



## **Play Wales' Response to the Child Poverty Strategy for Wales Consultation**

Play Wales is the national charity for children's play - promoting quality in all environments where children might play and advocating for playing children across disciplines and services.

There are a number of professionals working in different contexts in Wales who support children's health, development and wellbeing through play. The work of all of these professionals is of the utmost importance to the Child Poverty Strategy. The innovative Foundation Phase curriculum recognises that children's individual learning journeys are best supported by play because of the way play starts with the child and fosters a growing sense of confidence and esteem. As children spend a substantial proportion of their time in school, the professional play practice of teachers and learning assistants is pivotal in reducing the effects of inequality. Playworkers offer play provision outside of the school day that enables children to follow their own initiatives and to benefit from play for play's sake. Developmental and therapeutic play specialists work with children, parents/carers and professionals in school and community environments to promote children's growing repertoire of play skills in order that they gain maximum benefit from their own initiated play opportunities and those that are provided for them. Children suffering sickness, trauma or severe adversity are supported by hospital play specialists or play therapists.

We work to close the gap between children and young people's needs and wishes and the provision that is made for them to play.

We provide advice, support and guidance for all those in Wales who have a concern or responsibility for any environment where children and young people might play. We uphold children's right to play. Freely chosen play is critically important in the healthy development of all children and young people.

All children are entitled to quality play opportunities within their communities and we work strategically to achieve this goal on their behalf. We have been closely involved in drafting the national Play Policy (2002)

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and in providing recommendations for Play in Wales (2006) the Welsh Assembly Play Policy Implementation Plan.

Play Wales' membership is drawn from a wide constituency including local and regional voluntary organisations, local authorities and individuals, employers, playworkers, other play professionals and academics. This response has been written following consultation with our membership.

Play Wales welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Child Poverty Strategy and Delivery Plan for Wales consultation. Our response focuses on Chapter 6, which is of most relevance for our membership and our area of charitable interest. However, there is evidence to show that providing children and young people access to quality places, with freedom and time to play and hang out makes a significant contribution to alleviating the affects of poverty across the whole of this Strategy and Delivery Plan.

### **1. What are your views on our three strategic objectives for our new Child Poverty Strategy in Wales?**

Play Wales supports the proposal for three strategic objectives:

1. Reduce the number of workless households in Wales.
2. Tackling in work poverty – improving parent's skills to enable access to employment
3. Reduce inequalities that exist in health, education and economic outcomes

We also support the team around the family approach, provided that ALL professionals who work with children and their families understand the vital importance of play, are conversant with why play is important and realise the breadth of opportunities that can be provided for children and young people to play.

Inequalities for children are broad rather than specific and the delivery plans highlight a range of opportunities and services, therefore, the third objective might better read:

*.. to reduce the inequalities of access to services and opportunities for children living in poverty by improving the outcomes of the poorest . .*

Play Wales has strong concerns that the language of the Broad aim "To reduce inequalities in participation in cultural, sporting and leisure..." as it appears on the face of the Measure, is not coherent with the Chapter title,

Core Aim 4; All children have access to play, leisure, cultural and sporting activities (as in Annex 1, section 1.5).

We recommend the inclusion of a Long Term Priority Policy Action for the broad aim “To reduce inequalities in participation in cultural, sporting and leisure...” in Table 3.1 p 17.to read:

*Greater promotion of quality provision for play and child-friendly environments and practices across services and provision that reduce inequalities and support children’s opportunities to become engaged in playing.*

## **2. What are your views on the policy action we set out in the Delivery Plan?**

It is disappointing that the Delivery Plan in Chapter 6 is in part backward-looking and it does not reference the contribution of the Cymorth Support Fund play theme in its fullest context.

Play Wales has recently undertaken a national review of Children and Young People’s Partnerships to ascertain the *State of Play 2009* in Wales. This is the fourth such survey and builds on the first *State of Play* review and report commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government in 2000<sup>1</sup>, which was updated by Play Wales in 2003 and 2006.

The *State of Play* reviews demonstrate that the Cymorth play theme has more recently been used to develop staffed play provision for children, most of which operates in the school holiday periods, specifically during the summer. A few areas with larger allocations have also developed other staffed play provision in other parts of the year. The play theme continues to be the dominant funding source for play provision.

