



★ READY, STEADY, PLAY! A National Play Policy





...the corporation are knocking down a tree because we made a swing on it but the only reason it is there is that there are no playgrounds...

contents

Minister's Foreword	4	3. Creating a Child-Friendly Environment	40
Minister of State's Foreword	5	Child Friendly Cities	41
Acknowledgements	6	MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICE – Safe Routes to School	42
Summary	8	4. Maximising the Range of Public Play Opportunities	43
CHAPTER 1 – The Context for Developing a Play Policy Vision		MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICE – The Playground at Jobstown	43
Introduction	10	Guidelines on the Content of a Play Policy	44
Background	10	4.1 Ensuring Social Inclusion in Publicly-Funded Play	45
Objectives of Play Policy	10	MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICE – Bed and Breakfast Play Programme	46
Defining Play	10	4.2 Play in Childcare Settings	46
Creating a Rich Play Environment	11	4.3 The Importance of Play in Schools	47
How is Play Changing	11	MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICE – The Importance of Play in School	47
Whole Child Perspective	12	4.4 Play in Hospital and Other Health Settings	48
Play and the Whole Child Perspective	12	MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICE – Meeting Children's Play Needs in a Hospital Environment	49
Principles Underpinning the Policy	13	5. Improving Quality and Safety at Play	50
The Policy Context	13	MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICE – Outdoor Play for Children: The Swedish Experience	52
National Policies Affecting Children 1998 – 2000	14	6. Training for Play	52
Consulting with Children on Play	14	7. Developing a Partnership Approach to Play	53
The Views of Children on Play	14	MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICE – Supporting Play in the Barnardos Family Support Project, Waterford	54
The Views of Adults on Play	14	8. Research on Play in Ireland	55
National Play Consultation Forum	15	Conclusion	55
About this Policy	15	CHAPTER 4 – Implementing and Monitoring	
CHAPTER 2 – Children's Play in Ireland Today		4.1 Driving Implementation	56
Introduction	16	4.2 National Implementation	56
Children's Public Play Space	16	4.3 Local Implementation	56
A Parks Policy for Local Authorities	16	4.4 Cost Implications	56
Children's Playgrounds	16	4.5 Evaluation and Review	57
Formal Play Settings	17	ACTION PLAN	
Levies on Developers	19	Objective 1: To give children a voice in the design and implementation of play policies and facilities	58
Play Policies at Local Level	19	Objective 2: To raise awareness of the importance of play	58
Irish Playground Safety Standards	21	Objective 3: To ensure that children's play needs are met through the development of a child-friendly environment	58
Pilot Playground Projects:		Objective 4: To maximise the range of public play opportunities available to children, particularly children who are marginalised or disadvantaged or who have a disability	59
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown and Sligo County Councils	21	4.1 Ensuring social inclusion in publicly-funded play	59
MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICE – New Playground at Cabinteely Park, Dublin and Redeveloping an Old Playground in Sligo	22	4.2 Play in childcare settings	59
Play in Childcare Settings	23	4.3 The importance of play in schools	60
Play in Primary Schools	25	4.4 Play in hospital and other health settings	60
Play for Children in Hospital	26	Objective 5: To improve the quality and safety of playgrounds and play areas	60
Voluntary Sector and Communities Supporting Play	28	Objective 6: To ensure that the relevant training and qualifications are available to persons offering play and related services to children	61
Play and Social Inclusion	28	Objective 7: To develop a partnership approach in funding and developing play opportunities	61
MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICE – Mobile Playbus Childcare Services	29	Objective 8: To improve on, and evaluation and monitoring of, play provision for children in Ireland.	61
MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICE – Maam Children's Playscheme	32	Appendix 1: National Policies Affecting Children 1998 – 2003	
The Importance of Physical Activity for Children's Health	33	Appendix 2: Review of County/City Council Strategies for Social, Economic and Cultural Development for Actions Relevant to Play	
Commercial Involvement in Play	34	Appendix 3: Recommendations from the Children in Hospital Ireland Report (1993)	
Promoting Safety at Play	34	Reference List	
Conclusion	36		
MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICE – New Play Opportunity in Newbridge, Co. Kildare	36		
CHAPTER 3 – Challenges and Solutions			
Challenges and Solutions: The Case for Better Play	37		
MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICE – Waterford Skate Park	37		
1. Participation and Children's Views	38		
2. Raising Awareness of the Importance of Play	39		
MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICE – Ag Súgradh Le Chéile (Playing Together)	40		



minister's foreword

**Micheál Martin T.D.,
Minister for Health and Children**

I am delighted to be associated with this important policy document which was drawn up under the direction of my colleague, Brian Lenihan, Minister of State with Responsibility for Children.

There are many reasons why play is changing in Ireland. Most adults would agree that there is a significant contrast between the way that they played when they were young and the way children play today. Changes in lifestyle, society and the environment in which we are living, as well as advances in technology, have all had an impact on the opportunities that children have to play. Parental fears of traffic and other possible dangers have led to children having fewer and fewer opportunities to play. I believe that initiatives in this Policy will lead to a more child friendly environment where children will be free to play and to enjoy themselves. This will help them to develop into happy and healthy young adults.

One of the key messages of the National Children's Strategy and this Policy is that children should be consulted on issues that affect them. This is particularly important in planning public play facilities and a more child friendly environment.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone that contributed to the development of the Policy and I am confident that it will have a very positive impact on the lives of the children in Ireland.



minister of state's foreword

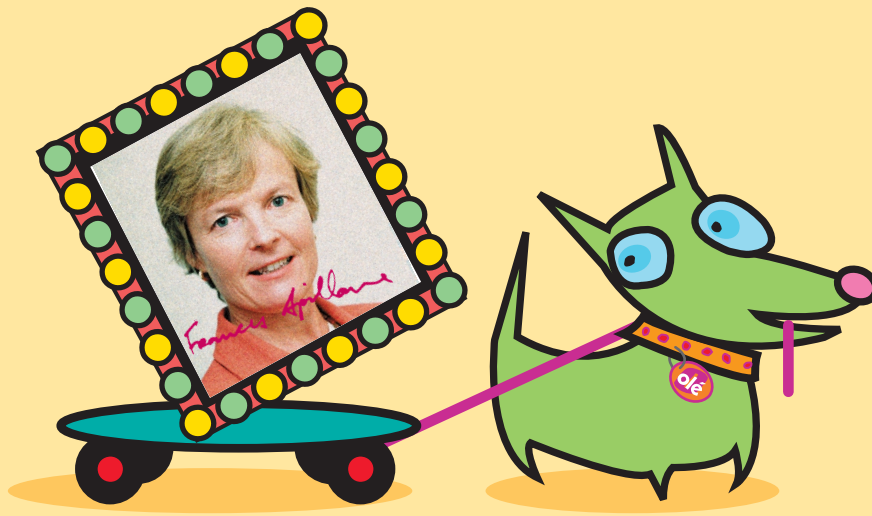
Brian Lenihan, T.D., Minister of State with Special Responsibility for Children

As Minister of State with Special Responsibility for Children, it gives me great pleasure to publish the *National Play Policy*.

The impetus for the development of the *National Play Policy* came from children themselves during the consultation on the National Children's Strategy (NCS). In this consultation, the lack of play opportunities was the most frequently cited concern of children throughout the country. The NCS is a ten-year strategy to guide children's policy in Ireland and includes a commitment that 'children will have access to play, sport, recreation and cultural activities to enrich their experience of childhood'. The *National Play Policy* will cover the years 2004 - 2008 and will make a vital contribution to the provision of play facilities in the towns, cities and villages of Ireland.

Play is really important to children and vital to their development. This Policy has been developed as a response to the concerns of children, parents and the providers of play. It will contribute to improving play opportunities for children and enrich their experience of childhood.

As Minister for Children, I will work with my Government colleagues to ensure implementation of this Policy at a local level, to make Ireland a better place for children to play. The Government is committed to the importance of play for children and to take steps to safeguard their right to play in a changing world.



acknowledgements

Message from Frances Spillane, Director, National Children's Office

The National Play Policy is the first major publication of the National Children's Office (NCO). I hope that the Policy will be of benefit to all children, in that it will raise awareness of the importance of play and contribute to the expansion of play facilities over the next five years.

This Policy is the result of many months of hard work by NCO staff, the Department of Health and Children, various other Government Departments and many groups, individuals and children with an interest in play. Acknowledgements are due to a number of people who developed this work and brought the document to publication.

Thanks are particularly due to all those who attended the Play Consultation Forum, which played a major role in setting the direction of the Policy. The members of the National Play Policy Working Group are also due thanks for their valuable contributions in the early stages of the development of the Policy.

The biggest thanks of all should go to the many children who wrote letters to the Minister for Children highlighting a lack of play facilities as their greatest concern. It was these letters that directly led to the Government committing to the development of a play policy. I hope that children will be informed by, and enjoy our children's leaflet which is published to accompany the *National Play Policy*.

press PLAY to begin...



'We will develop a National Play and Recreation Policy which will aim to ensure that all children have access to at least a minimum standard of play and recreation facilities.'

national play policy – summary

INTRODUCTION

This National Play Policy is about creating better play opportunities for children. Its overall objective is to plan for an increase in public play facilities and thereby improve the quality of life of children living in Ireland by providing them with more play opportunities.

The Policy is an example of how the Government recognises the importance of play and is making a commitment to ensure that play is facilitated for all children.

BACKGROUND

The Government, under the National Children's Strategy, launched in November 2000, included a commitment to develop National Play and Recreation Policies. The agreed Programme for Government built on that commitment stating that: 'We will develop a National Play and Recreation Policy which will aim to ensure that all children have access to at least a minimum standard of play and recreation facilities.'

The Play Policy addresses the needs of younger children, and a Recreation Policy will follow to address the needs of older children. The overall vision and principles identified in this Policy will apply to both policies. However, the actions published in the Play Policy will focus primarily on younger children.

The Policy provides a framework for future development and looks at a range of issues, including:

- ✓ Guiding principles;
- ✓ A partnership approach between the statutory, community, voluntary and private sectors;
- ✓ Developing a play infrastructure;
- ✓ Safety and public liability insurance; and
- ✓ Funding arrangements.

The Policy also identifies responsibility for implementation and sets target dates for the achievement of actions.



OBJECTIVES

The following objectives have been set out for this policy:

- ✓ To give children a voice in the design and implementation of play policies and facilities;
- ✓ To raise awareness of the importance of play;
- ✓ To ensure that children's play needs are met through the development of a child-friendly environment;
- ✓ To maximise the range of public play opportunities available to all children, particularly children who are marginalised, disadvantaged or who have a disability;
- ✓ To improve the quality and safety of playgrounds and play areas;
- ✓ To ensure that the relevant training and qualifications are available to persons offering play and related services to children;
- ✓ To develop a partnership approach in funding and developing play opportunities;
- ✓ To improve information on, and evaluation and monitoring of, play provision for children in Ireland.

These objectives were set following consultation with key stakeholders in the area of play. Detailed specific actions are set out under each of the eight objectives, and responsibility for achieving those actions is clearly defined.

STRUCTURE OF THE POLICY

CHAPTER 1 introduces the context for delivering a play policy, giving the background to the impetus for addressing play and setting out the principles which underpin the policy. The objectives of the policy are also set out.

CHAPTER 2 contains an overview of current levels of play provision by the State, local authorities and the community and voluntary sectors and identifies factors which impact on play. It also identifies groups of children who have particular play needs.

CHAPTER 3 outlines the challenges to improving public play provision, and identifies the specific actions to be taken to achieve the objectives for the policy, which are set out in Chapter 1.

CHAPTER 4 identifies the resources and supports necessary to achieve the goals and objectives of the Policy, and sets out the administrative framework within which implementation of the Policy will be driven, and progress monitored and evaluated. An action plan is set out at the conclusion of the Chapter which clearly defines responsibilities and timescales.



CHAPTER 1 The Context for Developing a Play Policy

VISION: An Ireland where the importance of play is recognised so that children experience a range of quality play opportunities to enrich their childhood.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of play is being addressed by Government to meet commitments made in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the National Children's Strategy (2000) and the Programme for Government (2002). Underlying that commitment is an acknowledgement that children's play has not been given the priority or attention it deserves. The objective of this national play policy is to plan for an increase in public play facilities and improve the quality of life of children living in Ireland by providing them with more play opportunities. The policy will also address issues such as funding, standards and quality. For many complex reasons, the nature of play is changing and opportunities for play are diminishing, due to changes in the environment, technology, lifestyle and society. This policy illustrates Government recognition of the importance of play, and a commitment to making sure that play is facilitated for all children.

BACKGROUND

The original impetus for addressing play came from children, during the consultation process for the National Children's Strategy in November 2000. In the creation of this Strategy, children were invited to make submissions to the Minister for Children, a new departure in the development of public policy in Ireland. 2,488 responses were received from children ranging in age from 3 to 19 years. The lack of play and recreation facilities emerged as the most frequently cited concern by children in their submissions to this consultation.

There are an estimated 1.01 million children under the age of 18 years of age living in Ireland, according to the 2002 census (Central Statistics Office, 2003). The Government is committed to ensuring that play is encouraged for all children through the development and implementation of national policies on play and recreation. This policy is the first phase in the development of national play and recreation policies and addresses the issue of play provision for children for the five year period 2004 to 2008. The policy is aimed principally at children up to and including primary school age. However, the general principles relating to play are relevant to all children up to 18 years of age, and the policy should be read in that context. The second phase in developing play and recreation policies will be aimed at older children/teenagers and will be published within a year.

In Ireland, play has been seriously neglected at policy level. There is a shortage of safe public play spaces, no ring-fenced Government funding for play, a poorly developed public awareness of the value of play and no national strategy for play (Webb and Associates, 1999). Play has been given greater priority in many other EU countries, including Belgium, the Netherlands, the UK and Sweden. Countries with well-developed play policies and facilities share the following characteristics: national and local political commitment, a highly developed public play infrastructure, a play training framework and a child-friendly environment. In Ireland, several voluntary

and community sector, children's and childcare organisations have championed the importance of play in child development over the last four decades.

OBJECTIVES OF PLAY POLICY

The following objectives have been set out for this policy:

- ✓ To give children a voice in the design and implementation of play policies and facilities;
- ✓ To raise awareness of the importance of play;
- ✓ To ensure that children's play needs are met through the development of a child-friendly environment;
- ✓ To maximise the range of public play opportunities available to all children, particularly children who are marginalised, disadvantaged or who have a disability;
- ✓ To improve the quality and safety of playgrounds and play areas;
- ✓ To ensure that the relevant training and qualifications are available to persons offering play and related services to children;
- ✓ To develop a partnership approach in funding and developing play opportunities;
- ✓ To improve information on, and evaluation and monitoring of, play provision for children in Ireland.

DEFINING PLAY

Defining play is central to how it is conceptualised and understood in practice. A clear definition is also necessary to guide policy and consequently, a range of issues were taken into account in attempting to define play for the purpose of this policy document.

Many definitions draw on the work of Garvey (1977), first published in the 1970s. Key areas identified by Garvey were:

- 1 Play is pleasurable, enjoyable. Even when not actually accompanied by signs of mirth, it is still positively valued by the player.
- 2 Play has no extrinsic goals. Its motivations are intrinsic and serve no other objectives. In fact, it is more an enjoyment of means than an effort devoted to some particular end. In utilitarian terms, it is inherently unproductive.
- 3 Play is spontaneous and voluntary. It is not obligatory but is freely chosen by the player.
- 4 Play involves some active engagement on the part of the player. (Garvey, 1977, p10)

The multi-dimensional nature of play has been noted by a number of authors (Webb and Associates, 1999; Street, 2001) and many definitions focus on the characteristics of play itself. In their document setting out 'Best Play', the National Playing Fields Association (NPPA), PLAYLINK and the Children's Play Council (CPC) (2000, p6) identify the following definitions of play.

'The main characteristic of play – child or adult – is not its content, but its mode. Play is an approach to action, not a form of activity.'
(Jerome Bruner, quoted in Moyles, 1989)

'Play has been described as scientific research conducted by children.'

(Hughes, 1996 and 1968) paraphrasing Eibl-Eibesfeldt (1970)

Coalter and Taylor (2001) in a review of the research literature on play, note that, in general, definitions are characterised by three elements. These are: **freedom of choice, spontaneity and an absence of extrinsically imposed rules.** The definition used to guide this policy also draws on each of these three identified elements. Consequently, we understand play to exclude sports because of the need for extrinsically imposed rules and this distinction has been noted by others (European Home and Leisure Accident Surveillance System (EHLASS), 2000).

The definition below, presented by NPFA, PLAYLINK and the CPC (2000), draws on the work of Bob Hughes and Frank King. It takes account of each of the three criteria outlined above and is used here to provide an understanding of play.

'Play is freely chosen, personally directed, intrinsically motivated behaviour that actively engages the child.'

(NPFA, PLAYLINK and CPC, 2000, p6)

Put more simply, it could be said that play is what children do when no-one else is telling them what to do.

This play policy sets out ways in which play, defined above, can be supported. It focuses on providing opportunities for play and these may be provided in a variety of unstructured or structured settings, including, for example, hospitals, playgroups and schools, reflecting the fact that children's play happens wherever children are.

'Children play wherever they are. This might be indoors or out. Children play in their home, at school, in childcare and play provision, and in the public and private places they visit with their friends or with adults.'

(Cole-Hamilton and Gill, 2002, p14)

CREATING A RICH PLAY ENVIRONMENT

Best practice in play provision has been identified by the NPFA, PLAYLINK and CPC (2000) who suggest that a rich play environment should provide opportunities for:

- ✓ A varied and interesting physical environment – changes in level, hiding places, trees and bushes, places to inspire the imagination.
- ✓ Challenge in relation to the physical environment – activities which test the limits of capabilities, rough and tumble, chase, games.
- ✓ Playing with the natural elements – earth, water, sand, fire, digging, flying kites.
- ✓ Movement – running, jumping, rolling, climbing, balancing – beams and ropes, soft mats, space, juggling.
- ✓ Manipulating natural and fabricated materials – materials for art, making and mending, building dens, making concoctions, using tools, sand, mud, access to bits and pieces.

- ✓ Stimulation of the five senses – music making, shouting, quiet places, colours and shapes, dark and bright places, cooking on a campfire, edible plants, nuts and berries.
- ✓ Experiencing change in the natural and built environment – experiencing the seasons through access to the outdoor environment, opportunities to take part in building, demolishing, or transforming the environment.
- ✓ Social interactions – being able to choose whether and when to play alone or with others, to negotiate, co-operate, compete and resolve conflicts. Being able to interact with individuals and groups of different ages, abilities, interests, gender, ethnicity and culture.
- ✓ Playing with identity – dressing up, role play, performing, taking on different forms of responsibility.
- ✓ Experiencing a range of emotions – opportunities to be powerful/powerless, scared/confident, liked/disliked, in/out of control, brave/cowardly.

NPFA, PLAYLINK and CPC (2000, p35)

HOW IS PLAY CHANGING?

The way children play is constantly changing and evolving. Most adults perceive a significant contrast between the way they played when they were young, and the way children play today. Today's children, in general, have more money, toys and accessories but they also have less freedom. Changes in the natural and built environment have resulted in a decreasingly child friendly environment, with less open spaces in which to play and explore. Increased traffic and real or perceived stranger danger have resulted in parents becoming increasingly reluctant to allow children to play unsupervised outside their own homes. Changing work patterns have led to more formal structuring of children's out-of-school hours and an increase in the number of children spending time in formal and informal childcare. Technological changes have resulted in more sedentary play in the form of computer and video games, the internet and mobile phones. Further detail on the extent to which social and environmental changes have impacted on children's play is set out in Chapter 2.



1

WHOLE CHILD PERSPECTIVE

The whole child perspective has been identified, within the National Children's Strategy (2000), as facilitating a more complete understanding of children's lives. This understanding is drawn from three aspects of the perspective which are:

- ✓ The extent of children's own capacities;
- ✓ The multiple interlinked dimensions of children's development and
- ✓ The complex mix of informal and formal supports.

The importance of the interaction between and among the three aspects of the whole child perspective is fundamental to its conceptual underpinning. Children's own capacities, for example, affect and are in turn affected by the relationships around them. Outcomes achieved at various developmental stages are expressions of a set of relatively discrete but interrelated dimensions along which children develop. The complexity of children's relationships with the broader familial and social setting is not fully understood, but relationships are, nevertheless, central to the extent to which children develop socially and achieve their potential.

PLAY AND THE WHOLE CHILD PERSPECTIVE

Research about play is methodologically and conceptually complex and, in the Irish context, only a small number of studies about play have been published (Webb and Associates, 1999). Internationally, the limited scale and scope of the substantive body of research on play has been highlighted as problematic. It has been suggested that while there are a number of potential contributions of play there is 'a widespread lack of systematic outcome analysis' (Coalter and Taylor 2001, p37). A review of literature on the value of children's play and play provision has, nevertheless, identified some key benefits of play (Street, 2001). These benefits have been grouped under the broad headings of health (for example, good mental health, positive views of physical activity, improving self-confidence), education (for example, the development of cognitive skills, ability to solve problems, social skills) and socialisation. In the United Kingdom, benefits for individual children have been set out by Cole-Hamilton and Gill (2002) as:

- ✓ Promoting children's development, learning, creativity and independence;
- ✓ Keeping children healthy and active;
- ✓ Allowing children to find out about themselves, their abilities and their interests;
- ✓ Giving children the chance to let off steam and have fun;
- ✓ Having a therapeutic effect by helping children to deal with difficult or painful circumstances, such as emotional stress or medical treatment.

Fig 1.1 The Whole Child Perspective





It has been suggested that many of the presumed benefits of play are related to the child's development as a social being (NPFA, PLAYLINK and CPC, 2000). Potential benefits for the wider community have been summarised by Coalter and Taylor (2001) as fostering social inclusion, aiding the economy by developing autonomous adults and assisting in tackling anti-social behaviour and juvenile offending. Additional areas include offering opportunities for exploring cultural identity and difference as well as supporting families and communities, by providing a focus for informal networks of family support (NPFA, PLAYLINK and CPC, 2000). Street (2002) notes, however, that these benefits assume that children have access to and can engage with their local environment and the facilities contained within. A number of key issues are highlighted by Street in terms of public provision for play. These are:

- ✓ A lack of involvement of children and young people in the planning and development of their own play spaces, activities and opportunities;
- ✓ The commercialisation of play space and consequent issues around access;
- ✓ The growth in structured activities and control over children's play;
- ✓ Concerns about safety, especially traffic safety and the impact on children's spatial mobility;
- ✓ The conceptualisation of children as "problems" within urban planning.

These and other issues are considered in Chapters Two and Three.

‘..please make it a law that builders must provide more spaces for a park and children's facilities and support access to transport to the nearest shop and town centre.’

PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING THE POLICY

The principles underpinning the play policy are drawn from the consultation process on the National Children's Strategy (2000). They also reflect the values of UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). All actions proposed in the policy should be implemented in conformity with these principles.

- ✓ **CHILD-CENTRED:** in planning a child-friendly environment and public play facilities, the best interests of the child will be a primary consideration and children's wishes and feelings will be given due regard;
- ✓ **FAMILY-ORIENTED:** publicly-funded play policies and facilities will be established in a manner which supports and empowers families within the community;

- ✓ **EQUITABLE:** all children should have equality of opportunity, access, and participation in publicly-funded play. A key priority in promoting a more equitable society for children is to target investment in public play at those most in need;
- ✓ **INCLUSIVE:** the diversity of children's experiences, cultures, lifestyles and levels of ability must be recognised in the design and implementation of play policies and facilities;
- ✓ **ACTION-ORIENTED:** the planning and construction of public play policies and facilities must be clearly focused on achieving specified results to agreed standards in a targeted and cost-effective manner;
- ✓ **INTEGRATED:** play policies and play facilities should be delivered in a co-ordinated manner through integrated needs-analysis and policy planning.

THE POLICY CONTEXT

The policy context for the development of a national play policy has been determined by three significant policy documents, namely, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the National Children's Strategy (2000) and the Programme for Government (Government of Ireland, 2002).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) was ratified by Ireland in 1992. In Article 31, it specifically addresses the issue of play:

‘States Parties recognise 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 **National Children's Strategy (2000)**, published in November 2000, specifically referred to the issue of play and recreation. The Strategy is a 10 year plan of action for children, covering all issues which affect their lives. Lack of play and recreation facilities was identified as a major concern, particularly by the children themselves, in the consultation process that preceded the National Children's Strategy, which included 2,500 children and over 300 organisations and individuals.

The Strategy is built on the belief that all children have a basic range of needs, some children have additional needs, and all children need the support of family and community. Significantly, the issue of play is addressed in the first category, acknowledging that it is a basic need of **ALL** children. Objective D of the Strategy states as follows:

‘Children will have access to play, sport, recreation and cultural activities to enrich their experience of childhood.’ (p57)

A number of specific actions flow from the objective, including a commitment to the production of a national play policy:

‘National play and recreation policies will be developed which will provide a comprehensive approach to children's play and recreation including:

- ✓ guiding principles;
- ✓ a partnership approach with the voluntary/community sector
- ✓ developing a play infrastructure;
- ✓ funding arrangements.’ (p58)

The commitment to a national play policy in the National Children's Strategy was reinforced in the **Programme for Government** of June 2002, which contained a commitment that:

1

'We will develop a National Play and Recreation Policy which will aim to ensure that all children have access to at least a minimum standard of play and recreation facilities.'

The importance of play and recreation to children is reflected in the way in which the issue was repeatedly raised by the young delegates at Dáil na nÓg and at local Comhairle na nÓg. At the inaugural meeting of Dáil na nÓg in October, 2001, the delegates themselves chose play and recreation as one of the two motions for discussion.

NATIONAL POLICIES AFFECTING CHILDREN 1998–2003

Recent years have seen a number of important social, economic and health policy initiatives, including the National Children's Strategy (2000), the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (Department of Social Community and Family Affairs, 1997), the National Childcare Strategy (1999), the Health Promotion Strategy 2000–2005 (Department of Health and Children, 2000), the Report of the Cardiovascular Health Strategy Group: Building Healthier Hearts (Department of Health and Children, 1999), the Education Act, 1998 (Government of Ireland, 1998) and the Children Act, 2001 (Government of Ireland, 2001a). The major objectives of government policies as they affect children are to eliminate child poverty, reduce social exclusion, promote child health and welfare, increase educational achievement and consult with children on issues which affect them. While very little, if any, reference to play is made in these national policies, there are repeated references to adopting a holistic, child-centered approach to the care and well-being of children. (A summary of some of the major national social, economic and health policies, as they affect children, is contained in Appendix 1)

CONSULTING WITH CHILDREN ON PLAY

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) addresses the issue of consulting with children in Article 12:

- 1 States parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.**
- 2 For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial or administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.**

This commitment is built on in the National Children's Strategy (2000) in the form of the first goal of the Strategy:

NATIONAL GOAL: Children will have a voice in matters which affect them and their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity.

