.

Creating a play-friendly environment

Nurturing and play-friendly environments – or lack of them – affect the healthy development of children. In *Wales – a Play Friendly Country*, the Welsh Government defines a rich play environment as ‘one which is flexible, adaptable, varied and interesting’. It maximises the potential for socialising, creativity, resourcefulness, challenge and choice. It is a trusted space where children feel free to play in their own way, on their own terms. Characteristics of quality children’s spaces include chances for wonder, excitement and the unexpected, but most of all opportunities that are not overly ordered and controlled by adults.

Use Staff Tool 5: Play environments audit tool in the International Play Association’s *Access to Play for Children in Situations of Crisis* toolkit to identify how the play environment is – or isn’t – meeting children’s play needs and to identify potential actions.

Provide materials that encourage creativity and flexibility. There are resources, such as sand, water, shells, fabric, buckets, boxes, rope, tyres, bottles, wood and scrap materials of all kinds, that we can provide to facilitate and encourage play. Such resources can also support children with heightened sensory sensitivities.

Provide a variety of materials such as paint, playdough and tools – this will encourage children to be creative and play at their own pace.

Encourage small world play – sand trays, building blocks, puppets, dolls and other figures help children to understand their stories through imaginary characters.

Outdoor play

Playing outdoors is linked to increased physical health as well as social and emotional health. It gives children the space they need to run, climb, roll, jump, hide, and use up energy. It also provides natural sensory features which can be calming and comforting.

Take a common-sense approach to health and safety. Make sure the play environment is checked and that these are recorded. Ensure checks are a mix of visual checking and physical testing. All settings should have clear procedures on what should be checked, by whom and how often.

Making sure that the physical needs of children and staff are met goes some way in equipping them to be outdoors. Make sure everyone has appropriate clothing and shelter for wet weather and sun protection on sunny days. Provide water in warmer months, and make sure that hats and coats can be accessed in the winter.

Things to consider when planning setting-based play spaces:

- Loose fill surfaces such as sand or bark, the inclusion of water, trees and bushes will provide a supply of loose parts play materials that change with the seasons, which children will use in a variety of ingenious ways.
- Play materials and play features that are non-prescriptive and therefore encourage imagination and suggest many different ways of being played on or with.
- Opportunities for social interaction, such as seating and other spaces with open ended possibilities (such as logs, stumps, walls and art features).
- Sand and water at raised level.
- Loose parts play materials to move and create with.
- Equipment which can accommodate groups of children.
- Opportunities for sensory experiences, such as shading and lighting, gentle sound and music, and quiet spaces.

Develop a setting-based play policy

A play policy states the value that an organisation place on children’s play and can make a significant contribution to providing opportunities to play.

Identify a staff member that’s in a leadership position that can support both the strategic and operational practices to support play.

Use Policy Maker Tool 1 in the *Access to Play for Children in Situations of Crisis* toolkit to develop a play policy.

Work together to identify key principle statements which endorse play and articulate the actions the setting is taking to protect children’s right to play. Identify short, medium and long-term commitments.

Publish the policy and include it in information about the wider support your service offers.

Promote the importance of play to caregivers

Parents and caregivers have a crucial role in supporting children’s play both at home and in the community.

Engage with parents and caregivers so that they understand your commitment to children’s play and why it is being provided as part of the service offered.

Find out about local parks and playschemes and share the information with families.

Visit the *Playful Childhoods* website to access and share play ideas and other parenting resources.

A play informed approach lends itself well to the range of good interventionist services developed and being developed to support children experiencing trauma and adversity. Where children are traumatised by Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), providing opportunities to play can help children to understand difficult experiences in a sensitive and non-judgmental way.

Children's play in hospital: How can we improve their experiences?



A new collaboration between researchers at Cardiff University, Play Wales, and Starlight to promote the importance of humorous play in hospital settings.

Navigating the challenges of spending time in hospital can be an exceptionally difficult experience for children and their families. While each child's healthcare journey differs, many find their time in hospitals to be fraught with worry and fear. Evidence¹ shows that children who require long-term medical care face an increased risk of developing mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, and trauma. For some, the impact of negative hospital experiences on mental health can last into adulthood.

However, there is now extensive research showing that having opportunities to play during their healthcare journey can support children through their treatment and protect against the development of mental health conditions.

