

Play for Wales

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Play news and briefing from the national charity for play



**Playing in neighbourhoods:
places and spaces to play**

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

Playing and the sense of belonging to a place are interconnected. Having plenty of opportunities to play every day has traditionally provided children with a sense of fun, with added benefits that can act as protective factors against everyday uncertainty and the negative impact of adversity.

Many of us have fond memories of growing up in a time when it was accepted that children played outside, in and around their neighbourhoods with friends. The spaces near where we live and grow up have always been a place of connection – full of nooks and crannies where magic erupts when children have enough time and are allowed to play.

In recent surveys, children across Wales have reinforced the well-known and accepted truism that playing matters to them. The views of the children humanise the compelling evidence: play supports children to feel part of their neighbourhoods and wider communities. Playing allows children to learn about the world around them, make connections and develop a sense of identity and belonging.

The spatial justice theme of the Welsh Government's Ministerial Review of Play explored why and how we need to make our neighbourhoods and other public spaces more encouraging and welcoming for play. Spatial justice is about children's fair and just access to – and participation in – what public space, particularly neighbourhoods, has to offer.

“Playing allows children to learn about the world around them, make connections and develop a sense of identity and belonging.”

Adults and children continue to identify a number of factors that impact on the opportunity for children to realise their right to play, specifically: changes in neighbourhoods, including increased car use and traffic, perceptions of neighbourhood safety (traffic, bullying, racism, stranger danger), participation in structured activities and educational demands, and intolerance towards children and teenagers playing and meeting up.

Being able to play in their neighbourhoods is a question of equality for children as a group. However, children's insights make it clear that play is not experienced equally. Some groups of children and teenagers face additional barriers related to safety, inclusion and relevance of provision near where they live. Looking at and addressing the conditions that support those who have difficulties accessing neighbourhood play provides a more equitable experience for children.

The Ministerial Review of Play drew on the evidence in literature and the views of children, all emphasising the same point: playing benefits children, families and the neighbourhoods in which they live. Children are reminding us that playing comes instinctively to them, and they can find opportunities to play when the conditions are right. It is vital that all of us – parents, practitioners, policy makers and the wider community – take action to ensure the conditions are right for children to have sufficient opportunities to play. Being mindful of the experiences of children and their relationship with neighbourhoods will help to create a more playful Wales for all children.

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Drum roll, please...

Congratulations to Play Wales colleagues and supporters who have recently been recognised for their work with children in Wales:

- **Julian Davenne**, Play Services Manager at Torfaen Council, was given the British Empire Medal (BEM) in the King's Birthday Honours list. Julian, who supports county wide year-round playwork provision, was recognised for his services to young people.
- **Sarah Sharpe** is a registered childminder in the Vale of Glamorgan. Sarah, who worked closely with Play Wales on our *Playing outdoors in early years settings* toolkit, has won the WeCare Wales award.
- **Windsor Clive Primary School** in Cardiff was shortlisted for the Tes Schools Awards 2025 in the category of Pupil Mental Health Initiative of the Year, for its outstanding commitment to supporting student wellbeing. The only primary school in Wales to be shortlisted for these awards, the school supported Play Wales by acting as a sounding board during the 2024-25 academic year.
- **Dr Charlotte Brookfield** of Cardiff University's School of Social Sciences has been awarded a National Teaching Fellowship – the highest award in the sector. Play Wales has been a placement setting for students in Charlotte's Real World Research module, which aims to equip social science students with quantitative research methods.
- **Tŷ Gobaith Children's Hospice** in Conwy was selected by Starlight Children's Foundation as a runner-up in its Innovation Awards for its work developing an exciting and accessible programme of playful events to support families of children with life-limiting conditions.
- **Dr Gwenllïan Lansdown Davies**, Chief Executive of Mudiad Meithrin has been honoured with the 'Gwisg Las' (blue robe) at the 2025 National Eisteddfod in Wrexham. Gwenllïan has been recognised for her work to expand and develop the accessibility, availability and affordability of Welsh-medium childcare provision.

Bil Pob Plentyn

Bil Pob Plentyn (A Law for Every Child), a legislative proposal calling on the Senedd to enshrine children's rights in Welsh law, has been put forward by Jane Dodds MS. The proposal has support from more than 20 organisations, including Play Wales.

The proposal calls on all political parties to commit to placing a statutory duty on public bodies to actively listen to, protect and support every child in Wales, regardless of their background or circumstances. It aims to guarantee children's rights are treated as fundamental to public decision-making and accountability.

The campaign behind Bil Pob Plentyn stems from a growing recognition that despite progress, too many children, especially those in care, in Wales still face barriers to being heard, safe, and properly supported.

Jane Dodds, Chair of the Cross-Party Groups, Children in Our Care and Children and Families, said:

“ This is about building a Wales where every child knows their voice matters, where their safety is protected by law, and where their future is shaped with dignity and care. ”

Play Wales added:

“ Wales is rightly seen as a country where children's play is prioritised. The need for this legislation was identified in the Ministerial Review of Play. The Bil Pob Plentyn act has the potential to extend current legislation and ensure that play is given the priority it deserves. ”

Playwork Principles research – share your views

Play Wales has commissioned the Childhood Development and Playwork Team at Leeds Beckett University to undertake a survey on the scale of the use of the Playwork Principles.



