

LEEDS PLAY SUFFICIENCY

FINDINGS FROM RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN



HOW WE THINK ABOUT PLAY

Leeds is proud to be a Child Friendly City, with a child friendly ambition to “put children and young people in the heart of a strong economy in a compassionate city”. Leeds strives to have the voice and – crucially – the influence of children at the centre of decision-making and policy. Child Friendly Leeds, on its tenth anniversary year, have refreshed their 12 wishes, taking feedback and ideas from thousands of children and young people in order to identify the current top issues and priorities for children in Leeds.

Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that every child has the right to play. Leeds is keen to see this right actively applied and is serious in its responsibility to ensure that all children in Leeds have the right to play.

As a local authority, we are taking steps to secure opportunities for play. From innovating our thinking about public realm (spaces for play and not just playgrounds) to exciting active travel and zero carbon initiatives: these are all things that can positively affect children’s opportunity for play.

THE PLAY SUFFICIENCY DUTY

Wales was the first country in the world to have a law about making sure children have enough time, space and permission to play. This law is called the Play Sufficiency Duty.

Play Sufficiency is about securing sufficient opportunities for children’s play and that involves far more than simply looking at designated provisions (although these are still important). Securing sufficient opportunities for play is about cultivating the time, space and attitudes needed for children’s play to flourish, in their homes, on doorsteps and residential streets, within local neighbourhoods and local community practices, throughout adult run institutions and across local authority policy and practice.

Play Sufficiency is an ongoing process of research and action to assess, improve and protect children’s opportunities for play. The assessment stage explores what is working for who, where and why at a neighbourhood and organisational and/or local authority level. This means working together to understand that the things that are supporting play as well as the constraining factors to play.

LEEDS PLAY SUFFICIENCY

In 2013 the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child published General Comment 17 on Article 31 of the UNCRC. The purpose of this ‘General Comment’ was to clarify and emphasise the responsibilities of countries within the United Nations in respect of children’s right to play. The General Comment goes on to recommend that government support for children’s play should be based on the principle of sufficiency; an endorsement of the pioneering approach taken in Wales. Leeds is leading the way on this recommendation. Though others are beginning to follow, we will be the first city in England to work through a Play Sufficiency Assessment.

The Leeds Play Sufficiency Assessment is being led by Active Leeds through a project funded by Sport England: Get Set Leeds Local (GSL). The research element has been led by Active Leeds and supported by Fall into Place and Public Health. We have commissioned play consultants Ludicology to guide us on this journey. Ludicology provides advice, research and training to those working with or on behalf of children and their play.

WHAT IS PLAY?

Children described play as being freely chosen. They said play was 'fun' and it involved the forming of new friendships and the deepening of relationships. It was an intrinsic feeling: *'play is where if you are sad, you can have fun and be happy'*. Children spoke about play happening in lots of different places – inside and outside. They talked a lot about nature and outdoor spaces. Children spoke about games such as tag, imagination games, hide and seek and online games.

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'Climbing trees'

'Play is where you can fill up on joy'

'Getting dirty – a mucky child is a happy child'

'Making up stuff and acting it out with your friends'

'Having a great time with your friends'

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WHY IS PLAY IMPORTANT?

Children and young people told us that play is important because of how it makes them feel: *'Play is fun...amazed, nice'*. Play was pleasure – it contributed to quality of life and sense of wellbeing. Many young people reported that play was important for their mental health: *'you can relax after working so hard...time to relax, important after the depressing work, gets rid of unhappiness'*. Play was an important regulator of mood: *'because it does help you not feel depressed'* and was a *'time where you can take a break'*. Children talked about being active whilst playing and spending time with friends and family.

'We can make new friends'

'It's important because the less you enjoy yourself – the less friends you will have have. And nobody likes being lonely'

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'Play makes life amazing'

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'Being bored is lame, so you play'

'Because it makes you feel free, creative, happy, energised and 100% makes you happy'

'Because it helps us be mature, stop being rude and helping boost our kindness to people who are disabled.'

'Play gives children a healthy mindset'

This document shares some of the things people told us and looks at the main issues affecting children's opportunities for play. We will use this information together when thinking about the ways in which we can help support children's right to play.

PLAYING AT SCHOOL

During our research sessions, school children colour coded a timetable of their week: green when they had freedom to play, amber when when children were encouraged or only allowed to play in certain ways (regulated) and red when children found it difficult to play or were not allowed to play (constrained). Responses from children were consistent within the same school, but varied across different schools. For some schools, much of the school day was highlighted green: playtimes, lunchtimes and a lot of lessons (particularly maths), whilst for other schools timetables were red even for children's playtimes.

Playful adults in schools supported children's opportunities for play. Children also quoted space as being really valuable to them. Where experiences of play were 'red' and play was constrained, children reported less permissions to play and lack of opportunities.

Outside of school, time was key. Extra-curricular commitments, homework and further education, religious commitments and caring commitments all constrained children's ability to play.

