

SPOTLIGHT REPORT

ARTICLE 31:

**Foreword by Sally Holland,
Children's Commissioner for Wales**

March 2018

As Children's Commissioner for Wales I want all children in Wales to have equal opportunities to be the best they can be and to realise their rights.

Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) creates a specific right for all children to have rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to their age and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

The Convention recognises that these elements enrich children's experiences and are an important aspect of childhood.

The Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 places a duty on Local Authorities to assess for, and secure sufficient play opportunities for children and young people in their areas.

As a result, authorities have been required to assess their play provision since 2012, and required to secure sufficient play opportunities since 2014.

Wales - A Play Friendly Country(2014) is Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities which provides details about meeting these duties.

Children and young people tell me that having opportunities to play and spend their free time in safe and enjoyable ways in their local area is important to them.

This spotlight report shares over 450 young people's experiences of accessing play/free time, sport, leisure, culture, heritage and the arts in Wales. I would like to thank all those who engaged

for their time and honesty including those who assisted a number of children and young people to take part.

My hope is that the experiences highlighted in this report will not only help inform current thinking but prompt organisations, including those who have responsibility for delivering play, leisure, sport, art, culture and heritage opportunities, to consider if they are providing sufficient arrangements to engage with children and young people to enable them to inform and plan their services. Providing such opportunities has real value not only for children and young people but organisations themselves.

Enabling children and young people to participate is one of five principles within "The Right Way" a framework that my office has developed for working with children that is grounded in the UNCRC. This is a framework that helps organisations put children's rights at the heart of their work. Case studies can be found at the back of this report which provide examples of how both public and non-public bodies responsible for delivering play, sport, art, leisure and cultural opportunities are working towards implementing a Children's Rights Approach. I hope they will inspire other organisations to take the same approach.

KEY MESSAGES

The key messages:

As may be expected, children and young people engage in a wide range of play, leisure, heritage and cultural activities. However the barriers they face affect their ability to choose, and their current experiences are not necessarily a reflection of how they'd like to spend their time.

This was particularly apparent for children over the age of 13.

- 1. The most common barriers** to accessing more structured activities are financial, lack of variety and transport. A considerable number of children and young people also feel that they lack free time outside of school, studying and structured out-of-school activities.
- 2. Children and young people** want to play and spend free time in their own communities feeling safe, and having opportunities to take part with friends or other children and young people are an important part of this.
- 3. The views we gathered** indicated that many children and young people are not feeling confident enough to embrace the opportunities available to them. However, many saw the adults in their lives as important sources of support for accessing opportunities; all adults have a responsibility to help empower children to realise all their rights and help them be the best they can be – nurturing confidence is a key part of this.
- 4. Children have the right to be involved** in planning and decision-making about public provision of facilities and activities, and by doing so organisations will be able to better tailor their provision to meet the needs of children in their area. A number of encouraging case examples from Wales are provided in this report.

“I hope you take our thoughts into consideration, as we voice the issues that matter to us.”

(Caerphilly Youth Forum)

INTRODUCTION

In 2015 over 7000 children and young people took part in our ‘Beth Nesa?’ conversation. The purpose of the conversation was to ensure that the Commissioner’s strategic work plan was firmly grounded on what is important to children and young people in Wales.

Three to seven year olds told us that play was important to them and chose play as their top priority.¹ “Better places for young people to spend time in their local area”² was one of the top 3 priorities for 11-18 year olds and whilst further down the list for 7-11 year olds still featured in their top 10.

As a result, the Commissioner made a specific commitment to “*promote children’s rights to play and access leisure and cultural activities, whatever their circumstances*” as part of her three year strategic work plan.

This piece of work has created an opportunity to gather and share the views of children and young people, including those whose circumstances can often mean that their voices are not always heard.

The report is split into four sections:

- 1. Methods of data collection;**
- 2. Children and young people’s current experiences of playing, free time, sport, leisure, arts, culture and heritage;**
- 3. Barriers to play, free time, sport, leisure, arts, culture and heritage; and**
- 4. Delivering play, sport, art, leisure, cultural and heritage opportunities through a Children’s Rights Approach.**

A note about terminology

Due to the subjective nature of words like ‘play’, ‘leisure’ and ‘arts’ this section provides individual definitions which have been used during this work and should be kept in mind whilst reading this report.

Play/free time - Play is what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way, and for their own reasons. Play is fun and helps children to develop, explore and be creative. Play is the fundamental way that children enjoy their childhood. Play and free time were used interchangeably and older children and young people tended to identify with the term free time rather than play.

Arts/Arts based activities - These could include musical activities (watching or playing), drama (watching or being involved in plays, theatre, stage shows), dance, art (visual arts and crafts, community art, street art, drawing, painting, making things, going to art galleries), literature (reading, creative writing, poetry).