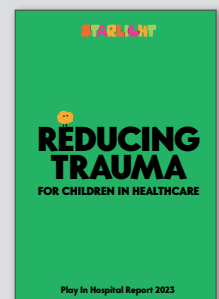


Ways play can support children during hospital stays^{1,2,3}

- **Therapeutic benefits:** before, during, and after medical procedures, play helps children feel prepared and supported, it provides distraction and mitigates boredom, stress, anxiety, and pain.
- **Communication tool:** play serves as an age-appropriate tool for health professionals to convey complex medical information, fostering understanding and building trust.
- **Treatment and recovery:** in some instances, play itself can be a form of treatment, aiding in recovery and rehabilitation, and in certain cases, complementing or replacing conventional treatments.
- **Adaptation and resilience:** play offers children opportunities to regain a sense of control and independence, strengthening family bonds and fostering adaptation and resilience.

STARLIGHT

Starlight's 2023 report¹, *Reducing Trauma for Children in Healthcare*, emphasises the crucial role of Hospital Play Specialists in creating play opportunities. Together with resources for play, carefully designed by charities such as Starlight, the support provided by Hospital Play Specialists can result in children feeling happier, more relaxed, less fearful and in less pain.



However, the report¹ also highlights a significant gap between the demand for play services and their availability in hospitals, demonstrating the urgent need for increased resources and support. Starlight's data showed an average ratio of just one full-time Hospital Play Specialist for 3,986 child admissions to hospital per year, and that 71% of healthcare settings have no budget for play resources, meaning that many children are missing out on vital opportunities to play.

Building connection in play

In addition to play resources being limited in healthcare settings, parents have called for more opportunities that enable children to interact and connect with others⁴. Children's natural language of communication is play, and it is through play that they can express and make sense of their feelings and share them with others. Connecting with others through play is especially important when hospital settings are often frightening, confusing and lonely.

Many children use humour in their play to connect with others and build positive, warm relationships, such as with their siblings, peers and parents⁵. For many people, some of the fondest memories of childhood are the times spent laughing and doing absurd and humorous things with close family and friends. Supporting children's humorous play in hospital may enable children to cope with stress and anxiety, to reclaim a sense of normalcy in an otherwise strange, serious environment, and give children opportunities to rehearse and develop important mental, emotional and social skills.



Building opportunities for humorous play

Researchers at Cardiff University, Play Wales, and Starlight have received new funding from the Economic and Social Research Council to work with children, their families, hospital staff and play specialists to co-design and produce novel, freely available, bilingual (Welsh-English) resources to promote humorous play to support children's wellbeing and relationships in hospital. This project will take place in four main phases:

- **Collecting experiences:**
we will gather perspectives of children, families, and hospital staff to understand their play experiences and ideas for improvement of resources available to them for play.
- **Specialist insights:**
we will consult with Hospital Play Specialists to identify their needs for supporting children and generate ideas for new resources to support interaction and connection in play, including humorous play.
- **Resource development:**
on the basis of the perspectives of children, families, hospital staff and Hospital Play Specialists, we will create new resources and share them with children and families in healthcare settings, and collect data on their impact.
- **Advocacy and implementation:**
we will share insights gained from the project to underscore health play as a policy priority and plan large-scale dissemination of the new resources.

By drawing on existing knowledge and new learning, we hope to develop new ways for children to connect with others through play during short- and long-term hospital stays and in end-of-life care. In doing so, we hope to take new steps forward in protecting and upholding children's right to play.

If you are a Hospital Play Specialist and you would like to hear more or take part in this project, please get in touch with the team at play@cardiff.ac.uk.

Meet the research team

- **Dr. Amy Paine** studies play in childhood and is interested in supporting children's mental health and family relationships.
- **Dr. Kai Thomas** has expertise in children and young people's mental health.
- **Dr. Nicola Birdsey** is a Clinical Psychologist in Paediatric Health with expertise as a Play Therapist.
- **Dr. Faith Martin** is a Clinical Psychologist with experience working in liaison mental health in children's hospitals and conducts research on supporting parents of children in distress.

The research team will be supported by Laura Walsh, Head of Play at Starlight Children's Foundation and Marianne Mannello, Play Wales' Assistant Director.

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 Llywodraeth Cymru
 Welsh Government

NEST Framework to support children's mental health

The Welsh Government's NEST framework aims to ensure a whole system approach for developing joined up mental health, wellbeing and support services for children of all ages, parents and caregivers.