LEEDS BECKETT UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF HEALTH

We are asking anyone who has any role or responsibility for facilitating play for children in a staffed setting, to complete this survey.

This research is designed to ascertain how widely and in what settings the Playwork Principles have become adopted 20 years since they were first devised. 2025 marks the 20th anniversary of the Playwork Principles. The research involves surveying the playwork sector nationally and internationally, to identify:

- organisations and stakeholders who have adopted the Playwork Principles or who use the Playwork Principles to inform their work
- organisations that have adopted alternative forms of guiding principles for playwork.

This research has been approved by the Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group who hold the Playwork Principles in trust on behalf of the sector.

We are keen for the survey to be distributed as far and widely as possible, nationally and internationally. Are you a representative of an organisation with contacts across the children's workforce who may be applying the Playwork Principles in their practice? Could you help promote the survey? If so, please email the Childhood Development and Playwork Team at:

playworkprinciples@leedsbeckett.ac.uk

To share your views, please complete the survey by 31 December 2025.

For more information visit

www.play.wales/news/play-wales-news/playwork-principles-research-share-your-views/

Early years framework for action

Play Wales recently spoke at the launch of the *Best Start in Life: An Early Years Framework for Action*, published by Public Health Wales. Published alongside a Parental Insights report, the framework outlines a new approach to improving support for families with babies and young children.



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The framework brings together the expertise of early years professionals and the lived experiences of parents and carers to define what it means to give every child in Wales the best start in life. It also offers a clear, shared vision for how the early years system can bring the framework to life.

The framework contains seven thematic building blocks that detail the elements of the system that matter most for babies, young children and their families, directly influencing their day to day lives and outcomes. Opportunities for babies and young children to be able to play, explore and learn is a key feature within the building blocks.

For more information visit:

www.phw.nhs.wales/news/parents-voices-at-the-heart-of-new-early-years-framework-for-action/

Play Wales national conference 2025

Following the success of last year's event, our national conference will be back again this autumn. Focusing on the theme of Play policy, research and practice: Getting it right for children, the conference will be held at the Hilton hotel in Cardiff on 16 October 2025.

Over recent years, the play and playwork sectors have delivered significant progress in creating a play-friendly environment for children, supported by ground-breaking policy and research. This progress and momentum need to be nurtured and maintained.

Join us at the Play Wales national conference to discuss how we continue this momentum and explore ways to build on our combined work, and work together to provide, promote and protect children's right to play.

The keynote speakers at this year's conference will be:

- **Dawn Bowden MS** – Minister for Children and Social Care
- **Dr David Dallimore** – researcher and consultant

- **Professor Philip Jaffé** – Vice Chair of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child
- **Robyn Monro Miller** – President of International Play Association and Winston Churchill Trust Fellow.

The conference will provide delegates with the opportunity to:

- hear about children's views in relation to play satisfaction
- reflect on and share good practice about children's play
- contribute to a wide range of case study workshops
- network with colleagues
- consider ways to ensure that policy and research is implemented to make a real



difference to children and their opportunities to play

- celebrate Wales' place in shaping global trends and ideas about play.

The conference is aimed at:

play sufficiency officers, childcare and playwork practitioners, local government elected members, and those involved in health, education, active travel, town and community planning.

To find out more about the conference and to book your space, visit:

www.play.wales/events/play-wales-conference-2025

New Emotional Health, Wellbeing and Resilience website launched

Play officers from the six north Wales local authorities have contributed to the recently launched Emotional Health, Wellbeing and Resilience (EHWR) website. This collaborative regional initiative was developed through the North Wales Children's Regional Partnership Board.

The EHWR website, designed to promote emotional wellbeing across the life course in north Wales, is grounded in principles of early intervention, prevention and co-production. It aligns with the Emotional Health, Wellbeing and Resilience Framework and includes:

- **A whole-family approach** – resources for parents, carers and professionals, with a focus on nurturing environments from birth.
- **A children and young people section** – age-appropriate content to build emotional literacy and resilience.
- **Five ways to wellbeing** – embedded throughout the site: Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning, Give.
- **Professional resources** – tools for cross-sector use in health, education and social care.

Local authority play teams have provided local information for the **Explore Outside Section** of the website which features information about local opportunities to play.

Find out more at: **www.wellbeingnorth.wales**

What children say about neighbourhood play

Section 11 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 places a statutory duty on local authorities to assess and secure opportunities to play. As part of this work, local authorities are required to consult with children about their opportunities to play.

In measuring play sufficiency, it is important to appreciate children and teenagers' perspectives on what is good and what is not so good about their experience of play in their neighbourhoods. Most local authorities do this by talking to them in person and by undertaking surveys. The information gathered can be used to understand the barriers to creating a play friendly environment. The results have an important role in providing the evidence needed for local authorities to identify gaps in provision and support the development of action plans to address these gaps. Responses highlight what works well, as well as significant barriers to playful, inclusive and safe environments.

In early 2025, Play Wales asked local authorities to share the results from their Play Satisfaction Surveys. Of the 22 local authorities in Wales, 19 responded and 15 were able to provide anonymised data in a format that could be analysed. This means we have analysed insights from 7,825 children and teenagers across Wales, exploring their experiences of play in their neighbourhoods.

Researchers Dr Michaela James and Dr Hope Jones from Swansea University have undertaken a qualitative analysis of two questions from the survey:

- What is good about play in your area?
- What is not so good about play in your area?

What's good?