Sports and Leisure - Sports and leisure based activities could include playing sports, getting involved in activities, using leisure centres, going to clubs or groups, being active (e.g going for walks), other things you do in your free time and hobbies, etc. Some people have also referred to clubs as “structured activities”, as opposed to free time.

Culture and Heritage - Culture and heritage based activities could include visiting museums, castles and historic sites, going to the Eisteddfod, specific cultural events or festivals around your own cultural background, activities around tradition, customs and beliefs, activities in your chosen language, etc.

What we did

In order to gain the perspective of providers, a roundtable event was held with national arts, sport and heritage organisations in May 2017. Perspectives on challenges and innovative practices from this roundtable were used to inform the summer workshops with children and young people, and the Children's Rights Approach section in the second half of this report.

Over 450 children and young people took part in this project. Methods of seeking their views included a small-scale survey at the Urdd Eisteddfod in Pencoed in May 2017 and creative activities at the Conwy Play Day on Colwyn Bay beach in August 2017. These initial activities involved 314 children and young people aged 2 to 18, and 277 parents and carers. This helped to gain a sense of experiences of engaging with play, leisure and cultural activities amongst children and parents from a range of backgrounds.

A more focused set of activities followed which aimed to explore in more depth the experiences of children and young people who may face more challenges to access their rights under Article 31, or who may have specific experiences to share.

Sixteen interactive workshops were held with 159 children and young people aged 3 to 24. These included young people from Voices From Care, our own Community Ambassadors scheme, and a wide range of children and young people from the following groups:

- Children and young people with physical disabilities
- Deaf children and young people
- Children and young people with developmental disabilities - for example Autistic Spectrum Disorder
- Children and young people with additional learning needs
- Children and young people living in low income areas
- Children and young people with caring responsibilities (young carers)
- Young people who identify as LGBT
- Children and young people of Muslim faith
- Care experienced young people (young people who are or have been looked after by foster carers, family and friends foster carers or in residential care setting).

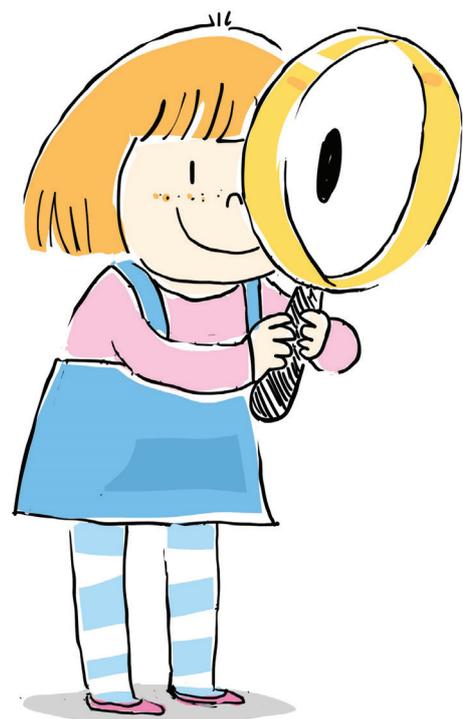
The majority of evidence in this report is drawn from these in-depth workshops.

1 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S CURRENT EXPERIENCES OF PLAYING, FREE TIME, CULTURE AND HERITAGE ACTIVITIES

We were able to collect illustrative examples of the wide range of activities that children and young people told us they were engaging in across Wales. These examples are shared in this section.

Key Findings

- Play, free time and having the chance to engage in different activities is important;
- Playing and spending time outdoors, going to the shops and physical activities dominated children and young people's discussions;
- Disabled children and young people often felt school was the place that provided them with the most opportunities, however they clearly valued the chance to engage in clubs and activity groups outside school;
- Technology was always used during free time but no one mentioned wanting more time to play on or use technology. Instead there was a clear sense that children and young people not only enjoyed the opportunities they currently have to take part in non-technology related activities in their own communities but wanted more of these experiences;
- Children over the age of 13, often felt that their local area offered few places to spend their free time in a safe and enjoyable way. Their current experiences depicted them resorting to visiting places, often outdoors, that they and other members of their community felt were unsuitable;
- Children and young people who have the opportunity to play and engage in activities in their free time recognise and value the support they receive from their family, friends, teachers and even their local authority. Those we spoke to wanted organisations to listen to their views, particularly to make sure that the current opportunities they valued were not taken away. This was particularly the case in respect of the youth centres and outdoor spaces;
- The variety of different experiences that children and young people described were not always based on personal choice. They were often limited by the barriers they faced and this is explored in section 2.



Children and young people's current experiences of playing, free time, culture and heritage activities

PLAY AND FREETIME

Playing and spending time outdoors was frequently mentioned.

Online activity was mentioned in all of our workshops.

Many participants in our workshops mentioned spending free time with family and friends.

