

## **Yorkshire Play Response to DfES/HM Treasury Joint Policy Review on Children and Young People call for Evidence**

### **Introduction**

Yorkshire Play wishes to make a submission in response to the DfES/HM Treasury Joint Policy Review on Children and Young People call for evidence. The overall aim of Yorkshire Play is:

**“To promote access to excellent play opportunities for all children and young people in the Yorkshire and The Humber region”**

by:

- Supporting play providers to develop high quality, diverse and inclusive play environments
- Supporting the development of a qualified workforce
- Advocating the right of all children and young people to play, through lobbying at local, regional and national levels
- Promoting a play friendly approach within all the services for all children and those services that impact on play.

By working towards these aims we can identify examples of how Play and Playwork can build on the principles identified in ‘Support to Parents: the best start for children’. This evidence not only contributes to the prevention strand of the review, but the additional sub-reviews of disabled children, strategy for youth services and of high cost, high harm families.

### **1) Supporting play providers to develop high quality, diverse and inclusive play environments**

For excellent Play services to be delivered, and then for additional support services to be co-located, investment is required in Play environments and maintained and developed in the Playwork education and training sphere..

There is an increasing need for Play and Playwork in order to compensate for the increasingly constrained and lost natural Play spaces. This loss has occurred due to a number of modern factors including perceived ‘stranger danger’, increasingly busy roads and the reduction in the ability of families to maintain observation of their children.

In the Yorkshire and The Humber region there is a diverse range of issues affecting our communities from rural isolation, to the economic issues faced by the loss of traditional industry e.g. coal and steel. Also, the increasing social issues faced in our urban areas such as ethnic tension, which emerges from lack of understanding and low tolerance, loss of green space and low incomes. Play can offer a starting point for all children and families exposed to these social issues.

It is perceived that a neighbourhood where children are seen to be playing, without fear or exposure to danger, is a safe neighbourhood. The sound of

children playing has been described as the 'soundtrack' of a healthy community. How can we re-create this atmosphere and culture of communities? Much can be learned from the work of U. Bronfenbrenner on the 'ecology of human development' here an argument is made for the importance of the matrix of links with institutions (school, church, family, workplace, playgrounds and voluntary organisations) within a range of communities.

In the process of regeneration the creation of places for children to play is an excellent way of increasing social cohesion by providing a focal point, as has been demonstrated at Kendray in Barnsley. Kendray was described as suffering 'a typical spiral of decline'. A regeneration project has been implemented with the involvement of the local community, including the children and young people. They have jointly developed a central leisure area for the whole community including an outdoor amphitheatre, and a variety of different play areas. Policy manager for the initiative, Carol Brady, stated "The success of the project has been quite amazing in terms of the wider regeneration of Kendray."

In the early 1970's, a small piece of research performed by the Thames Valley police indicated that when playscheme provision was made available in local communities, the levels of vandalism and petty crime dropped amongst young adolescents.

It has also been shown that children involved in play before school exhibit improved behaviour and concentration within school. This translates to increased attainment, and eventually better socio-economic outcomes.

Further evidence regarding the improved outcomes for children in difficult environments has been found when researching children visiting prisons. When play provision is made available for children who visit prisons, the outcomes are that the tension of the experience is reduced and managed by the child; positive relationships are maintained with the relative and through the play experience children are offered a vehicle to help them cope with the experience of a prison.

Play is a platform through which parents can get involved in the community. By becoming involved in their own children's play they also develop the confidence to take part in other ways such as joining community groups and taking part in adult learning. Again, in the Yorkshire and the Humber region, all the differing communities can benefit from parental and community involvement. This helps to alleviate social and emotional exclusion that emerges at one end of the spectrum from rural isolation, and at the other end through lack of access to affordable amenities experienced by some suburban areas in the region which are affected by the loss of industry.

An investment in the Playwork profession and related employment opportunities is required in order for these excellent Play environments to exist. This also works in reverse, as a playworker can facilitate play opportunities almost anywhere that children choose. In Leeds, for example,

Leeds Play Network has, for the last five years, run a street play project. The aim of the project is to legitimise the presence of children in the places where they want to be and to enhance their play experiences. Outcomes of the project have included a reduction in youth nuisance calls, better relations between children and adults, community volunteering and a better understanding by local adults of what constitutes good play environments. In Wakefield, a "Play Rangers" project operates with similar aims but specifically targets their activities at formal playgrounds. They have seen similar outcomes as in Leeds but in addition, have seen increased usage of the playgrounds for longer periods, thus increasing the value for money invested in the playground.