The *State of Play* review returns indicate that the Children and Young People’s Partnerships have used Cymorth to provide play opportunities to good effect. However, a more robust data collection system is needed to inform policy decisions.

Play Wales is aware of case studies that provide evidence that where staffed play provision is provided in targeted areas of deprivation it has contributed to community cohesion and to the alleviation of demand on

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<sup>1</sup> State of Play, Welsh Assembly Government 2000, and Play Wales, 2003, 2006, 2009  
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preventative statutory services (The Venture, Caia Park<sup>2</sup>; Penlan Adventure Playground<sup>3</sup>, Swansea)

The first action set out in the Delivery Plan focuses on universal provision and the second action focuses on disabled children. Therefore there is no action in the Delivery Plan focused on child poverty or reducing inequalities related to income. This is a missed opportunity in a comprehensive, national child poverty strategy designed to reduce child poverty and inequalities.

Furthermore, the action “Work with local authorities and other partners to develop definitions of play opportunities...” is superfluous and does not reflect the current context in respect of play provision.

Nationally and internationally there is a well established working definition of play, as already articulated in the Welsh Assembly Government Play Policy<sup>4</sup> and the Playwork Principles<sup>5</sup>. The development of the latter was funded by WAG and endorsed by WAG and SkillsActive (the sector skills council for Active Leisure, Learning and Well-being) in 2005. They establish the professional and ethical framework for playwork, and describe what is unique about play and playwork, and provide the playwork perspective for working with children and young people in the UK.

The actions would be more effective if they were worded as follows:

*We will*

- *Work with local authorities and other partners to develop an understanding of the breadth of opportunities that can be provided to reduce inequalities for all children and young people to play*
- *Develop Regulations and Guidance to support local authorities to undertake sufficiency audits as part of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure that are coherent with the national play policy and the definition of play articulated therein. They will be developed to support a cross-professional and joined up approach.*

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<sup>2</sup> Evaluation of The Venture, Caia Park, Wrexham, Clwyd Social Services, 1995

<sup>3</sup> Institute of Welsh Affairs, Integrated Centres in Wales, final report 2005

<sup>4</sup> Welsh Assembly Government Play Policy 2002

<sup>5</sup> Playwork Principles, SkillsActive 2004

- *Continue to improve access and the development of play services for children and young people, referencing the play theme of Cymorth Support Fund and its support for all children living in poverty, including disabled children.*

We would also recommend additional actions as follows:

- *work with partners to develop public information initiatives in respect of the nature of playing and the importance of supporting playing children and reducing inequalities of access*
- *explore the benefits of cross sector training for all those whose professional decisions may have an impact on children's access to play opportunities.*<sup>6</sup>

**3. Do you think the policy action set out in the Delivery Plan will enable us to achieve our three strategic objectives and our vision for 2020?**

No. There is not enough emphasis on how access to play opportunities contributes to alleviating the effects of childhood poverty and improving wellbeing amongst children and their families. Considerable evidence exists within *Play for a Change, Play, Policy and Practice*, published by Play England in 2008.<sup>7</sup> There is also an established group of researchers working in Wales exploring and evaluating what supports children's resilience and sense of well being and why playing is important.

Children place great emphasis on playing and their freedom to play out with their friends in their immediate neighbourhood; failure to support playing will impact on children's own assessment of their well-being and their resilience. Many children living in low income families are prevented from playing by circumstances, attitudes and inappropriate environments. They need interventions on their behalf to remove the barriers and to support their right to play as they wish.

In Annex 1 (Section 1.5, page 80), there appears to be a disproportionate focus on the importance of organised structured physical activity. The evidence/information regarding physical activity (specifically around school-based interventions) would be better placed in Chapter 5 (Supporting parents to understand the importance of a healthy diet and

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<sup>6</sup> [www.playshaper.org.uk](http://www.playshaper.org.uk)

<sup>7</sup> *Play for a change - Play, Policy and Practice: A review of contemporary perspectives*, Stuart Lester and Wendy Russell, Play England, 2008  
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exercise) or Chapter 4 (Using Community Focussed Schools to tackle Child Poverty).

The sentence “Play is also important” is misleading and therefore may inadvertently cause the reader to view play as an add-on. We recommend that this is changed to read:

*Playing is important ...*

We recommend that this section references current evidence on children and young people’s play. The literature review published in 2008 by Play England. *Play for a change*<sup>8</sup>, is the most comprehensive, up to date and considered evidence about children and young people’s play and how we provide for it. *Play for a change* is beginning to have an international impact beyond the UK.