"Going to see my mates and family" (Barnardo's Flintshire Young Carers group)

Younger children were keen to tell us about this too.

Going to the shops was often raised in workshop discussions. It was also selected as the most frequent place to go in their free time in one of our surveys. However, similarly to outdoor spaces this wouldn't necessarily be their first choice.

One young person said that it 'gets repetitive'.

Children and young people valued youth clubs:

"Youth clubs are safe spaces" (Eat Carrots Be Safe from Elephants - Powys Junior Safeguarding Board).

OUTDOOR SPACES

Younger children who attended the Conwy play day communicated their love of spending time outside through the colourful pictures they drew.

Parks were the most frequently mentioned destination across all age groups.

Responses to our online survey by parents showed that whilst they take their children to a number of places the park is the most frequently used.

The street was the least popular place to play with parents and children who completed our online surveys.

Lots of children and young people enjoyed outdoor activities like walking, cycling and football.

Older children told us they enjoyed spending free time outside but that the spaces currently available aren't always suitable.

SPORTS & LEISURE

Going to the gym and football were two of the most frequently mentioned activities.

Other activities mentioned included swimming, walking, running, rugby, hockey, gymnastics, dance, karate, basketball and badminton.

A number of children and young people raised that they wanted more opportunities to try different sports, particularly to socialise.

ARTS

Reading and listening to music were two of the most frequently mentioned activities.

Other arts activities mentioned included dance, writing, listening to music, drawing, singing, going to gigs, playing musical instruments, photography and designing.

A number of children and young people, particularly taking part in the Urdd Eisteddfod survey, talked about structured art activities like drama sessions and music lessons. Those in the workshop sessions often mentioned personal self-directed activities like art/drawing and listening to music.

A number of children and young people in our workshops enjoyed the art activities they took part in and wanted more similar opportunities, particularly outside of school.

CULTURE AND HERITAGE

96% of children in one of our surveys had been to a museum, castle or historical site.

Only 53% thought they had enough opportunities to celebrate their culture and heritage.

These results, largely involving children and young people representing groups that often miss out on activities enjoyed by their peers, encouragingly showed almost universal experiences of engagement in some heritage and cultural activities in Wales. This was often achieved through school. It is interesting to note however that around half of participants would like more opportunities to explore their culture and heritage.

2 BARRIERS EXPERIENCED BY CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

We asked children and young people to tell us what stopped them playing, using their free time and taking part in different sport, leisure, art, cultural and heritage experiences. Unprompted, several of the children and young people who participated in the interactive workshops also volunteered solutions to the barriers they discussed. These can be found at the end of this section.

Key Findings

- Despite living in a range of different circumstances and having different needs a number of common barriers emerged. These barriers are explored further in this section:
 - Time;
 - Money;
 - Transport;
 - Confidence;
 - Lack of provision and accessibility;
 - Not enough information about what is happening; and
 - Permission.
- Often more than one barrier was mentioned.
- Although there were commonalities across different social groups, as may be expected, there were some differences. These are described within the lack of provision and accessibility section as this is where the differences tended to present themselves.
- Just under 40 children and young people who participated in the interactive workshops completed an activity which involved writing a letter to the Commissioner telling her what they felt were the main barriers they faced to playing, using their free time and taking part in sport, leisure, arts, culture and heritage activities. The three most frequently raised were:
 - Lack of provision and accessibility;
 - Money;
 - Transport.
- Those involved in planning, policy and service development have a real opportunity to ensure that children and young people have the space (environment), time and permission to play and use their free time in fun and safe ways.
- Children and young people are not only willing and able to describe the barriers they face, but also to offer solutions. Through effective participation organisations can harness and benefit from children and young people's solutions and creativity. An example of this can be found in Section 3, where children and young people were involved in the design and development of a new play area.

Time

Having enough time to play and take part in sport, leisure, art and other activities was a recurring issue for children and young people.

Almost all young people and some children as young as 11 years old expressed that **school, homework, exams** and **revision** were barriers to play and free time.

It may be tempting to suggest that this reflects that children and young people will always want more time to do the things they enjoy and do less school work. However, after considering all responses there was a sense that children and young people accepted that school work was part of their day-to-day lives but that it was a dominating force leaving them with little opportunity for other things.

“Make sure I spend time doing things I enjoy as well as school work.”

(Girl age 13 - Muslim Council for Wales, discussing the arts)

One young person expressed a view that a combination of ‘addictive’ digital technologies and the compulsory nature of homework reduced young people’s time for other activities, including physical exercise:

“The availability of entertainment. Whether it is YouTube, Xbox, Facebook, Netflix or TV, there are far too many easily accessible sources of entertainment. These are all addictive and can limit the amount of physical exercise that young people do. Young people can often find time for homework because it needs to be done, but in my opinion, exercise is something that many people leave

out. Some young people, of course, find a balance, but I believe that many can’t and spend too much time on a computer or phone.”

