

Everywhere,  
Any Day,  
You Can Play!

Everywhere, Any Day, You Can Play!

Dublin City Play Strategy 2022-2027



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Comhairle Cathrach  
Bhaile Átha Cliath  
Dublin City Council

Dublin City  
Play Strategy

2022-2027



Comhairle Cathrach  
Bhaile Átha Cliath  
Dublin City Council

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# Foreword

## Dublin City Play Strategy (DCPS) “Everywhere, Any Day, You Can Play!” (2022 - 2027)

Dublin City Council is the only local authority that employs a Play Development Officer. This demonstrates the City Council's commitment to keeping abreast of up-to-date concepts and theories of play in addition to supporting play as a 'rights' issue for children and young people.

Public parks, green and urban spaces need to be designed to provide opportunities for play which does not always mean the installation of playgrounds and play equipment. The importance of natural play and being close to nature are highlighted in this strategy.

The City Council will build on the conversations and research that informed this strategy and will continue to involve young citizens by inviting their participation in the planning, design and reimagining of public spaces for play.

In seeking a title for the play strategy it was agreed that the city's youngest citizens would be the best people to complete this task. During February 2022 Dublin City Council Parks, Biodiversity & Landscape Services-Play Development & Dublin City Council Libraries coordinated and hosted 'Create a Title for the Dublin City Play Strategy' competition for schools in Dublin City Council's administrative area. The winning and aptly named title “Everywhere, any day, you can play” was created by 10 year old author Leon Travers from Francis St School.

The vision for Dublin as a child-friendly and playful city to improve the lives of its youngest citizens is at the heart of the Dublin City Play Strategy; “Everywhere, Any Day, You Can Play!” (2022-2027). Debby Clarke, Dublin City Play Development Officer deserves great credit for the diligence and effort she has expended on preparing this strategy.

**Leslie Moore**

**Head of Parks, Biodiversity and Landscape Services Culture, Recreation and Economic Services Department Dublin City Council**  
July 2022

Leon Travers - Proud Author of Play Strategy Title  
Photo: Dublin City Council



National Playday  
Photo: Dublin City Council



# Foreword

## Lord Mayor of Dublin City, Alison Gilliland

I am very pleased to acknowledge the development and publication of the Dublin City Play Strategy “*Everywhere, Any Day, You Can Play!*” (2022-2027). This Play Strategy illustrates the commitment and support of Dublin City Council to providing improved and increased opportunities for play for children and young people throughout Dublin City.

The Play Strategy is led and developed by national and international evidenced-based good practice including expertise from; Play Wales, Play Scotland, Dr Wendy Russell, Visiting Fellow at University of Gloucestershire and Olive McGovern of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, feedback from a robust public consultation process that included local communities, children and young people from various youth groups, schools and after-school clubs as well as parents, carers, youth workers, community groups and childcare providers, and collaborative conversations across Dublin City Departments, partner organisations and outside agencies including Comhairle na nÓg, the Lab Arts Centre and the Ombudsman for Children’s Office.

Significantly, this Play Strategy is underpinned by Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC); the child’s right to play. Therefore, our Play Strategy acknowledges and understands play as a biological and psychological element of children and young people’s development and a social necessity that supports their overall health and wellbeing. In realising this

understanding of play we promote a holistic approach in the development of a hierarchy of a high quality citywide play infrastructure that encompasses local and public places and spaces for play that are accessible and inclusive for children and young people of all ages, genders, abilities and socio-economic backgrounds.

We also promote play in terms of play value and safety alongside opportunities for risk taking, access to nature and everyday child-led opportunities for play in local neighbourhoods and the public realm. This allows for the development of rich and engaging play environments and experiences that are fundamental to supporting strong foundations for children and young people to be confident and well-functioning young citizens who feel included and encouraged to be actively engaged in their communities and society in general.

On behalf of Dublin City Council, I particularly want to acknowledge the dedicated work of Dublin City Council’s Play Development Officer Debby Clarke who has led the development of this Play Strategy. I also want to thank the various departments within Dublin City Council that have worked with Debby and contributed to the development of this strategy through the review and agreement of strategy themes and approval and agreement of future collaborative working. I would also like to thank the public, particularly our children and young people, our many partner organisations, key stakeholders and individuals who contributed toward producing this Play Strategy and making it fit for purpose.

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**Alison Gilliland**

**Lord Mayor of Dublin City**  
*July 2022*

National Playday  
Photo: Snapshot Photography



# Foreword

## Comhairle na nÓg Having our say

Involving the Dublin City Comhairle na nÓg in the development of the Dublin City Play Strategy has been a positive, challenging and enjoyable experience. Upon reading the and discussing the draft of the Play Strategy , we the Comhairle members found it very beneficial to know that UNCRC Article 31; is part of an international binding agreement that endorses ‘play’ as a right for all children and young people.

While reading through and discussing the Play Strategy our members made many comments: one of them being on how we felt that play is essential in the lives of children and young people, and how unfortunately sometimes, the importance and necessity of play for children and young people isn’t fully recognised. We also discussed rules surrounding play in the lives of children

and young people, and in some instances, how it can be viewed as an unwelcome hindrance.

Play introduces and encourages many positive skills to children from a young age, such as teamwork, creativity and facing challenges. Play also allows children to experience beneficial and appropriate levels of risk - after all if we don’t experience risk how will we know how to deal with or assess risk. And just to note, risk can be physical, virtual online and emotional. We also agree and believe that free play is much better than organised, controlled playing as it meant young people were in control of where, how and what we played, being with friends etc.

The strictness concerning some things like parks and street signs saying ‘No Ball Games’ and the simple fact that

young people aren’t allowed sit around and chat, listen to music in local streets, city’s public parks and public spaces depicts play as unnecessary and unwanted. Play is a person’s right, it isn’t merely a suggestion or an idea! As an American professor of psychiatry stated “Children need the freedom and time to play. Play is not a luxury. Play is a necessity” (Kay Redfield).

Concerning the right to play in schools, especially secondary schools we feel that curriculum based P.E. can often be harsh on teenagers. More choice on how individuals wish to play and be physically active is needed, young people should be allowed to express themselves through how they want to play just as much as any other way. The general agreement was that schools need to be less controlling and more accepting of their students’ right



Comhairle na nÓg AGM  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Comhairle na nÓg Right to Play Workshops  
Photo: Dublin City Council

to play – we need more playful second level and primary schools.

The idea of encompassing the entire 0-18 age bracket within the Play Strategy was particularly welcomed as many Comhairle members fit in the older half of this age group. Sometimes when play is being discussed by adults, the focus is mainly held on young children rather than teenagers, who ought to be included too. Many adults believe that just because children enter their teenage years that we stop playing. The activities of teenagers such as simply hanging out and chatting in the local park often aren't viewed as play, but they are! As already stated by our Comhairle predecessors, we would like to continue to put the record straight by echoing that older children enjoy play as much as young children but just in a different way. If playgrounds have stuff that is interesting and challenging enough for us to play on, we would definitely use them. By simply providing no cost, freely available space for teenagers to sit, chat and 'hang out' would really make young people like us feel welcome and at ease in our local neighbourhood and city parks like Merrion, Mountjoy and Wolfe Tone Square and Stephen's

Green. This is equally important in our local streets and public spaces throughout the city.

This opening statement from Comhairle na nÓg would not be complete without acknowledging this historical moment in time regarding the outbreak of the Coronavirus. For almost 2 years, a series of lockdowns and Covid 19 restrictions has placed additional responsibilities on children and young people with regard to lowering the spread of the disease, protecting ourselves, our families and friends – not to mention educational and exam pressures. These disruptions and negative changes to our play, recreational and social lives has restricted our freedom, where, what and how play can happen as well as keeping in touch with friends and making new ones. In many cases this has also resulted in a definite decline in children and young people's mental health and well-being. The arrival of

**Catriona Feeney**

**Chairperson,  
Dublin City Comhairle na nÓg**

'Zoom', Tik-Tok' and other online mediums helped in some way to keep in touch with friends and find things to do. But, as the song says "There ain't nothing like the real thing".

As we begin to enjoy some of our pre-pandemic freedom, now more than ever, is the time for Comhairle to revisit the work previously done regarding our input to the Play Strategy and keep the importance of play high on the city's agenda.

We the Comhairle members have discussed and agree fully with the overall idea of the Play Strategy. We have also discussed the policy statements and action plan within the strategy and have agreed with the general principles and ideas in all of them. Responding to one of the city council's key questions "What would a child-friendly and playful city look like?" we offered some ideas but also wonder, what will that look like? In exploring this question Comhairle have realised that children and young people are part of realising this vision. We are greatly encouraged to know that our agreement to be actively involved in this process by sharing our knowledge, ideas and experience with the city's planning, architects, roads and traffic, community, play, arts and many other departments and outside agencies as relevant issues regarding play arise. In particular we look forward to realising one of the key actions within the strategy which involves co-writing the city's Play Declaration/Manifesto. This will be a legacy for current and future Comhairle na nÓg as clear evidence that children and young people's voices are written into key policy documents that will place them as citizens that are seen and heard in a city that will support us to play more and play better!

**Cúán Murray**

**Vice Chair  
Dublin City Comhairle na nÓg**

# Section 1 Introduction

## Dublin City Play Strategy (DCPS) “Everywhere, Any Day, You Can Play!” (2022 - 2027)

Dublin City has a population of 321,741 children under the age of 18 years. As the city’s main local authority, this presents Dublin City Council with issues around access to high quality opportunities to play. That includes playgrounds and beyond, throughout the city’s parks, local greens and open spaces and local neighbourhoods and also encompasses the built and natural environment.

Children and young people spend more time playing than any other waking activity, they play wherever and whenever the conditions are right for playing. As theorists Iona and Peter Opie state “Where children are is where they play” (Opie & Opie, 1969). They play in their homes, gardens, on the doorstep, streets, schoolyards, and open spaces, parks, near rivers, forests

or other wild places. All of these places inspire them. Outdoor spaces that have features like street furniture, bushes, hills, water and loose materials, offer all sorts of play potential (Nicholson, 1972). Similarly indoor spaces that provide a range of toys and everyday items like pots, pans and water spark the imagination and creativity of children. Many of the fields, small rivers or waterways where Dublin children played in the past are no longer accessible for play. Places retaining their wild charm and attractiveness to children and young people must be protected and preserved so that they can continue to have access to play experiences in natural and wild places.

Evidence is also emerging that if given a choice, most children prefer to play outdoors and that the indoors is mainly

attractive when experienced with friends (Blinkert, 2004).

As defined by General Comment 17 on Article 31, the right to play, Dublin City Council and its partners believe that play is any behaviour, activity or process initiated, controlled and structured by children themselves, that takes place whenever and wherever opportunities arise (see ‘Defining Play’ below).

The vision, mission, principles, and themed policy statements included in the Dublin City Play Strategy were developed through an understanding of play as essential to the social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional development and overall health and wellbeing of children and young people.

“A child-friendly city sounds safe to me, but a play friendly city sounds appealing.”  
(Female Comhairle Member aged 14 years)

“Play is a pleasure for its own sake, but its genetic gift is perhaps the sense that life, temporarily at least is worth living.”

(Brian Sutton Smith July 15, 1924-March 7, 2015 The Strong National Museum of Play, 2021)

2013 Boys & Girls Come Out to Play! City Hall  
Photo: Dublin City Council



The Dublin City Play Strategy “Everywhere, Any Day, You Can Play!” (2022-2027) is a key strategic document that will enhance and further develop play facilities and play opportunities for children and young

people living in, and visiting, Dublin City. The development of a citywide Play Strategy and action plan is a key initiative in redefining Dublin City Council’s commitment to supporting children’s play (*Da Silva, 2011*). Article

31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child provides the key underpinnings of the Dublin City Play Strategy as a local authority response to supporting the rights of children and young people, as it states:

**Article 31:  
Leisure, Recreation & Cultural Activities:**

- 1. States Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure; engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.**
- 2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.**

**UNCRC Article 31**

The actions within the strategy will support children and young people’s existing use of space. In addition, these actions will support informal places and spaces that create the network of streets, places, people and things that are interwoven into children and young people’s everyday freedoms and infrastructures (Arup,

2017). The strategy has adopted Play Sufficiency (Children & Families Wales Measure 2010) as a key principle for the ongoing development and assessment of a citywide play infrastructure. This approach is relatively new to government and local authorities understanding of play and their subsequent responses to children and young people’s unconventional use of space, their diverse cultures and

the spontaneous and unpredictable nature of play (Lester & Russell 2013). In adopting different ways of thinking about and working with adult’s accountability and responsibility regarding children’s right to play, the Dublin City Play Strategy recognises that Play Sufficiency is key to the co-creation of a child-friendly and playful city (Russell in Lester, S., Lester, J. and Russell, 2019)

2013 Boys & Girls Come Out to Play! Barnardos Square  
Photo: Dublin City Council





# Introduction

## Vision, Mission and Principles

### VISION

Dublin will be a child-friendly and playful city where all children and young people can enjoy and fully exercise their right to play.

### MISSION

We will adopt a citywide coordinated approach to developing high quality, accessible and inclusive play facilities and opportunities for everyday play experiences for all children and young people.

### PRINCIPLES

Play is essential to the social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional development of children and young people and in particular their overall health and wellbeing.

Children and young people have a right to be seen, to be heard and to play in public spaces in the city.

Adopt and implement Play Sufficiency as a guiding principle for strategy actions to support children and young people's natural creativity and imagination and their everyday freedom to enjoy play in all its forms.

Apply a play-led approach (which is neither didactic nor outcomes focused) to the development of a citywide play infrastructure to address opportunities for play within the natural and built environment. These are places and spaces identified by children and young people where they can experience freedom of choice, be spontaneous, explore their varied and circumstantial levels of independence and movement throughout their neighbourhoods but most of all direct and control the content and intent of their play.

Audit current support for play and outline rationale for further improvements based on analysis of local needs and the wider community, namely Dublin City.

Children and young people are consulted in all matters concerning play in the city, in particular, this includes ongoing research with children and young people with regard to their use of outdoor space.

Universal Design is key in supporting, promoting and providing inclusive opportunities for play for all children and young people.

Cross collaboration and partnership, working at national and local level, is key to achieving our vision that Dublin will be a child-friendly and playful city.

St Anne's Rose Festival  
Photo: Dublin City Council



# Introduction

## Scope of the Dublin City Play Strategy

2018 Rose Festival  
Photo: Dublin City Council



This play strategy will embrace children and young people within the 0-18 age group and also be guided by the further extended age group identified in Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People (2014-2020) which identifies children and young people as those in the 0-24 age group. This determines an inclusive approach to supporting and facilitating play for older children and young people.

Adopting the principle of Play Sufficiency will require a balanced set of measures that will support the ongoing development of rich play environments that incorporate time and space, city planning, health and safety, accessibility and inclusion, access to cultural and artistic activities, children's mobility and everyday freedoms and access to nature and wild spaces.

Since the launch of the Dublin City Play Plan: Play Here, Play There, Play Everywhere in 2012, there has been significant progress with regard

to an increased understanding and awareness of the meaning and value of play and its importance in the lives of children and young people. This has brought about some improvements in attitudes and understanding regarding Dublin City Council's obligations and appropriate responses to supporting play for children and young people. In 2018, a review of the Play Plan was completed. This review has provided information that has impacted on and informed the policy statements and action plan within this strategy.

# Introduction

## Using the Play Strategy

The Dublin City Play Strategy presents an opportunity to develop and implement an action plan based on a comprehensive understanding of play. The strategy and action plan will be a key document guiding the realisation of the vision for Dublin as a child-friendly and playful city. This strategy will also be a useful reference document regarding obligations of government and local authorities and will provide guidance regarding the roles and responsibilities of the private sector and individuals working with children. A broad range of groups and organisations can use this document as a guide in developing actions to improve children and young people's play experiences within the context of their specific service or setting.

Although many playgrounds have been built in Dublin, they are only one form of solution to multi-faceted issues regarding opportunities for play in this city. As each street, neighbourhood, city and county possess individual characteristics of place, it is far more appropriate to support children in navigating and utilising their existing environment for play. Caution is required in developing plans and

designs that are too specific and dictate where and what children play as they have potential to inhibit spontaneity, creativity and the heterogeneous nature of play. Moreover, the Dublin City Play Strategy will be used to preserve the 'chase' element of play, which impacts on the level of challenge risk and the ordinary magic of play (*Welsh Government, 2012, cited in Lester and Russell, 2013*).

**"If you find yourself in an inconspicuous place, forget about time and all your pressing tasks, and simply watch and listen, you will develop a kind of reverence for the games of children, for their inexhaustible ingenuity, for the ways in which the rules they devise are more subtle, less attuned to competition and more geared to enabling everyone to have a chance, than the team games devised for them by adults"**

*(Ward 1979, p.76)*



Pop-up Park  
Photo: Dublin City Council

## Section 2 Defining Play

Dublin City Council takes a ‘whole child’ approach to the concept of play. The definition of play is drawn from sound and up-to-date knowledge of a wide range of evidence based research. This approach places a key focus on the importance of play in the lives of all children and young people. Many definitions of play are provided within international policies and strategies that support play. Most of these definitions hold similarities in relation to concept, meaning and the importance of play.

The Dublin City Play Strategy has adopted the definition of play provided in the UNCRC General Comment 17 on Article 31, the child’s right to play, where play is defined as follows:

Defining play in this way highlights the importance of play as part of a child’s overall development, in particular their general health and wellbeing alongside the requirement of states bodies to provide a variety of appropriate opportunities, experiences and facilities for play. Creating the right conditions for play is a complex task. It requires adults and key decision makers to pay close attention to children’s use of space for playful engagements and respond

**“Children’s play is any behaviour, activity or process initiated, controlled and structured by children themselves; it takes place whenever and wherever opportunities arise.”**

*United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) General Comment 17*

St Anne’s Rose Festival  
Photo: Dublin City Council



appropriately in terms of how play will be supported from a child’s doorstep to the wider community, in public spaces and wilderness areas citywide. This approach addresses creating the right conditions for children and young people to access play facilities and services and engage in a wide range of opportunities for play in their local neighbourhoods, and beyond.

This definition of play recognises that it is embedded in the environment and an integral part of human life and an indisputable ingredient of childhood. A child-friendly and playful city is one where children and young people experience the pure joy of playing as their way of participating in society, make connections in their community and developing a sense of identity and belonging.

Within this definition consideration is also given to the diversity of the target audience for this type of statement. The Dublin City Play Strategy is based on in-depth understandings

of play and a diversity of play needs and play cultures. Implementing this broad reaching Play Strategy for the city enables Dublin City Council and its partners to acknowledge the importance of play as an integral part of the human psyche.

**“We would do well to try to integrate our thinking on children’s formal participation with what is known of children’s informal participation and culture-building through play with their peers (e.g. Hart 1979; Corsaro 2003). We should therefore be equally concerned with how adults differently ‘set the stage’ for children to self-organise such as how they arrange public settings for play and recreation.”**

*(Hart, 2008)*

# Defining Play

## What is play?

Play can be viewed as something children do during their free time, or anytime that adults are not directing them in specific activities. Play happens whenever conditions allow and anywhere that children and young people are. It is an innate human behaviour where children and young people engage in instinctive and impulsive behaviour for no particular reason or outcome and without regard of any particular goal or consequence. Play is a vital component that supports the social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional development of children and young people and their overall health and wellbeing. It is how they interact with peers and the world they live in. As the universal language of childhood, play can overcome barriers such as language, gender, age or ability. Play allows children to exercise their freedom and autonomy and affords them the opportunity to create their own rules and set their own agenda in their own way and at a pace or level that is appropriate to the age and ability of each individual child or young person. Play can be physically active and sometimes appear sedentary if children are sitting or lying down. It can be noisy or quiet, scary, fun, challenging and exciting. Sometimes play involves children seeking out quiet and 'secret' places (perceived as such by the playing child) for imaginative, contemplative and social play experiences and interactions. This type of play also requires a degree of movement and dexterity not always associated with this type of play activity but which nonetheless holds equal importance to more obvious physically active and dynamic play activities.

The health and developmental benefits associated with the physical, social, psychological and therapeutic values that play incorporates require flexible and often impromptu responses that are authentic to the unpredictable, spontaneous nature of play. Play is how children find the fun, novelty, wonder and magic in ordinary everyday life.

Ensuring sufficient time, space and permission are key adult responses in co-creating the right conditions to support children and young people's play. Dublin City Council is committed to addressing the many constraints to play such as, increased traffic, over scheduling of children and young people's free time, fears for children's safety (e.g. 'stranger danger') and a

lack of safe and interesting outdoor spaces and places for play. Play can happen within any context, it can take place at home, on the street, in parks, playgrounds and open spaces and in the in-between and incidental spaces of daily living such as shops, walking, driving or cycling to school, in the doctors waiting area and almost everywhere that children happen to be.

Children and young people often use natural materials for play, or find creative and alternative use for equipment and materials no longer used for the purpose they were designed. The key role for adults is to provide time, space and permission to enable children and young people to create their own safe and interesting spaces in which they can play.

**“Playing unfolds from the middle, creating a milieu of its own that allows for experimentation with affirmative affective experience, it always contains within it the possibility for further transformation – what if? What happens if you fall off? What counts...? Children’s ordinary minor acts of disturbance actualise a different form of ordering, an unexceptional yet potentially magical form of hope.”**

*(Lester 2019)*



Playing on your doorstep  
Photo: Dublin City Council

# Defining Play

## Play and children's autonomy

Supporting children's play requires a holistic and broad-reaching approach that moves beyond facilities and organised activities and places a focus on time, space and permissions. This requires the Dublin City Play Strategy to identify an appropriate framework for the development of an interdisciplinary approach in advocating for, and facilitating, play. To that end, the strategy is informed by Playwork Principles and Practice as a framework to support play. This involves a set of techniques which enable children to get as much 'free play' as possible out of supervised settings in order to

compensate for the loss of what should come naturally to them and happen on an everyday basis (*Newstead, 2005*). This framework will ensure a focus on preserving the unique definition, characteristics, value and aesthetic nature of play.

Developing and maintaining current and new play spaces and facilities demonstrates Dublin City Council's pledge and particular attention and actions to implement measures that address current lifestyles and play trends. The play strategy action plan includes working with children and

young people through conversations and research. In this way it ensures a response that reflects their current opinions and ideas and their desired use of space. This approach will assist in facilitating a broad range of opportunities for play based on their lived experiences. This supports children and young people to engage in play experiences that facilitate their self-efficacy, mobility, freedom of choice, risk and challenge, imagination, resilience, self-confidence and fun, as these elements of play are currently decreasing at an alarming rate.



Self-directed play  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Creating the right conditions for play to happen!  
Photo: Dublin City Council

**“Every child should have mud pies, grasshoppers, water bugs, tadpoles, frogs, mud turtles, elderberries, wild strawberries, acorns, chestnuts, trees to climb. Brooks to wade, water lilies, woodchucks, bats, bees, butterflies, various animals to pet, hayfields, pine-cones, rocks to roll, sand, snakes, huckleberries and hornets; and any child who has been deprived of these has been deprived of the best part of... education”**  
*(Luther Burbank, 1907)*



Loose Parts and Open-Ended Play Materials  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Playing on the edges  
Photo: Dublin City Council

# Section 3 Play Strategy Policy Statements

## Dublin City Play Strategy “Everywhere, Any Day, You Can Play!” (2022-2027) Themed Policy Statements

The Dublin City Play Strategy includes the following set of themed policy statements that further emphasise play as a rights based issue for children and young people. These statements are elaborated on throughout the strategy.

**1** Develop an awareness of play and its value and importance in the everyday lives of children and young people

**2** Create an effective city-wide play infrastructure through collaborative design that enhances and responds to children and young people’s existing infrastructure

**3** Place a key focus on accessible and inclusive opportunities for play for all children and young people

**4** Work in partnership to support schools and early childhood care and education settings to improve and increase child-led play experiences

**5** Support children and young people to fully exercise their right to play by providing ease of access to engage in cultural life and the arts

### Dublin City Play Strategy Action Plan (2022-2027)

The Play Strategy Action Plan will be the key instrument in fully implementing the Dublin City Play Strategy. The new themed policy statements developed within the strategy have influenced the nature and timeline for subsequent actions as follows:

- Demonstrate clear alignments with regard to the recommendations by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment 17 on Article 31; the child’s right to play. This includes alignments with city planning, roads and traffic, arts and culture, community and capital projects and relevant policies that place obligations on local authorities to support and provide for play as a right. Moreover, include realistic budgets and practicable timeline for implementation.
- Adopt key principles, concepts and theories of play in keeping with the Dublin City Play Plan (2012) and continue to focus on supporting children’s play based on sound and up-to-date knowledge of the study of children’s play.
- Develop and/or provide appropriate training for staff, organisations and communities regarding children’s rights, Playwork practice and play led approaches to planning and supporting play for children and young people.
- Support ongoing consultation and research with children and young people regarding their opportunities for play, recreation and cultural and artistic life.
- Include the development of a practice framework for Dublin City Council as a local authority that will support the ongoing monitoring and evaluation regarding the assessment process in securing sufficient play opportunities for the city’s young citizens.
- Develop and encourage cross-departmental and collaborative working with partner and outside agencies and organisations at local and national levels.
- Invest in Universal Design to support accessible and inclusive opportunities for play.
- Include the development of playful school environments that ensure adequate time and opportunities within the school day for rest, artistic and cultural activities and rich play.
- Align with the ‘Five National Outcomes’ adopted by Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: National Policy Framework for Children and Young People (2015-2020); Active & Healthy, Achieving, Safe, Economic Security and Connected and Respected.

# Play Strategy Action Plan

## Adopting the principle of Play Sufficiency as a methodology for the implementation of the Play Strategy Action Plan

The implementation of the Play Strategy Action Plan will reflect the concept of Play Sufficiency. Recognising the concept of Play Sufficiency, Dublin City Council will provide appropriate support such as time, space and permission for play to happen. Throughout the duration of the strategy Dublin City Council will continue to engage with the city's citizens to ensure overall service performance and more informal opportunities for play in children and young people's everyday lives. This will involve ongoing consultations regarding satisfaction with provision and service, and meaningful involvement in the maintenance and management of the city's play facilities. This will also include the design of new play facilities and upgrading of existing play facilities.

Everyday opportunities for play will be further addressed at local level by working with communities, especially children and young people, to gain an understanding of their use of outdoor space. By acknowledging local play cultures and play patterns any future city planning and design will better reflect the needs of children and young people.

Local Communities supporting play  
Photo: Dublin City Council



How greening cities can support children's play  
Photo: Dublin City Council





# Play Strategy Action Plan

## Budget

Dublin City Council is committed to a cross departmental approach to supporting the Play Strategy and subsequent Action Plan. All actions taken that reflect Policy Themes will include accurate costings and timelines to meet with short-term proposals. Also realistic and practical estimates for medium and long-term plans. The proposed budgets will be in alignment with previous and current City Council budgets for play and recreational facilities.



How greening cities can support children's play  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Play events to support children's play  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Naturally Wild/ Play event to support children's right to play  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Involving children in the design and planning of play spaces and places  
Photo: Dublin City Council



## Section 4

# The Case for a Play Strategy for Dublin

### UN Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment 17 Article 31: Analysis and interpretation of Article 31 as a right for children and young people.

The Dublin City Play Strategy includes a strong, achievable action plan that is informed and guided by General Comment 17 on Article 31; the child's right to play. As such, it will ensure that children and young people's right to play is promoted, protected and fulfilled throughout Dublin City, and as an example of best practice for Ireland.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is an internationally recognised binding agreement for governments to support and respect children's rights. The UNCRC was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989 and has since been adopted by all countries around the world, apart from the United States of America. Ireland signed the convention in 1990 and finally ratified it in 1992. This placed the Irish Government in a binding agreement to promote, protect and fulfil the rights of children throughout Ireland. A child is defined as anyone younger than 18 years of age. The four general principles of the UNCRC are:

- That all the rights guaranteed by the Convention must be available to all children without discrimination of any kind (Article 2).
- The best interests must be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children (Article 3).
- That every child has the right to life, survival and development (Article 6)
- That the child's views must be considered and taken into account in all matters affecting him or her (Article 12).

Under Article 15 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child children

have a right to freedom of association and peaceful assembly. Article 15 is an important right as it presents a case for children and young people's clandestine use of space. It acknowledges their freedom to be welcome in the public realm. This is an important right regarding children and young people's contested use of space, which may not meet with adult expectations or approvals. Additionally, Article 15 presents a case for spatial justice (*Russell, Barclay, Tawil & Derry, 2019*) as it states that children have the right to meet with friends, join groups, and be free to set up or join an organisation.

In 2013 the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted General Comment 17 on the Article 31. It sets out in detail the obligations and measures that governments and states bodies are urged to take in order to realise Article 31 for all children and young people. It involves the following three core objectives:

1. To enhance the understanding of the importance of Article 31 for children's wellbeing and development
2. To ensure respect for and strengthen the application of the rights under Article 31
3. To highlight the implications for the determination of:
  - (a) Strategies and programmes aimed at the realization of the rights defined in Article 31
  - (b) The role and responsibilities of the private sector and civil society organisations providing such services for children

- (c) Guidelines for all individuals working with children in the area of play

Adopting a clear and comprehensive understanding of play as instinctive, intrinsic and vital to the general health and wellbeing of children and young people is to understand play as an important human function for growth and overall development. For this reason all of the work carried out by Dublin City Council to support, advocate and provide for play is underpinned by UNCRC General Comment 17 on Article 31, thus promoting and supporting play as a basic human right for all children and young people.

Dublin City Council adopted this level of commitment through the development of the Dublin City Play Policy (2003), Dublin City Play Plan (2012 -2017) and the current Play Strategy. Based on this legal analysis of play, General comment 17 on Article 31 includes key considerations of 'quantity' and 'quality' of environment as an integral element of measures taken to support play for children and young people.

Dublin City Council recognises that all other rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child are indivisible and interdependent, and that Article 31 is central to the realisation of many other rights.

The indivisibility and interdependency with other rights clearly indicates the responsibility of Dublin City Council as a local authority to develop clear and concise methods of developing cross-departmental and inter-agency collaborations at local and national level.

# The Policy Context for the Dublin City Play Strategy

## Children's Play & Policy: Evolution of legal context for children in Ireland

Developing and providing legislation that supports the implementation of interventions that place children at the centre of society is a clear validation by states parties of their obligations and commitment to supporting children's general health and wellbeing.

There is a long history of many societal, economic and cultural changes in Ireland that have addressed a duty to support children as valued members of society. "*Cherishing all of the children of the nation equally*" was a key statement and aspiration within Ireland's 1916 Proclamation (*National Museum of Ireland, 2022*).

But even before the Proclamation, legislation to protect children had been enacted. Child protection issues were addressed in the Children Act of 1908, based on the accountability of parents and carers as opposed to a child centred issue. Under the Employment of Women, Young Persons and Children's Act of 1920, employing children under the age of 16 years in industry was abolished. A significant landmark was former Minister for Education Donogh O'Malley's ground-breaking announcement in 1966 of 'free second level education'. The outlawing of corporal punishment in schools followed in 1982.

The Status of Children Act 1987 was established to amend the law relating to the status of children in relation to legitimacy, guardianship, family maintenance of spouses and children, provision for declaration of parentage and registration of births and connected matters.

The development of the above-mentioned Acts track changes in how children were legislated for during the 20th century. Towards the end of the 20th century the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child brought about a significant change in how children and young people were to be supported.

In 1992, Ireland ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which includes Article 31; the child's right to play. To begin the process of implementing the convention, the National Children's Strategy: Our Children – Their Lives was published in 2000. The development of the strategy entailed a national consultation process that involved over 2,500 children and young people. A key issue identified by children and young people was poor access to play opportunities and facilities. Four years later Ireland's first National Play Policy: "*Ready Steady Play!*" (2004-2008) was launched.

One of the key recommendations within the National Play Policy was the development of play plans and strategies by each city and county local authority to support the child's right to play. In May 2012, Dublin City Council was the lead agency involved in the development of a multi-agency city Play Plan. Together with its partners, Dublin City Council launched the Dublin City Play Plan "*Play here, Play there, Play Everywhere*" (2012-2017). The Play Plan was an important development in the acknowledgement of play as a right for children and young people.

### Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (BOBF)

The Irish government includes a dedicated department for children; Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Formerly, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs). It is currently overseen by Minister Roderick O'Gorman TD. The National Play Policy (2004) falls within the remit of this department. Having a minister with responsibility for play at the cabinet table is key to ensuring a commitment to supporting children's right to play. (*Voce, A. 2015 Chapter 15, page 150-151*).

Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (BOBF): the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People was published in 2014. This whole of government policy framework presents a clear and comprehensive statement setting out how the Irish Government will achieve optimum outcomes to realise bright futures for all children and their families. During 2018, a mid-term review of the framework was completed, this will be followed by a final review which is currently being prepared. Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures encompasses all aspects of children's lives and presents a policy framework designed to achieve the five National Outcomes that will realise its goal.

The Children and Young People's Policy Consortium was established in 2014 as part of the implementation structures outlined in this policy document. The Consortium has oversight of and drives cross-Government implementation of

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures and its supporting strategies, and reports annually to Government on progress achieved.

The Dublin City Play Plan “*Play Here, Play There, Play Everywhere*” (2012-2017) aligns well with each of the five national outcomes. Additionally, the National Play Policy “*Ready, Steady Play!*” (2004-2008) has particular relevance as it supports the development of the Dublin City Play Plan. This plan is regularly referenced in BOBF as an example of best practice in how local authorities can support, plan and advocate for play. This Play Strategy is a further demonstration of constructive actions undertaken to realise the vision for Dublin as a child-friendly and playful city.

As a national policy framework for children and young people BOBF provides an indicator that tracks progress for children and young people aged 0-24 across the five national outcomes. The framework also encourages those working with children and young people to consider and review their work and identify measures where collaborative working partnerships can be developed. To this end, the Dublin City Play Strategy examines this issue and includes a newly developed themed set of actions. Play is connected in a number of complex and comprehensive ways to all BOBF five National Outcomes and their supporting policies. Within this context play is aligned with these outcomes as a flexible, unpredictable, imaginative, peer/self-directed ‘as-if’ behaviour (Lester & Russell 2008).

### Active and Healthy

When children play they are usually physically and mentally active. There is often a tendency to focus on the physical benefits of play and overlook the social and emotional benefits. A more holistic approach regarding the benefits of play is required in order to appreciate the relationship between play and the ‘active and healthy’ outcomes associated with

children’s play behaviours that involve resilience, adaptation, problem solving and developing connections and a sense of belonging with people and place. This presents strong evidence to support claims regarding both the central role of play and its positive impacts on the quality of many aspects of children and young people’s lives (Gleave, 2010). Peer led, self-directed play assists in developing motor skills in addition to reducing accidents. The therapeutic value of play has positive effects for children with diverse needs. For example, it has been found that play, particularly in a natural environment, has assisted in reducing challenges associated with ADHD (Panskeep, 2008). Therefore, detailed attention should be given to the therapeutic benefits of play in terms of children and young people’s overall health and development. This includes their physical health and also places equal importance on their mental health and wellbeing.

### Achieving their full potential in all areas of Health and Development

Playing is part of a child’s social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional development. In the absence of national policies to support this heading, the issue receives recognition and commitment within the BOBF framework. With regard to play, this heading includes mainly utilitarian policy priorities; Aim 2:1 Learning and developing and 2:2 Social and Emotional Wellbeing. In addressing these aims, it must be acknowledged that play contributes greatly to children’s social and emotional wellbeing as it is inextricably linked to resilience as a basis for good social emotional health including emotional regulation, stress response systems, enjoyment and pleasure and overall good mental health. In this way, play is not viewed as a luxury but as a necessity in supporting how children and young people develop attachments to places and friends and develop an openness to learning and creativity. This supports their

participation in community and society as active citizens during their transition to adulthood, but more importantly as part of their childhoods (Lester & Russell, 2008).

### Safe and Protected from Harm

In relation to children, Dublin City Council has a set of ethical procedures applied to all staff working with children and young people covered under the DCC Safeguarding Children Policy. The ‘Child Safeguarding’ procedures are available in various forms that are appropriate to different staff roles and professions. In terms of the implementation of the Dublin City Play Strategy, ‘Child Safeguarding’ and ‘Health and Safety’ policies and procedures would be most relevant.

With regard to children’s play these procedures and policies are also linked to other relevant departments with responsibility for parks, landscaping and public domain.

