



# PlayAction Guide

## Fair Play for Children: Making the World Fit for all Our Children to Play in.

This is the [Annual Report for Fair Play for Children in 2002/03](#).

This has been an active and challenging period for Fair Play, mid-way through its Community Fund 3 year funding. It is apparent that this organisation has started a process which is fundamentally shifting its emphasis, from a mainly inward-looking group of people delivering Children's Play to a much broader alliance of those working with children in play, day-care, youth, advisory, rights and other settings. The **Community Fund** award was sought in order to take Fair Play from that previous level to a more sustainable level of activity. At Year 2 of the grant, we can say that much of our original target is being achieved, though there are difficult areas.

Our main areas of developing work have been:

**Child Protection in Play**, **Local Play Partnerships**, **Children's Rights**.



### Child Protection in Play: Fair Play leads Good Practice

In the mid-1990's Fair Play pioneered child protection work in the area of play and leisure. We have taken this work forward since then through our Police Checks Service, our Training programme and through a range of publications. During the year, we published updated and full colour **PlayAction Guides** on the **1989 Children Act** (as modified by the Care Standards Act), on **Ofsted Regulation of Child Care**, and on **Child Protection**. Our training activities took in sessions in East Sussex, Hampshire, Newcastle etc, and we settled into our role as an **Umbrella Body** with the **Criminal Records Bureau**. It is true that the CRB took quite some settling in and that there were long delays. Our work and system with the former VOCS pilot scheme has stood us in excellent stead, so that at this time we have some 170 organisations in membership and using this service. **Andy Cosgrove** has been responsible for overseeing this project and he is now **Child Protection Services Worker** - it's his voice people hear when they're chasing an application. We have been looking at certain issues such as the information held by Ofsted and Social Services Departments which currently is not available within the CRB context but which we have represented to the Home Office could be very significant. The Home Office Minister has acknowledged the importance of our suggestion which is being carefully weighed at this time. **Jan Cosgrove**, **National Organiser**, has continued to undertake training in child protection good practice with a wide range of organisations. In particular he has been promoting the good practice of **Child Protection Auditing**, a specialised form of risk assessment which encourages those working with children to view the child's play environment in terms of risk reduction strategies.

### Local Play Partnerships: Children's Voices First

During the year, along with many others in play, we were invited to participate in a Consultation about the ways in which the funding allocated from the **New Opportunities Fund** into Play might be rolled out. This sum of £200 millions is a major investment, and we were delighted when Frank Dobson MP was asked to chair an independent review. Our response to the Consultation was undertaken by Jan Cosgrove, based on discussions with members, and on years of existing experience of working with children. One major target, we felt, was to ensure that children and young people were fully involved, at local level, in determining what best use could be made of such funding allocation. Existing sys-



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tems simply ignored or patronised children, especially the very young, so we felt that an entirely new and child-appropriate approach was required, which we have termed **Local Play Partnerships**. We rejected the 'usual suspect' idea of giving the funding to local authorities to disburse or indeed to existing partnership arrangements. **Fred Brown**, now our **Play Partnerships Development Worker**, has been working on resources to help such partnerships come into being and to develop bids. His report is given below. An article in *Local Council Review* (aimed at parish councils) elicited a huge response as many of them face serious challenges around lack of facilities and limited budgets. Fred has already been running pilot training sessions and a *PlayAction Guide on Local Play Partnerships*, written by him, has now been published.



## Children's Rights: Time for a Wake-Up Call

Somewhere along the line, the idea has grown up that Children's Play is a "fluffy" subject which everyone knows is Good and "We can all agree on it, can't we?" It



is a fact that children have faced increasing restriction on their ability to go out to play in their communities - the well-known issues of traffic, 'stranger' fears and so forth have been acknowledged to have contributed towards a marked and serious reduction in children's outside play. What is less acknowledged is the increasing extent to which adult intolerance of children playing has been contributing towards this tendency, and the even more worrying phenomenon of those in Government being seduced by the need to play to the gallery of 'crime and disorder'. No one objects to there being laws and measures to stop real anti-social behaviour, but in this past year Fair Play for Children has become seriously concerned

at laws and schemes which are claimed to tackle anti-social behaviour but which are being imposed with scant regard for the fundamental rights of children. One particular issue is the use in places like the London Borough of Islington of **Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs)** where we have investigated a parent's concerns that her children have been pressured to sign contracts which would seriously infringe their basic rights of assembly, free association, expression and play, based on hearsay and vague allegations which the local housing authority and police could not back up. There are several hundred such ABCs in that Borough, it is being held up by the Home Office as good practice, but we have asked, without success, Islington to answer a list of questions about their methodology and their respect for human rights. This issue is still running, and we have had supportive comments from the Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE) and from a serving police officer in London who says the ABCs could be both traumatic for children and a hindrance to good policing. Fair Play is also concerned about aspects of both the new **Crime and Disorder Act** (especially the sections allowing the police to move on young people in groups of 2 or more and to take anyone who appears to be under 16 home after 9pm) and the **Sexual Offences Act** which may criminalise children and young people under 16 for doing things which the young, in growing up, have done since time began. These issues are being pursued by CRAE, of which we are members, and CRAE is beginning to take on board our concerns about the unfairness and human rights breaches of ABCs. Fair Play objects to any process which muddles civil and criminal law and which gives power to those who want to "Sweep Kids Off The Streets". We continue to monitor a steady stream of parents who complain about serious harassment of their children by unreasonable adults objecting to their play.



