

Play for Wales

Autumn | Winter
2025

Play news and briefing from the national charity for play



**‘The Wales I want to
grow up and play in’**

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

Senedd Cymru has supported children's play since it was established in 1999, publishing the world's first national Play Policy and ultimately legislating for play – another world first. For nearly 30 years, there has been a national recognition that play is a not a luxury, a nice to have, a maybe tomorrow. Play is a right and a necessity for healthy and happy childhoods.

We know this because children keep telling us so. Indeed, our *What children say about play in Wales: 2025* report of children's views about neighbourhood play informed a Senedd Cymru debate on children's access to play in December 2025. All major political parties spoke in favour of children's play and broadly called on the Welsh Government to safeguard children's access to play by strengthening the Play Sufficiency Duty included in the Play Opportunities section of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010.

As we look forward to the next Welsh Government, we have a clear and significant ask: to continue its global leading commitment which prioritises play. This commitment, from the earliest days of Welsh devolution, has led to pioneering legislation and brave guidance. The Welsh Government has been clear that for children to

have sufficient opportunities to play, they need time to play, space to play and the recognition by adults that this is every child's right.

This recognition by all adults is vital to ensure that all children are allowed enough time and opportunities to play wherever they find themselves – in play and childcare settings, schools, hospitals, neighbourhoods, at home, and so on. A new government brings tremendous opportunity for Wales to continue to lead the way. By choosing to keep children's play at the centre of policies that matter – across education, planning, health and neighbourhood life – it protects play, one of the most important aspects of a healthy and happy childhood.

“Children want time, space and the acceptance of adults to experience everyday moments of playing – of feeling well, feeling joy and feeling a sense of belonging.”

The message from children about why play is so important to them is loud, clear and concise. They want time, space and the acceptance of adults to experience everyday moments of playing – of feeling well, feeling joy and feeling a sense of belonging.

Wales has led the way for play. It is crucial that this internationally ground-breaking progress on behalf of children, and their right to play, is maintained and nurtured. The next government in Wales has a unique opportunity to grasp all-party support for play. It can reaffirm the historical commitment. It can strengthen the support. It can extend the commitment.

A Wales that values play, values children.

Chwarae Cymru
Play Wales



Join the Play 31 Challenge!

Give children 31 extra minutes of playtime this International Day of Play.

The theme for this year's United Nations International Day of Play – taking place on 11 June – is Protect Play, Protect Childhood.

To celebrate, the UK Children's Play Policy Forum – in collaboration with the International Play Association (IPA)

branches across the UK and Ireland – is calling for schools to give children 31 more minutes to play outdoors on the day. Children need time to play on International Day of Play and every day.

International Day of Play is a time to celebrate the power of play. It's a great opportunity to:

- raise awareness about how central play is to a happy and healthy childhood for every child

- remind everyone that every child has the right to play, as recognised in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
- come together to make sure that every child can fulfil their right to play.

Find out more about how to get involved at:

www.play.wales/news

IPA Cymru Wales membership

Join IPA Cymru Wales to support an international movement working to protect, preserve and promote the child's right to play. IPA Cymru Wales membership is available to those living or working in Wales. A range of membership levels for individuals and organisations are offered.

The International Play Association (IPA) is an international non-governmental organisation founded in 1961 to protect, preserve and promote children's right to play. IPA has a wide and diverse membership with active branches around the world. IPA branches are the basis

of a worldwide network and support IPA's international activities and programmes of work.



The work, values and principles of IPA Cymru Wales are underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and in particular Article 31:

'States parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.'

To join IPA Cymru Wales visit:

www.ipaworld.wildapricot.org/wales

Playday

2026

This year's Playday – the national day for play in the UK – takes place on Wednesday 5 August.

Established in 1987, Playday is an annual celebration of children's right to play. It's an ongoing campaign that highlights the importance of play in children's lives, focusing on a particular theme or highlighting an issue or aspect of children's play each year.

The theme for this year's Playday will be announced soon...

Follow the Playday Facebook page for the latest updates, or visit: www.playday.org.uk

At Play Wales, Playday gives us a valuable annual opportunity to raise awareness of the importance of children's play and the need for quality play provision. We use Playday to highlight that play is important and quality play provision is needed every day of the year in all areas of Wales.

Playday is coordinated by Play England, Play Scotland, PlayBoard Northern Ireland and Play Wales.

Children's access to play – Senedd debate



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

In a Senedd Plenary debate on 17 December 2025, Members of the Senedd discussed children's access to play. Rhys ab Owen, supported by Russell George, Mike Hedges and Jane Dodds, called on the Welsh Government to safeguard children's access to play by:

- strengthening the duty under section 11 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 so that local authorities must secure sufficient play opportunities in a playground for each community
- developing ways to publicise safe and local places to play
- safeguarding playgrounds from local authority cuts
- supporting community groups who have taken over responsibility for playgrounds
- tackling the fact that children, especially disabled, in rural and deprived areas often have greater access to outdoor spaces, but encounter greater issues with maintenance, accessibility and inclusivity.

All major political parties spoke in favour of children's play, with contributions from Jane Dodds, Lee Waters, Natasha Ashgar and Julie Morgan, amongst others.

The debate was closed by Dawn Bowden MS, the Minister for Children and Social Care. The motion was agreed – no Members of the Senedd objected.

Findings from Play Wales' *What children say about play in Wales: 2025* report were referenced throughout the debate. Having observed the debate in the Siambr, Play Wales said:

“ We welcome the all-party support for play demonstrated at the plenary debate. Although the discussion started with a focus on access to equipped spaces for play, it was encouraging to hear the discussion broaden to discuss the wide range of opportunities to play, in various spaces, that children need and ways to address the barriers in accessing their right to play. It was especially heartening and positive to hear children's voices – through our *What children say about play in Wales: 2025* report – loud and clear through contributions from all Members of the Senedd. ”

Watch the debate at:
www.senedd.tv

Baby Bundle Programme



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

In February 2026, the Welsh Government launched its new Baby Bundle Programme. The Baby Bundles, delivered to families in Flying Start areas across Wales, include essential items for newborns and their parents, providing practical help and support to prepare for a baby's arrival.