A key challenge in the development of public play facilities will be the incorporation of meaningful consultation with children and young people in their design, development, management and evaluation.

THE VIEWS OF CHILDREN ON PLAY

During the consultation process for the National Children's Strategy in November, 2000, children of all ages, from all geographical locations and socio-economic groups, raised the issues of the lack of play and recreational facilities and the changes in the natural and built environment which restrict their play. An underlying thread in their comments was the belief that adults do not appreciate the importance of play in their lives.

Concerns about play and recreation facilities for children and young people were also expressed at the inaugural meeting of Dáil na nÓg in October, 2001. The delegates, aged between 7 and 18, from all parts of the country, chose to discuss the following motion:

'That every child and young person should have the opportunity for play and recreation and that

- ✓ there should be more safe, supervised playgrounds for children;
- ✓ there should be more appropriate outlets where young people can mix to reduce drinking among young people;
- ✓ there should be less emphasis on sports as this discriminates against girls;
- ✓ schools should provide more after-hours activities.'

Play and recreation were raised at a number of local Comhairle na nÓg (Youth Council) meetings held by the County and City Development Boards in the lead up to Dáil na nÓg 2002. In the motions at Dáil na nÓg in October 2002, play and recreation permeated every discussion. For example, in a discussion about high density housing, the point was made that small children needed space to play, within sight of their mothers. In the discussion on drug and alcohol abuse, many participants expressed the view that young people resort to dangerous alternatives in the absence of safe places to hang out with their friends.

Discussions and consultations with young people have consistently highlighted the fact that play and recreation are an integral part of their lives. Specifically, they have asked for improved play facilities and recognition of the fact that changes in their environment are impacting adversely on their opportunities for play. This policy acknowledges and addresses those concerns.

THE VIEWS OF ADULTS ON PLAY

CONSULTATION ON NATIONAL CHILDREN'S STRATEGY:

The submissions from adults and organisations in the process leading to the publication of the National Children's Strategy in November 2000, identified play and other recreation for children as issues to be addressed. However, it is significant that adults did not attach the same level of importance to play as the children who were consulted. Many submissions called for play, recreation and leisure facilities to be provided in every community as part of local authority planning and estate design. There was an emphasis on safety, good quality play provision and aesthetically pleasing facilities based in the local community. Another issue raised was the importance of an integrated approach to ensure that policies and services are planned and delivered strategically.

WHAT THE ADULTS SAID ABOUT PLAY

Quotes from parents and organisations...

'...as young mothers of children under seven, we are worried about what the future holds for our kids. For example, they want to go out to play but there's nothing to let them out to. You are either letting them out to busy roads, dirty flat complexes, broken houses or older kids that lead them astray. One child has to play in an alleyway behind her house beside a busy road. Others can only play in the rubbish chutes or beside a dirty pool that has been in the flats for years...'

'...lack of clear direction, no recognition, no strategy and no structure for children's play services in Ireland...'

'...less green space, trees, hills and ditches and the fear of parents to allow their children to roam and explore the areas have resulted in indoor play. Social interaction as a result of play and the widening of the mind to new experiences with nature and the out-of-doors are critical to the development of the young mind...'

NATIONAL PLAY CONSULTATION FORUM

A National Play Consultation Forum was held by the National Children's Office on 12th November 2002. The purpose of the Forum was to provide an update on progress in drafting this policy and to obtain views from a wide range of stakeholders. It was attended by 57 representatives from local authorities, city/county development boards, sports agencies, childcare organisations, the teaching profession, the health profession, voluntary organisations, play specialists and parents' representatives.

The forum identified a number of key issues to be addressed in the context of developing a national policy on publicly-funded play:

- ✓ The importance of providing an opportunity for children to be consulted on, and participate in, the planning, provision and maintenance of facilities at local level;
- ✓ The need to promote awareness of the value and benefits of play, as a quality-of-life issue for children;
- ✓ The need to create safe and specific spaces for children, and to recognise their needs in shared spaces;
- ✓ Equality of access to play facilities and opportunities;
- ✓ The importance of a child-friendly environment;
- ✓ The need for investment in training;
- ✓ Play proofing of national and local policies;
- ✓ The need to ring-fence funding for play, and to provide for current expenditure;
- ✓ Difficulties in relation to insurance.

The objectives set for the provision of public play facilities in this policy have been framed around these issues.

ABOUT THIS POLICY

This policy is about creating better play opportunities for children growing up in Ireland. Chapter 2 will illustrate how these facilities have either failed to develop, or have developed at an inconsistent rate throughout the country. To date, the development of a national play infrastructure, allocating clear responsibilities, roles and sources of funding has been inadequate. This policy seeks to redress that inadequacy.

The remainder of the play policy is structured as follows:

CHAPTER 2 contains an overview of current levels of play provision by the State, local authorities and community and voluntary sectors and identifies factors which impact on play. It also identifies groups of children who have particular play needs.

CHAPTER 3 outlines the challenges to improving public play provision, and identifies the specific actions to be taken to achieve the objectives for the policy, which are set out in Chapter 1.

CHAPTER 4 identifies the resources and supports necessary to achieve the goals and objectives of the Policy, and sets out the administrative framework within which implementation of the Policy will be driven, and progress monitored and evaluated. An action plan is set out at the conclusion of the Chapter which clearly defines responsibilities and timescales.



2

CHAPTER 2 Children's Play in Ireland Today

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the opportunities for play in a range of settings including local communities, playgrounds, childcare facilities, primary schools, libraries and hospitals are outlined. A number of new and innovative play facilities are showcased as models of good practice, including two which were supported by the National Children's Office. The importance of social inclusion in the provision of public play opportunities is highlighted and, finally, health and safety issues are considered.

CHILDREN'S PUBLIC PLAY SPACE

In outdoor settings children enjoy being mobile and moving from one location to another, using their whole environment and spending relatively little time at each individual location or attraction (Milward and Wheway, 1997). These authors found that the majority of outdoor play (75%) is active, involving walking, running, ball games, use of wheeled vehicles and play equipment. At present, public playgrounds and amenity spaces are provided primarily by local authorities and to a lesser extent by Dúchas¹. A key issue to be addressed is the need for accessible areas for children to congregate and socialise freely.

Local authorities provide, operate and maintain parks and open spaces for both amenity and recreational purposes. Although the provision of amenity areas in communities is discretionary, general guidance at national level supports and guides their provision. A Parks Policy for Local Authorities (1987) recommends that amenity areas be provided in a hierarchy of spaces, ranging from regional parks through neighbourhood parks, neighbourhood open spaces, local open spaces to incidental open spaces.

A PARKS POLICY FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES:

A Policy for the Provision and Maintenance of Parks, Open Spaces and Outdoor Areas by Local Authorities (Department of the Environment, 1987)

OPEN SPACE STANDARDS IN URBAN AREAS

- ✓ Local Park of minimum 2 hectares open space per 1,000 population
- ✓ Neighbourhood Park of 16 hectares and two local parks per 10,000 population. The Neighbourhood Park should be capable of including
 - ☆ up to 6 football pitches
 - ☆ up to 10 tennis courts
 - ☆ up to 2 netball or basketball courts
 - ☆ up to 2 golf putting greens
 - ☆ 1 children's playlot
 - ☆ 1 athletic facility
 - ☆ and carparking

A number of local authorities have dealt with the demand for recreational areas by acquiring land in scenic and rural areas (in some cases, including woodlands, historic houses, etc.) and converting the property to country-type parks which are open to the public. Some of these parks have been used to accommodate a range of active recreational facilities but without impairing the overall landscape of the park. The Parks Policy encourages local authorities **'to play a more active role in relation to the conservation of the countryside and to provide more opportunities for recreation in the rural environment'** (p13).

The Parks Policy issued to local authorities for information and general guidance. It is not prescriptive and application of the standards contained therein is not monitored by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

The guidelines on social housing (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 1999) stipulate that play spaces for small children should be provided within one minutes' walk of each front door and should be overlooked from the dwellings.

CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUNDS

The provision of fixed equipment playgrounds is the most tangible evidence of a national commitment to supporting play. Playgrounds cater primarily for children between the ages of 4 and 10, but are frequently used by older children in the absence of facilities more appropriate to their age. At present, recommendations on the ratios of playgrounds to population are included in the Parks Policy, which recommends, as shown above, that every neighbourhood park, serving a population of up to 10,000, should be capable of accommodating a playground or playlot. A playlot is the term used in the Parks Policy to refer to a formal playground with fixed play equipment.

Adherence to these guidelines is not mandatory and the implementation of the policy has not to date been reviewed. However, a survey of playgrounds provided by local authorities and Dúchas, carried out by the National Children's Office in 2002, shows that playground provision varies considerably from this guidance throughout the country.

'...the builders are only interested in cutting down trees for new houses but they are not taking into

account that each family is going to have two or three children on average and in a few years time there will be no facilities for those children...'

¹ Dúchas - the Heritage Service ceased to exist in April 2003 and was merged into the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

FORMAL PLAY SETTINGS

There are three basic types of children's playgrounds in public spaces.

1 Traditional Playgrounds

These are formal playgrounds which are designed and built specifically for children and are characterised by steel bars, fixed into the ground that have limited and specialised functions. Examples would be a simple slide or swing.

2 Contemporary Playgrounds

This type is characterised by modular multi-functional structures and uses the natural environment to offer a wider experience and range of alternative activities. These types of play facilities are more common among the public playgrounds in Ireland today.

3 Adventure Playgrounds

The Adventure Playground grew out of a movement dedicated to children's freedom of expression in an outdoor environment. This type of playground offers children flexibility and the opportunity for self-direction in a range of activities using materials and tools provided in the playground. A good adventure playground contains loose parts like old tyres, wood, crates and other materials. These loose parts in the environment create flexibility and diversity in the range of activities that are available. Adventure play takes many forms but some examples are building camps, cooking on open fires, digging gardens, tending animals, and also play on structures built from timber found in most adventure playgrounds.

Benefits

Each of the differing types of play facilities brings with it different benefits.

- ✓ The traditional type supports physical development, but the capacity for social play and cognitive development is limited.
- ✓ The contemporary type supports more beneficial forms of play.
- ✓ The adventure type of play supports the child's cognitive, social and physical development and therefore is the most beneficial to the child. Another benefit is that children are able to build their own structures and shape their own environment which improves their sense of competence and responsibility. Research has proven that children prefer adventure type playgrounds to either traditional or contemporary designs.

Current Provision

Current public playground provision in Ireland falls into either the traditional or contemporary categories. There is, however, an increasing awareness that children need playgrounds that challenge current skills and provide opportunities to learn new ones. Adventure play is a valuable source for new opportunities but is, unfortunately, the least developed playground type.

Draws on Children's Formal Play Environment (1976) Wilkinson and Lockhart and Child playground Summary (1996) Sherri Arnold





TABLE 1 – PROVISION OF PLAYGROUNDS MANAGED BY LOCAL AUTHORITIES

County/City Council	Number of playgrounds with fixed equipment owned & managed by the Local Authority	Total Population	Ratio of Playground to Population
Carlow County Council	2	45,845	1:22,922
Cavan County Council	2	56,416	1:28,208
Clare County Council	1	103,333	1:103,333
Cork County Council	19	324,843	1:17,097
Cork City Council	6	123,338	1:20,556
Donegal County Council	0	137,383	
Dublin City Council	58	495,101	1:8,356
Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council	7	191,389	1:27,341
Fingal County Council	4	196,223	1:49,058
Galway City Council	8	65,744	1:8,222
Galway County Council	2	143,052	1:71,526
Kerry County Council	4	132,424	1:33,106
Kildare County Council	1	163,995	1:163,995
Kilkenny County Council	0	80,421	
Laois County Council	1	58,732	1:58,732
Leitrim County Council	3	25,815	1:8,605
Limerick City Council	2	54,058	1:27,029
Limerick County Council	1	121,471	1:121,471
Longford County Council	0	31,127	
Louth County Council	1	101,802	1:101,802
Mayo County Council	3	117,428	1:39,143
Meath County Council	5	133,936	1:26,787
Monaghan County Council	1	52,772	1:52,772
Offaly County Council	0	63,702	
Roscommon County Council	7	53,803	1:7,686
Sligo County Council	2	58,178	1:29,089
South Dublin County Council	5	239,887	1:47,977
Tipperary (NR) County Council	5	61,068	1:12,213
Tipperary (SR) County Council	2	79,213	1:39,607
Waterford City Council	1	44,564	1:44,564
Waterford County Council	3	56,954	1:18,985
Westmeath County Council	2	72,027	1:36,014
Wexford County Council	6	116,543	1:19,424
Wicklow County Council	4	114,719	1:28,680
Totals	168	3,917,306	1:23,317



TABLE 1 shows the current number of playgrounds provided and managed by local authorities around the country. There are currently 168 public playgrounds with fixed equipment, owned and managed by local authorities around the country. At the time of the survey, four counties were without local authority provided public playgrounds, Donegal (pop. 137,383), Kilkenny (pop. 80,421), Longford (pop. 31,127) and Offaly (pop. 63,702). Dublin City has the largest number of playgrounds. The best provision, with reference to population size, is by Roscommon (1:7,686), Galway City (1:8,222), Dublin City (1:8,536) and Leitrim (1:8,605). Some counties have high population numbers served by only one public playground, Kildare (1:163,995), Donegal (1: 137,383), Limerick (1:121,471), Clare (1:103,333) and Louth (1:101,802). The national ratio of playgrounds to population is 1:23,598. This represents only 43% of the level of playground infrastructure recommended by the Department of the Environment in 1987. By comparison, there are 405 golf courses in Ireland, representing a national ratio of golf courses to population of 1:9,672. By way of an international comparison in relation to playgrounds, Edinburgh City Council currently provides 157 playgrounds to serve a population of 449,020, a ratio of 1:2,860, while Essen in Germany has 420 playgrounds serving a population of 588,177 which represents a ratio of 1:1,400.

In addition to these local authority playgrounds, Dúchas provided and managed five play facilities in Doneraile (Co. Cork), Kilkenny Castle, Phoenix Park (Dublin), St. Stephen's Green (Dublin) and JFK Arboretum, Co. Wexford. These playgrounds have now come under the auspices of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. In 2001, Waterford City Council became the first local authority in the country to construct a public skate park. Another has been opened in the Millennium Children's Park in Galway more recently.

The survey provides a useful snapshot of the state of play in Ireland today but is limited, in that it does not measure the level of publicly-funded summer camps/holiday play schemes, children's farms, arts and crafts programmes, activities provided by the public library service and other recreational activities, all of which are important aspects of children's play opportunities.

LEVIES ON DEVELOPERS

The Planning and Development Act, 2000 (Government of Ireland, 2000a), empowers local authorities to levy development contributions from builders as a condition of planning permission. These contributions are for the development of public infrastructure and community facilities, which may include recreational facilities, open spaces, playgrounds and sports areas. There are opportunities to fund the capital cost of providing recreational and community facilities such as children's play areas, which are provided by or on behalf of the local authority through this development contribution system. However, it would appear to be the case at the moment that most local authorities centralise the monies accruing from the levy into a single fund, with no ring-fenced funding for play and recreation facilities or amenities. The point has been made that the contributions must continue to be available to fund infrastructure such as roads and water, and that the level of the contribution will have an effect on house prices, which is also a consideration.

PLAY POLICIES AT LOCAL LEVEL

The National Children's Strategy contains a specific objective on access by children to play and recreation facilities. In 2000, City/County Development Boards (CDBs) were established in each county and city borough. The CDBs are representative of Local Government, local development bodies, state agencies and social partners. Each CDB has drawn up a city/ county Strategy for Economic, Social and Cultural Development, which is the template guiding all public services and local development. The City/County Development Boards are responsible for the implementation of the National Children's Strategy at local level and were asked to include play and recreation in their Strategies for Economic, Social and Cultural Development.

'...every bit of green is being built on...'

2



TABLE 2 – COMMITMENT TO PLAY AT LOCAL LEVEL

County/City Councils	Has the issue of children's play been identified as an action to be progressed under the City/County Council Strategy for Economic, Social & Cultural Development?	Is the issue of play being progressed by a strategic policy committee of the local authority?	Has a city/county play policy been adopted?	Has a designated officer been appointed to progress play/recreation issues?
Carlow County Council	Yes	Yes	No	No
Cavan County Council	Yes	Yes	No	No
Clare County Council	No	Yes	No	No
Cork County Council	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Cork City Council	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Donegal County Council	Yes	No reply	Yes	Yes
Dublin City Council	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Dun Laoghaire – Rathdown County Council	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Fingal County Council	Yes	Yes	No	No
Galway City Council	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Galway County Council	Yes	Yes	No	No reply
Kerry County Council	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Kildare County Council	No	Yes	No	Yes
Kilkenny County Council	Yes	Yes	No	No
Laois County Council	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Leitrim County Council	Yes	No	No	No
Limerick City Council	No	Yes	No	No
Limerick County Council	Yes	No	Yes	No
Longford County Council	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Louth County Council	Yes	Yes	No	No
Mayo County Council	Yes	No	No	Yes
Meath County Council	Yes	Yes	No	No
Monaghan County Council	No reply	No reply	No reply	No
Offaly County Council	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Roscommon County Council	Yes	Yes	No	No
Sligo County Council	Yes	Yes	No	No
South Dublin County Council	Yes	No	No	No
Tipperary (NR) County Council	Yes	Yes	No	No
Tipperary (SR) County Council	Yes	No	No	No reply
Waterford City Council	Yes	Yes	No	No
Waterford County Council	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Westmeath County Council	Yes	Yes	No	No
Wexford County Council	Yes	Yes	No	No
Wicklow County Council	Yes	No	No	Yes

TABLE 2 provides information on the progress being made on play provision at a county/city level. Only four local authorities have failed to identify play within their Strategies for Economic, Social and Cultural Development (Clare, Kildare, Limerick City and Monaghan). In the case of Kildare, play is referred to in its Leisure Strategy. Further details in relation to inclusion of play and recreation in Strategies for Economic, Social and Cultural Development are set out in Appendix 2.

In almost all of the local authorities, play is being progressed by a Strategic Policy Committee, with the exception of Leitrim, Limerick County, Mayo and South Dublin. It is the task of the Strategic Policy Committees within each City/County Council to assist in the formulation, development and review of policy. However, final policy decisions rest ultimately with the full council. These committees are making significant progress on the development and implementation of play policies. While only four counties have play policies in place, (Galway, Laois, Offaly, Waterford), a large number of counties are working on county play policies. In some instances this is part of a wider leisure, recreation or parks policy. Progress on the designation of officers to implement play is less satisfactory. In 23 counties, the responsibility to develop play has not yet been assigned to a designated officer. In the other counties, the person responsible varies from Parks Superintendent, to Sports Development Officer, to Community and Enterprise Officer. Dublin City Council is the only local authority to have an officer dedicated full-time to progressing play activities.

IRISH PLAYGROUND SAFETY STANDARDS

The relevant safety standards applicable to public playgrounds in Ireland were introduced in 1998 and 1999. I.S. EN1176 (National Standards Authority of Ireland, 1998) relates to fixed equipment, installation, inspection and maintenance and I.S. EN1177 (National Standards Authority of Ireland, 1999) refers to playground surfacing. These standards are not legally binding but serve as a voluntary code of good practice.

Irish Public Bodies Mutual Insurance Ltd. (IPBMI) are the insurance advisers and brokers for local authorities. Under their general public liability policies, local authorities have cover for the provision and operation of playgrounds and play centres.

The cover operates under the following conditions:

- ✓ the playgrounds are operated directly under the control and management of the local authority;
- ✓ the authority is responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the playgrounds and all equipment therein;
- ✓ weekly inspections of all equipment are carried out by suitably qualified employees of the authority;
- ✓ all defective/dangerous equipment is immediately replaced;
- ✓ records are available of the inspections, showing the date of the inspection and the name and qualifications of the person carrying out the inspection and the action taken.

IPBMI identify the following issues as of relevance in seeking to minimise public liability claims:

- 1 Children under 3 years of age are expected to be under supervision when using playgrounds
- 2 Parts 1 and 7 of ISEN 1176 provide guidance on inspection and maintenance of playgrounds and include the following points:
 - ★ Access: If equipment is not safe, access by the public should be prevented.
 - ★ Inspection: The manufacturer/supplier will provide instructions for maintenance and frequency of inspection. Circumstances may require a daily check. There are 3 types of inspection i.e. routine (possibly daily), operational (every 1 to 3 months) and annual inspection. Personnel involved in inspection or maintenance should be competent to perform the given tasks. Training may be necessary.
 - ★ Documentation: Standards are set down for the keeping of records in relation to maintenance, inspection, repair and testing. *Irish Public Bodies Mutual Insurance (2000)*

PILOT PLAYGROUND PROJECTS: DUN LAOGHAIRE RATHDOWN AND SLIGO COUNTY COUNCILS

During 2002, as part of developing the National Play Strategy, the National Children's Office provided grants for the construction of two playgrounds in Dun Laoghaire Rathdown (DLR) and Sligo. €53,000 was allocated to Sligo County Council and €75,000 to DLR County Council. The purpose of these pilot schemes was to identify issues that must be addressed by local authorities in the planning and construction of playgrounds, in order to develop a model of best practice. DLR County built its playground in the grounds of Cabinteely Park and Sligo County Council's playground was built in the Forthill area.

The National Children's Office (NCO) monitored the development of the playgrounds in order to identify key learning areas in building public play facilities. The NCO also wished to evaluate the extent to which the first national goal of the National Children's Strategy, that of giving children a voice, was included in the projects.



'...where I live the only space to play was the park, with swings and slides etc. But the corporation took them all down, with no consideration for anyone but themselves, the park is now full of drug dealers...'

MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICE

NEW PLAYGROUND AT CABINTEELY PARK, DUBLIN

Cabinteely Park spans about 45 hectares and surrounds the extensive 18th century Cabinteely House. The large park is used extensively by children and their families but was, up to this year, without a playground. In 2001, the National Children's Office part-funded the development of a new playground to provide an example of the practical issues encountered in playground development and serve as an example of good practice. Matching funding was provided by Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council (DLR). In developing the playground, DLR engaged a professional and experienced design consultant to design and manage the development of the playground. The consultant also had a professional expertise in playground safety and equipment.

A key feature of the Cabinteely Park initiative was the ongoing involvement of children in the planning and development of the playground. This aim was to build a playground for the children – by the children. From the outset, children from local schools were invited to submit their ideas on the kind of playground they wished for – ranging from facilities for very young children right up to teenagers. Almost 500 children contributed to this process and many of their ideas now feature in the playground.

The importance of nature was a key element in the design concept. The playground design includes a willow dome, a maze of fruiting and edible plants and a nature play area with opportunities for sand and water play in addition to traditional swings and rocking horses. Phase Two of the playground, which will be developed at a future date, will include a 'space net', which is like a spider's web of ropes and a Teen Zone.

This much-anticipated, innovative play area is proof of what can be achieved through collaboration between Government, local authorities and local communities and, most particularly, children.

REDEVELOPING AN OLD PLAYGROUND IN SLIGO

Sligo Town had no public playground for children to use when it was identified as one of the locations for the National Children's Office pilot projects. A playground had previously been built by a group of unemployed men as part of a community development project in Forthill, which is a designated area of disadvantage. The men took great pride in the work, which led to the development of a very unique playground. However, they had no special expertise in play equipment and the play components did not meet with national safety standards, so insurance cover could not be obtained on the site. The playground never opened and fell into disrepair.

Sligo Borough Council became involved when funding from the National Children's Office became available. Discussions were held between the Borough Council, Forthill men's group and Northside Resource Centre and it was agreed the playground built by the Forthill men would be redeveloped. A RoSPA safety audit of existing equipment and surfacing was commissioned. An extensive consultation was undertaken by the Northside Community group in local schools to discover the problems with the playground. Forthill men's group came up with the idea for a competition for the children to find a new name for the playground. In the interest of democracy, it was decided to poll the children on the new name. 'Hillside Adventure Park' was the chosen name.

On foot of the consultation, extensive refurbishment work was undertaken including the installation of safety surfacing and the modification of various items of equipment. The local children wanted additional pieces of equipment and the playground was expanded. Further consultation meetings were held to decide where the new equipment would be placed and the new playground was officially opened in June 2002.

'...I feel sorry for all the children who live far away because the small towns do not have any facilities. The boys are not too bad because they get to play football as most towns have playing pitches and also outdoor games...'

The key learning points from the pilot projects were as follows:

Consultation

- ✓ It is both feasible and useful to consult with children and to address local concerns regarding the location of play facilities.
- ✓ A flexible approach is required in relation to consultation: both local authorities tailored the consultation process to suit the issue and the interest and capacity of the individuals being consulted.
- ✓ Some expert knowledge is useful in consultation meetings but is not essential. There are arguments for and against having experts present, as expertise can either overcome unfounded concerns or stifle debate.

Risk Assessment

- ✓ The Irish Public Bodies Mutual Insurance Ltd. (IPBMI) has issued guidelines.
- ✓ Formal risk assessment is essential to ensure compliance with IPBMI safety guidelines.

Private Funding

- ✓ The potential for public/private partnerships was considered to be limited as it was felt it could give rise to charges to access play facilities. However DLR used funds raised at a commercial pop concert in Marley Park to contribute towards the Cabinteely playground's costs. Capital sponsorship from a local firm or corporation could be considered but this avenue was not actively pursued by either of the local authorities. The possibility of tax incentives for private sponsorship of public play facilities was identified as a potential source of capital.

Costs

- ✓ Estimates differed, but it was considered that a large playground in a regional park would cost approximately €250,000 - €300,000 and a playground for a neighbourhood park would cost approximately €80,000 - €100,000.
- ✓ Annual costs were estimated to run in the region of €7,000 to cover ongoing repair/replacement, ongoing maintenance and weekly inspections.

Aftercare and Maintenance

- ✓ Aftercare and maintenance of equipment is essential to ensure compliance with IPBMI terms of insurance cover.
- ✓ Community involvement was not considered, given the requirement for training and ensuring that the personnel undertaking inspections are fully insured.

Timeframes

- ✓ It was considered that a realistic timeframe for designing and building a playground in a regional park was a period of one year.

Design

- ✓ DLR engaged an experienced and qualified professional designer to develop and manage the project. This designer was an expert in playground and landscape design, and also had a working knowledge of safety standards. They felt that his input resulted in a product with better play facilities for children, which balanced opportunities for challenge within acceptable levels of risk.
- ✓ The importance of landscape and public amenity design was highlighted as a significant issue to be considered in progressing play.

Funding

- ✓ Section 48 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (Government of Ireland, 2000a), which provides opportunities to fund the capital cost of providing recreational and community facilities such as children's play areas which are provided by or on behalf of the local authority, was considered to be an important support to assist in the development of community play.