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## In the Field: Fair Play in Action

**John Field**, our Southern Development Worker, left for a new post in Spring 2003, and this was a good point at which to review tasks and to re-align our work, leading to the new posts occupied by Andy and Fred. Here is Fred's report for the year.



*There are areas of work that have been part of my role that have been on the agenda from the beginning of the project. The work with **Liverpool City Council's Play service** is slowly bearing fruit, with the inclusion of Articles 31, 12 and 13 being central to the up and coming Play Review and Play Policy. Developments are still ongoing to ensure that both Play and Inclusion are given status in the build up to the European Capital of Culture status in 2008. Input into the **Adlam Play Bus** has increased, as the project has been taken on board by the Children's Play Council, as a Pilot for their **Neighbourhood Play Toolkit**. We are learning many lessons and rediscovering old truths in this work, which we hope will be of value in the future. The Toolkit project is due to run until 2005, assuming the stamina is kept up. **Playwork North West** are making steady progress in their work, and in supporting the Regional Centre at GRUMPY. As ever with this work it takes it's time, but there is an opportunity for my input to increase as we organise a regional conference, and off-shoot work.*

*There is still support offered for local projects such as **Merseyside Access to Play**, **Liverpool Inclusion Project** and the **North City Project**. The latter may well see itself joining with Adlam to achieve mutual aims. In January of 2003, a national consultation occurred regarding New Opportunities Funding for Play. Fair Play contributed to this with a number of positive suggestions. A definite criteria for access to this funding is clear evidence of people working together for Play. This has led to the development of Local Play Partnerships. This programme is designed, from a Play perspective, to look at how people can work together in Partnership and Collaboration to best achieve the aims for children's play in their area. It has become apparent that Partnership working has been badly undermined in a number of areas, because of bad design and preparation. Local Play Partnerships looks at building from the very bottom, using tried and tested Play principles and Practice, in conjunction with the basic principles of partnerships, to create a unique way of working. The idea has been spread strategically through the Play world, with a cautious but positive response, particularly in Parish and Town Councils. It is hoped that the programme will be included in the work of the Regional Centres, and ripple out across the country. It's fun, and it just might work.*

In the East Midlands, **Ethel Swann** has continued to undertake a huge amount of work as voluntary **Network Co-ordinator**, working in Notts with many local play organisations and in Derbyshire with play care bodies. Her work has taken in training and promotional activity. Ethel has been building strong and viable partnerships with local groups and councils. In Liverpool, **Yelena O'Connell** has been investigating Fair Play's potential role in developing exchange visits for younger children than the usual current age range of 16 years and over. She has been exploring a possible partnership with Chance for Life (CFL) in Romania, based in Bucharest. They work with children who have a high risk of social rejection, particularly those with HIV living in care homes. They work under severe conditions - little money, prejudice and rejection etc. A recent grant came from UNICEF for their new day centre and toy library and they are grateful for toys etc. The possibility is to organise an exchange between Fair Play and CFL, one for staff and volunteers from here travel to Bucharest to meet, share experience, and plan an actual children's exchange. In London, our **President, Janet Dalglish MBE**, continues her training work and also her very full involvement in e.g. Westminster Play, keeping an eye on the **Children's Play Council**, play in Southwark, London Play etc.



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## The Organisation: Under Pressure

PlayAction has continued to develop as our main source of published ideas and information, and its quality, quarterly format has attracted an increasing number of admirers. We have faced a problem, however, with the publishing arrangement in that the company contracted to produce the publication through goodwill advertising and to supply Fair Play with income became the subject of Charity Commission concern because of complaints about methods of approaching potential donors. A Commission enquiry has been held and there are ongoing issues involving Fair Play in discussion with the Commission. Many of the original issues have been resolved, but the Commission appears to believe that such a method of fund-raising should produce about a 50% return to Fair Play of the overall turnover secured by the company. This appears to Fair Play to be an unrealistic expectation and even an in-house operation would achieve around 30% in our view. We are reviewing options for Fair Play. We have now published a version of PlayAction in Acrobat PDF format, which means that it can be sent very cheaply, attached to emails etc, to a much wider range of people and organisations. Two PDF versions have been published this year, the latest in full colour.



Our **Web Site** now has attracted over 20,400 visitors and there are regular monthly plus updates of the Events Page and the Press Digest. The site has been due for an update which is in serious progress given the makeover being currently undertaken by **Arman Charif** at no charge. The revised site promises to be as informative as the existing one and also very attractive. This site remains an attractive and major resource but it has proven hard during the year to find enough time to undertake the necessary revision work so the current effort is all the more welcome.

**Membership** has now reached over 390, mainly local groups, local authorities, and other public and charitable/community organisations. This growth is mainly down to groups appreciating the services we are able to offer. It does suggest, together with feed-back, that groups want us to develop the services they feel are missing. A reliable CRB agency, an independent journal, a range of basic guides about play-related issues, small regional gatherings to discuss areas of concern and mutual interest etc, these are the messages our members are feeding back to us.

**Publications:** The number of PlayAction Guides has grown to nearly 20 titles and several of those have now had the 'colour supplement' treatment. We publish four such guides a year, in this format, and it has proven a most popular and durable approach. There are web and PDF versions also. Other Fair Play titles are now either sold out or beyond their sell-by. The child protection pack is due for re-publication and it too will be in several formats.

Fair Play occupies a unique niche in the field. We have grown by responding to need and also at the same time by not being afraid to revisit what we exist to do. The recent rapid growth of Fair Play has meant that we do face imminent challenges to ensure continuity, as our current Community Fund grant expires July 2004. We also need to review our constitutional and elected management structures so that these evolve to ensure effective direction of the organisation.

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