Green and open spaces

Many children enjoy having access to parks, fields and natural environments that are safe, fun and close to home. These spaces allow for play and social interaction.

“There is lots of green space and forests near me, it is a quiet area and lots of places to hang out.”
Boy, aged 11



“It's big – we can run around play football and the goal can be our bags and coats.”
Boy, aged 10

“There is lots of trees to climb and lots of space to play.”
Girl, aged 10

Opportunities for play

Children particularly value spaces where they can play freely and creatively, often with little to no adult intervention.

“It's great and we have a lot of space to play and to do whatever we are playing.”
Girl, aged 9

“LOADS of space and a lil den made out of trees (football pitch and a park as well!).”
Boy, aged 10

Friendship and socialisation

A strong theme was the importance of friendships in enabling play. Children appreciated being able to hang out with friends, often referring to secret dens, bike rides and local hangouts.

“ There are lots of people we know that we can go to if we ever needed help. ”
Girl, aged 15

“ I like it because I’ve got friends on my street that knock for me and don’t leave me out and we go to the field or woods or street. ”
Child, aged 10

Feeling safe

In several areas, children described their areas as safe for play, due to low traffic, good lighting or familiarity with neighbours.

“ I am close to my friends and there are lots of people with cameras on their houses for safety. ”
Girl, aged 8

“ It’s good because it’s very big and good for children, it’s very safe, it’s the most of safe even my mum and dad like it! ”
Child, aged 13

What’s not so good?

Safety

Safety was the most frequently cited issue. Children mentioned worries about bullying, drug use, dog fouling, poor maintenance and unsafe roads that prevent them from playing freely or accessing spaces they enjoy.

“ There are lots of people taking drugs everywhere. Even in the parks. ”
Girl, aged 11

Improvements needed to existing equipment

In several areas, play equipment was described as outdated, broken or suitable only for younger children. Many called for investment in spaces for older children and teenagers.

“ The swings are very rusty and feels like it will break when going high. ”
Boy, aged 9

“ The slides are dirty and boring. ”
Child, aged 10

Lack of opportunities

Some children expressed frustration at the lack of things to do and by long travel distances, and a lack of designated or teen friendly areas led to feelings of being unwelcome.

“ Anywhere we go, we get judged. I don’t really want to play on swings and slides. ”
Boy, aged 13

“ Nothing that interests me. It’s all sports activities and I don’t enjoy sport. ”
Boy, aged 13

Barriers to inclusion

Children with additional learning needs (ALN) highlighted that many spaces and opportunities are not inclusive. Responses also revealed inequalities in access to safe and accessible play opportunities for disabled and neurodivergent children.

“ Not enough autism friendly play areas which can be too busy and scare me. ”
Boy, aged 10

“ I have no interest in sports and there’s no youth club available locally for SEND children. ”
Boy, aged 13

Lack of time

A few older children expressed that academic pressures, homework, or other activities left little room for outdoor play or socialising with friends.

“ Homework, and other priorities like gym and just don’t have enough time to. ”
Girl, aged 15

Findings from the Play Satisfaction Surveys highlight that children know what they need. These are inclusive, well-maintained, and age-appropriate spaces.

These responses from children highlight that children’s play experiences are deeply shaped by local conditions. While some areas are actively supporting play through inclusive design and accessible green space, others are falling short, especially for teenagers and children with additional needs. This reinforces the need for place-based approaches that consider the specific challenges and assets of each community.

Our full report about what children have to say about play in Wales will be published in the autumn.

Thinking outside the box: bringing play everywhere and anywhere

The aim of neighbourhood play projects is to provide children with opportunities to play near where they live. Gareth Stacey from Wrexham County Borough Council's Play and Youth Support Team, Becki Miller from Children's Play Services at Cardiff Council, and Rachel Jones from Gwynedd's Early Years Unit discuss local projects which have enhanced how children and teenagers use neighbourhood spaces for play.

Coedpoeth Play and Youth Project

The Coedpoeth Community Council in Wrexham began funding playschemes in 2015, initially offering weekly holiday sessions in a public open space adjacent to a fixed play area within a housing estate. These sessions were immediately popular, garnering support from residents, professionals and local businesses to expand the offering for children.

In 2018, with funding from the All Wales Play Opportunities Grant, an adapted shipping container and a storage container were installed, providing a 'base' for both play and youth sessions. The container was internally clad with windows and doors, allowing for indoor sessions during inclement weather. This development was based on extensive consultation, not only with children, but also with local residents and key stakeholders.

At the same time, the local authority's Play Development team merged with the Community Youth Work team, creating an integrated Play and Youth Support Team. This structural change has allowed for a more complementary delivery of both play and youth sessions. As a result, youth club sessions were also held at the container following the play sessions, delivered by staff trained in both playwork and youth work providing a blended approach to children and teenagers in the community.

In recent years, with the support of local stakeholders, further improvements have been made, including graffiti sessions to decorate the container, the installation



Play session full of loose parts at the container in Coedpoeth

of seating and decking, and the creation of allotments to further engage the community. More recently, in partnership with the community council, a local building firm has created a larger sheltered area attached to the container as part of their community benefit scheme.

One of the key learnings from this project is that gradual development over several years has allowed the initiative to deeply embed itself within the community. Children have taken ownership of the space, and, crucially, all developments have been driven by the voices of the children themselves.