The pilot projects provided information which will be invaluable to other local authorities in building playgrounds. It is hoped that the processes put in place for the planning and construction of the two pilot playgrounds will be examined by other local authorities, who will then be able to adapt them for use in their areas.

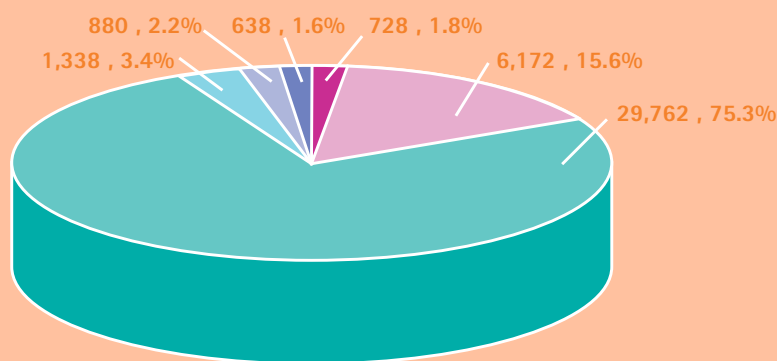
PLAY IN CHILDCARE SETTINGS

The National Childcare Census was carried out from April 1999 to April 2002 (Area Development Management Limited, 2003). A total of 56,803 children were found to be attending 2,607 childcare facilities, notified to the Health Boards under the Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations.





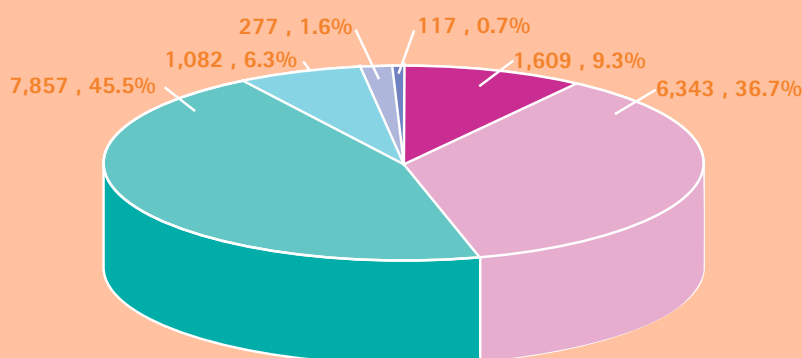
Figure 2.1 The Number and Percentage of Children Attending Sessional Facilities, by Age



Source: ADM Limited

0-1 yrs 1-3 yrs 3-6 yrs 6-9 yrs 9-11 yrs 11+ yrs

Figure 2.2 The Number and Percentage of Children Attending Full Day Care Facilities, by Age



Source: ADM Limited

0-1 yrs 1-3 yrs 3-6 yrs 6-9 yrs 9-11 yrs 11+ yrs

Of those 2,607 facilities, 2020 (77.5%) had access to an outdoor play space. Good design in childcare settings is essential to ensure that children have the spaces and opportunity for play in safe environments. The Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Childcare Facilities, published in July 2001 (Government of Ireland, 2001b) as Ministerial Guidelines under the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (Government of Ireland, 2000a), ensure a consistency of approach nationwide in the treatment of planning applications for childcare facilities. The Guidelines include a requirement that all new childcare facilities provide outdoor play areas for children. Standards in the childcare sector are regulated by Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations, 1996 (Government of Ireland, 1996), as amended, and give effect to provisions of the Child Care Act, 1991 (Government of Ireland, 1991). These regulations give the Health Boards responsibility for the regulation of preschool services and set a minimum standard for services in a number of areas including the following:

- ✓ The development of the child (including the use of appropriate materials and equipment);
- ✓ Health, safety and welfare of the child;
- ✓ Suitability of premises and facilities;
- ✓ Adult to child ratios; and
- ✓ Child to space ratios.

The National Childcare Nurseries Association added to the promotion of good design to create child-friendly spaces in 2002 with the publication of *We like this place – Guidelines for best practice in the design of*

childcare facilities. This publication makes specific recommendations with regard to the design of play areas, both indoor and outdoor, and in relation to play equipment for childcare facilities.

The National Development Plan 2000-2006 (Government of Ireland, 2000b) provided for significant investment in the childcare sector, specifying that the needs of disadvantaged children would be catered for by initiating play and development opportunities for them. The sector has experienced rapid development over the past 5-7 years because of the substantial investment from the Equal Opportunity Childcare Programme, with a significantly enhanced focus on the quality of these services. Prior to this, over a period of several decades, voluntary childcare organisations, such as the IPPA (the Early Childhood Organisation) and the National Children's Nurseries Association (NCNA) developed highly effective and professional training for their childcare staff. Accredited childcare training has been available at third level since the 1970s. Third level courses in childcare are now available throughout the country. The National Childcare Strategy (1999) recommended the development of a national qualifications framework. This new *Model Framework for Education Training and Professional Development in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector* was published in September 2002 (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2002a) and is based on an in-depth consultation with childcare providers and training and accreditation providers. It specifies the

development of skills in the area of 'play and education' as one of the six key areas of skills and knowledge necessary in childcare.

Not all young children are cared for in formal childcare settings. It is estimated that approximately 80% of childcare is conducted in the informal economy, mostly through the use of childminders, relatives and other informal arrangements. Childminders who care for three children or less, children of relatives or children from the same family along with their own children in the childminders own home are exempt from the notification and inspection requirements of the Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations 1996 as amended (Government of Ireland, 1996). There is, however, a voluntary notification scheme in place for such childminders. (A childminder should look after no more than 6 children including her own who are aged under 6 years and no more than 3 of these should be under 1 year of age). The sector is therefore largely unregulated. Consequently, there is little published information on the overall standard of play opportunities for children in this sector of child minding.

PLAY IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

By the age of five years of age most children in Ireland are attending primary school. There were 444,782 full-time pupils in primary level schools in the year 2000/2001.

The administration of primary schools is governed by the Education Act, 1998 (Government of Ireland, 1998) and the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 (Government of Ireland, 2000a). Neither of these pieces of primary legislation makes any direct reference to play provision. However, schools must comply with rules for national schools, issued by the Department of Education (1995), which cover most aspects of a school functioning. Of particular relevance to play is the guidance to schools regarding timetables. Under these rules, a full school day comprises a period of not less than five hours and forty minutes. There is a requirement that schools allow an interval of one half hour for recreation. Morning and afternoon breaks of five minutes each are allowed, but

where breaks of a longer duration are taken, the length of the school day must be lengthened accordingly. There is some evidence that play during break-time is becoming increasingly restricted as the more physical activities such as running, chasing, climbing and ball games are banned or curtailed due to fears of injury and litigation.

The primary curriculum recommends the use of play in the teaching of Social, Environmental and Scientific Education, Arts Education, Physical Education and Social, Personal and Health Education. The Physical Education curriculum provides a framework for encouraging children to pursue healthy life-styles and to develop positive attitudes towards physical activity. The physical education curriculum outlines a balanced range of activities for children and allows schools considerable flexibility in planning a programme that meets the needs of the school. The curriculum is divided into six strands, athletics, games, dance, gymnastics, outdoor and adventure activities and aquatics. The curriculum incorporates developing a broad range of activities including running, jumping and throwing, body management movement, developing creativity and imagination, jumping, turning, swinging and balancing. In the aquatics strand, the curriculum stresses the importance of play in the development of competence in the water.

'*Fifty School Reports - What Inspectors Say*', published by the Department of Education and Science in December 2002, comments on quality and standards in some schools. The Inspectors concluded that all schools provide primary pupils with some experience of physical education but that there is scope for development. They state that provision is not planned on a whole-school basis and pupils do not have access to a balanced PE programme, with the teaching of gymnastics, athletics and outdoor pursuits receiving little attention. In a few instances, the imbalance in provision was attributed to a paucity of accommodation or resources. The Inspectors note that opportunities to develop a sense of fair play, co-operative skills and the acceptance of success and failures might be usefully exploited through the PE programme.

TABLE 3 – NUMBER OF PUPILS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS BY AGE AND STANDARD 2000/01

Age from January 1st 2001	Pupils in Ordinary classes										Pupils with special needs in Ord. N.S.	Pupils in Special Schools	Pupils in Private Primary Schools	Grand Total
	Jun Infts	Sen Infts	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	Other	Total				
3	170	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	170	11	59	259	499
4	24,406	288	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24,694	415	91	409	25,609
5	27,341	22,358	296	0	0	0	0	0	0	49,995	747	181	497	51,420
6	707	27,550	21,030	330	0	0	0	0	0	49,617	909	253	539	51,318
7	16	967	27,957	21,091	297	0	0	0	0	50,328	923	311	541	52,103
8	3	21	1,461	28,646	21,896	455	33	0	0	52,515	1,047	409	624	54,595
9	0	3	66	1,626	30,059	21,777	474	0	0	54,005	1,162	466	648	56,281
10	0	2	8	63	1,704	30,666	21,705	511	0	54,659	1,169	526	682	57,036
11	0	0	0	9	64	1,650	29,825	21,021	15	52,588	1,230	569	713	55,100
12	0	0	0	1	12	54	1,931	29,825	429	32,252	1,016	617	265	34,150
13	0	0	0	0	1	3	83	2,142	167	2,396	344	640	44	3,424
14+	0	0	0	0	0	1	8	96	20	125	119	3,002	1	3,247
TOTAL	52,643	51,189	50,818	51,766	54,033	54,606	54,063	53,595	631	423,344	9,092	7,124	5,222	44,782

Source: Department of Education & Science



Funding for Play in Schools

There is no funding programme specifically designed to support play in schools. However, the Department of Education & Science provides primary schools with an annual physical education grant of €635 p.a. with a higher grant of €1,270 p.a. being paid to disadvantaged schools. The spending of this grant is at the discretion of each Board of Management and may be used to purchase play equipment. This grant was suspended in 2003, but is expected to be reinstated in 2004.

Teacher Training at Primary Level

Primary school teachers are trained and receive qualifications through State sponsored and approved training courses. All of the B.Ed courses include the history of education, philosophies of education and education psychology. Student teachers also attend lectures on play theory which includes ideas on promoting play within the classroom. Six hours of teacher training is dedicated to the management and organisation of play activities. This is the only dedicated period of time allocated to play over the three years of teachers' training. While play is used as a methodology in all aspects of the curriculum, the junior and senior infant programmes contain the best developed inclusion of play as an integral part of children's learning.

PLAY FOR CHILDREN IN HOSPITAL

In 1999 the admission rate to hospital for children aged 0-14 was 12.9% (Chief Medical Officer, 2002) In the Eastern Regional Health Authority day case admissions are more prevalent than in other parts of the country. In addition, children receive treatments as out-patients through local GP services and clinics.

The importance of play for hospitalised children cannot be overstated. Play in hospital provides a normalising experience in a stressful environment and, guided by a Hospital Play Specialist, can help to increase each child's ability to cope with illness and hospitalisation and to understand treatment (Children in Hospital Ireland, 2002). In the United Kingdom, a recommended ratio of Hospital Play Specialists to child patients of 1:10 was set out as far back as 1959 following the publication of the Platt report (Ministry of Health, 1959).

In Ireland, since 1993, the number of full-time or full-time equivalent Hospital Play Specialists has increased from seven to sixteen. However, as shown in Table 4 below, this level of provision still falls short of the recommended level outlined in the Platt report (Ministry of Health, 1959) and compares poorly to our UK counterparts. For example, in Our Lady's Hospital for Sick Children, Dublin, the ratio of Hospital Play Specialists to child patients stands at 1:82. By comparison, at Great Ormond Street Hospital, London, there is a current provision of approximately one Hospital Play Specialist to every seven child patients. Our Lady's Hospital for Sick Children is the largest children's hospital in Ireland, with 330 beds. There are only 4 play specialists employed in Our Lady's Hospital. Great Ormond Street Hospital has 300 beds and employs 40 play specialists. In general, the provision for play for hospitalised children in Ireland continues to rely largely on the goodwill of volunteers. Currently, there are approximately 250 volunteers, trained, vetted and supported by the group, Children in Hospital. This situation signals a need for increased ratios of Hospital Play Specialists in Irish hospitals.

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TABLE 4 – THE PROVISION OF PLAY IN MAIN HOSPITALS CARING FOR CHILDREN

	Hospital/ Unit Description	Professional	Volunteers	Community Employment	Others
Our Lady's Hospital for Sick Children, Crumlin	330 bed children's hospital	4 Full-Time HPS Positions	120 CHI Play Volunteers 10 CHI Information and Activity Volunteers	None	Occasional Students
The Children's University Hospital, Temple Street	140 bed children's hospital	3 Full-Time HPS Positions	10 CHI Play Volunteers 15 CHI Information and Activity Volunteers	2	2 Part-Time Play Assistants Occasional Students
National Children's Hospital, Tallaght Hospital	70 bed children's hospital 2 Job-Share	1 Full-Time HPS Positions and Activity Volunteers HPS Positions	10 CHI Play Volunteers 20 CHI Information	None	Occasional Students
Limerick Regional Hospital	57 bed children's unit	1 Full-Time HPS Position	25 CHI Volunteers	6	None
Cork University Hospital	50 bed children's unit	1 Full-Time HPS Position	2 CHI Volunteers	4	None
Mercy Hospital, Cork	44 bed children's unit	1 Full-Time HPS Position (not yet filled)	None	None	None
South Infirmary, Victoria Hospital, Cork	15 bed children's ward	None	None	None	None
University College Hospital, Galway	36 bed children's unit	1 Full-Time HPS Position	None	None	None
Letterkenny General Hospital	30 bed children's unit	1 Part-Time HPS Position	None	None	None
Beaumont Hospital	28 bed children's unit	None	3 CHI Volunteers	None	None
Cappagh Orthopaedic Hospital	17 bed children's ward	None	None	None	None
Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda	25 bed children's unit	None	18 CHI Volunteers	None	None
Sligo General Hospital	25 bed children's unit	1 Full-Time HPS Position	None	None	None
Mayo General Hospital	25 bed children's unit	None	None	None	None
Portiuncula Hospital	20 children's bed unit	None	None	None	None
Tralee General Hospital	20 bed children's unit	2 Part-Time HPS Position	None	None	None
Wexford General Hospital	20 bed children's unit	None	6 CHI Volunteers	None	None
St Lukes, Kilkenny	20 bed children's unit	None	None	None	None
St Joseph's, Clonmel	14 bed children's unit	None	None	None	None
Cavan General Hospital	16 bed children's unit	1 Part-Time HPS Position	None	None	None
Eye and Ear Hospital	10 bed children's ward	None	12 CHI Volunteers	None	None
National Rehabilitation Hospital	8 bed children's ward	None	12 CHI Volunteers	None	None

Source: Children in Hospital Ireland

* Children in Hospital Ireland is currently exploring the establishment of volunteer play schemes with Waterford Regional Hospital and all Midland Health Boards Hospitals (Mullingar, Portlaoise and Tullamore)

Play in Other Healthcare Settings

There is a growing awareness that children accessing other health-related services may also benefit from quality play opportunities to normalise traumatic experiences and situations. Examples include children in women's refuges and children accompanying adults to treatment centres such as the National Drug Treatment Centre where over 5,290 child visits were made to the Play Therapy Department during 2000, catering for 120 individual children in any one month (Drug Treatment Centre Board, 2001). Other settings where play and recreational needs are significant include facilities for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, as well as Residential Care Units for children.

VOLUNTARY SECTOR AND COMMUNITIES SUPPORTING PLAY

Survey of Voluntary Sector Supporting Children's Play Activities

A brief survey, seeking feedback on the barriers to play and the play needs of disadvantaged children, was conducted by the National Children's Office with a small number of voluntary organisations, which specialise in supporting and empowering marginalised groups or communities, as follows:

- ✓ Knockanrawley Family Resource Centre, Co. Tipperary
- ✓ Pavee Point, advocacy for Travellers
- ✓ Baleskin Refugee Reception Centre
- ✓ Irish Drug Treatment Centre, Pearse Street, Dublin
- ✓ Women's Aid Refuge Centre, Rathmines, Dublin
- ✓ Rainbows Child Counselling Services, Coolock
- ✓ Ana Liffey Children's Project, Dublin

A summary of the main barriers and needs outlined by these organisations is set out below:

Barriers:

- ✓ Lack of space for play within facilities and in the wider community;
- ✓ Poor planning of the environment;
- ✓ Inadequate development of both indoor and outdoor play;
- ✓ Lack of creative use of space to provide opportunities for challenge and stimulation;
- ✓ Limitations in children's own capacity to play, for a range of reasons including emotional and psychological problems.

Needs:

- ✓ More designated space for indoor and outdoor play;
- ✓ A wider and more challenging range of play activities;
- ✓ A range of play activities and programmes for older children, which include physical challenge;
- ✓ Increased staff numbers to support play activity;
- ✓ Anti-discrimination policies, which incorporate play issues;
- ✓ Play opportunities that are disability friendly;
- ✓ Training for staff;
- ✓ Greater understanding by families of their children's play needs.

Voluntary agencies have an important role in providing play opportunities, particularly in areas of disadvantage and with marginalised groups. Many of them receive funding from government programmes for their activities. For example, Barnardos run toy libraries and have play activities for children as part of the Family

Support Services. The ISPPC uses therapeutic play as a tool in the Childhood Support Worker Service and provides play supports in the STEPS drop in centres.

At community level, many pre-school children get the opportunity to play at mother and toddler groups. These are usually informal groups, which meet in venues loaned by a parish, community or Health Board. Children benefit indirectly from family, community and social services around the country, including the Family and Community Services Resource Centres (60 countrywide with 25 more approved in principle), Community Development Projects (159 countrywide) and Social Economy Schemes (25 currently dealing with childcare services). Child-care facilities are typically provided for parents attending these projects and schemes, which enhance children's play opportunities at local level. In addition, many community groups have come together in an effort to organise play facilities, typically playgrounds, in local communities. These groups have, in the main, encountered insurmountable difficulties in relation to insurance, where even if funding for the facility is raised or secured, it has proved prohibitively expensive, or impossible, to arrange insurance cover.

Súgradh is the only national voluntary organisation dedicated to children's play. Súgradh was established to promote better play opportunities for children and has assisted local authorities around the country in the development of play policies. The Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management Ireland Ltd (ILAM) is a non-government organisation, which provides training in playground maintenance and promotes standards for the leisure industry, including commercial play facilities.

PLAY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

Although concerns about social exclusion have become more prominent, there is some evidence to suggest that certain groups of children routinely have difficulty in accessing play (Cole-Hamilton and Gill, 2002). Groups of children at particular risk of exclusion include the following:

- ✓ Children from low income families;
- ✓ Traveller children;
- ✓ Children from an ethnic minority group;
- ✓ Children living in emergency accommodation (due to the family being homeless);
- ✓ Children from refugee families;
- ✓ Children with disabilities; and
- ✓ Children living in rural areas.

Barriers to their inclusion include, amongst others, a lack of safe spaces, language difficulties, mobility problems, fear of assault, concerns about safety, especially among girls, and an absence of transport. Further details in relation to these specific groups and their access to play opportunities are set out below.

Children Living in Poverty

Children are more likely to experience poverty than adults. The most recent research available indicates a steady decline in the number of children experiencing 'consistent poverty'. 'Consistent poverty' is defined as those living in households below the 60% of average income and experiencing enforced basic deprivation. Consistent poverty among children fell from 24% in 1994 to 6.5% in 2001.



MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICE

MOBILE PLAYBUS CHILDCARE SERVICES

Background

The Galway City and County Childcare Committee have purchased and renovated two mobile playbuses with initial funding from the Western Health Board, to provide new mobile childcare services for communities and families in the most isolated areas of the Connemara Gaeltacht and disadvantaged areas of Galway city. The services will be delivered to communities and areas with no existing services.

The services will involve the children and parents in planning and delivery. They will be flexible and serve travellers, refugees, asylum seekers and ethnic minorities. The services will provide capacity building within communities leading to the establishment of permanent services. Parents will have the opportunity to seek employment, gain work experience in childcare on the service and attend training on the playbus while their children are being cared for.

The service will facilitate integration of vulnerable children into mainstream services. It will be affordable and accessible to parents and will be economical as it will be capable of meeting the needs of a large number of families each week.

Objectives

- 1 To provide childcare services for preschool children at Traveller halting sites which do not have premises suitable for the provision of services;
- 2 To provide childcare services in isolated areas of Connemara, which do not currently have a childcare service;
- 3 To provide a meeting or training area for parents availing of these childcare services.

Consultation & Planning

A review of childcare services carried out by Galway City and County Childcare Committee in 2000/2001, identified a gap in service provision for a number of Traveller families located at halting sites in Galway city. Certain isolated areas of Connemara were also identified as having no childcare services and no facilities for children to participate in organised play.

Working groups were set up to examine ways of meeting these identified needs. In Galway city the working group consisted of representatives from the Travelling Community, the Galway Traveller Support Group, Galway Corporation, Western Health Board, and Galway City and County Childcare Committee. Consultation took place with a variety of relevant agencies as well as families at the relevant halting sites. A similar consultation process was undertaken in Connemara.

Proposal

The favoured option to meet the needs of these areas in the short to medium term was to provide mobile childcare

services. As no such services were found to be currently in operation in Ireland, a field trip was planned, to visit services in the UK.

A group representing the City and Connemara working groups visited services in two areas of London, where double-decker buses were used as mobile play buses for children in areas which did not have access to childcare services.

The working groups proposed setting up two similar services in Galway city and Connemara. Two buses were sourced in the UK, as no suitable buses were found to be available in Ireland.

Funding

A commitment was given by the Western Health Board to cover the cost of purchasing and refurbishing the buses. An application is being made to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform for a grant to cover staffing costs and a number of options are being examined to meet the running costs of the services.

City Play Bus Service

The upper deck of each bus is laid out as a play area for children, while the lower deck has been designed as a meeting/training area for parents. The city bus travels to 3 traveller halting sites per week and the sessions last for a minimum of 2 hours. Approximately 80 children avail of the service in and around Galway City. For many of these children, it is their only opportunity to participate in organised play and it is extremely popular with them. So much so that it is difficult trying to facilitate all the children who want to participate at times. Two trained childcare workers are employed on the playbus with some voluntary assistance from the traveller parents from time to time.

Connemara Play Bus Service

The Connemara Play Bus Service has a similar layout to the city bus. The bus travels to 5 different areas in the west of the county. It delivers the service through Irish and can facilitate communities in the remotest parts. Approximately 70 children avail of the service. Again these are children and parents who do not have access to any childcare services or any form of early childhood education or play. Last week alone, one parent commented how she realised that she did not have the right toys and equipment suitable for her child's age and development when she observed the equipment and activities that were available on the playbus.

The 2 buses are a learning experience for both parents and children. Parents are learning how to play creatively with their children by observing trained childcare workers. It is also an opportunity for parents who are isolated in their rural homes to get together and network. It is our experience that parents who may live quite close to each other do not know each other as there are no opportunities to meet with their children.

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TABLE 5: CONSISTENT POVERTY

	1987	1994	1997	1998	2000	2001
Children*	24.8%	23.5%	16.9%	11.7%	7.7%	6.5%
Adults	14.6%	14.8%	9.4%	6.9%	4.3%	4.1%

Source: Combat Poverty Agency, (2000) 'Child Poverty in Ireland' p.56 and Office for Social Inclusion (2003) National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003-2005, p.Appendix A(v)

* Children are defined as under 14 years for the years 1987, 1994, 1997 and under 18 years for 1998, 2000 and 2001

Children who live in poverty are less likely to have the toys and leisure equipment usually associated with childhood. (Nolan and Farrell, 1990). Children of semi-skilled or unskilled families are generally less likely to take the regular vigorous exercise necessary for health and wellbeing (see figures 2.5 and 2.6 below).

Criticisms have been made of the commercialisation of playgrounds which may erode opportunities for play among the children of low income families (Cole-Hamilton and Gill, 2002). There is some evidence to suggest that low income families reside in cities and their opportunities for play are limited. Matthews and Limb (2000), report that the street is the main social forum for children from less affluent families because they have nowhere else to go.

It is essential that facilities and opportunities for play are provided which are easily accessible and free of charge, so that they can be used by children experiencing poverty.

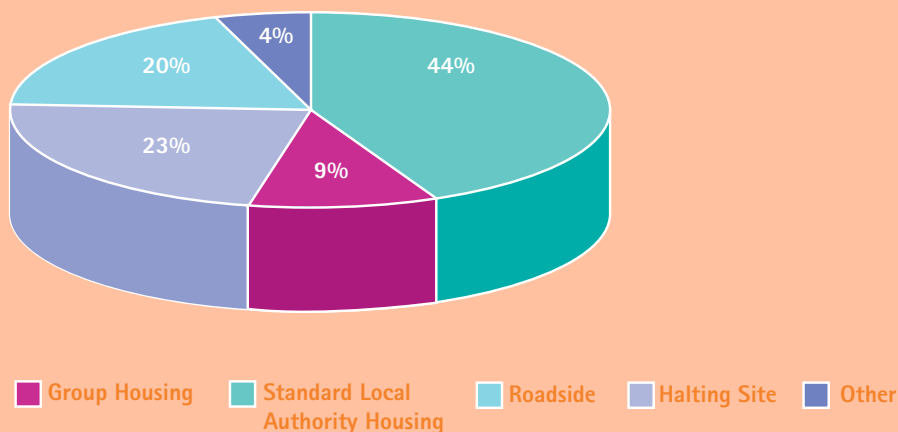
Traveller Children

There are approximately 5,150 Traveller families or an estimated 31,000 Travellers in Ireland (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 2001). Over half of this Traveller population is under the age of 15 and 40% are under 10 years of age (Rothman et al, 1986).

Play opportunities for Traveller children are generally restricted due, in part, to the ill-effects of inadequate accommodation, poor living standards, the absence of safe play areas and hostility from the majority community (Pavee Point, 2003). Currently, 23% of the travelling community live in permanent or transient halting sites around the country and one in five live on the roadside (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 2001).

The Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community, 1995 (Department of Equality and Law Reform, 1995) recommended that play space be provided in the design of all accommodation schemes for Travellers. The Guidelines on Residential Caravan Parks for Travellers, published by the Department of the Environment and Local Government, recommend that consideration should be given to the provision of play areas, where risk from vehicular traffic is minimised and which are fenced to prevent dumping or use for scrap storage. Despite this and other initiatives on Traveller accommodation, few of the halting sites around the country include play facilities for children, although a number of schemes currently under construction have designated play areas.

Figure 2.3 The Living Arrangements of the Travelling Community



Source: Department of the Environment and Local Government

Children from Ethnic Minorities

This group of children has also been identified as having restricted access to play. Street (2002) concluded that the use of public open space and play and recreational facilities is more restricted for children from ethnic minority groups than for others. Limitations emerge, they suggest, from a range of complex environmental and family factors including racism, fear of assault and harassment, marginalisation and home-focused style of life (Davis and Jones, 1997; Greenfield et al., 2000).