(Young person - Vale of Glamorgan Rights Ambassadors)

A number of children and young people explained that they **already take part in activities** but that this in itself meant that they **did not have as much time for self-directed free time (play) or the chance to try new activities.**

“3 days I have activities after school but I do get the rest of the week off.”

(9 year old, Urdd Eisteddfod)

Some of the reasons given for not having enough time included things we might expect like **chores** and **“bed-time.”**³ However several talked about spending a considerable amount of time **caring for others;** from helping to look after siblings and younger foster children to caring for a parent.

When asked about how they spend their leisure time one young carer from Flintshire said;

“Walking to the shops to go get stuff for my mum.”

(Young Person - Barnardo's Flintshire Young Carers group)

Parents and carers' time was also recognised as affecting their experiences. Children and young people appreciated the support they were given and also showed an understanding of the competing demands on their parents/carers in terms of caring for others and going to work.

Money

Money was consistently raised as a barrier in the interactive workshop sessions and was often referenced in our survey responses by both children and adults. Children and young people were acutely aware of the cost of structured activities⁴ and equipment, particularly in the context of their family's financial circumstances.

“Money problems”.

(Young Person - Barnardo's Flintshire Young Carers Group)

“I go to circus group ...this is free. All the rest cost money.”

(Child aged 11 attending the Urdd Eisteddfod)

Structured arts activities were particularly, but not exclusively, perceived as unaffordable.

“I have missed out on music in school because it is too expensive.”

(Child Aged 13 attending the Urdd Eisteddfod)

This young person's account sums up what a number of older children and young people told us in respect of affordability of activities in general:

“The costs of activities, the majority of activities from sports and art clubs to casual leisure activities such as visiting the cinema all cost a lot. As a teenager, these activities are often too costly, acting as a barrier to us participating in activities.”

(Vale of Glamorgan Rights Ambassadors)

As highlighted in Section 1, children, young people and parents told us that they also play and spend their free time in unstructured ways and utilise free environments like the park. However there is a sense that children and young people would

like the option to access affordable structured activities and choose when to access them. The next section talks about transport, the cost of which was also raised as a major barrier.

Getting about - Transport

For many, transport and getting to places was identified as a significant challenge; whether it was for the purpose of going to play or hang out with friends or to take part in structured activities. There were three main issues;

■ Cost of transport and associated costs

“Price of the bus.”

(Conwy Play Day - Colwyn Bay)

“My family often can't even afford the car park prices so we aren't able to go many places together and experience new things as a family.”

(Girls Circle)

■ Availability of public transport

“Bus times and train times.... too early or too late for the planned activity”.

(Care experienced young people - Voices from Care Carmarthen Event)

■ Lack of alternative travel routes and options

Roads were perceived by several children, young people and parents as being too dangerous, particularly for cycling. Children and young people also commented on the maintenance of walking paths.

Transport was an issue which received a large volume of comments, and is clearly viewed as a significant barrier by those children and young people who participated in this project. It is interconnected with the next barrier, as “lack of provision” in local areas was one of the key messages emerging from the workshops. Lack of local provision means that transport becomes a necessity for many.

Lack of provision and accessibility

Lack of provision and accessibility was one of the most frequently mentioned barriers by children and young people and something they wanted to see change.

Lack of local provision was at the heart of the majority of discussions.

“Venues are often too far away.”

(Eat Carrots Be Safe from Elephants - Powys Junior Safeguarding Board)

“More local clubs in communities - and more accessible.”

(Vale of Glamorgan - Rights Ambassadors)

It was not only those living in rural areas that felt that local provision was an issue.

“There aren't many areas for free activities in the suburbs.”

(Girls Circle)

Where local provision did exist it was appreciated and concerns were raised about **closures**, often due to **funding**. This was an issue particularly highlighted by young people attending **youth clubs**.

“Youth Clubs are another safe place. They were good, but lots of youth clubs have gone now.”

(Eat Carrots Be Safe from Elephants - Powys Junior Safeguarding Board)

When discussing **arts activities** a number of children and young people wanted the chance to access more opportunities, including in school time. Some young people felt that schools do not hold arts subjects, including music, in the same regard as other subjects. As a result they felt discouraged from pursuing such activities.

The **availability of local football provision** was specifically raised on a number of occasions, often, but not exclusively by girls. It was also raised that

“mixed sport would be good for non-specific genders.”

(YMCA Swansea LGBT+ group).

Children and young people also indicated that **there wasn't always enough provision in their area that took into account their specific needs or the needs of others around them.**

Wheelchair accessibility, suitable changing facilities and **opportunities outside of school** were three examples raised when talking with disabled children about the barriers they faced.