The framework is a planning tool for professionals and services whose work involves babies, children and teenagers' mental health and wellbeing.

When developing the framework, children and teenagers were asked what words described how support for mental health and wellbeing should feel. They came up with NEST:

Nurturing – taken care of and cherished

Empowering – feeling strong and listened to

Safe – feeling protected and able to be yourself

Trusted – reliable and there for you.

The framework consists of six core principles for improving mental health and wellbeing services. It notes that children need to be given time, space and permission to play and socialise. Playing is crucial for children's mental wellbeing, but how does play and playwork link with the NEST principles?

Trusted adults

Playing together is important for family bonding and developing trusting, secure attachments with

parents or primary caregivers.¹ Playworkers are listed in the NEST framework as possible trusted adults. Research² suggests that children and teenagers value the important and on-going roles that play providers have in their lives – a 'play philosophy' which values individual choice, expression and development in a supportive setting.

There are external environmental and personal biological factors that hinder some children from playing. Such children can be supported to play in an environment where there are trained playworkers who know how to intervene, where necessary, to facilitate playing. This extends the advantages of playing to children and teenagers who face multiple barriers to accessing the many benefits of play.

Playworkers understanding their role as trusted adults and supporting

children's mental health and wellbeing upholds this key principle. In addition, it is important that other services, for example education, health and social care acknowledge the importance of playworkers in children's lives.

“ Playwork is a highly skilled profession that enriches and enhances children's play. It takes place where adults support children's play but it is not driven by prescribed education or care outcomes. ”

Wellbeing across education

The Welsh Government's *Framework on embedding a whole school approach to emotional and mental well-being* and Estyn's *Healthy and happy – school impact on pupils' health and wellbeing report* discuss the importance of having time to play in schools. Protecting playtime in schools is a low/no cost way to support wellbeing and the everyday realisation of children's right to play. Services and schools recognising the importance of protecting playtime and regularly advocating for play uphold this key principle.

Children enjoying playtime and engaging in enriched play opportunities in school can have a positive effect on their sense of wellbeing in education. It is linked to a range of improvements in academic skills, attitudes, attention and behaviour, and to improved social skills, increased social relations

between different groups of children, and better enjoyment of and adjustment to school life.³

Co-produced innovations

Quality playwork provision takes place in diverse settings – projects start by researching the characteristics and needs of the local community and the spaces where children and teenagers are most likely to want to gather. As a result, projects can provide an environment that is tailored to the needs of local children and teenagers.

Good play and playwork provision provides a space in which children can develop and change it for themselves to meet their needs and wishes and where the space can grow with children. It's a space that reflects children's play needs and that they grow attached to.

Community playwork provision that works to the Playwork Principles of facilitating freely chosen, personally directed play is an example of continuous co-production in action.

Easy access to expertise

Playwork provision appeals to families who most benefit from early preventative services, as there is no formal referral system. Most open access playwork provision is offered free at the point of access. Playworkers also often act as informal community link workers, signposting families to other support services where needed.

Playing together is important for family bonding – open access playwork provision can help parents relax enough to play with their children and gather ideas for low cost or no cost play opportunities.

Safe and supportive communities

Community based playwork provision contributes to stronger, more play friendly communities, which have a wide-reaching impact on children, teenagers and adults.^{4,5} Playing is how children build social networks and create positive attachments to people and places in their community.

The NEST framework asks services to consider the overall needs of the children they work with. This should include understanding the individual's opportunities for play and the importance of play to their overall wellbeing and development.

No wrong door

Open access playwork provision is often available when families need it most – after school, during school holidays, evenings and weekends – filling in gaps when other services are unavailable. It also offers informal respite for both parents and children – particularly during school holidays. It gives an opportunity for children and adults to extend their social and peer networks, which contributes to increased resilience.

Playworkers can often identify when families would benefit from more specialist services and can signpost them without stigma. More broadly, playworkers have been responsive in diverse ways to the impact of austerity on the children and families with whom they work, and particularly so through the COVID-19 pandemic⁶.

Find out more about the NEST framework at:

www.gov.wales/nest-framework-mental-health-and-wellbeing-introduction

contemporary perspectives, London: National Children's Bureau for Play England.

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The Ministerial Review of Play and the United Nations: making the links

In October 2023, the Deputy Minister for Social Services, Julie Morgan MS responded to the recommendations in the *Ministerial Review of Play steering group report* – the culmination of a three-year collaborative review of the Welsh Government’s play policy work.