'It's super fun and I have very good friends, so I enjoy playing at school'

'Even break times are revision time now'

'My son is in high school, he leaves the house at 8am and doesn't get home until 4:30pm. Once he's changed and eaten, it's dark. And there's homework due the next day. It's a full time job, isn't it! There's only Friday night youth club where he plays.'

STREETS FOR PLAY

Streets are crucial to play. For many, the street that they live on is the only place that they can play outdoors without an adult present. This is particularly true of children and families living in high-rise accommodation where they generally have no gardens or yards. Streets were many children's only available play space.

Where streets were quieter and had adults that supported children's play, conditions for play were good. However, many children and parents/carers reported that there were several constraints that stopped children from playing in the street outside their homes. These were: traffic and parked cars – busy roads and cars going at high speeds; rubbish and litter. Children's space for play often had clear end points: "I'm not often allowed to go far, but I could play by the house".

'[I'm not allowed to play] Down the street because they can't see me.

Sometimes we get told off for accidentally hitting a car but it was not even our fault'

Do you meet up and play with friends outside of school? 'No because a lot of cars are parked on my street. I'm not allowed to go 3 streets away because it's not safe because of cars passing by'

'On my street...it's the drug dealers and idiot drivers the police are chasing. The other day one just sped round the corner, mounting up over the kerb'



COMMUNITY SAFETY AND TECHNOLOGY

When we asked children 'What is not play?' the response was striking. It was aggressions (physical, violence and conflict) that dominated e.g. hitting and fighting; breaking things; guns, bombs and murder; bullying; arson; shouting and swearing. These are potential indicators of what some children are seeing and hearing.

Parents concerns for their children's safety reduced permissions to play and reduced the number of available spaces that children were allowed to play in. As a consequence to this, children and young people often filled their time with playing online at home.

Children who played out and reported having sufficient quality of play did also report that they felt safe. However, many children were not allowed to play out due to 'risks'. Some of these included: a fear of teenagers, older children and ASB; dogs off their leads; drug dealing and drug litter; poorly lit areas; speed of traffic.

"My child was coming home from St Francis, and I don't know why but my son picked it up and got pricked. We had to go to LGI, it was terrifying...I was mentally affected by that..."

'Play is important because you can play with your friend on a online game and it would make it better if you can actually play with your real friend'

'Sometimes you see the cars come out of nowhere, we know to get out the way quick, but the kids might not.'

SPACES

Children talked about playing in the home, street, park or other spaces such as car parks or patches of grass. Some children could only list rooms in their house as places they could play without a grown up present. Children could share features of a space that supported play and very often these were minute details e.g. branch to swing on; railing to walk along.

Play parks were valued places that children mostly visited with a grown up. It was felt by many children that the main parks were too far to be allowed to visit on their own - *'Have to cross road, but one of them is busy so I have to go with my dad'* - but they did enjoy going when they were able to.

However, many children shared that they craved nature in their play spaces: trees to swing on; things to collect such as pine cones and conkers. They were also looking for more challenge from play equipment through activities such as climbing, monkey bars and obstacle courses. Young people spoke about having spaces they could talk to each other: *'swings don't come in pairs'*. Sometimes just a play prompt was required to make a space more inviting.

Conflict within spaces was a key constraining factor to children and young people. Children reported being moved along due to anti-social behaviour. Older children were reluctant to play in spaces dominated by younger children and younger children and parents were deterred from play spaces due to the presence of 'teenagers'.

'I think playing is when not just children but grown ups and other people have fun together. When they have laughter and come together and enjoy themselves. You can play at the park. You can play in your house. You can play in your garden'

'Little kids screaming around. I know they're trying to have fun, but it's annoying sometimes. When they're screaming around going 'I want this' and that'

'If you put an area outside Wortley Towers I could play, I could play more'

'Teenage boys come on the pitch and they're always swearing'



RELATIONSHIPS

We asked children 'What is play?'. It was consistent across all geographical areas that friendships were seen as fundamental to play. Children recognised that play was the means through which they made new friends and sustained relationships.

Despite this, 1 in 4 children said that they couldn't play out with their friends. In addition to this, 6/10 teenagers said that they hardly ever hung out with friends due to constraints put on them. This came through particularly strongly in our workshops with PRU and SILC pupils.

Play was supported by the presence of playful adults (who often facilitated a free-play structure to sessions) at clubs and after school activities.

Hanging out is...? 'Being on your own'

'I think playing is actually kinda healthy because you can play outdoors and you can also meet other people by playing'

'I cannot play because I have to look after my mom. Only allowed people around if they are older and helping. If not I just play with my dog and my fish'

WHAT WE CAN DO TO SUPPORT PLAY

- WORK TOGETHER TO DEVELOP ACTION PLANS AND STRATEGY TO FACILITATE AND PROMOTE CHILDREN'S PLAY
- CHAMPION CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO PLAY IN OUR FIELDS OF WORK
- FOLLOW @LEEDSPLAY ON TWITTER FOR UPDATES, INSIGHT AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING

