



## Play Right Chwarae lawn's Response to the Child Poverty Strategy for Wales Consultation

**Deadline - 12th August 2010**

Play Right is the voluntary sector's Play Association for Swansea, Neath and Port Talbot, established in 1975 and has developed many different services during this time that respond to the needs of local communities and play providers. Play Right promotes best practice and partnership working to improve outcomes for all children and young people particularly those aged 5-15 years, who often get missed out in planning services because there has traditionally been more emphasis on pre-school activities and then youth provision which only covers 11-25.

Play Right upholds children's right to play. Freely chosen play is critically important in the healthy development of all children and young people. All children are entitled to quality play opportunities within their communities and Play Right works strategically to achieve this goal on their behalf.

Play Right works on both strategic and face to face levels advocating for children and young peoples' rights and advising other organisations about providing and planning for the play and developmental needs of children and young people in their local communities.

Play Rights' membership is drawn from a wide range of providers including local voluntary organisations, local authorities, schools, playgroups, childminders and parents.

Play Right welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Child Poverty Strategy and Delivery Plan for Wales consultation. Our response focuses on Chapter 6, which is of most relevance for our membership and our area of charitable interest. However, we have evidence that children and young people's opportunity to access quality places, freedom and time to play and hang out makes a significant contribution to alleviating poverty across the whole of this Strategy and Delivery Plan.

This response has been written following consultation with our membership.

## **1. What are your views on our three strategic objectives for our new Child Poverty Strategy in Wales?**

Play Right supports the proposal for three strategic objectives in principle but the objectives are not measurable and concentrate on the economic agenda of getting parents into work. Play Right would wish to see the third objective placed first, indicating the importance of the preventative and early intervention approach that will need to be maintained and strengthened for the other objectives to be moved forward.

Inequalities for children are broad rather than specific and the delivery plans highlight a range of opportunities and services, therefore, the third objective might better read:

*.. to reduce the inequalities of access to services and opportunities for children living in poverty by improving the outcomes of the poorest . .*

Play Right has strong concerns that the language of the Broad aim “To reduce inequalities in participation in cultural, sporting and leisure...” as it appears on the face of the Measure, is not coherent with the Chapter title, Core Aim 4; All children have access to play, leisure, cultural and sporting activities (as in Annex 1, section 1.5).

We recommend the inclusion of a Long Term Priority Policy Action for the broad aim “To reduce inequalities in participation in cultural, sporting and leisure...” in Table 3.1 p 17. to read:

*Greater promotion of quality play-friendly environments and practices.*

## **2. What are your views on the policy action we set out in the Delivery Plan?**

It is disappointing that the Delivery Plan in Chapter 6 is in part backward looking and it does not reference the contribution of the Cymorth Support Fund play theme in its fullest context.

The actions would be more effective if they were worded as follows:

- *We will work with local authorities and other partners to develop an understanding of the breadth of opportunities that can be provided for all children and young people to play.*
- *Develop Regulations and Guidance to support local authorities to undertake sufficiency audits as part of the Children and Families*

*(Wales) Measure that are coherent with the national Play Policy and the definition of play articulated therein. They will be developed to support a cross-professional and joined up approach.*

- *Continue to improve access and the development of play services for children and young people, referencing the play theme of Cymorth Support Fund and its support for all children living in poverty, including disabled children and young people.*

We would also recommend additional actions as follows:

- *Work with partners to develop public information initiatives in respect of the nature of playing and the importance of supporting playing children,*
- *explore the benefits of cross sector training for all those whose professional decisions may have an impact on children's access to play opportunities.*

### **3. Do you think the policy action set out in the Delivery Plan will enable us to achieve our three strategic objectives and our vision for 2020?**

No. There is not enough emphasis on how access to play opportunities contributes to alleviating the effects of childhood poverty and improving perceptions of wellbeing amongst children and their families.

The sentence "Play is also important" is misleading and therefore may inadvertently cause the reader to view play as an add-on. We recommend that this is changed to read:

#### ***Playing is important ...***

In addition, we note that this strategy and delivery plan was formulated prior to recent significant changes to the Benefits system. It is likely that these changes will impede the achievement of Welsh Assembly Government's vision for 2020 – the effect might be that children are poorer financially.

