



# Children in Wales

## Plant yng Nghymru

### **The NAfW Children and Young People's Committee inquiry into the provision of safe places to play and hang out.**

Children in Wales is the national umbrella organisation in Wales, bringing organisations and individuals from all disciplines and sectors together. Its role is to make the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child a reality in Wales. Children in Wales fights for sustainable quality services for all children and young people, and special attention for children in need, as well as ensuring children and young people have a voice in issues that affect them.

Children in Wales has around 300 organisations in membership, including the major voluntary children's agencies, professional associations, local authorities and health bodies, as well as many smaller community groups. Children in Wales facilitates a variety of forums including a parenting forum, a disability forum, a poverty network and practice exchange groups in North and South Wales. Children in Wales is currently leading the partnership that is delivering the Early Support Programme in Wales, and developing the young disabled people's network, with support from European Social Fund monies. Children in Wales works in partnership with the National Children's Bureau in England and Children in Scotland, and internationally is active in Eurochild and the International Forum for Child welfare.

#### **Context**

Children in Wales welcomes this opportunity to submit a written background paper ahead of providing oral evidence to the NAfW Children and Young People's Committee. This paper has been developed with input from member organisations and groups of disabled young people.

Children in Wales is aware that the Children and Young people's committee has already received a wide range of evidence, directly from some of our member organisations, such as

Play Wales and Barnardo's, as well as receiving evidence from the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales, therefore this paper will address the following areas:

- Broad principles
- Issues relating to disabled children and young people.
- Issues relating to disadvantaged areas and low income families

### **Principles.**

Children in Wales fully supports the view that play is vital to children and young people's health, wellbeing and development, and that all children and young people in Wales should have the right to access play opportunities, as stated in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC):

*"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."*<sup>1</sup>

Children in Wales also welcomes and supports Welsh Assembly Government work to support Play, in terms of the development of the Play Policy and the Play Policy implementation plan, which defined play as:

*' children's behaviour which is freely chosen personally directed and intrinsically motivated. It is performed for no external goal or reward, and is a fundamental and integral part of healthy development — not only for individual children, but also for the society in which they live.'*<sup>2</sup>

However Children in Wales is concerned that not all children and young people in Wales are able to access a range of play opportunities. While there are challenges faced by all children and young people, we will focus our evidence on the particular challenges faced by disabled children and young people, and for those living in disadvantaged areas and low income families.

The Concluding Observations from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child published in October 2008 recommended that the UK Government should:

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

<sup>2</sup> Welsh Assembly Government (2002)

*The Committee recommends that the State party strengthen its efforts to guarantee 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. The State party should pay particular attention to provide children, including those with disabilities, with adequate and accessible playground spaces to exercise their play and leisure activities.*<sup>3</sup>

### **Disabled children and young people.**

There is a range of evidence, both Wales specific and UK wide that indicates that disabled children and young people have difficulties, or do not feel comfortable and safe, in accessing play in their local communities.

Two recent examples are :

1. In 2007, Play Wales published their briefing paper entitled *Inclusive Play and Disability*, which identified barriers which can prevent disabled children from accessing play opportunities in their community.<sup>4</sup>
2. In 2008, the office of the Children's Commissioner published *A Happy Talent*<sup>5</sup> which looked at how the play needs of disabled children and young people are addressed in local plans.

In developing our evidence, Children in Wales undertook a series of consultation events in February 2010, with groups of disabled children and young people in North and South Wales to seek their views on safe places to play and hang out.

The key issues and barriers identified were:

- Young disabled people do not feel safe in the local parks or open spaces because many people hang out there in gangs.
- Young disabled people often don't go local places because they are worried about name-calling and bullying.
- TV images of knife crime and drugs add to young people's fears and their parent's fears about them being out on their own.
- Many of the young people felt they needed a family member or carer to go out with them at all times in order to feel safe. If no-one is available to accompany them they cannot go out.

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<sup>3</sup> Committee on the Rights of the child, Forty-ninth session, Concluding observations: UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

<sup>4</sup> Play Wales: Inclusive play 2007

<sup>5</sup> *A Happy Talent: Disabled children and young people's access to play in Wales 2007*. A review of local authority strategies,

- Poor public transport particularly in the evenings can prevent opportunities to access facilities such as the cinema.
- There are many issues relating to physical access, such as clubs having upstairs areas which are difficult to access, or a lack of disabled toilets.
- Some young people also referred to lack of money as a barrier.