Children Living in Emergency Accommodation

Irish research undertaken by Halpenny et al. (2002) on children in emergency accommodation, found severe restrictions on the ability of families to access play areas. Significantly, they found that most children had no access to appropriate play space both within and outside such accommodation. For the majority, accommodation was located in areas unfamiliar to the families and consequently, children could not play outside unaccompanied. Where opportunities for play were available they were usually within very confined space or sometimes, parents brought children to nearby parks. Some of the few opportunities identified included a small number of Bed & Breakfasts that allowed children access to a garden where they could play as well as play activities organised by the Ana Liffey Children's Project. A weekly after-school club was run on a voluntary basis by one manager of a Bed & Breakfast (Halpenny et al., 2002).

Children of Asylum Seekers

Research, which examined the experiences of child poverty and social exclusion amongst asylum-seeking children in Ireland, found there was a lack of appropriate space to play for children living in temporary accommodation, communal areas were considered ill-equipped and unsafe and, due to the financial burden, parents were often unable to afford toys or participation in clubs or after-school activities (Fanning et al., 2001). To date, the Baleskin Refugee Reception Centre in North County Dublin remains the sole centre of this kind to make formal provision for play, with the recent appointment of two publicly funded play therapists.

Children with Disabilities

Children with disabilities face particular difficulties in enjoying the play and recreation facilities used by able-bodied children. The physical and sensory disability database (Health Research Board, 2002) shows a total of 4127 children under the age of 18 years. The most recent figures relating to intellectual disability show 7,954 children under the age of 18 years (Health Research Board, 2001). It should be noted that participation in the databases is voluntary, the databases identify people with disabilities who are currently availing of, or require, specialised health and social services, data collection is at various stages of completion, and the figures have not yet been validated. Accordingly, it is likely that those figures do not represent the total population of children with disabilities in Ireland. The additional needs of children with disabilities are recognised in the National Children's Strategy, that *"children with a disability will be entitled to the services they need to achieve their full potential"* (p68).

Providing public play facilities for children with special needs is a particular challenge. While play facilities may be available in residential services, day-care services and specialist education centres, public playgrounds are generally not designed with the needs of these children in mind. Playgrounds that are designed for both able-bodied and disabled children provide an enhanced opportunity for inclusion. Playgrounds that cater for children with disabilities need careful planning to ensure that they are suitable to their needs and capabilities. Account must be taken of children with physical or sensory disabilities or who are intellectually impaired. Play opportunities must facilitate their sense of adventure in a safe environment and with supervision suitable to their needs. In designing playgrounds, recognition must be given to all disabilities including visual, aural, oral, perceptive and mobility difficulties.

Children Living in Rural Areas

Children living in rural areas may have greater problems than others elsewhere in accessing play opportunities and the reasons for this are multi-factorial. It has been noted that childcare services are generally lower in rural compared with urban areas (Department of Agriculture and Food, 1998). This, coupled with an absence of adequate public transport services, means that children living in rural areas are more likely to be disadvantaged in terms of play. In their White Paper the Department of Agriculture and Food (1998, p8) writes, **'in the rural context, poverty and disadvantage are often invisible due to the scattered settlement pattern and a landscape which may not necessarily appear deprived'** (p8).

The stated commitment by the Department of Agriculture and Food to improving and ensuring access to adequate levels of social and other services and infrastructures is welcomed here. For children, these commitments underpin the development of local play areas and the provision of opportunities for socialising and playing. Further, the proposed community development approach, which includes supporting and empowering active rural communities to contribute to planning and developments, will enable children to have a say in this provision.

A further issue is raised here in respect of the farming environment. In the six years to 2002, thirty children lost their lives on farms in the Republic of Ireland (Health and Safety Authority, 2002). In recognition of the high risk of injury to children on farms, a code of practice on preventing accidents to children and young people in agriculture has been published and is actively promoted (Health Safety Authority, 2001a). The Authority notes that a safe, supervised play area for children is a vital part of today's farm.

'..ba chóir dóibh níos mó aiteanna a dhéanamh chun spóirt agus rudaí eile a dhéanamh..'

MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICE

MAAM CHILDREN'S PLAYScheme A Volunteer Playscheme in Rural Ireland

Background

Maam Children's Playscheme caters for young people aged five to 14 from Maam, Co. Galway and nearby villages. Visiting children are also welcomed. In recent years, children from the Ukraine, Belarus, Spain and Britain have participated in the playscheme. This is a dispersed rural community spread along nine miles of the valley running between the Maamturks and Joyce Country Mountains, in the west of Ireland. The resident population is about 300. It is a remote area with few facilities, poorly served by public transport. The main occupation is hillfarming supplemented in summer by tourism. Some people commute to work in local towns, a 30+ minute drive away.

The playscheme is community-run by volunteers for one to two weeks in the summer holidays. We have run seven summer playschemes since 1996. Each year over 40 children chose to join in general play and activities including arts and crafts, drama, dancing, singing, stories, sports and treasure hunts.

Children and young adults also get a chance to enjoy their own environment, with hill walks, canoeing, bicycle rides and farm visits. Children have painted colourful murals in the school playground and enjoyed trips to places such as Connemara National Park.

We have also organised specific projects. In 2000 a group of 16 children trained in film-making with The Nerve Centre (a media arts community workshop based in Derry). They devised, scripted and produced their own films, visiting Derry for the editing. The films were shown to over 200 people locally as part of the Clifden Arts Festival. In 2001 we organised a time capsule: families, individuals and community groups contributed many items in English and Irish. Children at the village school are its custodians and it will be opened in 2051.

There are no paid workers. The playscheme depends on parents, young adults and others, working together. Fees are kept low – there is a sliding scale for larger families. As far as possible, parents and carers are expected to give at least a day or half day at the playscheme playing/ helping. Some help with fundraising and we have had grants from organisations such as the Irish Youth Foundation and Ireland's Millennium Commission.

Workshops are held at local schools to involve children in deciding on the playscheme activities. At the playscheme itself children choose what they want to do – much of it is free play with some organised workshops. For instance, we have three big tubs of dressing-up clothes and items. Children of all ages play with these most days, including boys of 11 or 12.

During 2002, a 12-year old, two 14-year olds, a 19-year old and six adults met together regularly to organise and plan the playscheme. Four 14-year olds joined in the scheme itself and worked with six to eight adults every day. Every year children and adults evaluate what they like or don't like and how to improve things to ensure the playscheme continues to deliver the high quality play opportunities children want.

Some things I like about the playscheme...

'clay, modern dance, treasure hunt, art'

'Corners' [a playground game which children taught to each other and adults, which really took off]

'hula hoops' [very popular: children from Belarus taught other new skills],

'puppets, parachute games, marble run, soccer, art room, lunch, friends, skipping' 'playing with cars and trucks, stained glass, doing puppet show, dressing up, painting, everyone was nice and good, we all play together, everything'

*by Jean Parker and Martina Venneman
[Extracted from children's evaluations in 2002.]*

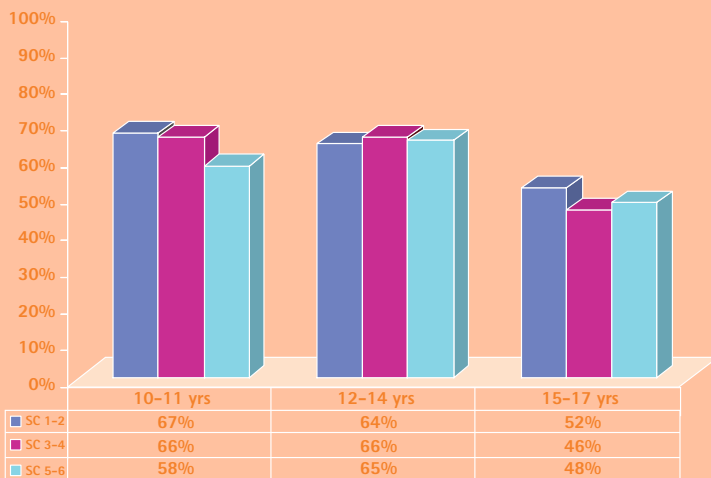


'...soon there will be no green left because of all the building going on. I used to love going for long walks in the convent if I was upset and then the nuns couldn't afford to pay for the land and now I've nowhere to go for walks when I'm upset and I'm having a hard year...'

THE IMPORTANCE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR CHILDREN'S HEALTH

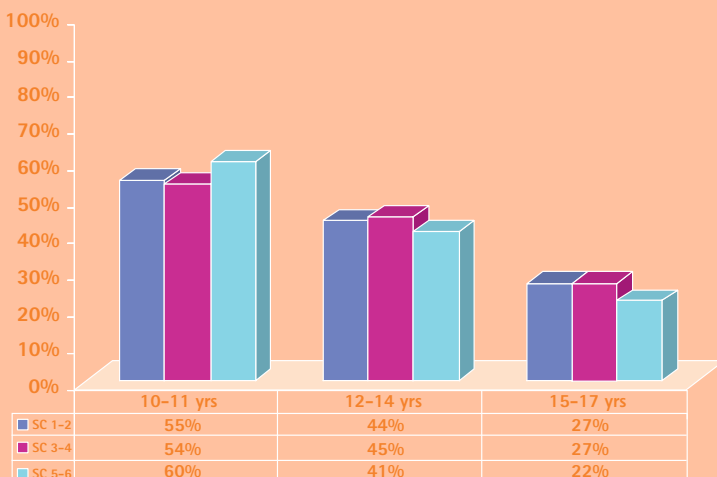
Physical activity is an important aspect of good health. The adoption of healthy lifestyles is of increasing importance, particularly given the rising levels of childhood obesity and reduced levels of vigorous exercise.

Figure 2.4 The Percentage of Boys Participating in Vigorous Exercise 4+ Times Per Week, by Social Class



Source: The National Health & Lifestyles Surveys (2003)

Figure 2.5 The Percentage of Girls Participating in Vigorous Exercise 4+ Times Per Week, by Social Class



Source: The National Health & Lifestyles Surveys (2003)

TABLES 2.4 AND 2.5 above clearly show how physical activity declines with age, with some small variations related to social class. Overall, 48% of children report exercising four or more times per week with 12% exercising less than weekly according to the National Health and Lifestyle Survey. The decreasing participation in exercise is apparent among both genders as children get older, but is most noticeable among girls, with a very sharp drop by the age of 15 (Centre for Health Promotion Studies, 2003).

Rising Levels of Childhood Obesity

Allied to the decreasing level of vigorous exercise among children, is the rise in the level of obesity in the population. The European Heart Health Initiative (2001) highlights the correlation between sedentary behaviours and levels of obesity. It states that '**persistent obesity in childhood may increase the risk of developing many chronic diseases in adulthood including cardiovascular diseases, non-insulin dependent diabetes mellitus (now occurring in children), osteoarthritis, and colon cancer**' (European Heart Health Initiative, p6). They also point to the important link between obesity and physical activity 'as there is good tracking of obesity from youth

into adulthood and physical activity, combined with dietary modification, has been shown to be an effective treatment for obesity'. While there are no figures available for childhood obesity levels in the Republic, international statistics reveal the extent of the problem:

- ✓ In Denmark 3% of girls aged 8-10 and 4% of boys aged 8-10 are classed as obese
- ✓ In England, it has been estimated that 20% of 4-year olds are overweight and 8% are obese
- ✓ In France, the prevalence of obesity among 5 to 12-year olds has doubled in 15 years from 6% in the 1980's to around 12% today
- ✓ In Norway the average increase in weight (adjusted for height) among 9-year olds was found to be 3kg in the last 25 years

Source: European Heart Health Initiative (2001)

Play to the extent that it includes physical activity may be part of the solution to growing levels of obesity in children, though it is acknowledged that the issue is a complex one, which may span diet, physical activity, genetics, and social determinants.



COMMERCIAL INVOLVEMENT IN PLAY

There are a growing number of commercial play facilities around the country, although the actual number is unknown. The business sector has recognised the opportunity for commercial enterprise in providing facilities and spaces for children's birthday parties, group outings and other play activities. Many shopping centres, leisure centres, fast food outlets and hotels have developed indoor and outdoor play areas to cater for children. These facilities provide both play experiences for children and, in some instances, paid childminding for adults. Some of the issues which arise in relation to these facilities are standards of equipment, training of staff and the fact that access to these facilities is not necessarily open to all children.

PROMOTING SAFETY AT PLAY

Children of all ages may fall or incur injury when they are active. However, safety is frequently used as an excuse for limiting the development of play areas and play services, not least because of the implications for litigation and claims. The reason for a child falling and sustaining an injury in formal play environments can relate to two factors: loss of grip and loss of footing. The major causes of these factors can be identified as being either physiological or psychological (Wilkinson and Lockhart, 1976). The physiological elements identified include:

- ✓ Improper scale of equipment to the child who is using it;
- ✓ Improper material for the design and function of the unit;
- ✓ Changes in the properties of the material, e.g. splintering, slipperiness;
- ✓ Slippery clothing;
- ✓ Pushing by other children.

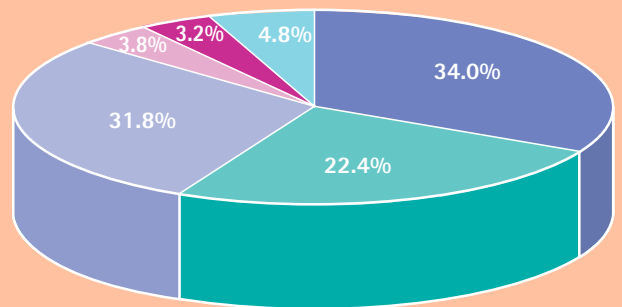
The elements of psychological causes identified include:

- ✓ Misperception of the situation e.g. distance between steps;
- ✓ Misperception of the child's own abilities - due largely to inexperience;
- ✓ Fatigue;
- ✓ Emotional stress.

Data on the Occurrence of Childhood Accidents

The influence of traffic on mortality and morbidity rates for children under the age of fourteen make stark reading. In the Republic of Ireland in 2001, eleven pedestrian children died and a further two hundred and twenty one were seriously injured. In addition, there were a further fifty-six child pedal cyclist casualties and two fatalities (National Safety Council, 2003). In 2000, over 18.0% (n=10,676) of hospital in-patient discharges among children up to 14 years of age were attributable to accidental injuries (ESRI, 2000).

Figure 2.6 Where Accidents Happen



- School Area
- Leisure Area
- Around the Home
- Other
- Sports Area
- In the Home

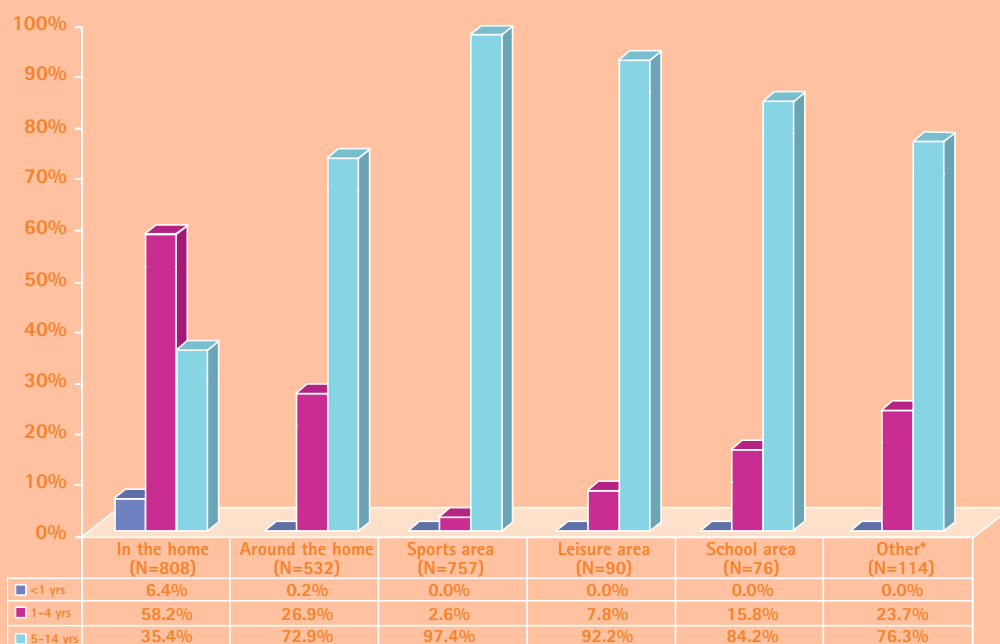
**other areas relate to transport area, work site/agricultural area, shop/service area and others.*

Source: EHLASS

Research has suggested that the majority of these injuries were sustained through play/leisure activities or sport and, as illustrated in Figure 2.6, occurred primarily in or around the home and in sports areas (EHLASS, 2000). This however, tended to vary according to the age of the child.



Figure 2.7 Where Accidents Happen, by Age



Source: EHLASS

For example, for children less than 1 year of age, accidents occurred almost exclusively in the home (98.1%), for children between 1 and 4 years of age, accidents occurred most frequently in the home (69.2%), while for those between 5 and 14 years of age, accidents occurred most frequently in sports areas (44.8%).

The injuries sustained in these accidents are mostly to limbs – these account for nearly 70% of the total injuries for all age groups and for both sexes. The Chief Medical Officer in his Annual Report for 2000 (CMO, 2002 p78) points out that **‘there is little knowledge about the true incidence of non-fatal trauma. Even where data is recorded, there are concerns regarding the completeness and accuracy of the data. Circumstances of the accident are often unknown and data generally relate to the injury received and not to its cause.’**

Nonetheless, the available statistics would appear to counter the anecdotal evidence of a high incidence of accidents in public play areas and should overcome the perceived barrier of insurance and litigation cited by local authorities as an obstacle to public play provision (Webb and Associates, 1999). Indeed, Irish Public Bodies Mutual Insurance Ltd., who provide insurance cover for local authorities, do not consider playgrounds to be a major source of concern in terms of accidents: in their experience, playgrounds have generated relatively few claims by comparison to road and footpath accidents, which represent the bulk of public liability claims.

Limiting children’s exposure to the risk of accidents is essential, particularly where they relate to play. In the annual report, the Chief Medical Officer points to the need to prevent accidents, promote children’s health and prevent disability through accidents (CMO, 2002). The main approaches to injury identified are prevention, enforcement and environmental change. These approaches must be considered in the provision of safe play environments where children are physically active.

Sports Capital Programme

In Chapter 1, in setting out a definition for play, sport was excluded from that definition. However, it is acknowledged that the distinction between the two is not always clearcut, and an overview of current play opportunities for children would be incomplete if the substantial investment in sport over recent years was not acknowledged.

Under the National Lottery funded Sports Capital Programme operated by the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, funding is provided for projects directly related to the provision of sport and recreational facilities at local, regional and national level throughout the country. A considerable level of funding has been allocated, particularly over the last five years or so, which has greatly assisted sports clubs and community organisations in providing a network of high quality indoor and outdoor facilities for a wide range of sports and leisure activities.

In terms of multi-purpose centres available to the wider community, an increasing number of such complexes under the management of local authorities have been funded, particularly during the past couple of years. The availability of such facilities taken together with the range of programmes promoted and funded by the Irish Sports Council in the area of sport for children and young people should help broaden the range of opportunities available to all age groups to participate in sport and recreation according to individual needs in recreational as well as in competitive sports. In 2002 and 2003, a total of €15.7 million was allocated to such projects and a total of €33.7 million was made available to community type facilities.

A number of these centres are also providing swimming pools as part of the overall range of facilities and have also sought funding under the Department’s other capital scheme, the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme.

Over recent years the Department has allocated almost €267 million to over 3500 projects under the sports capital programme and has provided over €57 million under the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme.

CONCLUSION

This Chapter outlined an overview of the play opportunities currently available to children in a variety of different settings and circumstances. It points to the gaps that need to be filled and areas which require further development.

In developing play, the actions to be taken by a range of stakeholders must take account of the changing context of children's lives, the need to inform decision-making and the development of policies that take account of children's views and the diversity of experience in their lives. The objectives identified in Chapter One provide the framework for a plan of actions, which are set out in Chapter Three. These actions are derived from national and international experience, the most recent information on good practice and the views of children and adults in Ireland.

MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICE

NEW PLAY OPPORTUNITIES IN NEWBRIDGE, CO. KILDARE

Kildare County Council sought funding under the 2000 Programme of Sports Capital Funding from the Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation and was allocated £250,000 for the design and provision of a multi-playground, two all-weather pitches and additional car spaces. Suggestions came from local sporting organisations, KARE Disability Project, the Irish Wheelchair Association and local residents on the location, design and specifications for the project. Local residents and children were regularly updated on the project during its development phase.

The playground, which provides ten pieces of equipment in a space 26m x 24m cost €100,000, was opened to the public in June 2002. It is situated within the grounds of the sports centre and caters for children between the ages of 5 –10 years. Daily, weekly and monthly reports are compiled for the annual report, which is reviewed by an external safety consultant. The playground is opened by staff of the sports centre at 9.00am every morning and closes at either 5pm or 8pm, depending on the season. The playground is not supervised on an ongoing basis but spots checks are routinely carried out.

An evaluation of the playground project has found that:

- ✓ Some 89,000 people have come through the gates of the playground in the past year.
- ✓ One parent, usually the mother, accompanies an average of two children.
- ✓ The peak times are 3-5pm and 7-8pm.
- ✓ The off peak times are 12-2pm and 5-6.30pm.
- ✓ Most users came from Newbridge with others coming from Rathangan, Celbridge and Ballymore Eustace.
- ✓ The age profile of children using the playground ranges from 5-10 years.

Feedback from users found that:

- ✓ 89% were very happy with the safety aspects;
- ✓ 91% commented on the colourful, child-friendly design;
- ✓ 69% wanted more seating;
- ✓ 44% felt there should be more bins and
- ✓ 28% suggested increased provision for children over 10 years of age.

The first year of the new playground was very successful. The evaluation of the project points to:

- ✓ the need for a feasibility report on the provision of play activities for older children including skate parks and
- ✓ the importance of consultation with relevant interest groups, including children.



CHAPTER 3 Challenges and Solutions



CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS: THE CASE FOR BETTER PLAY

This chapter sets out a framework for action to meet the challenges identified in Chapter Two. It highlights the importance of children's participation in the overall process and describes ways in which the views of children can be taken into account. The principles underpinning this document are that all play initiatives must be child-centered, family-oriented, equitable,

inclusive, action-oriented and integrated. These principles are of particular importance in meeting the needs of children who are disadvantaged or marginalised. The need for a wide range of different environments for play is a reflection of the multi-dimensional nature of play. Integration, co-ordination and co-operation between voluntary, statutory and professional services are central to the delivery of high quality play services for children.

MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICE

WATERFORD SKATE PARK

Background

Waterford County Council became the first local authority in Ireland to provide an outdoor public skate park in the summer of 2002. The development of the skate park came about due to the demands of local children and also through public consultation with local councillors. The Park was seen as a response to what was perceived as 'nuisance skating' on the streets of the city and is one of the actions in the proposal to develop Waterford as a child-friendly city.

The project 'SK8 Park' was developed in consultation with representative groups of local skaters and BMX riders. Site visits were made to a number of skate parks to examine the issues to be addressed and identify good practice. The site chosen was an old car park in the grounds of the Regional Community Sports Complex. The Waterford Skate Park Club was formed in summer 2002.

Membership

Users of the skate park must join the Waterford Skate Park Club. The annual membership fee is just €5, which entitles the member to access to all of the skate park facilities. The application form must be signed by both the user and a parent or guardian. There is also the option of a 'Day Membership'. Each member has a laminated membership card which must be produced each time they use the park. The park is open to people of all ages and all areas and has

a strong social inclusion focus. There are currently 561 members of the club and day visitors come mainly from the Munster region. Most members are boys in the age range 8-18 years.

Facility Management

The skate park is run by the Skate Park Club, which is in the process of setting up a Committee comprised of young people and the Sports Development Officer, acting in an advisory capacity. The skate park is managed by a young person in his 20s, with an interest in BMXing. This person also provides ongoing daily supervision of the park. There is a forum for the users to communicate any ideas or concerns to the Sports Development Officer. The numbers in the park at any one time are limited through a point system to reduce the risk of accidents.

Insurance and Safety

The Skate Park is insured under Waterford City Council's insurance policy with Irish Public Bodies Mutual Insurance Ltd. In order to keep the young people safe, a rule requiring the wearing of helmets for over 16s and knee, elbow, wrist pads and a helmet for the under 16s is enforced. The equipment in the Park meets recognised safety standards. The Park is maintained to a high standard, with regular weekly inspections and cleaning to ensure it is free from obstacles. Any vandalism on the premises is reported.

'...every time I go out on my skateboard,
I hear someone shout "go skate somewhere else"
or "move it, I'm calling the Gardaí..." '



3

1. PARTICIPATION AND CHILDREN'S VIEWS

OBJECTIVE: To give children a voice in the design and implementation of play policies and facilities

There is a stated commitment in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) (Article 12) to the right of children to express an opinion on all matters which concern them and, further, that their views should be taken into account in any matter or procedure affecting them. This commitment is restated in the National Children's Strategy.

Concerns have been raised about the lack of children's input regarding planning and development of their own play spaces, activities and opportunities (NPI, 2002). Findings from research undertaken in London suggest that children have many useful ideas on neighbourhood renewal (Limb and Mathews, 2000). These findings also suggest that children's ideas differ fundamentally from those of adults involved. Significantly, children prioritised more play space and better city maintenance compared with parents who were more likely to prioritise security and traffic safety. There is little evidence that children's views are sought or considered in local development and planning.

The NPI (2000), for example, reports that literature from the disciplines of environmental psychology and geography highlights the marginalisation of children in the decision-making process. Further, they suggest that this can have adverse effects on their use of public space and this is a view supported by others (Webb and Associates, 1999; Stevenson et al., 2000). Young people have been found to express dissatisfaction with the token range of provision of play areas (Stevenson et al., 2000), while Webb and Associates, (1999) draw attention to a potential relationship between a lack of consultation with young people and subsequent boredom and resentment. This, in turn, they suggest may lead to vandalism of equipment at playgrounds. This point is reiterated by Cole-Hamilton and Gill (2002) who suggest that children will not use open access play provision if they do not like it.

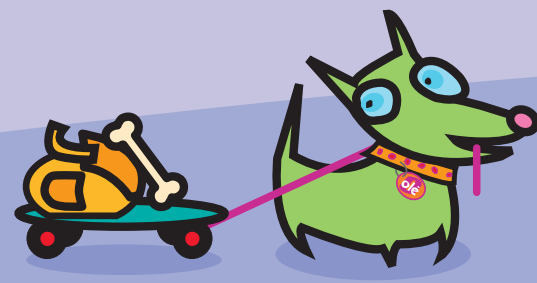
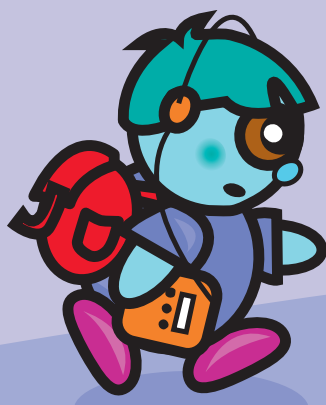
Ireland has committed to giving children a voice in matters that affect them, through its ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the National Children's Strategy. The development of play and recreation policies and facilities affect every child directly, and are opportunities to fully operationalise the goal of listening to and taking into account the views of children. It is equally important that children and young people are provided with opportunities to participate in the planning and development of policies and facilities in their local communities and nationally.