In her response, the Deputy Minister explains how the Welsh Government intends to make the 15 recommendations set out by the steering group a reality – or in some instances explore further. Implementing the recommendations will improve opportunities to play for children across Wales.

Also in 2023, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child published its UK Concluding Observations. The UK Government and devolved administrations must report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child approximately every five years to explain how well they are protecting children’s rights. The committee then makes what is referred to as ‘concluding observations’ which lay out any children’s rights issues of concern and recommendations for the UK Government and devolved administrations (State Party).

The Concluding Observations are published following a detailed reporting process, which includes receiving a range of written and oral evidence. In Wales, evidence was gathered by the Wales UNCRC Monitoring Group. Although the Welsh Government is still working on its response to the 2023 UK Concluding Observations, there are some links between the Ministerial Review of Play and the Concluding Observations which relate to play:

The UN Committee recommendation that the State Party:

Develop a strategy, with sufficient resources, aimed at ensuring children’s right to rest, leisure and recreation, including free outdoor play.

Theme 1 of the Ministerial Review of Play covers the laws and policies that relate to the right to play. The steering group determined that aligning key policies and legislation would help more children to play more often. Theme 2: Play Sufficiency Duty and funding covers the importance of working together to plan and provide for play, including setting aside money for play.

Six recommendations from the steering group identify key milestones that the Welsh Government should undertake to ensure a well-resourced strategic response to play.

UN Committee recommendation:

Integrate children’s right to play into school curricula.

Another theme of the review focuses on play in schools. The steering group concluded that play in schools was important to consider because children spend a lot of time at school. Sometimes, it is the main place where children can play with their friends. Key recommendations include promoting the use of school grounds as a community asset for play and milestones which aim to increase and improve play and break times during the school day.

UN Committee recommendation:

Strengthen measures to ensure that all children, including children with disabilities, young children, children in rural areas and children in disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, have access to accessible, safe, public outdoor play spaces. Involve children in decisions regarding urban-planning processes.

Spatial justice means ensuring that neighbourhoods and other public places are suitable for play and that they are welcoming for children of all ages. The spatial justice theme of the review explored why and how the Welsh Government needs to make neighbourhoods and other public spaces more encouraging and welcoming for play. Discussions included key national policies that have an impact on children being able to play in their neighbourhoods and public areas. Key messages from the steering group include ensuring that:

- guidance about planning neighbourhoods and towns takes account of the way children move around their communities for play
- the views and experiences of children inform the ways in which neighbourhoods are planned and managed.

For more information about the Ministerial Review of Play and the Welsh Government’s response, visit: www.play.wales/ministerial-review-of-play

Play deprivation and the potential of playwork

Eleven years since it was originally published by Play Wales, Emeritus Professor Fraser Brown has updated the *Play deprivation: the causes and consequences for child development, and the potential of playwork* information sheet he wrote back in 2013. Here we give you a taste of what Fraser had to say.

When children are deprived of play, the consequences are catastrophic. Play deprivation can affect children from all social, cultural and economic backgrounds across Wales. The causes of play deprivation are varied but, generally, the main factors in Wales, and the rest of the UK, include: fear of traffic, perceived 'stranger danger' and living in a 'risk averse' society.

As a result of these factors, opportunities for children to explore their neighbourhood in free-ranging play activity are becoming more and more restricted. Play deprivation is almost certainly getting worse. Yet, we know that play is essential for children's healthy development. As their social and physical horizons shrink so do their opportunities for development during play. This is extremely dangerous for the individual child as well as for society in general.

What does playwork have to offer?

At its most fundamental level the role of a playworker is to provide an environment where children are free to play as they wish. The playwork approach is well placed to address the ills of play deprivation. It is an approach that has many unique characteristics, all of which are potentially relevant in the alleviation of the issues attributed to causing fewer opportunities for children to play.

In the information sheet, Fraser details the unique elements of

playwork, which include:

- The provision of environments that are characterised by flexibility, so that the children are able to create (and possibly destroy and recreate) their own play environments according to their own needs.
- An approach to practice that involves a willingness to relinquish adult power, suspend any preconceptions, and work to the children's agenda.
- A general acceptance that risky play can be beneficial, and that intervention is not necessary unless a safety or safeguarding issue arises.