The Grange Pavilion Play Shack

Tucked away in the vibrant grounds of Grange Pavilion in Cardiff, nestled between greenery and the local play park, sits a small but mighty 2x2 metre metal container. Full of surprises, this unassuming structure – known as the Play Shack – transforms several times a week into a hub of imagination, creativity and community.

When its doors swing open, the Play Shack spills out a treasure trove of materials designed to spark joy and inspire play. From large loose parts like tyres, crates and guttering, to smaller, more curious items like keyboards and everyday

Trelar Chwarae Gwynedd

In 2021, Gwynedd Council's Early Years Unit invested in a trailer with capital grant funding from the Welsh Government. Officers of the Early Years Unit had identified a lack of play activities in areas of the county, and saw the trailer as being able to fill this gap by taking resources to the communities and providing children with opportunities to play.

This was the beginning of Trelar Chwarae Gwynedd (Gwynedd Play Trailer). The trailer is full of loose parts resources which gives families and children up to the age of 11 the opportunity to play outdoors with their friends.

Qualified play staff from Plas Pawb Nursery, and staff from the unit's other teams are responsible for taking the trailer to communities across the county during school holidays. Working together with schools and community councils ensures that the trailer goes to the areas where there are few other activities for children.

With all the resources in the trailer, no session is the same – the children's imagination and enjoyment is a joy to see as they work together to create a 'den' or to adapt a blue tub into a boat or a vehicle! What is better than a two hour session out in the open air, an opportunity to play, have fun, laugh and enjoy with friends?

By now the Trelar Chwarae is well known across the county during school holidays, with great feedback from children and parents, proving that the vision and investment has been well worth it.



Water play with loose parts from the Play Shack at Grange Pavilion

objects repurposed for fun, the possibilities are endless. No two play sessions are ever the same – children are free to explore, invent and let their imaginations run wild.

More than just a container of playthings, the Play Shack is a community cornerstone. It champions free play, encourages creativity and fosters inclusive engagement for children of all backgrounds. Regularly used by home education groups, parent meetups, youth and children's play services, the shack is independently managed by the pavilion team. This grassroots approach promotes local ownership and strengthens the sense of community around the project.

Inspired by the Vale of Glamorgan Council's Play Development team and its Play Cubes project, Cardiff Council started the Play Shack project in 2022 with Welsh Government funding. The Play Shack is one of 16 similar installations across Cardiff, located in school grounds and community spaces. It's the result of a powerful partnership between Re-create scrapstore, Children's Play Services and Play Wales. Re-create has played a vital role in supporting the initiative, helping to stock the shacks with resources chosen by the hosts of the play shacks. Through its Community Play Ambassador project, Play Wales provided loose parts training to local parents and residents.

Initially curated by playworkers and keyholders, the contents of the shack are now replenished in consultation with the children who use it, ensuring the space evolves with their interests. All keyholders have received training in loose parts play and risk-benefit assessment, ensuring a safe yet adventurous environment for all.

The Grange Pavilion Play Shack is a shining example of how a simple idea can create lasting impact, one playful moment at a time.



Loose parts fun with the Trelar Chwarae in a Gwynedd community

Romilly Road Play Street – building a playful community

Play streets are neighbour-led official short-term road closures, creating a safe space for children to play freely together on their doorstep.

For over two years, children in Romilly Road in Barry, Vale of Glamorgan have enjoyed monthly play street sessions, thanks to an official temporary road closure from the council.

Aoife Blight, play street organiser, reflects on her experience kick-starting a play street in her area.



Romilly Road has always been a lovely neighbourhood. Neighbours are supportive and friendly and come together to celebrate special occasions (jubilees, VE day and so forth), but you'd be forgiven, day-to-day, for thinking there were very few children living on the street. You'd rarely see kids going out to play, but that changed when we started running our play street sessions.

When I first became a parent, I didn't realise how hard it would be to give the kids opportunities to play outside of the house. It always involved going to the park or the soft play, which was manageable when I was on maternity leave but was less so when I returned to full time work. I wondered: was it this hard for my parents? Were they constantly trying to squeeze in trips to the play park? I realised, a huge part of my childhood was spent outside, playing with friends from my neighbourhood.

We would spend hours exploring our surroundings, playing Tip the Can and chasing.

I remembered how much fun I used to have and knew that I wanted to make sure my kids had the same chance to play and grow up with their neighbours. There was just one problem – drivers speed down our road, earning themselves a few seconds of shortcut while depriving our kids the chance to play safely. I didn't know what to do, but then I discovered Play Streets. Closing the road to drivers and opening it up to play – the perfect solution.

Using a couple of cones as traffic calming measures, myself and a neighbour would go out with our kids for a bit of supervised fun. We didn't fully close the road, but we slowed the cars down enough to create space for the kids to play. This started to get positive attention from the other neighbours and soon

enough we had the support of the whole street to close the road for the kids to play. I worked with my local council's Play Development Team and Play Wales to get the necessary risk assessments and permissions in place and then we were open for playtime.

Now, we have a community of parents and neighbours that help us with our monthly road closures. We fully close the road for two hours on the first Sunday of the month, resident access only, and the kids come out to play. Scooter races, skipping rope games, football and general running around make this everyone's favourite time of the month. My favourite things are the chalk drawings that linger on the road and pavement for days after the session, reminding us of the fun. The parents and grandparents all come out to play too, which helps us build a real sense of community and friendship that extends beyond the two-hour session.

