



# PlayAction Guide

## Local Play Partnerships- a grass roots exercise in developing Children's Rights

This PlayAction guide looks at how Play People, both the usual and also unusual suspects, can come together to create their own Local Play Partnership initiative. These Partnerships have basic play principles at their centre, and are functioned on the concept of serious fun for all.

This initiative has been prompted by the National Play Review, and the onset of New Opportunities Fund money for Play, coming on line in 2005. We believe that the setting up of Partnerships/collaborative working that are solely to do with Play will be an important tool in ensuring that funding is properly allocated and spent. The ideas in this Guide are relevant hopefully not just in relation to the NOF funding but in a wider context of engaging interest in improving children's play at local level.



### **What is a Local Play Partnership?**

Quite simply, a focus in a local community/ neighbourhood/parish to improve children's play environment, facilities, resources and awareness. It is a means of bringing together "all players who want to play", that is, anyone and everyone who wants to see better things for children - that will, first and foremost, include children. But, it also will bring in many others.

### **Where to start?**

Somebody will have to take the initial responsibility to contact all those people who are identified as being important to a Play Partnership, (e.g. Leisure Services, Education, Social and Family Care, Children's Trusts, Local Play Councils, Early Years/Sure Start, Health Authorities, GP Trusts, Community Councils, CVS's, Youth Councils, Children's Councils, Chambers of Trade, Regional Play Networks, Regional Centres for Playwork and Education, other local Partnerships etc). But, SOMEONE has to take the first step. It can be anyone who cares about children and their play needs - including YOU!

### **Philosophical base**

After identifying and contacting all those people you think should be involved in this Partnership it is vital that the partnership group develops a common aim and philosophy that can be agreed - vision and values. This may either take some time or an hour or two, depending on the approach taken and the groundwork done.

In this way there can be an open admission of why people are really taking part and a recognition of a possible broad base of approaches to improving children's play opportunities. This gives a sound foundation for exemplary, audacious and enjoyable Play Partnering.



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Fair Play for Children has a number of models available that can be adapted. It is also suggested that at least Articles 31, 12, 13 and 14 from the U.N Convention on the Rights of the Child are adopted as basic principles for working [the Rights to Play, to be Consulted, to Freedom of Expression, to Freedom of Thought] - yes, that the whole process involves Children from the outset, in a fundamental manner.

## Is everyone here ?

One of the easiest and earliest traps to fall into is assuming that once you've got all your mates in, and all those people that you know will agree with you, - the usual suspects, then that's the team put together. A valuable early exercise is to identify who isn't in the gang - the unusual suspects. This may well be children, parents and carers, but could just as easily be, e.g., Town Clerks, engineers from Public Highways, City Planners, etc.



Use an early gathering to identify who's missing and approach them. If you are feeling a bit tentative about getting too many people involved, human nature would probably support your fears. BUT, this is a Play Partnership, and as play workers we all know that we need to build in elements of risk and conflict.

## What do I bring to the Partnership?

This is a great opportunity to 'show- and -tell' what people have to offer, so don't be shy about your own skills and abilities, and encourage others to explore what personal and professional resources are available to bring to the Partnership party.

## Being playful in your approach

This is a key element to the success of a Play Partnership, and a possible reason why others may not have worked. Never resist the opportunity to have some fun with what you're doing, even if that is having an argument. There is nothing better than being able to let your soft side out, and encourage others to do the same. You'll be surprised how easy it is to then let your 'serious' out when dealing with any conflict.

## Identifying Ways of Working

Immediately you will have to establish ways of working that can be agreed upon. As basic starters are honesty, trust, integrity and commitment, the last being both individual and organisational. Even the best of Partnerships will suffer if key players are not allowed to or are unable to play anymore. Another area, as mentioned above, is the area of conflict.

We strongly suggest that you build managing conflict into how you work as a group. Even if there is an overwhelming agreement to 'play nice', conflict will come into the work, in fact we would go so far as to say it should be actively encouraged. It comes as a terrible surprise when it occurs,



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and can be very destructive.

It is too important to go without saying, that most 'adult' ways of working are not conducive to working with children, and it is a must that children are involved. Exploring 'Playing for Real' is a good way to get everyone involved in practical work that not only meets an immediate need - children involved in a play activity - but also sets the scene for future work.

## Planning what to do

While we're all glowing in the knowledge that we all know why we're here, it mustn't be forgotten that, for a Partnership to actually be successful, it has to do something (yes, it comes as a shock doesn't it). What you actually do is very much up to yourselves, but it is suggested that you do something that is short term, practical and that is designed to create something of use to the development of your philosophy.



There may well be some doubters out there, so possibly putting something together that says "This is an example of what we're about" will be of use. The importance of Play and Children's right to play is as good a starting point as any.

## Carrying out joint operations

It also offers an opportunity to test out Partnership working, by working together, which gives an opportunity to both monitor and evaluate how you work together, which should then dictate what you do next. Don't worry if you can't develop a piece of work that everyone can get involved with. Everyone doesn't have to do everything everytime- but everyone does need to be kept informed about what has gone on.

Important as well is identifying who does what in any operation, particularly if there is a need to joint-manage money.

A good tool for planning operations is employing and understanding SMART - Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Resourced, Timed. After a bit it will come as second nature!!!!

## Monitoring and Evaluation

Contrary to rumour and speculation, these two are not a trick by management to catch you out. They are a vital part of Partnership working to help ensure that what you're doing is what you said you would do, and that what you do actually has the desired effect. It is also about letting any funders know about what you've been doing. Remember, this isn't about rapping yourself over the knuckles for 'getting it wrong'.

In a Play Partnership, it's about looking at what you've done, how you've done it and what the results were. They'll be there or thereabouts to what you were after, believe us, and if not there will probably some good learning to be had. This will be because you will have set the Partnership



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up in a proper manner, all will have responsibility for these processes, and all will get the enjoyment from the results.

Reward yourself by re- looking at what you have set out to do, re- evaluate your initial ideas, and put together something new and enjoyable to achieve. Enjoy the thrill of exploring what's possible and then go for the audacious.

## BE BOLD!

### Sustainability

A strategy for long-term well being that allows for your development and continuation without restricting others opportunities. Local Play Partnerships can offer an opportunity to build in sustainability now, by exploring possibilities as you go.

### What are the alternatives?

A formal 'Partnership' as such might not be the best way of working, and it may be useful at an early stage to do some exploring of the possibilities. A Collaboration, (which is what children do when they build a den - natural, enlightened self-interest, a foundation for Broad Based organising - but that's a different PlayAction Guide), a Play Forum, getting involved with any Local Cultural Strategies, which should have Play as a core principle, a foundation, as lead -in activity.



If you are successfully engaged in something resembling any of the above, please let us know so we can share the experience with others.

There is obviously only so much that can be covered, even in a PlayAction Guide, but worry not, further help is at hand. (and foot, ear, eye, tongue, nose and e-mail). If you are interested in taking this further, Fair Play for Children can offer more detailed and on-going support. Please contact:-

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