#### **What is the best way to integrate local multi-agency support for families living in poverty?**

The Welsh Assembly Government must provide clear and firm directives to organisations on joint working arrangements, the need to explore more creative ways of working with families, and the pooling of resources.

There will need to be commitment from Senior Managers, Middle Managers within agencies and those people that are working on the ground, ensuring that firm links are established and maintained between strategic thinking and the operational delivery of services.

It will be important that the further development of multi-agency working builds on existing local work with children, young people and families.

It is imperative that play provision features as an integral part of multi-agency support for families. Parents and carers are supporters of staffed play provision. They recognise that staffed play provision is an important part of their children's lives – an integral experience that their children would otherwise miss. They are aware of the mix of learning, socialising and health benefits that children gain from playing, but primarily emphasise how their children gain valuable and unique experiences when playing is allowed to take place for its own sake.

Support for staffed play provision is often expressed through volunteering, which in turn can be beneficial to parents, who learn valuable transferable skills.

### **Related issues**

- This strategy reads as an economic document and feels like it is written for parents to get back into work and not focused on the health and wellbeing of children and young people currently living in poverty.
- The strategy reads as though the importance of play is not fully understood by the writing group. For instance the term play forms part of (and is noted in 2.4) the 7 Core Aims in the title of Chapter 6, and yet in the first sentence of this chapter play is completely left out.
- No support for WAG's Play Policy is mentioned in Chapter 6 although support for the Youth Support Strategy is mentioned in Chapter 4.

- The Strategy refers to using Community Focused Schools as a 'key mechanism for supporting parents from disadvantaged backgrounds' this is not child focused.
- Community Focused School Programme has been in place since 2002 and still has not established itself as a roll out programme. As the agenda is left up to the Governing Bodies, often opportunities for locally delivered services can be missed. For example: in Swansea last year a Manager from the Council was told CFS's do not fund open access play provision. If this is what the community is asking for then why not? This is not an isolated incident, it simply highlights the inconsistencies and the possibility for missed opportunities.
- There is an emphasis on out of school childcare through Community Focused Schools. What about free open access play provision for children and young people? Only stating childcare as an option in this strategy re-enforces misunderstandings. Free play often engages with hard to reach children and young people who aren't engaging/achieving in school. Play opportunities allow children and young people to learn social skills, develop intellectually, express themselves creatively, develop emotionally (including emotional resilience – leading to less likelihood of mental health problems in later life) and develop physically alongside their peers. Play promotes and develops 'social inclusion' through engaging with those not engaged in education in the same space and their peers.
- Play obviously supports learning and wellbeing and yet is not mentioned in Chapter Three. The jump in strategies goes from 7 years olds (in the Foundation Phase) to 11 years old (in the Youth Service). What about the 8-11 year olds. This does not fit in with the Strategies desire to create 'seamless transitions' between services from the outset.
- Wellbeing is vital and is sited in the strategy, and yet the actions relating to it are all about health and fitness. Wellbeing is about the holistic development and happiness, of children and young people not simply health services. Play and recreation, freedom to choose and hang out, help to develop a sense of self-belief and

wellbeing. A child who is always led and instructed will develop belief in themselves much slower than a child who learns experientially and is allowed the freedom to try new things in her own time and at her own pace. This strategy needs to recognise and acknowledge these facts.

- Play Right works with parents who feel intimidated by sports centres. Therefore, a link from the Change4Life web page about local activities links directly on to the Sports Council website (as the only option) instantly creates a barrier and is idealistic. There has been a study which shows that when a child is playing freely they burn more calories than participating in structured sport (Play Research Network – National Children’s Bureau).
- There is a clear imbalance between reactive and preventative services to tackle mental health in Chapter 5, but only in the explanation of the three dimensions making up Dame Carol Black’s review “Working for a Healthier Tomorrow”. There seems to be a focus on maternity and ante natal intervention and then nothing until a child has developed mental health problems and is referred to CAMHS. Play is a preventative mechanism for mental health problems and there is evidence to prove this.
- This document claims to work in line with the UNCRC to “ensure and adequate standard of living which is essential for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development” and yet free time to play and opportunities to hang out with friends does not seem to be adequately catered for.
- There is a heavy emphasis on education, sport and leisure activities which many children living in poverty would not be able to/want to access. Young people we work with practice free running and have said they will not go to gymnastics classes because they are not interested. Having attainment levels in all aspects of children and young people’s lives does not support holistic development and improved sense of wellbeing. It is important that this document acknowledges that. There is no point getting parents into work if the children are not being fully supported in a holistic way to improve their life chances.