We are now in our third official year of the Romilly Road Play Street project. In that time, we have had birthday parties, camera crews and visits from local dignitaries, all celebrating the joy of neighbourhood play and how it brings everyone together. I'm so proud of what we have achieved as a community and how we have created space for our children to play.

Our neighbours all enjoy and value the play street sessions too:

“ The play street has brought together the community more than any other activity that I can remember. It has helped us to get to know our neighbours better, make many new friends and given us a sense of ownership and commitment to the street we live on. ”

“ We moved to the street during the pandemic, so we didn't know any of our neighbours. Street play has helped us meet lots of people and our children have too, it has created such a neighbourly ethos, full of fun and kindness. ”

“ Having the opportunity for our boys to play outside of our house without the worry of them getting hurt has been invaluable. ”

“ It has been paramount in helping us get to know our neighbours, and now friends (we moved in not long before play street commenced). It has massively helped my three-year-old grow in her social confidence. ”



“ I have an (almost) three-year-old who has thoroughly enjoyed the monthly play with her friends and neighbours. I grew up in a very close-knit community, spending most of my childhood outdoors with friends. Watching my daughter getting to do the same, now, fills me with such joy and nostalgia. ”

“ When we moved to Barry, play street was one of the things that helped us find community. My young son has made and played with new friends and this has helped him grow in confidence in a new area, attending a new school. I have helped steward on occasion and residents have cooperated happily with the short road closure on a quiet day of the week. ”

Play Street has helped me get to know adult neighbours who I probably would never have met otherwise (both because our kids go to different schools and because, as you get older, opportunities to get to know people your own age decrease). I've loved stewarding and my kids have got involved, both through playing and through organising activities like treasure hunts. It's become a real community event, and I look forward to it every month.

The parents really appreciate the social aspect and the chance for their kids to let loose, run around and mix with other children. I think we all understand that as a society – because of cars, long work hours and online activities – we have fewer opportunities to get together with the people who live around us. We have all become more isolated in the past 20 to 30 years. Our play street addresses this beautifully by reconnecting us in an environment which is safe and fun and where no one has to spend money to join in.

Play street manuals and toolkits are available in the Resources library section of the Play Wales website: www.play.wales/resources-library

Playday 2025

Spaces for play

On Wednesday 6 August, Wales and the rest of the UK celebrated Playday, the annual national day for play. Playday is a day to celebrate every child's right to play and to emphasise the importance and value of play in children's lives.

The campaign theme for Playday 2025 highlighted the vital importance of accessible, inclusive spaces where children and teenagers have opportunities to play freely, spending time, and connecting with friends – and feel valued as part of their community. The theme was chosen to remind us that access to quality playful spaces and places is essential for children's happiness and development, offering opportunities to boost both physical health and emotional wellbeing.

Across Wales, thousands of children and families enjoyed a day of fun at local and regional events. Playday organisers collaborated locally to make sure that children and families in their area could mark the national day for play.

Here is a small selection of photos of children and families enjoying at Playday celebrations in Wales.



Building a cardboard den in Llanrumney, Cardiff



Facepainting and fabric swirling at Splott, Cardiff



Getting messy with the water slide at Llanharan in Rhondda Cynon Taf



Grown-ups joining in with the marshmallow toasting at Bedwellty House, Tredegar



The Children's Commissioner for Wales, Rocio Cifuentes, having fun at the celebration in Aberaeron



Impressive hula hooping at Wrexham's big-scale event in the city centre



Children and adults enjoying the giant sand pit at Eirias Park in Colwyn Bay

Date for your diary

Playday 2026 will take place on
Wednesday 5 August!



Tunnel fun for toddlers at Rodney Parade, Newport

Improving play spaces and playgrounds

Welsh Government investment to improve opportunities to play



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government



The Minister for Children and Social Care, Dawn Bowden chatting to children and parents at the funding launch

As reported in issue 64 of *Play for Wales*, the Welsh Government is providing capital funding for play spaces and playgrounds. As part of the budget for 2025-26, the Welsh Government agreed a number of funding allocations and policy issues with Jane Dodds MS, Leader of the Welsh Liberal Democrats.

The agreement focuses on a series of shared priorities, which secures more than £100m of additional funding for local authorities and public services. This included £5m of capital funding to local authorities to improve the quality of play spaces, refurbish playgrounds and support the creation of accessible play spaces and opportunities for children.

The aim of the play spaces and playgrounds capital funding is to provide children with better opportunities to play within their local communities. The grant will assist local authorities in responding to shortfalls identified within their Play Sufficiency Assessments and provide flexibility to purchase items to improve the quality of play spaces, refurbish playgrounds and support the creation of inclusive and accessible play spaces.

Distributed via the All Wales Play Opportunities Grant, local authorities are asked to consider the outcomes of their Play Sufficiency Assessment when considering their proposals for funding to improve the quality and quantity of play spaces and playgrounds. They are asked to pay attention to particular aspects of the assessment:

- **Providing for diverse needs**, which directs local authorities and partners to aim to offer play opportunities that are inclusive and encourage all children to play and meet together.
- **Space available for children to play**, which directs local authorities to undertake access audits at all designated play spaces and implement proposals to improve access and safety, and assess its play value.
- **Community engagement and participation**, which directs local authorities to consult widely with children, their families and other stakeholders on their views on play provision. This includes engaging with relevant groups to enhance play opportunities for children in their area.