A consistent message also emerged from **older children and young people** that they often felt that their local areas offered few places to spend their free time in a safe and enjoyable way:

“We are expected to be out of the way and you have nowhere to go. We are unable to stay in places and are often moved from parks and skate parks.”

(Caerphilly youth forum)

A number of **girls** felt that spaces and activities expressly for them would assist with confidence and also for some this was essential due to their cultural and religious beliefs.

“Lack of resources and venues and variety of options for all. Girls need more “girls-only activities.”

(Muslim Council for Wales youth discussion).

This links to the barrier in the next section, although confidence was not solely an issue for girls.

Confidence

Confidence is often associated with taking part in competitive or team sports and with arts activities like drama. However an important message from the children and young people who shared their views was that **confidence** is a real barrier for them **irrespective of the activity or experience**.

The **views and support of family, teachers** but **particularly friends** was an important factor in the context of confidence.

“Fear of embarrassment / being judged by friends.”

“Lack of confidence, it would help to have an escort and more teachers for art.”

(Ceredigion Tuesday group)

Several of the comments about being judged related to arts activities, creating a sense that these were seen as “social suicide” amongst the peer groups of some of the children and young people we spoke to. Yet when in a ‘safe’ workshop environment many expressed their enjoyment for these activities and wanted to find more like minded people to go with them.

Social constructs and pressures were also influencing factors;

“Popular people do sports.”

“Self-confidence is an issue - worried about how they look e.g. P.E. skorts!”

(Girls Circle)

“Knowing that there is a lack of understanding about your religion and knowing that people can judge you.”

(Muslim Council for Wales, youth discussion).

For children and young people to be able to participate it is important for them to feel confident in taking part in opportunities that exist already and in sharing their ideas about improving experiences. In respect of existing opportunities a number of children and young people told us that not having enough information about what is happening or available to them was an issue as set out below.

Not enough information about what is happening

‘Not having enough information about what is happening’ did not feature as prominently as the other barriers however it was often raised in conjunction with them. It tended to be mentioned in relation to **arts** and **disabled access provision**.

“Lack of advertisement around school.”

(Girls Circle)

“More options/advertising.”

(YMCA Swansea LGBT+ group)

“More information.”

(Craig y Parc Primary School)

“Lack of advertising.”

(Caerphilly youth forum)

Permission

In many cases parents, carers, family, friends and teachers were seen by children and young people as key people that supported them to play. However there were several occasions where children and young people raised permission from care givers and others in their lives as a barrier.

Children and young people seemed aware that parents were not giving them permission because they had concerns about their safety.

“Parents (worrying about safety).”

(Muslim Council for Wales youth discussion)

Parents providing feedback as part of the Urdd Eisteddfod survey often mentioned road safety and their child being too young to play outside.

“Not safe to play on street/pavements because of cars.”

(Parent of 4-year-old, Urdd Eisteddfod)

One of the parents attending a workshop session for Deaf children and young people also felt this was a particularly important issue:

“The children can't go out to play in the street anymore they have become too busy with cars so too dangerous to let them out to play.”

(DEFFO Swansea Workshops)

In most cases there was a sense that children and young people understood these reasons and even had concerns themselves as described by one 10-year-old Deaf girl:

“I couldn't possibly go to the park you just don't know who could be lurking there.”

However some children and young people's responses suggested they felt parents'/carers' concerns were sometimes unduly cautious.

A group of disabled young people described “**people intervening**” as a barrier. The use of the word ‘Intervening’ gave the impression that whilst adults felt they were providing support, the young people themselves felt they were actually limiting their experience. This is something children and young people with disabilities have raised in discussions outside this piece of work.

The term “intervention” was used differently to “support”, which the same group of children and young people acknowledged they sometimes needed and appreciated.

Several care experienced young people communicated their **frustration** in respect of the **poor processes in place between local authorities and their carers** in terms of permission to take part in activities.

Two groups also touched on permission from a different perspective. Their views related to people who had **control over the environment** around them and an **understanding about how and why they used it**.

“Parks are a safe place to spend your free time but in some places there are no parks and in other places ‘Health and safety came and ruined it.’”

(Eat Carrots be Safe from Elephants - Powys Junior Safeguarding Board)

Section 3 also includes an example which shows how important permission from the community is in terms of making children and young people feel welcome and valued in their communities.

Overcoming Barriers

As highlighted at the start of this section several children and young people who took part in the interactive workshops offered to share their suggestions about how to overcome the barriers they highlighted.

“Female sports stars celebrated more in mainstream media e.g. for women’s champion.”

(Girls Circle)

“Mixed sport would be good for non-specific genders.”

(YMCA Swansea LGBT+ group)

“Groups (rather than elite clubs) being set up for young people.”

(Vale of Glamorgan Rights Ambassadors)

“Youth services could work closely with schools to act as an extra-curricular service to support all young people.”

