

PIW 14

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into: Poverty in Wales Strand 4

Response from: Play Wales



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Committee Clerk
Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay, CF99 1NA

Re: Inquiry into Poverty in Wales-Strand 4

1.1 Play Wales is the national charity for children's play.

1.2 We work to raise awareness of children and young people's need and right to play and to promote good practice at every level of decision making and in every place where children might play.

1.3 We provide advice and guidance to support all those who have an interest in, or responsibility for providing for children's play so that one day Wales will be a place where we recognise and provide well for every child's play needs.

1.4 We worked closely with Welsh Government on its groundbreaking 'Play Sufficiency' legislation.

1.5 Play Wales advocates for the provision of quality play opportunities for children in their own communities. This has included advocating and supporting the development of both quality staffed provision and quality spaces and places for playing, particularly in the public realm. We have produced a range of resources¹ to support those who plan for and provide children's play services and provision.

1.5 Play Wales is pleased to have the opportunity to input into Strand 4 of the Inquiry into Poverty in Wales.

1.6 We support, with some reservations, Welsh Government's aspiration to eradicate child poverty by 2020 as outlined in the Revised Child Poverty Strategy for Wales (out for consultation until 29 January 2015).

1.7 We are extremely concerned that this ambition remains entirely aspirational, in view of both welfare reforms from central Government and the unprecedented public expenditure cuts. These cuts will severely restrict the level to

¹ <http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/information sheets>

which local authorities and their partners in the third sector will be able to respond to Welsh Government initiatives and policies. However, we note that

1.8 We welcome the strong reference to the importance of children's play in the *Revised Child Poverty Strategy for Wales*.

1.9 In particular, the strategy notes that opportunities for children and young people to play contribute to mitigating the negative effects of poverty on children's lives and help to build their resilience and overall wellbeing.

1.10 It also recognises that play provision 'can also be a means of reducing inequalities between children living in families that can afford costly recreational provision and those that cannot, so reducing poverty of experience for all children' and 'community space and facilities and opportunities to support play are also vital, particularly for children young people.'

1.11 There is evidence that playing is central to children's physical, mental, social and emotional health and well-being² and play is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and elaborated upon in General Comment 17.

1.12 Through play, children develop resilience and flexibility, contributing to physical and emotional well-being.

1.13 For children themselves, playing is one of the most important aspects of their lives^{3,4}, they value time, freedom and quality places to play. Consultations with children and young people show that they prefer to play outdoors away from adult supervision – in safe but stimulating places. In this situation children tend to be physically active and stretch themselves both physically and emotionally to a greater extent than they would if they were supervised.⁵

1.14 Research suggests that children and young people living in poverty are more likely to live (and therefore play and hang out) in environments that are dangerous or toxic due to greater traffic volume, incidences of crime, poor air quality and much more. Toxicants such as lead, cadmium and mercury have a negative impact on social and cognitive development, including play behaviours, that can be ameliorated by environmental enrichment and the presence of adults who can facilitate play.⁶

1.15 Children and young people living in rural areas encounter many of the same barriers to playing out and hanging out as urban children (most notably parked cars and traffic intensity and speed, fear of strangers and unwelcoming attitudes and environments). The social element of playing and hanging out is one of the most important, and while there may be better access to natural environments to play and hang out in, there is greater distance between them and their friends and less

² Lester, S. and Russell, W. (2008) *Play for a Change: Play, policy and practice - a review of contemporary perspectives*, London: National Children's Bureau

³ Funky Dragon (2007) *Why Do People's Ages Go Up Not Down?* Swansea: Funky Dragon

⁴ National Assembly for Wales (2010) *National Assembly for Wales Children and Young People's Committee Provision of Safe Places to Play and Hang Out*

⁵ Mackett, R. et al (2007) 'Children's independent movement in the local environment', *Built Environment*, 33, 4, 454-68

⁶ Lester, S. and Russell, W. (2008) *Play for a Change: Play, policy and practice - a review of contemporary perspectives*, London: National Children's Bureau

chance for independent mobility than their urban counterparts. Rural poverty is a significant inhibitor to independent mobility.

1.16 Whilst the right to play and the importance children place on playing is increasingly recognised, there is still a need to highlight how playing and community based staffed play provision can positively impact on children and families that are experiencing poverty.

1.17 Communities First and Families First are two Welsh Government programmes to provide support for those living in poverty or deprived areas.

1.18 The Play Wales information sheet, Play and 'making poverty less damaging for children'⁷ explores how provision for playing responds to the Families First principles.

1.19 Communities First Programme has contributed to the development of new play opportunities for children in many areas; however, the funding has been used to best effect where there has been a local play officer or play association with considerable expertise in the development of play provision.

1.20 Quality play and youth provision contributes to community cohesion. The approach of the Venture staffed adventure playground in Wrexham has successfully included some of the most alienated and feared members of the local community.⁸

1.21 Guidance from Welsh Government regarding these programmes should explicitly state that provision for children's play should be included under these programmes if they meet locally identified need.