### Economic Security and Opportunity

The introduction of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme in 2010 involves the provision of early childhood care and education for children of pre-school age. The initial scheme was available free of charge for 1 year (38 weeks), however in 2018 the scheme was doubled to cover 2 full academic years (76 weeks). The ECCE Scheme is offered in early year’s settings, for 3 hours a day, 5 days a week for 38 weeks of each year. The State pays participating services a set amount per child. In return, participating early years settings provide a pre-school service free of charge to all children within the qualifying age range. Through this scheme parents can ensure their children have access to care and education settings.

This scheme was further supported in 2016 through a cross-government initiative led by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and

# The Policy Context for the Dublin City Play Strategy

## Children’s Play & Policy: Evolution of legal context for children in Ireland

involving the Department of Health and the Department of Education. The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) is a child-centre model of support, which ensures that children with disabilities can access and meaningfully participate in Early Childhood Care and Education programmes in mainstream pre-school settings.

### Connected and Respected

Creating a democratic environment for children enables and supports them to discuss, and think critically about, issues that affect their lives. This facilitates providing children and young people with opportunities to explore a multiple of perspectives, engage in decision making, develop evaluation skills and question dominant discourses (*Moss 2007*). This should be done in a manner appropriate to the age, stage and responsibilities of children to engage in society as active participative citizens. Observing, listening and talking to children and young people is required as part of the process of developing a shared understanding of childhood and children (*Scotland Executive, 2006*).

Playing is also a way of connecting with others. Children and young people make connections with peers through their play and consequently adults make connections with others through their children’s play. Therefore, play is a key element of community cohesion and the development of social networks for children, young people and adults in local neighbourhoods.

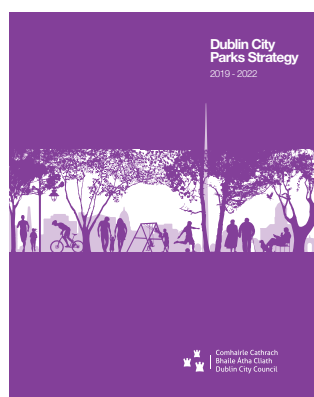
To further explore the connections between play and the five national outcomes for the BOBF framework, it is worth reviewing the Spider’s Web map developed by Lester and Russell in ‘Play for a Change’ in 2008. This diagram shows the interrelationship between play, resilience and the five national outcomes for the UK’s Every Child Matters (2003) which have striking similarities to Ireland.

This comprehensive Spiders Web diagram presents an illustration of the complexity and interconnectivity of the relationship between play, wellbeing and the Every Child Matters outcomes. This is also the case with play and wellbeing and the five national outcomes for Ireland’s Better Outcomes Brighter Futures.

### Dublin City Council alignments with relevant strategic documents

Dublin City Council provides a wide variety of services that address local needs and at the same time reflect citywide and national policies. In response to providing opportunities to play for children and young people, the City Council strives to implement recommendations through agreed actions within key policies that are in alignment with wider policies and strategies developed to support play for children and young people.

As mentioned, Ireland’s ratification (1992) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the first National Play Policy (2004) and the Dublin City Play Plan (2012-2017) are in alignment with Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, the Policy Framework for Children and Young People (2014). These connections will instigate inter and intra-departmental and inter-agency and collaborative working that will assist in realising the vision of this wide-ranging and ambitious Play Strategy (*Voce, 2015*).

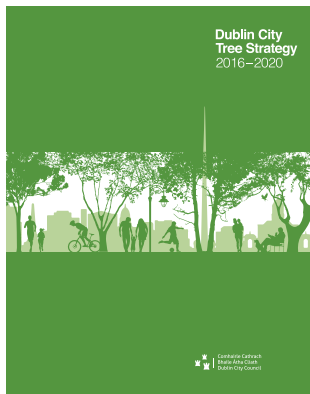


### The Dublin City Parks Strategy (2019-2022)

Dublin City Council’s Parks and Landscape Services prepared The Dublin City Parks Strategy (2019-2022). This strategy presents the wide range of resources and services under the Parks Services portfolio and states current policy and intended actions to seek the strategic vision of a greener and more liveable Dublin. The Parks Strategy links well with the Dublin City Play Strategy as it places a focus on parks and play, which includes but also moves beyond provision of traditional playgrounds to include green and wild spaces, brownfield sites and public space. Moreover, the strategy vision of a greener more liveable city aligns with supporting children’s everyday freedoms and opportunities for play in local streets, neighbourhoods and public space.

### The Dublin City Biodiversity Action Plan (2015-2020)

The Biodiversity Action Plan for Dublin is aimed at preserving and improving the city’s green infrastructure. Most of this work can be achieved where the city’s parks provide biodiversity-rich environments that are also part of the city’s landscape that support children’s play.



### Dublin City Tree Strategy (2016-2020)

Focused on the management of the city’s trees, the Dublin City Tree Strategy includes measures and initiatives for engagement such as Tree Trails, National Tree Week, and Arboreta that provide practical information and awareness. These kinds of initiatives also present opportunities for play that support children and young people’s environmental and nature based play experiences.

### The Heart of Dublin: City Centre Public Realm Masterplan (2016)

This masterplan includes identification of public space and places that hold the potential to be child-friendly and playful. Play and recreational opportunities for young people present an appropriate alternative to sports participation. Including children and young people in the design and planning of age appropriate play facilities and public space demonstrates consideration and acceptance of the city’s youngest citizens, making it easier for them to ‘fit in’ and feel that they are valued members of society. Supporting both younger and older children’s use of public space for social interaction involves identifying spaces and places that hold meaning for them and providing further support through interventions that will ensure time, space and permission regarding their use of public space to meet and ‘hang out’ with friends and in some instances engage in physical play activities.



Local authorities can support children’s everyday play experiences by developing and implementing policies and strategies that place a key focus on supporting children’s day to day freedom and opportunities to play outside in local streets and neighbourhoods.

In conclusion, a shared understanding of play among government departments and local authorities is embedded in current policies and strategies for children and young people. This avoids recent challenges in supporting and facilitating self-directed,

unstructured play, which can sometimes be overlooked through a misguided focus on instrumental and outcomes focused approaches to play provision. The Dublin City Play Strategy contains multifaceted links to Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, a policy framework that

places emphasis on the importance of play, acknowledging play as a right and the intrinsic nature and value of play regarding the general health and wellbeing of children and young people.



Children playing hospital during 1900s  
Photo: Irish Independent Archives

Kids on railings - Corporation Buildings, Dublin 1960s  
Photo: Pinterest Dublin Vintage Archive



Witches Hat at Mounjoy Square Merrygoround - Mountjoy Sq  
Photo: Pinterest



Roll out the Barrell  
Photo: Pinterest Dublin Vintage Archive

"Go on a tricycle at this section of Parnell square today and you're toast. Dublin in 1946"  
Photo: Mary Bartley Pinterest



Walking to school  
Photo: Kath Fouk Pinterest Dublin Vintage Archive



Up the wall  
Photo: Alex Lambrou, Pinterest Dublin Vintage Archive

Boys flying kites at Fairgrounds Park, 6 March 1950.  
Photo: Missouri History Museum



Lunch time off Moore Street  
Photo: Pinterest Dublin Vintage Archive

# Challenges in realising the Dublin City Play Strategy

Play Friendly Communities  
Photo: Dublin City Council



- Unsafe & hazardous environments
- Resistance to children and young people's use of public space
- Balanced approach to risk and safety
- Poor access to nature
- Pressure for educational achievement
- Overly structured recreational programme schedules
- Neglect of Article 31 in development programmes
- Lack of cultural and artistic opportunities for children
- Marketing and commercialisation of play

Realising all of the policy statements and subsequent actions within this play strategy will present a number of challenges for the city. Adopting the key principles and obligations for states parties as set out within General Comment 17 on Article 31, will provide the rationale to overcome the following challenges:

- Lack of recognition of the importance of play for children and young people
- Including 'the voice of the child' within actions taken in creating a child-friendly and playful city
- Providing sufficient equality of access to play opportunities for children and young people of all ages and abilities

As we now enter into 2022 Dublin City Council has been tasked with the development and launch of the Dublin City Play Strategy "Everywhere, Any Day, You Can Play!" (2022-2027). This new play strategy clearly validates ongoing local authority commitment to supporting and upholding children and young people's right to play.

Clandestine use of public space  
Photo: YouTube



National Play Day  
Photo: Dublin City Council





## Section 5

# Review of Public Engagement

### Interactive workshops and conversations hosted at National Playdays

The consultation process that preceded the Dublin City Play Strategy placed particular focus on children and young people through a mixed range of research methods to support public engagement. This involved a mosaic approach regarding group work and public consultations with children and young people that featured informal conversations and playful engagements and observations of their use of outdoor space.

This section provides an overview of discussions and summary of survey findings. To view the full report of Public Engagement for the Dublin City Play Strategy, please follow this link

<https://bit.ly/PlayConsultationReview>

Dublin City Council has consulted with partner agencies and organisations who contributed to the Play Strategy

and who will also use the Strategy as a tool for developing their own organisational statement of intentions with regard to play. Ongoing work with regard to active research carried out for local play projects have also provided vital information that has been acknowledged and considered within the Play Strategy.

### Approach

The development of the Play Strategy required contributions from local communities, children and young people throughout the city. This process involved children, young people, and their parents/guardians/carers, who shared their views and ideas as part of a citywide consultation process that involved a multi-method approach in order to collate the required information that has informed the Dublin City Play Strategy. This process included the following methodologies:

- Interactive workshops and conversations hosted at National Playdays
- Parks Pop-Up Play & Conversations
- Comhairle na nÓg (Young People’s Parliament - approximately 50 young people from across the city)
- Article 31; Right to Play Workshops
- Stoneybatter Greening Strategy – ‘Playful Parks Mobile Radio’ Interviews
- Let’s Play with clay to Create a Child-Friendly and Playful City; National Playday clay modelling consultation workshop
- Online survey ‘Have your say about play’ (2019-2020)
- Survey Regarding ‘The Impact of Covid-19 on children’s play and friendships in the Dublin City Council Area’ (2020)
- Online Survey ‘The Changing Patterns of Urban Park Usage in Dublin City Council Catchment Area During the Covid-19 Pandemic’

### Parks Pop-Up Play & Conversations

Pop-up Play Consultations in some of Dublin’s local parks, that involved parents/carers, children and young people. ‘Have Your Say About Play!’ Surveys were distributed alongside



Having our say in Stoneybatter  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Parks Pop-Up Play Conversations  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Parks Pop-Up Play Conversations  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Parks Pop-Up Play Conversations  
Photo: Dublin City Council

informal conversations with adults/parents/carers and interactive play sessions that supported children in articulating their views and ideas about their particular play experiences.

**Comhairle na nÓg  
(Young People’s Parliament  
- approximately 50 young  
people from across the city)**

Presentation on the draft Dublin City Play Strategy to all members of the 2018, 2019 & 2020 Comhairle na nÓg where they participated in Play Strategy workshops and formed a



Right to Play Workshops at Ombudsman for Children’s Office  
Photo: Dublin City Council

sub-group to review the Play Strategy draft. They also gave their views on their experiences of Dublin as a child-friendly and playful city. Additionally, the members completed hard copies of the ‘Have your say about play’ survey.

**Article 31;  
Right to Play Workshops**

In support of the development of the play strategy, the Ombudsman for Children’s Office provided a venue to host a series of consultative workshops on Article 31; the child’s right to play. A collaborative process was developed with the Lab Arts Centre where the practice of Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) was used as a way of working with children and young people to explore what Article 31 means for them. Children and young people from the Central Model School in Dublin 1 and the City Council’s network of Community and Recreation Centres engaged in a series of workshops. These workshops took place over 3 days.

There were approximately 705 respondents to the overall engagement process that provided meaningful input for the Dublin City Play Strategy. The profile of participants was made up of approximately of 300 adults, 45 Comhairle na nÓg members, 100 children and young people who participated in interactive art workshops at National Playday 2019, 120 children and young people who attended pop-up play sessions in city parks. Finally, 110 children and young people from the Dublin City Council Community and Recreation Centres and 30 pupils from the Central Model School attended workshops on ‘Article 31; right to Play’ at the Ombudsman for Children’s Office

Dublin City Council also consulted cross-departmentally and with partner



Involving children and young people in development of local greening strategies  
Photo: Dublin City Council

organisations and outside agencies to obtain additional input, comments and agreements for the content of the new city Play Strategy.

As part of some of the above mentioned public engagement sessions, some participants also completed hard copies of ‘Have your say about play!’ survey.

**Stoneybatter Greening  
Strategy – ‘Playful Parks  
Mobile Radio’ Interviews**

A key part of the Stoneybatter Greening Strategy (2020) was engagement with the local community. Safe and accessible places for play was important in this area, which presented the catalyst for local conversations. These conversations evolved to more detailed and specific workshops, meetings, walkabouts etc. where playable space for children and young people remained at the forefront of conversations. One way of carrying out active research with children was to conduct radio interviews with local children during one of the workshops. Dublin City Council Landscape Architects and Play Development Officer worked collaboratively to design the workshops so that younger people and children could take part. This



Things that stop me from playing  
Photo: Dublin City Council

provided them with the opportunity to give feedback in different ways through drawings and giving them a voice. This included the use of a playful tool: the 'Parks Mobile Radio Station' to spark conversations with children and young people and record feedback.

During these interviews the children outlined barriers to play which included lack of space, speeding traffic, litter and dumping and road safety on residential streets which can even stop them calling in to friends who live close by.

The children and young people explained how they could offer solutions to these issues and described their ideas and design for a 'parklet' at the end of their street. The children explained what the space could look like, what kinds of things they could play there and how this would support them to be able to play every day.

*"Well we don't have many places to play because we're near the city so the 'parklet' would be a good idea. This would have flowers, trees games... and cars can't park there anymore!"*  
(Girl aged approximately 9 years)



Modeling workshops to help create and design a play friendly city  
Photo: Dublin City Council

Additionally, adults input focused on preserving and increasing green infrastructure alongside opportunities for play and socialising for children and young people. The result has been the steady progress of interventions and initiatives that are child focused and play friendly. Some of the play friendly interventions planned are 'parklets', a rain garden and small local pocket parks.

*"Right now we play on our road but my little sister has a friend across the road so my parents have to watch her all the time ...and sometimes they're making the dinner and the road can be like.... there are people flying up it like they're cars"*  
(Girl aged approximately 10 years)

*"Stuff we'd like to happen on our road; Well it would look like a greener street and well it would look a lot nicer to live on because right now there's a lot of rubbish on it and loads of people just dump their clothes and mattresses and everything on it!"*  
(Girl aged approximately 10 years)

It is clear from children and young people's responses and input that the key constraints to play are speeding traffic, littering and freedom to be with other children to make and maintain friendships.

### Let's Play with Clay to Create a Child-Friendly and playful city: National Playday clay modelling consultation workshop

As part of National Playday interactive art workshops took place where children and young people joined in conversations and used clay modelling and other materials available to create an image of what they thought a child-friendly city would look like. The workshops were facilitated by an artist who specialized in this art form with children and young people. Utilising this art form as a medium for play provided an active and participative way for children and young people to actively explore and articulate what a child-friendly and playful city means to them and how it might look.

During the clay workshops the children and young people were most engaged when they were not told what to do. They were most interested when they thought that they had the freedom to create anything they wanted with only some direction – if requested. Most of the children and young people's creations indicated that they wanted



Right to Play Workshops at Ombudsman for Children's Office  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Pop-Play at St Patrick's Park  
Photo: Dublin City Council

more playgrounds and playful objects that they could play on in an ideal playful city. Many produced models of slides, tunnels, swings and mobile cars for children made out of clay and other loose materials. The children and young people felt more confident about their ideas when they communicated with facilitating artists who realised the importance of acknowledging and praising their creations, and encouraged them to continue making and expanding ideas for the city. Many children were most engaged when they had a parent/ guardian actively helping or being involved with their actions in a

manner that was supportive rather than directive. Quite a lot of the children noted that there needed to be more animal friendly areas within the ideal city, which indicates the importance of animals in their lives. Most participants also mentioned that there was not enough water, lakes or ponds to be seen in the city. Notably, for this form of participation, cars and bikes were not as frequently mentioned when children were making the models.

Approximately 300 children and young people participated in this activity throughout the day as engagement

was transient rather than set times so children could join in and leave as they so pleased. The models they completed were creative, detailed and provided information that is now included in the Dublin City Play Strategy.

### Have Your Say about Play! (2019-2020)

This online survey was available on the Dublin City Council website and included three questionnaires for specific categories - adults, children under 12 years and teenagers 12 years plus. The activity ran from March 18 2019 to June 27 2019.

The purpose of this online survey was to form part of a citywide consultation that supports Dublin City Council to get as many views and as much information as possible from the city's citizens, especially children and young people, in order to reflect their wishes and needs within the Play Strategy.

The survey included the following three age appropriate surveys, which could be completed online and were also offered as hard copies at onsite consultation venues and completed manually:

- Children's Survey  
- under 12 years
- Young People Survey  
12-18 years approximately
- Parent/Guardian/Carer Survey –  
age is only a number!

Overall there were 376 responses to the survey of which 27 were children, 50 were young people/teenagers and 299 adults. This is a reasonable representation of the city's population and their views on children's play and Dublin as a child-friendly and playful city.

The key findings are based on the results from the following questions which were answered in completed online and manual surveys received and reviewed.



Pop-Play at St Patrick's Park  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Parks Pop-Up Play Conversations  
Photo: Dublin City Council



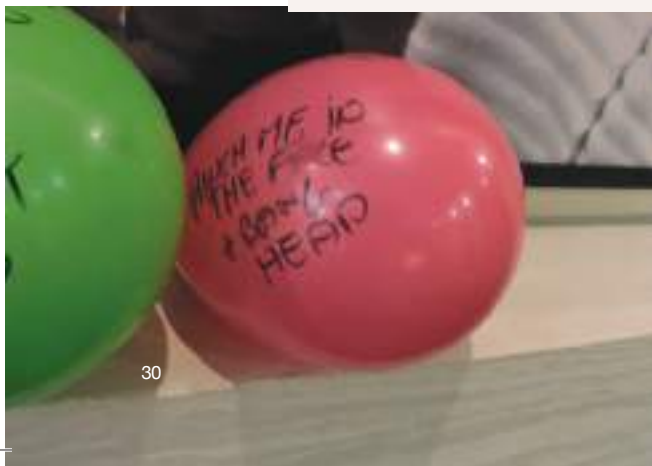
Comhairle na nÓg AGM Dublin's Young Citizens discuss the Dublin City Play Strategy  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Modeling workshops to help create and design a play friendly city  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Things that stop me from playing  
Photo: Dublin City Council



# Children's Voices



1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. Are you a /I identify as?
4. What area/neighbourhood do you live in?
5. Where do you like to play?

*"My family and I go to parks all around Dublin almost every weekend (if we're not too busy e.g. with matches or Coder Dojo). Dublin has a good variety of different parks and gardens, so we usually have fun on scooters or bikes, and, of course, with playgrounds! Also, there is an area of grass right outside my school. It's not huge, but for the city it is quite large. We call it the Green and a few kids in my class play there often after school, even just for half an hour. Some play football in the mornings too."*  
(Girl aged 11 years)

*"Belgrave and 'The Green' in front of Safari Childcare and behind Swan Leisure. I go there after school nearly every day."*  
(Boy aged 5 years)

## 6. What stops you from playing?

*"There aren't many good parks or open spaces near where I live, so we have to take a 15 minute car drive minimum whenever we want to go somewhere. It means we can't really go anywhere once at home after school. My parents don't allow me to play on the road like some kids in my neighbourhood, because it's too dangerous. I totally agree with them, but I've nowhere to go after school if I'm really bored."*  
(Girl Aged 11 years)

*"My mum, weather and rubbish, dog poop."*  
(Boy aged 5 years)

*"Nothing really, but the nearest park is like 10min walk away from my house so I wish there was one closer but I can understand that they take up a lot of space so it is often difficult to find a nice area to build a park."*  
(Girl aged 12 years)

## 7. How would you rate Dublin as a "child friendly and playful city"? 10 being the highest and 1 being the lowest

## 8. If I never played my life would be like...?

*"a different life - very sad with no imagination and no fun."*  
(Girl Aged 10 years)

*"It would be horrible if I couldn't enjoy sunshine or play with my friends."*  
(Boy Aged 9.5 years)

*"If I never played my life would be extremely boring and dull. It would take away a big part from who I am and myself as a person would be much less interesting, as would many others I know. Playing is one of the joys of life, where you can let your imagination run wild and nobody really cares. I know from experience that it really helps to just go to the park or playground and just do what I want, especially if I'm stressed or anxious".*  
(Girl Aged 12 years)

*"vrvjbfgh (nonsense)!"*  
(Boy Aged 6 years)

## 9. Anything Else?

*"More community gardens so we can learn about growing and sustainability and work together in a fun way to make something grow. I'd love youth clubs that do dance and art and fun stuff without it feeling like a class or any kind of a competition."*  
(Girl aged 10 years)

*"It would be amazing if good playgrounds were erected in, especially, residential areas that teenagers and other adults couldn't hang around, destroy or scare off young families. The problem is that many beautiful new playgrounds are built only for no one to use them because the teens are so loud and, literally, scary."*

*Speaking as an older child, playgrounds are still fun and great to let off steam, but there isn't much for older kids. For example, a stimulating obstacle might be a difficult climb up to a really high slide. Most playgrounds just have swings with 6 - 12 years or something on it which isn't very mentally challenging, though still great fun."*  
(Girl Aged 11 years)

# Young People's Voices



1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. I gender identify as?
4. What area/neighbourhood do you live in?
5. What would a child-friendly and playful city look like?

*"Many playgrounds, day cares, safer streets, little or no crime".*  
(Female aged 14 years)

6. What makes it difficult for you to spend time/be with your friends outside?

*"I have autism and can't go out safely alone in my area"  
"Nowhere to go when the weather is bad"*  
(Boy aged 16 years)

*"All the gangs hanging around. My ma hates me being out cause of all the people that hang around"*  
(Female aged 14 years)

*"Other commitments like school, work, weather - lack of places to go"*  
(Female aged 17 years)

*"The city centre is all business blocks now. There's nowhere to play with my cousins. Also, some playgrounds are creaky or missing swings and it'd be really good to have them renovated or have new things added in. It would almost certainly boost the number of visitors to that park or playground."*  
(Male aged 14 years)

7. What makes your area a good or bad place to live in?

*"Bad - gangs, no areas for hurling. Only one astro for soccer and we have to climb over the gates a lot to access."*  
(Male aged 16 years)

*"Bad- not enough trees, hundreds of cars, gas fumes, damage to playground equipment, not enough things to do, I get bored easily.  
Good - Green outside my school"*  
(Boy aged 16 years)

*"Not much local organised activities that is supervised and safe to go with my friends"*  
(Male aged 13 years)

8. What would a 'child-friendly and playful city' mean to you?

*"It would be great to be able to just be out with my friends and not have to worry."*  
(Female aged 14 years)

*"A child-friendly city sounds safe to me, but a play friendly city sounds appealing."*  
(Female aged 14 years)

*"Haven't heard of it!"*  
(Boy aged 12 years)

9. How would you rate opportunities for outdoor play & recreational facilities in your area?
10. When play and recreational spaces are being planned in your area, how would you like to be involved? Tick one or more of the following:

*"You tell us!"*  
(Male aged 13 years)

*"I like all of these"*  
(Female aged 17 years)

11. If I never played my life would be like ....?

*"A prison - everyone needs the green areas and outdoor space, even big kids."*  
(Female aged 16 years)

*"10 million sad faced emojis"*  
(Male aged 12 years)

*"I'd be very nervous and cautious and clueless in social situations"*  
(Female aged 12 years)

*"Boring, no purpose, no happiness in life"*  
(Female aged 16 years)

12. How would you persuade adults of the importance of play/hanging out/being with friends?

*"They have places to go, why don't we?"*  
(Male aged 12 years)

*"I would ask adults to imagine when they were young they played out on the streets with their friends so how would they like it if they weren't able to go out and play with their friends, how would they have felt and I bet they would feel very sad so please do not deprive me of playing with my friends as it's different now compared to the days when the adults were young as the streets had more playing space for children and were more safe but now we need a dedicated safe place to play as the streets have less space now as more cars etc. and is less safe but we still need to play with our friends the same way adults did when they were young."*  
(Male aged 13 years)

*"I would say 'mom I'll get off my Xbox for like 10 hours'"*  
(Male aged 11 years)

13. Anything Else?

*"Play is essential for childhood development. It teaches resilience, sociability, confidence"*  
(Female aged 14 years)

# What Adults Said



1. What is your name?
2. What is your email address?
3. What area/neighbourhood do you live in?
4. What is your role?  
If you are an organisation can you provide the name of your organisation/group/service?
5. Would you consider Dublin to be a child-friendly and playful city?

*"Only if you live near a playground"*  
(Parent/Carer)

*"Getting better, however compared to other countries we would be the lowest I feel on amenities!!! More could be done for all age groups?"*  
(Parent/Carer)

*"Bad - Lack of public space so required to go to a pub to catch up with people. Good - community, good school, close to everything, Dolphin Park."*  
(Male aged 25 years).

And how would you rate Dublin as a 'child-friendly and playful city'; 10 being the highest and 1 being the lowest?

6. What groups of children and young people do you think do not have opportunities to play? And what could be done to help them?
7. What can be done to make play spaces more appealing for everyone?

*"Ask Children!"*  
(Parent/Carer)

*"Develop informal play spaces e.g. open space and street play initiatives"*  
(Parent/Carer)

*"Provide play and 'hang out' spaces for teenagers"*  
(Parent/Carer)

*"Reinstate Play Officers and Play Rangers"*  
(Parent/Carer)

8. How can government and local communities support play through changing negative perceptions of children and young people?

*"Build more child-friendly zones"*  
(Parent/Carer)

*"Develop and implement pilot projects"*  
(Parent/Carer)

*"Children and young people also play in a way that is safe!"*  
(Parent/Carer)

*"Involve children and young people in planning and design for play"*  
(Parent/Carer)

9. Do you agree with the following **"Aim of the Dublin City Play Plan (2021-2017): All relevant agencies will work together to ensure that Dublin City is a Child-Friendly and Playful City"**?
10. If I never played my life would be like \* or (if my child) or (the child in my care) never played his/her life would be like\*)?

*"Stifling! Play is like breathing to children!"*  
(Parent/Carer)

*"If I never played my life would be like I never dreamed, touched the sky, landed on the moon, ran away and found freedom in a universe inside my heart"*  
(Parent/Carer)

*"Very sad indeed. A child's job is to play."*  
(Parent/Carer)

11. **Vision of the Dublin City Play Plan; Dublin will be a child-friendly and playful city where all children and young people can enjoy their right to play.**

In order to realise this vision do you agree with the following:

- **Agree or disagree** - Children and young people in Dublin are valued as an integral part of their neighbourhood and the community of the city.
- **Agree or disagree** - Play and young people's recreation is recognised as an essential and important part of their growing up.
- **Agree or disagree** - In every residential area there are a variety of good quality places to play for all ages.
- **Agree or disagree** - The city and its neighbourhoods are and feel like safe and interesting places to play.
- **Agree or disagree** - All public space is considered possible play space.
- **Agree or disagree** - Parks and open spaces are safe and accessible for all children and young people.
- **Agree or disagree** - All play spaces are attractive, welcoming, engaging and accessible to all children and young people, including disabled children and children from minority groups in the community.



- **Agree or disagree** - Children and young people have a clear stake in public space and their play and activities are accepted by their neighbours and readily defended.
- **Agree or disagree** - Children, young people and their communities take an active role in the development of local play spaces.
- **Agree or disagree** - Children and young people play in a way that respects themselves, other people and property
- **Agree or disagree** - Children feel able to and encouraged to move between play spaces, schools and other services useful to them.
- **Agree or disagree** - Interaction between children, young people and other generations is fostered within their communities.

“Agree ++++ ++ Walking distance is vital”  
(Parent/Carer)

“Please develop more intergenerational spaces”  
(Parent/Carer)

“Please develop more natural recreational spaces”  
(Parent/Carer)

“Traffic restrictions to support play”  
(Parent/Carer)

“Kids need not only a home but services that go with it and play areas available in all weather conditions, and free!!!”  
(Parent/Carer)

## 12. Anything else?

### Summary of Findings

Overall this survey has provided results that indicate overarching themes in terms of where improvements can be made on play facilities and opportunities to play for children and young people, and the positive impacts for the wider community. These results have provided a wealth of information to inform and shape the Dublin City Play Strategy and subsequent action plan that will include the following matters:

- Equality of access and improved and increased accessible and inclusive play facilities and opportunities for play
- Increased opportunities for play for older children/teenagers
- Increased access to nature and tactile play experiences for all ages and abilities
- Enhancement of public space and local neighbourhoods to include shared and intergenerational spaces for play facilities and spaces
- DCC-hosted play activities and events programme
- Supervised play provision



# Play and the Global Pandemic

## The Impact of Covid-19 on children's play and friendships in the Dublin City Council Area (2020)

Dublin City Council Parks & Landscape Services – Play Development, commissioned a report extracted from an online survey carried out by Dublin City University which focused on 'The impact of Covid-19 restrictions on children's play and friendships in the Dublin City area' (2020).

This survey was carried out during 2020 by Dublin City University (DCU) in response to the coronavirus pandemic and how it disrupted play worlds, friendship groups and potentially the wellbeing of every child and young person in Ireland. Initially all local authority playgrounds closed, as did schools. Children and young people could not socialise with their friends face to face, which had hugely negative impacts on children and young people's physical, mental, social and emotional health and wellbeing. In order to capture the voices of parents and school aged children, DCU developed an online questionnaire which children completed with parental consent and their own assent. The questionnaires focused on children's play, play activities, hanging out and friendship groups. In total there were 1,553 individual responses to the online survey. In support of children's play, Dublin City Council (DCC) acknowledged this issue and was keen to obtain and understand children and young people's own perspectives, as well as their parents, on the impact of these new circumstances on their wellbeing and play experiences.

In order to identify subsequent supports that could be included within the upcoming Play Strategy, DCC was also interested in finding out what ideas, strategies and solutions children, adults and young people came up with, and where possible, to overcome the difficulties imposed by the social restrictions imposed by Covid-19 in relation to their play, hanging out and keeping in touch with their friendship groups. Consequently, DCC engaged DCU to extract a report that focused exclusively on the findings from the parents and children who lived in the Dublin City Council catchment areas from which a subset of 191 responses were analysed. The findings focused on responses from 51 separate areas within the Dublin City Council catchment area. This comprised 164 parents and 27 children. 82.3% of parents answered questions in relation to children aged between 4 and 9 years of age. 60.8% of child respondents were aged between 10 and 13, and 39.2% were aged between 14 and 18 years.

In total, this report covers the views of children between aged 4-18 years. 88.5% of parent respondents were between the ages of 31 and 50. Although the responses received covered a wide geographical distribution within the DCC catchment area, the top four clusters of responses were from Glasnevin, Raheny, Cabra and Clontarf.

### Survey Findings: The Impact of Covid-19 on children's play and friendships in the Dublin City Council Area (2020)

The majority of respondents were overwhelmingly white Irish for both parents and children. Most of the parental respondents were female and parented children between 4-10 years. The findings summarised below focus on responses from Dublin City catchment areas only and under the following set of headings which were posed as themed questions within the survey:

- Dwelling type and available outdoor play spaces
- Pre Covid-19 - Where do children play and 'hang out'
- Children, the outdoors and physical activity during the Covid-19 Pandemic
- Changes to daily routine
- Changes to indoor play activities during Covid-19
- Who do children turn to when they need support?
- Social media usage to maintain friendship groups
- Children's life satisfaction
- What caused the most difficulty in assisting children to play and maintain their friendship groups?

*"Only child so misses her friends to play with. Depending on parents - not as much fun!!"*  
(Parent/Carer)

*"It is usually hard when I meet my friends when me and my family are out for a walk - we have to social distance and we don't really play, we just talk"*  
(Boy aged 10 years, Dublin)

● **Working from home**

*"Both parents working from home means nobody free to play"*  
(Parent/Carer)

*"I have an 8 month old and also trying to balance and help my mother who is cocooning"*  
(Mother, Dublin)

● **Best ideas to promote play**

*"Getting a climbing frame helped as he had something new to focus his energy on"*  
(Parent/Carer)

*"Dug a hole in the garden and let him play in it. Filled it with water and splashed around, threw toys in etc. Allowing him to engage in very messy play in the garden especially using the hose has worked well"*  
(Mother, Dublin)

*"I made a fort in my garden. I made a snail hotel. I made a zip line for my brother's action heroes"*  
(Boy aged 10, Dublin)

● **What can the Irish Government do to help children's ability to hang out or play during this time?**



**Summary of Findings**

These findings clearly demonstrate that the spaces that children occupy for play are key to their day to day lives and play experiences. Additionally, children and young people's infrastructure and use of play spaces do indeed change as they get older with a stronger concentration on public parks and sports facilities as they reach adolescence, whereas playgrounds and back and front gardens feature more for younger children unless age appropriate play facilities are provided. Interestingly, the home still remains a significant space for children's play and recreation.

Overall this survey revealed that younger children spent less time outdoors by themselves or being vigorously physically active. Older children did spend slightly more time with

friends outdoors than younger children but the children tell us that a lot of this contact was socially distanced e.g. talking to friends over the garden wall etc.

Going forward Dublin City Council will continue to implement actions with the Play Strategy that support the development of a citywide play infrastructure that can address many of the issues identified within this survey report.

The survey was authored and carried out by Dr Carol Barron, Ms Mary-Jane Emmett and Dr Marcos Dias of Dublin City University in June 2020.

To view full report, follow link for the flip book version: <https://media.dcu.ie/media/parksreport2021/>



# Play and the Global Pandemic

## Changing patterns of urban park usage in Dublin City Council catchment area during the Covid-19 Pandemic

### Public Parks and the Covid-19 Pandemic

Dublin's parks were an exception to the lockdown, as they stayed open through all phases of the Covid-19 pandemic. The full extent of the direct impact of the coronavirus pandemic on children, adults and older people is still being researched and understood. The indirect effects however may be substantial and widespread, stemming from overburdened health systems, loss of household income, disruptions to child and adult health services, disruptions to education and work-life balance, social isolation and reduced opportunity for contact with nature and physical activity.

Dublin City Council's urban parks became a vital resource to Dublin citizens during the Covid-19 pandemic. In order to address and support any key issues for the city in this regard, Dublin City Council was keen to investigate and report on urban park usage in its catchment area during the Covid-19 pandemic. Subsequently, Dublin City Council Parks & Landscape Services and Play Development and Dublin City University (DCU) worked collaboratively to develop an online survey to identify the health and social benefits of parks, changing patterns of usage and what citizens expect from their parks now and in the future. This research was part funded by Dublin City Council, the Publishing Fund from the School of Nursing, Psychotherapy and Community and the Covid-19 Research Grant, DCU.

### Findings of Survey on Changing Patterns of Urban Public Park Usage and the Covid-19 Pandemic:

The survey reached out to 1,337 residents of the Dublin City Council catchment area of whom 96% were adults and 4% were children aged 10 to 17 years old. The findings summarised below focus on responses from Dublin City Council catchment areas only and under the following set of headings which were posed as themed questions within the survey:

- Parks, Play and Families
- Park as an Imaginative Natural Environment
- The Park as a Safe and Accessible Space for Families

*"[The children] enjoy using the smooth surfaces for their scooters as the footpaths [outside the park] are atrocious"*  
(Female aged 25-44)

*"Outdoors, but feels safe, they meet friends & get off screens & have 'old fashioned' fun"*  
(Female aged 45-64)

*"They love the playground and cycling all over the park. Every morning my husband and 10-year-old go cycling in the park for an hour or more – they have started to develop small mountain biking trails in the park with jumps etc. as they can't currently escape to the mountains."*  
(Female aged 25-44)

*"[The park is] a great amenity for kids to meet outside and play together, outside of organised activities. They learn social skills and how to use their imaginations. It's wonderful for children"*  
(Female aged 25-44)

*"[we have] 3 kids, our younger 2 like to use the play aspect. Our eldest daughter in a wheelchair rarely can get involved as there are little facilities for our disability community"*  
(Male aged 25-44)

- Teenage Children and Parks

*"I have 2 teenagers who like to meet friends in the park to play football, cycle and 'hang out'"*  
(Female aged 45-64)

- Children and Active Pursuits

*"[We use] the swings but it's difficult in the pandemic because I don't like letting the kids touch everything—I try to go with the kids early morning to avoid crowds"*  
(Female aged 18-24)

*"[Our children] also love the playgrounds in the park but we haven't used them during [the] pandemic as they are very busy/crowded"*  
(Female aged 25-44)

## Summary of Findings

The report includes a set of recommendations for changes in parks usage that will assist in supporting the overall health and wellbeing of children and young people. This includes building on 'Infrastructure Investment' improving 'Mobility and Accessibility', responding to 'Changing Park Usage', removing 'Barriers to Park Usage' in the DCC catchment area, and improving communication mechanisms regarding 'Park Events' Promotion'.