Each bundle includes a range of clothing from newborn to six months, warm blankets, muslin cloths, bibs, a thermometer, maternity and nursing pads, a playmat and a baby book. The bundle also includes useful information and advice about parenting and support programmes.

Launching the Baby Bundle delivery, Dawn Bowden MS, the Minister for Children and Social Care, said:

“ This marks a significant milestone in our support for parents during the earliest, most impactful months of their child's life ... this targeted programme helps eligible families by easing some of the financial pressures associated with preparing for a new baby. This approach allows support to be focused where it can make the greatest difference. ”

For more information visit:
www.gov.wales

Playing Out organisation bids farewell

From 2009 to 2026, Playing Out CIC helped to grow the UK-wide resident-led street play movement. Over the years, thousands of people have been working in their own communities to make street play sessions happen for children.

Alongside the street play sessions, Playing Out campaigned and lobbied for longer-term changes to support children's right to play out. The small Bristol-based team was founded by parents and steered by a board of voluntary directors.

The Playing Out organisation closed at the end of March 2026, but the

movement continues. At its *Playing Out and beyond* conference in mid-March, Play Wales joined colleagues from Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan, two local authorities that currently support resident-led play street programmes. It was an inspiring day. Hearing about the achievements of local authorities in other parts of

the UK has motivated us to continue to support the development of play streets here in Wales.

For information about play streets, please see these Play Wales publications:

Opening streets for play – toolkit for local authorities: www.play.wales/opening-streets-for-play

How to organise playing out sessions on your street – a manual for residents: www.play.wales/publication-library/toolkits/how-to-organise-playing-out-sessions-on-your-street

Play for Wales magazine

Thank you for reading this magazine. If you no longer wish to receive a printed copy of our magazine in the post, please let us know by emailing mail@play.wales and we will remove you from the mailing list.

We will continue to email new issues of *Play for Wales* to you twice a year, so you won't miss out on the latest play and playwork news and information.

This issue, and previous issues, are available to read online on our website: www.play.wales/resources-library



Playing and hanging out in the winter months

In February 2026, the Children's Commissioner for Wales' Monthly Matter focused on play in the winter months (between November and March).

The Children's Commissioner asked children and teenagers about their opportunities to play and hang out with their friends – and how their experiences change – during the winter.

Play Wales worked with the Children's Commissioner on this survey. It builds on the children's survey used

to inform Play Wales' *What children say about play in Wales: 2025* report. We look forward to seeing the results from the Children's Commissioner's survey about what children and teenagers have to say about their winter play experiences.

Each month the commissioner asks children and teenagers across Wales about a specific right or a timely topic which impacts on them. For more information about the Monthly Matters, visit:

www.childcomwales.org.uk/resources/monthly-matters



Comisiynydd Plant Cymru
Children's Commissioner for Wales

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 Support Worker, Cate Jordinson. Cate is an Australian playworker on a study tour of the UK, currently based in Cardiff.

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

I started my career in Outside School Hours Care in Australia. I started working with individuals (across different jobs) with additional needs and trauma backgrounds, and I found myself wanting to understand how a child's day looked from start to finish. Some playworkers came in to conduct training with a team I was managing and realised I had been using playwork all along. From there, I fused playwork into all the roles I worked.

What do your current playwork job role(s) involve?

Currently, I work in Residential Care across multiple houses in Cardiff. I am a support worker, and my role is to provide care for teenagers and adults with intellectual disabilities. This mostly includes individuals with autism.

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

As a playworker in a support worker capacity, I feel like a chameleon! In one workday, I might be their partner in crime for a playful prank, their cheerleader when they aren't feeling confident, a teacher to explain something, a friend when they need comfort, the fabric connecting other services, their voice when advocating, or just present while we decompress on the couch together.

How does a background in playwork help when working with children?

My playwork background has really influenced the relationship I have with the children, young people and adults I work with. A unique trait of playworkers is that we 'level the playing field' in a sense – we create a flat hierarchy and develop our relationships with trust, compassion, flexibility and playfulness. By gifting this kind of relationship to people in a care setting, they can feel a sense of control, autonomy, independence, and maybe just for once, that someone doesn't have a hidden agenda other than being present and supporting them. Being able to give this sense of control back to someone who doesn't have a lot of control over their life is so rewarding.

Is there anything you find challenging about your job?

I sometimes find it challenging to work with staff that don't understand playwork. As playworkers, we manage to create trusting, positive and playful relationships with people without enforcing hierarchies or agendas – but still get to see the best of them.

For other examples of our Spotlight on... interviews visit: www.play.wales/playwork/workforce

Playworkers Forum

1 - 2 July 2026 | Rhayader, Powys

The Playworkers Forum is a two-day, residential playwork training event under canvas that gives playworkers the opportunity to learn from each other and experienced playwork trainers.

Participants are expected to camp and will need to provide their own camping equipment. Hot drinks, lunches, breakfast and an evening meal will be provided.

Who should attend?

The event is aimed at playworkers, play development workers, playwork managers, forest school practitioners,



childcare workers and all those wanting to increase their skills and knowledge in playwork, especially in the outdoors.

Book your place at:

www.play.wales/events/playworkers-forum-2026

Workforce development

Launch of Chwarae o Safon – our new playwork quality mark

Chwarae o Safon is Play Wales' new playwork quality mark. The meaning of the Welsh title 'Chwarae o Safon' in English is 'Play of Quality'.