These characteristics place the child's immediate agenda at the heart of everything – which leaves the child free to explore, experiment and develop their own life skills at their own pace. They also suggest that the playwork approach is ideally suited to providing the sort of play environment within which play deprived children can gradually regain and retain their own wellbeing.

As well as referencing the work of Brian Sutton-Smith and Bob Hughes, well-known play and playwork scholars, the information sheet also discusses research undertaken by Fraser and various students. One of the most useful additions to the updated information sheet is a table which provides a thorough summary of the benefits of play and the dangers of play deprivation. Relevant and relatable to all practitioners

who work with children, it includes information which describe:

- the key factors that contribute to wellbeing and development when children are playing
- aspects of the process – how children are learning, enacting and developing a range of essential life skills when playing
- what outcomes playing helps to produce in the longer term for children
- implications of play deprivation – what will result over time.

To show the devastating impact of severe play deprivation, and the difference a therapeutic playwork approach can make, Fraser draws on his own work with neglected children in a Romanian children's hospital. To emphasise the impact, he draws parallels to an experiment with young monkeys undertaken by a developmental psychologist in the 1970s. The absence of play was a critical factor in the developmental process of the children and the young monkeys. In both instances, simply providing opportunities for interactive play and play-mates significantly improved their development.

During a period when nothing changed in their lives, other than their introduction to the therapeutic playwork project, the children in Romania changed dramatically:

- Their social interaction became more complex.
- Their physical activity showed a distinct move from gross (crawling, throwing a ball) to fine (colouring, clapping hands) motor skills.
- Their understanding of the world around them improved.
- The children began to play in highly creative ways.

For a more detailed look at the causes and consequences of play deprivation and the potential of playwork to support children's wellbeing and development, see the newly published information sheet on our website: www.play.wales/resources-library

Workforce development

Exciting news

Funded playwork qualifications through Welsh Government Training and Support Programme

Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs has secured funding to deliver playwork qualifications to 750 learners in Wales between now and May 2025. The funding has been awarded through the Welsh Government Training and Support Programme.



To best meet the needs of the sector, the 750 funded learner places will be divided as follows:

- 300 learners – Agored Cymru Level 2 Award in Playwork Practice (L2APP)
- 75 learners – Agored Cymru Playwork: Principles into Practice (P³) at Level 2 and 3
- 375 learners – Level 3 Award in Transition to Playwork.

The L2APP qualification will be delivered to employed, unemployed or volunteering early years, childcare and playwork practitioners aged 18 and over. And, the Transition to Playwork and P³ (Level 2 and 3) qualifications will be delivered to employed early years, childcare and playwork practitioners aged 18 and over.

Play Wales is delighted to see this funding being made available for L2APP and P³ qualifications. These are qualifications that we have developed with funding from the Welsh Government, specifically for the playwork sector in Wales. We have worked closely with Agored Cymru and other partners over the last seven years to make them available.

This Training and Support Programme funding will bolster the development of the playwork sector, and it responds to recommendations in the Ministerial Review of Play. We will be working with our partners and the Welsh Government to identify future funding for playwork qualifications beyond 2025.

Play Wales has agreements with a number of delivery Centres across Wales, including Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs, to ensure that the delivery of L2APP and P³ are supported by skilled, experienced and occupationally competent tutors.

To register your interest in these funded qualifications please get in touch with Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs: www.clybiauplantcymru.org/training-events/

For further information and advice on play and playwork training and qualifications, please contact Play Wales: workforce@playwales.org.uk

www.play.wales/playwork/training

Playworkers Forum

3 - 4 July 2024

This year's event will offer an opportunity to learn and share knowledge and experiences with other playworkers on topics including: inclusion, behaviour, play and wellbeing as well as practical playwork skills.

The residential playwork training event under canvas is aimed at: playworkers, play development workers, playwork managers, forest school practitioners and childcare workers and all those wanting to increase their skills and knowledge in playwork, especially in the outdoors.

For more information and to book a place go to: www.play.wales/events

Workforce development

Spotlight on ...



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Emma Booth, Lecturer in Childhood Development and Playwork

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 in the sector. For this issue, we spoke to Emma Booth, a Lecturer in Childhood Development and Playwork at Leeds Beckett University.