However, for the purpose of the Play Strategy, the focus is placed on findings and recommendations involving 'parks, play and families' in order to inform the strategy action plan. It is therefore noted that the single most attractive element of parks for respondents with children was the presence of a playground.

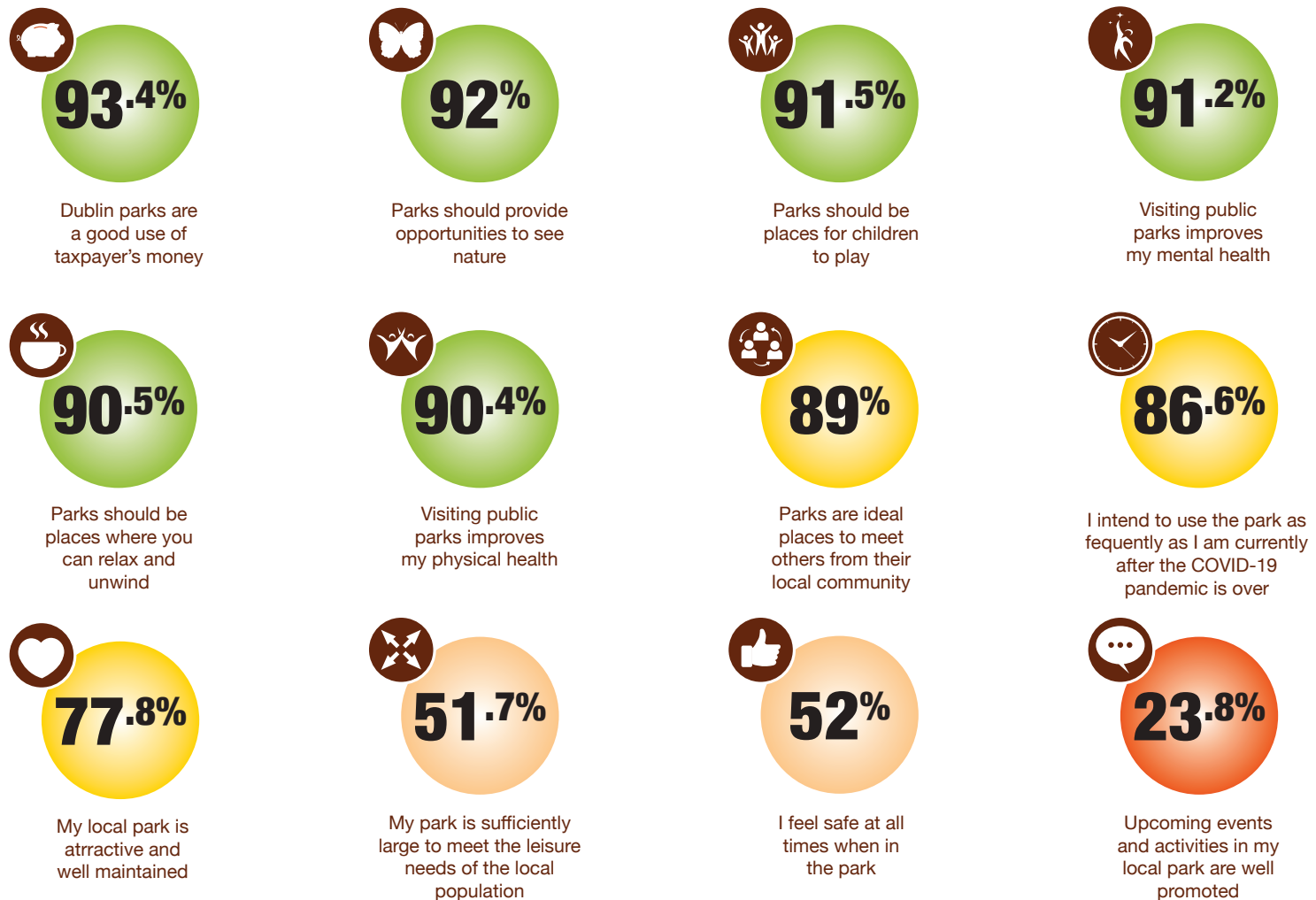
Parents also acknowledged that parks assist with the health and wellbeing of their children and see urban parks as a means of letting their children enjoy the benefits of active pursuits in a natural environment. A wide variety of child

activities and behaviors are facilitated within urban parks by creating the right conditions for informal and imaginative child-led play in the natural landscape.

The survey respondents were asked to identify and rank the priority areas that they believed should be the key priority for Dublin City Council moving forward. The most common request was for more landscaping (plants and trees), followed by better facilities (toilets, seating, bins), more socialising initiatives, including more local events. This presents DCC with the task of working in partnership with local community groups, partners and outside agencies to implement these priority areas identified by the park users.

The survey and all subsequent reports were carried out and authored by Dr Carol Barron, Dr Marcos Dias and Ms Mary-Jane Emmett June/July 2021 of Dublin City University.

To view full report, follow link for the flip book version: <https://media.dcu.ie/media/parksreport2021/>



# Section 6

# Themed Policy Statements

## 1 Develop an awareness of play and its value and importance in the everyday lives of children and young people

Dublin City Council will work interdepartmentally and with outside and partner agencies to implement the strategic action plan. The newly developed and completed Play Sufficiency Assessments will feed into the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the action plan in order to support and realise the vision for Dublin as a child-friendly and playful city.

### A play-led approach to creating a child-friendly and playful city

Play is one of the few topics that is affected by almost every part of local government as well as so many other governmental agencies and voluntary organisations. There is a need to think more broadly on this issue when defining key stakeholders for developing play plans and strategies. Some stakeholders are obvious, for example, parks and

landscape design, housing, community development, education, health, sport development, childcare. But other relevant stakeholders are less obvious. Planning, roads and traffic, arts and culture, public realm and even finance departments have significant roles that affect opportunities for play. There is also a role for An Garda Síochána, caretakers of the countryside and waterways, social services and firefighters.

Many departments and organisations may need convincing that play is something to be considered, and that their involvement can add value to developing supports for play through cross and interdepartmental and inter-agency working. Based on their full understanding of the implications of their commitment to both the city Play Plan and this play strategy, each partner organisation will be requested to assist in delivering a key strategy

action by developing and signing up to the Play Manifesto for Dublin City. In some cases, this will also involve contributing to the Play Sufficiency Assessments by providing data from their own areas of work e.g. social inclusion, schools, education and childcare, supporting children with additional needs and marginalised groups. Developing the Play Manifesto will include the city's youngest citizens and give them a voice in issues that affect their lives. This will be a significant landmark for Dublin in demonstrating a citywide commitment to supporting and upholding UNCRC Article 31; *The child's right to play*.

### Supporting play as a right for all children and young people

As set out in presenting the case for the Dublin City Play Strategy, promoting, protecting and fulfilling UNCRC Article 31; the right to play, is a key challenge. Often identified as the 'forgotten right', the right to play needs more comprehensive support to ensure it is fully realised.



Thinking differently about Play  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Benefits of play in natural settings for young people's overall health and well-being  
Photo: Dublin City Council

In its efforts to promote an awareness and understanding of play and its importance in the lives of children and young people, Dublin City Council has adopted the definition of play provided by the UNCRC General Comment 17 on Article 31. The proposed actions outlined in the Dublin City Play Strategy were developed by taking on board the detailed obligations, roles and responsibilities of States Parties to ensure that Article 31 is promoted, protected and respected in an all-embracing and holistic way that fully supports the overall development and general health and wellbeing of the child. This places a focus on play and recreational obligations for Dublin City Council, roles and responsibilities of the private sector, and guidelines for all individuals working with children - including parents/guardians.

Every child needs and wants the time and space to play. The importance of play for every single child needs to be recognised and provided for in an innovative and imaginative way. A child-friendly playful city will encourage and stimulate children and young people to play, range safely and with ease of access, have their opinions heard, feel respected, and consider themselves meaningful citizens. Adults must take their needs seriously, listen to what they say, and attempt to facilitate them. Developing a model of multi-agency, coordinated support for play will ensure that accessible and inclusive play opportunities are freely available to all children and young people thus safeguarding their physical and mental health and wellbeing.

From birth and advancing through developmental milestones from early years, middle childhood and on to puberty and maturity, the key human behaviour that enables children and young people to interact with the world around them is play. This innate primal human behaviour enables the child to understand the world around them, wherein their natural curiosity and fascination with their world is satisfied at a pace appropriate to their age and stage of development.



The Hole: Supporting children to take and assess risks – DCC ‘Runamuck’ Play Programme  
Photo: Dublin City Council

Play is a significant element of nurturing from the late stages of pregnancy through to birth when babies relate to the first maternal sounds and facial expressions, where they learn to read, understand and develop flexible responses to these expressions, many of which they learn to understand as play. During these early stages of development children learn to understand and eventually use language, experience physical and emotional intelligence, discover how they can master their world and develop resilience and flexibility in order to have adaptive responses to expected and unexpected life events.

When play is led by children, they experience and practice decision-making skills, move at their own pace, discover their own areas of interest, and ultimately engage fully with the passions and interests they wish to pursue. When play is dominated by adult control, children respond to adult rules and concerns and lose some of the developmental benefits that play offers them, particularly in developing creativity, leadership, resilience, flexibility, negotiation, problem solving and group skills. Play builds active, healthy bodies and play supports creative, emotional and physical development. Experts point out that encouraging unstructured play may be an exceptional way to increase physical activity levels in children in the fight to combat childhood obesity. Children have a natural desire to play; they

need good quality play environments to stimulate the broad range of development that takes place while they experience freedom of choice during open-ended, child-led play.

Children and young people are naturally adventurous and physically active and have a strong desire to engage in ‘deep play’; play that is potentially hazardous to their physical health. Adults are often concerned and often try to prevent the thrill-seeking nature of this type of play that can involve jumping from great heights and climbing high features. Accident statistics in Ireland show that children and young people are generally more at risk of injury through organised sporting activity than they are through self-directed play that involves risk and challenge (*Dublin City Council, 2008*). Children and young people use play as a mechanism to understand their world by engaging in activities that supports the development of skills to adapt and experiment with environmental hostilities by creating fun, scary, exciting and challenging scenarios pretend moments that reflect and have evolved from real life situations (*Hughes, 2013*).

Equality of access is of paramount importance in the delivery of high quality opportunities and experiences for play for children and young people of all ages and abilities. Dublin City Council will endeavour to identify barriers to play for those

requiring particular attention such as marginalised groups, children with specific needs, disabled children, gender equality, and diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

The remarks and opinions of children and young people were very important to developing the content, policy statements and action points for the Dublin City Play Strategy. Talking and listening to children is a vital component in the development of a child-friendly and playful city. Therefore, engaging with the city's youngest citizens is a process that will place a high value on the views and ideas of children and young people so that they are included in the design, redesign refurbishment and planning of a hierarchy of play places, spaces and facilities in their city. This is further supported by implementing actions that will support active research with children and young people in, for example, mapping, photography, walkabouts and other creative methods that will assess how local spaces and facilities meet their needs. Adopting Play Sufficiency Assessments leads to carrying out local research that provides local responses which guide the design of child-friendly and playful neighbourhoods with the right conditions for play to take place.

Sometimes adults adopt what has been described as a 'utilitarian' approach to play. This is an approach which understands play as being outcome oriented and didactic in nature. However, as noted within Comment 17 on Article 31, this approach reflects a lack of understanding:

**“Moreover, adults often lack the confidence, skill or understanding to support children’s play and to interact with them in a playful way. Both the right of children to engage in play and recreation and the fundamental importance of those activities for children’s wellbeing, health and development are poorly understood and undervalued.”**

(UNCRC GC17 ARTICLE 31)



Finding our way down: Supporting Risk in DCC Play 'Runamuck' Play Programme  
Photo: Dublin City Council

The Dublin City Play Strategy includes actions that contribute to the development of a city that supports play. This presents a more holistic approach to supporting and advocating for play that shifts the focus from outcomes based agendas where play is supported solely for academic achievement or social and economic gain. Priority is given to the importance of the overall benefits of play in terms of the general health and wellbeing of children and young people, in particular their mental health.

### Responding to General Comment 17, Article 31 by adopting the principle of Play Sufficiency to develop a framework for monitoring progress, standards and overall impact of the Dublin City Play Strategy

General Comment 17 on Article 31; the child's right to play, underpins all policy statements included in the Dublin City Play Strategy. Dublin City Council is committed to the implementation, ongoing sustainability, effectiveness and overall performance of the Dublin City Play Strategy. This presents the task of ensuring high quality facilities, services and opportunities as the city's main local authority with responsibility for play.

Dublin City Council will develop a set of quality indicators to ensure standards across the city. The quality indicators will be based on sound and up-to-date knowledge regarding key concepts and theories of play. Adopting an organisational 'play-led' approach will maintain Dublin City Council's ethos regarding policy statements aimed at supporting and acknowledging the importance of play.

This measure is a clear demonstration of the ideal of fairness and policy based commitment to maximise public benefit (*Play Safety Forum, 2021*).

Dublin City Council has adopted and implemented the principle of Play Sufficiency in order to develop comparative measures on quantity, quality of play facilities, places, spaces and opportunities for play.

The principle of Play Sufficiency will be implemented through the strategy and action plan to identify the different matters that should be taken into consideration when assessing opportunities for play. The key aim of the Play Strategy is to provide a local authority response regarding facilities, environments, practice frameworks and organisational policies that are influenced by the playing child. This ensures everything that is done to support play puts the playing child at the centre of this work (*Play England, 2016*).



The obligation to monitor, review and evaluate the Dublin City Play Strategy “*Everywhere, Any Day, You Can Play!*” (2022-2027) is an important measure in successfully realising the vision: *Dublin will be a child-friendly and playful city where all children and young people can enjoy and fully exercise their right to play.*”

### Adopting and implementing the principle of Play Sufficiency

The development of a quality action plan for play is key to monitoring the overall performance of Dublin City Council in providing and supporting a broad range of opportunities for play for its youngest citizens. This will provide an overview and evaluation of the City Council’s current play infrastructure that will assist in developing further actions regarding the maintenance and/or enhancement of existing facilities, and the development of new play facilities and opportunities to play. Clear and succinct reporting and dissemination mechanisms are essential to providing clear and transparent communication throughout the organisation, with partner agencies, local authorities and the public.

In order to achieve this, and alongside GC17 on Article 31, Dublin City Council has adopted the principle of Play Sufficiency. The principle of Play Sufficiency involves an ongoing monitoring reviewing, evaluation and reporting mechanism that will assess overall performance. In 2010 the Welsh Government published the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 within which Section 11 placed a statutory duty on all local authorities to assess, and as far as is reasonably practicable, secure sufficiency of play opportunities for children (Lester and Russell, 2013). This formed part of the Welsh Government’s Anti-Poverty Agenda, which recognises that children can suffer poverty of experience, aspirations and opportunities (Welsh Government, 2010).

General Comment 17 on Article 31; the child’s right to play, specifically recommends that governments consider the introduction of legislation to address the principle of Play Sufficiency (Lester and Russell, 2013). As part of the Play Sufficiency obligations Play Wales developed the ‘Play Sufficiency Assessment Toolkit’. This toolkit is used to assess, audit and measure the levels of play opportunities in each local authority in Wales. Local authorities are required to publish a summary of assessments that must include a report on related actions and ongoing progress regarding play facilities in their administrative areas.

Play Sufficiency Assessments involve a holistic approach that encompasses play facilities, services and opportunities for play in public parks, playgrounds and also includes local neighbourhoods and the public realm. This acknowledges the importance of availability of public space and its shared use by children and young people and the wider community. This type of initiative is a key component to the successful implementation of the Dublin City Play Strategy and action plan, and as such Dublin City Council is committed to developing Play Sufficiency Assessments. The process will place a focus on the policy statements and associated set of actions included within the Play Strategy. Dublin City Council Parks & Landscape Services – Play Development will manage this process as part of the City Council’s commitment to the successful implementation of the Play Strategy. Play Sufficiency Assessments include the following components:

- An audit of current opportunities to play
- Ongoing consultation with key stakeholders, especially children and young people
- The development of a Play Space Quality Assessment Tool



Kite Flying Dad National Playday  
Dublin City Council (Scope of strategy)  
Photo: Kevin McFeely Photography

- Guidance on mapping play spaces including playgrounds, open green space and public space
- A policy analysis framework for local authorities

Play Sufficiency Assessments present a clear picture of the delivery of play facilities, organised activities and opportunities for play in addition to identifying any further actions that could strengthen ongoing support for play. Evaluation of current facilities, services and play opportunities clarifies current quantitative and qualitative levels and deficits. The assessments will identify and make recommendations for enhancement of current facilities, the development of new facilities, services and opportunities for play. Furthermore, ongoing monitoring can pre-empt plans for new projects that may come about as a result of unexpected funding resources and/or policy change.

### Developing contextual ‘Play Sufficiency Assessments’ for Dublin City

Adopting and adapting Play Sufficiency Assessments to the needs of Dublin City Council which reflect its organisational structure, is a key factor in developing a citywide play infrastructure.



Bounce! DCC National Playday  
Photo: Snapshot Photography

The development of a contextual quality framework requires liaison and collaboration with Play Wales in order to ensure up-to-date and accurate knowledge and advice on sufficient opportunities to play. This would enable Dublin City Council to adopt the principle of sufficiency and give reference to the Play Sufficiency Assessment (Wales) Regulations 2012 and associated Statutory Guidance. The Guidance sets out the details of the assessment that each local authority needs to undertake following the commencement of relevant sections of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure (*Welsh Government, 2010*). This will enable Dublin City Council to carry out bespoke assessments of local authority supports for play.

The tools and templates provided by Play Wales are robust measures based on matters that need to be taken into account within Wales Statutory Guidance (*Play Wales 2014*). The policy statements featured within the Dublin City Play Strategy reflect the matters identified by Play Wales, all of which are listed below.

Drawing on the progress made in the Wales in implementing statutory guidelines on assessing play sufficiency, the Planning (Scotland)

Act 2019 places statutory duty on local authorities to undertake Play Sufficiency Assessments and for children to be consulted on local place names (*Play Scotland, 2022*).

Developing a contextual Play Sufficiency Assessment toolkit will provide resources to support Dublin City Council to collate and analyse sufficient information to measure against a set of newly developed quality indicators within an Irish context. The toolkit developed to carry out the overall sufficiency audit can also be adapted for use by community groups and outside agencies providing for play.

### Matters that need to be taken into account

Local authority responsibility for play is not just about providing playgrounds, there is a list matters that should be taken into account when assessing play sufficiency. These matters are strongly linked with the themes included in the Dublin City Play Strategy and are identified within the Wales Play Sufficiency Toolkit as:

- Population – methodology for provision based on local needs and the wider community
- Providing for diverse needs – commitment to providing accessible and inclusive play facilities and opportunities
- Space available for play – local green spaces, local streets and in-between spaces and public space, throughout the city
- Playwork provision - supervised play provision; City Council managed play services e.g. homework clubs, after-schools clubs and summer project schemes that are facilitated by designated trained staff
- Structured recreational activities - as above and sports clubs that are facilitated by designated trained staff

- Information, publicity , events - dissemination of information and promotion and
- Charges for play provision – equality of access to play facilities and opportunities and services
- Access to space – local research to map informal and incidental places and spaces that are used and/or have potential opportunities for play
- Securing and developing a play workforce – adopting a play-led approach to develop a workforce in alignment with the Playwork Principles and Practice.
- Community engagement - consulting with communities and promoting and developing play at community level
- Play within all relevant policy and implementation agendas – Local Authority Development Plans, Policies, and Strategies and national and international policies and links to all relevant policy agendas.

### The current ‘state of play’ in Dublin

The ongoing monitoring of the Dublin City Play Strategy will require an overview of current local opportunities to play. This will involve an audit of the city’s play facilities, services and more informal everyday opportunities for play. The initial focus for the City Council will be to highlight facilities and amenities as a starting point. This will then extend to assessment of how a play-led approach will be applied to the development of a citywide play infrastructure. Furthermore, the assessment will address the natural and built environment and include active research with children and young people with regard to their use of outdoor space and how this can be supported. This will result in developing a full audit of the current support for play and outline the rationale for further improvements and support based on analysis of local needs and the wider community, namely Dublin City.

## Continuing the city's conversation about play and responding appropriately

The focus of the monitoring, evaluation and review process is based on implementing a framework that places the 'playing child' and local communities at the centre of all development processes for high quality play environments. This involves an innovative and creative consultative process with children, young people and the wider community. Maintaining a dialogue with stakeholders and developing clear and comprehensive conversations that trigger reflection and dialogue will result in gaining a comprehensive picture of satisfaction regarding the level and nature of supports for play. The initial consultation carried out during the development of this Play Strategy has provided a baseline for the continued development of Dublin as a child-friendly and playful city. Continued dialogue is essential in order to monitor the progress and sustainability of the Play Strategy. Realising the strategy vision for Dublin will require some of the following methods focused mainly on children and young people:

- On-street conversations
- Pop-up play parleys in parks and green spaces
- Design and planning workshops with specific groups to ensure involvement of children and young people requiring specific attention e.g. hard to reach and marginalised groups
- 'Have your say about play' annual online play survey
- Walk 'n' Chalk! Where feasible, onsite neighbourhood workshops focused on children's geographies in relation to street play opportunities
- Youth participation included in all of the above

The ongoing implementation of the Dublin City Play Strategy will involve a process of change that requires the introduction and reintroduction of new concepts to familiarise stakeholders and decision makers with the relationship between play and the built and natural environment. The desired outcome is to increase the number of children playing outside and ensure 'overall performance' of high quality play infrastructure for Dublin City. The evaluation and review of current citywide play infrastructure will include facilities as well as opportunities for play in more incidental spaces identified by children as part of their everyday lives and play experiences. This involves the following areas of stakeholder engagement:

- Increased youth participation – increased number of children and young people playing outside
- Sufficient number of play facilities based on identified deficits
- Sufficient range of play opportunities based on identified deficits
- Sufficient proximity of access to play facilities based on identified deficits
- Assignment of appropriate budget to address sufficiency issues regarding play facilities, services and opportunities
- Improved and increased number and size of green open spaces and improvements of same based on identified deficits
- Active research with children and young people that involves creative mapping of current and desired use of space
- Collaborative working in order to maximise potential use of outdoor space
- Clear links to other relevant policies and strategies
- Practical timelines
- Development of organisational and community resources



Hot Topic... playing with the elements!  
Photo: Dublin City Council

## Expected Outcomes

The findings from the evaluations and reviews will be measured against a set of quality indicators that will be developed that provide information regarding the implementation and progress of the quality plans and strategies for the city.

The aim of this process is to achieve levels of excellence in overall service performance in terms of facilities, amenities and opportunities for play in housing estates, parks and other greens spaces. Additionally, a more holistic approach is used to support children and young people's movement through, and use of, the built and natural environments, local streets and open public space as part of their everyday lives and play experiences.

## Collaborative working and knowledge sharing

To ensure consistency among the various local authorities in Dublin and countrywide, there will be a focus on collaborative working regarding plans to support play. This will involve identifying agreed benchmarks and quality indicators, and sharing findings and achieved levels of excellence. Improving play facilities, services and

opportunities for play in local streets, neighbourhoods and outdoor public space will provide a model of best practice for Dublin City.

Assessment of more informal opportunities for play will be addressed through the development of experimental pilot projects. This will involve identifying a local neighbourhood and carrying out active research with children and young people that includes their own infrastructure and how they interact with the built and natural environment in order to assess if and what kind of further support is required.

**“In the absence of any direct cause-effect relationships to establish any advantageous circumstances for navigating playful moments, it remains possible to gather greater wisdom in understanding how local conditions may act to support or constrain play through cartographic practices that are attuned to process, movements, sensations, things and their effects.”**

*(Lester, 2020)*

### Timeframe – when will it happen?

The initial Play Sufficiency Assessment will be undertaken during the timespan of the Dublin City Play Strategy 2022-2027. It will be an ongoing process that will involve an annual review of the strategy and action plan in order to assess progress and to address any changing circumstances such as funding or legislation which may occur.

Parks and Landscape Services are working to a three year playground improvement and development plan. This will be adapted to Play Sufficiency Assessments that are specific to Dublin City Council’s five administrative areas. The proposed Play Sufficiency Assessments will be carried out as follows:

- 2022-2027; Annual Play Sufficiency Assessment & Active Research Projects Reports
- 2025; Overall 3 year Play Sufficiency Assessment & Active Research Projects Report for the Dublin City Play Strategy Mid-Review Report
- 2027; Strategic 5 year Play Sufficiency Assessment, Active Research Projects & Collated Report for the Dublin City Play Strategy Final 5 Year Review Report. **Note:** The completed 5 year review will form the basis for a further 5 year Play Sufficiency Assessment e.g. 2027 - 2032 as an ongoing process for Local Authorities to support and maintain sufficient opportunities to play.

### Adopt the theory and concept of Playwork Practice

Playwork entails identifying a framework of practice for those working with children at play. Playwork Practice provides a way of working within a context that supports children and young people to play spontaneously and retain control over the content and intent of their play (*Play Wales, 2005*). Barriers to play include increasing traffic and fears for children’s safety such as child abduction and serious accidents. The key purpose of Playwork is to compensate for these constraints to play and provide a setting that

will support children to engage in ‘free play’ activities within a frame that facilitates freedom and autonomy and is responsive to the unpredictable, autogenous, spontaneous characteristics of play. This means providing children and young people with time and space to play as much as is practicable, and ensuring adult involvement and interventions are mainly at the behest of the playing child.

In general, the issue of professionalisation is vital in developing the identity of Playwork. In advocating for Playwork as a profession, it is worth considering the overarching purpose of Playwork. Wendy Russell provides a comprehensive, historical account of how Playwork originated as a response to delinquency among working class boys during the post-war late 1940’s (*Cranwell, 2007*).

Similar initiatives took place in Dublin in the early 20th century. For example, the Presbyterian Church implemented social supports in order to remove wayward working class children from Dublin streets. This was followed in the 1930s by work undertaken by the Civics Institute of Ireland to develop playgrounds in Dublin’s suburbs and inner city. Today play and recreation for all children and young people is the responsibility of local authorities and national and regional youth organisations.

Rolling with the punches DCC National Playday  
Photo: Snapshot Photography





Roly Poly Mischief – National Playday  
Photo: Snapshot Photography



Playing with the Arts – National Playday  
Photo: Snapshot Photography

Playwork Practice is an approach to working with children that addresses the diminishing freedom and autonomy children currently experience regarding access to rich and meaningful opportunities to play. The dilemma regarding cyber play with console games and social media is an ongoing issue. This presents a challenge for adults in recognising the benefits of free play within this context whilst considering their role in supporting, protecting and enabling children and young people’s free play experiences within an online digital play environment. This requires understanding and support of children and young people’s right to sufficient time, space and freedom to play in the digital world that holds the same qualities to real world playing which is an intrinsically motivated, voluntary, imaginative, stimulating, social activity that involves an open-end structure and emotional resonance and a diversity of forms (Potter & Cowan, 2020). Caution is required with regard to modern technological advances regarding play by acknowledging and accepting that technology is here to stay as part of the progressive world and therefore is a prominent part of children and young people’s play, education and everyday lives. This is a learning and living environment in which they can exercise their freedom to choose and navigate within that space (Lester & Russell, 2010).

A widely recognised challenge to children and young people’s outdoor play is the presence of traffic. Concerns around stranger danger have also had an impact. Research suggests that

children and young people currently spend more time indoors, often using technological play and social media as a new and readily available alternative to outdoor play.

Playwork addresses concerns around developing a balance of these forms of play and supporting children and young people with a range of play opportunities and choices (Lester & Russell, 2010).

### Playwork Principles

Playwork Practice is underpinned by a theoretical framework that reflects the unique characteristics of play.

Playwork Practice is analytical and reflective requiring reflection, review, and analysis in order to support and extend the play process. In essence, Playwork Practice involves practitioners adopting a play-led approach to supporting children’s play and developing a repertoire of reflective and reflexive responses as part of their practice in order to address the fluid and ever-changing nature of play and the creative ways that children and young people interpret, use and adapt spaces and places for play (Nottingham City Council, 2006).

There are eight Playwork Principles (Play Wales, 2005), designed to support the theoretical concept of play as an innate, biological, psychological and social necessity. As a code of practice for the Playwork profession, the Playwork principles present a practice framework that resembles an ethical code as all principles contain elements of virtue, care, duty and

responsibility. These principles act as guidance for practitioners. There is potential within the Dublin City Play Strategy to include actions that will have a positive influence on Dublin City Council’s organisational policies that focus on and support the play process. The development of a related code of ethical conduct that enhances a professional identity that resembles the Playwork principles (PPSG, 2005) would be a welcome initiative.

**“A playwork approach creates and maintains both the physical and psychological conditions which enable children to engage in play as a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated.”**

(Newstead, 2005)

### A contextual approach to a Playwork Practice framework for Dublin

Within an Irish context, there is an absence of an identified workforce associated with working with children at play apart from those working in early years education, after-schools and youth work settings. Ultimately, Playwork is not a recognised profession in Dublin or Ireland. As Dublin City Council does not have a designated play service, the development of a citywide play team and workforce is an ongoing objective for the organisation. The establishment of organisational conditions to support a play service and associated framework of practice will involve a management role within Dublin City

Play Development as the lead section. This would involve coordination of collaborative working and initiatives with relevant DCC departments to 'sign up' to the Play Strategy to fulfil this common goal. The adoption of an innovative approach to overall service quality and staff development and teamwork will involve the following measures to develop a citywide play service:

- Coordination of appropriate training, namely accredited Playwork training.
- Development of play focused initiatives that will improve and increase play opportunities for children and young people using City Council facilities
- Provision of practice framework support for relevant staff that includes a works programme for those who work with children at play

In anticipation of the future development of such a workforce focused on working with children and young people at play and in the absence of a recognised play workforce, all of the above-mentioned codes, standards and principles should be adopted. This will contribute towards the establishment of a sound and up-to-date 'Ethical Code for Playwork' that will contribute to the professional approach to working with children and young people at play.

In the UK and other countries, there is a dedicated education and training curriculum that is underpinned by theoretical concepts of play. This supports the development of a framework for professional practice for those working with children at play. In order to adopt this approach, it is necessary to endorse the establishment of Playwork as a professional practice for those working with children and young people at play in Ireland. Qualified Playwork practitioners by obtain up-to-date information and training that enables them to support children's play by taking a play-centred approach and regarding

children as being and becoming through play (*Sturrock, Russell & Else, 2004*). This ensures support for play as set out in GC17 on Article 31 as a human right for children and young people, and forms an understanding of how to support play informed by contemporary play theory. Ireland has a long history of people working with children in settings that support their play. The City Council currently has responsibility for community and recreation centres that facilitate after-school programmes and school breakfast clubs, schoolyard and special needs assistants and youth clubs. All of these services directly or indirectly involve working with children and young people at play. Moreover, they are doing so without the benefit of an effective support structure that exists in some other countries e.g. UK, Sweden, and America (*Dublin City Council, 2008*).

To date, there has been some Playwork training provided within the City Council. Approximately 25 staff based in DCC Recreation Centres completed introductory Playwork training as well as Summer Project volunteers, Early Years Childcare and Family Support Groups and Youth and After-Schools Groups and organisations. This required working across departments to co-ordinate resources to make it possible to implement some basics of Playwork Practice into relevant services for children. Formalising a continuum of accredited Playwork training will present the beginning of a journey of understanding and learning of play and Playwork Practice. This will enable relevant staff to develop a work practice that holds children's play at the core of its service. Although the introduction of play and Playwork Practice in Dublin and Ireland is at a very basic introductory stage, it has been beneficial to those who have been involved. Additionally events such as 'National Playday' which is now in its 17th year have provided examples of 'best practice' and a basis of understanding of what play and Playwork could look like if developed further.

The implementation of Playwork practices presents an opportunity for the City Council in bringing about real change and a rethinking of working with children and young people. It presents something brand new in terms of both the content and the structure of delivery of service. Good quality training is essential in forming a baseline for Playwork Practice within an Irish context for a new way of working with children and young people at play.

**"One of the most significant elements of the playwork role is the way in which relationships are made with children. If the child-adult relationship is effective, there is a good chance of not only helping children with their problems, but also raising their self-esteem generally."**

*(Brown and Taylor, 2009)*

**Highlight the benefits and importance of 'risk' and 'challenge' in play for children and young people by supporting them to assess and take risks.**

#### **What is 'Risky in Play'?**

**"Children deliberately seek out physical and emotional uncertainty in their play (Spinka & Others 2001) and this uncertainty can be manifested in behaviour that may not appear to be 'positive' in building skills or preparing children for adulthood. It may include for example, war and superhero play, rough and tumble play and play fighting, teasing and bullying, jokes and obscenities, thrill seeking play such as parkour or skateboarding, as well as behaviour in the public realm that is increasingly understood as risky or anti-social."**

*(Lester and Russell, 2008)*

The concept and importance of 'wild', 'deep' or 'risky' play is key to play experiences for children and young people. It is a vital part of the play process and as such the element of risk in play greatly supports their

overall development and wellbeing (Sandseter, 2010). Risk and challenge are essential components to the overall play experiences where children learn to assess and take risks in everyday play situations. Sandseter places the element of risk in play under six categories:

- a. Play with great heights – danger of injury from falling
- b. Play with high speed – uncontrolled speed and pace that can lead to collision with something or someone
- c. Play with dangerous tools that can lead to injuries (e.g. knives, axes)
- d. Play near dangerous elements where you can fall into or from something (e.g. fire pit, cliffs, deep water)
- e. Rough and tumble play – where children can harm each other
- f. Play where children can disappear or get lost – i.e. go exploring alone

Using this type of characterisation as a guide to understanding and supporting the element of risk in play presents the requirement for parents and providers to support opportunities for risk alongside the responsibility to manage and assess the benefits of providing conditions for risk in play to take place in a safe and secure environment. Consideration must be given to the understanding of play as an unpredictable, innate, self-motivated human behaviour.

Diminishing access to natural landscapes has contributed to the current decline in opportunities for risk in play. Additionally, increased and speeding traffic and an increase in the amount of time children and young people spend indoors are all inhibiting opportunities for playing outdoors. As a result, childhood is becoming undermined by risk aversion and children and young people have less experience of assessing and taking risks (Gill, 2007). It is the responsibility of parents/guardians and decision makers to provide play

facilities, services, and opportunities that support wild, deep and risky play experiences. This requires a balanced and play-led approach to risk and safety that will fully support children and young people to meet the daily challenges that the outdoor and indoor environment present.

General Comment 17 (GC17) on Article 31; the child’s right to play, highlights the importance of risk as part of children and young people’s play and recommends that it is facilitated within play provision and more informal play environments that include opportunities for risk taking. GC17 also identifies opportunities for risk as a key element within the following checklist for optimum environments for play:

**“Space and opportunities to play outdoors unaccompanied in a diverse and challenging physical environment, with easy access to supportive adults when necessary.”**

*(General Comment 17 on Article 31, 2013)*

### Why is ‘Risk in Play’ so important?

The rationale for providing for and facilitating risk in play is associated with the many health and developmental benefits for children. Risk and challenge within play experiences support children and young people to develop resilience, problem solving, face fears and develop physical intelligence. Overall risk in play supports children to embark on a journey of self-discovery and experimentation. If this is restricted, children and young people will inevitably seek out more hostile environments to experience opportunities that involve risk and challenge. This will happen regardless of adult involvement, intervention or permission.

In terms of quality play opportunities and the variables required in providing ‘good’ places for play, features such as repetition, adventure, exploration and freedom are important. In this



Smart Move – National Playday  
Photo: Snapshot Photography

way, children and young people are afforded the opportunity to repeat risky activities, thus refining skills in self-efficacy, physical intelligence and self-awareness.