## 2) Supporting the development of a qualified workforce

In order to ensure an excellent service that can contribute to the issues raised in 'Support to Parents: the best start for children' there needs to be a long term commitment to Playwork education and training. This commitment needs to be maintained over a lengthy period of time which would provide longitudinal evidence which in turn would measure the impact of such projects and allow creative development in the field. This would inevitably assist in improving outcomes for children and their play opportunities..

In Yorkshire and the Humber we recognise a shortage in not only qualified and experienced playwork staff, but also playwork trainers. We are working hard to rectify this in the region, which is the only one to have two universities delivering Playwork education and training, Leeds Metropolitan University being the first in the country to offer education to degree level in Playwork. In order to build upon this and address the shortages long-term, maintained investment is required.

Playwork education and training is essential for the development of a quality workforce who are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to deliver excellent play services for children, young people and families.

The Playworker provides supervision and facilitation for play services without intervening in, or constraining, the play opportunities offered. Their role is to act as an advocate for both children and their families when their voices are not heard; equally the development of strong relationships with children, young people and parents is vital. A playworker is viewed as a trusted, non-judgmental adult by both children and parents. Importantly, playworkers are in a unique position, with no extended agendas e.g. education or improving health. Their focus is purely working with children enabling their development through play and accessing good play provision and opportunities.

A trained and experienced playworker can contribute to the regeneration of the area by being the elected voice of children in community and a means of the community linking with its children.

Playwork needs to be highlighted and developed within the Extended Schools agenda as it has clear links with the core offer.

### 3) Advocating the right of all children and young people to play, through lobbying at local, regional and national levels

All children and young people have the right to play and the right to improved outcomes through participating in play. Play environments and Playwork improve outcomes particularly for disabled children and young people who often find themselves excluded from other areas of society.

Play offers an inclusive environment for disabled children and young people to express their feelings and behaviours that are too often misinterpreted in the wider community as negative.

Also play, just by its nature, will help improve the physical mobility, coordination etc of children with physical disabilities

Children and young people also have the right to be involved in their community and this can begin with involvement in the design and running of a range of play opportunities. This is coupled with responsibilities in helping to maintain this provision and an inclusive environment. This fosters community involvement which can continue into adult life.

### 4) Promoting a play friendly approach within all the services for all children and those services that impact on play

Children, young people and family support services can be co-located with places where children play. With Play as the primary focus of the site, other support services can naturally be 'bolted on' in order to benefit from the positive associations Play offers. Being involved in Play is not problematic for families. Play provides everyone with an equal starting point. There are no inequalities where playing is concerned. Play is the unifying reason for being there.

Therefore the additional services are more easily accessible as the location is free from the stigma often associated with the health and social services.

With a play friendly approach from support services parents and children become more comfortable with seeking help and guidance at the outset of issues, therefore increasing prevention and reducing the high cost interventions at later stages

### Focussing on Issues identified in 'Support to Parents: the best start for children'

The document states that Government strategy is focussing on 'building stronger communities and regenerating deprived neighbourhoods' (see Bronfenbrenner). The examples given above have a clear relevance to the benefits play and playwork can have in regenerating and strengthening communities through not only a focus on, but actual involvement with, their children.

There is recognition that parents would welcome support that is easily accessible, non-stigmatising, sensitive to different cultures and ways of bringing up children and responds to problems when they are easier to deal with. There is a clear match with the playwork examples and ideas above of how the play ethos can be used to develop such an approach to support services – but it is important to not dilute the value of play for its own sake.

This is linked to the statement within the document that ‘All children deserve a secure safe and happy childhood for its own sake and also because it provides the basis for them to make the most of their talents as they grow up, achieve potential as adults and pass the benefits on to their own children’

Play is a huge part of a happy childhood, and can help to compensate when children experience the risk factors identified –

- Poor parenting
- Poor experiences in school
- Association with negative peer groups
- Living in poor housing or a deprived neighbourhood

It can also be used to address some of the issues as the examples above show

The document recognises that the financial support to parents needs to be combined with other measures to directly influence child outcomes. The examples and ideas above clearly show how play has positive outcomes for children

There is reference to neighbourhood providing the environment where children take their first steps to becoming a citizen with rights and responsibilities and the idea that volunteering is a way of developing citizenship skills. Indeed, community involvement is essential to both the child’s development and that of the community. However, the schemes referred to focus on teenagers – Play offers an earlier start with the examples above

The document acknowledges that one of the challenges set out in Every Child Matters is that of workforce reform to raise the status of all practitioners working with children. The examples above are clearly dependent on this including Playwork as it is a valuable career in children’s work and suffers from poor status.