Playwork quality assurance is the process of looking deeply at playwork practice to improve the quality of children's play experiences in the wide range of settings where playwork takes place. It builds on playworkers' qualifications, training, experience and knowledge of the Playwork Principles. It helps practitioners to look critically at specific elements of their work and how they ensure these elements are realised in principle and in practice.

Chwarae o Safon formalises this process so that settings can evidence that their practice fits with the quality expectations of the sector. It is beneficial in its own right for staff, settings and of course for children, but it also demonstrates to parents, funders, and legal and regulatory bodies that the setting is of quality.

Chwarae o Safon is intended to be used in unregulated playwork settings, as well as settings regulated by Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW). It also applies to those involved in playwork in non-dedicated playwork settings.

There are two different playwork quality mark awards, one focused

on practice and the other on policy. Playwork settings can work towards one or both of these awards:

1. Chwarae o Safon – playwork practice quality mark

This assesses:

- children's play experiences
- the playwork environment.

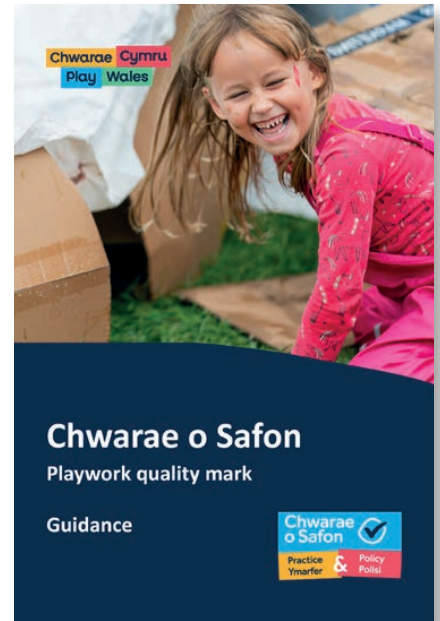
This is suitable for settings using a playwork approach or whose staff have completed playwork training or qualifications and want to show good playwork practice. As well as dedicated playwork settings, this can also include youth work, childcare, education, sports and health provision.

2. Chwarae o Safon – playwork policy quality mark

This assesses:

- playwork policy and practice
- the playwork organisation.

This is suitable for settings whose main purpose is supporting children's play using a playwork approach. This includes both regulated and unregulated settings that define themselves as either peripatetic or play ranger provision, adventure playgrounds, out of school childcare, open access playwork or street play. It focuses on the policies, procedures and organisational ethos that support



playwork practice. To achieve this quality mark, settings will already have received the playwork practice quality mark.

Getting started

Chwarae o Safon involves both self-assessment and external assessment. If you are interested in undertaking *Chwarae o Safon*, you can download the guidance and self-assessment framework for free from our website. Settings only need to pay for external assessment once they are ready for an assessor to view their evidence to gain the *Chwarae o Safon* quality mark.

For current costs, please contact us at workforce@play.wales

To find out more and to download *Chwarae o Safon* please go to our website: www.play.wales/playwork/quality-assurance

Workforce development

Playwork National Occupation Standards Review 2025/26 update

As we have reported in previous issues, the UK Playwork NOS Consortium is reviewing 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 England, PETC Northern Ireland, Playwork Scotland and PETC Wales) and stakeholders across the UK.



Since the last issue, the NOS Writing Group has drafted standards for the roles of:

- Support Playworker
- Playworker
- Playwork Manager.

The focus is on the application of a playwork approach in a range of different settings and the standards are intended to reflect the broad generic functions in playwork. There are a series of core standards for each job role plus additional optional units, which will be used to shape training and qualifications.

In addition, we hope that employers and managers will use the new NOS to help with drafting job descriptions, appraisals and monitoring practice, as the NOS reflect the functions for playwork and are agreed on a UK-wide basis.

During March and April 2026, the consortium hosted a series of webinars for stakeholders in each of the four nations to have their say on the draft NOS. The webinars were intended to share an overview of the progress and to give participants the information and tools to be able to respond to the written online consultation. We are very grateful to all those who attended the webinars and responded to the online consultation.

Martin King-Sheard, Assistant Director: Workforce Policy and Strategy at Play Wales, who is leading the review, said:

“ It has been a privilege to take forward this review of the playwork NOS. In addition to drafting a set of standards that will help to shape training and qualifications over the next five years, this process has ensured collaboration and improved strategic planning for playwork workforce development across the four nations. ”

The UK Playwork NOS Consortium and NOS Writing Group will now take account of all feedback and finalise the NOS. This will include drafting a consultation report that will be made available. The final NOS will be published prior to summer 2026 in English and Welsh.

Following the publication of the NOS, the Awarding Bodies/Awarding Organisations will begin the process of re-mapping or re-developing their playwork qualifications.

To find out more about the NOS development process please visit: www.play.wales/workforce



About this issue

In anticipation of the Senedd election in May 2026, Play Wales produced *Championing children's play: a manifesto for Wales*.

We shared our manifesto with the major political parties in Wales and hope they found it useful when developing their own priorities and agenda for Wales. It has the potential to influence the actions of the next government of Wales.

In our manifesto, Play Wales calls for the next government in Wales to continue its longstanding commitment to prioritising play. We ask all political parties to carry on supporting the implementation of the statutory Play Sufficiency Duty.

We urge the government to make cross-policy commitments to ensure that children's opportunities to play increase and improve. Prioritising children's play brings proven benefits to children, families and communities, both immediately and in the long term.

In our manifesto – *Championing children's play* – we make 15 calls, focusing on:

- **strategic leadership:** so that Wales continues to lead the way in championing children's play through policy, legislation and funding programmes.
- **playful neighbourhoods:** so that conditions improve to make neighbourhoods and public spaces more play friendly allowing more children to play and socialise with friends near where they live.
- **playful schools:** so that children have opportunities to play and move more in school.
- **play in times of uncertainty:** so that staff working with children who are homeless, spending time in hospital or being cared for in residential facilities understand the importance of play and how to support it.