### Creating conditions for playful environments that support and facilitate opportunities for ‘risk in play’

Addressing the issue of risk in play presents a particular dilemma for local authorities. The challenge is to provide spaces for play that comply with health and safety concerns whilst also taking a common sense approach to incorporating risk within play provision. The British Health and Safety Executive developed a landmark statement addressing risk averse organisations and individuals who are burdened with a fear of serious hazards and litigation. This was achieved through the development and implementation of ‘position statements’, guidelines and policies that support the management of risk in play provision (Children’s play and leisure – Promoting a balanced approach).

The European Play Safety Forum was established in 2003 to provide a forum for examining the issues around the balance between safety, risk and the opportunities for children to play. The development of The European Play Safety Forum resulted in the publication of a Manifesto on Risk

Management in Outdoor Games. The manifesto subsequently influenced the revision of BSEN1176 Playground Safety Standards and a new more detailed guide on managing risk in play provision. It is important to ensure that a clear understanding of risk is adopted in order to provide reasonable levels of risk in play provision. The UK Play Safety Forum identifies ‘good and bad’ risks. Good risks involve challenge, excitement, support growth and learning and overall developmental benefits. ‘Bad risks’ present elements that are difficult or impossible, have potential to cause serious harm and have no obvious benefits (*UK Play Safety Forum, 2002 & UK Play Safety Forum, 2008*).

The UK Play Safety Forum (PSF) was formed in 1993 and works with government in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The UK position statement was first published in 2002 by the former Children’s Play Council. In June 2008 the statement was redesigned and reprinted as an implementation guide by Play England. The UK Health and Safety Executive endorsed the UK Play Safety Statement in 2005 and supported the concept of managing risks without eliminating them.

**“Sensible Health and Safety is about managing risks not eliminating them all. HSE is not in the business of stamping out simple measures wherever they appear at whatever cost. We recognise the benefits to children’s development of play which necessarily involves some risk, and this shouldn’t be sacrificed to the unachievable goal of absolute safety.”**  
(UK Health and Safety Executive, 2012)

The work of the PSF work is aimed at identifying and developing an approach to risk, challenge, benefits and safety, advising on policy and practice and keeping abreast of up to date research and best practice in balancing risk and safety in play. The UK Play Safety Statement has been a key supporting document for governments and local authorities assisting them in developing

policies, strategies and plans that highlight the importance of including the element of risk in play.

For those facilitating play in play clubs, schools, and youth clubs an additional set of skills is required to engage in a practice that can address on the spot decisions that manage risks in real time. This type of practice is necessary in order to deal with the unpredictable, uncertain, spontaneous and autogenous nature of play. The UK Play Safety Forum identifies this concept as ‘Dynamic Risk Assessment’ (DRA).

Dynamic Risk Assessment is a method of adult support where intervention takes place in real-time for on the spot responses to unpredictable situations using an ABC process; A) Assess Activity, B) Observe Behaviour and C) Reflect on the context of the situation which may increase the likelihood of potential severity of harm.

In order to manage reasonable risk within supervised and unsupervised play provision and as part of children and young people’s everyday play experiences, a balanced approach is required, alongside informed knowledge regarding risk and challenge. This should involve a citywide play infrastructure that encompasses their navigation and use of all settings where children and young people play, including; the built and natural environment, parks, playgrounds, green spaces, local streets and open spaces, public realm, play clubs, schools, after-schools, hospitals and early years education and care settings.

### Risk in play within an Irish context

In support of the ‘best interest of the child’, listening to children’s experiences and concerns should be the key principle for determining levels of risk. It must also be acknowledged that perceptions of risk vary among diverse cultures and lifestyles. For example, Dublin City Council’s administrative areas include the most urbanised and densely populated parts of the city

alongside the more rural and suburban areas located on the periphery of the city that are under the administration of Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown, Fingal and South Dublin County Councils. Urban, suburban and rural parts of the city will have varying levels and types of risks associated with the local environment. In 2014 Ireland saw the worst year on record for farm accidents with 30 fatalities on Irish farms, 5 of which were children (*Agrikids, 2021*).

Children themselves present potential hazards and danger in that they can be a threat to each other through, for example, bullying, gang violence, or group pressure regarding high risk taking such as the traditional ‘chicken’ and ‘dare games’ which go beyond the limits of reasonable risks.

Overall, each environment and culture presents its own lived experience of risk and challenge. Children and young people need to encounter reasonable levels of risk in their play in order to empower them to take necessary precautions to secure their own safety. The built and natural environment should include a range of affordances that support challenge and risk in play but with fewer hazards. For this reason, the design of play spaces should include elements that support risk in play where children can satisfy their urge to engage in wild, deep and risky play activities at a level that is appropriate to their age, ability and personal choice. Achieving this requires a change in attitudes, understanding and appreciation of the benefits of risk in play as a key support to children and young people’s overall development.

**“Children need and want to take risks when they play. Play provision aims to respond to these needs and wishes by offering children stimulating, challenging environments for exploring and developing their abilities. In doing this, play provision aims to manage the level of risk so that children are not exposed to unacceptable risks of death or serious injury.”**  
(Play Safety Forum, 2008)



Despite the perceived dangers, children and young people need to encounter some real risks if they are to respond positively to challenging situations and learn how to deal with uncertainty. This cannot be achieved by limiting them to supposedly safe environments and it will not stop simply because adults feel that it should. The challenge for Dublin City Council is to balance facilitating and supporting risk experiences for children and young people within the context of providing well maintained challenging play facilities and opportunities for play. Equally, children and young people need to develop skills that will assist them in managing the balance between exhilaration and fear, risk and uncertainty that will allow them to engage and enjoy play between these two emotions i.e. bordering on the edge of danger. Balancing risk from a child's perspective is in seeking out thrills and excitement and developing skills to either continue to enjoy the 'buzz' or develop techniques to stop, cease or just avoid the activity.

A draft Play Safety Statement was developed in 2013 (*Sugrath, 2014*). The draft document was submitted to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs for endorsement as a key document to support risk in play and in fully upholding and realising children's rights under Article 31. To date, the document has not yet been reviewed or endorsed.

The development and endorsement of a National Play Safety Statement for Ireland would greatly benefit play provision and opportunities for play within an Irish context. Developing such a document would require collaborative working with relevant government departments. This would present a national position statement that would assist in removing barriers and improving opportunities for play by further promoting the concept of risk in play. This proposed document would also include the development of a format to carry out 'risk benefit assessments' in place of the current 'risk assessment' more attuned to risk averse cultures (*Gill 2007*).



Animalenga  
Photo: Dublin City Council

**“Life demands courage, endurance and strength, but we continue to underestimate the capacity of children for taking risks, enjoying the stimulation of danger and finding things out for themselves. It is often difficult to permit children to take risks but over-concern prevents them from growing up.”**

(*Lady Allen of Hurtwood, 1968*)

### The impact of the digital age on opportunities for risk in play

Technology now plays a part in children and young people's play cultures. They use technology and digital media for a broad range of educational, social, play and recreational purposes. This type of activity takes places mainly away from adult supervision, which can present the potential risks such as exposing children and young people to dangers like cyberbullying, pornography and cyber grooming (*Council of Europe, 2020*).

There are also questions regarding the contested impact of technology in terms of over stimulation of brain cells and the negative and positive impacts of this on cognitive development particularly during children's early years (*Vedechkina & Borgonovi, 2021*). Moreover, there are concerns that children and young people's growing use of technology may be impacting negatively on social

skills, resilience, physical activity, playing outside and even the development of poor sleep patterns. Exposure to violent games, particularly among boys, involves arguable evidence regarding the impact of negative messages that stimulate increased violent behaviour and which can result in a lack of empathy.

Taking a more positive perspective, technology also provides creative and playful opportunities through gaming, social media and opportunities to create audio and visual art and social networks which enables them to explore and interact with peers (*Livingstone & Blum Ross, 2020*). For example, it was evident in Dublin that throughout the current Covid-19 pandemic children and young people's engagement online had increased by 50.6% (*Barron 2020*). This evidence is directly linked to Covid-19 restrictions. During the initial national lockdown contact with peers and outdoor activities were severely restricted. This greatly impacted on children's enjoyment of time spent playing with friends. This has been particularly hard on single child families and those with specific needs. In this instance, technology provided a positive alternative virtual environment where children could meet, play and interact with peers. In this way children and young people could maintain friendships and enjoy creative and playful activities through virtual arts, sports, and social media platforms (*Play Wales, 2017*).

Children and young people should be supported to access the potential technology has to offer. Although this is not a direct responsibility for Dublin City Council, consideration should be given to including cyberspace within the hierarchy of play environments by providing Wi-Fi in playgrounds and public space. This has particular relevance to older children where phones can provide safety in terms of assurance for parents by maintaining contact and for young people themselves in providing charging points so that they can stay and play longer and have a resource should they feel unsafe or threatened.

In order to address the perceived fears, the proven dangers and benefits of technology, there is a growing need to investigate how it affects human behaviour by understanding cyberspace as a place and an environment with pros and cons (Aiken, 2016). This requires an understanding and perception of cyberspace as an environment that contains dangerous places such as the 'deep web' or 'dark net' as equivalent to real world places of danger for children and young people (Aiken, 2016).

As such, it is important to advocate for children and young people's safety when they engage in digital play. Media and digital literacy skills help children and young people to assess and manage online risk and can arm them with the appropriate tools to cope with potential hazards (ERGA Academy, 2018). They should be supported in using their agency and control over content and consumption, as well as devising systems to protect themselves so as to ensure their online safety (DCEDIY, 2021).

The work of Dr Sonia Livingstone and Dr Mary Aiken offers a dual approach that involves securing mechanisms for age verification alongside support and the development of digital literacy skills so children and young people can carefully navigate the digital play world. These two concepts play a key role in the EU Audio-Visual Media Services Directive (ERGA Academy, 2018).



Dublin City Play Strategy 2022-2027

Playwork works!  
Photo: Dublin City Council

**“We are still at the beginning of an unimaginable shift in how we live. Let’s give ourselves a break. If you have a problem with technology, perhaps you’re not addicted, just cyber maladapted. And the good news: There are things you can do about that.”**

(Mary Aiken – *The Cyber Effect*, 2016)

**“The UNCRC’s assertion that children are rights-bearing individuals is particularly pertinent in Internet governance discourses that tend to oppose adults rights and child protection. And is particular articles specifying children’s rights dovetail with the emerging challenges that the Internet poses to children and families.”**

(Livingstone and O’Neill, 2014)

The establishment of the Royal College of Surgeons Ireland Cyber Psychology Department, which is headed up by Cyber Psychologist Dr Mary Aiken, positions Ireland as a centre of excellence, leading the way in research on cybercrimes against minors.

There has been valuable work carried out within the European Regulators Group for Audio-Visual Services in support of the protection of children and young people. Additionally, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment 25 on children’s rights in the digital environment looks at the protection of minors. This general comment sets out in detail that children and young people have the right to participation in the digital age. Children’s participation in the digital environment is the subject of a body of multi-disciplinary research investigating the issues around protection versus education. This research is also looking at questions around harm and the value of media literacy as a solution (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020).

*“A child-friendly and playful city means a better place for children and a little more freedom in the city”*  
(Girl aged 12 years)

*“if I couldn’t play my life would be like...Boring terrible ..not fair”*  
(Boy aged 14 years)

## Engagement Focus for Dublin City Council

The focus for Dublin City Council is to implement actions that assists in promoting awareness of the meaning and importance of play, maintain links across city council departments and with partner agencies in order to initiate interdepartmental and interagency working and continue to consult with children and young people on the design of play spaces and their access to opportunities to engage in self-directed informal play. Moreover, Dublin City Council will adopt a play-led approach in order to secure citywide commitment to producing and signing up to a play manifesto for Dublin City as a clear demonstration in realising the vision for Dublin as a child-friendly and playful city



Loose Parts Play  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Effects of Climate Change on Children's Play  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Playwork Works!  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Parents supporting children's play  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Loose Parts Play  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Effects of Climate Change on Children's Play  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Events that support children playing in and with nature  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Let's play house!  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Parents supporting children's play  
Photo: Dublin City Council

# Case Studies

## National Playday

National Playday is aimed at promoting the concept and awareness of play where parents/guardians and children can celebrate the child's right to play. In 2005 Dublin City Council hosted Ireland's first ever Playday in Merrion Square Park.

This has now become a national event promoting play and encouraging communities throughout the country to organise energetic and health-focused play activities in their own cities, neighbourhoods, streets, parks and open spaces. It highlights the facilities available in parks and open spaces and promotes the social and health benefits of active play for children. Many of the activities that National Playday promotes involve very limited costs. The event also highlights the fact that by featuring low-cost games including penalty shoot-outs, relays, skipping, and obstacle courses alongside imaginative and creative elements of play such as messy play, art, dress up and den building, a Playday can happen any day. Local communities can take the initiative to host Playdays by making time for play using simple ideas, materials and equipment to provide a variety of play opportunities for children and young people in their local area.

Information on how to organise a Playday is available at [come-on-out-and-play-resource-booklet.pdf](#) ([dublincity.ie](#))

## Wales Sufficiency Duty - The Play Wales Impact Report

*“Children's Right to Play in Wales; Six years of stories and change since the commencement of the Welsh Play Sufficiency Assessment Duty”*



National Playday  
Photo: Fennel Photography

Wales is a play-friendly country. It has developed Statutory Guidance for each local authority on assessing and securing sufficient play opportunities for children and young people. This guidance fully came into effect on July 1st 2014.

In March 2018, Welsh local authorities were required to complete and submit their 5 year Play Sufficiency Assessments and Play Action Plans. In order to assess the impact of the Welsh sufficiency duty, Play Wales commissioned a study in 2018. The report of this study “Children's Right to Play in Wales; Six years of stories and change since the commencement of the Welsh Play Sufficiency Assessment Duty” was completed by Dr Wendy Russell, Ben Tawil and Mike Barclay (Ludicology) and Charlotte Derry (Playful Places) and was published by Play Wales in October 2019. The Play Wales Impact Report 2019 was based on the review of 26 local authority Play Sufficiency assessments and actions plans. The research focused on the work involved and explored what has changed for children's play opportunities since the Welsh Government's Play Sufficiency Duty commenced in 2012.

The Wales Play Sufficiency Duty was introduced at one of the most challenging times in the history of devolved and local governments and

public services, and yet, according to the research, much has been achieved in terms of partnership working, raising awareness of children's right to play, and reconfiguring services and spaces to create opportunities for playing. Additionally, significant improvements on partnership working across local authority departments and partner agencies have been shown to be a direct result of increased awareness among adults recognising their responsibilities regarding children and their play. Moreover the study report stated this was achieved despite local authorities being faced with significant challenges mainly associated with the austerity agenda. This resulted in cuts to services and staff which placed major constraints on securing Play Sufficiency.

**“Play is so critically important to all children in the development of their physical, social, mental, emotional and creative skills that society should seek every opportunity to support it and create an environment that fosters it. Decision making at all levels of government should include a consideration of the impact of those decisions, on children's opportunities to play.”**

*(Welsh Government Statutory Guidance, 2014)*



Play sufficiency  
in Wales

Children's Right to Play in Wales; Six years  
of stories...  
Photo: Play Wales

## Newport- Development of Risk Benefit Assessment

Newport City Council in Wales has always operated its play settings using a work based risk assessment programme, where hazards are identified and risks eliminated or reduced. However, the council's Play Development Team (four members of staff) recognised that this method of risk management is not viable within play settings as it does not take into consideration the need for children's play to include an element of risk. Therefore, in 2015 a concerted effort was made to work with relevant departments within the Council to change this system and adopt a risk-benefit assessment (RBA) process. This risk management system has been adopted by a number of play agencies in Wales.

In the first instance, a conversation was held with the Health and Safety Department within the Council to assess the feasibility of adopting an RBA process and whether this would contravene any policies and procedures. This highlighted the

need to show valid justification for the amendment to the existing risk management system. Subsequently, Play Wales were approached, given their vast experience in this area, to assist in presenting a case for change to Council representatives. A seminar focused on presenting valid evidence in support of the adoption of the RBA system was held for Council representatives. This involved a presentation by Tim Gill (Independent Scholar, Consultant and Author with an expertise on children's play) and Marianne Mannello (Play Wales).

The seminar was attended by council representatives from various relevant departments including Health and Safety, Law and Standards, Youth Service, Parks and Recreation and Development Services. Participants enjoyed healthy debate regarding the justification for using RBA and the viability of introducing it into the Council's Play Service. People in the Law and Standards section were particularly enthused by the idea of using a more open system with the potential to reduce claims made against the Council.

Following this seminar, further talks were held with Health and Safety. This resulted in piloting a new risk management system with 40 staff across six settings during October

2015 half term play scheme. This pilot included robust suitability assessments and daily checks on premises and fixed equipment, combined with play specific risk assessments on activities and play.

The outcome of using this system produced a reduction in accident/incident forms and feedback from play staff suggests that, while the initial suitability assessments are more time consuming, the system is more relevant to their settings. This ensured focus on real risk not perceived risk, in a practical way while allowing children the freedom to manage their own risks, according to age and ability. These are things that the staff themselves had not been asked to consider before.

There is still a long way to go in developing an updated Play Policy for Newport City Council that reflects the RBA process and information sharing with parents/carers to ensure that they are aware of the benefits this system has for their children's play. However, this Council has taken a dramatic step towards changing the shape of risk management within play and the Play Development Team will endeavour to continue to implement RBA in all their settings. Additionally this process has improved many target areas as set out in matters to be taken into consideration for Play Sufficiency Audits.

Developing a balanced approach to risk taking –  
serious hazards are identified and eliminated or reduced.  
Photo: Dublin City Council



The cross collaboration with Play Wales and partnership working within the organisation has prioritised the Playwork Principles. This ensures that children have the opportunity to manage their own risks in a stimulating and supportive environment, alongside play staff who understand the importance of a play specific risk management process.

### Tirana - A New Approach in Transforming Cities for Children

In 2016, the city of Tirana, led by its centre left Mayor Erion Veliaj, began a programme of child-friendly initiatives that would transform the city.

A programme of playground building was undertaken which was the installation of 44 new play spaces across the city – in some cases, replacing car parks. Public spaces have also been upgraded to meet the needs of children, and other measures such as tree planting, and traffic calming have all ensured a shift towards child-friendliness in Tirana.

Following a study that was commissioned by the mayor and carried out by Gil Penolosa, Founder of 8 80 Cities, many parents were shocked by the results which revealed that they were spending on average more on



Car free, child- friendly streets in Tirana  
Photo: apolitical

their cars than their own children. This brought about public debate for change to improve the lives of children and young people in their city.

The Mayor also set up a children's council which has an important say in the cities decision making processes, and plays a significant role in shaping the development of Tirana (*Cities Alive 2017*).

Other cities throughout the world are now looking to Tirana's as an example of how to ensure children and young people have a say in the development of playful infrastructure, giving them a voice in the co-creation of public space and facilities. This approach has cultivated a sense of ownership which has resulted in reductions in vandalism,

an increase in informal supervision and community cohesion. For the first time in many years those who left Tirana are seeking to return as the city has become a more attractive place and much more fun for children.

The changes have, at times, met with resistance, even to the point of violent protests. However, the city went to great lengths to communicate effectively with residents and listen to their concerns. Seeing the positive impacts of a shift towards a more child-friendly focus in urban planning and design has helped bring citizens on board. There is now more understanding that reclaiming space for children and young people is of benefit to all.

Climbing frames at the children's playground in Grand Park Tirana  
Photo: Bloomberg



# Themed Policy Statements

## 2 Create an effective city-wide play infrastructure through collaborative design that enhances and responds to children and young people's existing infrastructure.

**“There is no difference between a right to play and a right to life. Children have a right to navigate to health-enabling resources; adults have an ethical responsibility to support this.”**

*(Lester, 2019)*

Developing citywide play infrastructure is a key responsibility of Dublin City Council Parks and Landscape Services and Play Development section that will be implemented through associated actions within the Dublin City Play Strategy. This involves the development of a wide variety of facilities, spaces and places where children and young people can play. Taking a whole child approach will necessitate collaborative working intra-departmentally, cross departmentally, with partners, and outside agencies. This will ensure a much broader focus on creating conditions that support play which includes, but is not limited, to conventional playgrounds and designated play areas. For example, the UK Children's Play Policy Forum 'Four Asks for Play' urged decision makers to identify play in schools, in streets, in parks and public spaces, and in staffed play services as areas for investment that would result in improvements in children's health and wellbeing (*UK Children's Play Policy Forum, 2015*).

If play is to be properly protected and respected as a human right, children and young people should be visible and accepted within and throughout their cities and local communities when they are playing. This should not be limited to children of a certain age

and ability but rather be accessible to all children and young people up to 18 years. However, this guide for age should also take into consideration different intellectual and physical abilities of all children and young people wherein age will not be a factor in the desire and need to play. These places need to be safe, challenging and interesting and should include parks, playgrounds, green spaces, local streets and public space in town cities and neighbourhoods. Therefore, in response to supporting children's play Dublin City Council needs to support play within the following contexts:

- Public parks and green spaces e.g. playgrounds, natural landscapes that provide lots of different possibilities for play including play equipment, trees, hills, rocks, secret places.
- Supporting and enhancing existing opportunities, street characteristics, the natural and the built environment that facilitate children and young people to play outside. This includes removing constraints to play through traffic calming, a reduction in parking and vigilant traffic enforcement. Also informal seating, different types and levels of surfaces, public art that facilitates playfulness, and street design to support safety when playing out on the street.
- Overall, a wide variety of play facilities, places and spaces that support the diversity of behaviours and activities so old games and new can be played each day.

- When possible and practicable supervised local play services where play activities are supported by adults in alignment with the Playwork principles e.g. Local Parks "Play Ranger Programmes".

**“Playing as developed in this account, is an everyday ordinary occurrence that appears fleetingly in the most mundane circumstances. Yet there may be something in the process of playing and it's very ordinariness that demands far greater attention, accountability and responsibility.”**

*(Lester, 2019)*

### Review and scope of Dublin City Council's current play infrastructure

The current typology of the City Council's play infrastructure is provided in detail within the Review of Dublin City Council's Current Play Provision. This review is focused mainly on the provision of conventional playgrounds and designated play areas and presents a starting point for documenting and mapping Dublin's citywide play infrastructure. The City Council plans to carry out a more comprehensive review and mapping that will move beyond conventional playgrounds and designated play areas. Dublin City Council has been timely in adopting an alternative approach to the issue of planning for play (*Lester, page 127, 2019*). This approach will encompass measures that address the issue of children and young people's everyday play experiences within their community. It will also address how they navigate

and experience local streets, greens, parks, public and wild spaces for play. The associated themed policy statements and action plan included in the Dublin City Play Strategy “Everywhere, Any Day, You Can Play!” (2020-2027) will involve a comprehensive audit and assessment of opportunities for play based on the principle of Play Sufficiency. This type of assessment will include, but also move beyond, provision of standard fixed playgrounds. There will be a process of mapping where and how children and young people use green space, incidental spaces, and public space.

Multi-Use Games Areas known as MUGAs, usually placed near playgrounds, cater for both formal and informal games and can also be used as ‘hanging-out’ space for older children. Therefore in this strategy they are also identified, managed and maintained as play facilities. This type of provision is not the exactly the first its kind in Ireland or Dublin. In fact many parks and playgrounds countrywide provide play equipment and Youth Shelter/Teenzones as incidental features when addressing the play of older children. The Play Strategy aims to openly address play provision for older children by giving permission to play and hang out, and supporting their visibility in public space.

As a capital city Dublin has a wealth of public spaces and it is the responsibility of Dublin City Council to provide opportunities to play for older children/teenagers in the urban public realm. There are a number of spaces located throughout Dublin City that are identified and scheduled for environmental upgrading, or are currently used by young people to sit and gather socially, mainly during fine weather. These places include; St. Stephen’s Green, Barnardo’s Square, Grafton Street, Meeting House Square, Smithfield Square and Wolfe Tone Park. By providing features that prompt and encourage playfulness, these spaces will be perceived as more welcoming for young people.

Dublin City Council is developing an initiative called ‘Watch This Space’ which will facilitate young people to design teen friendly places and spaces throughout the city. It is envisaged that this will lead to the provision of Youth Shelter/TeenZone spaces. A Youth Shelter/Teenzone is a structure, which provides informal seating and reasonable shelter. It is a place for young people to meet and socialise safely within their community and within the public realm, in essence, somewhere to “hang out”. Meaningful consultation is vital to ensuring the success of this project. Dublin City Council’s response will endeavour to truly reflect young people’s views in future public space design proposals. The implementation of this type of intervention will provide a model of best practice for other local authorities and communities both city and countrywide.

It is also worth acknowledging and supporting young people’s current geographies either at home or playing out. Careful consideration is required to assess and acknowledge their use of various spaces and the extent of their ranging, in order to enhance their independent mobility and realise as many affordances as possible to ensure they gain rich and varied play experiences.

**“Understanding children’s play patterns helps adults appreciate how best to design spaces and support children’s play”**

*(Chawla, Cited in Lester and Russell, 2008)*

Dublin city has around 1,5000 hectares of parks, open spaces and parkland. This incorporates an array of approximately 200 parks of various size and character. Sixty seven of the city’s parks include playground facilities that are managed and maintained by Dublin City Council Parks & Landscape Services. Playgrounds located in house and flat complexes are the responsibility of Dublin City Council Housing Maintenance Section. Both

of these services are managed and maintained in alignment with the distribution of the city’s administrative and local electoral areas; Central, South Central, South East, North Central and North West Dublin.

### Hierarchy of Play facilities

The Dublin City Parks Strategy (2019-2022) and the Dublin City Play Strategy (2022-2027) share the same goals with regard to play provision as both strategies adopt the principle of Play Sufficiency regarding the provision of adequate quantity and high quality play facilities. The development of a hierarchy of play facilities will be a significant accomplishment in ensuring the provision of places and spaces for play that address the diversity of play needs for children and young people throughout Dublin city.

### Typology of Play Facilities

<b>Destination Playgrounds:</b>	Located in Flagship Parks (Approx. 97 ha) with café, toilets etc. and including 8 + play units.
<b>Local Community Neighbourhood Playgrounds:</b>	Located in Grade 1 Community Parks (approx. 11 ha) wide range of play units amounting to 8 + play units.
<b>Local Community Playgrounds:</b>	Located in Grade 2 Community Park (approx.5ha) – and including 8 or less play units.
<b>Play Lots Door Step:</b>	Location indicates access to serve immediate catchment area. Housing playgrounds also categorised as play lots including 8 or less play units. ‘Play lots’ are mainly associated to playgrounds provided by DCC housing as play facilities within flat complexes and housing estates.



## Provision, Distributions and Standards

In order to prioritise the provision of new playgrounds, Central Statistics Office 2016 data was reviewed to identify and address deficits in the provision of play facilities for all Dublin City Council administrative areas. Indicative walking distances can be determined from the access and proximity guidelines set out below:

1. 500m (5-10 minutes' walk) this walk-in zone provides a good level of local community access
2. 1 Km (10-20 minutes' walk), this walk-in zone provides a reduced level of access but usually presents a high quality destination facility

DCC has adopted accessibility guidelines provided by Fields in Trust (England) 'Guidance for Outdoor Sports & Play - Beyond the Six Acre Standard'. These guidelines provide examples of best practice based on walking distance from dwellings. It should be noted that these indicative distances take into account actual walking routes and busy roads. However, major barriers or even location of park/playground entrances are also distribution factors that need to be taken into account. Therefore more detailed research with children and young people may also be required in some cases to ascertain fair levels of access and distribution of play facilities and opportunities for play.

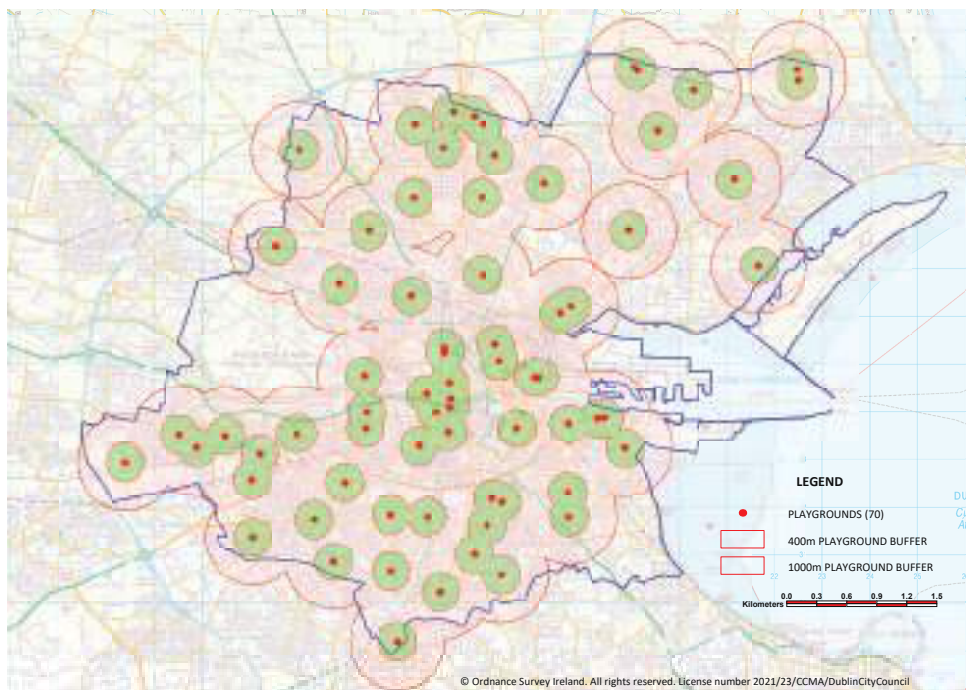
The GIS maps shown in this section indicate how well Dublin City Council are doing in terms of access and proximity by mapping the current provision of play facilities. This is measured by mapping the distribution of all playgrounds against population and density. In order to prioritise the provision of new playgrounds, census data is reviewed to identify key deficit areas. This indicates areas with higher concentrations of children who would benefit from new playgrounds.

## Management & Maintenance

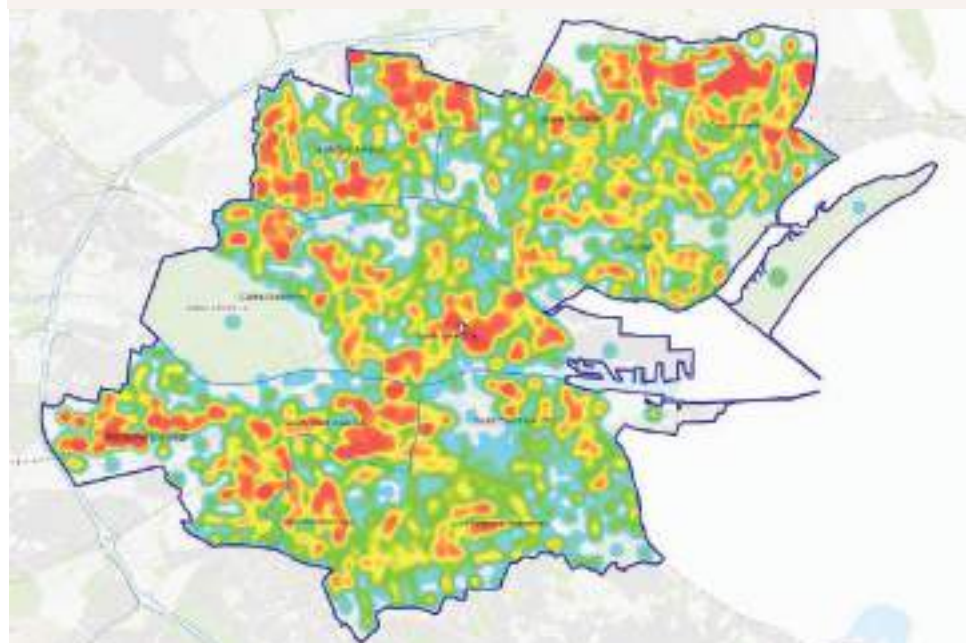
As a local authority with responsibility for play provision, Dublin City Council has adopted organisational best practice. One method of achieving this standard is by having the correct policies and procedures in place regarding the management and

maintenance of play facilities.

This includes access and safety regarding the day-to-day running, maintenance work and retrofitting of play facilities. Dublin City Council has implemented robust management and maintenance regimes that align with the City Council's play and parks strategies to ensure that they meet



Distribution map showing access zones for DCC playground in Public Parks  
Map: Dublin City Council



Population Density Map based on Central Statistics Office (CSO) 2016 figures regarding population of children under 14 years.  
Photo: Dublin City Council

the highest maintenance standards. Independent specialist inspections are also carried out on Multi Use Games Areas (MUG.'s), Outdoor Gym Equipment and Skate Parks. DCC Parks & Landscape Services Health and Safety programme also impacts on management of new capital projects, maintaining and improving standards of existing play facilities, allocation of appropriate annual budget regarding capital and revenue for play facilities. Playgrounds provided by DCC Housing Maintenance Section have similar management practices as set out above, however the focus is mainly on repairs and maintenance rather than development or upgrade of new facilities.

### Playground Safety Inspections

It is vital that any play provision offered by Dublin City Council is safe, as the protection of children and young people is paramount in providing good service records that mitigate risk of serious harm or injury. This is achieved by engaging the services of accredited playground inspectors and providers in order to meet the strict criteria set by the Register of Playground Inspectors International (RPII). These inspectors are fully trained to conduct inspections to the required levels of competence. Dublin City Council, like other local authorities, is not legally responsible for providing inspection and maintenance regimes for play areas. However, all play facilities provided by the City Council meet the expectations of parents and carers in that inspections and equipment are compliant with EN Playground Safety Standards. Dublin City Council playground maintenance and repairs programme includes the following schedule:

### Annual Playground Safety Inspections

These are currently carried out on an annual basis by Play Services Ireland, an independent RPII (Register of Play Inspectors International) certified organization who carry out assessments of compliance to EN

1176 (Play Equipment) and EN 1177 (Playground Safety Surfacing).

### Routine (Visual) Playground Safety Inspections

Routine inspections including above-mentioned standards are carried out daily or weekly.

### Operational Inspections

Operational inspections are carried out monthly or quarterly. These inspections are also dependent on the usage of the playground and the likelihood of vandalism.

### Design Risk Assessments

This type of inspection focuses on design plans for new or refurbished play facility where the design and installation are carried out by commercial companies.

### Post Installation Inspection

Newly developed or refurbished playgrounds and works involved in the repair and/or replacement of play equipment are carefully checked for compliance with the City Councils claims, specifications and installation procedures before they are accepted and taken in charge by the City Council.

### Playground Safety Inspections and Staff Training & Development

Dublin City Council strives to provide appropriate training for all staff with responsibility for play facilities and is required to carry out regular playground safety inspection. This involves the provision for said staff to undertake some basic, specialist training, and accreditation in playground inspections.

### Assigned Budgets

DCC Parks and Landscape Services have an annual allocated budget to address playground safety inspections, maintenance and repairs, renewal of existing and development of new playgrounds.

DCC Housing Department includes the annual playground safety inspections within its annual maintenance budget. Playground Maintenance and Repairs – Annual Playground Safety Inspections and Training To date Dublin City Council Parks & Landscape Services have a designated budget for ‘Playground Maintenance and Repairs’ which includes costs for inspections and playground safety training.

- Overall budget for DCC Parks & Landscape Services ‘Maintenance and Repairs’ Budget is €260,000
- **Note:** DCC Housing Maintenance has no fixed budget assigned to playground repairs and maintenance.

### Playground Capital Projects

The playground capital projects programme for new playgrounds is based on ensuring play provision in deficit areas. The programme is developed on an annual basis and where possible and practicable this may include improvement and enhancement of existing playground provision. The cost of new playgrounds depending on typology will range from €50,000 to €200,000. DCC’s annual Housing Maintenance budget does not include the development of new playgrounds. This is usually dependant on availability of annual discretionary funding provided through local area offices. The amount available for new play areas is on average €55,000.

### Annual Playground Renewal/Upgrade Budget

In advance of a formalised monitor, review and evaluation of play provision, DCC Parks and Landscape Services have prepared a 3 Year Playground Upgrading Programme. The programme identifies play facilities requiring renewal and possible redesign based on the level of play value and safety of the facility. Approximately two playgrounds per district per year will undergo upgrades at an average cost of €80,000 per project.

## Opening Times

The play facilities in parks are open from Dawn to Dusk. Play facilities located on open green space are more easily accessed, at earlier and later times.