Also, Play England has commissioned [Matrix Evidence](#) (an independent research company) to undertake an economic evaluation that will develop an evidence base on the value added by staffed play provision. Even at this early stage there appears to be a causative link between access to staffed play provision and improved health outcomes and increased income in adulthood. It is anticipated that this work will be published in the early autumn. There is a need for more research and there are established research groups in Wales who could be involved.

In addition, we note that this strategy and delivery plan was formulated prior to recent significant changes to the Benefits system. It is likely that these changes will impede the achievement of Welsh Assembly Government’s vision for 2020 – the effect might be that children are poorer financially, but if our recommendations to this consultation are implemented, there is enough existing evidence to suggest that we are likely to see children enjoying richer lives and an improved sense of wellbeing and happiness.

#### **4. What is the best way to integrate local multi-agency support for families living in poverty?**

It is imperative that play provision features as an integral part of multi-agency support for families.

Parents and carers are supported by professional play practitioners across

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<sup>8</sup> *Play for a change - Play, Policy and Practice: A review of contemporary perspectives*, Stuart Lester and Wendy Russell, Play England, 2008

all of children's services including in health, recreational and educational contexts. They share a working practice that recognises that play (particularly play where children are afforded choice and control) is essential for maintaining and promoting children's health, development and wellbeing.

Parents and carers are supporters of staffed play provision. In case studies documented in *People Make Play*<sup>9</sup> parents share powerful stories of how such play provision has changed the lives of their children, of themselves as parents, and how it has benefitted their neighbourhoods as places to live. They recognise that staffed play provision is an important part of their children's lives – an integral experience that their children would otherwise miss. They are aware of the mix of learning, socialising and health benefits that children gain from playing, but primarily emphasise how their children gain valuable and unique experiences when playing is allowed to take place for its own sake.

The stories demonstrate that the provision makes a difference in parents' lives too. It brings parents into contact with other parents and facilitates the creation of informal social bonds and support networks – crucial lifelines in deprived neighbourhoods and for parents in need. Parents feel that play provision can transform their communities, by cutting across social divides, bringing neighbours into contact with each other and creating a greater sense of community.

Support for staffed play provision is often expressed through volunteering, which in turn can be beneficial to parents, who learn valuable transferable skills. Volunteering can lead to progressive training in play, increasing understanding and perhaps leading to a career in play provision, which may open up local employment opportunities that are compatible with childcare responsibilities. Encouraging community participation also means that play provision can be sustainable and may encourage a return to the playing out culture that has arguably reduced over recent years.

In other words, play provision can increase local social capital where it is needed most. Because of all this, many parents feel that the value of these play settings can be equal to or higher than many services for which they might have to pay – including childcare, school trips or sports activities. There is a clear qualitative perception that developing and supporting quality community-based play provision meets children's' play needs, fosters social and community cohesion and alleviates the affects of child poverty.

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<sup>9</sup> People Make Play – the impact of staffed play provision on children, families and communities, Joost Beunderman, Play England, 2010  
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A significant contribution to multi-agency working would be the creation of a national professional development programme that helps the people who plan, design, build and manage our communities to understand the importance of play and their role in creating child-friendly public spaces. This would also contribute to better use of existing funds.

Where Guidance on the development of local child poverty strategies is issued to Local Authorities, recommended core membership of working groups or similar should include play associations/play officers.

### **Related issues:**

Play Wales is contributing to the Welsh Assembly Government *Children and Young People's Well-being Monitor* chapter on *Access to play, leisure, sport and culture*. There are key information gaps with regard to access to play provision and playing. The following actions would fill these gaps:

- Support for further research into the differential access to play opportunities experienced by children living in low-income households and disadvantaged communities (inc. rural; urban; Valleys etc.) compared with their peers; the barriers these children and their families experience and how to overcome
- Support for further research into the play value afforded by play opportunities
- Support for further research into attitudinal and environmental constraints on children's access to play
- Support for further research into children and young people's views of play provision
- Support for further research into what ensures equal access to opportunities for playing for all children
- Compilation of regional baseline audits to present an all Wales review.

In addition we have identified a need:

- To research the contribution that staffed play provision makes to community cohesion.
- To research the effects that raising awareness of the importance of play makes to local community cohesion.