This issue of *Play for Wales* includes articles with examples of work being undertaken across Wales on the



“ Prioritising children's play brings proven benefits to children, families and communities, both immediately and in the long term. ”

four themes within our manifesto. We have included these examples to celebrate the good work happening at local, regional and national level and hope they provide inspiration for play champions wherever they are – in neighbourhoods, settings or developing policies. The Senedd election provides us all with an opportunity to highlight our asks for children's play in Wales.

Our *Championing children's play* manifesto is available to download on our website: www.play.wales/publications_category/championing-childrens-play

Please also see the centre pages of this magazine for a special pull-out feature – ‘*The Wales I want to grow up and play in*’: *A play manifesto from the children of Wales*. We are grateful to the children in the School Government at Windsor Clive Primary School in Cardiff for their help in developing these important messages.

The pull-out feature is available to download at: www.play.wales/resources-library

Strategic leadership



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

In our manifesto, Play Wales urges the next Welsh Government to continue its strong tradition of supporting children's right to play, through policy, legislation and funding programmes.



In previous issues of *Play for Wales*, we have reported on the progress the Welsh Government is making on its action plan to take forward recommendations from the Ministerial Review of Play. Here, we discuss how other government policy areas and programmes aim to support play.

Active Travel Guidance

During winter 2025-26, the Welsh Government consulted on the third revision of the Active Travel Act Guidance. This is the technical guidance for planning, prioritising, designing and delivering walking, wheeling and cycling infrastructure under the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013.

As well as covering the legislative context and statutory duties on local authorities in regards to Play Sufficiency Assessments and Action Plans, the guidance also includes a new chapter on placemaking. As members of the Placemaking Charter Partnership, Play Wales welcomed the addition of this new chapter in our response to the consultation. The section within the chapter which discusses play is good and useful. It will support those involved in active travel, placemaking and play sufficiency at local authority level to work more effectively and collaboratively, supporting children's opportunities to play in neighbourhoods and public spaces.

In our consultation response, we shared evidence from *Playing and being well*, our literature review into children's play, social policy and practice, that highlights that playing contributes to the immediate happiness of babies, children and teenagers, supporting them 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. Considering this in Active Travel Plans is incredibly important.

Our response also commended the production of useful information which has the potential to improve current thinking and planning for opportunities to play. We were pleased to see that the guidance uses the wording 'opportunities to play' (rather than 'play opportunities'). This not only responds to recommendations within the Ministerial Review of Play, but will support a change in attitude about where, and when, children play. It has the potential to support children to be more visible in neighbourhoods and legitimise their presence in public spaces.

Healthy Wales, Healthy Weight Delivery Plan 2025-2027

Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales is the Welsh Government's 10-year strategy to support a healthy weight and is supported by a series of delivery plans. The third delivery plan sets out a series of themes, goals and actions to help focus where the Welsh Government and partners can collectively effect the greatest change. The plan puts supporting children and young people at its heart.

The plan notes that it is well-established that active play improves a child's fitness and health, helps to improve their mental health and cognitive development as well as building confidence and improving social skills. Active play outdoors that can be classed as moderate to vigorous

exercise is best for protecting against the risk of obesity. Referencing the UK Chief Medical Officers’ physical activity guidelines, it also highlights that increasing the duration of physical activity and less time spent sitting has positive mental health benefits too.

As members of the Active Lives working group for the plan, Play Wales has highlighted the evidence discussed in *Playing and being well* – that allowing children to choose how they play is linked to higher wellbeing. Playing outdoors provides opportunities for co-ordination and balance, decreased fatigue, stress and depression and improved self-esteem and cognitive functioning.

Within the plan’s goals to support babies, children and teenagers is an aspiration that all children in Wales can play outdoors every day. In Action 18 of the plan, the Welsh Government asserts that it will support affordable, accessible active play environments that meet the developmental needs of young children.

Action 18 reaffirms that playing is central to children’s wellbeing and being able to play and be physically active

outdoors helps children feel part of their neighbourhoods and wider communities. The narrative for Action 18 references the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010, which places a statutory duty on local authorities to assess and, as far as is reasonably practicable, secure sufficient opportunities for children to play in their areas.

Action 18 also highlights the important role of schools and school staff, noting that they can promote the benefits of play with parents. It notes that providing opportunities for links with the wider community is a key aspect of the Community Focused Schools policy and guidance. The incorporation of play in the guidance covers three areas:

- engaging with parents through the family engagement officer role to promote the benefits of play and encourage family or child play interaction
- schools linking up with play organisations and community groups to make connections to what is already offered within the community
- the potential for schools to provide play space outside of the school day through the opening up of school grounds.

Support from public bodies

The Play Wales manifesto also calls on the next Welsh Government to support Bil Pob Plentyn, which will ensure that public bodies support every child in Wales. Bil Pob Plentyn will also strengthen children’s statutory right to play, extending play sufficiency duties to public bodies, such as Public Health Wales.

The Best Start in Life: An Early Years Framework for Action, published by Public Health Wales, has seven thematic building blocks that detail what matters most for babies, young children and their families. Access to high quality play, learning and care is one of these building blocks.

Play Wales was part of a working group set up to develop the framework. The working group identified local, regional and national actions which will contribute to access to high quality play, learning and care:

Local	Regional	National
<p>A range of affordable high quality early play, learning and care options that meet the needs of all babies and young children, including Welsh language and those with additional needs.</p> <p>Easy to access and up-to-date information about local play opportunities.</p>	<p>Coordinated approaches to support local services and groups create and maintain play friendly neighbourhoods.</p> <p>Regional collaboration and coordination to ensure good quality play provision and enable equitable access to a diverse range of opportunities for play and socialising for all babies, young children and families.</p> <p>Assets-based approaches to meeting play sufficiency requirements that recognise the diversity of places babies, young children and families enjoy playing and socialising.</p>	<p>Guidance and information on the importance of play and how professionals, services, schools, communities and families can support babies and children’s play.</p> <p>Cross government policy that supports the creation of playful and inclusive environments for babies, young children and families.</p> <p>Clear governance, accountability and monitoring arrangements for the delivery of play sufficiency requirements.</p>

These examples clearly demonstrate the Welsh Government’s commitment to supporting children’s play. We urge the next government in Wales to make cross-policy commitments to ensure that children’s opportunities to play increase and improve. Prioritising children’s play brings proven benefits to children, families and communities, both immediately and in the long term.