Current List of Dublin City Council Parks Public Playgrounds Overall Dublin City Council Parks & Landscape Services manages 66 playgrounds distributed across the city in each of the Parks Districts, accessible to the public. There are an additional 61 (approx.) playgrounds in DCC housing and flat complexes that are available to those living in the immediate area. For this reason, the review of play provision focuses mainly on play facilities that are more accessible to the public. Although facilities in local authority housing complexes are not included in the maps provided, they should be taken into consideration in terms of provision of local play facilities within deficit areas.

## Public Engagement in the Design and Planning of Play Facilities

Current practice involves consultation with local residents and ongoing research with children and young people by facilitating design and planning workshops. These workshops involve mapping exercises to assess use of existing play facilities and public space. This approach ensures ongoing dialogue with the public, especially children and young people as a clear demonstration of taking on board their opinions, concerns and ideas regarding the design of new facilities and the redesign of existing facilities. Dublin City Council Playground Located in Public Parks & Open Spaces (67 sites)

- **South East (SE) Parks District**  
17 x Playgrounds
- **South Central (SC) Parks District**  
13 x Playgrounds
- **North West (NW) Parks District**  
13 x Playgrounds



Sandymount Playground – located within a natural landscape and providing inclusive and accessible opportunities to play  
Photo: Dublin City Council

- **North Central (NC) Parks District**  
13 x Playgrounds
- **Central Area (C) Parks District**  
11 x Playgrounds

2020 Dublin City Council Housing Playground List - Housing Locations (59 Sites) (Flat Complexes and Housing Estates)

- **South East Housing Area**  
14 x Playgrounds
- **South Central Housing Area**  
16 x Playgrounds
- **North West Area**  
1 x Playground
- **North Central Area**  
4 x Playgrounds
- **Central Area**  
24 x Playgrounds

This review presents a detailed account of play support in terms of mapped play facilities managed and maintained by Dublin City Council in the city's administrative areas. In order to address play deficits, the Dublin City Play Strategy includes themed action points that will ensure the removal of barriers that restrict children and young people of all ages and abilities to access locally based play facilities.

The action points regarding Play Sufficiency assessments, playground development frameworks, addressing play deficits, annual playground maintenance and repairs programme and identifying locations for destination playgrounds will help to identify and address deficits in play provision. They will also help with developing a broad range of play facilities and opportunities for play that are assigned reasonable budgets and practical timelines.

Providing this overview of current play facilities clearly shows the current standpoint for provision of play facilities by Dublin City Council. It is evident from this review that future cross-departmental and inter-agency working is required to provide a full listing and mapping of all of city parks and places and spaces for play that include facilities managed by DCC Housing Maintenance and the other local authorities; Fingal, Dun Laoghaire Rathdown and South Dublin County Councils.

**“The best playgrounds are never finished.”**

*(Frost, 1992)*



Involving children and young people in the design and planning of play spaces  
Photo: Dublin City Council

### Adopting the principle of Play Sufficiency as a methodology for monitoring and evaluation of Dublin City's play infrastructure

Future proofing a wide-ranging hierarchy of everyday play experiences for children and young living in Dublin will involve ongoing work focused on a more holistic approach to supporting play. This will encompass access and inclusion, variety, change with the seasons, adaptability and open-ended potential for change and modification, seasonal effects and most importantly include other children to play and interact with.

In response to the ongoing dilemma for cities in providing high quality and sufficient play environments, General Comment 17 on Article 31 recommends that countries adopt the legal principle of Play Sufficiency as a policy narrative. This requires a paradigm shift within governments, local authorities and society in general in understandings and perceptions of children's play (*Lester and Russell, 2013, p. 23*). This paradigm shift will broaden the scope of play support and place a more in-depth focus on children's infrastructure within urban landscapes so as to support and create the right conditions for play to happen.

Ongoing assessment of current provision will assist in identifying and removing barriers and constraints to play that may change or evolve over time. Initiating and maintaining conversations with citizens that focus on play will bring about attitudinal change that is informed by advocacy for Article 31; the child's right to play. These conversations will be drawn from sound and up-to-date knowledge regarding the concept and meaning of play and its importance in improving the lives of children and young people. Interdisciplinary practice, ongoing engagement that involves children and young people and cross and interdepartmental working, provide essential elements for decisions about enhancing play and play environments (*Frost, 1992*).

The matters identified for consideration with the Wales Play Sufficiency Assessments will assist in forming the basis of Play Sufficiency Assessment for Dublin City's existing play facilities and everyday opportunities for play. They will also assist in identifying deficits and support measures.

### Reporting mechanisms, keeping good records and maintaining access to information

The development of Play Sufficiency Assessments and subsequent reports for Dublin City supports the practice of keeping good records and ensuring easy access to them. This provides Dublin City Council with clear and transparent methods of providing information on the ongoing progress of the Dublin City Play Strategy and action plan. The proposed Play Sufficiency Assessments will reflect the specific context of Dublin City and provide vital information that will enable the City Council to:

- Provide annual, tri-annual and final reports on local standards and quality of play provision
- Identify and make any necessary improvements and or interventions
- Inform actions for further improvement or interventions - if required

This presents a common sense approach for the City Council to identify what needs to be recorded in a clear and succinct manner.

### Quality Indicators – How is Dublin doing?

Drawing on the different matters identified by the Wales Play Sufficiency Assessments and the themes within the Play Strategy will assist in developing a set of quality indicators that take into account the recommendations in General Comment 17 on Article 31; the child's right to play. The results gleaned from analysis of findings in the overall review, evaluation of opportunities to play, and subsequent consultations will be measured against the newly developed and appropriate set of indicators. This will result in:

- Assessing the impact of local opportunities to play against children and young people's experiences and concerns about play opportunities where they live

- Assessing children and young people’s satisfaction regarding local opportunities to play and the maintenance of existing provision. Involving them in the planning and development of new playgrounds, places and spaces for play across the city
- Assessing the degree of multi-agency collaboration to maintain and/or improve services and provision for children and young people

### Ongoing Play Sufficiency Assessments for Dublin City

Proposed assessments will focus on each of the five Dublin City administrative areas alongside the city parks districts division (see above), which have slightly different boundaries. Both methods will be incorporated into ‘Play Sufficiency Assessments’ for Dublin City. This will ensure the completion of a comprehensive citywide audit and assessment of play facilities and opportunities for play that will feed into monitoring and management regimes. The principles of developing a hierarchy of play infrastructure in Dublin City should include the following elements that assist in providing and supporting the right conditions for play to happen:

- Active, participative research with children and young people regarding the design, planning and location of new and existing play facilities
- Address all aspects of children’s infrastructure; parks, playgrounds, green spaces, natural and built environment, local streets and public space
- Ensure Universal Design principles are implemented to ensure accessible and inclusive play experiences for all children e.g. equality of access regardless of race, minority groups,



Self-directed play enables children to engage in complex play with other children, make and maintain friendships and developing empathy  
Photo: Sophie Graefin Von Maltzen/Dublin City Council

ability, gender, socio-economic backgrounds and those seeking refuge from conflict or natural disasters

- Ensure that a reasonable percentage of Public Art involves playful interactive elements
- Design of play spaces should focus on children of all ages in terms of challenge and risk, casual informal sports activities and social play experiences
- Include intergenerational activities through design that supports shared and mixed use of public open space

### Integrated actions within Dublin’s greening strategies

The Dublin City Council Parks Strategy and Play Strategy both include priority actions that will inform best practice in providing sufficient play opportunities that address the diverse play needs of children and young people living in Dublin. This will be achieved through the ongoing development and monitoring of play infrastructure that includes parks, playgrounds, open spaces, local streets and the public realm.

The planned development of more comprehensive audits and assessments that involve ‘Play

Sufficiency Assessments’ will address matters such as; levels of play value, immersion, flexibility, accessibility, inclusion and freedom of choice evident with formal and informal opportunities for play.

The Play Strategy is also aligned with the Dublin City Council Greening Strategy. Both identify the ecological and health and wellbeing benefits of the ongoing development of a green infrastructure for Dublin City. This is in keeping with a more holistic and forward thinking approach that includes creative, innovative and broader reaching measures that support children’s play within the built and natural environment. This approach focuses on infrastructure for children and young people that involves a network of streets, natural environments and design interventions to support their everyday play freedoms (ARUP, 2017).

Opportunities for play are found throughout the city’s existing infrastructure. These play experiences and opportunities can be found in many places such as:

- Grassland/scrubland
- Woodlands and amenity greenspace



Co-creating play space that responds to nature with children and young people at Hertzog Park  
Photo: Dublin City Council

- Beaches and rivers, canals and lake sides
- Public parks and gardens (in addition to dedicated play areas within the parks)
- Residential streets
- School grounds
- Brownfield sites
- Village greens, town squares, plazas and other open urban public space
- Derelict sites
- Wild spaces

Dublin City Council will engage with children, young people and the wider community to identify ways in which the local authority can support and extend the potential of these spaces to ensure that conditions are right for play to happen.

### **Making use of evidence gathered from active research with children and young people to support their 'everyday freedoms'**

Recent evidence shows that if given a choice most children prefer to play outdoors and that the indoors is mainly attractive when experienced

with friends (*Blinkert, 2004*). Poor play environments, for example cramped living conditions, extensively built up neighbourhoods, lack of natural elements and air pollution are all causal effects that contribute to environmental challenges. Furthermore, technology is now a key element of children's play and a permanent feature in everyday day life for all of society. Children and young people are growing up in a world of progressing technology and they will require knowledge and skills to engage in this medium as part of their play and later in adult life. Therefore, it is clear that a balanced approach is needed to understanding and supporting children and young people's engagement and enjoyment of technology as part of modern day play cultures alongside other traditional outdoor play experiences.

The degree of independent mobility children enjoy today is more limited than previous generations. Factors outlined in this strategy such as traffic, stranger danger, bullying and other potential threats to their safety, inhibit their outdoor freedoms. Even when they are not with an adult their activities are often monitored in some way, sometimes through agreed or negotiated protocols, sometimes by mobile phone and sometimes through their situated knowledge of spaces through which they distinguish between

the safe and scary spots, and identify who they consider threatening people.

When playing and socialising outdoors, children and young people require the freedom to explore and test the boundaries within and outside of their local play places by ranging from their home location to places they are allowed to roam to. The mechanics of how these places are selected involves seeking out the components of a secret playful space (*Kytta et al., 2018*). Adults have a part to play in creating the right conditions for this type of play behaviour to happen. Understanding the value of these 'other worldly' places and making them more accessible is important. These can be places where children feel they can restore calm, reflect, sit and talk, share troubles or simply 'do nothing' (*Korpela et al., 2002*).

One way of achieving this is by removing barriers such as real and perceived fears and improving the environmental quality of these spaces. This can be done through the development of spaces with trees and bushes that give the sense of secrecy but also include transparency and marked boundaries. In this way, adults covertly sanction these spaces by preserving and/or modifying affordances that facilitate children and young people's everyday freedoms to enjoy different play experiences at different times (*Lester and Russell, 2008; Kytta, 2004*). Adults are also faced with the dilemma of affording levels of freedom for children and young people in their care against concerns of being viewed as neglectful. An unobtrusive adult presence outside can offset some of these fears, lessen related anxieties and consequently support children play. Supporting children and young people at local level to become active researchers in their own neighborhood and city is key to identifying stimulating, sociable and playful journeys and routes. This will take into account parental fears, physical design, habitual engagement and children's play patterns. Engaging in this way challenges the contemporary 'risk averse' society (*Gill, 2007*).



Hertzog Playground Plan Review  
Photo: Dublin City Council



According to Gill, assessing the benefits of risk and managing risk factors helps offset risk aversion. Adults need to take a new approach to their care for children and young people, ensuring that risk and challenge are included in their everyday play experiences. In this way, adults support the development of resilience. When planning urban space, children and young people's everyday lives need to be taken into account. This approach demands decision makers to stand in the footprints of the contemporary urban child (Ward, 1978). This requires a focus on levels of freedom and how this impacts on the way that children explore and engage with existing features to play. The role of adults and decision makers is to ensure that urban planning involves a process where children and young people are involved in identifying places and spaces for play. These spaces should be supported through design features that facilitate social and playful interactions with urban space. These features should be basic requirements in realising and supporting the active role of material and social environments in supporting children and young people's mobility. The challenge for Dublin City is in acknowledging and preserving playful spaces and places that hold meaning for children and young people, and which support their sense of belonging. Discussing the importance of public space for children, Jane Jacobs pinpoints the sidewalk as the place where children learn the "first fundamental of successful city life" - a reference to the importance of

community responsibility. Their local streets can also be a place of bustling activity and a compelling place for them to congregate (Jacobs, 1961).

Regardless of the context of any city, the fundamental characteristics of child-friendly settings are those that enable children and young people to actualise and harness the opportunities available to them near home, in local streets, neighbourhoods and public space (Kyttä, 2004). Developing a more broad reaching citywide hierarchy of play facilities and opportunities for play throughout Dublin City requires a place-based approach. This includes identifying meaningful places, mode of travel, varying levels of independent mobility and the opportunities for play and social interaction that these places hold. The concept of placemaking is a useful way of working with communities to demonstrate the power of collective vision in re-imagining everyday spaces and to see anew the potential of parks, downtowns, waterfronts, plazas, neighbourhoods, streets, markets, campuses, and public buildings (Project for Public Spaces, 2020).

The Child Friendly Cities Initiative is a UNICEF-led initiative that supports governments and local authorities to realize the rights of children and young people at local level, using the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as its foundation. The initiative focuses on five key areas; the right to be valued, respected and treated fairly, the right to be heard, the right to essential services, the right to be safe, the right to family time, play and leisure.

The Dublin City Play Strategy prioritizes family time, play and leisure for Dublin's youngest citizens. Dublin City Council is working towards achieving Play Sufficiency with the clear intention of becoming a candidate to obtain the Child Friendly Cities Initiative logo and Child Friendly City Status. Recognition of Dublin as a child-friendly city requires ongoing efforts to realize the rights of children and young people. This depends on collaborative work with other local authorities and partner and outside organisations to ensure that all areas of the guidelines for creating child-friendly cities are met.

Child in the City (CITC) is an independent foundation that has been operating since 2003. Its focus is on strengthening the position of children in cities by promoting and protecting their rights. It provides a network for cities to bring stakeholders together, with a focus on the involvement of children and young people who wish to make their cities more child-friendly. The foundation also advocates for the Child Friendly Cities Initiative. The CITC Foundation has carried out this work by connecting people around shared objectives and giving a platform for the exchange of research results and good practice directed at the creation of child-friendly cities. The foundation observes five general guidelines and encourages national and local networks to translate these into specific local policies addressing local points of focus. The general guidelines are; a holistic, integral and intergenerational approach; the importance of participation for children

and young people; and dynamic trade and continuous challenge (CITC 2021). The Dublin Play Strategy themes and associated action plan align with the aims of the CITC Foundation in working towards the creation of a child-friendly and playful city.

### Cities Alive: Designing for Urban Childhoods

was published in 2017 by ARUP. ARUP is an independent firm of designers, planners, engineers, architects, consultants and technical specialists who work across every aspect of today's built environment. Cities Alive presents global research focused on a child centered approach to rethinking how the future design of cities is managed. The report outlines how a child-friendly approach to urban planning is vital for the creation of cities that work better for everyone.

The report looks at mapping existing infrastructure and planning for the future based on a child-friendly approach. The aim of this process is to create more sustainable and resilient cities that focus on supporting children's overall development and wellbeing.

The report outlines case studies that focus on time spent outdoors, ability to get around independently and level of contact with nature. These features present strong indicators of how a city is performing for children and young people. The research shows how improving the lives of the children and young people in cities across the world also has direct positive impacts on the lives of all citizens.

In developing its play infrastructure for children and young people in Antwerp, a unique approach was inspired by Wim Seghers who was given responsibility for developing the city's playgrounds (*Rethinking Childhood, 2018*). Seghers used city data and engaged with local communities to develop a 'play space web' for Antwerp. This process assisted in identifying children and young people's movement throughout their city to key locations for education, play, leisure

and other activities. It also facilitated developing ways to make these routes and locations more child-friendly and playful.

**"There is no doubt that a child-friendly city and a sustainable city are fundamentally interlinked."**

(*Australian Institute of Architects, 2018*)

**"If an 8 year old child can understand it then anyone will."**

(*Camps, 2019, quoted by Rethinking Childhood, 2018*)

Currently Dublin City Council Parks and Landscape Services uses GIS mapping to identify the distribution of play facilities throughout the city. Green infrastructure is also mapped. This mapping process helps Dublin City Council in developing a citywide play infrastructure that engages with everyday activities and play patterns in the city's local neighborhoods.

Making use of the Dublin City's GIS system to map the distribution of play facilities is an existing resource that can assist in further developing a process of identifying and mapping children and young peoples' geographies and their routes around their home, school, parks and playgrounds, sports grounds, youth and after-school clubs.

**"The exercise revealed all the children could talk eloquently and intelligently about their area and their experience of living in it. It gave us rich details about the range of experiences of living in Hackney that the children have and raised issues that may not be immediately obvious to adults. Most children engaged well with the exercise and showed a clear enthusiasm for doing so."**

(*Bornat and Shaw, 2019*)

## How city parks greening and public realm strategies can support and enhance children and young people's everyday play infrastructure

Dublin City Parks Strategy includes actions to develop a greener more liveable city. This has presented the opportunity for interdepartmental working for DCC's Play and Parks and Landscape Services and working collaboratively with the private sector to provide child-friendly and playful public space.

During the development of Dublin City Park's Greening Strategy for the North East Area of Dublin City, two areas – Stoneybatter and Sherrif Street - were identified to carry out mapping and observational research with local children. Their views and ideas shared in that research have been incorporated into the play strategy. They have also informed the greening plans for these locations and provide examples of best practice for a citywide greening strategy (See case studies). This process of engagement with children and young people at local level is an example of best practice that can be used as a template for local consultations citywide. This will ensure that children and young people are involved in the design and planning of their outdoor environment through genuine responses to their day to day living experiences and playful engagement with the built and natural environment.

### Greening Strategy Play Friendly Workshops;

The Dublin City Parks Strategy (2019-2022) includes policy statements and actions that impact on local community and public space. As key stakeholders, local communities throughout the city will be invited to engage in consultative processes. Children and young people require particular attention regarding involvement in the design and planning of existing and new hard landscaping and green open spaces to ensure



that these developments enhance rather than inhibit their use of local streets and outdoor public space. This involves the implementation of greening strategies and public housing landscaping and refurbishment projects that include the development of Home-Zones.

Home-Zones are streets or neighbourhoods designed to meet the needs of children and other pedestrians. Typically traffic speeds are very slow and there are various traffic calming measures in place. The concept of Home-Zones in housing development requires detailed community engagement and careful consideration, or they may not succeed. For example, the regeneration project in Ballymun involved housing developments that featured Home-Zones. But as residents were poorly informed on the potential for these schemes, the opportunities for reducing traffic speeds and ensuring recreational use were misinterpreted. As a result, innovative car parking and the opportunity for space for children's play was lost.

Dublin City Council's Public Realm Strategy and subsequent Public Realm Masterplan (2016) addresses neighbourhood play through the creation of a network of open spaces that hold meaning for user groups and create connections between neighbourhoods and across the city. This includes the development of child oriented space in the public realm. The process is underpinned by the redesign of existing and hidden spaces, and exploring the possibilities of used and unused spaces as sites for play, social interaction, and recreational use.

The Dublin City Public Art Strategy has implications for the development of play infrastructure through interactive artistic interventions. Spaces that include artistic installations can suggest and prompt the sharing of space and have the added potential of providing intersections for old and young as intergenerational public spaces with shared values, connections and interpretations.



Dublin's green infrastructure supporting everyday play experiences  
Photo: Dublin City Council

It is clear that there are shared objectives across a range of City Council strategies with respect to the development of streetscapes and outdoor public space. A coordinated approach within the council will enhance the potential for outdoor play in local streets, neighbourhoods and public space.

The completion of a Play Sufficiency Assessment will ensure a more planned and coordinated citywide approach to evaluating and documenting various opportunities for play and subsequent action plans to address any issues or deficits. Balanced and careful planning and design will be partnered with improved use of resources that clearly maps and acknowledges these spaces for play and recreation such as traditional playgrounds, natural and hard landscapes, small pieces of land and open spaces where children and young people congregate. This will include equipment-based larger playgrounds that will be further developed through assessment and subsequent enhancement and redesign of existing facilities.

Taking all of the above elements of play provision into consideration will ensure the qualitative design of 'good' play spaces that reflect location, that include natural elements, that allow for change and adaptability, that are

inclusive and accessible and finally, that encourage a sense of belonging with people and place. A focus on supporting children's independent mobility will inform future actions taken (*Whewey & Milward, 1997*).

### Play and PA – The benefits and value of informal sports

One of the key aims of the Dublin City Play Strategy is to develop innovative and challenging outdoor play facilities and opportunities for play for children of all ages, including older children/teenagers and those with mixed abilities. This requires appropriate responses to the ideas they put forward regarding their experience of poor access to play and recreational facilities and their everyday freedom to engage in these activities.

For many children and young people, play can mean football and other ball games. Ball games are considered play when they are informal and led by the young people themselves. More extreme sports such as skateboarding, pump tracks, parkour, free-running, rock climbing and more recently 'DanceSport', provide opportunities for challenging and exciting play experiences for many children and young people. This has particular relevance for older children who tend to shift from make-believe



Puckelball in Kroksback park ...creative use of public space for informal sports activities  
Photo: Public Space Barcelona



Casual sports support social and active play for older children  
Photo: Anemoe Youth Club

to skills focused activities from 10 years onwards. Children and young people's infrastructure and use of play spaces change as they get older with a stronger concentration on public parks and sports facilities as they reach adolescence (*Barron & Emmet, 2020*).

Providing a broad range of alternative activities e.g. slacklining, yoga, gymnastics, dodgeball, martial arts, scooters and hip-hop will also ensure that there is something for everyone. This also addresses equality of access and results in more attractive and more welcoming sports, leisure and play facilities and opportunities for teenage girls (*Make Space for Girls, 2021*).

Dublin City Council Sport and Recreation provide a broad range of services for children and young people such as gyms, swimming pools, sports and wellbeing initiatives, clubs and groups in addition to seasonal organised games and activity programmes and support for existing sports clubs and teams.

Numerous city parks house sports pitches, running tracks, tennis courts and gym equipment. One of the objectives of this Play Strategy is to maximize the use of these facilities by providing more playful alternatives to formal organised sports. Facilitating more informal physical opportunities that are imaginative and fun can support children and young people who have difficulty in adhering to the strict regimes involved in competitive sports.

Many children and young people involve themselves in sports clubs which are highly valued supports and

hugely beneficial for their overall health and development. However, this type of support is often focused on specific goals and levels of achievement bound by a specific set of rules that may not always be attractive to all children. Sport and play have the potential to create equal access and opportunity for all children and at some level provide a welcome diversion and assist in eliminating discrimination, violence, and bullying. However, as sports activities in a club setting usually take place once or twice a week, this format may not be suitable to all. Young people express a preference to use a large proportion of their free time being with their friends and making their own choices (*Dublin City Council, 2008*). Children have a natural desire to play; they need good quality play environments to stimulate the broad range of development that takes place while they experience freedom of choice during open-ended, child-led play. Sports facilities can support their imaginative role play and offer potential for a range of creative games.

Many sporting activities can be demanding due competition schedules, training timetables and constant parent supervision and coach direction. Adopting a more balanced and play led approach can help remove potential barriers to sport for some children. Sports clubs and amenities need to be associated with 'fun' as the driving reason for children to participate. Shifting the focus to taking part and social interaction in games and sports as opposed to winning and losing can motivate further involvement. This type of approach will support children's physical literacy where movement is

encouraged from infancy, expanding to playful and fun movement in early childhood, more fundamental skills in middle years and more complex skills as they enter adolescence and adulthood.

Since the beginning of National Playday in 2005, Dublin City Council Sports Section have provided support to this event by facilitating casual sports activities. Children and young people have access to sports such as yoga, soccer, volleyball, and dance based on a play led approach to facilitating sports activities and games that allows for freedom of choice.

Providing informal opportunities for sports activities presents unique challenges, but also presents the chance for collaborative work between the city council's play, sport and recreation sections. This will require adopting a play-led approach to the design and planning of facilities and opportunities to play that includes challenge and risk, casual sports activities and skills associated with street games and social interaction in the city's parks, neighbourhoods and public space.

*"If parents knew you were in a safe outdoor place they would be happy - need to de-stress after study - sport is great but it's different than just hanging out and messing about"*  
(Girl aged 16 years)



Dublin City Play Strategy 2022-2027

Playing in and with nature at Bridgefoot St Park  
Photo: Fennell Photography



Leslie Moore Head of Parks, Biodiversity & Landscape Services & Lord Mayor Alison Gilliland at Official Opening of Bridgefoot St Park  
Photo: Fennell Photography

### Support and encourage the development of play-friendly communities to provide time and space and permission for 'everyday street play'

Thinking about children and young people and outdoor space is as much to do with challenging attitudes and gaining permission as it is about designing the outdoor environment. This presents dilemmas and tensions between adult led design processes and the unique design features of children and young people's play. In examining the countless forms of children's play, adults need to pay attention to the 'ordinary things' that happen in their everyday lives, as this will most likely be what affects their opportunity to play, and if those opportunities are disturbed, constrained or changed in any way. Exploring alternative methods to the control and order of space should include children's input regarding how they actually play. This is a proactive approach to identifying alternatives to segregated play spaces, for example utilising street spaces, wastelands, derelict sites and wild outdoor spaces that can be transformed to places of play when used by children. Children's play generates a 'culture of childhood' in which children and young people experience the world differently to adults (Play England, 2007). It is important to consider feelings and emotions associated with play places and spaces. This is particularly relevant to doorstep spaces and the street as a child's first playground, and the extent to which they can roam independently within local neighbourhoods and the wider public realm.

Making use of this type of knowledge, and understanding children's playful engagement with outdoor space, presents an opportunity for developers to include playful interventions within the design and planning of urban environments, and to create fun and vibrant journeys and destinations (Cities Alive, 2017).

**"Seeing cities through the eyes of children strengthens the case for planning and transportation policies that work for people of all ages and for the planet."**

(Gill, 2021)

Looking back at childhood through a nostalgic lens risks making assumptions about how children play today. In previous generations, children had more freedom to roam, and lower levels of adult involvement, which resulted in opportunities to reclaim and play in 'forbidden places'. But adults should not underestimate the ingenuity of children today, who continue to devise ways of playing in 'constrained' environments.

A key purpose of this Play Strategy is to advocate for and support play in contemporary time and space contexts for children and young people. This leads to the question of planning and/or designing for play where the requirement is more attuned to 'space' and 'time' for play.

A series of factors impact on availability of, and access to, outdoor space for play including: urban development, growing populations, the urgent need for housing, increasing traffic and fears

for children's safety. These demands require a rethinking of play support by the City Council, and investigating how to ensure children and young people can access shared, and more clandestine, space. This will require understanding everyday journey's children and young people make and in-between spaces of meaning where they have agency to 'get on with it' themselves (Lester, 2010).

### Community response to children and young people's use of local streets and public space

Traditionally children and young people have used spaces near their homes, and specific destinations further afield, for play and recreational purposes. Children and young people's time spent in local neighbourhoods and city spaces is filled with play behaviours through affordances provided by the built and natural environment (Gibson, 1979). Incidental prompts for play can be found on pathways, kerbs, walls, bollards, sculpture, steps, gable ends and so on, which historically were places that children and young people had the freedom to make use of these type of spaces whilst playing and interacting with their peers.

Over time this has become a contentious issue as increased traffic has had a huge impact on children's lives. Additionally, urban and rural development, perceptions of safety, vandalism and anti-social behaviour have had negative impacts on children and young people's freedom to roam and interact with each other whilst

using local spaces for play. Emotive language is used to sustain and support negative views of childhood and promote related thinking or suggested actions where policies, legislation, and byelaws may inhibit children's use of public space. This can lead to poor access to the outdoor environment.

Public space is traditionally where children and teenagers interact with each other and their surroundings. It is here that they develop rich connections and a mutual respect for people and place. This element of children's culture requires actions that include design and planning of outdoor space and positive attitudes where adults see children and young people as valued members of society whose childhood cultures need to be acknowledged and preserved. An understanding of play is required in order to reverse decades of poor play environments by allowing children to return to freedom (Beunderman, 2010).

The challenge for Dublin is to create clear actions that will enhance the streetscapes and the public domain to support traditional street games

where skipping, rounders', hopscotch, handball, chasing and hide and seek and simply 'hanging out' can continue to be enjoyed.

The presence of older children can be supported through, for example, 'play lounges' to facilitate positive social experiences where they sit and chat, or more active spaces where they can engage in highly physical activities like casual street soccer, skateboarding, free-running and parkour. Overall, older children/teenagers need to be able to use the outdoor environment as a place to 'be' but not engage in any particular agenda if they choose not to.

**"We recommend that local authorities consider investing time and resources in ongoing ethical research with children using observations, mapping and other creative methods at micro-neighbourhood level, enabling a more in depth understanding of children's play habits and preferences to develop, and sharing those findings with other adults to enhance collective wisdom."**

(Play Wales, 2020)

Responding to modern day challenges for children and young people to play in local streets and neighbourhoods requires community cohesion in developing street-play initiatives. This involves a micro-neighbourhood approach which may result in simply acknowledging, understanding and permitting the use of spaces. It should also include traffic calming and enforcement of rules of the road.

The action points within the Dublin City Play Strategy are aimed at removing as many obstructions as possible to street play, and allowing children to engage in everyday experiences of independent, freely chosen play. This will allow them to develop socially, creatively, emotionally and physically at their own pace and in their own way. Adults need to understand that their responsibility and role in this matter is one of enabling and support. Children often have mixed feelings when identifying key adults in their neighbourhoods who provide support and those who present barriers to play. Some adults complain about children's behaviours as being noisy and disruptive, others who engage in threatening or anti-social behaviours present dangers for children and young people.

How greening strategies can support children's play infrastructure  
Photo: Dublin City Council



There are also those adults who provide support by simply being present as part of children's everyday lives such as local shop keepers, 'the chipper', supportive parents and other interested adults who live nearby and often overlook where children and young people play. This subtle presence and support allows feelings of independence.

Children and young people's every day experiences of their neighbourhoods is individual to each child depending on age and circumstances, but in general, they require spaces that are close to home, rely on easy access and are well overlooked shared spaces. If this is not made available then playing outside and with friends is less likely to happen (Bornat. & Shaw, 2019).

The Playing Out movement which began in Bristol in 2009 is an example of best practice of how local authorities can support community-led initiatives that support children's play in local neighbourhoods (See case studies). The initiative has been implemented in many parts of the UK. Legal requirements in Ireland present a challenge for Dublin to develop a framework for implementing a Playing Out initiative across Dublin City.

But implementing a Playing Out scheme would present Dublin City Council with the opportunity to work at local level with communities to support street play as an everyday occurrence for children and young people. Community play projects are ways in which adults can provide support by acknowledging play as a vital component in the development of sustainable and cohesive communities. This level of community cohesion supports children's independent mobility and freedom to range as appropriate to their age and stage of development.

**"Central to our project was the aim of developing new ways of mapping urban neighborhoods that are more responsive to children's behavior and needs"**

(Bornat and Shaw, 2019)

### Local authorities responding to and supporting playful communities, street play and play in urban public space

A typical urban or suburban street should present the usual opportunities for street play i.e. skipping, hopscotch, cycling, skating. However, there are a number of issues that constrain children and young people's access to everyday street play activities. Additionally many children need to make necessary weekly and daily journeys either with adults or independently as they make their way to school, parks, playgrounds and other sports and recreational activities. Increased traffic and perceptions around stranger danger have placed limitations on the children and young people who want to navigate their neighbourhoods on foot, skating, cycling and playing (Ferudi, 2001).

The layout and design of a particular road or street can also present barriers such as obstructing the vision of oncoming traffic. Apart from residents' gardens, many streets often lack green or natural features, thus restricting children's access to and experience of playing in and with nature.

Environmental play is an inherent element of street play that should be an everyday occurrence in children and young people's lives. Playing in and with natural landscapes is the best place for children to play and develop their creativity (Nebelong, 2021). While it is acknowledged that there are a number of parks and playgrounds throughout the city, a considerable number of children and young people would not have a park or playground within walking distance of their home.

All of these issues combined can have negative impacts on children and young people's independent mobility. A number of solutions can be put in place as part of community based local authority initiatives to support play in local streets, neighbourhoods and public space. These measures require a coordinated approach between the relevant departments within Dublin City

Council, local residents and outside agencies to develop solutions focused on the following issues:

- Reduce rat running by developing altered layout of roads/streets to discourage traffic passing through the road or street.
- Plan and design opportunities for play by exploring landscaping and health and safety issues. Moreover, identify location(s) on the street that can be landscaped play spaces including grass, sand and planting that can withstand the rough and tumble of street play activities. Specifically, include native trees and hedges that will attract wildlife so that children can learn and experience nature through play.
- Reduce and discourage traffic by engaging with initiatives such as the Love 30 campaign and working inter-departmentally with DCC Road Safety Department, Planning and Roads and Traffic
- Public art provided through the resource of DCC Artists in Residence to create features that support and extend outdoor play e.g. pavement art signalling children to 'play here!'
- Carry out audits that determine the use of hard landscaping i.e. pavements, kerbs, gateways, posts and bollards for street games such as ball wall, hopscotch and skipping
- Redesign and/or repair pavements and ground surfaces for more creative use by including gradients, contours and characteristics that facilitate street games i.e. marbles, ball wall, hop scotch, chalk, skipping
- Coordinate and develop community projects that include 'equipment banks' to increase play and leisure opportunities. An example in the UK involved the re-use of old wheelie bins and fitting them out with play materials and equipment to create 'what if' street play scenarios.



Communities supporting play in local streets and public space  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Communities supporting children's play  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Children's use of public space  
Photo: Stock photos



Skatepark and playground at Weaver Square Park supporting intergenerational shared spaces  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Communities supporting play in local streets and public space  
Photo: Dublin City Council

These interventions and modifications can be ongoing. Additional creative developments may evolve in response to children and young people's engagement in street play.

### The effects of climate change on children's play

Environmental conditions have direct impacts on children's right to play. The effect of climate change on the environment is a global challenge for cities. The new urban agenda requires cities across the world to develop a carbon neutral approach to urbanisation.

Climate change has gained close attention and there is now a move towards activism amongst children and young people themselves. This kind of activism has gained momentum among millions of children and young people worldwide, inspiring them to become activists in the protection of their planet for their future.

Extreme weather conditions, such as heatwaves causing hotter and longer summers, flooding, wild fires, heavy downpours, increased storms and air pollution place major constraints on children and young people's outdoor play and socialisation.

To support their play there is a need to ensure biodiversity in both green open spaces and built environments, as well as clean air and a healthy climate. As play is such an innate behaviour, children and young people can overlook advocating for the effects of environmental conditions for play in their campaigns against climate change. Therefore, adults, governments and local authorities have a vital role to play in ensuring that spaces and places for play are included within these campaigns. As part of the Dublin City Play Strategy, it is important that we do not lose sight of the value and benefits of children's lure to play in natural landscape, have clean air and liveable climates.

In 2016 a Day of General Discussion (DOGD 2016) which focused on 'Children's Rights and the Environment' was held in Geneva by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. To emphasise shared concerns, this day of discussion was titled 'Under the Same Sky.'

The International Play Association (IPA) was part of this day. IPA prepared a paper to demonstrate the role of the environment in creating healthy places for children to play (IPA, 2016). Children

and young people were involved in this DOGD where they used a range of creative media to present and explore their experiences of the places they are growing up in (e.g. Scotland, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Australia, Brazil and Palestine).

In preparation for the long-term impacts of climate change, Dublin City Council has developed clear actions through various strategies that share the common goal of addressing climate change to create a more liveable climate and healthier environments for the future. The vision of the Dublin City Parks Strategy "Growing towards a greener and more liveable Dublin City" (DCC, 2019) is in alignment with the City Climate Change Action Plan to "tackle climate breakdown" (DCC, 2022). Action points within both strategies present obvious links to the Dublin City Play Strategy. Measures that incorporate development and preservation of flood plains, wetlands, ecosystems, citywide greening and green corridors and tree canopies will lower the impact of Dublin's carbon footprint. Interdepartmental and collaborative working in the planning of some of these actions will involve an innovative and play-led approach to implementing measures that address climate change.