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

When I first heard about playwork, I was dead set on studying psychology to go into forensic psychology. However, I found the fact the interventions came after the 'problem' didn't sit well with me. As I read more about playwork and the way it works with children, I was drawn to the unique, non-judgemental approach of working with children in the here and now. It's this unique way of supporting children that is a fundamental feature of playwork in prisons.

What is your job title and what does your role involve?

I am now a lecturer on the Childhood Development and Playwork degree. Prior to this, I worked in both the prison and probation service in family services. One aspect of my role with the prisons was to provide play for children visiting their parent who is incarcerated.

What is the most important or enjoyable aspect of your work?

An important part of the role is supporting a child's right to play in possibly the most restrictive playwork environment. Play within a prison setting can have several therapeutic benefits, such as reducing stress and anxiety, and support children in reconnecting with their parent.

Something I find truly special about playwork in prisons is the friendships children develop through finding themselves

in similar situations. There is a lot of stigma around having a parent in prison, and for children who know the truth they often feel shame and embarrassment, or the wider community can treat the children as being guilty by association. All of this can result in children struggling to maintain friendships. However, when playing in a prison setting these concerns are reduced, and as such friendships develop among children and their families which goes beyond the context of the visit hall.

How does a background in playwork help when working with children in the context of prison?

As playworkers, we recognise the importance of removing the barriers to play, as mentioned previously a prison setting is particularly restrictive. These restrictions can make the environment inflexible and hostile – this is where the role of the playworker comes in. Rather than increasing the flexibility of the environment, it is the playworker that needs to be flexible to remove the barriers to play.

Is there anything you find challenging about your job?

The most challenging aspect to the job is the restrictions. There are many resources that you can't provide, such as play dough, scissors and wax crayons, that in other play settings would be taken for granted. A further challenge is the lack of understanding around the importance of play within a prison. It is often viewed as a luxury for children rather than valued for the intervention that it is.

Playwork guides

A series of four playwork guides for all those who work with playing children. The guides introduce and explore some of the core theories, concepts, ideas and practices that are at the heart of playwork.

Our playwork guides are now available in print. If you live or work in Wales, visit our website to find out how you can order (for a small postage fee) – while stocks lasts!

www.play.wales/news

Playful Communities

'The garden'

CAMHS Environment Project

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) support children from birth to 18 who are experiencing poor mental health or difficult feelings or experiences.

CAMHS is staffed by multi-disciplinary teams which include CAMHS practitioners, nurses, child psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, and other professionals who work with children.

A few years ago, a young person accessing CAMHS at Wrexham Child Health Centre wanted to look at the entire CAMHS environment – everything from the clinic rooms to the website. The Head of Nursing invited the young person to tell her more and encouraged her to find out what others thought would help to improve the service for children attending appointments at the Child Health Centre.

The young person, also a member of Senedd yr Ifanc – Wrexham's Youth Parliament, worked with peers to run a survey of about 950 people aged 10 to 25 who lived in Wrexham. About half of the respondents had attended the Child Health Centre at some point in their lives.

Feedback from the survey included ideas for improvements to the clinic rooms, information and resources for children and the outdoor area. The survey results identified that the outdoor area was valued but needed attention to be more child friendly.

CAMHS and Senedd yr Ifanc are now collaborating to ensure that the project is youth led and that play is kept in mind through the environmental improvements. A range of partners, such as the council's Play and Youth Support Team, Coleg Cambria and the National Trust are working with child health professionals and the estates team to co-produce an outdoor space which supports a range of play types and offers a place to explore and relax in. The garden, due to open in April 2024, will include space for early years, quiet spaces, shelters and a playbox with loose parts to support play and creativity.



Jane Berry, CAMHS Patient Experience Lead, said:

'Co-production and engagement takes time to ensure that the views and suggestions of children are listened to as part of the play garden improvement. Visiting playwork sessions with the council's play team was really helpful and inspiring. Seeing children lead their own play reminded us how important playing is to children.'

Marilyn Wells, Head of Nursing for CAMHS, said:

'Play is already an important part of assessment at the Child Health Centre. We also have a role in making sure children have time to play on site as part of their recovery. Our patients are children first, all who have a right to play. It is important to provide a range of environments to ensure we maximise the opportunity for play with our children which in turn helps with engagement.'

Across Wales organisations and groups run play projects or make sure children have opportunities to play in their communities. In each issue, we share an example of a project that's helping to make a community more playful.

For more examples of playful communities in Wales visit: www.playfulchildhoods.wales/play-in-the-community/inspiration