

Briefing Paper 6

Communities

National Assembly Elections 2007

“An increasing body of research evidence is building up to prove that whilst young people may not be interested in local party politics, they are very interested in the issues that affect them and their community.”

Sir Jeremy Beecham



Communities

Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child gives children the right to play, leisure and recreation and Articles 12 and 3 give them the right to have a say in matters which concern them. These articles are reflected in the Assembly's seven core aims for children.

What has been achieved since 2003?

Communities First funding has achieved some positive outcomes for children and young people in terms of facilities, but in most areas, it has not adequately addressed the issue of involving children and young people in their communities and consulting them about their needs. We welcome the recently published guidance that addresses this issue.

The Assembly government's Play Policy Implementation Plan 2006 outlines a distinctive national lead from the Welsh Assembly Government for play development. Within this implementation plan we look forward to the production of guidance upon what constitutes quality play. We welcome the Big Lottery funding for children's play and active and healthy families that provide additional funding to the implementation of the play policy.

Community focussed schools have received pump priming and a vision for their development has been agreed between LEA's and Continyou. This initiative has the potential to include children and young people at the heart of their communities and to make more outdoor space available to play and sport.

There has been continued and welcome investment in the Safe Routes to School initiative since 1999 and more recently in a Road Safety Strategy, encouraging low traffic speeds and the creation of home zones.

What are our current concerns?

- **Play and Leisure opportunities for low income families**

Research (Generation 2020) revealed that children and young people who do not live within walking distance of facilities and do not have access to a family car cannot get to leisure and play activities. Families on low incomes cannot afford bus fares, inhibiting access to initiatives such as free swimming and use of adventure play grounds. These children are also not accessing play areas within their own communities due to the low importance given to localised play spaces. Low income families cannot afford to pay for entrance fees to family attractions or days out during school holidays. After school play services reached crisis point when support from the New Opportunities Fund reached the end of its three year cycle. Funding is now piecemeal and low income families not in receipt of free school meals are often unable to meet the cost of after school clubs.

- **Exclusion of disabled children**

In some areas, children with disabilities are unable to participate in holiday schemes, particularly open access outdoor schemes, because their specific needs are not being met. Provision should be adapted to ensure it is inclusive. Additionally children with disabilities are excluded from accessing adventure play and do not participate in informal play opportunities in the street. They often cannot access childcare and after school provision children either, so are socially isolated and excluded.

- **Bullying in Communities**

Children and young people report of receiving verbal abuse and bullying from other children and adults within their communities. This is particularly experienced by BME children, children with disabilities and young people known or believed to be lesbian, gay or bisexual. Community based bullying inhibits children and young people being able to access community based facilities.

- **Impact of Traffic**

The research 'Stop Look and Listen' outlines how traffic impinges on children's use of their community. Whilst there is policy support for home zones, to date there are only 2 home zones in Wales. Traffic calming measures are implemented without consulting children and so often do not address the needs of child pedestrians.

- **Children and young people in rural areas**

Poorer children and young people in rural areas are excluded from many activities because of transport issues as well as the cost of activities.

- **Anti- social behaviour**

Punitive approaches to anti social behaviour tend to further stigmatise young people and their families, without addressing the underlying causes and problems faced by these young people and their families. Research and our own practice shows that good community youth work schemes can greatly reduce incidents of anti social behaviour. We are also very concerned about the use of The Mosquito device to deter young people from meeting together.

Recommendations

We call on the Welsh Assembly Government to:

- Provide support for evidence based practice with regards to the play strategy implementation to accompany the existing theory in children's play.
- Provide consistent funding for after school and evening play clubs and holiday schemes.
- Encourage local authorities to develop home zones and street play opportunities and maintain challenging local play spaces.
- Expand the safe routes to school initiative to create safe routes to play and community facilities.
- Produce guidance for community based play and leisure services working with children and young people regarding how to tackle community based bullying and aggression experienced by children. This should include mechanisms to enable children and young people to participate within community safety partnerships.
- Ensure long term stable funding for targeted youth schemes which reduce anti social behaviour.
- Fund entry to family leisure and day attractions to enable families on low incomes to participate in family holiday and weekend activities.
- Ensure that child protection and safeguarding procedures in place in all organisations providing sporting, leisure and cultural activities to children and young people.
- Establish practices within public funded regeneration initiatives, including Communities First, which ensure the active and sustained participation of children and young people in community programmes.
- Promote and monitor inclusive play and leisure opportunities for disabled children.
- Research best practice models to address the needs of children and young people in rural areas.

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This briefing is supported by Children in Wales