Examples of what might be funded include the purchase of:

- equipment, such as gazebos or roofed structures, which will enable play sessions to operate year-round
- portable equipment to enable peripatetic play
- equipment to facilitate street play
- equipment to create natural looking footpaths and nature trails which incorporate children's play
- equipment or structures to support inclusive and accessible play spaces
- repairs or replenishment of equipment in play areas and playgrounds
- lighting for play spaces.

Funding launch

To launch the fund, the Minister for Children and Social Care, Dawn Bowden MS visited the refurbished Williams Field Lane playground in Monmouth where she met parents and children who benefit from the facilities. Here, Becky Hall, Play Development Lead at Monmouthshire County Council, tells us about the play space.

Monmouthshire County Council recognises the importance of play in children's lives, for both its recreational value and for the important part that it plays in children's physical and emotional health, wellbeing and personal development.

Play is an important aspect of achieving the vision of the council's corporate plan:

- A fair place to live where the effects of inequality and poverty have been reduced.
- A safe place to live where people have a home and community where they feel secure.
- A connected place where people feel part of a community and are valued.
- A learning place where everybody has the opportunity to reach their potential.

These strands of our corporate plan mirror the objectives of the Welsh Government's Play Policy where children should have time, space and permission to play as part of their community.

Our goal as a local authority is to ensure that there is sufficient access and opportunity for children and young people to participate in play. To achieve this, cross-directorate collaboration plays a key role to develop play across the local authority.

The Active Travel team works closely with the Play Development team to ensure that access to play is considered when developing active travel routes. As such, active travel schemes and interventions around Monmouthshire have helped to increase access to play provision, including Williams Field Lane.

Funding from the Active Travel Fund has been used to enhance the playground through the Williams Field Lane

The Minister for Children and Social Care, Dawn Bowden MS, said:

'We want a Wales where all children feel physically, mentally, and emotionally healthy and can access their right to play. ... This funding will improve children's experiences and help them build confidence and develop their skills.'

We will continue to work with local authorities and partners to support our ambitions in improving opportunities to play and promote the benefits of play for children's wellbeing.'

Active Travel Scheme. This has seen a mixture of planting, natural eco-friendly play areas, equipment such as swings, and a host of eco-friendly equipment for children's development, such as a hedgehog house, put in place.

Built in 2020, this project was the first of its kind to use active travel funds to develop a play park. The scheme developed a safe pedestrian route connecting Overmonnow Primary School to local housing estates with the route taking families right to the school gates. The local authority worked in partnership with the school to ensure the children have the opportunity to use this area as an outdoor natural learning area, as well as being able to use the play equipment.

A parent from Overmonnow Primary School said:

“ We use the park every day after school, it is lovely to let the children play together and decompress after the school day. ”

Another parent added:

“ The park is nice, especially if we are slightly early, then we can use it. Also, at the end of the school day the park is nice to stop off at. ”

Play Wales says

'Play Wales welcomes the Welsh Government's investment to improve playgrounds and play facilities for children. We welcome the commitment that the Welsh Government continues to make to children's play, recognising the important contribution it makes to a healthy and happy childhood. Having access to well designed and welcoming spaces has positive effects on children's health and happiness, community engagement and wellbeing, and enhancement of the local sense of community. This funding provides a unique opportunity to invest in innovative and sustainable design of spaces to play for children of all ages.'

Children across Wales and Japan celebrate the joy of playing

On 11 June 2025, children across Wales and the rest of the world celebrated the International Day of Play. Here, Marianne Mannello, the branch secretary for International Play Association (IPA) Cymru Wales reports on a collaboration to celebrate the day.

International Day of Play is a global celebration that highlights the power of play in children's lives. Organised annually by the United Nations, the day affirms every child's right to play and promotes play as a fundamental element of wellbeing, learning and healthy development.

2025 is the Welsh Government's Year of Wales and Japan, so it seemed right for IPA Cymru Wales to collaborate with the Japanese branch of International Play Association. We wanted our collaboration to be as child-centred as possible, so we were delighted when IPA Japan agreed to partner with us to produce a child-led film. The finished product, filmed by branch members across both countries, highlights the joy that playing brings to children. It gently reminds us that, no matter where children find themselves, they greatly value and need to play... every day.

The film showcased children playing across Wales and Japan and features interviews with children of all ages – in English, Welsh and Japanese – sharing what they love about play. The short film is available at:

www.play.wales/publications_category/celebrating-play-a-short-film



The theme for this year's International Day of Play, Choose Play – Everyday, was a powerful reminder that play is not just for one day, it's something to be protected and prioritised all year round. This is why we called for schools, hospitals, families, and neighbours/community members to give children of all ages plenty of chances to play, every day.

As the children in the film tell us, playing is central to their wellbeing and happiness. For them, play is essential, not optional.



'If you don't play, you would get stuck at home.'

'When we go outside to play, we can express ourselves way more than when we are in class.'

'I am not lonely when I play with someone.'

'And I just forget about everything that's stressing me and I just have fun with my friends.'

'Well, I love to play because I get to play with my friends and I don't feel left out.'

'Without playing, I don't have a thing to do.'



To find out more about IPA Cymru Wales, contact ipacymru@play.wales

Right to play poster

We have worked with our illustrator to create a new right to play poster to remind everyone how important playing is to all children.