The views of disabled children and young people are echoed by the professionals who support them. We know that disabled children and young people want to do the same things and go to the same places as other children and young people. They want safe places where they can go to spend time with their friends, be one of the gang and have a laugh. However members of Children in Wales' disability forum identify that the major barrier faced is bullying. Disabled children can be bullied at school or in the community and the latter can be a major barrier to feeling safe enough to access play or leisure activities. Members have told us that worries about bullying can prevent disabled children and young people from going to places.

As a result of the above, while young disabled people value the opportunity to be involved in mainstream activities, they also want opportunities to meet up with other young disabled people to share experiences. Experiences such as disabled young people only being able to access youth services if they have their own support worker with them, further encourage young disabled people to opt out of mainstream services. However it should be stressed that many of the services set up to support disabled children and young people do a lot of work to support access to local universal services.

### **Children and young people in disadvantaged areas and low income families**

Many of the children and young people who cannot access safe play and hanging out areas are likely to live in poverty and social exclusion, in addition a lack of play opportunities may lead to poverty of experience. Children and young people who live in low income families may also be unable to access after school activities, summer clubs, play schemes, cinemas, or free swimming lessons.

The rural idyll takes for granted that the green open spaces in the countryside offer an abundance of play opportunities for children and young people, in reality the opposite is true. Children and young people who live in rural areas are often unable to play in fields or by the rivers by themselves. Landowners are often unwilling to allow children and young people

access to their land and parents are fearful of allowing their children to be away from their sights for long periods.

For children and young people living in low income families in particularly in rural areas, a lack of an affordable and frequent transport system makes accessing clubs, play schemes, and after school activities very difficult for families who do not own their own car. In the 'Child Poverty and Social Exclusion in Rural Wales' Report (ECPN, 2009) a member of a School Council stated:

*'I never see my friends during the summer and I lose touch with them... I cannot pop over to see them because they live too far. But it would be alright if there were buses'<sup>6</sup>.*

Where an area has a designated play space, they may be fenced-in areas, mainly suited to younger children. When teenagers go there to hang out they are often seen as a threat, and discouraged from staying or made to move on. When they then gather at a bus shelter or on the street their behaviour is perceived as anti-social. The use of Mosquito devices to stop children and young people from congregating on streets also has an impact on the availability of safe places to hang out. This has a significant impact on young people from the lower socio-economic group because they cannot afford to go to other places where they can hang out, e.g. cinema because of the cost implication.

While summer activities can offer children and young people Safe Play opportunities, those from low income families are often unable to participate. This may be because of fees or "subs", or the need to take lunch, or money to purchase food. These are added financial burdens to low income families and are often a barrier to safe play. Teenagers often find the activities on offer unsuitable, and thus teenagers often opt to hang out on streets which may be unsafe, or in their own homes where they can become socially excluded.

Children and young people who don't have safe places to play and hang out are often discriminated against by older people. They are often moved on by the police and others from places where they congregate. This is in direct violation of Article 15 of the UNCRC which states that all children and young people have a right to 'freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly'<sup>7</sup>. The Children's Commissioners' Report to the UNCRC Committee also cites the attitude of authorities and community at large to children and young people hanging out on streets, saying that 80% of children who have been playing outside

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<sup>6</sup> *Child Poverty and Social Exclusion in Rural Wales*' Report, ECPN, 2009

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child , Article 15

have been told off for playing outside and 50% of them had been shouted at. Of great concern is that 25% of children aged between 11 and 16 had said that adults had threatened them with violence for playing outside.<sup>8</sup>

There are also challenges for children and young people living in urban areas in terms of poverty of opportunity. The young people often feel unsafe and are very aware of urban dangers and potential risks of going out. Housing may be overcrowded, and houses densely packed, with limited space for play and access to green spaces. Children and young people often play on narrow and crowded streets, competing for space with cars and lorries. While urban parks may be considered as a safe place to play, the reality is often that parks are ruined by graffiti, broken glass, litter, or are unsafe due to gangs or drug use.

Many of the children and young people who live in high rise flats are denied adequate safe play areas. Children and young people are often forced to stay indoors, restricting their play space to their living room lessens their ability to learn life skills i.e. how to take risks, gain confidence and experiment through play and socialise with other children

### **In conclusion**

Children and Young People in Wales face a number of challenges in achieving their right to safe places to play and hang out. This evidence has highlighted the challenges facing particular groups of children. This information should be viewed in the context of the universal challenges faced by all children and young people, outlined in the evidence submitted by Play Wales and the Office of the Children's Commissioner.

Children in Wales

April 2010.

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<sup>8</sup> Commissioner's Report to the UNCRC Committee, June 2008, Par 147