(Vale of Glamorgan Rights Ambassadors)

“Youth clubs should be on in the summer holidays. They should be 2 nights in term time and the rest of the money should be saved to open them during the summer holidays.”

(Caerphilly youth forum)

“16 year olds, for example, are seen as too old to play in the park but too young to go to the pub. There should be more outdoor adventure and indoor social spaces that are young people friendly and not child friendly”.

(Caerphilly youth forum)

We are aware that organisations who are less familiar with engaging with children and young people can be anxious that this will ultimately result in negative comments and present them with additional challenges. However children and young people are willing and able to identify solutions even when unprompted, as shown here. Through effective participation opportunities, organisations can harness children and young people’s solutions and creativity. An example of this is provided in the next section as participation is one of the five principles of a Children’s Rights Approach.

DELIVERING PLAY, SPORT, ART, LEISURE, CULTURAL AND HERITAGE OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH A CHILDREN'S RIGHTS APPROACH

3

Public and non-public bodies delivering play, sport, art, leisure, cultural and heritage opportunities are already playing a significant part in realising children's rights under Article 31 of the UNCRC

There are 54 articles under the UNCRC and 42 of them provide children with specific rights including; the right to health (Article 24), to meet friends, join groups and clubs (Article 15), a right to education and to become the best they can be (Articles 28 and 29), special care and support if they are disabled (Article 23), and protection from abuse and neglect (Article 39). These rights are inter-related and are equally important.

In Wales, the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011, the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 all establish duties on public authorities that contribute toward the realisation of children's rights. Similarly, a range of organisations in the private and non-governmental sectors in Wales have a significant part to play in the implementation of services for children, and should, wherever possible, contribute towards a better realisation of children's rights in Wales.

A Children's Rights Approach provides a principled and practical framework for working with children grounded in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and will help organisations give effect to children's rights. A dedicated [Children's Rights Approach publication](#) is available on our website.

Investing in a Children's Rights Approach has real benefits for organisations:

- It helps public bodies to meet their statutory duties and non-public bodies to champion well founded principles;
- It contributes to enabling more children and young people to be better involved in services; leading to better decision making;
- It ensures there's a real focus on the particular needs of children whose voices can be lost or silenced; and
- It helps to create an environment where services are accountable to all of its service users.

This section provides an insight into how the 5 principles of our Children's Rights Approach apply in the context of play, sport, leisure, arts, culture and heritage, through a series of contemporary case examples from Wales.

Embedding Children's Rights – putting children's rights at the core of planning and service delivery.

All organisations, big or small, can make positive links to children's rights throughout their policy documents, mission statements, strategic plans and in staff training. This provides an underpinning value base for all provision for children, and sends an important message to children that they have a right to receive the services on offer under the UNCRC.

Case Example: National Museum Wales

National Museum Wales have committed to embedding A Children's Rights Approach within their five year strategic plan. They have already undertaken work to simplify their strategic plan in part to ensure that people's right to participate in their work and decision-making process is more explicit. It was developed before the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and a key reason for reviewing it was to ensure that they are maximizing their potential to directly respond to the Goals and the Five Ways of Working in the Act. This work is important in relation to their plans to embed the UNCRC in their working processes. It will provide a strategic framework for them to take this work forward over the next five years.

As part of their commitment National Museum Wales has specifically identified that they needed to further develop their staff skills and knowledge regarding the UNCRC. They will be developing learning and development for staff and trustees. They have established Partnership Agreements with several organisations involved with young people. As part of these agreements, partners such as Children in Wales and Barnardo's will be providing learning and skills development training to staff on, for example, the stereotyping and discrimination of young people and on effective ways to engage with young people. The first training workshops took place in January 2018 and attendees fed back that they were enthusiastic about taking forward children's rights in all aspects of their work. It is their intention to roll training out across the organisation, including to trustees.

Equality and non-discrimination - ensuring that every child has an equal opportunity to be the best they can be.

Under this principle, organisations should consider how children may be disadvantaged as a whole group. They should also consider which groups of children and young people may have more difficulty accessing their services and make active plans to combat this.

Case Example: Conwy Play Team

As part of Conwy's Play Sufficiency Assessment, Play Development workers spent a lot of time talking to children and young people about their opportunities for play and the barriers to play that they experienced. In these conversations and in consultation with Conwy's Youth Council the negative message given out by "No Ball Games Signs" was highlighted as an issue. In order to address the perception of "No Ball Games" signs giving the message that children aren't welcome to play in their community the Conwy Play

Development team worked with the local authority and housing associations to create a plan to take down the signs.