It is a great resource for promoting children's right to play on awareness days – such as International Day of Play and Playday – and throughout the year.

The poster is available to download in the Resources library on our website: www.play.wales/publications_category/right-to-play-poster



Play as an antidote to a world gone awry

The Vice Chair of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, Professor Emeritus Philip Jaffé, shares his views about the crucial importance of children's right to play and how it should be prioritised in a challenging, changing world.



There is so much going on in relation to children's rights that it has become very difficult to stay grounded. How does one set priorities when everything is urgent, and in some parts of the world life-threatening? In addition, it seems that every issue we discuss is embedded in an echo chamber where conformity rules.

I would be remiss not to offer the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as the blueprint we should all adhere to – governments, civil society, all stakeholders. But the UNCRC is no longer working as it was intended and States are increasingly choosing to approach child rights selectively. This is my personal view, yet it is informed by my experience sitting on the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child.

In this jostling landscape of advocacy, policy and crisis response, it is critical that we do not lose sight of the holistic needs of children. Among the most overlooked, yet foundational, is the right and need for children to play.

Play is not a luxury or a peripheral concern – it is enshrined in Article 31 of the UNCRC as a fundamental right, recognising that play is essential to every child's physical, cognitive, social and emotional development.

What are some of the priorities children are facing? UNICEF's 2024 *The Future of Childhood in a Changing World* report sets the tone.

It identifies three megatrends shaping the future to 2050:

- a massive demographic transition
- the intensifying climate and environmental crises
- the ever-greater influence of frontier technologies.

We could add the mental health crisis, increased poverty (even in our rich democracies) and, in some regions, physical and psychological trauma from armed conflict. For these children, I cannot get the expression 'slivers of childhood' out of my mind. Just slivers is unacceptable! Against this backdrop, safeguarding and promoting the right to play should be a touchstone for our priorities, an indicator of whether we are truly upholding children's rights in their full breadth.

Play is far more than a pastime. It is *the* space where creativity and imagination are activated and sustained. Through play, children invent worlds, test boundaries, solve problems and imagine new possibilities.

Practicing creativity is not only central to a child's wellbeing and development, but also an investment in humanity's collective future. In a world defined by accelerating change and mounting challenges, the capacity to think creatively, adapt swiftly and approach problems with imagination is more critical than ever. The adults who will one day confront the world's most complex crises are the children who today build castles from sand, devise their own games on the playground and dream up new stories with their friends.

If we are to cultivate a world capable of meeting existential threats and responding with ingenuity and courage rather than conformity or fear, we must ensure that every child has meaningful opportunities to play. Protecting the right to play is not just a gesture of care for children's wellbeing, but a vital act of hope and responsibility for the creative solutions our shared future so desperately requires.

Join us at our national conference to hear more from Philip Jaffé. Find out more about our keynote speakers and how to book at: www.play.wales/events

Workforce development

Spotlight on ...

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 chatted with Julia Sky, the Community Play Development Officer at Vale of Glamorgan Council.

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

My playwork journey first began in 2012, I was looking for a summer job after finishing uni and considering a role in teaching. I joined the play team that summer, loved it and never looked back! I was mostly working on play rangers sessions in parks and open spaces across the Vale, as well as some events, and our inclusive play sessions. That summer opened my eyes to the importance of freely chosen play – I knew it was a career in playwork that I wanted to pursue.

What does your role involve?

I'm responsible for developing and delivering community play opportunities across the county. Every day is different: from delivering training, liaising with schools and community

partners, supporting our street play initiative, co-ordinating our open access play provision, to maintaining our huge lock up of loose parts and resources for play!

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

I think just when you can see play making a difference, whether that be delivering play sessions, supporting vulnerable families or empowering members of the community by delivering playwork training. I think playwork is such a meaningful thing and sharing that with others is awesome.

How do you think knowledge of the playwork approach would be useful to anyone working with children? (for example, teachers, youth workers or childcare)

I think knowledge and understanding of the playwork approach is so important to anyone engaging with children and young people. The playwork ethos is so child-led and I'm really passionate that if more people put the playwork approach into practice it would be so beneficial to children and young people, giving them choice, a voice and the freedom to express themselves in more areas of life.

Is there anything you find challenging about your job?

The sector not having funding to invest in infrastructure. We could make a bigger difference if we were more than just a team of two!

Update: Review of the National Occupational Standards for Playwork 2025

Since the last issue, the UK Playwork NOS Consortium has made significant progress in its self-funded review of the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for playwork.

This collaborative effort spans all four nations – Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and England – and is supported by sector experts, Playwork Education and Training Councils (PETC) and stakeholders across the UK.

Key achievements

In the last few months, the work on the review has progressed significantly. The key achievements include:

Development of the functional map

The consortium has drafted a functional map to outline the key purpose and the main functions of playwork. This is part of the NOS development process as outlined by the Standards and Frameworks Panel. The map has been shared with the NOS Advisory Group and other stakeholder groups for feedback. The functional map is continuing to evolve as the NOS themselves take shape.

There are some key principles behind the development of the functional map, including:

- a focus on playwork as an approach
- a recognition of the range of settings where playwork happens
- streamlining standards to ensure they are more holistic and fit for purpose to shape future qualifications, especially the Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQ's)
- integration of the Playwork Principles.