Playful neighbourhoods

In our manifesto, Play Wales urges the next Welsh Government to ensure that children of all ages can grow up in neighbourhoods where they feel a sense of belonging and have opportunities for playing and socialising with friends.

Our calls include:

- The principle of play is recognised in guidance relating to land use and development
- Support for community-based playwork provision.

Here we share two inspiring examples – from Merthyr Tydfil and Newport – of projects supporting community-based play provision.

Play Pod Chwarae

As part of its Play Sufficiency Action Plan, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council has developed the Play Pod Chwarae project to provide resources and equipment to community-based play providers. Julia Lewis, the Play Officer, tells us more.

The Play Pod Chwarae project operates from a custom-built timber frame storage unit with steel door and external lean-to. It is stocked with play resources and equipment – large and small – for organisations and schools to borrow, once they have joined as members.

The pod and its contents reduce the risk and stress on charitable community play providers who may be struggling with cash flow. It also encourages providers to be more experimental with equipment borrowing, trying new or unfamiliar items.

The project is a member of Benthg Cymru and operates a membership model. Members pay an annual fee and can borrow any of the equipment and resources, as many times as they like, through an online booking system. A surcharge only applies if equipment or resources are returned damaged or go missing. There is also an opportunity to pay additional charges for delivery of large items and facilitation of workshops.

The Play Pod Chwarae project developed as an idea to tackle three problems from a playwork and sustainability point of view:

- decreasing availability of funds for play provision and outdoor education



- inequality of access to resources across play providers
- useful items being sent to landfill.

As the Play Pod Chwarae is a professional library of things, Benthg Cymru has provided mentoring on setting up and running the pod. Egin, a programme to tackle climate change, has also provided support as the project supports the reduction of reusable items that get sent to landfill.

Through a collaboration between a community development company and Merthyr Council's play and parks department, the pilot grew by creating a secure central location at Clwb Crown. Here professionals in playwork, youth work and education can book and borrow from a large array of play resources and loose parts, for a range of play opportunities, such as:

- fire play – pyrography, fire lighting, cooking equipment
- water play – slip 'n' slide, water jets, water wall
- earth play – mud kitchen, swings, slack lines, den building, obstacle course items
- wind play – spinning seats, throwing games, vertical hammocks.

We have included many items used in forest schools and for widening access to neurodiverse participants as well as many communal activities to encourage group work. Partners have also contributed to the stock: for example, Active Merthyr donated sports equipment and Keep Wales Tidy provided litter picking packs.

Local organisations are starting to get involved too and a few are motivated to put items into the pod. Louise, from Twyn Community Hub said,

“ the Play Pod reduces storage costs of infrequently used bigger items. The sharing of equipment provides better play access for the kids we work with. We hope that through joint bids, organisations can work together to get better quality larger items that we all can use. ”

We have ambitions for the future. For instance, we hope to explore creating satellite or mobile pods to increase access. As part of the project, we will also develop and deliver education, participation and repair sessions in the future. We hope the pilot demonstrates that this model can work and that other regions can take up the idea.

Mendalgief rec natural play space

As we have previously reported in a playful community feature, Play Wales was commissioned by Pobl Group to undertake a play audit in Pillgwenlly, Newport. Paul Macey, who is co-ordinating the Pillgwenlly Masterplan, tells us about an exciting local development which is shaping and informing the development of the plan.



Space before development

The audit really has had a positive impact. It has helped shape how we move forward and it has been extremely well received locally. The audit brief was to provide information to support the development of playable spaces across five areas in the community. This audit included:

- guided and independent community walk-about
- desk research, including reading community reports
- workshops with children
- engagement with parents
- meetings with local organisations and practitioners
- parent informed analysis of the community.



Play space after development

Mendalgief 'Rec' wasn't one of the original areas identified for development, but engagement with local residents took us in that direction. Sandwiched between traditional housing and new housing developments and a school, this space seemed perfect for a demonstration project focusing on a landscape-design, rather than on the installation of play equipment.

Mendalgief 'Rec' play space adds value to the extensive work conducted in Pill Park, which is the largest green space in the area. The play audit highlighted the importance of this space to the local community. The focus of the work is based on the asks of local children and families through numerous community engagement activities, some of which was part of the audit. Children and parents alike told us that this space should be a priority to make it easier to find space to play locally. Work to enhance the 'Rec' also includes an Active Travel route, a nature trail and revamped play areas alongside the rugby and football pitches, and the Pill Millennium Centre.

Of the development of Mendalgief 'Rec', Saera, a parent of three primary school aged children, said:

“ The area was unattractive and used but is now transformed. The equipment is interesting and attractive and opens up the wider space for play. Being next to the two schools is a real advantage. My children love to play there after school and at weekends and it makes the rest of the park more accessible. ”

Developing the areas for playing is part of the ongoing and evolving multi-agency masterplan in Pillgwenlly, which has been taking place over the past three years. The initiative supports the realisation of a community vision, which includes increasing outdoor facilities for children and teenagers, improving green spaces with a focus on natural play and developing pop-up play spaces across the area.

Playful schools

In our manifesto – *Championing children's play* – Play Wales urges the next Welsh Government to ensure that it pays attention to play in schools for children of all ages. Our calls include: make a minimum amount of playtime mandatory in the school day.