At national level, the National Children's Office has the lead role in encouraging Government Departments and State agencies to consult with, and encourage participation by children when drawing up policies relevant to them. The National Children's Office is currently involved with the End Child Poverty Coalition in drawing up guidelines for consulting with children and young people.

At a local level, it is important that local authorities and other public bodies consult with children and young people in the planning and development of play facilities. This will ensure that the facilities being provided will, as far as possible, match the wishes and aspirations of children, which will maximise the benefit of those facilities. As outlined in Chapter 2, the built environment also has a significant impact on children's play and, accordingly, consultation with children should be a standard process in the planning of other services and facilities. The majority of City/County Development Boards (CDBs) hold very effective Comhairle na nÓg (young people's councils), which allow for the participation of children and young people at local level. It is vitally important that local agencies and bodies, who are involved in development and planning, work with the relevant officers in CDBs to arrange consultations with young people through Comhairle na nÓg. Delegates from the Comhairle na nÓg are elected/selected to represent their local area at the annual, national Dáil na nÓg, which ensures that local issues become part of a national agenda.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

- 1 The National Children's Office will continue to drive the goal of the National Children's Strategy to encourage children's participation in decisions which affect them through the provision of information, guidelines and support.
- 2 As required by the National Children's Strategy, local authorities and other bodies in the public sector will put in place measures to achieve participation by children in matters that affect them, including the development of play policies and facilities and the planning and provision of other services which impact on children's opportunities to play.
- 3 The voluntary, community and private sectors will be encouraged to engage with children in the development of play facilities and play policies.



2. RAISING AWARENESS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY

OBJECTIVE: To raise awareness of the importance of play

Children play in the home more than in any other place, particularly in the early years of life. The home is generally the first play environment for young children, and parents can facilitate their play through providing opportunities to explore, experiment, learn new skills and grow in competence. As far back as 1977, Garvey wrote about the need for a diversity of types of play as well as a broad range of resources for play, to meet the needs of the developing child. Outdoor activities like splashing in water, digging, climbing and planting can provide good opportunities for physical activity, talking and listening.

The adult's role in play has been outlined by Fernie (2003 p3) who sets out the following guidelines:

- ✓ Value children's play and talk to children about their play. Adults often say 'I like the way you're working' but rarely, 'I like the way you're playing';
- ✓ Play with children when it is appropriate, especially during the early years. If adults pay attention to and engage in children's play, children get the message that play is valuable;
- ✓ Create a playful atmosphere. It is important for adults to provide materials which children can explore and adopt in play;
- ✓ When play appears to be stuck or unproductive, offer a new prop, suggest new roles or provide new experiences, such as a field trip;
- ✓ Intervene to ensure safe play. Even in older children's play, social conflicts often occur when children try to negotiate. Adults can help when children cannot solve these conflicts by themselves;
- ✓ Adults should identify play which has led to problems for particular children;
- ✓ They should check materials and equipment for safety;
- ✓ They should make children aware of any hidden risks in physical challenges they set for themselves.

The attitude of the parent has been identified as *'the single most important factor in determining the quality and quantity of children's play activities in the early years'* (Canadian Parks and Recreation Association 2002 p3). The education of parents and other adults in the importance of play for children is critical to this policy. Some progress has been made in promoting play by the non-government organisation Súgradh, which has a website dedicated to the issue of play (www.playireland.ie).

2004 is the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. The National Children's Office will use the opportunity to liaise with the Family Support Agency to promote awareness within families of the value of play, and to develop a partnership with families to promote children's play.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

- 4 The Health Promotion Unit will continue to avail of opportunities in the context of programme development to promote the importance of play and physical activity in children's lives.
- 5 The National Children's Office will work in partnership with the Health Promotion Unit, the Health Boards, and other relevant statutory and voluntary agencies to promote play.
- 6 The National Children's Office will disseminate research findings about children's play.
- 7 The National Children's Office will liaise with the Family Support Agency to develop opportunities in 2004, the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, to promote the importance of play.

'...builders must provide more space for a park and supply access to transport...'



3

MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICE

AG SUGRADH LE CHÉILE (PLAYING TOGETHER)

Background

This is a workshop promoting play with parents and children together. Parent tutors from the North Western Health Board's parenting programme Fás le Chéile were trained to deliver workshops with parents and children (4-7 years) in primary schools incorporating traditional, playground and co-operative games.

Aim of the Programme

To promote active play as vital to children's healthy development – physically, emotionally, socially and intellectually.

Objectives

- ✓ To increase the active play levels of children through the promotion of active play with parents and their children.
- ✓ To support family-based activity by promoting parents involvement in their children's development through active play.
- ✓ To revive many of the traditional games which are no longer played by children.
- ✓ To support schools to work in partnership with parents.

Progress January 2002– June 2003

- ✓ Workshop developed promoting active play for parents with their children using traditional, playground and co-operative games.
- ✓ 30 tutors trained to deliver the workshop throughout the region.

- ✓ 90 Workshops held in schools attended by approx 1,300 parents with their children.
- ✓ Monitoring of feedback from parents, teachers and tutors.
- ✓ Initial workshop delivered to preschool leaders.
- ✓ Links with Local Sports Partnerships established.
- ✓ Materials being developed with children of traditional games.

What parents have said that they have learnt in the workshops:

'I enjoyed seeing my child enjoy it so much. I think she was proud of having someone there. It was nice to be part of her school group and meet other parents.'

'That you don't have to be 5 years old or have expensive toys to play and have fun'

'To take time to play with my child'

'It brought back a lot of games and ideas we used to play that are a lot more enjoyable than playing with some toy'

Future Plans

- ✓ Follow-on course being developed to enhance the skills of parents.
- ✓ Materials published for the workshop.
- ✓ Programme delivered in schools throughout the region linked with the Health Promoting School.
- ✓ Evaluation of the workshops undertaken.
- ✓ Develop programme for parents of preschool children linked with the Buntús Start programme being piloted in 2003/4 in Sligo and Donegal.

3. CREATING A CHILD-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT

OBJECTIVE: To ensure that children's play needs are met through the development of a child-friendly environment

Issues of safety have led to increasingly restrictive play opportunities for children. Research in this area was carried out by Hood in 2001. Although a number of issues emerged including the threat of strangers, environmental pollution and bullying, fears about road safety was the most prominent issue.

In the light of the statistics quoted in Chapter 2 about traffic casualties and fatalities, it is not surprising that concerns have been raised by parents and others about the danger to children from increased volumes of traffic. Matthews and Limb (2000), reporting on a study of young persons views on their environment, found that the danger from traffic was perceived by young people to be greater than that of bullies, gangs, strangers or fear of attack.

In the Irish context, Webb and Associates (1999), report that cars now dominate the spaces where children could once play safely. In the United Kingdom, the NPI (2002 p35) reported that fears about children's safety, especially the dangers posed by traffic, 'have resulted in children's independent mobility and their opportunities for free play being restricted'. This, they suggest, is evidenced by the increasing tendency of parents to escort their children to and from structured and

supervised activities. Play opportunities are under threat and one of the greatest threats is road traffic (Cole-Hamilton and Gill, 2002).

In recognition of these difficulties, many countries have created safe spaces for children to play. Home Zones, which originated in Holland more than thirty years ago, aim to create streets where children can play safely and where cars travel at less than 10 miles per hour (Coalter and Taylor, 2001). These zones have also been developed in Austria, Denmark and Germany (Stevenson et al., 2000). Home Zones are not the same as traffic calming measures or restricted speed zones. They usually include other play-friendly features, including seating and other street furniture as well as play areas. In addition, an internationally recognised street sign has been created and shows a walker, a child with a ball, a house and a distant car.

In the United Kingdom, traffic calming measures have been introduced and have been found to result in many demonstrable benefits. The introduction of 20 mph/hour speed limit zones reduced child bicycle injuries by almost half and reduced pedestrian fatal road traffic accidents by more than 70 percent (Nicholson and Vincenten, 2002). A number of other initiatives have been developed elsewhere. In Edinburgh, for example, 'safer routes to school' have been developed. These include a number of low-cost measures which aim to maximise safety and include cycle training for children, minor junction improvements and the development of school crossing routes (Stevenson et al., 2000).

In the United Kingdom, information from the National Playing Fields Association suggests that over the last twenty years playing space for children has been greatly reduced (NPI, 2002). A growing literature suggests that formal playgrounds are only one of a number of areas where children choose to play. The NPI (2002), for example, conclude that areas which facilitate the highest range of play activity and satisfaction are those with footpath networks, cul-de-sac layouts, public open spaces as well as play areas. This is supported by others who identify green spaces, such as parks and trees, streets and facilities that were open and visible as being preferable for children (Matthews and Limb, 2000; Coalter and Taylor, 2001). The importance of landscaping in providing visually-attractive public areas than can stimulate new play opportunities for children should not be overlooked. This approach can build on the natural landscape of a locality or compensate for lost natural habitats through landscape design. Nevertheless, the low ratio of playgrounds to population is a matter of concern in the Irish context. The relative scarcity of these amenities has been highlighted in Chapter 2.

It has been argued that a lack of appropriate and accessible play space has constricted children's activity and this is a major problem for public health. The CPC (2002) identify poor spaces, public policies and planning practices, public attitudes to children and young people and broader social changes as all infringing on children's activity. Cole-Hamilton and Gill (2002) note that children want exciting and challenging play opportunities with some degree of risk and this can be problematic for adults who may have concerns about liability or safety. Others support this position and Davis and Jones (1997, p351) are particularly critical of the decreasing opportunities for children to engage in physical activities. They write that there is '*an inescapable paradox apparent in the exhortations by health educators to children, on the one hand, to keep healthy, fit and active and yet, on the other to keep safe and avoid risks.*'

In general, where the play needs of children have been acknowledged, it has been considered sufficient to provide playgrounds and play areas in parks and amenity spaces. Most parks are flat green spaces which are suitable for ball games but not for a wider range of play and games. Play and recreation have been considered primarily to be an issue for younger children. However, the understanding of play and recreation is evolving to include children up to the age of 18 years and to include the entirety of the child's environment and not just those physical spaces allocated to play. Play and recreation take place in housing estates, on the roads and pathways around children's homes and schools, and around all the buildings and spaces in the locality, and not just in spaces which have been earmarked to be child-friendly. A key issue in the expansion and development of play opportunities for children is promoting an understanding of the implications for children's play in the design of the wider environment.

CHILD-FRIENDLY CITIES

At the UN Special Session for Children held on 8 May, 2002, the issue of child-friendly cities was addressed, in the context of working to fulfill the rights of children. At that session, Mayors acting as spokespersons for children's rights called for:

- ✓ Mayors and local authorities all over the world to develop action plans for their cities to become child-friendly and protective of children's rights;
- ✓ Mayors and local authorities to promote the participation of children and adolescents as actors of change in the decision-making processes in their cities and in the process of implementation and evaluation of municipal policies;
- ✓ UNICEF, UN-HABITAT and other partners to continue to promote child-friendly cities all over the world and to enhance capacity building of local authorities towards this end.

The Mayors committed to:

- ✓ Advancing a global network of Mayors promoting child-friendly cities;
- ✓ Promoting the exchange of information, experiences and best practices at the local level and calling on UNICEF through the Child-Friendly Cities Secretariat to make them widely available;
- ✓ Reaffirming the responsibility of Mayors and local authorities as advocates for children to promote respect for children's rights, including by parents and teachers.

(UNICEF, 2002)

UNICEF states there is no single definition of an ideal child-friendly city. In some contexts there is an emphasis on recreation areas, parks, green spaces and controlling traffic in order to make safer streets for young citizens. In other less developed countries, the focus is on increasing access to basic services for the poor. In many cases, a conscious attempt has been made to adopt a child rights framework for identifying activities and for monitoring progress (UNICEF, 2001). One of the key elements of child-friendly cities is the opportunity for children to be consulted on matters that affect them, an issue which has already been dealt with in Objective 1. A related key element is that the definition of a child-friendly environment should come from children.

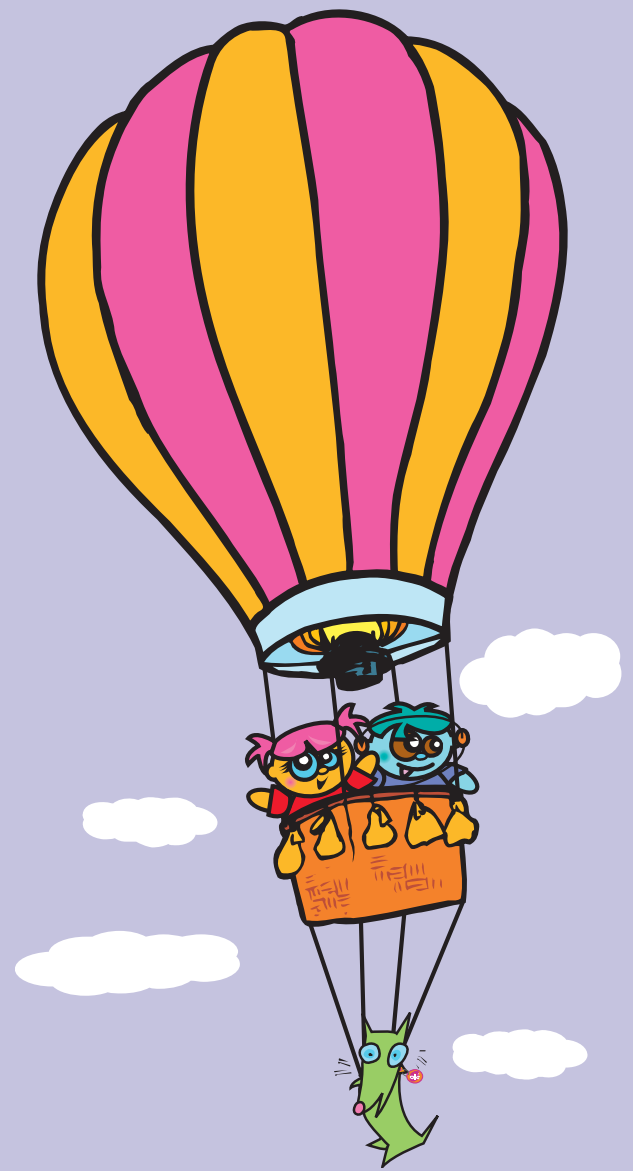
A number of European countries are aspiring to the creation of effective child-friendly cities, primarily through the coordinated activity of the Mayors and local authorities of cities. In France the Association of French Mayors promotes this ethic in partnership with the French committee for UNICEF, while in Italy the Ministry for the Environment initiated such a project in 1996. Similar initiatives are taking place in Spain, Germany and Sweden. There are two such projects in Ireland, driven by individual local authorities. A preparatory report was commissioned for Galway City in 2001 and Drogheda Town Council undertook preparatory work in 2002. Many other local authorities are taking actions to deal with traffic calming and safe routes to school but without the overall stated strategic goal of creating a child-friendly environment.



3

PROPOSED ACTIONS

- 8 The National Children's Office will liaise with local authorities and the Department of Transport to establish a pilot scheme of 'Home Zones', where the living environment predominates over traffic.
- 9 Local authorities, the Department of Transport and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government will continue to invest in the development in footpaths, cycleways and traffic-calming measures in line with government commitments in relation to the national network of cycleways and provision of new footpaths.
- 10 The *Development Plan Guidelines for Planning Authorities* currently being developed by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government will refer to children's play in the context of community facilities.
- 11 Each City/County Development Board will prepare a co-ordinated multi-agency County Play Plan, in consultation with children and communities, for improved play facilities. This plan will take account of the changing play needs of children as they age.
- 12 The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government will continue to issue guidelines to local authorities on specific areas/topics, having regard to the need to develop child-friendly environments.
- 13 The use of creative landscaping by local authorities and others will be promoted as a means of providing new play opportunities for children.



MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICE

SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

Developing safe routes to school is an essential element of a child-friendly environment. Some local authorities, notably Dublin City Council with the Office of the Director of Traffic and Bray Urban District Council, are making steady progress on this issue.

In the UK, *sustrans* - the sustainable transport charity - works on practical projects to encourage people to walk, cycle and use public transport in order to reduce motor traffic and its adverse effects. Their website provides valuable assistance to schools, local authorities, parents and consultants to develop strategies for reducing car use and improving safety on the school journey. They refer to school travel plans in an information sheet, describing these plans in terms of improving health, broadening education and combating exclusion. They point to schools as being central to developing these plans in co-operation with their local authority. Each School Travel plan should include the following:

- 1 Introduction;
- 2 Brief description of the school;
- 3 Evidence of consultation;

- 4 Summary of school's transport and road safety problem;
- 5 Proposed initiatives with objectives and targets;
- 6 Programme for implementation;
- 7 Plans for monitoring and review.

sustrans suggest that the School Travel plan can help:

- ✓ Demonstrate the school's commitment to environmental and community concerns;
- ✓ Attract funds towards safe routes and for school initiatives;
- ✓ Attract pupils (better ethos, safer and more convenient journeys);
- ✓ Promote school travel issues with parents, pupils and staff;
- ✓ Improve chances of planning consent for further school development;
- ✓ Provide a framework for curriculum links particularly under citizenship, sustainable development and health and safety.

For more information: www.sustrans.co.uk

4. MAXIMISING THE RANGE OF PUBLIC PLAY OPPORTUNITIES

OBJECTIVE: To maximise the range of public play opportunities available to children, particularly children who are marginalised or disadvantaged or who have a disability

Chapter 2 sets out the current position in relation to public play facilities in Ireland. There are significant variations in the provision of play facilities across the country, and it appears that the standards set out in *A Parks Policy for Local Authorities*, referred to earlier, for public and amenity areas are not generally being

reached. However, it is acknowledged that some local authorities are making significant progress in relation to developing play policies and opportunities in their functional areas.

As set out in Chapter 2, many local authorities have not yet designated officers for the development of play and recreation, although this is a requirement under the National Children's Strategy. Some authorities have produced, or are in the process of producing, play policies, but significant variations exist in their scope and content. Progress should be made on this issue without delay.

MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICE

THE PLAYGROUND AT JOBSTOWN – A BRIEF ANALYSIS

Prior to the development of Jobstown playground there was no such facility available free of charge to children in the locality. Indeed if parents wanted to bring their children to a playground they had to travel by bus to either Corkagh Park in Clondalkin, or Tymon Park in Tallaght. This meant that access to any kind of play facility was sporadic at best.

When considering the development of a playground, consultation is vital. This will provide you with information on potential users, accessibility in terms of geographical location, other groups who are working in the community and could provide you with the critical insights. This also lends itself to the partnership approach and led, in the case of Jobstown, to the establishment of a very effective partnership between South Dublin County Council and the Jobstown Community Development Project (CDP).

As a result of this partnership, the Council provides expertise in design and construction, as well as the responsibility for maintenance of the equipment and other physical elements, such as boundary fences, seating and planting. The Council is also responsible for insuring the facility, as it is located on an area of public open space. The Jobstown CDP is responsible for administering the staff in terms of wages training and development.

Given the nature of the area and our experience with other playgrounds, the importance of permanent supervision cannot be overstated. It is true to say that the playground would not survive without its supervisors. In Jobstown we have two full-time supervisors who are responsible for enforcing the rules of the playground, carrying out daily safety checks on all items of equipment, and liaising with the Council and CDP on a regular basis. These are their official duties, but the reality is that their job is far more than enforcement. They must know and understand the children, they communicate with the parents and their very presence on site instils confidence in the facility and demonstrates the serious commitment of all involved in its management.

The funding of the playground at Jobstown has been a constant challenge. The initial funding was provided by

the EU URBAN Initiative following consultation with local residents. This funding was supplemented by South Dublin County Council during the construction phase with help from Cement Roadstone Holdings, who donated the stone for the base. An additional sum for the provision of new equipment and repairs has been included in the Council's estimates, and this will be the case into the future.

In the first year and a half the funding for the playground supervisors came as a result of a generous donation from the Society of the St. Vincent de Paul. At present, the two staff members are funded by donations from developers involved in housing construction in the area. The monies involved are administered by the Jobstown CDP, who is responsible for paying the staff.

South Dublin County Council's Parks & Landscape Services Department have recently produced a comprehensive report on Jobstown Playground. The report includes a description of consultation that was carried out by the CDP in Jobstown Playground, in which both parents and children were asked for their views on all aspects of the facility. The results of this consultation will form the basis of the ongoing development both in terms of the physical infrastructure and management. Part of the consultation process involved an analysis of usage patterns, peak demand times, ages and demographic profiles.

The issue of liability is one that arises whenever the provision of a playground is discussed. In the case of Jobstown, the Council carries the liability for the facility as it is situated on an area of public open space. All of the equipment is manufactured and constructed to the highest EU standards, it is also checked regularly, and records are kept by the playground supervisors. In the almost two years of its operation there has only been one claim associated with the playground, and in that case the incident took place when an individual was trying to gain access to the facility when it was closed. The rules for the use of the playground are clearly on display at all times including the opening and closing times. Through all of these factors, and most particularly through the element of supervision that exists at Jobstown, the liability issue is minimised.

Ruairí Ó Dúlaing,
Acting Senior Executive Parks Superintendent.

3

GUIDELINES ON THE CONTENT OF A PLAY POLICY

A play policy for a public body should include the following:

- ✓ Vision Statement
- ✓ Play Values – right to play
- ✓ Existing Services and Provision
 - ☆ Responsibilities, aims and objectives, how they are provided
- ✓ Service Delivery
 - ☆ Types of play settings: open space hierarchy, child-friendly town/city, supervised play areas, holiday play schemes
- ✓ Statements of Intent
 - ☆ Quality standards
 - ☆ Accessibility: disabled, special needs, minority ethnic communities, disadvantaged, isolated
 - ☆ Quality indicators for play
 - ☆ Consultation: community, parents, children
 - ☆ Training
 - ☆ Range of play opportunities
 - ☆ Partnership – statutory, voluntary sectors
 - ☆ Environmental play
 - ☆ Fixed equipment playgrounds – Standards, design, installation, age segregation, maintenance schedules, records, procedures, staff responsibilities, independent annual inspection

Drawn from Belfast City Council (2001) Play Policy

The difficulties faced by community groups in accessing insurance were repeatedly referred to in the consultation process. Progress in this area in the short term, might involve the adoption of a flexible approach by local authorities to taking responsibility for the insurance and maintenance of such facilities, subject to adherence to standards and guidelines.

At a national level, there is considerable merit in developing some state-of-the-art playgrounds in a number of areas of large population and/or of disadvantage, with a view to developing innovation and best practice.

During the consultation process, reference was made to the fact that school buildings are rarely used outside school hours. The use of school buildings, playgrounds and facilities could provide enormous opportunities in developing play and recreation in local communities. In view of the scarcity of land and the high cost of building, the use of schools as a community resource is an issue which should be further examined.

The public library service provides an additional gateway to indoor play opportunities. In addition to the range of books, CDs, videos and DVDs available, many libraries build in opportunities for creativity and imagination through children's storytime, arts and crafts events and workshops aimed to open up a wider world of dance, music, drama and language. This makes the local library a lively and fun place that caters for children of all ages.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

- 14 City/County Development Boards will carry out an assessment, to include disability access, of play facilities in each local authority area identifying the level, range and standard of public and community play facilities available to children of all ages, and will advertise the availability of these facilities.
- 15 Local authorities will, as far as possible, pursue the policy objectives set out in "A Parks Policy for Local Authorities" (1987) in relation to standards for provision of play facilities and amenity and recreation areas.
- 16 The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government will review and update the Parks Policy of 1987 in the light of this policy.
- 17 As required by the National Children's Strategy, all local authorities will designate an officer to be responsible for the development of play and recreation activity, to oversee implementation of the County Play Plan and to promote and co-ordinate multi-agency activity.
- 18 Local authorities will prepare a local play policy in consultation with children and other stakeholders.
- 19 Local authorities may consider, resources permitting, taking on the insurance and maintenance of community play facilities, subject to satisfying themselves that appropriate standards and guidelines have been adhered to.
- 20 The National Children's Office, in association with relevant agencies, will pursue the development of pilot projects in play facilities to develop best practice and innovation.
- 21 The National Children's Office, in partnership with the Department of Education and Science, will conduct a feasibility study on the potential for making school buildings available to communities for play and recreation purposes.
- 22 The public library service will continue to act as a gateway to the world of knowledge for children and to stimulate their minds and imagination.



4.1 ENSURING SOCIAL INCLUSION IN PUBLICLY-FUNDED PLAY

Chapter 2 set out current play provision in Ireland, and made specific reference to the needs of the following marginalised children:

- ✓ Children from low income families;
- ✓ Traveller children;
- ✓ Children from an ethnic minority group;
- ✓ Children living in emergency accommodation (due to the family being homeless);
- ✓ Children from refugee families;
- ✓ Children with disabilities; and
- ✓ Children living in rural areas.

The Equal Status Act, 2000 prohibits discrimination in the provision of goods and services. The Act also requires reasonable accommodation of people with disabilities. It permits positive action in favour of members of specified groups who have experienced discrimination in the past. The Equality Authority (2003) suggests that in order to ensure social inclusion and acknowledge diversity, there are five areas for inclusion in a play policy:

- 1 Children are diverse;
- 2 Children come from diverse family backgrounds;
- 3 If children play together it can help overcome prejudice and discrimination in the future;
- 4 Play can also model a more diversity-friendly future;
- 5 If children play together, their carers/parents may also begin to socialise together, thus overcoming prejudice and discrimination more immediately.

The needs of children with disabilities have been identified as a challenge to be addressed in this policy. A comprehensive review of play activities for non-able-bodied children was commissioned by the National Disability Authority and was undertaken by Súgradh. The report was published in November 2003 and incorporates the concept of *Universal Design*. *Universal Design* has been defined by the Council of Europe (2001) as 'a strategy which aims to make the design and composition of different environments and products accessible and understandable to, as well as usable by, everyone, to the greatest extent in the most independent and natural manner possible, without the need for adaptation or specialised design solutions.'

The principles of Universal Design are

- 1 **EQUITABLE USE:** the design does not disadvantage or stigmatise any group of users.
- 2 **FLEXIBILITY IN USE:** The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.
- 3 **SIMPLE, INTUITIVE USE:** Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experiences, knowledge, language skills or current concentration level.
- 4 **PERCEPTIBLE INFORMATION:** the design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient condition or the user's sensory abilities.
- 5 **TOLERANCE FOR ERROR:** The design minimises hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.

