The Fair Play for Children Association and its Charitable Trust (reg number 282134) exist to promote the Child’s Right to Play as proclaimed in Article 7 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child:

The Child shall have full opportunity for play and recreation, which should be directed to the same purposes as education; Society and the public authorities shall endeavour to promote the enjoyment of this Right.

This objective has no binding force in international or national law but Britain has acceded to the more-recent United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and by so doing commits itself to enforce in this country the 54 articles of the Convention, covering every aspect of children’s welfare, education, leisure, culture, civil and other rights. Article 31 of the Convention states that:

1. States Parties recognize 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.

2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational, and leisure activity.

Article 18 also deals with the right of children of working parents to day care, and also there is provision concerning disability (A.23), standard of living (A.27), cultural identity (A.30) and education (A’s 28-29), whilst Article 2 guarantees these rights to all children irrespective of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.

Article 12 importantly deals with children having a voice and the right to be consulted, Article 13 is about Freedom of expression and Article 15 recognises freedom of association and of assembly, key issues when we consider children accessing resources.

Many will understand by “equal opportunities” in this context that children in this country, irrespective of origin or status etc should be able to access play provision on an equal footing. It is a fundamental tenent of our approach, underpinned by Article 31.2, that this commits all who work for and with children in their play environments not only to ensuring children have equal opportunity to access the community’s facilities and resources for play, but, as importantly, to children having equal opportunity to share the resources society provides for culture, recreation, arts, leisure, crafts and sport. Also, that this should be in ways appropriate to the child in terms of culture, age
etc. Fair Play for Children is convinced that at this time, this is far from being realised with the 20% of the nation who are children not receiving anything like its share of such resources, both at national and local level. We are campaigning for a Fair Deal for Children which aims to redress that imbalance.

Most emphasis in play on equal opportunity is aimed at e.g. race, gender and disability issues. We make the additional point that advances to achieve full implementation of Article 31 cannot happen if resources devoted by central and local government to play continue to be so grossly low compared to provision for adult recreation. It is not only a question of equal opportunities between children but between children and adults. If, for example, local authorities expend public resources on leisure, culture and recreation, Article 31.2 means that they should be able to show, with transparency, that children are able to access those facilities in a manner consistent with their age, development and status as children, and that they have a fair share of those resources.

If a local council expends funding on a leisure centre, Fair Play would ask that in its monitoring of the centre, there is clear identification of use by children and young people, what subsidy, if any, they attract, what proportion this is by comparison of subsidy to adults, and what proportion they are paying in respect of fees and charges.

It is axiomatic that those involved in play should conduct themselves in such a way that their example to children promotes the concept of equal opportunity and this extends to ensuring all who work in play also have equal opportunity.

Fair Play for Children advises all individuals and organisations engaged in play practice to establish sound working practice in the field of equal opportunity. This will encompass e.g. access to provision, attitudes and stereo-typing, promoting positive behaviour models (and combating negative), content of programme/publicity/promotion and every aspect of working practice in the play setting. Consideration should be given to adopting a statement/policy on equal opportunities in whose formulation all workers (paid and voluntary), management, and users should participate, likewise in a regular review/monitoring process.

Fair Play’s Membership has agreed such a statement, reproduced below, and it may be freely incorporated as the basis of any organisation’s own statement/policy as a broad expression of aims and principles around which may be based statements on local working practices. Fair Play is committed to its regular review and welcomes suggested improvements at all times.

The concept of ‘appropriate’ opportunity is key when regarding play provision - this is an age, culture, ethnic, social, gender and other related issue, and it is also relevant to the ways in which children learn to access culture, recreation, arts, sports etc. Because play takes place in the neighbourhood, the question of where resources are directed is of great importance.

We attach the greatest importance to this issue in play because, in the absence of appropriate and equal opportunities children can be and are being denied important, formative experiences - in this issue the playworker is example, advocate, educator and campaigner, a unique responsibility.
FAIR PLAY FOR CHILDREN’S STATEMENT ON EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IN PLAY AND PLAYWORK PRACTICE.

Fair Play for Children is committed to the promotion of equal opportunity in all play activities and work, in play employment and volunteer practices, and in all aspects of its work with its Membership and with others.

The primary purpose of this policy is to seek to ensure that children and all who work with and for them in Play receive equally favourable treatment and do not suffer negative discrimination on the grounds of their social status, income, gender, race, colour, ethnic or national origin, beliefs, religion, marital/family status, nationality, lawful sexual preference, ability and health (physical or mental), or age, and that through our work and example, children learn the basis for harmonious and co-operative behaviour and for discarding attitudes which are oppressive to others.

Above all, we recognise that the immense potential of Play for the healthy development of the child into a well-balanced adult imposes upon those who work in this field a continuous obligation to strive to educate children in the spirit of this policy.

We are committed, therefore, to countering all harmful stereotypes and images of people and groups, to working within communities and with parents to gain their support and co-operation for this work, and to promoting a healthy and questioning attitude amongst children towards discrimination.

We believe that the play worker, paid or unpaid, has a unique and privileged opportunity to influence children in this regard, and to encourage peer group and parental standards consistent with this statement.

Fair Play for Children is committed to ensuring that the needs and rights of oppressed groups are adequately represented in Play at national, regional and local levels, and to improving the presence and representation of such groups within our organisation. We also are committed to ensuring that knowledge about the customs, backgrounds, lifestyles and other issues affecting them are more widely understood.

Fair Play for Children is committed to working to promote the Child’s Right to Play and to opposing unjust legislation and practices which discriminate against children, infringe on their rights under the UN and other Conventions, especially those which help guarantee the child’s right to play and to access their environment for play.

We are committed to the principle that individuals working with children are selected, promoted and treated in all regards only on the basis of their relevant merits, achievements, abilities and potential.
We respect the right to privacy of all citizens, and in particular wish to ensure that, where enquiries are made about volunteers’ and employees’ suitability to work with children, enquiries about past offences and matters of health should proceed only as far as is consistent with a reasonable balance of that right of privacy with the right of the child to a safe play environment.

Training and advisory work within Fair Play for Children shall be performed with especial regard to the purpose of this policy and our publications, promotional materials, articles and activities will also reflect its major claim on our priorities.

Fair Play for Children will work to make this policy fully effective through its own work and by persuading its Members and others to adopt it in their work with children.

We will not allow into Membership those who violate the anti-discrimination provisions of the Fair Play for Children constitution or the intent of this policy, and will remove from Membership any who persist in violating either.

This policy will be kept under review by Fair Play for Children’s General Meetings and submitted to at least every AGM for review.

This Fact Sheet may be reproduced in full or part with an acknowledgement to Fair Play for Children.

Contacts

Fair Play for Children
35 Lyon Street, Bognor Regis PO21 1BW, Tel: 0845-330 7635, Fax: 01243862072, e-mail: fair-play@arunet.co.uk, web site: www.arunet.co.uk/fairplay/

Children’s Rights Alliance for England
94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF, Tel: 020-7278 8222, Fax: 020-7278 9222, e-mail: ibenister@crights.org.uk

UK Unicef
Africa House, 64-78 Kingsway, London WC2B 6NB, Tel: 020-7312 7640, Fax: 020-7405 2332

Children’s Play Council
8 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7QE, Tel: 020-7843 6016, Fax: 020-7278 9512

IPA-UK: International Association for the Child’s Right to Play
Douglas Cole, Chair, Play Development, County Hall, Cardiff CF1 5QW