1.22 This would clarify Welsh Government's support while the use of the phrase if they meet locally identified need, ensures that priority setting and decision making power is not removed from Local Authorities.

1.23 Staffed play provision, often run by the third and community sector, are an increasingly vital element in the multiagency approach to improving outcomes for children, families and communities and are also thought to be more cost-effective than more formal statutory services.⁹

1.24 Play Wales has recently undertaken external evaluations of three staffed community based play projects in Wales (Ceredigion, north west Wales and a tri county project covering Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly and Merthyr Tydfil).

1.25 The findings of evaluation projects consistently showed, that in terms of community cohesion, stakeholders recognised that the play projects contributed towards:

- Increased equality within communities
- Increased participation
- Reduced anti-social behaviour
- Reduced isolation (e.g. meeting new people)

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<http://www.playwales.org.uk/login/uploaded/documents/INFORMATION%20SHEETS/play%20and%20making%20poverty%20less%20damaging%20for%20children.pdf>

⁸ Brown, 2006, *The Venture: a case study of an adventure playground*. Cardiff: Play Wales, 2006

⁹ Beunderman, J (2010), *People Make Play*, London: National Children's Bureau

- Reduced fear and increased trust
- Gave community members a sense of ownership
- Increased community spirit

Play sufficiency

1.26 Section 11 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 places a duty on local authorities to assess and secure sufficient play opportunities for children in their area.

1.27 The Play Sufficiency Duty comes as part of the Welsh Government's anti-poverty agenda which recognises that children can have a poverty of experience, opportunity and aspiration, and that this kind of poverty can affect children from all social, cultural and economic backgrounds across Wales.

1.28 *Wales- A Play Friendly Place*, the Statutory Guidance to Local Authorities on assessing for and securing sufficient play opportunities for children in their areas demonstrates that developing conditions to support children's play requires cross-sector work.

1.29 Play Wales has worked with the University of Gloucestershire to produce a report that presents the findings of a small-scale research project.

1.30 The purpose of the *Towards Securing Sufficient Play Opportunities: A short study into the preparation undertaken for the commencement of the second part of the Welsh Government's Play Sufficiency Duty* research¹⁰ was to:

- Look at what has happened over the last 12 months after submission of Play Sufficiency Assessments
- Look at how selected local authorities have prepared themselves to respond to the forthcoming commencement of securing sufficiency of play opportunities.

1.31 Data from this report were gathered through documentation, attendance at and notes from regional meetings to consult on the draft Statutory Guidance for the second part of the Duty, and semi-structured interviews with national and local stakeholders.

1.32 The report identified that there is a need for the Welsh Government to lead by example and be seen to work cross-departmentally.

1.33 *Towards Securing Sufficient Play Opportunities: A short study into the preparation undertaken for the commencement of the second part of the Welsh Government's Play Sufficiency Duty to secure sufficient play opportunities*, written by researchers Stuart Lester and Wendy Russell is a follow up to an earlier report (*Leopard Skin Wellies, a Top Hat and a Vacuum Cleaner Hose: An analysis of*

¹⁰ Lester, S and Russell, W (2014), *Towards Securing Sufficient Play Opportunities: A short study into the preparation undertaken for the commencement of the second part of the Welsh Government's Play Sufficiency Duty to secure sufficient play opportunities*. Cardiff: Play Wales and the University of Gloucestershire.

Wales' Play Sufficiency Assessment duty)¹¹ that explored how local authorities responded to the introduction of the duty to assess sufficient play opportunities for children.

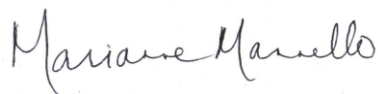
1.34 In conclusion, playing contributes to all children's ability to survive and thrive and it's particularly valuable to disadvantaged children.

1.35 Growing up in poverty and deprivation can potentially have a huge impact on both the physical and mental development of individual children. Interventionist programmes can be useful in minimising some of the damaging impact of poverty, however, they must be complemented by a focus on supporting children to be active participants in building their own resilience. We know that every aspect of children's lives is influenced by their urge to play, and that the kind of self-directed, self determined playing offered by quality play provision increases children's opportunities to build their own resilience.

1.36 Staffed play provision increases children's ability to support their own wellbeing and aids parents in understanding and coping with their children's development. Play is central to a healthy child's life, and provision for play should be central to any framework that informs programmes on how best to support children and families.

1.37 Play Wales is keen to work with Welsh Government and officials to ensure that the commitment to children's play can be taken forward across all policy areas and that all existing and emerging funding programmes can be used to best effect.

Kind regards,



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¹¹ Lester, S and Russell, W (2013), *Leopard Skin Wellies, a Top Hat and a Vacuum Cleaner Hose: An analysis of Wales' Play Sufficiency Assessment duty*. Cardiff: Play Wales and the University of Gloucestershire.