- 6 **LOW PHYSICAL EFFORT:** the design can be used efficiently and comfortably, and with a minimum of fatigue.
- 7 **SIZE AND SPACE FOR APPROACH AND USE:** Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation and use regardless of the user's body size, posture or mobility.

Source: *Centre for Universal Design (1997)*

Play and the constructive use of play time is an important diversionary measure in juvenile justice initiatives. In this regard, account should be taken of the approach in the Children Act, 2001 where there is a strong emphasis on prevention and early intervention and on community-based measures for dealing with young offenders. A national play infrastructure, which increases the social and recreation opportunities for vulnerable and troubled children, would support diversion programmes.

This play policy is rooted in the principles of equality and integration. Play provision at local level should seek as far as possible to take account of the relative disadvantage of marginalised children, and through its play provision to move towards greater social inclusion.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

- 23 All new and redeveloped local authority play facilities will be developed to be accessible in accordance with Universal Design Principles and best practice.
- 24 City/County Development Boards will identify the range of actions necessary to support the play activities of children from marginalised groups.
- 25 The National Children's Office will liaise with local authorities to pilot the use of accessible playbuses to bring play opportunities to children in rural areas, such buses to be staffed by playworkers.
- 26 The Office for Social Inclusion and the National Children's Office will work together to promote awareness of the play needs of children from low income families through the Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network which is administered by the Combat Poverty Agency.



MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICE

BED AND BREAKFAST PLAY PROGRAMME

The Ana Liffey Children's Project provides services to the families and children of drug abusing adults. The aim of this flagship project is to promote and support good parenting and improve the quality of life of children whose parents use drugs. The outreach programme was developed as a response to the fact that a high number of families attending the Ana Liffey Drug Project were residing in temporary accommodation. Such accommodation was/is having a significant impact on child development such as on school attendance, health, security and stability. However, the Children's Project decided to focus its energies on offering direct play experiences to children residing in temporary accommodation.

Play is essential for child development. Its importance in the development of cognitive, social and emotional development has been noted by a number of experts in the child care field. In fact, Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has "acknowledged the necessity of play in becoming a really human child" The article also states that all children have a right to engage in leisure, play and recreational activities.

The Ana Liffey Children's Project made a decision to put this article into action by offering play opportunities to children residing in bed and breakfast accommodation. Since February 2001, the project has provided 206 play sessions to over 170 children residing in three bed and breakfast establishments. Each session is managed by two child care professionals, with expertise in working with children from marginalised backgrounds. A typical session would involve up to eight children participating in individual and group play. The programme is targeted at children in the 2 – 10 years age range with the hope of expanding it to include older children. As professionals, we are aware of the impact of homelessness on child development and self-esteem. We utilise the medium of play to help children manage the impact of exclusion of their lives. We also support parents through advice and linking them with relevant services.

The costs of the programme are met from the general budget allocated to the Children's Project. The Children's Project is funded by the Northern Area Health Board (Child and Families section) and the North Inner City Drugs Taskforce.

4.2 PLAY IN CHILDCARE SETTINGS

The National Childcare Strategy (1998) endorses the importance of play in the early childhood education and care of children. It identifies play-based programmes as one of the critical features of effective early childhood programmes (Page 53). The importance of play in children's lives has been increasingly endorsed in various policy initiatives supporting the development of the childcare sector.

The Child Care (Pre-School) Regulations (1996), as amended, are currently being reviewed by a Working Group under the aegis of the Department of Health and Children. It is hoped that the revised regulations will adopt the Whole Child Perspective approach set out in the National Children's Strategy. While the existing regulations acknowledge the importance of play in child development, it is recommended that this be further developed. The Model Framework for Education Training and Professional Development in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector referred to in Chapter 2 acknowledges the importance of the development of skills within childcare in the area of education and play, including

- ✓ theories and processes of learning in early childhood;
- ✓ approaches to curriculum for early childhood;
- ✓ processes involved in curriculum and
- ✓ the role and importance of play (page 13).

The Childcare Facilities: Guidelines for Planning Authorities issued by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government make specific reference to outdoor play facilities in childcare settings but, as pointed out in Chapter 2, over 20% of childcare facilities still do not have outdoor play areas. Monitoring of compliance with any conditions attached to planning permission for childcare facilities is a matter for the individual planning authorities. The ongoing development of this sector can contribute positively to provision of quality play opportunities for young children.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

- 27 The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education will address the importance of play in developing quality standards in early childhood care and education.
- 28 The revised Child Care (Pre-school) Regulations will have a greater emphasis on the importance of play in child development.
- 29 Local authorities will monitor compliance with "Childcare Facilities: Guidelines for Planning Authorities" (2001) to ensure that outdoor play facilities are provided in all new facilities.



4.3 THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY IN SCHOOLS

There has been an increasing focus on the benefits of early education and on play as the way children learn in the early years. School is the place where children spend a significant amount of their time, yet for many children play is limited to designated break time. Play assists children in adjusting to the school environment. Playground games are equally important to learning. Break time has been described as the 'extended classroom' in which children can learn important social skills (Pellegrini & Blatchford, 2002). Children are walking to and from school less, so the school playground is increasingly important both for exercise and as a venue to develop friendships and peer interaction. At the beginning of the school year, play is the shared interest that assists children to get to know each other. Break time also provides respite from the cognitive demands of the classroom and has been shown to improve children's attentive capacity on their return to the classroom learning.



However new challenges are being faced in schools concerning playtime. In some schools in the UK certain games such as football, skipping or conkers have been banned due to fears of injury. In the US, play at recess is banned altogether in Atlanta and new schools are being built without playgrounds (Miller Rubin, 2001).

Given the limited playground space in some schools, innovative thinking and a commitment to the importance of play will be required to ensure that children's play needs are met.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

- 30 The Department of Education and Science will issue a circular to all primary schools reminding them of the requirement to ensure an interval of 30 minutes for recreation.
- 31 The Schools Modernisation Plan will have regard to the provision of safe play areas in schools.
- 32 The Department of Education and Science will request Boards of Management to include a statement about the value of play and enhanced opportunities for play as part of their overall school plan.
- 33 Teacher training will continue to promote the benefits of play both in the schoolyard and in the classroom.

MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICE

THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY IN SCHOOL

A dream came true for the boys of St.Vincent's infant school in Dublin's North William Street when work finished on their new play area. St.Vincent's Infant Boy's School is situated on the banks of the Royal Canal in Dublin's North Inner City. Designated as disadvantaged, the school is involved in a number of extra initiatives in its efforts to meet the needs of its pupils: 'Breaking The Cycle' Disadvantaged Scheme, Home School Community Liaison scheme and the Support teacher.

However, despite the benefit these initiatives have brought to the school, parents and teachers had been concerned for many years about the limited play opportunities available to the pupils. The school's small enclosed north-facing concrete yard space offered little to fire a young boy's imagination. Of necessity, activities at play time in the yard were restricted and limited to what was safe.

Teachers were forced to reward children for waiting in line to have a 'go' with a ball or bat when all our training told us that young children need a safe, stimulating environment in which to play, explore, and learn. This is particularly relevant in the case of St.Vincent's where a recent study on the pupils attending indicated 50% of pupils presenting signs of acute emotional/ psychological distress.

After many unsuccessful proposals to a variety of agencies to improve the yard, the school was finally successful with an application to a company in the Financial Services Centre. Our need matched the company's desire to make a contribution to the area in which they were located.

A landscape architect was engaged to oversee the project, which began with a parents/ pupils/ teachers brainstorming session. Our ideas of spacemen, pirates, scary animals, climbing frames, slides, sand area, play house, seating area and a giant snakes and ladders game all appeared on the plan. The children's space pictures were worked into a magnificent tile mosaic by teams of company workers and parents under the direction of two artists. A crane was hired to hoist the pirate ship and climbing frame. Some April showers delayed the laying of the soft surface, but finally, with the painting of some walls and the addition of shrubs and trees, our dreams became a reality.

All that remained was to e-mail the sponsoring company with the reaction of the boys.

One word 'deadly' said it all!

4.4 PLAY IN HOSPITAL AND OTHER HEALTH SETTINGS

The value of play for children in hospital is commonly viewed as an intrinsic part of their care and treatment. According to Children in Hospital Ireland (2002) the provision of play:

- ✓ Provides a normalising experience in a stressful environment;
- ✓ Increases each child's ability to cope with illness and hospital and helps them understand their illness and treatment;
- ✓ Helps a child to regain confidence, independence and self-esteem;
- ✓ Promotes normal development and meets developmental goals;
- ✓ Regains skills lost through the effects of illness and hospitalisation;
- ✓ Reduces stress and anxiety and provides an outlet for feelings of anger and frustration; and
- ✓ Encourages parental involvement in their child's care and play and relieves parental anxiety and stress.

Despite these obvious benefits, the provision of play for children in Irish hospitals is largely volunteer-led and the number of dedicated Hospital Play Specialists currently employed fall short of the recommended level as discussed in Chapter 2.

Aside from a lack of trained Hospital Play Specialists, play facilities in Irish hospitals often operate without dedicated funding for resources and equipment and rely solely on fund-raising activities and charitable donations (The Association for the Welfare of Children in Hospital, 1993). Furthermore, the focus on play in Irish hospitals often gives low priority to certain areas such as the Accident and Emergency Department and the Out-Patients Department. Play opportunities also exclude certain vulnerable groups of child patients, such as children in isolation and adolescents, and often fails to recognise that 'children's play needs are not restricted to mornings or to a nine-to-five, five-day-week schedule' (Children in Hospital Ireland 2002). In several Irish hospitals, play facilities are not accessible at weekends and evenings. While there are no Hospital Play Specialist training courses in the Republic of Ireland, since 1997 a number of students from the Republic of Ireland have successfully trained and qualified as Hospital Play Specialists in the East Antrim Institute for Further and Higher Education.

Article 7 of the Charter for Children in Hospital (Alderson 1993) was adopted by the European Association for Children in Hospital in 1998 to ensure that **'children shall have full opportunity for play, recreation and education suited to their age and condition and shall be in an environment designed, furnished, staffed and equipped to meet their needs.'** Implementation of this provision is progressed in Ireland by Children in Hospital Ireland in association with the Department of Health and Children and the regional health authorities. Funding was provided by the Eastern Regional Health Authority and the National Lottery to support Children in Hospital Play Days organised by CHI in collaboration with the Irish Association of Hospital Play Staff to highlight and promote the benefits of structured hospital play in hospitals around the country.

The need for play facilities arises not only in acute hospital settings, but also in other locations where children attend or access health and related services, including health centres and child and adolescent psychiatric units. The benefits of play identified by Children in Hospital Ireland also apply to children in residential, foster-care and social services settings. For children experiencing trauma or stress, play can provide opportunities to relax or work through fears and concerns in a safe environment. The play needs of children in palliative care or other traumatic circumstances must also be addressed. These play facilities should have a particular focus on the principle of inclusiveness, one of the guiding principles in this policy, and recognise that they are required to serve children with a variety of abilities and disabilities, both intellectual and physical, and covering a range of ages from infant to adolescent. The need for play facilities to be accessible in the evenings and at weekends should be considered, as well as the need to provide play opportunities for siblings and the children of patients and other clients. The scope for adopting a partnership approach to cover the costs of provision and maintenance of equipment should be examined in the development of options to support play in healthcare settings.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

- 34 The implementation of the recommendations in the Children in Hospital Ireland Report (The Association for the Welfare of children in hospital, 1993) in relation to play will be actively pursued by the Department of Health and Children and other agencies, including Health Boards. [See Appendix 3 for details].
- 35 The development of recognised courses for Hospital Play Specialists in third level institutions in the Republic will be pursued.
- 36 The rehabilitative and therapeutic value of play in a range of healthcare and social services settings will be identified and promoted by Health Boards.
- 37 Public health care settings accessed by children will be designed to be child-friendly.



MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICE

MEETING CHILDREN'S PLAY NEEDS IN A HOSPITAL ENVIRONMENT

The Children's Ark in the Mid-Western Regional hospital caters for children aged from 4 days to 16 years and includes a playroom that boasts an enclosed courtyard playground. The unit is dedicated to the care of Paediatric in-patients with a capacity of 53 inpatient beds and 4 day beds and is a discreet unit within a regional hospital. It was officially commissioned in 2000. The unit includes a dedicated day unit for children with cystic fibrosis.

The post of Hospital Play Specialist was created in September 2001 following funding from the Department of Health and Children. The role of the Play Specialist in a hospital is that of facilitator and communicator. The language used by children is that of play. It is here that the trained individual can assess a child's degree of anxiety and trauma. By facilitating understanding through preparation, a Hospital Play Specialist can alleviate emotional trauma. Through training and experience in child development, the specialist can observe and assess any anxieties a child may be trying to hide.

Preparation involves the following stages:

- ✓ Finding out what the patient /child knows.
- ✓ Giving age-appropriate and factual information.
- ✓ Reinforcing through play, picking up misconceptions, and encouraging questions
- ✓ Post-procedural play and discussion

In the Children's Ark, play is facilitated by the play specialist and assisted by a team of 6 trainee community workers. These are a group who are employed by FÁS on a community employment scheme and are sponsored for this work by *Children in Hospital Ireland*. Their role in this hospital is to co-ordinate play for children in any department where children are cared for and to prepare both children and families for difficult and sometimes unpleasant procedures. This activity is also supported by a team of 36 volunteers from *Children in Hospital, Ireland*. This multi-disciplinary group works to facilitate the children's play activities, ensuring that the hospitalised child is provided with a safe, stimulating play area to assist in normalising a sometimes boring, other times traumatic hospital stay.

The Ark Playroom has become a centre for socialisation and play, providing a welcome diversion for the children from the experience of being ill, being separated from parents and siblings and in need of specialised healthcare. The ethos of the playroom is that the space is their domain, the children are allowed the freedom to decide what they want to do: this provides a valuable counterbalance to the sometimes strict regime of medical assessment and routine ward activity.

The Play Specialist works closely with the medical staff as part of a team, to meet each child's physical, social and emotional health needs during their stay in hospital. The ethos in the whole department contributes to presenting a non-scary atmosphere for the children. This is achieved by not wearing white coats and conventional uniforms. Nursing staff often have to work around children's toys and activities to carry out routine nursing procedures.

The large playroom is well placed, located as it is at the centre of the children's unit. The playroom, which has a large landscaped outdoor play area directly outside it, is open from 9.45am – 5.45pm. The outdoor area facilitates the children's need for fresh air and the urge for movement and physical activity, so often limited in confined indoor spaces. For children who are bed bound or experience more limited opportunity for movement, there are four mobile play stations. Children also have access to videos and electronic games.

A relatively recent innovation is that the playroom has a virtual on-line communication with six other locations, all of which are located in a hospital environment apart from one based in a Cork school. The new computer was sponsored by IBM, while the Mid-Western Health Board paid for an upgraded ISDN line. This innovation is part of a pilot project led by the Centre for Health Informatics in Trinity College and is sponsored by IBM.

Costs relating to the provision of play run in the region of €43,000pa to include staff costs. In addition, FÁS sponsors six members of the play staff, who work part-time (19½ hours/weekly). The volunteers of Children in Hospital, Ireland accrue no costs; uniforms and training are met by funding from this voluntary organisation.

In the Children's Ark it is believed that the factors contributing to the success of the initiative are:

- ✓ Stakeholders working collaboratively to develop a specific and well-designed play area for the children
- ✓ Ongoing commitment from hospital management supporting new initiatives
- ✓ Multi-disciplinary ownership of the project.

Quotes from children on their views of the Ark Unit:

Gearóid, aged 8 years:

'It is very good and there are lots of things to do. I like all the playstation games. I like Spyro the Dragon the best. I like to decide myself which game I can play.'

Séan, aged 8 years :

'The playroom is brilliant. The activities are good. I like to be able to choose what I want to do.'

Laura, aged 13 years:

'I think that making a castle in the playroom is really good, because it is fun and I can take it home with me.'

Laura, aged 15 years:

'The playroom is absolutely fantastic. Hospital can be very boring but the playroom makes the days fly because you have so much fun! You can do whatever you want and the play workers are brilliant, they're great fun, always making the patients laugh. They encourage the patients in everything they do. With so much fun and laughs to be had, patients hate to leave the hospital! I know I will!'



5. IMPROVING QUALITY AND SAFETY AT PLAY

OBJECTIVE: To improve the quality and safety of playgrounds and play areas

Risk and safety are crucial to the debate on play. Research undertaken with children in Scotland found that, while children expect their parents to protect them, they also expect that some negotiation would take place and a balance would be reached between protection and restriction (Harden et al., 2000). Cole-Hamilton and Gill (2002) support this and suggest that there is a need for a trade off between the desire of many children and young people to have exciting and challenging play opportunities with a degree of risk and concerns about the need to protect children in public play spaces. It is suggested, therefore, that although designing a safe and risk-free playground is possible, children may not use it.

An understanding of risk is essential to the development of the child and it has been suggested that it is better for children to learn about risk within the safe confines of the playground than in the street or building site. As the Health and Safety Executive (2002, p69) states 'the risk of relocating children to these less safe environments through the inadvertent dumbing down of playgrounds, or reduction in provision over economic consideration or safety fears, warrants at least as much consideration as does the safety of playgrounds themselves'.

In the Irish context, Webb and Associates (1999) suggest that, although playgrounds are only one of many sources of public liability claims against local authorities, insurance is cited as a key obstacle in providing for children's play. Further, they note that some local authorities have responded to the issue by 'either not providing equipped play areas or by removing those that do exist' (Webb and Associates, 1999 p34). This is also the case elsewhere. Hood (2002), for example, reports that safety fears in the United Kingdom have led to the removal of play equipment from parks, and to adventure playgrounds being closed.

A distinction is made here between hazard and risk. Hazard has been defined as "a potential for harm, for example an entrapment area on a piece of equipment", while risk is "the chance or likelihood that harm will occur" (RoSPA, 2002 p4). In calculating risk during formal assessments, two aspects are considered – the risk of an accident occurring and the severity of such an accident. Hazard can be designed out by the use of standards in the design and siting of equipment, regular inspections and maintenance.

Public bodies, including local authorities, can avail of insurance provided by Irish Public Bodies Mutual Insurance Limited (IPBMI), a statutory non-profit making body. In the case of local authorities, no differentiation is made between public liability insurance cover for playgrounds/public play facilities and for other public facilities such as roads and pathways. Advice given by Irish Public Bodies Mutual Insurance Ltd. in reducing exposure to claims is twofold. First, equipment and surfacing must accede to I.S. EN1176 and I.S. EN1177 standards and be regularly maintained and inspected by trained personnel. Second, educating children about the safe use of equipment can reduce the risk of injury. The situation in relation to insurance is somewhat different for community and private play providers who depend on commercial insurance cover. Insurance for these groups is often prohibitively expensive or not available

and these difficulties are part of a broader picture in relation to public liability insurance.

Risk for local authorities can be reduced by taking account of factors that may result in claims of negligence. Negligence can arise from a failure to apply relevant standards or from inadequate levels of maintenance. The duty of care of local authorities in relation to playgrounds encompasses the following:

- ✓ Equipment and surfacing used is in compliance with ISEN standards;
- ✓ Post-installation inspection and risk assessment carried out on all new playgrounds;
- ✓ Weekly inspections carried out by trained staff and records maintained;
- ✓ Regular maintenance and replacement of equipment as required;
- ✓ Annual independent inspections as recommended in I.S. EN1176;
- ✓ A protocol in place to deal immediately and sympathetically with playground accidents.

(Webb, R & Associates, 2003)

Adherence to these standards can help to reduce liability and insurance risks. In addition, limiting damage caused by vandalism can also reduce the likelihood of negligence claims.

An insurance reform programme is currently being driven by the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The Programme seeks to bring about a reduction in insurance costs, for the benefit of consumers and business, by means of:

- ✓ Improving the functioning of the insurance market;
- ✓ Decreasing the cost of delivery of compensation; and
- ✓ Investigating the competitiveness of the market.

A ministerial level committee, chaired by the Tánaiste, is overseeing the implementation of the Reform Programme. Key elements of the recommendations of the Motor Insurance Advisory Board (MIAB) Report of April 2002, the establishment of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board and the Competition Authority study on competition in the insurance sector. The Irish Insurance Federation has also set up a Fraudulent Claims Hotline, which allows members of the public to report suspect insurance claims.

The cost and availability of insurance has also been identified as a special initiative under Sustaining Progress: Social Partnership Agreement 2003-2005 (Department of the Taoiseach, 2003). If these insurance reform initiatives are successful, the cost of insurance, including public liability insurance, should decrease. In this event, play service providers, including local authorities, can expect to benefit.

A Play Safety Forum in the UK was established to bring together the main national organisations with an interest in safety and children's play and build consensus on risk and safety. Its position statement states that **'risk taking is an essential feature of play provision and of all environments in which children legitimately spend time at play. Play provision aims to offer children the chance to encounter acceptable risks as part of a stimulating, challenging and controlled learning environment'** (Play Safety Forum, 2002 p 2). It further concludes that **'Safety in play**

provision is not absolute and cannot be addressed in isolation. Play provision is first and foremost for children and if it is not exciting and attractive to them then it will fail no matter how 'safe' it is!

Child protection issues are a critical element of any safety regime for children using play facilities. *Our Duty to Care*, published by the Department of Health and Children in 2002, provides guidance to the voluntary and community sector in providing safe environments for the children with which they are dealing. The guidelines are based on Children First - National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children and include guidance on the promotion of child welfare, the development of safe recruitment practices and safe management practices in work with children, as well as information on how to recognise signs of child abuse and the correct steps to take within organisations if it is suspected, witnessed or disclosed. It also suggests ways that organisations could raise awareness among their staff and volunteers about child abuse and how staff should respond to accidents or complaints and alleged or suspected abuse. In line with these guidelines, providers of play facilities should develop their own local procedures and guidance for dealing with child protection and all staff should be informed of, and be aware of, these procedures.

In recognition of the fact that play is relatively undeveloped in Ireland and that expertise in this area is relatively limited, the point has been made in the consultation leading to this policy that there is a necessity for a central play unit/resource centre. The functions of a Play Resource Centre would include providing information, support and advice on a range of issues to actively develop the play network, and, in particular, supporting officers designated with responsibility for play at local level. The Centre will, by disseminating information, research, and best practice, ensure the effective targeting of resources to secure best value for money. To exploit economies of scale, it may be advantageous to contract out this service to an existing body, and a possibility to be explored is a link between a research body and an NGO. The National Children's Office will examine the feasibility of contracting out this service and providing seed funding for an initial period of two years. The functions of the Play Resource Centre will include the following:

- ✓ Providing guidance for City and County Development Boards in the preparation of their multi-agency play plans;
- ✓ Assisting in the promotion of awareness of the benefits and value of play;
- ✓ Examining and making recommendations on best practice in play provision;
- ✓ Addressing the issue of risk and safety in play; and
- ✓ Advising on the development of playwork training.

Recommendations made by Children's Play Council and NPFA (2000) about improving the quality of play opportunities are supported in this policy and are set out below. They write that projects should:

- ✓ Extend the choice and control that children have over their play, the freedom they enjoy and the satisfaction they gain from it;
- ✓ Recognise the child's need to test boundaries and respond positively to that need;
- ✓ Manage the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep the child safe from harm;

- ✓ Maximise the range of play opportunities;
- ✓ Foster independence and self-esteem;
- ✓ Foster children's respect for others and to offer opportunities for social interaction; and
- ✓ Foster the child's well-being, healthy growth and development, knowledge and understanding, creativity and capacity to learn.

(NPFA and CPC (2000) *Best Play: What Play Provision Should do for Children*, p18)

Finally, consumer feedback is a recognised method of improving quality. It has already been proposed that children should be given a voice in the development of play policies and play facilities. Crucially, this will include feedback and evaluation of such policies and facilities, which should result in improved quality and facilities that children want and will use. Increased participation by children in all aspects of Government policy and planning should result in greater attention being paid to the impact on play, of policy and planning decisions. It should also result in improved play facilities and a genuinely child-friendly environment.



'...Children need a fun childhood!'

PROPOSED ACTIONS

- 38 All play equipment used in public playgrounds or in publicly-funded playgrounds should conform with the Irish Standards for play equipment and surfacing [I.S. EN1176 and I.S. EN1177].
- 39 Local authorities will continue, in accordance with the terms of their insurance cover, to arrange for regular inspection and necessary maintenance of all playgrounds and play equipment provided by them.
- 40 As part of the Special Initiative on Cost and Availability of Insurance under Sustaining Progress the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the Competition Authority will take steps to improve the cost of insurance to the Community and Voluntary Sector by:
 - (a) setting up the Personal Injuries Assessment Board, which will ultimately impact on the cost of public liability insurance, and
 - (b) engaging in dialogue with the Sector to identify any specific concerns relating to insurance.
- 41 A national Play Resource Centre will be established to provide information, support and advice on a range of issues, including child protection and safety issues, to actively develop the play network.
- 42 Local authorities will seek to improve quality in play facility provision by seeking consumer feedback.





MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICE

OUTDOOR PLAY FOR CHILDREN: THE SWEDISH EXPERIENCE

On a recent visit to Sweden I saw several examples of creative exciting places for children to engage in play that were FUN!! These are some highlights.

What really impressed me was the fact that the apparatus was designed in such a way that all children could join in. Many children who use wheelchairs can leave the chair to play, as long as the apparatus is appropriately designed. Transfer points on climbing apparatus are integrated for children using wheelchairs to get from the chair to the steps at the correct height, with strategically positioned grab rails. Getting off the apparatus is also made easy. Slides can be made extra wide also to enable a carer to go on the slide with the child, if needed. The guiding principle is inclusiveness, with equipment that is designed so that all children can use it, rather than 'special' equipment. Other features included sand tables of appropriate height for wheelchair users to pull up to, and play along with, the other children. There were ramped sections on other pieces where wheelchair users could also share the fun!! The apparatus also has pictures carved in to the wood, which adds tactile interest. Clues can be built in for visually impaired children, to guide them as to what is coming next. Hammock nets and supported swing seats mean that all children can enjoy the pleasure of swings... one of the great joys of childhood!!

The second playground we visited was my personal favourite. It was a water playground and it must be a wonderland for children. Built in cement it consisted of a canal with locks and dams which children themselves could manage. The opportunities for learning were limitless. Children could explore the effects of water building up behind the dam, then pull up the shutter and create a torrent of water. As the canal created an island in the centre there were stepping stones to the island... and for the more adventurous there was a pulley to grip on to and swing across the canal. The launch pad and landing pad for this pulley was raised and large so that children could grab the pulley without fear of stumbling or falling off the pad.

The stepping stones also doubled as seats so children could just shoot the breeze with the buddies and dabble their feet in the water. At one end there were five rocks with fountains built in, for added fun. These fountains operated on the same principle as a push tap, in that only so much water was released at any time. Simple ideas, packed with fun for children and extending their learning in such an unconscious way.