The play team worked with a local youth film club to create a video promoting the importance of play and the removing of No Ball Game signs. This video was then circulated via social media and a process for children and adults to challenge signs in their area is now in place across the county. The video can be seen here: <http://cvsc.org.uk/en/cvscplaydevelopment/no-ball-games-signs/>

A note on non-discrimination and competition

Some organisations providing activities may be competitive sports clubs, or arts organisations with auditioning requirements, and by their very nature selection is often based on ability. This does not mean that a Children's Rights Approach cannot be adopted or that this principle is not applicable. Clubs have a responsibility to their members to consider equality and diversity issues. They should recognise that not all children will have had the same opportunities to develop their talents, and look for potential as well as prior achievement. They can also aim to actively recruit in under-represented communities. Where children are not successful in trials or auditions, competitive clubs could actively identify other clubs and signpost them to equivalent experiences where possible. Where they observe that limited provision exists they should actively take opportunities to inform key influencers in their sector so that provision can be developed to meet local need. Local Authorities and key bodies in Wales should also take a lead role in monitoring, promoting and where possible supporting the growth of clubs and activities which are inclusive or provide equivalent opportunities to meet the need of children and young people in their communities.

Empowering Children - enhancing children's capabilities as individuals so they're better able to take advantage of rights, and engage with and hold accountable the institutions and individuals that affect their lives.

Children are unable to take up their rights unless they have the skills, confidence and opportunities to do so. These are developed through positive experiences of exercising rights, such as being listened to and taken seriously, and through training.

Case Study: Disability Sport Wales - National Youth Board

The National Youth Board was formed by Disability Sport Wales (DSW) in 2017 with members from across Wales. The aim of the board is to "enhance the voice of young people within the realms of disability sport in Wales" from delivery on the ground to "contributing to the Disability Sport Wales Executive board, ensuring that young people remain a core factor in the key decisions that are made". The first meeting provided members the opportunity to get together for the first time to discuss their visions and aspirations for the board, as the expert voice of young people in Wales. To help empower youth board members to undertake their new role Pippa Britton attended a December Board meeting to share her experience as a Disability Sport Wales Board member and chair. Youth Board members have also received training to enable them to support with the delivery of the DSW Mini Disability Inclusion Training to primary school children. The Mini Disability Inclusion Training aims to raise awareness of disability sport, and to demonstrate how disabled friends can be included in the activities pupils take part in during and outside of school.

Participation - listening to children and taking their views meaningfully into account.

Organisations that actively involve children in planning and decision-making are likely to find

that their decisions will be better informed than if they have tried to 'second-guess' whether they will be acceptable to and helpful for the children they are designed to serve.

Case Example - The Swansea Enabled Project⁵ and Dynamix⁶

The project undertook a 'Healthy, Active and Physically Fit' consultation with young people to find out if they felt services in Swansea that were helping people to keep active were allowing disabled people to get involved. The aim of this piece of work was to allow key decision makers to see how the work they do affects young disabled people in Swansea and make suggestions on ways to improve or adapt the services they offer. The consultation involved 15 young people aged between 14 and 22. Over the course of 3 workshops and 1 planning day young people were involved in activities which explored a number of issues including the barriers to joining in

physical activity, the type of instructor that would engage them and what would make activities more inclusive. The young people also shared where they felt were the best places for young disabled people to "get active." The consultation resulted in a report being written which shared the views of young people and which included a set of recommendations. A seminar and awards ceremony was then held and attended by organisations across Swansea, including the Children's Commissioner's Office, to share the findings and also celebrated the best places that young people had identified. Since this time Swansea City AFC Community Trust provided feedback that the information from the work has been taken forward by their Inclusion Manager.

Accountability - authorities should be accountable to children for decisions and actions that affect their lives.

The following case study is an example of a participation activity with an accountability framework which enabled children and young people to not only contribute their views but scrutinise and have a part in holding decision makers to account in respect of the design chosen.

Case example - City and County of Swansea

A local park was derelict and dilapidated; when funding became available it was agreed that the money should be spent to make it fun and inviting again. The Council's play development officer contacted the local school and asked the school council if they would like to be involved in redesigning the area. Consultation with the school council quickly got underway. It started with a visit to the park and a discussion with the children about how it felt and looked. They then had an opportunity through drawing and words to express how the play space could look in the future. All the

drawings and words were considered and analysed and the Play Development Officer took the findings to the Parks Department so it could be sent out to tender. Once companies returned their designs, two designs achieved the brief. These were then shared with the school council and after much animated discussion that included issues like accessibility, inclusivity, risk, and safety, the children voted for their favourite design. The children were able to monitor the progress of the project throughout. Eventually the new play area, that children had a hand in creating from the beginning, was ready and an event was held to celebrate and explore the new area.

CONCLUSION

Sally Holland,
Children's Commissioner for Wales

Play is synonymous with childhood. It's important to children and young people and helps contribute to their happiness, health and wellbeing. Yet for some in Wales, there are barriers to play, leisure and other enriching activities under Article 31 of the UNCRC, such as the creative arts, heritage and sport.