One such approach in cities internationally is the installation of playful and interactive water fountains and splashpad play areas which present excellent play value and support children playing outside during extreme heatwaves. Identifying responses to the effects of climate change on their play will involve listening to children and young people. It also entails understanding the holistic value of a green city that stimulates their development in terms of mind, body and spirit through playful and interactive installations, such as city fountains, cycle ways, forests, green walls and walkways. Working collaboratively is key to developing initiatives and actions that will minimize children and young people’s exposure to environmental risks when playing outside.

**“The problem of defining play and its role is one of the greatest challenges facing neuroscience, behavioural biology, psychology, education and the social sciences generally....only when we understand the nature of play will we be able to understand how to better shape the destinies of human societies in a mutually dependent world, the future or our species and perhaps even the fate of the biosphere itself.”**

*(Burghardt 2005, page xii, cited in Lester, 2019)*

### Play Services – supervised play provision

Services for children and young people are provided throughout various departments of Dublin City Council, however this provision has limitations in terms of play and the style of delivery and framework of practice under which it is managed. The nature and purpose of these departments are not specific to play but in their own right are valued and important elements of children and young people’s growth and development. Relevant departments include; Sport and Recreation, Arts and Culture, Events, Community and Social Development, Libraries, Dublin City



Project for Public Space Mowtown USA  
Photo: Project for Public Space



Identifying responses to the effects of climate change on children’s play  
Photo: International Play Association

Childcare Committee, Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) and Dublin Comhairle na nÓg.

These departments provide services for children and young people that mainly pertain to their section title. Some elements of their services may address play in terms of occasional or seasonal organised games and activity programmes. All of these services are beneficial and supportive in enhancing the lives of children and young people. However, they are not delivered through a play-led framework of practice. As a result, the extent to which they can adopt Playwork principles and put them into practice is limited. Therefore, the element of self-directed, intrinsic and unstructured play is not always addressed within this context. This presents an unintentional oversight of support for the heterogeneous,

unpredictable and spontaneous nature of play that is a vital part of children’s overall development and general health and wellbeing *(Lester & Russell, 2008)*.

The opportunity to resolve this issue can be easily found through the exploration of collaborative working and adopting a Playwork approach across all services.

Expanding the City Council’s play infrastructure to this form of play provision would provide direct and indirect benefits for its many stakeholders. Firstly, upholding Article 31; the child’s right to play, creates communities that are more cohesive by affording children and young people improved and increased opportunities for play and adding play value through support of appropriate adults.

Secondly, providing those working directly with children and young people at play with the appropriate tools and skills to respond appropriately to their play needs.

Thirdly, evidence of the success of this initiative through organisational benefits such as value for money regarding the number of children and young people and families availing of local authority facilities and services to their full potential.

The aim of the Play Strategy is to ensure that play services, if not the primary function of local authority facilities and amenities, will nonetheless be a specific and separate service included in the City Council's list of services for the Dublin city.

**"In a sense the ultimate goal of child-friendly urban planning is to turn the playground inside-out. Rather than building play reservations, the job of the child-friendly planner/designer is to remove the fences and gates, and invite children into the public realm beyond, so they can enjoy rich, engaging experiences and encounters with people and places around them."**

(Gill, 2021)

*"Where I live there are not enough trees, hundreds of cars, gas fumes, damage to playground equipment, not enough things to do, I get bored easily."*

(Girl aged 9 years)

*"Survey the children about their thoughts and let the data do the talking."*

(Adult)

*"Where I live is good, community, good school, close to everything, Dolphin Park."*

(Girl aged 9 years)

**"Understanding children's play patterns helps adults appreciate how best to design spaces and support children's play."**

(Lester and Russell, 2008)

## Engagement Focus for Dublin City Council

Adopt and implement the principles of Play Sufficiency Assessments in order to develop a contextual process for Dublin City to assess and further develop play facilities and everyday opportunities for play that includes mapping of formal and informal spaces in the city's parks, playgrounds, green, wild and doorstep and in-between spaces as a network of opportunities for play at city-wide and local neighbourhood level.

Initiate cross and inter-departmental working with relevant city council departments and external partner agencies to explore and identify new and novel ways of implementing actions that will address barriers to play and identify and plan interventions that support the right conditions for play to happen.

Level of contact with nature is indicates the city's response to children's play  
Photo: Dublin City Council





# Case Studies

## Dublin - Outside the Box! Thinking differently about play

During 2012-2016 local residents throughout Dublin City, including children and young people, were involved in developing design plans for the refurbishment of open space in their local areas. The aim of the 'Outside the Box!' project was to improve the lives of children and young people living in Dublin City Council urban and suburban flat complexes and housing estates and those living in the surrounding catchment area.

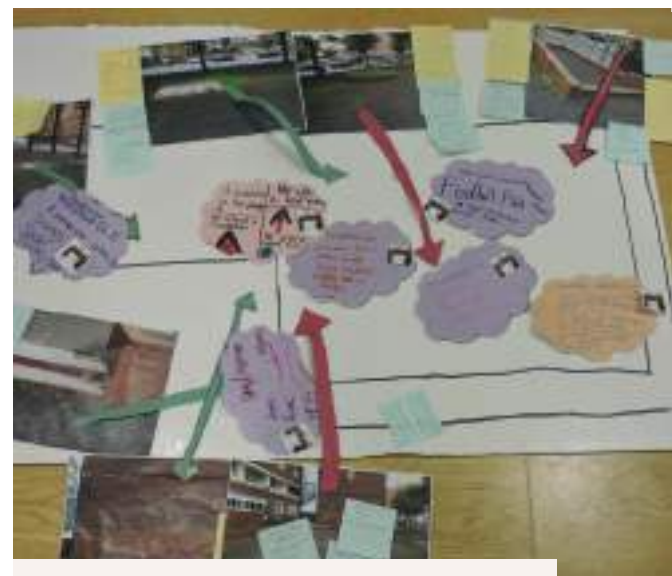
Improving children and young people's lives through play has positive impacts in relation to their overall growth and development and general health and wellbeing. The project involved DCC Play Development working collaboratively with the relevant DCC departments and local communities to think 'outside the box' to develop the basic components to improve and increase the play value of identified sites in their local area. This consultative process involved active research with seven community groups to improve and increase play opportunities in their local area. Across Dublin City seven sites were identified for this initiative and resulted in the following:

- **Bishop Street:** Re-engagement with existing large unsafe open space to create a challenging and interesting play scape that supported street play activities.
- **Poplar Row:** The re-design of this small community play area focused on encouraging street play activities in a challenging small space.

- **St Theresa's Gardens:** Development of a natural playscape and input to design of a temporary play space during the area regeneration project.
- **Mount Brown:** Creative and innovative re-design of existing and challenging sloped landscape to enhance the existing community play space.
- **York St:** Re-imagining and reclaiming of waste ground by developing an open-ended local community play space for imaginative play and street games.
- **Ross Road:** Playground vs. space to play. Re-imagining and redesigning local derelict playground and creating space for everyday play in an urban location.
- **Mount Bernard Park:** Development of natural playground. Landscaping and bespoke play units, willow weaving and traditional playground to facilitate dynamic active play opportunities.

The Outside the Box! play project presented communities with an alternative to standard fixed playgrounds. The project introduced innovative, cost effective solutions to providing daily and/or regular access to inclusive and accessible play experiences within local streets, parks, green spaces, housing and flat complexes.

Initial funding of €15,000 was secured through the Department of Children and Youth Affairs Playground Capital Grant and an additional €15,000 in kind was provided by Dublin City



Children co-creating play spaces for everyday play  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Council. Financial support was also provided through the council's annual discretionary funding. Due to the nature of this project, interdepartmental liaison to confirm various funding and practical support was required as each design was unique to each individual site. The initial amount of €6,000 - €10,000 was allocated to each site/project in order to commence works and realise the potential of proposed local areas for play. This included costs for works, consultation, training and supply of materials and equipment for play. As the programme developed, creative additions evolved in response to children and young people's involvement and engagement in play.

The programme has greatly improved access to play opportunities for local children and young people by redesigning and re-imagining public space. Outside the Box! provided an initiative that can be included within an open space strategy for local authorities and can be used as a template for similar projects throughout Dublin City and countrywide.



Dublin City Play Strategy 2022-2027

Walk n Chalk Workshops NEIC Greening Strategy  
Photo: Dublin City Council

### Dublin - North East Inner City (NEIC) Greening Strategy

As part of the consultation process for the North East Inner City of Dublin (NEIC) Greening Strategy, a diverse group of children and young people were engaged in a series of interactive and participative mapping workshops. This method focused on their current use of outdoor public space and their interests in the potential use of this space for play. The information gleaned from this process was used to inform and influence the design plans for the NEIC Greening Strategy by taking the current play cultures and behaviours of children and young people into consideration. The strategy supports children’s connection with people and place and nurtures a mutual respect.



This process involved ‘Walk & Chalk’ workshops as a geographical study of how children and young people navigate and utilise their outdoor environment for placemaking and most importantly for play. This research determined the extent and content of how local children and young people used outdoor space. It also explored how they experienced levels of independence regarding their movement throughout these spaces in terms of what is currently afforded and what they desire in terms of future design.

### Spatial Stories: An Exploration of Young People’s Everyday Experience of Public Space

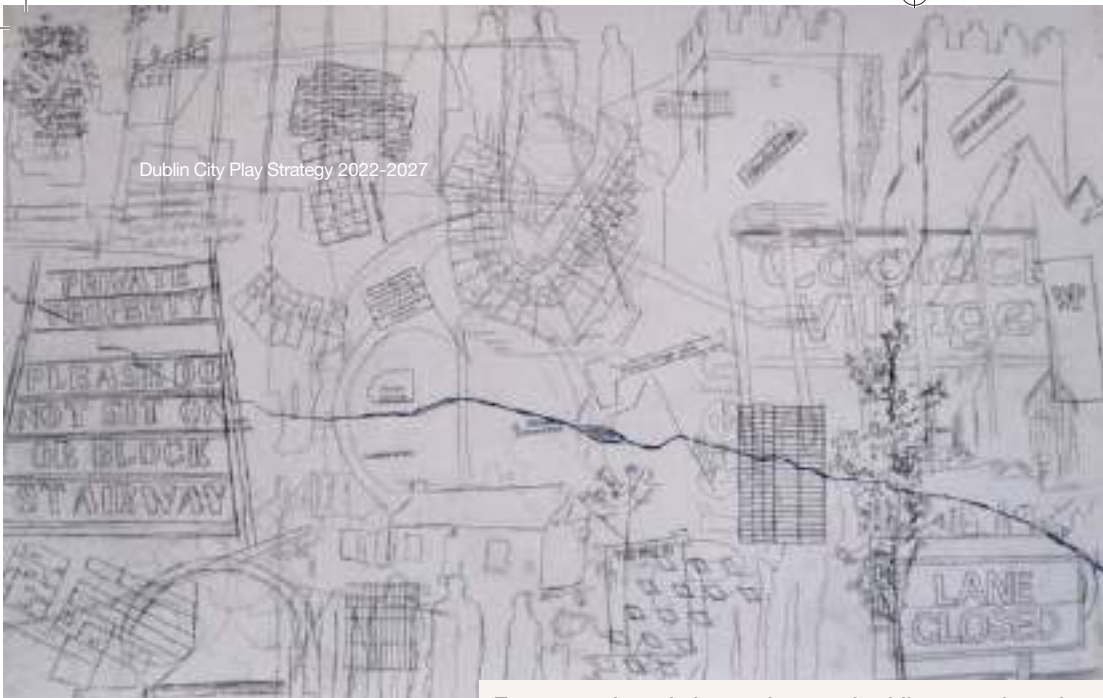
The urban public realm is an important location for teenagers. This is where they meet up with friends to walk to school or the shops, or to wander around and hang out. On these everyday walks young people

develop a sense of identity and of belonging. But public space is a contested space where teenagers often feel unwelcome.

Through an art based project with Jackie Bourke and Dorothy Smith of Creative Urban Mapping, a group of teenagers shared their experiences of public space. Using photography, walking and drawing methods, creative writing, and collaborative drawing they captured the fleeting moments and subtle details which shape their experience. They described it as both welcoming and hostile. They also conveyed an inherent playfulness, an acute awareness of architectural detail, of urban landscaping, of nature and of environmental neglect. Through their work they challenged assumptions about teenagers and shared an important perspective on the urban public realm.

The project evolved over the course of seven workshops at a community space in Stoneybatter, Dublin 7. The participants were Transition Year students at school locally. They began by talking about how they used public space, why it was so important to them and how they felt they were perceived when they were out and about. They talked about the importance of their everyday walks - whether it was to school or just to wander about chatting - as a time when they could be with their friends away from adult imposed structures. But they also discussed the impact of what they felt was a negative perception of teenagers. Their wish to socialize is sometimes misconstrued as anti-social behaviour, and they are moved on. As one participant put it; *“in a group you are seen as threatening, on your own you feel vulnerable.”*

The group spent time walking around Stoneybatter, exploring the



Teenagers share their experiences of public space through arts based project  
Photo: Jackie Bourke/Creative Urban Mapping



built environment and taking time to experience the space. They drew interesting features and details in their notebooks - from birds resting in window boxes to barbed wire topped walls. They were encouraged to look afresh at their home neighbourhoods, photographing places that were important to them, interesting, or challenging. The meanings of these images were discussed. The images formed the basis of collaborative drawings that expressed their individual and collective experiences of public space.

Then they designed posters with statements that challenged

assumptions made about young people such as; 'Please Loiter', 'Dossing Allowed' and 'Teenagers Welcome'. They put these posters up on lampposts around Stoneybatter. The project culminated in an exhibition which was on display in the community space where the workshops took place. Their photography, collaborative drawings and the sketches made on their exploratory walks were all exhibited for the public. An exhibition brochure available to the public included a map - hand drawn by one of the young people - which identified the location of the posters in the local area.

This project enabled young people to explore and communicate their knowledge and experience of public space. Through their work it was clear that their engagement with public space is complex. But they have valuable insights which are of benefit to future urban policy development in the city.

Spatial Stories was developed by Dr. Jackie Bourke, an urban researcher, and Dorothy Smith ARHA, a visual artist. Further information about Jackie and Dorothy, the Spatial Stories project and other creative mapping projects can be found on:

[www.creativeurbanmapping.com](http://www.creativeurbanmapping.com)

### Best practice regarding active and social play for older children/teenagers

Planning for new and upgrading of existing play facilities involves a review

of playground distribution maps, identifying areas of deficit and for the purpose of many current projects, taking on board the concerns of older children/teenagers aged 13 years plus. This cohort of young people have expressed that they generally want a place of their own away from the adult gaze but where they feel safe and can 'hang out' with friends. Provision of age appropriate play opportunities for older children/teenagers is a clear demonstration of Dublin City Council's commitment to creating time and space for older children/teenagers as they often feel they are not included in their community because they are not consulted on the design of play/recreational provisions made for their age group.

The extent and uncertainty of Covid-19 restrictions presented many challenges with regard to ensuring the involvement of children and young people in the design and planning of play facilities. As much as was practicable, engagement with local residents was carried out through online information on DCC Parks Facebook page, DCC website as well as articles in local newsletters and e-zines in addition to providing signage at playgrounds locations where works were due to commence. One of the key issues that came up within these engagements was the provision of play and recreational space and opportunities for older children/teenagers.



Street/free running style physical play units for teens  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Providing informal seating for social interactions  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Fun and challenging play for older children/teenagers at Ringsend Youth Space  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Providing informal seating for social interactions  
Photo: Dublin City Council

## Teenage Kicks at Ringsend Park

The design brief for the Ringsend Senior Play Area at Ringsend Park was based on information gleaned from ongoing consultations with children and young people living within the project catchment area and the results of DCC Citywide Play Strategy Online Consultation Hub 'Have Your Say About Play'.

The design proposal for this particular project involved DCC Play Development Officer meeting (virtually) with students and staff from Ringsend Technical College who had been developing a proposal for the redevelopment of the overall park. The students were encouraged by the successful consultation process of another project close by at Sean Moore Park, and wanted to engage in a similar process for Ringsend Park. The initial aim of the project was to look at the play and recreational facilities for older children/teenagers, but as the project developed, the students have taken into consideration the benefits of a more intergenerational approach that will benefit the wider community. Following on from this DCC Parks & Landscape Services Play Development have facilitated the students to present their

proposal at the 2021 April South East Area Committee Meeting where it was received with great positivity by all city councillors.

Liaising with the students has resulted in ongoing collaboration and identifying similarities in elements of the overall proposal for the park with those within the original design brief for the now completed 'Youth Space'. The upgrading of the Ringsend Senior Playground and additional Senior Play Features throughout Ringsend Park has resulted in the enhancement of the parkland at Ringsend.

The outcome to date has been the 'Youth Space' which includes street workout/ninja warrior, trampolines and informal seating. Also identifying additional elements for inclusion in the design proposal for the overall Ringsend Park Upgrade and Senior Playground Renewal. Surrounded by housing, near Ringsend Village, this park amenity attracts very high use as a central hub for play and intergenerational recreation activities. The site for the 'Youth Space' is located in an area of the park that is safe for users and has visibility within the main expanse of the park to ensure 'soft policing'.

The upgrading of this play facility addresses a deficit in play provision for older children/teenagers at Ringsend. The space successfully:

- Demonstrates acknowledgement and acceptance of the presence older children/teenagers playing and enjoying informal sports and physical activities in their own community and city
- Affords children and young people the freedom, agency and diversity they require to experience play in its most natural form, particularly freedom of choice, which is often missing from current play opportunities
- Prevents segregation and provides children and young people with the scope to learn from each other as well as having the choice to identify times and locations within the space where they can interact with their peers

Going forward, DCC Parks and Play Development have agreed to continue to work with the students and realise as much of their proposal as is practicable. It is also hoped that there will be some collaborative work with Ringsend Technical College and local Youth Groups.



Inspirational street play initiatives  
Photo: Playing Out UK

## Playing Out – Make your street a place to play

The Bristol Playing Out Movement is an excellent model in demonstrating how long term changes can be achieved through humble beginnings and the commitment and willingness of a few well intentioned people.

In 2009 friends and neighbours Alice Ferguson, Amy Rose, Ingrid Skeels and Lucy Colbeck initiated the Bristol Playing Out Movement. They had become increasingly frustrated by their children’s diminishing level of access to outdoor, child-led and locally available opportunities for play. Additionally, there was a general consensus among like-minded residents that due to increased volumes of traffic, both static and moving, busy schedules and negative perceptions of children playing outside, that they generally did not experience the same level of freedom to play outside as they had themselves as children.

This community-led initiative was developed based on a rationale which included the principle that play is vital for children’s physical and emotional development, for their social learning, and as a human right under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (*Playing Out, 2022*).

The simplicity and genius of the Playing Out initiative is beginning slowly, and closing local streets for a few hours so that children can engage in readily available, low-key street play activities such as skipping, chase games, hopscotch, soccer, scooter, cycling or roller-skate, in a safe outdoor environment that is close to home.

The results of Bristol’s initial one off event were transformative. It generated interest and gained momentum and the support of the Bristol local authority. The local authority responded by putting in place the Bristol Temporary Play Street Order (TPSO) which is valid for a 12 month period. Based on the existing street party road closure, the TPSO was developed in collaboration with Playing Out and has been copied by many councils around the UK as a tried and tested policy to provide a clear legal basis and process for other communities and cities to organise their own Playing Out sessions.

Maintaining local ownership is vital in the sustainability of the Playing Out movement. It is now a small not-for-profit national social change organization run on a voluntary basis by parents in Bristol. It is steered by a board of voluntary directors with a wider group of ‘expert friends’ and ‘funders and partners’ to cover core cost of playing out events across the UK. The model has been adopted and implemented in over 80 local authorities by local community activators who are enabling Playing Out events across the UK and internationally with over 20 countries and 36 cities implementing Play Streets based on the Playing Out Model.

The Playing Out movement has also provided resources to help communities resume their play streets to help children and communities recover after lockdown as Covid-19 Restrictions are lifted.

Playing Out is an example of how a community-led initiative can support children and young people’s overall

health happiness and wellbeing through playful change that strengthens community connections, creates a sense of belonging and nurtures mutual respect for people and place through creative and imaginative ways of bringing the ordinary magic of everyday play back onto local streets.

## Regnplatsen – The Rain Playground

Similar to our Irish climate, the rain falls on average every third day in Gothenburg in Sweden where the weather is just as prominent a topic of conversation as it is here in Ireland. In 2018 Gothenburg celebrated the city’s 400 year jubilee. To mark this celebration Renströmsparken Park which is a relatively unknown park located close to the city’s Museum of Art and the Faculty of Arts, was identified by the city’s Municipality as a key location to mark this celebration.

Commonly known as ‘rain man’ Jens Thoms Ivarsson, Creative Director for the Swedish city of Gothenburg, is a designer and artist who spearheaded the Rain Gothenburg Project. Thoms Ivarsson developed his passion for water as Creative Director of Sweden’s Ice Hotel in Jukkasjarvi in 1991, and has worked with German fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld. The rain playground project was designed to mark the city’s jubilee and assist in creating “the best city in the world to live in when it is raining”. Despite initial resistance and concern among city officials, who felt the focus on rain might frighten away tourists, Gothenburg adopted an appreciation of how visitors tend to know how to dress for elements of any kind and funded



Regnplatsen – the Rain Playground,  
A Playground that's even more fun in the rain  
Photo: Irish Examiner

projects such as a “rain playground” where there is better fun to be had when it is lashing and splashing down on a rainfall climbing frame.

Renströmsparken Park was traditionally a popular place, both for play and as a central gathering point. The creative team consisted of Landscape Architects 02Landskap and the two artists Annika Oskarsson and Thomas Nordström. The team worked together to create an imaginative site for children well attuned to the existing landscape of the site. In addition to that, 02Landskap had positive cooperation with the client - the Municipality of Gothenburg.

The aim of the project was to combine the different activities and necessities of the playground with hydrological functions and to realise the artistic proposals. Artists worked with engineers on city storm water management projects, and on rainwater recycling and other initiatives around climate change. An important part of the process was also to find craft-workers, especially blacksmiths, who could realize the artistic drawings.

The playground was designed to be playful even when it's raining.

This resulted in a newly designed “rain playground” which includes sweeping forms that interact with the park in general. The play elements are inspired by different shapes of water; raindrops on a window and “rain that stand as rods on the slope”. The south of the space is framed by plenty of benches for seating. Shelter, in the form of large leaves, offer protection during rainy days as well as shade when it is sunny and also collect rainwater leading to smaller funnels where the water flows further. There are the traditional pieces of equipment such as swings and a slide, as well as an unusual structure - “Spön i backen” - designed to playfully respond to heavy rain. Some of the surface ground is modulated in order to create play-puddles as well as cycling around or through the puddles. The colours and forms of the new playground reflect the time-honoured park to achieve a harmonious but playful expression. The playground also includes the reuse of existing paving stones in new classic patterns, large trees, the old statue, perennials and shrubs and metal fences, all designed with inspiration from classic models with a modern touch which connect to the concept of rain.

Although the playground mainly addresses children, the intention was to create a place that could be enjoyed by people of all ages and “reveal” this hidden gem to the citizens of Gothenburg. The large metal leaves offer a playful way of enjoying your coffee and the hammock by the pond offers a great view for a nap as well as public events such as dance and art projects aimed at brightening up some of the dark, old, rainy months of winter.

More recently the Covid-19 Global Pandemic refocused Gothenburg's approach, but also highlighted the need for more public space.

**“There is a realisation that we have to design cities for humans, not cars. Creating spaces where people can meet safely during a pandemic is a challenge for all cities, but one which can be overcome with pavilions and other structures celebrating the outdoors.”**

*(Jens Thoms Ivarsson interview with Siggins 2021)*

## Splash Pool – Boxhagener Platz

Boxhagener Platz is one of the most important meeting places in the Friedrichshain district of Berlin. A weekly market takes place here on Saturday mornings and on Sundays the square accommodates a weekly flea market, after which people can enjoy brunch in one of the surrounding cafés. However, in the summer families can enjoy an additional attraction at Boxhagener Platz. This public space features the famous ‘Splash Pool with Spray Nozzles’ which is not just a playground, but also a 25 meter x 14 meter splash pool, supplied with fresh water from a spray nozzle. The water is only calf-deep in order to support younger children to play and enjoy this space. This free public play facility is inspired by the four existing bronze penguin sculptures standing on a pedestal in the basin. The children can spray each other or fill their buckets with water whilst their parents/guardians can provide soft supervision as they can view what is happening from the surrounding park benches.



Boxhagener Platz Splashpool in Friedrichshain District  
Public Space, a Boxhagener Playground and Splashpool  
Photo: Top 10 Berlin



# Themed Policy Statements

## 3 Place a key focus on accessible and inclusive opportunities for play for all children and young people

### Fulfilling obligations under General Comment 17 on Article 31 by supporting play for all children and young people requiring particular attention

All children and young people want and need to play. The Dublin City Play Strategy advocates and supports play for all children and young people. A priority action for the strategy is to ensure the provision of accessible and inclusive play facilities, so as to support all children and young people to fully exercise their right to play.

The strategy aims to ensure enriching play opportunities are available to children and young people of all physical and intellectual abilities. The strategy also aims to ensure enriching play opportunities are available to children and young people from all cultural backgrounds, all socio-economic backgrounds and of all gender identification.

Furthermore, in order to fully address inclusivity, it is vital that the Play Strategy demonstrates acceptance and support for children and young people who identify as LGBTQ +. This is to ensure they feel secure and included in all of the policy statements and actions within the Play Strategy. In this way children and young people will feel respected and supported when reflecting on their identity as they develop and learn more about who they are (*Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 2021*).

Consideration is also given to home settings where children may be living with immediate family, are in foster care, in residential care, experiencing homelessness, or coming to Dublin from countries or cities where there are wars, conflict or natural disasters. In short, ensuring equality of access and inclusive play facilities is a priority action for the strategy.

In accordance with General Comment 17 on Article 31, the following groups of children and young people will be given specific attention:

- Girls
- Children living in poverty
- Children with disabilities
- Children in state care
- Children from indigenous and minority communities
- Children coming from situations of conflict, humanitarian and natural disasters

Identifying particular groups of children and young people in this way risks overlooking one or more particular groups or individuals with specific needs in addition to diverse needs within different contexts. But every effort will be made to ensure play is accessible to all children and young people.

The world is constantly changing and evolving, leading at times to new constraints on children's access to everyday play opportunities. This presents a challenge for Dublin in supporting children's right to play



DCC Play Pack Shelter Play Support - Pilot Project  
Photo: Dublin City Council

in a comprehensive and meaningful way, particularly our most vulnerable younger citizens.

Furthermore, costs associated with commercial enterprises can exclude children from families who can't afford to play. This is an infringement of Article 31 as it presents a barrier to play opportunities and excludes some children and young people.

Supporting everyday play opportunities and developing facilities is the responsibility of local authorities. An important guiding principle is to apply the Three F's, in other words, ensuring play is Free of Charge, that children and young people are Free to Come and Go, and that there is Freedom of Choice associated with play.

### Supporting play for children and young people with diverse needs

Dublin City Council recognises that children of all ages and abilities have a right play. In order to ensure equal access to play for all children, provision of play opportunities must reflect a diversity of abilities. This is realised through the promotion and development of accessible and inclusive play experiences for all children and young people.



Inclusive and accessible sand play as part of playground upgrade at Fairview Park  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Great Ormond St Children's Hospital (GOSH) Play/Reflective Garden  
Photo: GOSH

Dublin City Council aims to use the principles of Universal Design to guide the development and enhancement of all public play facilities. Under the Disability Act 2005 Universal Design is defined as the design and composition of an environment so that it may be accessed, understood and used to the greatest possible extent, in the most independent and natural manner possible.

In accordance with Universal Design principals Dublin City Council is committed to designing and planning neighbourhoods and public spaces where children play that are accessible and inclusive. Moreover, it is committed to developing outdoor play facilities that are accessible, inclusive and welcoming to all disabled children living in their local areas (DESSA, 2003).

There are 173,784 children and young people in Ireland with diverse and varying levels of physical, psychological, emotional, intellectual, visual and hearing disabilities (CSO, 2021). These statistics show that disabilities, or at least diagnosis, increases as children get older with significant increases from 5-19 years and early adulthood 20-24 years. This is most evident in the dramatic increase in the number of children and young people aged 5-19 years identified as having 'difficulty in learning, remembering or concentrating' (54,835), an intellectual disability (29,640) and psychological or emotional conditions (28,265).

This presents a solid case for the provision of inclusive play opportunities, particularly given the important developmental, social and health benefits of play. As the highest percentage of children and young people living with a disability reside in Dublin, Dublin City Council is tasked with developing methodologies to assess and provide sufficient access and inclusivity regarding play facilities, services and opportunities to play. It is evident from the varying levels and diversity of disabilities that accessibility and inclusion is not only applicable to wheelchair users. In order to shift the disproportionate focus on this issue the Play Strategy will address diversity across mobility, hyperkinetic issues and neurodiversity. The most obvious response can be achieved through provision of specialist equipment that addresses inclusive play in standard play facilities. However, some of these units are more suited to care settings rather than public use.

Play environments should be adapted and modified to ensure they are accessible and inclusive and that children and young people of all abilities can make choices about their play. They should be able to make choices about where and what they play, and who they play with. This includes choices around whether to play alone or with peers and friends. Applying Play Sufficiency to Universal Design requires further

conceptual refinement to consolidate the importance and future application of Universal Design for Play (UDP) in the design of public playgrounds that promote outdoor play, social participation, and inclusion.

The Play Strategy aims to address this issue by including the level of accessibility and inclusion within proposed Play Sufficiency Assessments. This approach initiates creative use of accessibility and inclusion guidelines applied to public space where playful engagements, recreation and social interactions should be accessible to all (Moore, Boyle & Lynch, 2022). This would involve further research with key stakeholders to explore additional and appropriate inclusive opportunities for play.

### Supporting children living in poverty, experiencing homelessness, from ethnic minority groups and various cultures and those coming from situations of conflict, humanitarian and natural disasters

More than 25% of those living in poverty in Ireland are children (Social Justice Ireland, 2022). As of September 2021, 2,189 children in Ireland were experiencing homelessness. There is also the issue of hidden homelessness whereby children and young people



are temporarily accommodated with friends or family but are living in precarious and unsustainable situations which are not included in official figures (*Barnardos, 2018*).

Furthermore, the unprecedented negative economic impact of the current Global Pandemic has placed additional financial and emotional strain on low-income families. Placing a focus on Ireland's indigenous background, the population of the Irish Traveller Community is 30,987, making up 0.7% of the overall population (*CSO, 2016*). 5,089 members of the Irish Traveller Community live in Dublin.

In 2017 the Traveller Community was formally recognised as an indigenous ethnic group. A study conducted in the same year found the Traveller Community as having a distinctive culture, tradition, shared language and customs that differ from the settled Irish population (*Science Foundation Ireland, 2017*).

This study contributed to the Traveller Community having an official designation as an 'ethnic group,' challenging the view that Travellers needed to be rehabilitated, then forcibly assimilated into the settled Irish population (*Faye & Collins, 2019*).

**"Travellers originated in Ireland, they are genetically different from 'settled' Irish people, to the same degree as people from Spain"**

(*Culture Trip, 2017*)

Additionally there has been a growing increase in the Roma population in Ireland. Estimates place the number of Roma living in Ireland at up to 5,000 people (Pavee Point). Both Traveller and Roma children have been identified as some of the most marginalised children in the state (*Irish Traveller and Roma Children Shadow Report 2015*). Racism and inequality is not always clearly visible, however many members of these communities have had negative experiences through overt, institutional, indirect, hidden or

unwitting racism and discrimination. In a study carried out by the Pavee Point Traveller & Roma Centre, many respondents were concerned for their families, more than for themselves. One man described how his neighbours would not allow their children to play with his children (*Pavee Point Traveller & Roma Centre, 2018*).

Over the past 25 years there has been a significant increase in children and young people whose families moved to Ireland from a variety of Asian, African and East European countries. This is of particular note in the inner city area of Dublin where almost half the population identifies as 'non-Irish' (*CSO 2016*). Many of these families have moved to Ireland by choice. Some, however, have fled conflict and humanitarian disasters and are seeking refuge. The children and young people of these families can benefit from the therapeutic value of play. The therapeutic, healing and rehabilitative nature of play is vital for children in challenging situations as it brings a sense of normality and calm and some joy to children who have been exposed to extreme and emotionally disturbing experiences such as loss, displacement, violence and trauma.

Society has come a long way in terms of discrimination and inequality with much legislation in place to address and resolve these issues. Despite these measures, unfortunately such inequalities still exist. By taking a more broad reaching approach to issues of equality of access and inclusion regarding play, the Dublin City Play Strategy addresses the needs of children and young people of various socio-economic backgrounds, and from various countries of origin. The City Council is particularly keen to support children and young people from indigenous and minority communities, as well as children and young people seeking refuge from conflict situations and humanitarian and natural disasters.

All of these children and young people can face many barriers to play through hostility, assimilation policies, bullying, racism, rejection, violence and

discrimination. Additional constraints are experienced by children and young people regarding engagement in their own cultural practices, rituals and celebrations and access to mainstream and public participation alongside other children in games, sports, play and recreational activities.

It is important to ensure that play opportunities are available to all children and young people who might be experiencing challenging circumstances, and that their right to play is afforded to them.

## The impact of the Covid-19 Global Pandemic

The recent crisis brought on by the Covid-19 Global Pandemic has affected the lives of children and young people all over the world. Now more than ever the right to play has become a prominent issue for children, governments and local authorities as they struggle to resolve this unprecedented disaster. There has been a plethora of information and resources and in particular, social media has been flooded with play ideas such as Tick Tock, Zoom parties and virtual play events and activities. While all of these interventions are well meaning, a lot of what is happening has sensationalised play as a commodity or as a subject for social media opportunities, rather than focusing on the importance and value of self-directed play, especially with peers as a way of socialising and maintaining friendships. Poor access to this type of play has detrimental effects on children and young people's overall health and wellbeing.

This crisis has demonstrated the importance of time and space to play, and being able to play with other children. In particular it has highlighted the importance of children and young people's mental health and developing resilience and flexible responses in dealing with the fear, confusion and uncertainty that this global crisis has presented.

The United Nations Committee on Children's Rights, the World Health Organisation and the International



Hammocks Hangout  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Dublin City Play Strategy 2022-2027

Equality of access for girls and all other gender types  
Photo: Dublin City Council

Play Association have developed and disseminated ‘Play in Crisis’ (IPA, 2020) as a support for parents, carers and children to help them to cope with the constraints to play during this extremely challenging and historical event.

At a national level Ireland responded to this issue by adopting the more holistic approach highlighted by the International Play Association: ‘Play During a Pandemic’ (IPA, 2020). This resulted in the ‘Let’s Play Ireland Initiative’ which takes a whole child approach to providing advice and guidance, toolkits and resources, to support families to navigate and support their children’s play in times of crisis. The initiative involved Dublin City Council in collaboration with local authorities throughout the country and early years and national family support organisations who joined the Department of Children and Youth affairs in developing the ‘Let’s Play Ireland’ initiative which launched in April 2020 as a play resource for each city and county.

Following on from this, Dublin City University conducted a study from which “The Impact of Covid-19 on children’s play and friendships in the

Dublin City Council Area” (Barron, Emmett & Dias, 2021) was extracted. This report was commissioned by Dublin City Council in order to gain more in-depth information on this issue regarding children and young people living in Dublin City Council’s administrative areas.

When asked about any changes in their indoor play behaviours in a survey on young people aged between 10-18 years, respondents reported that they did not experience any significant decreases in any specific play activities. Overall watching television / Netflix and ‘just hanging about’ saw the highest increase in their indoor play related behaviours which can be classified as sedentary activities. When asked a similar question regarding what were the constraints to play and maintaining friendships the unanimous response was; ‘Not being able to see friends face to face’. Parents of children (aged 4-13) and children themselves (10-18) agreed that the most important factors for enabling play was interaction with their friends, rather than public spaces.

The main difficulty identified by parents was a) the reality that children could not meet up with and play with their friends and b) working from home. The loss of opportunities to meet and play with friends, coupled with having to work from home, highlighted for parents the importance for their children of socialising with peers. The difficulty was exacerbated for only children and children with special needs. The results of this study have informed the content of the Dublin City Play Strategy.

In the UK researchers Alison Stenning and Wendy Russell explored play and playfulness at street level. The findings were used to advocate for play at street level and provide an understanding of the connections people were making with their streets during lockdown (Stenning & Russell, 2020).