Workforce development

Review and drafting of NOS

The NOS Writing Group has undertaken a review of the existing NOS to inform the development of the new and updated standards. Throughout the process, terminology is being refined, and a glossary is being developed to ensure clear use of language, that reflects differences in language across the four nations.

Sector engagement and feedback

We facilitated information sessions on the functional map at the National Playwork Conference and the Playworkers Forum. Further engagement with the Advisory Group will be held later in the year before a series of regional online meetings to consult on the draft standards.

Commenting on the review's progress, Jane Hawkshaw, Chairperson of the UK Playwork NOS Consortium, said:

“ We are pleased to see the intense debate and consideration being given to the process by the writing group. I would also like to acknowledge all those who have volunteered to be part of the NOS advisory group whose expertise will help to shape the draft NOS. ”

For the latest updates on the review, visit:
www.play.wales/playwork/workforce

Playworkers Forum 2025

A celebration of connection and creativity

Each year, the Playworkers Forum brings together practitioners from across Wales and beyond for two days of learning, sharing and playful exploration in a unique outdoor setting.

The 2025 Playworkers Forum continued this tradition with energy and enthusiasm, offering a space for reflection, connection and celebration of the playwork profession.

Held once again at the much-loved Willow Globe near Rhayader, we welcomed participants to a venue that combines natural beauty with practical facilities. The big top provided shelter for workshops and discussions, while the surrounding fields hosted games, camping and creative activities. The atmosphere was described by attendees as ‘inspiring and fun’ and ‘a safe space to reflect and learn from others’.

The programme featured a rich mix of keynote talks, practical workshops and reflective sessions. Ben Tawil's keynote on the *Playing and being well* literature review was a highlight and gave participants the opportunity to think about how an understanding of the research contributes to their playwork practice, community engagement and advocacy. Practical workshops on the first day were equally well received, offering hands-on experiences in fire-making, kite-building, structure building and imaginative play. One participant shared, ‘I learned how to make a kite, got ideas for using fire and how to make an igloo out of pipe cleaners’.



Day two included the Chwarae o Safon workshop and a session on the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for playwork, both of which sparked thoughtful discussion. Participants appreciated the opportunity to engage with sector developments, with one noting, ‘Being a small part of the NOS was great, and the Chwarae o Safon is a fantastic idea’.

Beyond the formal sessions, it was a place for community and camaraderie. Participants spoke of the value of networking, sharing stories around the fire and recharging their playwork batteries. ‘It’s the one place where I can refocus and take a step back to reflect on what I have achieved,’ said one participant. Another added, ‘We look forward to this all year round. If I had to choose one playwork event above all others, it would be this one.’

As the event concluded, participants left with renewed passion, new ideas and a deeper sense of connection to the playwork community. After 18 years, the 2025 Playworkers Forum once again proved to be a vital space for professional development, inspiration and joy ... and will be back next year, on 1 - 2 July 2026!

Playful communities

Play lane in Pillgwenlly

In March 2022, Play Wales was commissioned by Pobl Group to undertake a play audit in Pillgwenlly, Newport. The focus of the audit was to provide information to support the development of playable spaces in the area.

The audit was undertaken in line with the Pillgwenlly Masterplan which identifies key ambitions for the area, one of which is the development and improvement of green spaces. Brian McGuigan, a Community Development Facilitator for Pobl Group, reports on developments in the area.

The 'Pill' Play Audit has been instrumental in helping us and the local community to identify and develop play provision, and how we can help address the concerns of parents about the safety of their children playing in Pill. The audit identified that this could be achieved through the development of hyper-local play – pop up play spaces. These spaces would have natural surveillance and don't require children to walk from one end of Pill to another to have the opportunity to play.

Here is an example of how we were involved in a community driven project to create a pop up play space by transforming an overgrown lane into a clean and safe place space for local children. Residents of this street had experienced years of antisocial behaviour connected to this lane, with drug dealing, noise nuisance and sex work taking place in broad daylight, in full view of the houses, and particularly children's bedrooms at the rear of the properties.

The lane was left to become overgrown and uncared for. Due to these issues, members of the community decided that they wanted to reclaim this land and turn it into something positive and that they could be proud of. This began with residents cutting back overgrowth, which had grown upwards of five feet.

As a result of the play audit, a local play network was developed. The network identified that local partners could assist with this work as well as supporting the progress of the project. The lane backs on to a business park, so it was a good opportunity to reach out to local businesses who could see the social value of such a project. The generosity of the local businesses made a big difference to this pop up space to play.

Community members spoke to a local business that provides astroturf, who kindly donated some cut offs for the residents to use as the base of a small play area for younger children.



“ Since the improvements to the lane, it's become a safe, welcoming space where the kids can play and neighbours can stop for a chat. It's brought more life and laughter to the area, and really helped strengthen our community spirit. ”

Parent and resident of the street

A local house clearance company arranged to cut back more of the overgrowth, as well as providing a secure fence at the end of lane, to prevent unlawful access to the area.

Through the support of another local business, the community was provided with various items for children, such as a trampoline, football goals, a basketball net, as well grow boxes to help the residents grow fruit and vegetables. This business also provided a digger to level out the lane and remove weeds from the ground.

This project has ultimately demonstrated what can be achieved on a hyper-local scale: the creation of a local and safe space for children to play close to home. Our aim moving forward is to identify other areas in the community where this project can be replicated to ensure that children across Pill have the same type of opportunities for hyper-local play.

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