© Vale of Glamorgan Play Team

Children are playful whatever their age, and older children – including teenagers – need opportunities to play, socialise and meet up with their friends. Just like younger children, older children need time, space and freedom to play. This includes having opportunities for playful experiences at school break time.

Here, Julia Sky, from the Vale of Glamorgan Play Development Team, discusses their Outdoor Play & Wellbeing Project at Whitmore High School in Barry. The Vale's Play Team has been working closely with Whitmore High School's Wellbeing and Inclusion Co-ordinator to deliver a 12-week play and wellbeing programme for Year 7 pupils.

The project is now in its third year and aims to improve pupil wellbeing and confidence in the outdoors for a group of identified Year 7 pupils, through delivery of six weekly wellbeing sessions followed by six weekly outdoor play sessions. The project offers volunteering opportunities to Year 8 pupils who engaged in the previous year's project, as well as older pupils who have taken on roles as Play Champions and Wellbeing Mentors.

Holly Morgan, Wellbeing and Inclusion Co-ordinator, delivers the first six weeks of the project:

“ We focused on the importance of sleep, food and water and self-care. We learnt strategies to help us regulate and calm our bodies through food and relaxation. Our school nurse and counsellor also popped in to talk to us about how they can support us.

We have been lucky enough to have then worked with the Vale Play Team on a 6-week Outdoor Wellbeing project. Jo, Julia and Ceri have shown us how to work as a team, play fun games, make dens, make clay models, tie knots, make photos frames and have fun! ”

The success of the project has resulted in a Play Cube being sited in the school grounds for playing during the school day and out of school hours. The Play Cube is a lockable shipping container to store play equipment and loose parts play resources, such as fabric, buckets, boxes, rope, tyres, wood and scrap materials of all kinds.

Twenty-five pupils from Whitmore High School have recently undertaken *Let's talk about play*, a Play Wales endorsed training course that has been designed as an introduction to play and playwork. These pupils

are the Vale of Glamorgan's first Play Ambassadors, responsible for advocating for play within their school and beyond.

Following on from their engagement in the Outdoor Play & Wellbeing Project, pupils at the school have gone on to undertake the Agored Cymru Level 2 Award in Playwork Practice (L2APP) qualification. This course provides a broad introduction to playwork. The project, training and qualification have helped the pupils progress with their playwork journey.

This is what the Year 7 pupils had to say about their experiences:

‘Wellbeing is the best, it made me come out of my shell.’

‘I loved playing with the Play Team.’

‘Tug of war and building dens were my favourite things.’

‘Just being outside was fun.’

‘I liked playing games and the chalks.’

‘I most enjoyed meditating.’

Supporting playtime behaviour

Play Wales has seen an increase in queries from parents concerned with the removal of playtime for their children. In our manifesto, Play Wales also urges the next Welsh Government to:

proactively promote the Welsh Government's *Framework on embedding a whole school approach to emotional and mental well-being*, which states explicitly that play should not be removed from children at school as a form of punishment.

With thanks to our co-authors of the *Children's right to Play position paper*, published by The British Psychological Society Division of Educational and Child Psychology, we share some insight and ideas for schools.

Things to consider:

- Has the school assessed the play opportunities available to ensure they meet the children's needs?
- Has the school worked with children to devise succinct and easy to understand playtime rules that are clearly understood by all?
- Do the rules and activities promote certain types of positive behaviours, such as:
 - o communication
 - o verbal conflict resolution
 - o understanding personal space
 - o collaboration?
- Do all children and staff understand the consequences for not following the playtime rules?
- If the removal of playtime is due to difficult or dangerous behaviour in the playground, can the child's right to play be accessed through other means, such as short-term individual activities outdoors or indoors which lead to skills building with the goal being about ensuring future playground access?

Research¹ suggests that a whole school approach school to playtime is needed and playtimes need to be planned for and considered like other parts of the school day. We recommend a whole school approach that incorporates the following strategies:

- Teach children the skills that they need (for example assertiveness skills, friendship related skills, emotion management and empathy, and sharing and cooperation skills) through lessons, assemblies or interventions. Staff on the playground can reinforce and model these skills in context.
- Provide children with a way of resolving conflict. Train playground staff and children to mediate conflicts. Teach conflict resolution skills to all children through lessons, assemblies, modelling, or role play as part of the curriculum delivery.



- Ask playground staff to reinforce and pay attention to positive behaviour, talk with children and create a playful ethos.
- Promote a sense of belonging by supporting those children who need additional support to join in and providing children with ways of finding someone to play with (for example loose parts play that any child can join in with).
- Provide games and activities that are not all sports or competitive based and provide activities that promote free play.
- Provide games that are informed by pupils' ideas and ensure that all children know how to play the games. Encourage teachers to think about and agree on a handful of traditional playground games, skipping games, chanting games and clapping games that can be taught in physical education lessons or as part of a history lesson, during the term. As children will then know the games from taught lessons, they will be equipped to initiate them on the playground with little intervention.

For more information about policy and practice to help school communities take a whole school approach to supporting children's right to play, take a look at our *A play friendly school* guidance: www.play.wales/publication-library/research/a-play-friendly-school

¹Bristow, S. and Atkinson, C. (2020) Child-led research investigating social, emotional and mental health and wellbeing aspects of playtime, *Educational & Child Psychology*.

Play in times of uncertainty

Opportunities to play are particularly beneficial during times of uncertainty. Many children in Wales are displaced due to homelessness or spending time in hospital. Often, opportunities to play can be overlooked in these settings. Here we report on current projects to support children's opportunities to play in these places.

Play for children in temporary accommodation project

Concerned with the growing numbers of children living in temporary accommodation, such as bed and breakfasts and hotels, Play Wales developed a project to identify the opportunities and challenges of providing opportunities to play in these places.