“Missing school friends- zoom does not work at this age (5 Years) We have been social distancing outside so the kids play in zones but it feels artificial and way too organised and rigid.”  
(Mother, 2020)

“It is usually hard when I meet my friends when me and my family are out for a walk we have to social distance and we don’t really play we just talk’ ”  
(Boy aged 10 Years, Dublin, 2020)

“I can’t play with my friends on our scooters and bikes”  
(Boy aged 10, Dublin)

## Equal opportunities to play for girls

Equality for girls may not seem like an obvious issue for children living in Ireland which is regarded as an egalitarian society with modern attitudes and equal status for women and girls. In some instances, play provision is focused mainly on boys, which can present barriers to play for girls. Awareness raising, information and creative initiatives regarding these issues can assist in improving equality of opportunities to play, socialise and interact with peers to make girls lives more fun and enjoyable. All girls should have equal access to play

opportunities irrespective of their ethnic, religious, or socio-economic backgrounds. Games and toys should be equally available to girls. Gender specific toys can present exclusions to girls. The provision of gender-neutral toys, equipment and materials for play can go some way in addressing this issue.

## MAKE SPACE FOR GIRLS

‘Make Space for Girls’, a UK based charity, examines the issue of gender and access to outdoor opportunities. This involves campaigning for parks and public space to develop designs that include teen girls and as well as teen boys. The initiative also strives to raise awareness of this issue through research and ensuring that the voices of teen girls are heard in the planning process. This initiative has come up with a number of innovate ways to address this issue, for example; better lighting, wider entries into play areas, smaller sub divided sports areas, social seating areas, circular path around perimeter of park, more swings and good quality toilets (*Make Space for Girls, 2021*). The consultation process for the Dublin City Play Strategy included the voices of teen girls and this will continue as an ongoing element of engagement and active research with children and young people to ensure that all voices are listened to and acted upon. However, the challenge will be in addressing various cultures and changing attitudes regarding the promotion, awareness and understanding of the importance of play in the lives of girls as equal to that of boys, and ensuring girls are not excluded from play opportunities.

### Children in care – Dublin/Ireland

Some of our city’s children and young people are growing up in residential care, hospitals, detention centres, direct provision, temporary accommodation and foster care. In 2015 the overall number of children and young people in care with TUSLA Child and Family Agency was 6,384, with the largest proportion of 2,004 living in Dublin (*CSO 2016 & DCYA 2016*). Equal access to quality play environments and opportunities is essential to support children to cope with such difficult living arrangements. The therapeutic nature of play must not be underestimated as a coping mechanism for these situations and therefore detailed attention to supporting play for these children and young people is required to help those who need to ‘play out’ real life scenarios in order to make sense of their lives. This type of play behaviour is often subject to misinterpretation of the child’s actions which is viewed as challenging behaviour rather than seeing the therapeutic benefits of this type of play. This misunderstanding of play behaviours can often cause carers/ foster parents to place constraints to play through fears of safety and concerns regarding their responsibility and accountability for children in their

care. This over cautious approach can result in a ‘risk averse’ approach to play whilst in care. Providing information and awareness of the importance of play and the complexity of play behaviours and the characteristics of play will support those looking after children and young people in care situations to support them to enjoy rich and varied play experiences that involves opportunities for risk and challenge.

### Issues of intersectionality and the creation of a child-friendly and playful city

Within all of the diversity of issues outlined above it is noted that there are tendencies for intersection and overlap of individual issues as they are often interrelated and not just stand-alone issues for children and young people.

It is clear that in order to address these issues in a meaningful way the inter-connections of relevant organisations should be recognised alongside the need for, and benefits of, joined up thinking and collaborative working. This can be experienced through the habitual uses of time and space, particularly in the public realm. As a shared space the public domain is where girls, children and young people of various nationalities, those seeking

Copenhagen Super Garten  
Photo: Torben Eskerod





Newly developed inclusive an accessible swing  
Photo: Landscape Structures



Play Area design developed with and for children living in direct provision  
Photo: Dublin City Council

refuge, living in poverty, or from Roma and Traveller communities, need to feel safe. They have a right to access these places without fear or racist attacks and feelings that they are not accepted and respected or permitted to use public spaces and facilities for play. This issue needs to be challenged and resolved to permeate through all interventions and initiatives that confront equality of access and inclusion regarding opportunities to play.

Observing, talking and listening to stakeholders regarding their use of public facilities and space for play will be vital in assisting local authorities to find solutions for equality of access to rich and varied play experiences. This type of response will be evident within the design, planning and regeneration of the public realm and housing projects.

Play environments that support inclusive and integrated play opportunities are essential in supporting children and young people experiencing various types of hostility. They need to be, and feel, safe, confident and accepted when using play and recreational facilities, services and public spaces. It is the role of government and local authorities to ensure that all play facilities and services are devoid of all prejudices, non-judgemental of different races and cultures and accept and celebrate children of all cultures and nationalities. Local authorities are required to provide a response to this issue by making it a priority across departments.

The Dublin City Play Strategy will strive to ensure that all children and young people living in and visiting Dublin City have equality of access to good quality play experiences.

**“There are emotional effects, not having their own space, falling asleep with parents and in front of the TV, there is an impact on development, many children with inadequate space to play and explore and to do homework. Social development is impacted as these children cannot have friends over to the house and afterschool activities are limited. Parents are stressed trying to manage and parental mental health is impacted which in turn impacts their ability to parent.”**  
(Barnardos, 2018)

**Highlight the creative, social, physical and emotional benefits of play for older children/ teenagers that includes opportunities for risk, challenge and social interaction.**

Dublin has a population of 321,741 children age 18 years and under making up approximately 33% of the overall population of the city. 105,170 of this population are living in Dublin City Council’s administrative area of which 36,781 are aged between 12-18 years of age (Central Statistics Office 2016). Although older children/ teenagers make up the largest proportion of the 0-18 population of children in Dublin, there

## Communications Board

Use these symbols to make choices, share ideas and direct actions during play

what what?	I me	go high	drink cup	stand stand	loud loud	cold cold	slippery slippery	up up	swing swing	home home	yes yes	no no
where where?	you you	see / look see	eat eat	sit sit	tired tired	hot hot	fast fast	down down	slide slide	car park car park	fun fun	again again
when when?	he he	hear / listen hear	stop stop	rest rest	sick sick	scared scared	slow slow	on on	climbing frame climbing frame	toilet toilet	later later	now now
who who?	she she	help help	wait wait	fall fall	happy happy	funny funny	cool cool	off off	see saw see saw	car car	ready ready	turn turn
why why?	they they	talk / speak / say talk	finished finished	run run	sad sad	different different	wet wet	under under	monkey bars monkey bars	gate gate	thank you thank you	sorry sorry
it it	show show	play play	line up line up	angry angry	more more	dirty dirty	beside beside	behind behind	roundabout roundabout	bench bench	I hurt myself I hurt myself	oops oops
best friend best friend	hide and seek hide and seek	chase chase	sign sign	quiet quiet	same same	beside beside	bike bike	scooter scooter				
parents parents	climb climb	push push	walk walk									

a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m
n	o	p	q	r	s	t	u	v	w	x	y	z

1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10

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Finding Charlie's Voice Communication Board  
Photo: Finding Charlie's Voice

are less specific play and recreational opportunities for them than are available for children aged 0-12 years.

Traditionally, local authority play provision consists of standard fixed playgrounds and contemporary play facilities that mainly cater for children aged between 2½ and 12 years. There has been considerable investment in kick-a-bouts and Multi-Use Games Areas (MUGA's) however, they are not distributed evenly across the city. Huge stretches of Dublin with high numbers of young people have few outdoor informal recreation facilities. Additionally, this type of activity is not always the preferred or most suitable choice for older children, who generally want a place of their own and where they can simply 'hang out' with peers. Outside of youth groups/clubs and after school clubs, there is poor provision of informal opportunities for play for older children in Dublin City.

The Dublin City Play Strategy advocates for play and recreation for older children as an important feature in their everyday lives. The key themes and their relevant actions within the Play Strategy are aptly linked to play in local streets and neighbourhoods and within the public realm. Older children on the street are often regarded with suspicion. They are discouraged from using public spaces when simply 'hanging out' with friends.

Members of An Garda Síochána sometimes perceive this behaviour as a breach of Public Order Acts and make assumptions of anti-social behaviour. This can happen regardless of the ethnic background of the young people concerned.

However, the movement "Black Lives Matter" has received a level of attention here in Ireland and Dublin where 'worrying patterns' of racism including institutional racism, appear to be emerging (O'Halloran, 2019). A report by the European Fundamental Rights Agency showed incidents of racism in Ireland were above the European average (Irish Times July 2020).

This issue requires more in-depth discussion and examination, and should be addressed within relevant strategies and policies focused on racial inequalities in Ireland. While acknowledging that teenagers experience racism in Dublin, this strategy is primarily focussed on ensuring spatial justice for all young people. The focus of this policy statement is on promoting positive perceptions of older children as respected and connected members of society.

Within the review of the Dublin City Play Plan it was identified that gaining a more in-depth understanding of play for older children would result in positive changes regarding attitudes and permissions that would support them in accessing sufficient time, space and opportunities for play and social interactions with friends. As this is an ongoing concern, it is highlighted in this strategy which includes relevant policy statements and clear and comprehensive action points to ensure the implementation of sufficient opportunities for play for older children.

As a starting point, it should be acknowledged that although they may not necessarily identify or call it play, older children's use of their free time is often simply 'hanging out', chatting and spending time with friends. Although this type of activity may not usually be perceived or acknowledged as play, it bears many of characteristics associated with playing and is therefore a form of play for older children (Play Wales, 2019).

Supporting young people to hang out requires an acknowledgment of the importance of this activity, understanding how they use the natural and built environment, and providing appropriate facilities. Time, space and permission are key supports for them to engage in play as part of their everyday lives.

In 2004, the National Play Policy 'Ready Steady Play!' (National Children's Offices -NCO) was published. The policy focused mainly on the play needs of

younger children with particular focus on school-aged children. Following on from this, the Office of the Minister for Children published 'Teenspace' – National Recreation Policy for Young People (2007).

Subsequently, the Dublin City Play Plan; Play Here, Play There, Play Everywhere (2012-2017) was launched. Both the national recreation strategy and the DCC play plan identified children as those aged 18 and under. The current National Policy Framework for Children and Young People extends the age group to those aged 24 years and under. For the purpose of this policy statement, this age cohort will be referred to as 'older children' and focus mainly on 18 years and under.

The National Recreation Policy for Young People contains 11 objectives. Those relevant to highlighting awareness and understanding play and recreation in the everyday lives of older children are the following:

- Objective 1:** Give young people a voice in the design, implementation and monitoring of recreation policies and facilities
- Objective 3:** Ensure that the recreational needs of young people are met through the development of youth friendly and safe environments
- Objective 4:** Maximise the range of recreational opportunities available for young people who are marginalised, disadvantaged or who have a disability
- Objective 7:** Improve information on, evaluation and monitoring of recreational provision for young people in Ireland

More than 300 voluntary and statutory regional youth clubs and groups are provided by a variety of organisations across the City of

Dublin. Approximately 185 of these are registered with the City of Dublin Youth Services Board (CDYSB), which has responsibility on behalf of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) for the implementation of National Quality Standards Framework (NQS) and the NVSQ Volunteer-led Youth Groups.

While many of these cater for those aged twelve and upwards, some also cater for children as young as 8 years of age. The usual type of service delivered receives funding for staff and to support building renovation projects. The concept of Playwork Practice or the issue of young people's use of public space is not clearly identified within this sector. However, young people have made their views known through consultation on the development of policy specifically aimed at them. Comhairle na nÓg and Dáil na nÓg have stated that they want improvements in 'recreation' and 'facilities'. Moreover, this did not include sports activities but did include informal public space where they can spend time and socialise with friends.

During the development of the Dublin City Play Plan, those representing older children/teenagers raised concerns regarding the realisation of the broad ambitions relating to older children. This was regarded as a contentious issue requiring radical shifts in societal attitudes and understandings of play for older children. Fears of merely paying lip service were expressed. There were also worries around facilities being 'over policed'. More positive alternatives were identified which involved ongoing dialogue and collaborative working. The aim was to put play on the agenda within youth services, and future policy on young people. The implementation of the actions in this strategy that highlight awareness raising and practical information, alongside physical examples of addressing play for older children, will demonstrate the importance of older children being 'seen and heard' as active and playful members of society.

In order to comply with these policy developments and as a model of good practice, community groups, local authorities, youth organisations, the private sector, and young people themselves, can work together to devise ways of providing sufficient age appropriate play infrastructure. This will ensure that age and developmental stages alongside individual preferences are given equal and careful consideration. This will involve engaging in meaningful and participative consultation with older children/teenagers regarding the location, quantity and design of spaces for play and social interaction. This will include spaces and services that can be available within their local community and within the public realm of Dublin City. This will help address concerns around feeling excluded when there is no local play/recreational provision made for their age group.

General Comment 17 on Article 31; the child's right to play, highlights the issue of play for older children and advocates for them to be included within the play and recreation infrastructure of the cities they live in. Paragraph 'e' of GC17 states:

**(e) Appropriate to the age of the child:**

**Article 31 emphasizes the importance of activities appropriate to the age of the child. In respect of play and recreation, the age of the child must be taken into account in determining the amount of time afforded; the nature of spaces and environments available; forms of stimulation and diversity; the degree of necessary adult oversight and engagement to ensure safety and security. As children grow older, their needs and wants evolve from settings that afford play opportunities to places offering opportunities to socialize, be with peers or be alone. They will also explore progressively more opportunities involving risk-taking and challenge. These experiences are developmentally necessary for adolescents, and contribute to their discovery of identity and belonging.**

*(UNCRC General Comment 17; Article 31 the child's right to play)*

## Negotiating public space – a fair deal for older children/teenagers

Play and recreational opportunities for young people present a valuable alternative to sports participation. There is a growing need for acceptance and understanding of the 'play cultures' of young people. There is a need for increased awareness of how they use open space and recreational facilities within their local community and the public realm. Including the needs of young people in the design and planning of play facilities and public space demonstrates consideration for, and acceptance of, this age group. It supports their need for a sense of belonging in their communities and indicates that they are valued members of society.

To date, Dublin City Council is responsible for approximately 121 playgrounds, of which approximately 67 are located in public parks and publicly available. A further 64 playgrounds are located within DCC housing developments and flat complexes. These facilities provide play opportunities through traditional and contemporary play equipment and for the most part address play provision for children aged approximately 2½-13 years. Teenagers often view engagement with traditional playground equipment as a juvenile pastime, therefore this type of activity is not necessarily the most suitable choice for young people.

It is clear that more informal play and recreational spaces and facilities for young people need to be designed and presented in a format that is attractive and suitable to their age and stage of development. Responding to these issues requires the development and design of playful interventions within the public domain that will support young people physically, mentally and socially. This will place emphasis on two key elements of play provision within the public realm; shared public space and play for young people.

This presents a case for spatial justice in ensuring that conditions are right to facilitate and support young people’s play (Russell, 2019).

Play spaces provided within the public domain can be included as part of the environmental enhancement of a local area or public space based on the concept of shared use. Play spaces should have the potential to be perceived in various ways by potential users. A public play space provides somewhere for young people that is not technically a playground, but includes features that can be used for playful and social interactions. Involving young people in the planning and implementation of this type of initiative recognises their agency and ensures there are youth friendly places and spaces throughout Dublin City.

**“Through Spatial Stories young people mapped out their innate playfulness, an acute awareness of architectural detail, of nature, of environmental neglect and the important role of family and friends in their lives. Through their work they reveal a complex experience of vulnerability, alienation and a sense of belonging in their everyday urban worlds.”**

(Bourke and Smith, 2017)

### Place making, connectivity and young people’s spatial engagement within local streets and neighbourhoods

Supporting play for older children involves a balance of designated and informal shared spaces, design features that provide informal seating, transparency, and reasonable shelter where they can meet and socialise safely - somewhere to “hang out” (Play Wales, 2019). This can be a form of standard fixed play equipment, which can be tied in with informal seating areas. Where possible this can also incorporate challenging play equipment or casual sports facilities such as a Multi- Use Games Area (MUGA), skate and parkour activities for more

physically active opportunities for play. Features such as lighting with a time switch and partial screening help address safety concerns.

Dublin City Council has the potential to provide this type of play infrastructure through the actions identified in the Play Strategy alongside the city’s parks and public realm strategies. Initiatives that have provided opportunities for play and recreation for older children can be found worldwide. As play provision for older children/teenagers is also required in areas that are not designated play areas, consensus from local communities and the public would be vital to ensure the success of playful interventions in public space.

Supporting play for older children requires cross community involvement and an interagency approach. Engagement between relevant youth and community organisations and agencies, play and community officers in the local authority and an Garda Síochána is required. Cooperation among these groups is necessary to secure public engagement and agreement for the successful implementation of all of the following:

- Appropriate planning and public engagement.
- High level involvement of young people through participative research and consultation.
- Locally agreed design and location of the proposed play facilities, places and spaces.
- Securing permissions and public agreement/ ‘buy in’.
- Identifying and securing funding where required.
- Ongoing maintenance, monitoring, reviewing and evaluation of facilities.

This type of support and intervention will go some way towards addressing perceptions of anti-social behaviour associated with young people. Other

supports such as sports and youth clubs and special youth projects, art projects, outreach work, youth cafés and a variety of other special youth projects and interventions are equally important to ensure the needs of young people are met.

*“Hanging out and playing is as important to me as going to the pub and parties and concerts that adults like to go to”*  
(Girl aged 9 years)

*“I grew up in Malahide which fortunately had a lot of areas and clubs. I feel sad for the kids growing up in the area I’m renting in right now.”*  
(Adult)

### Engagement focus for Dublin City Council

Actively support the issue of equal opportunities regarding children’s play by placing particular focus on those marginalised from society through race, ethnic origin, physical and intellectual disabilities or socio-economic backgrounds.

Communities supporting play for older children. Photo: Dublin City Council



# Case Studies

## 'Adventures on the Sea Shore' Sean Moore Park Play Area; involving children and young people in the planning and design of accessible and inclusive play spaces.

Dublin City Council places great importance on involving children and young people in the design and planning of new facilities, and when upgrading existing play facilities to create better places to play.

This helps to create the best play friendly designs possible by including ideas from those who use them the most - children and young people. Therefore, the design for a new play area at Sean Moore Park in Sandymount Dublin was developed with students from two local schools in the area; Scoil Mhuire and Shellybanks Educate Together. The title of this new play area is 'Adventures on the Sea Shore' – aptly titled given it is located beside the sea.

Dublin City Council's Play Development Officer facilitated a series of design and planning workshops which involved site visits and group work where children came up with ideas and the agreed theme for the new play area.

The children were asked to think about how they play and what kind of things they would enjoy in the new playground. Due to time constraints regarding school timetables and planning deadlines, it was not possible to include children from Enable Ireland Primary School for children with diverse needs to fully participate in this process. However, as part of the

design and planning workshops the students involved were also asked to think about play ideas that would help children of all ages and abilities to be able to play together.

The children then worked together to come up with ideas for the space which focused on outdoor adventure, imaginative, fun, challenging and exciting play in nature and by the sea. They provided lots of ideas for inclusive play activities where children would have choices and freedom to create their own games and adventures, and decide for themselves what and where to play. They could also play with friends if they preferred. The group asked for some traditional play equipment such as swings, slides, see-saws and zip lines. The local history inspired ideas for bespoke play units and features that would remind people of the historical seaside location.

Some participants also talked about supporting and respecting the nature they already used for play at this park, which is now included within the new play area. This sparked ideas for forest play, sea life, den making, sensory elements and 'secret' quiet spaces. Ideas also focused on seating and informal spaces to sit, rest, talk or daydream as important things to have in the playground for all children and parents.

In order to manage expectations, respect children's views and ideas and avoid disappointment, it was explained that the size of the space and money for this project would affect the final design. The results of the creative workshops provided a design brief that included a list of ideas, drawings

Building on children's ideas to create accessible, inclusive and exciting play spaces  
Photo: Fennell Photography



and models which were sent on to playground designers to include in the final design proposal.

The playground was designed and built by 'Hawthorn Heights' and included as many of the children's ideas as was practicable and possible. The official opening celebration took place in July 2019. It was attended by all of the children involved in the design and planning process. A special word of thanks and appreciation was expressed to Sandymount Tidy Towns Community Association, the local community group responsible for the initial research and funding which realised the idea of a new playground





Glazer Family Playground at the St Peter Pier sets the stage for an immersive shoreline narrative  
Photo: W Architecture & Landscape Architecture LLC

for Sandymount and Ringsend. The project was supported by Dublin City Council's South East Area office and Dublin City Council Parks and Landscape Services who also project managed the design and build phase of this development and the ongoing management and maintenance of this coastal play facility.

The pupils from Enable Ireland Primary School now visit the Sean Moore park play area on a regular basis and have provided feedback which noted that they were they more than happy to be able to enjoy the play area as it had so much choice and variety of accessible and inclusive play opportunities.

The seaside play tower is a special part of the playground which is now part of the Dublin skyline at Sean Moore Park in Sandymount. It signals fun, challenge, excitement and inclusive opportunities for play, inviting hundreds of children and young people to visit the playground and enjoy endless 'Adventures on the Sea Shore'.

### Glazer Family Playground at St Pete Pier, Florida USA

The marine-themed Glazer Family Playground at the St Pete Pier in Florida is an exciting and whimsical playscape that ties into the context of the pier and nearby coastal creatures. The design evolved through a collaboration with W. Architecture and Landscape Architecture and the City of St Petersburg. It sets the stage for an immersive shoreline narrative. The new pier district is over 3,000 feet (almost 1km) in length and has been in development since 2014. The

pier features a variety of interactive experiences and programs, incredible views and is an important destination for Greater Tampa Bay residents and visitors. The playground is situated mid-way along the pier between the Spa Beach Pavilion and the Pier Plaza and Tilted Lawn.

The playground theme reflects the context of the pier and nearby coastal creatures – it started with the question: "What would newly hatched baby sea turtles see as they move from sand-to-sea?" The story begins in the junior play area, which represents the beach. An overturned sand bucket left by a beach-goer lies beside a curious starfish; a nearby mound with a hill slide and climbing log "drift wood" is a turtle's nest from which baby turtles are making their way to the water. Follow the turtles into the senior area where the shoreline transitions into deeper waters. An osprey's nest log climber is perched by the water's edge and overlooked by a lifeguard tower on a hill. Further into the deep, an immense kraken swirls around a multilevel seaweed tower and a sunken shipwreck.

A system of paths and gathering spaces designed in collaboration with W. Architecture links these spaces together, creating a hub of activity for visitors of all ages and abilities to enjoy. The Glazer Family playground at the St. Pete Pier is a reflection of the city in concept and design intent, and the focus on natural and non-prescriptive play engages children and young people (and adults!) in a unique and creative way as part of this incredible new place making development.

### LE Fanu Skate/ BMX & Play Park

Dublin City Council, the Irish Architecture Foundation, The Matheson Foundation, Ballyfermot Youth Action Project and FamiliBase

"We embarked on a project to build a Play and Skate Park in Ballyfermot through an innovative collaborative People First design process and international design competition co-funded by the Matheson Foundation and Dublin City Council."

(Dublin City Council, 2022)

This initiative commenced in July 2015 and set out to transform the lawns at Le Fanu Park in Ballyfermot into a new play and skate park. In addition, it aimed to provide a much needed space for the Ballyfermot Youth Services BMX club to practice with state-of- the-art skate and BMX facilities.

The project is born out of a shared mission between Dublin City Council Parks, the Irish Architecture Foundation (IAF) and the Matheson Foundation to develop a world class play and skate space in Ballyfermot. The Matheson Foundation in partnership with Dublin City Council generously provided the funding for the project. This partnership funding has forged new and exciting ways for the public and private sector to work together. The completed works involved the provision of a new skateboard bowl consisting of a concrete skate plaza, skate bowls and



Youth & Community led Play Spaces  
Photo: Dublin City Council

skate transition area. The project also included fencing, grass, mounding, pedestrian paths and bicycle stands with the provision of CCTV and public lighting in addition to play areas.

The site in Le Fanu Park was chosen by Dublin City Council in response to the growing need and desire for a free play and skate park in the Ballyfermot area. The site is adjacent to the Ballyfermot Leisure Centre and FamiliBase youth programme and the Play Park initiative is seen as a further extension of these resources.

Ballyfermot is an area of Dublin with a young population, which has been classified as an area of designated disadvantage. The Ballyfermot Youth Services and staff at Outdoorcommunity.ie along with local Councillors in Ballyfermot campaigned for increased investment in public amenities for the area. The focus was on providing high quality activities for the under 25 age group. The community response to the growing upsurge in interest around skateboarding and BMX riding in the area has now been addressed by the development of Le Fanu Skate/BMX & Play Park.

Ballyfermot Youth Service and its young members who are also Skaters and BMX bikers formed part of the jury that selected the final design for this unique project. The international design competition was won by London based interdisciplinary architecture practice Relational Urbanism who worked closely with DCC and the Ballyfermot community to achieve a design outcome that reflects the community's own ideas.

The 'People First' process adopted in the development of this project identified people's needs and aspirations at an early stage of the design process, ensuring a strong sense of shared ownership of the space and enhancing active citizenship. Employing this process in developing the Play Park has emphasised the importance of giving young people a voice in the decisions and processes which affect the way their surroundings are shaped. Communicating all designs and plans to the local community was prioritised at every stage of the project, from initiation to the final opening of the play space.

The project was completed and officially opened in June 2020 and

has been a roaring success despite some initial teething problems and some isolated incidents of anti-social behaviour. The public engagement process that involved the whole community, in particular the key user group - children and young people - has helped to develop and maintain a sense of ownership. This has resulted in the community coming together to form the Ballyfermot Community Action Group who meet each morning and evening for a quick clean-up of the facility. This initiative has gained momentum and involves growing numbers of young people and the wider community which means there is no shortage of volunteers.

The next phase of this project will be the development of a club-house, coffee shop and public toilets - all of which will further enhance this project. The development and long term sustainability of Le Fanu Skate/BMX and Play Park is a direct result of meaningful engagement with local communities, especially the young people themselves who were actively involved in the design and planning process of this excellent public amenity for their local area.

Meeting the needs of the wider community through collaborative projects  
Photo: Irish Architecture Foundation/Dublin City Council



# Themed Policy Statements

## 4 Work in partnership to support schools and early childhood care and education settings to improve and increase child-led play experiences

**“Age Segregation and lack of opportunities for free play add to the forces that work against the development of cooperation, compassion, and nurturance at school”**

*(Gray, 2015)*

The best days of our lives is a term often used to describe children’s time spent in school. However, for many children school can be a daunting and challenging experience, particularly in the initial stages of their education. Children all over the world describe their school break time as their favourite part of the school day. This is when they get to go outside and play with friends. However, from an educator’s perspective, break time can present a number of difficulties with supervision. The ongoing challenge for those responsible for children’s education is to allow the freedom to be physically, mentally and socially active whilst ensuring safety and adequate supervision.

Increased provision in early childhood education has resulted in more than 65% of four year old and almost all five year old children spending a considerable amount of their day in school (*Department of Education and Skills, 2020*). Where play and creating opportunities for time to play is concerned, the school environment is the place where children and young people spend the second greatest amount of their day.

The importance of directed forms of play in a teaching context has been acknowledged for many years but

many teachers and schools have yet to expand the possibilities of play and soft learning from the classroom to the break time situation, and from early years to older children. Research carried out in 2018 on ‘Outdoor Classroom Day’ found that 97% of teachers globally believed that time to play outdoors is critical for children to reach their full potential (*Persil, 2018*). Schools have a very significant role in developing play provision. Research shows a clear link between children enjoying their time at school and definable educational outcomes: where children enjoy school, their attendance levels are higher, their attainment is greater, and behavioural problems are fewer (*OPAL, 2021*).

Under Department of Education regulations (Primary Circular 11/95 ‘Time in School’) school going children must have a minimum of 40 minutes of break-time, which is usually divided into 10 minutes in the morning and 30 minutes at lunchtime. These break times equate to between 12% and 15% of the school day. The UK school system allows around 22% of the school day for break-time, and in Scandinavian countries, it is more likely to be 30% of the day (*Armitage, 2005*). In research conducted in 2008 for the Dublin City play audit, Marc Armitage reported that most schools believe that they were meeting statutory requirements regarding break times. Schools believe that there is no choice to allocate any additional break-time when in fact the regulation refers to an advised minimum. There was also a lack of clarity among teachers and school principals about the purpose of school break-time. Despite this

however, children were very clear that the reason for break-time was for play and being with their friends. Education writer and advisor Sir Ken Robinson advocated for the importance of play during the school day as essential to children’s overall growth, development and wellbeing and therefore playtime in school is central and not a waste of time (*TES News, 2016*).

In terms of exploring ways to improve children and young people’s play opportunities in an educational setting, schools welcome any kind of initiative that is of assistance. Developing school environments for play requires the commitment of school boards of management to adopt a “whole child” approach. Using this approach, schools promote development and wellbeing. By adopting this approach, primary and second level schools can respond to children and young people’s indoor and outdoor opportunities to play by providing rich play experiences and environments during the school break time which results in better behaviour and improved concentration afterwards (*Armitage, 2005*).

The whole child approach also requires consultation with children. Implementing a consultative process to move forward with this type of initiative requires the ongoing involvement of school staff including school principals, teachers, special needs assistants, school caretakers, parents and the children and young people themselves.

One of the challenges is for schools to implement initiatives that enrich play opportunities in the school environment. This requires supporting

children’s natural instincts to educate themselves by enabling more freedom, time and safe enough environments for play and exploration as well as access to tools, ideas and other children that can help learn and understand the world they live in through their interest and joy of playing (Gray, 2013).

In the past Dublin City Council has engaged in collaborative projects that place a focus on supporting schools to facilitate play as a rights based issue for children and young people. This places particular emphasises on unstructured, self-directed play as part of the school day.

**“Education is an admirable thing, but it is well to remember from time to time that nothing that is worth knowing can be taught.”**

*(Oscar Wilde, 1856-1900)*

## The importance of play in Primary and Second Level Schools

There has been an increased focus on play as the way children learn in early years. Most children of school going age spend a significant amount of their time within a school setting. Play assists children in adjusting to the school environment where playground games are equally important to learning. Break-time has been described as the ‘extended classroom’ in which children can learn important social skills (Pellegrini, Kato, Blatchford & Baines, 2002).

Children are walking to and from school less and less, so the school playground is increasingly important both for exercise and as a venue to develop friendships and peer interaction. At the beginning of the school year, play is the shared interest that assists children to get to know each other. School break-time also provides respite from the cognitive demands of the classroom, it has been known to improve children’s attentive

capacity (Dublin City Council, 2008). The investment in improving and increasing play opportunities in the school environment will be of benefit to all pupils, their parents and staff. The successful implementation of this type of initiative requires action-based, result-focused measures. Moreover, this type of intervention will provide schools with a specific methodology for adopting a holistic approach in working together to address all issues related to play. Embedding support to improve and increase play opportunities in schools is a positive measure in implementing best practice within school structures. This will result in providing the following benefits:

- Enhance children and young people’s experience of the school day and support and extend play opportunities and experiences that assist in developing strong and stable relationships with their peers
- Support children in developing resilience, social skills, flexible responses and a sense of empathy through increased and varied interactions with their peers
- Increase in school attendance
- Improve attainment
- Reduce accidents and incidents in the school playground
- Reduce incidents of bullying

**“We create happier playtimes, better play spaces and enable staff to support outdoor learning”**

*(OPAL, 2021)*

## School environments that support play

The approach to play provision for both primary and second level schools is the same. The type of activities desired by each age group may be different, for example older children may not consider their school break-time activities as ‘play’, as they are more

inclined to pass the time engaging in more sedentary activities such as socialising, chatting and listening to music. It is helpful to talk to children and young people and include their opinions and ideas in creating school environments that support play. This affords children and young people the experience of working alongside their parents and teachers and it affords a chance to experience the ‘fun’ and more informal side of school life.

Taking an international perspective, the International School Grounds Alliance (2017) developed the Risk in Play & Learning Declaration which is also known as the Ubud-Höör Declaration. This declaration is endorsed by all 54 members of ISGA’s leadership council. The Declaration is based on global research on risk benefit and encourages decision makers, parents, schools, legislators and insurers to devise policies and processes that permit schools to include activities with beneficial levels of risk (ISGA).

**“Since the world is full of risks, children need to learn to recognise and respond to them in order to protect themselves and to develop their own risk assessment capabilities.”**

*(International School Grounds Alliance, 2017)*

The consultation process for developing school grounds requires the adoption of a specific methodology that is appropriate to the age, stage and ability of individual children and young people. A key principle regarding this type of initiative is to keep costs to a minimum, as the main objective is to build on existing resources, address current permissions and attitudes to the use of existing spaces, improve and increase play opportunities as opposed to developing facilities such as elaborate and expensive fixed play equipment.

## Play-friendly Schools Initiatives

This type of initiative involves placing the emphasis on materials, attitudes and permissions rather than standard play equipment. Pilot projects have been trialled in twelve north central locations in Dublin and one city centre location at Warrenmount Primary School. These pilot projects resulted in a school playground development template. Further work and research is needed to develop a toolkit that can be adopted and adapted to each

individual school context. Local ‘buy in’ is required, in order to successfully implement this type of intervention such as assisting in carrying out some of the works involved. This can be identified through liaison workers and support from local resources such as environmental sustainability organizations, community employment schemes and DCC Parks & Landscape Services.

A key element of this type of initiative is involving children and young people in decision-making and supporting their

creativity with regard to their views, suggestions and ideas. Supporting this type of intervention demonstrates Dublin City Council’s commitment to all aspects of childhood including the improvement of children and young people’s play experiences in the school environment.

Building on this pilot will lead to formalising a process for the development of play friendly environments in schools. An example of this is provided by the EU Play Friendly Schools initiative (2018). This is a comprehensive programme which provides information and resources for schools to develop play friendly environments. This involves schools meeting with a detailed set of criteria to achieve a Play Friendly Schools Label (developed by Outdoor Play and Learning UK, 2021) and further support in achieving this is provided by the inclusion of a specific Playwork training course for staff.

Play Scotland has developed a tool kit for schools play based on the work of play theorist Bob Hughes. This toolkit features the play types identified by Hughes in the 2006 publication of ‘Playtypes – Speculations. The toolkit conveys the importance of facilitating each of the play types during school play times as each one is distinctly and subtly different from the other and of equal importance. Engaging in each one is a necessary component for a child’s healthy development (Hughes 2006).



Dublin City Council School Zones  
Photo: Fennell Photography



**“Moyle (1989), demonstrated that for every aspect of children’s development, there is a form of play. In combination, all of them support aspects of physical, intellectual and social-emotional growth and therefore a balance of experience of each of these types of play is beneficial to children.”**  
(Casey and Scott-Mckie, 2014)

## Potential of school grounds as community play spaces

While there may be compelling reasons for school managements to discourage freedom of access to their grounds, there are equally compelling reasons for school grounds to be made more accessible for play and recreation purposes. Perhaps their concerns could be eased by support from the community or other agencies. Children play all the time and everywhere. In densely built urban areas where open space is at a premium, the local school grounds could provide a valuable open space for children and young people to use after school hours. Schools should be encouraged to make their yards or play areas more playful and child-friendly with the addition of simple items that would encourage free play like loose materials, interesting landscaping, planting for the senses, division of spaces and seating areas.

Schools may have little access to funding and have concerns over safety issues, but allowing children the freedom to be physically, socially and mentally active will pay off in rewards in the classroom.

To date, there has not been enough emphasis on the value of free play in the training of primary teachers in Ireland. The introduction of sessions on the subject would be a positive asset to student teachers.

The development of playful schools can also include providing safe access to schools. The walking or cycling journey to school is also a valuable time for talking and socialising, sensing nature, gaining independence and problem solving, and staying healthy generally (Mckee, Mutrie, Crawford & Green, 2007). This issue can be addressed through the 'Schools Streets' initiative where cars are not allowed at the school gates. The Schools Streets Initiative was first introduced in Italy in 1989 and since then has gained momentum at an international level. This initiative involves the provision of temporary

restrictions on motorised traffic on a road outside a school during school drop off and pick up times. It offers practical solutions for school communities to tackle air pollution, poor health and traffic danger and supports and encourages healthier lifestyles through increasing active travel to and from school. The initiative provides information, guidance and resources to encourage and empower local communities who want to see School Street Schemes implemented. For example, a key support regarding the implementation of School Streets in the UK is that Local Authorities have powers under the Roads Traffic Regulation Act 1984 (S1 and S6-9) to regulate traffic and restrict access based on specific criteria which are linked to children's journeys and access to schools during drop off and pick up times.