Despite Welsh Government's ambition to drive through legislation to ensure that "every child has a wide range of challenging and interesting opportunities to play and enjoy their leisure time"⁷ and statutory guidance that requires local authorities to assess the sufficiency of play opportunities for children in their areas, this report highlights that children and young people, especially those with disabilities, those living in families with little money, and other marginalised groups, experience some fundamental barriers to play, and children's other rights under Article 31.

Some of these barriers may be overcome by targeting provision to help those who are currently struggling with having enough money or transport to access opportunities. Others are related to fundamental modern challenges for childhood, such as levels of road traffic inhibiting outdoor play, and intensity of demands of formal schoolwork reducing time for leisure and creativity. These require more wholesale changes in how we organise our landscapes, our educational performance indicators and our attitudes.

To prepare for this report, I've spoken to a number of children who shared some wonderful experiences with me. I want every child, no matter where they live and what their ability or income, to be able to enjoy the enriching experiences associated with play, leisure activities, the arts, sport, culture and heritage and form those memories that stay with us for a lifetime.

It would be very easy for me to publish the report, requesting more resource to be ploughed into play, leisure, arts, culture and heritage for children and not acknowledge the huge pressures on the public purse in Wales. The balancing act that our local authorities face on a daily basis will inevitably lead to decisions that may not necessarily help fulfil the Welsh Government's ambition, noted above. But my call to local authorities and other organisations, is for them not to see play, leisure, arts, sport, culture and heritage opportunities as something which 'is nice to have'. There is evidence that the activities under Article 31 are critical to children's intellectual, emotional and social development. It's critical therefore that local authorities and other organisations build the environments that provide our children with the opportunities to enjoy play and free time **with** those children and their families, in order to achieve the best results.

A section of this report describes how some public and non-public organisations in Wales are working towards a Children's Rights Approach to play, leisure, sport, art, and cultural opportunities. 'The Right Way' is a framework we have developed for working with children that is grounded in the UNCRC. It helps organisations put children's rights at the heart of their work. I would like to see all local authorities in Wales adopt this approach as they work on their play sufficiency assessments and budgeting for provision of all services that promote Article 31 of the UNCRC. This means enabling more children and young people to be better involved in shaping services and opportunities. In turn this will lead to better decision-making, to ensure there's a focus on the particular needs of all children but particularly those whose voices can be lost or silenced. It will

also create an environment where services are accountable to all of its service users. I would also encourage other organisations to explore how the framework can be used to benefit the children and young people they are there to serve.

I am also committed to play my part. Firstly I will include what I've heard, especially around safety issues and lack of young people's confidence, in my 'What Now? Beth Nawr?' project this year. This work will see me undertaking a large-scale consultation again to establish a state of the nation report of children's access to their human rights in Wales and the creation of a new three-year strategy for my office.

Secondly, I was particularly struck by the practical challenges to accessing rights under article 31, including the lack of money and lack of access to suitable transport. Those two main messages will be fed into my project this year looking at tackling child poverty; a piece of work that will provide some practical guidance to public bodies in Wales to enable children, whatever their background, to have the best start in life.

The General Comment on Article 31, published by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, has as its central message that play, recreation, rest, leisure, art and culture are all interlinked and together serve to create an environment in which children can thrive. As Children's Commissioner I am convinced that the activities under Article 31 are central to a 'good childhood' in Wales. I urge all those with responsibilities for delivering these services to ensure that a commitment to children's rights remain at the centre of their work.

Footnotes

- 1 Children's Commissioner for Wales Beth Nesa? I What Next? The findings, Children's Commissioner for Wales Office, 2016, page 15.
- 2 Children's Commissioner for Wales Beth Nesa? I What Next? The findings, Children's Commissioner for Wales Office, 2016, page 15.
- 3 Ceredigion Tuesday group - Community Ambassadors - children and young people with disabilities.
- 4 Structured activities can be described as activities which are organised and often supervised for example drama club, football clubs and surf lessons.
- 5 The Enabled Project is a social enterprise which aims to give young people with a disability in Swansea a forum through which their voice could be heard by decision makers, so that the services they use are made better - Evaluation Report for the Enabled Project 'Healthy, active and physically fit - Easy Read Version,' Dynamix and Enabled Project, June - September 2016, page 2.
- 6 Dynamix is a Welsh social enterprise that helps to give people a voice using fun and interesting methods that people can join in with. - Evaluation Report for the Enabled Project 'Healthy, active and physically fit - Easy Read Version,' Dynamix and Enabled Project, June - September 2016, page 2.
- 7 Play and Leisure, Welsh Government, Welsh Government Website, <http://gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/people/children-and-young-people/play-and-leisure/?lang=en>

All quotes in the report are direct quotes from children and young people

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