We worked with our network of play officers in four local authorities to understand the limitations and opportunities in temporary accommodation. We sourced and supplied play packages which included no-cost and simple ideas for families to support play in limited living spaces. We also provided small equipment and ideas to support physical activity in small spaces and supplied boxes of art and craft materials to encourage creative play.

These small and simple items were intended to enable play teams to engage with parents to hear more about their lived experience of supporting children's play in temporary accommodation. The project also enabled us to learn about the challenges for housing officers and providers of temporary accommodation.

Our project has highlighted that children living in temporary accommodation often face unsafe or unsuitable environments for play. Our engagement with parents and families indicates that children have little access to safe, clean, or culturally appropriate spaces for play, and are often isolated from community-based provision.

Although this was a small-scale project, we hope that the learning will enable us to work with trusted practitioners and families to co-create a practitioner-facing tool (for example a training resource, toolkit or information leaflet), grounded in lived experience.



The aim is to improve how services support play in low-income and displacement-affected contexts.

“ I feel like I am always telling my children to quiet down. Sometimes when they are playing they are loud, and I don't want to be told off for allowing the children to be noisy or messy. ”

“ I don't know where to take my children to play. There are busy roads and I don't have the money to take them to clubs or places to play. ”

“ I just wish there was somewhere to play outside. It is so hard for my son to let off steam and few chances for him to play with other children. ”

Play in healthcare

In our manifesto, Play Wales highlights the need for a strategic policy direction from those who support the wellbeing of children and teenagers who are patients in hospital or community settings, such as children's hospices.

Playing is essential to the health and happiness of children, and it should be given priority when children are ill. All children staying in hospital or receiving long term healthcare should have daily access to health play services.

The emphasis must be on safe practice and enhanced patient experience that considers children's immediate and long-term health and wellbeing alongside their healthcare needs.

In England, a Taskforce on Children's Play in Healthcare was convened by Starlight (the charity working to put play at the heart of child healthcare) and NHS England, and in collaboration with the Society of Health Play Specialists (SOHPS). The taskforce developed the *Play well* toolkit, which has three components:

1. Guidelines for commissioning and designing health play services
2. Recommended standards for health play services
3. Quality checklist for health play services to drive improvements.

Play Wales has been engaging with Starlight and a network of Health Play Managers to highlight the need for similar standards and guidelines in Wales.

Play for children in hospital is seriously under resourced^{1,2}: 77% of Trusts/Health Boards in England state they have no budget for play resources³ and children and parents have called for more activities and better facilities that enable them to interact and connect with others through play.⁴ Small scale research studies in Wales indicate a similar picture.

The current health play workforce is generally made up of a combination of Health Play Specialists (HPSs), Health Playworkers and Health Play Service leads or managers (who are often qualified HPSs). This is not consistent across Welsh Health Board areas.

Most hospital play teams are reliant on external funding to either fund the team or to fund resources. Fundraising activity is often undertaken by a member of the health team, by senior nurses and by ward managers.

The hospital playroom conveys a strong message, the presence of and access to a hospital playroom suggests that children have permission to play. It recognises that time and space for play are vitally needed, providing respite and contributing to children realising their right to play. Despite their importance to patients and parents, many hospital playrooms (or sections of them) have been repurposed since being closed due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Spaces for teenagers are also seen as important. Settings strive to create places for relaxation and socialisation, with a focus on the positive benefits that sensory experiences bring to all children, but this is dependent on knowledge of the play needs of older children, available space and appropriate resources.

“ It isn't nice to be able to see outside but not be allowed out there. ”

“ It would be nice to get some fresh air. ”

Access to outdoor play spaces can be incredibly important to sick children as it can provide a solace from unfamiliar and sometimes unsettling hospital wards. Outdoor spaces provide contact with nature, which can be an effective component in:

- coping with and reducing anxiety and stress
- strategies to reduce aggression
- increasing concentration levels in children
- the healthy cognitive development of children
- increasing a sense of wellbeing and mental health.

Despite this, access to outdoor space is limited in many hospitals across Wales.

To help bring our manifesto call on play in healthcare to life, Play Wales makes these recommendations for healthcare policy in Wales:

1. Consider the adoption of the NHS England *Play well* recommended standards for health play services in Wales
2. Work with Play Wales and Starlight Children's Foundation to contextualise the *Play well* Guidelines for health play services in Wales
3. Work with Play Wales to consider an appropriate response to identified health play workforce development issues.

We are delighted to be able to collaborate with Starlight to progress these recommendations. This partnership has the potential to improve play provision in hospitals and healthcare settings for children growing up in Wales.

With two-years' funding secured, Starlight and Play Wales will work together to embed play across paediatric pathways, focusing on adapting the *Play well* toolkit for the Welsh context and delivering family support and professional training to enhance play-based approaches in paediatric care. As part of this work, Starlight is committed to putting play at the heart of every child's healthcare experience in Wales.

¹ Gulyurtlu, S., Jacobs, N. and Evans, I. (2020) *The Impact of Children's Play in Hospital*, London: Starlight Children's Foundation.

² Starlight Children's Foundation (2023) *Play in Hospital Report 2022*, London: Starlight Children's Foundation.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Care Quality Commission (2022) *Children and Young People's Survey 2020*, Care Quality Commission.

Congratulations and thank you Windsor Clive Primary School!

Congratulations to our friends at Windsor Clive Primary School in Cardiff, which has recently been awarded its UNICEF Gold Rights Respecting Schools Award!

Gold: Rights Respecting is the third and highest stage of the Rights Respecting Schools Award (RRSA). It is granted by UNICEF UK to schools that have embedded children's rights through every aspect of school life, practice and ethos. To achieve the Gold: Rights Respecting status, schools are assessed by a Rights Respecting School assessor who looks at the whole school's work to respect rights and the impact that has been made through embedding children's rights into school life.