Máire Corbett,
*Regional Support Worker,
National Children's Nurseries Association.*

6. TRAINING FOR PLAY

OBJECTIVE: To ensure that the relevant training and qualifications are available to persons offering play and related services to children

If play provision is to offer children the range and types of play opportunities they need, staff must be properly valued, well trained and enthusiastic about their work (Cole-Hamilton and Gill, 2002). For this to be possible there needs to be:

- ✓ Greater recognition among all those with an interest in, and responsibility for, children's play, of the difference between the skills and knowledge required for play work and other types of work with children;
- ✓ An understanding of play and its importance among other staff working with children such as, for example, teachers, childcare workers and social workers; and finally
- ✓ A continued emphasis on the development of play work training and qualifications.

In the Republic of Ireland, there are wide variations in the extent to which play features in training programmes developed for professionals and others working with children. Additionally, as outlined in Chapter 2, there is a total absence of training in this jurisdiction for particular professional groups such as hospital play specialists.

Playworkers generally work with children in the 4 to 16 years age bracket. Playwork is defined by Sprito UK as **'provision by adults of an environment and opportunities that enable children and young people to engage in play opportunities that offer social, physical, intellectual, cultural, creative and emotional development. The value underpinning playwork derives from a clear understanding of and commitment to equality of opportunities, the**

children's right to play and the importance of choice, freedom, empowerment, safety and social justice. The playworker's task is to facilitate, enable, encourage, empower and, where necessary, intervene to ensure that the play environment and the play opportunities always start with the children and/or young person's needs first! (Sprito UK (2002) p7)

In the UK a national framework is in place to provide training for playworkers and opportunities for career progression. The UK Government made funding available in 1991 to establish four Centres for Playwork Education on a regional basis. The aim of this funding was to encourage women back into the workforce and support out-of school childcare provision. Training was developed at levels ranging from introductory to higher education standards. In 1992 a six-week Basic Playwork training course comprising ten sessions of interactive playwork-related training, information sharing and teaching was piloted and became the first national vocational qualification in playwork. These qualifications have been developed to form an introductory level, level 2, level 3 and a course specifically designed around the needs of children with a disability. More recently, a number of universities have added playwork to their range of courses providing education at both diploma and degree level. A further five regional centres to provide playwork education was recently announced.

These courses have been professionally endorsed by the national playwork training organisation in the UK (Sprito UK, 2002). In the UK, playwork is one of a number of childminding qualifications recognised by the Department of Education and Skills, particularly within the context of sessional services and playscheme provision.

The Republic of Ireland has, to date, failed to develop a formal training framework for playworking, which is a deficit that needs to be addressed.

Finally, the designation of an officer to develop play and recreation actively in each local authority has previously been recommended. It is acknowledged that these individuals, who may not have a background in play, will need support and training and it is suggested that a network be established to identify requirements and exchange information and best practice.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

- 43 A framework for the development of information and basic training in play and playwork skills and accredited play training that meets the play needs of differing groups of children in a variety of settings will be developed. This will include a skills audit, training needs analysis and the development of pilot training modules.
- 44 Local authorities will establish a network of Play Development Officers to exchange information and best practice, and to identify requirements for in-service training and development.

7. DEVELOPING A PARTNERSHIP APPROACH TO PLAY

OBJECTIVE: To develop a partnership approach in funding and developing play opportunities

Goal 3 in the National Children's Strategy states that **'Children will receive quality supports and services to promote all aspects of their development'** (*National Children's Strategy, 2000, p11*). The Strategy outlines the case for child-focused, needs-driven supports and services and, in addition, highlights the importance of finding better ways to link services. Current play provision has already been described in Chapter 2 and the range and scope illustrates the multiplicity of service providers in the area. Issues relating to play emerge from many different perspectives including child psychology and psychotherapy, education, human geography, anthropology and studies of children's folklore (Street, 2002). Consequently, although it is clear that the Local authorities have responsibility for some aspects of play, in practice many non-governmental organisations as well as Government departments may also be involved.

At a national level, there is no single Government Department responsible for the provision of play and recreation and no dedicated funding line to cater for play. Responsibility for play provision rests within a number of Government Departments. The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government has responsibility for local authorities, who are in turn empowered to provide public play facilities at a local level. In addition, the Departments of Health and Children, Education and Science, Social and Family Affairs and Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs all have responsibility for certain aspects of public play. This spread of responsibility has led to a lack of strategic focus in the development of play and recreation facilities for children and young people.

The Local Government Act, 2001 provides broad discretionary powers for a local authority to take action to promote the interests of the local community such as the support of amenity, sport and recreation facilities including the provision of playgrounds and play facilities. It is equally important, however, to recognise that the multi-dimensional nature of play may result in

competing interests in aspects of play emerging from other voluntary or statutory organisations. Cole-Hamilton and Gill (2002, p19) write that **'the provision of a good choice of attractive, satisfying, supervised and unsupervised, indoor and outside play opportunities benefits from the active involvement of different Local Government departments, partnerships and voluntary sector organisations.'**

Benefits accruing from taking a partnership approach to the provision of play were highlighted in an evaluation of a cross-departmental initiative undertaken to prevent youth crime in the 8 to 19 year old age group (CRG Research Ltd., 2003). Nationally, more than 10,000 young people took part in this programme which focused on providing them with access to a key worker and also the provision of play activities. The development of diverse teams as a result of local partnerships meant that young people had access to a range of adult workers each with differing areas of expertise. The authors recommended that efforts and resources need to be devoted to building and maintaining local partnerships because **'no one organisation has the knowledge and resources to provide effective, positive activity programmes for all young people.'** Partnership approaches, they note, are essential but do not 'just happen' (CRG Research Ltd., 2003). The CPC (2002, p15) in the United Kingdom have set out the following issues for involving the appropriate agencies and individuals in play. They write:

- ✓ Within local authorities, key professionals across many departments should be involved;
- ✓ Some key partnerships and initiatives should also be involved;
- ✓ In some areas voluntary sector and other local organisations are important providers;
- ✓ Multi-disciplinary working supports effective planning and delivery;
- ✓ Parents and other local residents need to take part;
- ✓ All those involved need to agree shared values and principles.





Traditionally, play and recreation facilities in Ireland have been funded through the recreation and amenities programme heading of local authorities. This funding has not been ring-fenced and expansion of play facilities has been in competition with funding for other areas. Even where funding for capital expenditure has been found within the budget, ongoing funding for maintenance, inspection and other staff costs has been problematic and difficult to guarantee on an ongoing basis.

There is also scope for private sector investment in the expansion of play facilities. At EU level, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been defined as **'a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operation and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis'**. The factors driving the move towards corporate social responsibility include new expectations from communities, consumers, public authorities and investors and the increasing influence of social criteria in business investments decisions. Companies are increasingly aware that by integrating CSR as a strategic investment opportunity, they can derive added economic value. CSR is also about integrating companies in their local setting, recognising that they are dependent on the health, stability and prosperity of the communities in which they operate. The reputation of a company at its location, its image as an employer and producer and as an actor in the local scene influences its competitiveness.

An increasing number of firms in Ireland are embracing a culture of CSR. The establishment of *The Foundation for Investing in Communities and Business in the Community* reflects this trend. The drive towards increased levels of corporate social responsibility in the form of corporate community involvement is a viable means of mobilising investment in improved play opportunities locally.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

- 45 Local authorities will consider the opportunities available to them under the development contribution system (Planning and Development Act, 2000) to fund the capital cost of providing play and recreation areas for children.
- 46 Local development programmes providing services to families and their children, such as CLÁR and RAPID, will identify the potential for actively supporting improved play provision within communities.
- 47 The National Children's Office will pursue the potential of corporate community involvement at a national level to expand play initiatives.
- 48 Local authorities will examine the potential of private investment in play facilities at local level.

MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICE

SUPPORTING PLAY IN THE BARNARDOS FAMILY SUPPORT PROJECT, WATERFORD

The Barnardos Family Support Project in Ballybeg, established in 1999, is one of a number of pilot projects funded by the Department of Health and Children as part of the Springboard Initiative. The objective of Springboard is to establish Family Support Projects in targeted areas to work intensively with children in the 7-12 age group, who are at risk of going into care or getting into trouble and with their families. Springboard is based on the belief that the best way to protect children is to provide the necessary coordinated supports to families in their own community.

Ballybeg is a large local authority housing estate built on the outskirts of Waterford in the 1970s. It consists of 800 local authority houses and some private houses and a nearby Traveller Halting site accommodating some 15 families. When the Project started, Ballybeg was estimated to have a population of 4,000 with 1,300 of these being under 14 years of age. There is a significant one-parent population and a high unemployment rate. Children from Ballybeg were shown to feature significantly in referrals to the Juvenile Liaison Service in the Waterford Garda District, to the School Attendance Officer and in foster care statistics from the South Eastern Health Board.

The Ballybeg Family Support Project offers intensive support to families in Ballybeg. Examples include parenting support, direct work with children, family work and group work with children and with adults. Flexibility is seen as the key factor in meeting the needs of each family. Alongside these targeted services, the Project offers a number of universal services to support families living in the area including a supervised playground for local children aged between 3 and 11 years.

Prior to the development of the playground, support for play provision in the area was very poor. Monkey bars and a slide had been in place in previous years but were removed due to vandalism. The Project soon identified the need for an accessible and safe play area for local children. The garden area was developed into a small playground and Waterford Area Partnership provided the necessary capital funding for fixed play equipment. Three playground supervisors were employed on Barnardos payroll by re-prioritising commitments in the core budget. They provide a positive play environment for children and offer a range of indoor and outdoor activities each Saturday and Sunday. The playground is now being further developed to include the play needs of older children, which is a joint initiative between Waterford City Council, the AIB Better Ireland program and Barnardos and will cost in the region of €80,000.

The playground has made a significant contribution to embedding the project in the community. The project is now effectively open seven days a week. Families have been successfully engaged in a diverse range of interventions and examples of positive changes for some families availing of the services are visible. Parents feel more supported and better able to cope with parenting and children's social skills are improving. The playground in Ballybeg has proved to be enormously popular with children in the locality. In addition, a number of spin off benefits have been achieved including a reduction in anti-social behaviour and the employment of local people in a local service.

8. RESEARCH ON PLAY IN IRELAND

OBJECTIVE: To improve information on, and evaluation and monitoring of, play provision for children in Ireland

The research available on play concentrates on younger children, is largely UK based and tends to be descriptive and general about the benefits of play to children, their families and communities. There is a lack of information on the Irish context and very little that relates to older children and marginalised groups. The National Children's Office has a stated commitment to supporting the development of research capacity about children in the Republic of Ireland. The objectives of the second goal of the National Children's Strategy are:

- ✓ To build up a more coherent understanding of children's development and needs among those working with children;
- ✓ To develop an evidence-based approach to decision making at all levels down to the point of service delivery;
- ✓ To improve the commissioning, production and dissemination of research and information; and
- ✓ To improve evaluation and monitoring of children's services.

Within this programme a number of key developments relating to children's research are taking place. Firstly, a national longitudinal study, the first of its kind in the Republic of Ireland, will be established. This study has the potential to assist in addressing some of the concerns about research and children's play in the Republic of Ireland. Secondly, a children's research programme is currently being funded by the National Children's Office with an aim of capitalising on existing research capacity in this area. The National Children's Office has already committed funding to the area of play through the research fellowship programme and will continue to assist relevant research in this area. Finally, as stated in the National Children's Strategy, the NCO is committed to developing a set of child well-being indicators, and the importance of play and recreation in child development will be actively considered in that context.

At national and local level, enhanced play provision must logically be matched by ongoing evaluation of facilities to ensure optimum use of public funds, and the best possible outcome for children in terms of improved recreational opportunities.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

- 49 Issues relating to play will be taken account of in the national longitudinal study of children in Ireland.
- 50 The National Children's Strategy Research Awards Scheme will actively promote the exploration of play in children's lives and the factors affecting safe play.
- 51 Consideration will be given to examining appropriate indicators for play in the child well-being indicators to be developed under the National Children's Strategy.
- 52 Evaluations will be undertaken at national and local level to identify the effectiveness of play supports and to establish and promote good practice.

CONCLUSION

The actions outlined in this chapter, once implemented, will make a difference to the lives of children in the area of play. The implementation of these actions will be carefully pursued and monitored by the National Children's Office as part of the National Children's Strategy.

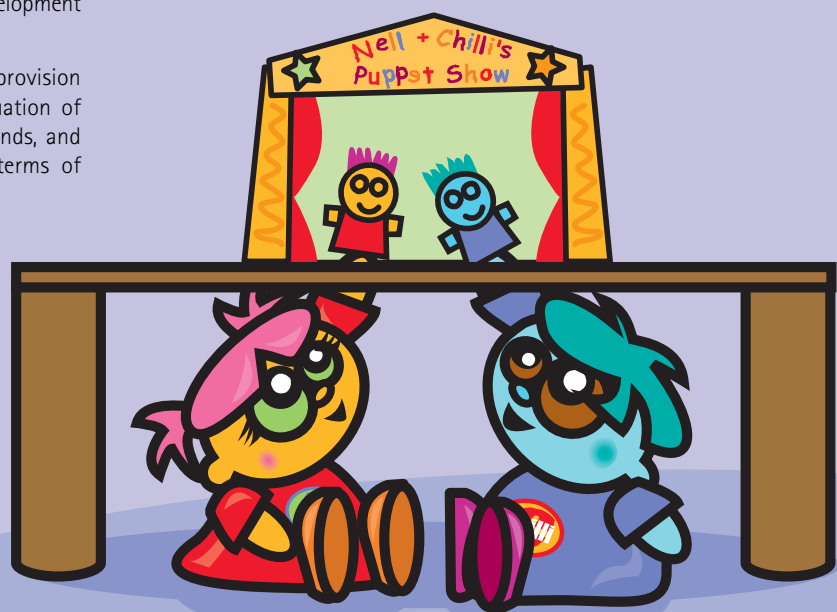
WHAT THE CHILDREN SAID ABOUT THE FUTURE

'...people will be very lazy...'

'...there won't be much emphasis on reading or play, there will be more emphasis on videos and computer games...'

'...no space left to play...'

'...it won't be as nice, because we won't be children any more and won't be able to play games...'



4

CHAPTER 4 Implementation and Monitoring

4.1 DRIVING IMPLEMENTATION

The National Play Policy aims to improve public play opportunities for children in Ireland. It identifies a comprehensive range of ambitious actions to be implemented by a number of departments and agencies, within a child-centred, family-oriented, equitable, inclusive, action orientated and integrated approach.

The approach to implementation spells out how change will be managed and how outcomes will be monitored and evaluated. The Action Plan at the end of this chapter clearly allocates responsibility for each action in the Play Policy to a named organisation. Successful implementation will only be achieved through a commitment to partnership between government departments, agencies, voluntary groups, local communities, families and children.

4.2 NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION

Managing the collaboration between government departments and agencies will be central to successful implementation. It will require inter-agency commitment, co-operation and collaboration to a degree that has not been in evidence to date. In recognition of the current low level of play provision or understanding of the importance of play in children's lives, leadership and direction at a national level is essential, as follows:

- ✓ The Cabinet Committee on Children is chaired by the Taoiseach and includes all government ministers with a role in implementing the National Children's Strategy (NCS). These are the Ministers for Health and Children, Education and Science, Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Social and Family Affairs, Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Arts, Sport and Tourism, Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Finance and Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.
- ✓ The Committee meets quarterly to review progress in implementing the Strategy and agree priorities for action. The Cabinet Committee will oversee progress in implementing the Play Policy and review certain areas as it sees fit.
- ✓ The Cabinet Committee will be supported in its work by the Inter-Departmental Advisory Board of the National Children's Office, chaired by the Director of the National Children's Office. The National Children's Office will drive implementation of the Policy, and will co-ordinate and monitor actions by departments and by other stakeholders.
- ✓ Individual departments will retain responsibility for implementing the Play Policy. The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government will have a particularly significant role in implementation, given its responsibility for housing, parks, roads and the development of a more child-friendly environment and will work closely with the National Children's Office.
- ✓ A specific commitment is made in Chapter 3 to the establishment of a national Play Resource Centre to provide information, support and advice on a range of issues to actively develop the play network. The functions of the Play Resource Centre will include:

- ☆ Providing guidance for City and County Development Boards in the preparation of their multi-agency play plans;
- ☆ Assisting in the promotion of awareness of the benefits and value of play;
- ☆ Examining and making recommendations on best practice in play provision;
- ☆ Addressing the issue of risk and safety in play; and
- ☆ Advising on the development of playwork training.

The Resource Centre will be set up for an initial period of two years. At the end of that period, an evaluation of the role and functions of the Centre will be conducted.

4.3 LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION

Improved play opportunities at local level will be the essential indicator of success for the policy. The NCS allocated responsibility for driving better local service provision (including play) to the City and County Development Boards (CDBs). Many of these Boards have made significant progress in supporting and improving play opportunities but more is required. To implement the play policy locally, each City and County Development Board will:

- ✓ Prepare a co-ordinated County Play Plan based on this policy, identifying gaps in provision and a funding plan. The County Play Plan will be developed through consultation with communities and children in the Community Forum and Comhairle na nÓg. Each CDB will ensure that the principles of equity and inclusion are adhered to in ensuring consultation with marginalised children in preparing the Play Plan.
- ✓ Ensure that provision for local community play and amenity areas is included in County Development Plans. A new plan is published every 6 years outlining the local authority's policies for land use and development in the county. The Development Plan also identifies the local authority's policy for road improvements, for development and renewal of obsolete areas, and for preserving, improving and extending amenities. Public participation in drawing up the Plan is important. Each new County Development Plan will explicitly state how the play needs of children will be catered for in the area.

4.4 COST IMPLICATIONS

The five key aspects of the policy with resource implications are:

- ✓ Provision of facilities;
- ✓ Development of a child-friendly environment;
- ✓ Consultation;
- ✓ Development of pilot projects; and
- ✓ Establishment of a national Play Resource Centre

Provision of Facilities

There is no dedicated national funding for the provision of play facilities. At local level, the main responsibility for providing and funding play and recreation facilities and amenities lies with local authorities. Funding for play and recreation facilities is not currently ring-fenced and competes with other budgetary priorities.

While recognising the competing demands on local authorities, progress can be made through the use of other funding lines such as:

- ✓ Community development contributions and
- ✓ Local development programmes, such as CLÁR and RAPID.

Chapter 2 outlines figures on the provision of playgrounds managed by local authorities and highlights the fact that the current levels of provision fall far short of the standard set out in the Parks Policy for Local Authorities [Department of the Environment, 1987]. It is estimated that at current prices, a local playground costs €80,000 - €100,000 and a regional playground costs €250,000 - €300,000. To bring the number of playgrounds nationally up to the standard of 1:10,000, as set out in the Parks Policy, would involve the provision of an additional 204 local playgrounds at a minimum cost of in the region of €16 million (capital). As outlined in Chapter 3, there is also potential for the corporate sector to contribute to expansion of play facilities.

Development of a Child-friendly Environment

The development of a child-friendly environment is central to this policy. This objective involves the recognition that children should not be confined to dedicated play spaces and that their needs must be considered within the wider built and natural environment. The resource implications of this objective can be reduced through the inclusion of child-friendly criteria in the early stages of environmental design.

Consultation

Consultation is central to this policy and to all government policy in matters that directly affect children. The resource implications of consultation are more likely to be about staff time than about finance. In the long-term, consultation will deliver improved value for money and will ensure the provision of facilities that meet the needs of the users.

Development of Pilot Projects

The National Children's Office will continue to explore potential sources of funding to support pilot play projects.

Establishment of National Play Resource Centre

The National Children's Office will fund the establishment of a National Play Resource Centre for an initial period of two years. It is estimated that the cost will be in the region of €50,000 per year.

4.5 EVALUATION AND REVIEW

The implementation of the Play Policy will be complemented by monitoring and evaluation. This will include:

- ✓ An annual review of progress by the Cabinet Committee on Children. The National Children's Office will prepare a report for the Cabinet Committee, which will indicate progress on each action in the Action Plan.
- ✓ A number of organisations concerned with children's issues in the voluntary sector and the research community will be essential partners in improving play provision. Many of these groups are represented on the National Children's Advisory Council, which will review developments and provide independent advice to the Minister of State with Special Responsibility for Children.
- ✓ Ireland's next Report to United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, due to be submitted in 2004, will include specific reference to measures taken to implement Article 31 of the Convention - promoting the child's right to play.
- ✓ An independent external evaluation of implementation will be undertaken at the end of the period covered by this policy. That evaluation will measure progress against the action plan and conduct in-depth assessments of the play value of measures implemented and the extent to which the principles of the play policy have been adopted. This external evaluation will also assist in identifying the scope and priorities for the next phase of the National Play Policy.



Action Plan

OBJECTIVE 1: To give children a voice in the design and implementation of play policies and facilities

No.	Action	Responsibility	Target Date
1	The National Children's Office will continue to drive the goal of the National Children's Strategy to encourage children's participation in decisions which affect them through the provision of information, guidelines and support.	National Children's Office	2004 and ongoing
2	As required by the National Children's Strategy, local authorities and other bodies in the public sector will put in place measures to achieve participation by children in matters that affect them, including the development of play policies and facilities and the planning and provision of other services which impact on children's opportunities to play.	Local authorities	2004 and ongoing
3	The voluntary, community and private sectors will be encouraged to engage with children in the development of play facilities and play policies.	National Children's Office	2004 and ongoing

OBJECTIVE 2: To raise awareness of the importance of play

No.	Action	Responsibility	Target Date
4	The Health Promotion Unit will continue to avail of opportunities in the context of programme development to promote the importance of play and physical activity in children's lives.	Department of Health and Children	2004 and ongoing
5	The National Children's Office will work in partnership with the Health Promotion Unit, the Health Boards, and other relevant statutory and voluntary agencies to promote play.	National Children's Office, Department of Health and Children and the Health Boards	2004
6	The National Children's Office will disseminate research findings about children's play.	National Children's Office	2004
7	The National Children's Office will liaise with the Family Support Agency to develop opportunities in 2004, the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, to promote the importance of play.	National Children's Office with Family Support Agency	2004

OBJECTIVE 3: To ensure that children's play needs are met through the development of a child-friendly environment

No.	Action	Responsibility	Target Date
8	The National Children's Office will liaise with local authorities and the Department of Transport to establish a pilot scheme of 'Home Zones', where the living environment predominates over traffic.	The National Children's Office, local authorities and the Department of Transport	2004
9	Local authorities, the Department of Transport and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government will continue to invest in the development in footpaths, cycleways and traffic calming measures in line with government commitments in relation to the national network of cycleways and provision of new footpaths.	Local authorities, the Department of Transport and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government	2006
10	The "Development Plan Guidelines for Planning Authorities" currently being developed by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government will refer to children's play in the context of community facilities.	Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government	2004
11	Each City/County Development Board will prepare a co-ordinated multi-agency County Play Plan, in consultation with children and communities, for improved play facilities. This plan will take account of the changing play needs of children as they age.	City/County Development Boards	2005
12	The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government will continue to issue guidelines to local authorities on specific areas/topics having regard to the need to develop child-friendly environments.	Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government	2004 and ongoing
13	The use of creative landscaping by local authorities and others will be promoted as a means of providing new play opportunities for children.	Local authorities	2004 and ongoing

OBJECTIVE 4: To maximise the range of public play opportunities available to children, particularly children who are marginalised or disadvantaged or who have a disability

No.	Action	Responsibility	Target Date
14	City/ County Development Boards will carry out an assessment, to include disability access, of play facilities in each local authority area identifying the level, range and standard of public and community play facilities available to children of all ages, and will advertise the availability of these facilities.	City/County Development Boards	2004
15	Local authorities will, as far as possible, pursue the policy objectives set out in "A Parks Policy for Local Authorities" (1987) in relation to standards for provision of play facilities and amenity and recreation areas.	Local authorities	2004 and ongoing
16	The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government will review and update the Parks Policy of 1987 in the light of this policy.	Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government	2004
17	As required by the National Children's Strategy, all local authorities will designate an officer to be responsible for the development of play and recreation activity, to oversee implementation of the County Play Plan and promote and co-ordinate multi-agency activity.	Local authorities	2005
18	Local authorities will prepare a local play policy in consultation with children and other stakeholders.	Local authorities	2004
19	Local authorities may consider, resources permitting, taking on the insurance and maintenance of community play facilities, subject to satisfying themselves that appropriate standards and guidelines have been adhered to.	Local authorities	2005
20	The National Children's Office in association with relevant agencies will pursue the development of pilot projects in play facilities to develop best practice and innovation.	National Children's Office	2004
21	The National Children's Office, in partnership with the Department of Education and Science, will conduct a feasibility study on the potential for making school buildings available to communities for play and recreation purposes.	National Children's Office and Department of Education and Science	2005
22	The public library service will continue to act as a gateway to the world of knowledge for children and to stimulate their minds and imagination.	Local authorities	2004 and ongoing

4.1 Ensuring social inclusion in publicly-funded play

No.	Action	Responsibility	Target Date
23	All new and redeveloped local authority play facilities will be developed to be accessible in accordance with Universal Design Principles and best practice.	Local authorities	2004 and ongoing
24	City/County Development Boards will identify the range of actions necessary to support the play activities of children from marginalised groups	City/County Development Boards	2004 and ongoing
25	The National Children's Office will liaise with local authorities to pilot the use of accessible playbuses to bring play opportunities to children in rural areas, such buses to be staffed by playworkers.	National Children's Office and local authorities	2004
26	The Office for Social Inclusion and the National Children's Office will work together to promote awareness of the play needs of children from low income families through the Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network which is administered by the Combat Poverty Agency.	Office for Social Inclusion and the National Children's Office	2004

4.2 Play in childcare settings

No.	Action	Responsibility	Target Date
27	The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education will address the importance of play in developing quality standards in early childhood care and education.	Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education and Department of Education and Science	2005
28	The revised Child Care (Pre-school) Regulations will have a greater emphasis on the importance of play in child development.	Department of Health and Children	2004
29	Local authorities will monitor compliance with "Childcare Facilities: Guidelines for Planning Authorities" (2001) to ensure that outdoor play facilities are provided in all new facilities.	Local authorities	2004 and ongoing

4.3 The importance of play in schools

No.	Action	Responsibility	Target Date
30	The Department of Education and Science will issue a circular to all primary schools reminding them of the requirement to ensure an interval of 30 minutes for recreation.	Department of Education and Science	2004
31	The Schools Modernisation Plan will have regard to the provision of safe play areas in schools.	Department of Education and Science	2004 and ongoing
32	The Department of Education and Science will request Boards of Management to include a statement about the value of play and enhanced opportunities for play as part of their overall school plan.	Department of Education and Science	2004
33	Teacher training will continue to promote the benefits of play both in the schoolyard and in the classroom.	Department of Education and Science	2004 and ongoing