## Chapter 6

- This Chapter includes support for initiatives for “cultural, sporting and leisure activities”, but does not offer support to the Play opportunities. If Play is important enough to have it’s own subsection (when the other three priorities in this section are documented together) then why are the actions so weak?
- There is no mention of WAG’s Play Policy 2002 or the WAG Play Implementation Plan 2006 in this chapter.
- This chapter seems to back track on WAG’s commitment to play as laid down in the Play Strategy 2002 and Play Implementation Plan 2006
- The definition of Play is already publicly available through the Welsh Assembly Government’s Play Strategy 2002. There have been no calls from the Play Sector to amend this working definition, which is used in training for Playworkers across the country.
- There is no mention of ‘free play’, which has been proven to develop social skills, physical capabilities and awareness, intellectual stimulation, creative achievement, emotional stability as well as aiding spiritual growth, sense of wellbeing and community responsibility. All of which this strategy if it were written for children would be striving to achieve, alongside getting parents and young people back into work.
- There is no mention of support for the BIG Lottery Child’s Play Programme which has just secured £10million for Play across Wales through joined up partnership working between the Voluntary and Statutory sectors in each of the 22 Local Authority areas across Wales.
- There is no mention of providing free or subsidised access to staffed provision for children and young people living in poverty and yet the evidence proves that communities hardest hit by poverty are often living in fear and will not let their children out to play on their own, or with friends.

- Playwork and quality play opportunities serve children and young people between the ages of 5-15 years supporting them to develop in a holistic way primarily focusing on 8-12 year olds who seem to have been ignored throughout this strategy.
- Measuring progress does not mention Local Authorities assessment of play opportunities as laid down by the Child and Family Measure.

#### **ANNEX 1.4**

- Ensuring “children’s wellbeing” cannot solely be achieved by providing health services and stopping parents from smoking around them. Wellbeing comes from spiritual and emotional stability, a sense of belonging and a sense of security, it comes from playing out in the community with friends and being acknowledged as an important member of the community. This will not be achieved simply by attending structured child care provision.

#### **ANNEX 1.5**

- Again Play is missing from the text both in and out of the green box
- Playschemes and play provision need to be sites in the second paragraph
- Inviting friends over for tea is not always to do with cost and is an idealistic view point. Parent relationships, substance misuse, community judgment on life styles also inhibit children from inviting and being invited to tea. These are the vulnerable children who rely on play spaces and staffed provision to allow them to integrate and find their place in their own community.

- This Strategy states that “evidence suggests that there is a potential for children and young people from poorer backgrounds to become disengaged from education” so again why is everything being focused on attainment and learning rather than child development.
- The statement “Whilst young people living in disadvantaged areas do not play significantly less than their counterparts, they tend to have fewer safe places to play and live near dangerous road environments” needs to be referenced. Roads are a real hazard which inhibit children’s play opportunities in all areas.
- The statement “Physical Activity (of which sport is a key part)” is leading. Free play has also been proven to burn as many and sometimes more calories than structured sport.
- The last 5 paragraphs centre on sport and education as a way of increasing physical activity. Children and young people whose parents will not engage with the schools will become increasingly excluded and more vulnerable if all opportunities for physical activity (of which free play is one) are not supported and highlighted in this document.
- Increasingly children and young people are not allowed to play out in their communities because of fear or complaints for the neighbours. Play Right is currently running a play project that particularly focuses on dealing with neighbours and community members who are a barrier to children accessing their right to play out. In some areas staffed provision is the most appropriate service and is vital to support child development, social interaction, sense of community and social responsibility. This strategy must acknowledge this.
- This strategy seems like a step backwards for the Welsh Assembly Government, from it’s pioneering gestures and commitment to children and young people’s right to play. This strategy needs to emphasis and pledge to continue to lead the way for the rest of the world when it comes to policies to protect children and young people’s global rights.