Achieving Gold: Rights Respecting means there is evidence that:

- the school has explicitly adopted a child rights approach based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and has embedded it in school practice, ethos and culture
- children, young people and adults have an awareness and understanding of child rights, with rights respecting attitudes and language embedded across the school
- RRSA has had a positive impact on children and young people's learning and wellbeing
- inclusion and diversity are actively promoted and celebrated
- children see themselves as rights respecting global citizens and are advocates for social justice,



fairness and children's rights at home and abroad

- leaders use the UNCRC as a driver for school improvement.

Children also play an increasingly leading role in driving progress. Gold: Rights Respecting Schools aim to intensify and broaden:

- 1. Teaching and learning about rights:** for the whole school community through training, curriculum, assemblies, topics, focus days/weeks, displays.
- 2. Teaching and learning through rights:** by modelling rights respecting language and attitudes and making strategic decisions that involve students.
- 3. Being ambassadors for the rights of others:** developing as rights respecting citizens.

The School Government told us about their progress to achieve the Gold: Rights Respecting award when we visited to celebrate World Children's Day in November 2025.

To mark World Children's Day, and based on feedback from children, the school extended playtime. We were

delighted to hear that the school had another extended playtime before the spring break following the success of the first one held in November.

On World Children's Day, the School Government also arranged a Toy Drive to gather used toys in good condition to pass on to other children. In particular, the School Government was keen that asylum seeking and refugee children should have some toys. With the help of Cardiff Children's Play Services, the toys were shared with children and families, and given to organisations supporting children's play. Thank you to everyone in the school who helped with this.

Thank you too, to the School Government for welcoming us to a meeting in early March 2026 where we discussed the Play Wales manifesto for the next Government in Wales. The children provided very important and useful advice to help us with 'The Wales I want to grow up and play in': A play manifesto from the children of Wales (see pages 19 and 20).

‘The Wales I want to grow up and play in’

A play manifesto from the children of Wales

The Wales I want to grow up and play in needs to be a great place to play.

We – the children of Wales – are asking all members of Senedd Cymru to make sure every child across the country has good places to play and enough time for play.

Be good leaders

Thinking about play helps us, our families and our neighbourhoods be happier and healthier. We need politicians and government workers to make good rules and plans to help us play.

In the Wales I want to grow up and play in, the Welsh Government will:

- keep listening to children and help our right to play be understood
- make sure that your decisions about children (and our families) consider play
- make sure that grown-ups who work with children know how important play is
- try to make sure there is enough money so that we can have lots of chances to play.

Playful
Childhoods



Playful neighbourhoods

We need to feel safe and welcome in the places we live and play. Playgrounds are fun and important, but they are not the only place we play.

In the Wales I want to grow up and play in, the Welsh Government will:

- make sure that towns, villages and parks are fun and clean places to play
- make sure that streets are safe enough so that we can get to the places where we play
- make sure that teenagers have good places to play and see their friends
- make sure that there are playschemes and playworkers so that we can play and have fun – and our parents know we are safe.



Playful schools

Playtime and break time is so important to us. It gives us a break, helps us learn better and we can be with our friends.

In the Wales I want to grow up and play in, the Welsh Government will:

- make sure that there is enough time to play and have a break during the day – and at lunchtime, we need time to eat and see our friends
- make sure that our playtime is not taken from us if we haven't done our work fast enough
- make sure that playtime is not taken away if someone feels we have not behaved nicely
- try to find ways to help us play even if we are finding it hard to play with others
- help schools to let us play in the playground after school if there is nowhere safe near our houses, or if it's the only place we can see our friends
- make sure that all the adults in school understand how important play is and make sure they know how to help us play.

Playing when life is hard

Some children go through difficult times – like when they are in hospital, when they and their family don't have their own place to live or can't live with their own families. When this happens, playing helps us feel safe and a little bit hopeful.

In the Wales I want to grow up and play in, the Welsh Government will:

- make sure that all hospitals have playrooms, plenty of stuff to play with and people whose only job is to help children to play – outdoor places to play would be good too
- make sure that children without a home can stay somewhere with space to play, where play is allowed and where it is safe for them to play and have fun
- make sure that if children can't live with their own families, that they can stay in homes where the people that care for them understand play so that they can help children play, especially when they are scared and sad.



Playing matters to us because it helps us:

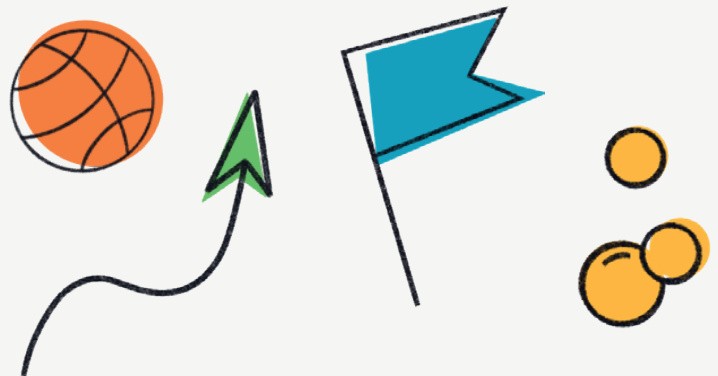
- make friends and understand people
- stay healthy and feel good
- feel a part of where we are growing up
- learn about stuff, solve problems and grow
- be adventurous and brave
- work out how to do things that are hard
- have fun!



The right to play

Every child has the right to play. This is recognised in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). In Wales, the Welsh Government has laws about children's play. Our government has worked hard to try to make sure that children have plenty of opportunities to play.

In the Wales I want to grow up and play in, the Welsh Government will keep on working hard to make sure that all children can play. Everyday.



About Play Wales

Play Wales is the national charity that stands up for children's right to play. Play Wales will always work hard to make sure that adults know how important play is to all children. *Playful Childhoods* is a Play Wales campaign.