4.4 Play in hospital and other health settings

No.	Action	Responsibility	Target Date
34	The implementation of the recommendations in the Children in Hospital Ireland Report (The Association for the Welfare of children in hospital, 1993) in relation to play will be actively pursued by the Department of Health and Children and other agencies, including Health Boards.	Department of Health and Children	2005
35	The development of recognised courses for Hospital Play in third level institutions in the Republic will be pursued.	Department of Health and Children in liaison with National Qualifications Authority of Ireland	2004
36	The rehabilitative and therapeutic value of play in a range of healthcare and social services settings will be identified and promoted by Health Boards.	Health Boards	2005
37	Public health care settings accessed by children will be designed to be child-friendly.	Department of Health and Children and Health Boards	2004 and ongoing

OBJECTIVE 5: To improve the quality and safety of playgrounds and play areas

No.	Action	Responsibility	Target Date
38	All play equipment used in public playgrounds or in publicly-funded playgrounds should conform with the Irish Standards for play equipment and surfacing [I.S. EN1176 and I.S. EN1177].	Local authorities	2004 and ongoing
39	Local authorities will continue, in accordance with the terms of their insurance cover, to arrange for regular inspection and necessary maintenance of all playgrounds and play equipment provided by them.	Local authorities	2004 and ongoing
40	As part of the Special Initiative on Cost and Availability of Insurance under Sustaining Progress, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the Competition Authority will take steps to improve the cost of insurance to the Community and Voluntary Sector by: (a) setting up the Personal Injuries Assessment Board which will ultimately impact on the cost of public liability insurance, and (b) engaging in dialogue with the Sector to identify any specific concerns relating to insurance.	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment	2004 and ongoing
41	A national Play Resource Centre will be established to provide information, support and advice on a range of issues, including child protection and safety issues, to actively develop the play network.	National Children's Office	2004
42	Local authorities will seek to improve quality in play facility provision by seeking consumer feedback.	Local authorities	2004 and ongoing

OBJECTIVE 6: To ensure that the relevant training and qualifications are available to persons offering play and related services to children

No.	Action	Responsibility	Target Date
43	A framework for the development of information and basic training in play and playwork skills and accredited play training that meets the play needs of differing groups of children in a variety of settings will be developed. This will include a skills audit, training needs analysis and the development of pilot training modules.	Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in co-operation with National Children's Office	2004
44	Local authorities will establish a network of Play Development Officers to exchange information and best practice, and to identify requirements for in-service training and development.	Local authorities	2004

OBJECTIVE 7: To develop a partnership approach in funding and developing play opportunities

No.	Action	Responsibility	Target Date
45	Local authorities will consider the opportunities available to them under the development contribution system (Planning and Development Act, 2000) to fund the capital cost of providing play and recreation areas for children.	Local authorities	2004 and ongoing
46	Local development programmes providing services to families and their children, such as CLAR and RAPID, will identify the potential for actively supporting improved play provision within communities.	Local authorities and the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs	2004 and ongoing
47	The National Children's Office will pursue the potential of corporate community involvement at a national level to expand play initiatives.	National Children's Office	2004
48	Local authorities will examine the potential of private investment in play facilities at local level.	Local authorities	2004 and ongoing

OBJECTIVE 8: To improve information on, and evaluation and monitoring of, play provision for children in Ireland

No.	Action	Responsibility	Target Date
49	Issues relating to play will be taken account of in the national longitudinal study of children in Ireland.	National Children's Office and Department of Social and Family Affairs	2004
50	The National Children's Strategy Research Awards Scheme will actively promote the exploration of play in children's lives and the factors affecting safe play.	National Children's Office	2004 and ongoing
51	Consideration will be given to examining appropriate indicators for play in the child well-being indicators to be developed under the National Children's Strategy.	National Children's Office	2004
52	Evaluations will be undertaken at national and local level to identify the effectiveness of play supports and to establish and promote good practice.	National Children's Office and local authorities	2004 and ongoing



Appendix 1

NATIONAL POLICIES AFFECTING CHILDREN 1998-2003

Recent years have seen a number of important policy initiatives in areas affecting children. While many of these do not deal directly with the issue of play, they overlap to a greater or lesser extent with a number of related issues which are of relevance. A short summary of recent initiatives is set out below.

Children's Health

The following national documents and strategies, published in the last five years, refer to children's health. While none of them specifically mentions the issue of play, repeated references are made to the importance of physical activity and a holistic approach in working with children.

The National Health Promotion Strategy 2000 to 2005:

- ✓ acknowledges the effect of the environment and housing on health;
- ✓ refers to the impact of exercise on health and expresses particular concern about low levels of physical activity among young girls;
- ✓ supports a holistic approach to the physical and mental health of children and
- ✓ commits to consulting with young people in the planning, implementation and evaluation of interventions aimed at youth.

Youth As a Resource: Promoting The Health Of Young People At Risk (July 2001) (National Consultative Committee on Health Promotion):

- ✓ engaged in a consultative process with young people;
- ✓ covers issue such as physical activity, eating patterns, mental health, and safety and injury;
- ✓ puts forward recommendations on youth participation, access to and integration of services, parenting and family support, education, good practice, funding and health promotion.

The Health of our Children (Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer, 2000)

- ✓ considers child health needs from a broader health promotion perspective because for too long it has been associated with a narrow focus on diagnosis and treatment of illness and disease;
- ✓ recommends the integration of children's health care into a holistic, child-centred system resourced in the context of a national child health strategy.

Quality and Fairness: A Health System for You (2001 Health Strategy) identifies:

- ✓ Initiatives to promote healthy lifestyles in children will be extended;
- ✓ Initiatives to improve children's health;
- ✓ Actions to eliminate barriers to healthy lifestyles among Travellers, the homeless, asylum seekers and refugees;
- ✓ Actions to expand family support services.

Best Health for Children, a health promotion initiative by the Health Boards, underpins its recommendations with the development of a model which encompasses a more holistic child health approach.

Children in Education

The New Deal: A Plan for Educational Opportunity was launched in December 1999, to tackle educational disadvantage. This was followed by the White Paper on Early Education, 'Ready to Learn', which acknowledges the importance of play and activities for young children, in the learning process.

Quality Childcare And Lifelong Learning: Model Framework For Education Training And Professional Development in the Early Childhood Care and Education [ECCE] Sector was published by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in September, 2002. The document addresses access, transfer and progression of qualifications in the field of ECCE. Education and play are set out as core knowledge and skills training areas. It also sets out the core value statements for the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector in Ireland. These include:

- ✓ Childhood is of value in its own right;
- ✓ The rights of children, who are active agents in their own growth and development;
- ✓ Diversity by acknowledging and promoting each child's and each adult's individual, personal and cultural identity;
- ✓ Equality of access and participation in services;
- ✓ Experiences and activities which support learning and allow children to actively explore, to experience, to make choices and decisions and to share in the learning process;
- ✓ Play is the natural, constructive mode of children's interactions with their peers, adults and environment.

Children Living in Poverty

The *National Anti Poverty Strategy (NAPS) - National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Inclusion 2001/2003* contains a specific objective towards the elimination of social exclusion among children, giving them every opportunity for social integration. It reiterates the commitments in the National Children's Strategy, which includes a national goal that children will receive quality supports and services.

The Strategy provides an integrated focus for addressing the needs of a number of vulnerable groups including:

- ✓ Children and Young People;
- ✓ Travellers;
- ✓ People with Disabilities;
- ✓ Migrants and Members of Ethnic Minority Groups;
- ✓ Urban poverty;
- ✓ Rural disadvantage.

While no specific targets are set in relation to play, the Strategy touches on a number of related areas. The following commitments are outlined:

- ✓ to remove any remaining barriers to the full participation by Travellers in work and social life of the country;
- ✓ to increase the participation of people with disabilities in work and in society generally and to support people with a disability, and their families, to lead full and independent lives;

- ✓ to tackle social exclusion in a comprehensive manner, by building viable and sustainable communities, through improving the lives of people living in disadvantaged urban areas;
- ✓ to ensure that State services are delivered in an integrated way;
- ✓ to tackle social exclusion in rural areas in a comprehensive and sustained manner by improving transport and access to services and infrastructure.
- ✓ specific targets not defined for migrants and members of ethnic minority groups in absence of sufficient quantitative information on this group.

The most recent partnership agreement, *Sustaining Progress: Social Partnership Agreement 2003-2005*, identifies 10 special cross-cutting initiatives for the life of the agreement. A number of these areas have a peripheral link with children's play and recreation.

- ✓ Housing and accommodation;
- ✓ Cost and availability of insurance;
- ✓ Migration and Interculturalism;
- ✓ Long-term unemployed, vulnerable workers and those who have been made redundant;
- ✓ Tackling educational disadvantage: literacy, numeracy and early school leaving;
- ✓ Waste management;
- ✓ Care – children, people with disabilities and older people;
- ✓ Alcohol/drug misuse;
- ✓ Including everyone in the information society;
- ✓ Ending child poverty.

Traveller Children

Recent years have seen the setting up of a Task Force on Travellers, which reported in July 1998 and the production of *Traveller Health - A National Strategy 2002 - 2005*. The report of the Task Force recommended that play space be provided in the design of all accommodation schemes for Travellers. In addition, many national policy documents, have specific objectives for Travellers and other marginalised groups on access, integration and inclusion.

Children with a Disability

The issue of disability is relevant to a number of Government agencies, including the Department of Health and Children, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, the Equality Authority and the National Disability Authority. A recent significant policy initiative in this area was the launch of the National Physical and Sensory Disability Database by the Minister for Health and Children in March, 2002. Other initiatives include legislation in the area of anti-discrimination in employment, and the setting of targets for the employment of people with a disability in the public sector. The link between disability and poverty and the need for social inclusion measures have been acknowledged in NAPS. However, there has been little focus to date on the specific play and recreation needs of disabled children.

Children at Risk

There have been a number of important policy developments and publications on children at risk in recent years. These include *National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children, 1999* and *Children First*, the enactment of the *Children Act, 2001*, the establishment of the *Social Services Inspectorate* and the establishment of the Springboard family support projects. While these initiatives do not make specific reference to play or recreation, they embody the principles of acting in the best interests of the child, consulting with children on matters which affect them and acknowledging that a holistic view must be taken of the child's development and welfare.

A Partnership Approach

The importance of the community and voluntary pillar is articulated in the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Inclusion 2001/2003, which states that 'an active community and voluntary sector contributes to a democratic, pluralist society, provides opportunities for the development of decentralised and participative structures and fosters a climate in which the quality of life can be enhanced by all'. Their role was specifically recognised by the Government in its White Paper, *Supporting Voluntary Activity (2000)*, which sets out a cohesive framework of support for the future development of the relationship between the State and the community and voluntary sector. The paper forms an important context for the strengthening of consultative mechanisms generally. The community and voluntary sector will continue to be a major partner in the expansion of play opportunities for children.



Appendix 2

REVIEW OF COUNTY/CITY COUNCIL STRATEGIES FOR ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT FOR ACTIONS RELEVANT TO PLAY

CDB	Actions Yes/No	Details of Actions
Carlow County Council	Yes	<p><i>Objective: To promote equal opportunity to play for all children in County Carlow</i></p> <p><i>Action: Explore the possibility of developing a children's centre open to all children as a play and education resource. Develop a plan of action based on results.</i></p> <p><i>Action: Explore the provision of a mobile play bus for use by childcare schemes around the county.</i></p> <p><i>Action: Establish children's consultative forum to inform future play developments. Comhairle na nÓg</i></p> <p><i>Action: Pursue the establishment of an interactive science discovery centre.</i></p> <p><i>Action: Conduct needs analysis of play and develop play action plan based on needs identified.</i></p>
Cavan County Council	Yes	<p><i>Objective 1: to ensure equality of opportunity for all to quality housing and leisure facilities through a multi-agency approach</i></p> <p><i>Action 1: Continue to provide "open spaces for recreational amenity purposes in housing estates" as outlined in the County Council Development Plan</i></p> <p><i>Action 6: Continue to improve on the provision of local authority recreational/amenity facilities</i></p>
Clare County Council	No	
Cork City Council	Yes	<p><i>Objective 72: All children will have equal access to a wide range of leisure and education facilities and activities</i></p> <p><i>Action: Opportunities for the continuing development and implementation of new play and recreational facilities will be identified</i></p>
Cork County Council	Yes	<p><i>Objective: To improve the childcare situation in areas identified as particularly disadvantaged. Within each electoral area, specific locations will be targeted in consultation with local interests, local development groups and the Community Work Department of the SHB.</i></p> <p><i>Action 5: Play Spaces for children</i></p> <p><i>Objective: To encourage more activity & participation by general public</i></p> <p><i>Action 35: Enhance & establish more: Playgrounds, Children's Safe Places and Open Spaces within Towns & Villages</i></p>
Donegal County Council	No	
Dublin South County Council	Yes	<p><i>Objective: Recommend that the external environment to housing estates is made accessible to disabled people in terms of road structure, footpaths, signage, and facilities such as seating, play areas and green areas.</i></p> <p><i>Action: Pilot the proofing of all future planning applications for housing developments to ensure surrounding environment is accessible.</i></p> <p><i>Objective: Develop a plan for play and recreation facilities taking into account the safety needs of children and young people, and insurance issues.</i></p> <p><i>Action: Report on safety and insurance issues as barriers to the provision of facilities.</i></p> <p><i>Objective: Develop models for the management and supervision of play facilities to ensure that they are developmental resources.</i></p> <p><i>Action: Explore models of developmental play facilities to initiate a pilot programme for the county.</i></p> <p><i>Action: Input into the National Play Strategy and promote recommendations within the county.</i></p>
Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown County Council	No	
Fingal CDB	Yes	<p><i>(Goal): That a high quality housing environment will be secured and maintained</i></p> <p><i>Action 12: To examine best practice, including insurance implications, so as to provide, by 2003, in the preparation of Local Area Plans for child-safe playground facilities, located in safe, observable areas within residential developments.</i></p>
Galway City Council	Yes	<p><i>Objective 2: To promote the timely provision of an appropriate quantity and quality of recreation and community facilities as part of all housing developments, fostering community cohesion.</i></p> <p><i>Outcome: Child-friendly infrastructure and children's play facilities.</i></p>
Galway County Council	Yes	<p><i>Objective: To improve the overall quality of life for children in the County by focusing on their right to play, a place to mix with other children safely within their communities, and access to a range of extra-curricular activities.</i></p> <p><i>Action: Establish a Community Play Forum to support the development of a Play Strategy of the County.</i></p> <p><i>Action: Undertake an assessment of play, recreation and amenity space in County Galway.</i></p> <p><i>Action: Create a database of suitable sites, publicly-owned landbanks and areas of high demand for a Play and Recreation Profile of the County</i></p> <p><i>Action: Identify 6 pilot projects for new investment in play and sport, one in each electoral area.</i></p> <p><i>Action: Incorporate horticultural, environmental and artistic considerations into the design of an existing play and amenity space.</i></p> <p><i>Action: Draw up standards for play and amenity space within all new physical development projects in the County.</i></p> <p><i>Action: Establish a council supported system to ensure and maintain community-run play and sports facilities.</i></p>

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Kerry County Council	No	Objective SAH17: Develop a county-wide policy on playgrounds and play areas.
Kildare County Council	No	
Kilkenny County Council	No	
Laois County Council		Objective: There will be a balanced provision of a full range of sporting, play and leisure facilities throughout the county to facilitate the people of Laois and visitors to the county, based on the principle of social inclusion. Action: A balanced geographical spread of accessible facilities for sporting, leisure and play activities will be developed. Action: Provide active play areas for children at appropriate locations in the county. Objective: Laois will be a child-friendly county Action: All children will have appropriate play and recreation facilities.
Leitrim County	Yes	Objective: Ensure that young people benefit from and contribute to vibrant local communities Action 4: To make available more sport, play and recreational facilities Action 7: To provide recreation and play areas in all new housing developments
Limerick City Council	No	
Limerick County Council	No	
Longford County Council	Yes	Objective: To have in place a housing policy which promotes viable inclusive communities. Action: Include minimum requirements within the planning and housing codes for the provision and maintenance of play areas, community and childcare facilities in residential areas.
Louth County Council	Yes	Objective: To promote cultural understanding and social inclusion through cultural activity. Action: Promote and support the development of children's play facilities (indoor & outdoor) throughout County Louth Objective: To ensure equal opportunity is afforded to all people to participate in cultural activity Action: Designate an officer with responsibility for the development of play and recreation activity.
Mayo County Council	Yes	Objective 4.5A: To promote healthy lifestyle practices. Action: Appoint a Play & Recreation Officer as required under the National Children's Strategy. Objective 4.5B: Develop the infrastructure necessary to promote healthy lifestyle practices Action: Support the development of cycle lanes, walking & jogging paths, recreational areas and playgrounds in areas where they are currently required. Action: Work with the relevant parties – including the management of recreational facilities (especially playgrounds) – to explore ways of overcoming barriers such as insurance and care-taking.
Meath County Council		Objective: Coordinated provision of infrastructure (economic & social/cultural) to enable the Navan-Trim-Kells (NTK) corridor to become the primary growth area for the county with Navan as its centre Action: Provide high quality recreational infrastructure: playgrounds, parks, indoor leisure facilities etc. Objective: Enhancement of key economic infrastructure through upgrading and additional supply, throughout the remainder of the county, especially in the East Meath and South Meath Fringe corridors Action: To provide high quality recreational infrastructure: playgrounds, parks, indoor leisure facilities etc. Objective: Enhancement of social/cultural infrastructure provision (outreach health, housing, childcare, recreation, arts and culture) on a balanced basis throughout the county in conjunction with residential development Action: Provide parks and playgrounds
Monaghan County Council	Yes	Objective: To ensure the provision of a quality built environment. Action: Ensure community infrastructure such as open spaces and play areas are provided and maintained particularly in large housing developments.
Roscommon County Council	Yes	Objective 10: To ensure progressive and transparent planning systems in the county. To ensure future development plans, housing strategies and other local authority strategies take account of the environment and sustainable impacts of development. Action: Implement the recommendations of the Children's Strategy with regard to provision of safe spaces for the recreation needs of children and families. Objective 20: To encourage and support children to be actively involved in shaping their present and their future. Action: Implement the National Children's Strategy
Offaly County Council	Yes	Objective: Children will have access to play, sport, recreation and cultural activities. Actions: Playgrounds will be developed as part of new local authority estates where practicable. Arts and cultural activities will also be made available to children.

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		<p><i>Objective: Provide community learning, recreational, community development, environmental protection and service provision facilities where possible.</i> <i>Action: Integrate play areas/sports facilities into all new designs and, where practicable, into existing designs.</i></p>
Sligo County Council	No	<p><i>Objective 1(g): promote health and development through play, leisure and physical activity</i></p>
Tipperary North County Council	Yes	<p><i>Objective: Ensure that appropriate community facilities are included in all housing estates.</i> <i>Action: Develop policies and guidelines for use by the Planning Authority in considering applications for housing developments.</i> <i>Action: Provide funding to develop an appropriate level of childcare, playgrounds and community centre facilities in all new and existing housing estates.</i> <i>Objective: Provide facilities to accommodate cultural activities at appropriate geographical locations throughout North Tipperary</i> <i>Action: Use community levy and other schemes to enhance facilities.</i> <i>Action: Examine current provision of public recreation play areas and identify gaps.</i></p>
Tipperary South County Council	Yes	<p><i>Objective: Implementation of specific strategies</i> <i>Action: Prepare an action plan for the development of additional children's play areas in South Tipperary and respond to other recommendations made in the National Children's Strategy</i></p>
Waterford City Council	Yes	<p><i>Objective: To put in place the necessary physical infrastructure for sports and recreation</i> <i>Action: Implement the recommendations of the "Sport and community facilities in Waterford.</i> <i>Action: Maximise usage of existing facilities.</i> <i>Action: Provide increased recreational facilities</i></p>
Waterford County Council	Yes	<p><i>Objective: To develop a range of quality sports and recreational facilities throughout the county.</i> <i>Action: Develop a programme to ensure that all communities have quality accessible playground facilities.</i></p>
Westmeath County Council	No	<p><i>Objective: Ensure children have access to high quality play and recreation facilities</i> <i>Action: Develop a play policy for Westmeath</i> <i>Action: Develop a resource centre and play park at D'Alton Park.</i> <i>Objective: Give children and youth in the county a voice</i> <i>Action: Prepare an action plan to oversee the implementation of the National Children's Strategy in the County with an emphasis on:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Development of a Play and Recreation Strategy for the county ✓ Giving children a voice ✓ Encouraging involvement of young people in <i>Dáil na nÓg</i>
Wexford County Council	Yes	<p><i>Objective: Develop a strategy on play for children</i> <i>Action: Strategy on play for children</i> <i>Objective: Educate parents on the value of play for children</i> <i>Action: Promotion of play in children's lives</i> <i>Objective: Provide a broad range of play and activity opportunities for children</i> <i>Action: Development plan for the provision of play areas countrywide.</i></p>
Wicklow County Council	Yes	<p><i>Objective: Youth needs and facilities</i> <i>Action 41: Develop policies on the provision of and public parks/playgrounds throughout Co. Wicklow</i> <i>Objective44: Making Wicklow a child-friendly county.</i> <i>Action: That Wicklow CDB will develop and oversee the implementation of a play policy for the needs of young people in the community.</i> <i>Action: Greater emphasis to be placed by Wicklow local authorities in providing and maintaining the number of amenity areas eg. Public parks, playgrounds in Co. Wicklow.</i></p>

Appendix 3

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CHILDREN IN HOSPITAL IRELAND REPORT (1993)

- ✓ All wards where children are nursed should have a play area or play room on or near the ward, open during the day, evenings and weekends. The playroom must be safe for use by children and their parents, in the absence of play staff.
- ✓ Play facilities should be available in all areas where children and adolescents are admitted and treated. In the Out-Patients Department and Accident and Emergency Departments, the services of a Hospital Play Specialist should be available as required and a play area designated away from adult waiting areas.
- ✓ Play should be organised by a qualified Hospital Play Specialist, who would be responsible for co-ordinating and supervising play and play personnel throughout the hospital.
- ✓ Hospitals where children are treated should have an appropriate ratio of Hospital Play Specialists to child patients.
- ✓ Hospital Play Specialists should be accepted as professional members of the hospital healthcare team. The Hospital Play Specialist should have particular involvement in making all parts of the hospital friendlier for children and adolescents and also in training hospital staff in the special needs of children and adolescents in hospital.
- ✓ Adequate capital resources must be made available for the provision and maintenance of equipment.
- ✓ Play programmes available should be appropriate to the ages of the children and adolescents being treated. The programmes should be adaptable for all conditions and disabilities.
- ✓ Therapeutic pre-admission, preparation and follow-up play programmes should be available to all children and adolescents undergoing surgical treatment and investigative and invasive procedures.
- ✓ All hospitals where children are treated should have a clear, written policy and guidelines on the provision of play.

Recommendations from the Children in Hospital Ireland Report (1993)



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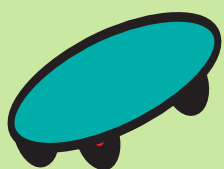
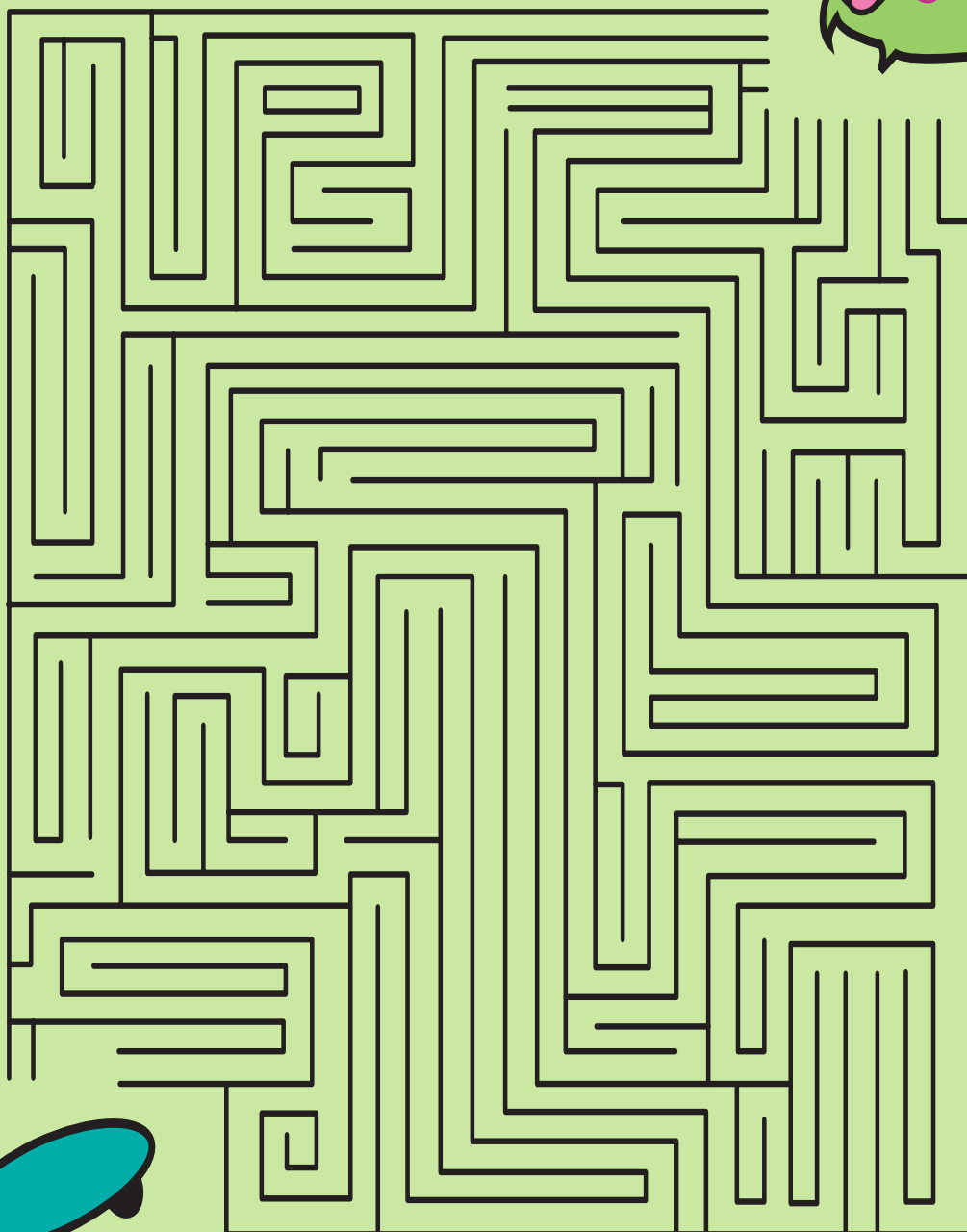
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