Closer to home Dublin City Council in collaboration with the National Transport Authority and Green Schools have launched the 'School Zones' initiative in a number of schools in Dublin City. The opportunity to implement this initiative was brought about during the Global Covid-19 Pandemic where the City Council responded to the subsequent lockdown and restrictions by providing additional space for walking and cycling. This approach involves encouragement and promotion and although it does not include traffic restrictions it does retain a focus on making a positive impact on children's safety and mobility during school drop off and pick up times through the design of physical intervention such as bollards and road markings. These measures suggest priority to students at the school gate by freeing up footpaths, reducing vehicle drop offs, pick-ups and idling and encourages active travel (walking and cycling) to and from school.

The 'School Zones' are currently being implemented on an ongoing basis through an application and assessment process managed by Dublin City Council.

## Promote and support the value and importance of outdoor, unstructured self-directed play in early childhood education and childcare settings.

The role of play in early childhood is significant. Through play young children develop their social, physical and cognitive abilities. Play is key to a healthy early childhood experience (Pellegrini, 2009). Today, it is quite common for both parents to work outside the home on a full or part-time basis. Many parents, even if not working outside the home, choose to send their children to early childhood



Developing resilience and flexibility  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Self Directed Play in Early Years  
Education and Care Settings  
Photo: Dublin City Council

education and care settings from around two and a half years of age. This is based on research which shows that early years education programmes support the growth and development of very young children. Some early years settings place a focus on academic developmental targets and formal learning. This limits free play opportunities.

Neuroscientific research has tracked the impact of children's experiences on their brain structure and ability to learn as they grow and develop. From birth, there is an upsurge in the growth of nerves, neural pathways, and their connections that becomes even more apparent from two years and onwards through to adolescence. Up to the age of five years, there is a major increase in the growth of cells and synapses. In response to the environment, the brain goes through a number of chemical changes which impact on brain plasticity and flexibility. Some theorists claim that environments rich in stimuli will have a positive effect on brain development. Many theorists take the view that play is how babies and young children find stimulus for healthy brain development and poor environments for play behaviour have detrimental effects on achieving the full potential of brain development.

There are conflicting and complimentary arguments and perspectives on the role and value of play in children's lives. But it is important that the value of play in early childhood is recognised, and that parents, carers and educators have the necessary information to ensure the provision of rich and varied play opportunities which support the healthy growth and development of the very young children in their care. The challenge for providers is in planning and organising indoor and outdoor space for self-directed play that is safe and maximises opportunities that encourage exploration, more play and supports their overall development (*Donoghue & Gaynor, 2003*).

### Providing 'good' play environments in early childhood education and childcare settings

National guidelines and regulations for early childhood education and care settings identify the need for adequate and suitable facilities for a pre-school child to play indoors and outdoors. Early years advocates argue that; "Operating a childcare facility without the inclusion of an outdoor play area is unthinkable" (*NCNA, 2002*).

There is a growing awareness and acknowledgement that self-directed play, experienced simply for the joy of playing, supports child development. In order for play to happen spontaneously, the right conditions need to be provided. Additionally, consideration of all relevant Health and Safety Guidelines are required when developing outdoor play space.

An extensive amount of development has occurred within early childhood education and childcare settings in providing high quality indoor and outdoor space for play that supports children's overall growth and development. Existing and newly developed settings can benefit from the guiding principles of Play Sufficiency to ensure interesting, challenging and varied play opportunities and access to outdoor natural landscapes. Rich play environments both indoors and outdoors will improve and increase play opportunities and provide positive long and short-term impacts for children, parents/carers and service providers. With regard to aspects of learning considered important for 'school readiness' research evidence has shown that this is best nurtured through a playful, rather than formal teaching approach (*O'Sullivan & Ring, 2018*).

Adopting a play-led approach within early childhood education and care settings requires inter-disciplinary practice in order to facilitate high quality environments for play. Being guided by the principles of Playwork



Play supports development of skills to adapt and experiment with environmental hostilities  
Photo: Dublin City Council

Practice and adopting the principle of Play Sufficiency will support the development of high quality play facilities in early years settings.

High quality early years play includes opportunities to play with other children, to play in natural landscapes including flora and fauna, to play with equipment and materials that facilitate informal and 'loose parts' play, challenging and risky play experiences, playing with identity, movement support for development of fine and gross motor skills, rough and tumble play and play that stimulates the senses (*Play Wales, 2015*).

### Adult roles, practice frameworks and the positive impacts of early childhood policy, legislation and initiatives

Babies and very young children need secure, strong relationships with their immediate carers as a vital part of their emotional development and disposition. The benefits for young children in having secure and safe relationships with parents, carers, providers and educators are fundamental to creating a 'realm of understanding' in the play exchanges between child and adult (*Brown, 2003*).

This creates a secure environment where children tend to be more outgoing, test behaviour, predict reactions, explore cause and effect and engage in complex play with other children (Santer, Griffiths & Goodall, 2007).

**“Individual Stakeholders need to understand the importance and value of play and ensure that it is incorporated into children’s daily lives; Play in Childcare and Early Education can include indoor and outdoor environment thus giving young children time, space and resources to ‘play freely’ without the influence of adult led structured and outcomes based activities.”**

(Santer, Griffiths and Goodall, 2007)

Current practice frameworks for early childhood education and care settings include principles and values that

support and extend children’s play. The action points within this Play Strategy in relation to early childhood suggest consideration of adopting an alternative approach through the inclusion of Playwork Practice within the training curriculums and operational practices of early years settings.

A play-led approach assists in enhancing the development of playful adult-child relationships and developing ‘good’ play environments that are rich in stimuli to support children’s overall development and wellbeing. This approach supports providers in gaining a deeper understanding of the benefits of facilitating self-directed unstructured play that supports children’s natural curiosity to explore their worlds, test boundaries, assess risks and develop resilience, in their own way and at their own pace.

Aistear is the early childhood curriculum framework for children from birth to six years in Ireland. The Aistear framework contains four interconnected themes:

1. Wellbeing
2. Identity and Belonging
3. Communicating
4. Exploring and Thinking

Aistear also provides resources and supports linked to these themes, which place a focus on learning and developing through play. Play is acknowledged as the most important context for children’s learning and development (Aistear, 2009). Aistear takes the position of exploring ways in which play is supported alongside ensuring that early years settings meet the requirements for quality assessments through the provision of rich play experiences and environments.



Self Directed Play in Early Years Education and Care Settings  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Additional policies and strategies have had positive influences on the quality and standards for early years settings. Guidelines and information on best practice can be found in the National Childcare Nurseries Association ‘We like this place’ (NCNA, 2005), Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People (DCYA, 2014), Early Childhood Ireland Play Curriculum (ECI, 2016) and the National Play Policy ‘Ready, Steady, Play’ (National Children’s Office 2004-2008).

The Síolta guidelines produced by the National Quality Framework for early Childhood Education (Síolta, 2007) provide guidelines on quality indicators for early years practitioners and childminders. An emphasis on play is highlighted as critical for the physical and emotional wellbeing of very young children and central to their overall development. Síolta ensures the regulation of quality standards within early childhood education and care settings. From a play perspective, Síolta states that:



**“Promoting play requires that each child has ample time to engage in freely available and accessible, developmentally appropriate and well-resourced opportunities for exploration, creativity, ‘meaning making’ in the company of other children, with participating and supportive adults and alone where appropriate.”**

*(Sólta, 2006)*

### Shared themes for the Play Strategy and early childhood education and care

The provision of outdoor play space is an ongoing issue and challenge facing early childhood education and care practitioners. For the older child in a childcare situation, the need to scaffold more boisterous ‘rough and tumble’ play that supports self-regulation, affirmation of relationships and the need for more dynamic challenging and physical play outdoors is essential.

As skilled facilitators, early childhood practitioners understand the need for young children to have time, space and materials for play and the freedom for this to happen within a child-led, unstructured environment. This includes freedom of choice regarding indoor and outdoor environments. During observations of his own children David Cohen noted that as early as 9 months, his infant son had shown instances of leading the action to create games with his older brother *(Cohen, 2006)*.

Many children under four years of age spend a large proportion of their day in educational or childcare settings. This presents challenges for providers to facilitate child-to-child contexts of play

that involves self and peer scaffolding and child-initiated play. Hayes and Filipovic (2018) recognise and encourage a move towards a pedagogy that is child sensitive, less patronising and more respectful of children’s own role in their early development. Otherwise, the value of and necessity for, the everyday playful elements of quality early education are lost *(Hayes & Filipovic, 2018)*.

The Dublin City Play Strategy presents arguments and action points that support the concept and theory of a ‘play-led’ approach that focuses on giving priority to self-directed unstructured play and the use of open-ended materials and equipment that facilitate freely chosen, intrinsically motivated and personally directed play. In this way, the service provider is required to observe and record learning outcomes as opposed to providing organised activities aimed at achieving specific learning outcomes. This approach requires planning and fits well with outdoor play provision and the early childhood education and care curriculum.

During early childhood, playing is an important part of the day for very young children, especially when being cared for by someone other than their parents or guardians or other family

members. In the context of education and care settings, young children should be afforded play experiences that involve freedom of choice regarding where, what and when they play and who they play with.

**“I have never let my school age interfere with my education.”**

*(Mark Twain, as quoted in Britannica, 2022)*

*“Green outside my school.”*  
*(Girl aged 8 years)*

### Engagement Focus for Dublin City Council

Include the matter of “Play in Schools” as part of the Dublin City Play Strategy and develop actions points that will support the implementation of this type of initiative. Moreover, liaise with Education Boards to promote the importance of the play as a key element of the school day.

Respond to the obligations within General Comment 17 to fulfil paragraph 1 and paragraph 2 of Article 31 within early childhood education and childcare settings.



Self Directed Play in Early Years Education and Care Settings  
Photo: Snapshot Photography



Pretend moments that reflect and evolve from real life situations  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Imagine if I was a Viking Princess  
Photo: Dublin City Council

# Case Studies

## EU Play Friendly Schools

The European Union Play Friendly Schools initiative offers two good arguments why schools should think about a play-friendly school environment:

- Governments who have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child have a duty to recognise, respect and promote children’s right to play, and this includes in school
- A play-friendly school is one where children are more likely to be happy, settled, in good mental and physical health, and open to learning; in other words, making time and space for play in the school day helps rather than hinders children’s education

Furthermore the publication of General Comment 17 on Article 31 specifically states that schools have a major role to play, including through the provision of outdoor and indoor spaces that afford opportunities for all forms of playing and for all children, and that the structure of the school day should allow sufficient time and space for play.

The Play Friendly Schools Project which includes a set of five criteria for evaluation and assessment of the school play environment, were developed by the Children’s Access to Play in Schools Consortium (CAPS) which was set up in 2018 and is made up of six EU Partner countries; with the United Kingdom as the lead partner (now left the EU) alongside Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia.

**“In a play-friendly school, play is recognised, valued and supported in all its forms and across all of school life. This includes providing dedicated times and spaces for playing, and, where appropriate, making use of playful pedagogies as well as valuing and working with playful moments that may erupt in the course of everyday school life”**  
(CAPS, 2018)

The EU Play Friendly Schools initiative provides information and resources for schools to develop play friendly environments. This is achieved by schools meeting with the detailed set of criteria to achieve a Play Friendly Schools Label and a training course for staff. The criteria were drawn from the experience of the UK based Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL, 2021) which is a mentor supported schools improvement programme. The aim of the programme is to develop a whole school culture that supports play and the measures involved to provide sufficient time and adequate space and materials for play to happen. The implementation of the programme focuses on two UK models to introduce better opportunities for playing in schools; Outdoor Play and Learning Programme (OPAL) and Playwork Practice and Principles.

The assessment and evaluation document includes the following set of five Quality Criteria:

**Quality Criterion 1:** The school has a leadership structure that supports children’s play



North West Dublin Schools receiving award and sharing plans and ideas for school playgrounds at the Ombudsman for Children’s Office  
Photo: Dublin City Council



**Quality Criterion 2:** The school has written a statement on how it supports play

**Quality Criterion 3:** Children have sufficient time for play

**Quality Criterion 4:** Children have sufficient space for playing

**Quality Criterion 5:** The school culture supports children’s play

The Play Friendly Schools Label includes three levels of awards; Bronze for getting started, Silver if a school is working towards play friendliness and Gold for further review and evaluation of ongoing work to support play.

The partner countries of the CAPS project carried out research and implementation work aimed at supporting schools to become more play-friendly. The overall project has involved desk based research in each partner country to understand national schools system, stakeholder and other relevant influence factors, a study trip to the UK to learn about the UK OPAL Programme and field research within each partner country. The outcomes of the programme included the



Dublin City Play Strategy 2022-2027



North West Dublin Schools receiving award and sharing plans and ideas for school playgrounds at the Ombudsman for Children's Office  
Photo: Dublin City Council



School boards of management adopted a “whole child” approach wherein each School Principal agreed to undertake consultation and engagement. Participating in this type of project demonstrated the schools acknowledgement of the concept of play and its importance in the lives of children and young people. The programme was successfully implemented in ten primary schools and two second level schools in the Ballymun area.

The Ballymun School Playground Improvement Programme has resulted in the development and implementation of school playground development plans unique to each of the 12 schools involved in this project. The regeneration programme in Ballymun provided the opportunity for this pilot project to take place. The main costs for the programme were in relation to consultants’ fees and equipment required when the action plans were implemented. Additional funding was secured through the RAPID Dormant Accounts Fund.

development of respective National Adaptation Plans that will assist in reaching the aim of the project to work towards and achieve Play-Friendly School environments and labels. The final outcome of the project was the publication of a number of documents which are currently available online; ‘Transnational Summary of Desk and Field Research’, ‘National Desk Research’ for each partner country, ‘National Field Research’ and ‘National Adaptation Plans’.

### Dublin - Ballymun School Playground Improvement Programme

In 2008 Ballymun Regeneration Ltd implemented the ‘Ballymun School Playground Improvement Programme’. This initiative was in response to and in compliance with recommendations and actions included in the National Play Policy; ‘Ready, Steady, Play’ (2004). The programme was adopted by schools to address the difficulty of balancing play freedoms and school safety regulations.

Schools sought positive and innovative ways to address this concern.

Marc Armitage, an independent play consultant (Mularkey) was engaged to work with BRL Play Development Officer and deliver the “Ballymun School Playground Improvement Programme”. This involved a high level of school engagement wherein 12 schools in Ballymun developed the skills to produce a school playground development plan that saw the creation of additional and alternative play opportunities to those currently available. The programme received a participation certificate as part of the Ombudsman for Children Connecting Communities Award. The assessment panel for the programme noted the high level of involvement by children and young people in both the decision-making and design of the project. Subsequently the children were invited to visit the office of the Ombudsman for Children’s Office to present their project.

The project was featured in Play Ireland Magazine and BRL newsletter and was promoted through the Dublin City Play Plan and Súgradh (National Play Organisations Network). The success of the project has been regarded as a model of best practice, providing a template that can be used for school playgrounds at regional and national level.

Completing the Ballymun School Playground Improvement Programme has resulted in positive play experiences in all 12 schools in Ballymun. This type of intervention has had equally positive effects on the use of new and existing public play facilities where children and young people play in their own neighbourhoods after school hours.

There is a need to rethink how play and learning can be better facilitated within the schools outdoor environment. The Ballymun School Playground Improvement Programme offers a model for future outdoor play improvements in schools. Adopting the concept provided by the EU Play Friendly Schools initiative and working in collaboration with Dublin City Council Play Development and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DECDIY) will support further changes. This will involve completing the review of the work these schools have done thus far in order to develop a Play Friendly Schools Label which can be used as a template for all.



Dublin School Playground project focused on improving and increasing play opportunities in schools  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Dublin City Play Strategy 2022-2027

## Early Childhood Ireland – Encouraging Outdoor Play Experiences

Promoting outdoor play experiences is a key part of the work of Early Childhood Ireland (ECI). Based on sound and up to date research and knowledge, ECI are dedicated to promoting and developing quality environments in early years settings. This is based on the strong belief that children are happiest and at their most vital and energetic when they play (ECI). Evidence based neuroscientific research regarding the overall benefits of child-led play, particularly outdoors, confirms the power of play for brain development (ECI). Self-directed open ended opportunities for play support children in developing skills related to a multiplicity of tasks such as relationships, activities, problem solving, respecting other people’s ideas, negotiation skills, making friendships and developing empathy. ECI have also adopted play as central to the Early Childhood Curriculum.

Both **Aistear**, The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework, and **Síolta**, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education state that play is vital in achieving the most important outcomes for early childhood.

ECI provide a wealth of information and resources to assist parents/guardians and those working in early childhood education and care settings to support and facilitate play. This rich resource promotes the outdoors as one of the best learning environments for young children as it provides opportunities to explore, experience and make meaning of the natural world. ECI provide information on the following:

- Encouraging Outdoor Play Experiences

- Developing an Outdoor Play Policy
- Risk Assessment (the importance of including ‘risk’ in play)
- Outdoor Environment
- Ideas for Outdoor Play

One of the challenges in facilitating outdoor play is often just getting started. Providing a resource to initiate this process helps encourage and enable staff in early childhood education and care settings to develop a culture of outdoor play that they can adopt and adapt to suit their individual settings.

**“The most important part of successful outdoor provision is a team of committed and enthusiastic adults – your staff – who fully appreciate what the outdoors offers, who are dedicated to getting very young children outdoors for significant amounts of time, every day, throughout the year, and who overcome the barriers or limitations in their setting. They enjoy being outside with these children, striving to understand what they are doing and how they are benefiting from being there, and taking pleasure in being with them on this fabulous journey of discovery”**

(Early Childhood Ireland, 2022)

**“Adequate time during the school day for play and rest; a curriculum which includes cultural and artistic activities; and a pedagogy which offers active, playful and participatory activities and learning.”**

(UNCRC General Comment 17 Article 31)



DCC play events supporting self-directed play for younger children  
Photo: Dublin City Council



# Themed Policy Statements

## 5 Support children and young people to fully exercise their right to play by providing ease of access to engage in cultural life and the arts

### Supporting and responding to paragraph 2 Article 31 regarding equality and ease of access to engage in cultural life and the arts

In 2013 the United Nations adopted General Comment 17(GC17) on Article 31, which sets out in detail the obligations for states parties. The comment notes obligations for states parties that are specific to paragraph two of Article 31, which refers to ensuring children and young people participate fully in cultural and artistic life:

**“The committee endorses the view that it is through cultural life and the arts that children and their communities express their specific identity and the meaning they give to their existence, and build their world view representing their encounter with external forces affecting their lives. Cultural and artistic expression is articulated and enjoyed in the home, school, streets and public spaces, as well as through dance, festivals, crafts, ceremonies, rituals, theatre, literature music, cinema, exhibitions, film, digital platforms and video. Culture derives from the community as a whole: no child should be denied access to either its creation or to its benefits. Cultural life emerges from within the culture and community, rather than imposed from above, with the role of states being to serve as facilitators not suppliers.”**

*(UNCRC GC17 Article 31; the child’s right to play 2013)*

Following on from themes and recommendations of the Dublin City Play Plan, this Play Strategy

places a focus on the child’s right to play by implementing clearly linked themes and actions that will ensure that children and young people can exercise their right in the way in which it is fully encompassed within paragraphs 1 & 2 of Article 31. This will be achieved through collaboration and partnership with relevant agencies and departments, in particular Dublin City Council Arts Office.

The scope for collaboration is evidenced in thematic actions as set out in this section. The primary aim of this partnership is to address relationships between play and the arts for children and young people. This can take two distinct forms, that which can be taught and that which can be learned only through experience (*Playlink, 2001*). This is an ongoing process, as the nature and narrative of arts and play involves spontaneity, creativity, change, variety and subjectivity. In responding to Article 31, the focus for the Play Strategy will include the following areas of interest associated with play, culture and art:



Play and the Arts  
Photos: Dublin City Council



Reimagining museums and child friendly and playful places  
Photo: Happy Museum Project





Story making and telling at Playday  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Children and young people experience and enjoy art forms such as listening to and playing musical, percussion instruments.  
Photo: Kevin McFeely Photography

- Play as childhood culture
- Playful and interactive sculpture and art expressions in parks and public spaces
- Play in heritage and cultural institutions
- Interconnections of play, cultural life and the arts

### Play as Childhood Culture

Recognition of the right of children and young people to engage in cultural life and the arts links in with their right to have a say in all matters which affect them (Article 12) and a right to freedom of expression (Article 13).

Adopting the obligations as set out in GC17 Article 31 demonstrates an acknowledgement of play as a 'culture

of childhood' which reflects nationality, religious cultures, and community cultures. Those caring for and working with children and young people require an approach that draws on their basic caring instinct for the young and their own childhood experiences. In this way adults recount how they played themselves as children or how they were cared for by parents. Caring and play cultures are passed down through generations and therefore within the context of arts, culture and heritage. The Dublin City Play Strategy acknowledges the obligation to support play as childhood culture, as it advocates for re-imagining and redesigning space with children and young people. Also by supporting engagement with the arts through an innovative, creative, play-led approach. Adopting a play-led approach involves inter-agency and collaborative working

alongside multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary practice. This presents meaningful ways of developing and implementing actions that will fulfil the obligations under paragraph 2 of Article 31.

**"Children want the same things we want. To laugh, to be challenged, to be entertained, and delighted."**

*(Dr Seuss, as quoted in Britannica, 2022)*

### Playful and interactive sculpture and art installations in parks and public space

Through public consultation, spaces can be identified for environmental upgrading or public design works. These spaces may not be suitable



Invitation to play through animation of public space  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Dublin City Play Strategy 2022-2027



Art as a medium for play in creating and telling stories  
Photo: Dublin City Council

as public playgrounds, as they would require a more intense form of maintenance and supervision. However, the issue of play opportunities can be addressed through providing features and spaces that prompt and encourage play. These spaces provide somewhere for children to play that is not technically a playground but includes features that children can play with, in, or on and can also prompt a range of play types.

The standards applied to these features do not require notices of cleanliness, safety or any other aspects of behaviour. However, as a duty of care, Dublin City Council will address this issue by applying 'Design Risk Assessment' to installations that prompt playful engagements and interactions. Using sculpture and artistic expressions can include sensory materials, sand, water, plants and scrub alongside interactive and playful sculptures and creating or reinstating public fountains as interactive features that can be touched, sat on, splashed in and climbed. These interventions offer potential to prompt imaginative and tactile play episodes.

The provision of this playful space and features is an imaginative approach to creating play space in a shared public space, where children can be 'seen and heard'.

This type of play provision is a vital component that will enhance community spirit whilst developing a sense of belonging amongst local children within their neighbourhoods and communities. Artistic play space

projects should be carried out by following the 'Sound Play Principles' as set out by "Playlink":

- Undertake projects from concept to specification
- Work with locally based and contracted landscape designers and architects
- Local play development officers and other relevant professionals should act as added value consultants, informing and supporting play space development - for example, local workshops on the design of play spaces
- Engagement with local communities and agencies
- Address policy and practice issues that have an impact on play provision, for example planning policy, risk assessment and management

This focus on the relationship between play and the arts holds particular relevance in creating an effective citywide play infrastructure, and improving the design and access to a hierarchy of play facilities. The Dublin City Parks Strategy (2020) includes relevant supportive action points regarding the creation of an 'outdoor art gallery' for Dublin to enhance the 'cultural value' of the city, in addition to displaying and promoting the talents of various artists. This approach has the potential to demonstrate three separate values of play for the city;

- **Intrinsic** - self-directed, intrinsically motivated and freely chosen



Play meets art!  
Photo: Dublin City Council



- **Instrumental** – assisting in learning and increasing physical activity
- **Institutional** – investments from public funding, value for money (Holden, 2006).

The development of a Sculpture Park is an action within the Parks Strategy that presents the opportunity for collaborative working with the Play Development Office. Additionally the public art policy presents opportunities to explore the potential for interactive and playful commissions in support of the development of a child-friendly and playful city.



Follow the Leader' Little Rock Arkansas Sculpture Park  
Photo: Dublin City Council

programmes with children and young people. All of these places have the potential to present opportunities for children and young people to engage in cultural life, heritage and a broad range of art forms. These experiences have the potential to be provided as stand-alone experiences, or can be brought together to provide more infused and conjoined experiences. The lines between arts, play, culture and heritage can be crossed and entangled to provide rich experiences for children and young people.

The Manchester Museum has adopted a play-led approach in order to cultivate a process to facilitate playfulness to permeate throughout traditional museum culture. This involves the development of cost effective ways of implementing interventions that create 'happier museums' by moving beyond education to increase the wellbeing potential of the museum experience (Thompson et al., 2011).



Re-imagining museums as child friendly and playful places  
Photo: Happy Museum Project

Places such as the Natural History Museum (sometimes referred to as the Dead Zoo) the National Gallery of Ireland, the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), The Hugh Lane Gallery and smaller local art centres such as the LAB Gallery on Foley St, Dublin 1 and Axis Arts Centre in Ballymun can provide exciting, interactive, creative and playful opportunities that present endless opportunities for artistic and cultural engagement.

Providing interactive art as play is an innovative way of acknowledging the play needs of children and young people. It also addresses barriers to installing conventional playgrounds at sensitive locations. This type of initiative provides the opportunity to develop a space that can be shared by the whole community. It lends itself to different interpretations specific to those who interact with it. These installations also address design issues and playfulness specific to the location, in accordance with a community's particular wishes, concerns and characteristics - thus creating connections with people and place.

**Place de Vosges - "This is a shared public space where people just congregate, sit on the grass and generally be very Parisian. The sand pit is set within the public space but is not given any real emphasis, it is what it is."**  
(Broom, cited in Playlink)

### Playful Places of Arts, Heritage and Culture

Throughout Dublin city, there are a number of galleries, studios, places of heritage, libraries, museums and theatres. Many of these institutions have workshops and other engagement

The development and implementation of arts and culture-specific commissions, projects and initiatives can have a positive impact on children's play by presenting the following forms of interactive play and artistic and cultural opportunities:

- Play infrastructure through art installations – interactive art
- Libraries supporting language and literature initiatives through enacting and creating stories and facilitating projects and commissions e.g. 'dream imagine'





Relaxy Staffitude!  
Photo Dublin City Council

- Play-friendly places of culture e.g. interactive and engaging museums, galleries and heritage sites

Working collaboratively with the City's Arts Office and Dublin City Libraries can present a springboard from which a more collaborative approach can be taken in developing, coordinating and building on initiatives that deliver a playful element to Dublin's cultural/historical sites that will also include the active participation of local children and young people.

Odense City offers a model of best practice in the form of 'The Culture Passport'. This initiative enables the children and young people of the City of Odense to obtain a solid and sound cultural foundation by creating a synergy between cultural institutions and facilitating varied, challenging and culturally themed play experiences.

The 'learning libraries programme' developed by play theorist Dr Peter Gray, is underpinned by child-led experiential learning where children are self-taught and explore elements of the library to satisfy their own particular areas of interest.

The Dublin City Play Strategy seeks to address the following issues which represent potential barriers to children and young people's access to cultural institutions:

- Socio-economic status
- Costs /admission fees
- Spatial restrictions such as access to certain areas and freedom of movement within art and cultural spaces particularly indoor spaces

- Noise restrictions can also place limitations on children and young people's play behaviours
- Children and young people spend less time at heritage and cultural venues due to lack of opportunities to play with materials and equipment
- Lack of opportunities to interact with the space in alternative ways as opposed to prescribed usage
- Restrictions to space and rare artefacts due to the practical issues in preserving these elements
- Genuine concerns from professional and amateur artists and curators regarding vulnerable art pieces and artefacts

**"The intention here is not to diminish this valuable role of museums but rather to present a more extensive account of the nature and value of play with particular reference to museums as spaces of children's wellbeing."**

(Lester et al 2014, p. 5)

### Interconnections between Play, Cultural Life and the Arts

Art is an integral part of children's play as a form of self-expression, creativity and exploration; in essence, it presents a medium for creating and telling stories. In exploring the interrelatedness between culture, heritage and the arts and children's play, theoretical approaches such as one developed by Mick Conway place emphasis on "the playful human urge to create and explore" (Conway, 2018).

This particular concept examines Neolithic origins through questioning; why do children under 5 years just 'do art', and why do children over 12 years feel they are no good at art? Additionally, there are overlaps between art and play behaviours, for example drawing, dancing, role play, dress up, singing, creating narratives for play frames, and using materials to create and change places for play.

The UK based Live Art Development Agency (LADA) commissioned a research residency exploring live art practices and methodologies for working with children and young people in London. Part of the research was to look at issues of race, disability and privilege. Live Art responded by developing new forms of access, knowledge, agency, and inclusion in relation to disempowered communities of youth, the elderly, the displaced and those excluded through socio-economic barriers (LADA, 2016).

Play can have parallel disempowerments and exclusions. Inclusivity, socio-economic background, and the struggle for agency in child-led self-directed play are key concerns. Children sometimes faces challenges when seeking to control the content and intent of their play.

Sometimes the barriers to museums, exhibitions, and performances reflect attitudes and perceptions around these spaces. For example, the MORI Report (2003) stated that 'people with a degree were 4 times as likely as those with no formal qualifications to have increased their visits as a result of 'free' museum entry' (MORI, 2003).

Children's space at Leeds Hospital Museum  
Photo: Dublin City Council





Playful art- Artful play!  
Photos: Dublin City Council



There is a need to address a range of barriers and broaden the audience profile. Young Dublin is an initiative led by Dublin City Arts Office which published a booklet containing conversations with a dozen young Dubliners who discussed their opinions, experiences and engagement with the arts, culture and heritage. Many of the young people identified barriers to engaging in the arts including peer pressure, feeling comfortable or welcome in arts institutions, lack of confidence in their artistic abilities, excessive entry fees and availability and preference for particular art forms (*Dublin City Arts Office, 2016*).

Older children/teenagers say that they are too old for playing or that they do not really play anymore. However they do talk about using large proportions of their free time to experience and enjoy art forms within social settings, such as listening to and playing music, reading, drama, coding, DJ Techniques, playing musical instruments, rapping and so on. Although they may not necessarily identify this type of behaviour as 'play', the principles and characteristics hold similarities. Engagement with the arts can also be spontaneous, unpredictable and autonomous, similar to the characteristics of play.

Live arts and play are inextricably linked as everyday occurrences in children's lives where they are interwoven within their play behaviours and narratives that involve fantasy, role playing, taking on new personas, experimenting with emotions and narratives of tragedy, joy, adventure and mystery.

**"In many ways Live Art and children seem to be the perfect fit, as Live Art deals with the everyday and the extraordinary in the everyday, with the domestic, with games, food, misbehaving, tinkering etc. and so one might ask why children have not been a part of the history of Live Art so far."**

*(Live Art Development Agency, 2016)*

A key aim of the Dublin City Play Strategy is to identify places of Heritage, Art and Culture as part of citywide play infrastructure. It is vital that the city's youngest citizens are encouraged and supported in engaging in the arts, cultural activities and places of heritage. In doing so, children and young people are presented with a wealth of interactive history, heritage and culture which otherwise may be lost to them.

*"Places that can be accessed all the time - safe secure and fun."  
(Girl aged 16 years)*

*"We kids need not only a home but services that go with it and play areas available in all weather conditions and free!"  
(Boy aged 9 years)*

### Engagement Focus for Dublin City Council

Formalise cross departmental and inter-agency partnerships to work towards implementing actions and initiatives based on the theme of access to interactive and playful arts, heritage and culture as a medium for play for children and young people.

**"Manchester Museum, through its participation in the Happy Museum's programme, has disturbed habitual ways of perceiving children and the production of museum space, and by doing so has destabilised traditional accounts and left space for further playful disturbance."**

*(Lester, Strachan & Derry, 2014)*

# Case Studies

## Manchester Museum - a more playful museum Exploring issues of institutional space, children's play and wellbeing

Manchester Museum is a world-renowned space with an extensive collection of anthropological, archaeological and natural history artefacts. The museum receives over 450,000 visitors per annum. The museum is well known as a family friendly, informal space that includes an established programme of organised activities. As part of the Happy Museums initiative, a play specialist was employed to explore and understand children and young people's use of museum space.

In 2014 and 2015 the museum sought to develop a more playful approach

to engaging its young visitors and developing skills to support child-led play. Through the Happy Museums project, staff looked at how museums can be transformed into places that are more playful. They also explored the positive impacts of this type of intervention on children and young people's wellbeing (*Thompson et al., 2011*). The project involved design, implementation and changes as a result of participation and provoking a wider discussion on children's presence and engagement in traditional museum spaces, notions of playing and the slippery concept of wellbeing (*Lester 2013*). Play Specialist and author Dr Stuart Lester led part of this project, an experiment in transforming museums into play friendly spaces. The aim was to create 'what if' spaces and situations where children and

young people could experience playful engagement with art, heritage and culture in a way that responds to their innate and complex playfulness. The project involved a set of measures to develop a process which would allow playfulness to permeate through a traditional museum culture.

An important outcome of this action research project was the development of a 'rule book' for play. The tools used in the development of this resource for museums was the 'story of change' which challenged the 'business as usual' approach of the traditional museum setting and posited instead a space children and young people would be supported and encouraged to talk, sing, run, play, explore, make and create. Rules for a Playful Museum is a playful and accessible handbook which promotes play in cultural spaces, setting out rules for improving the playfulness of a gallery or museum.

Play is situated as a permanent element within Manchester Museum's environment by adopting a flexible approach to responding to children's and young people's playfulness and increasing opportunities for play.

**"A playful museum is an attitude of people and the environment. Our museum is a living organism and our gallery staff have coined the term 'relaxy staffitude' as one of the key ingredients in creating the right conditions for play."**

*(Bunney, cited in Lester, Strachan and Derry, 2014)*



Relaxy Staffitude/Playful Approach  
Photo: Dublin City Council

### Dublin's 1916 Play Garden – involving children and young people in the design of a public play space located within a historical site

Ireland's 100th anniversary of the 1916 Rising and the Proclamation of the Republic took place in 2016. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs led consultations with children and young people from across Ireland on the theme 'Imagining our Future'. Through this consultation process children and young people made suggestions for commemorating the children who died during the 1916 Rising. This led to creating a play garden in memory of those children.

As part of the consultation process, children, teenagers and adults were given the opportunity to express views on what should and should not be included in the garden

- The space should not focus on one particular age range and overall should be an intergenerational space
- The space should not resemble a standard fixed playground – it should be a unique space authentic to its theme
- The space should not just focus on the past
- The space should invoke feelings of celebration and respect rather than creating a sombre mood

- An opportunity to agree on the park title should be afforded.

The 1916 Commemorative Play Garden is now located at St Audoen's Park, near the Liberties in the south inner city of Dublin. It is aimed at children and young people of all ages. Due to the historical nature of the site, the play space also includes elements that attract and accommodate parents and other adults. Overall this project has provided a playful intergenerational space holding meaning for old and young in reflection and celebration of the events of 1916 and also including a focus on contemporary Ireland's hopes and aspirations for the future.

The vision that children and young people had for the 1916 Commemorative Play Garden was to provide somewhere for children to play that is not technically a playground but includes features that children can play in, with, or on and can also prompt a range of play types and experiences.

A preference to avoid signage around cleanliness, safety or other aspects of behaviour was expressed by participants. This lack of inhibiting signage facilitates children and young people to choose to engage in adventure, pretend, rough and tumble, imaginative and risk in play. Overall the children and young people wanted a public play space with the following:

- Sensory materials - sand, water, plants, scrub

- An environment that is ever changing with the seasons thus creating a play space that will not become boring or repetitive
- Contrasting natural materials - large rocks, wood, grass, mounds
- Art features such as structures that prompt play activities
- Play sculptures - themed non-technical play equipment i.e. bridges, animals that can be touched, sat on, climbed on and are used to prompt interactive and imaginative play

This artistic play area affords children living locally a stimulating space to play and hang out while at the same time avoiding the challenges of installing a more conventional playground.

Dublin City Council Parks Department appointed the artists Bloom Fringe and Dermot Foley Landscape Architects for the project in December 2016. The space opened in 2019. The official launch of the 1916 Commemorative Play Garden was attended by local residents and school children and the surviving relatives of some of the children who had lost their lives during the 1916 rising.

The development of the 1916 Commemorative Play Garden has provided children and young people in Dublin and throughout Ireland with the opportunity to be involved in the co-creation and development of a public space located within a historical site that is unique in design and commemorates a specific event. It is also an example of how to develop a play area which is sensitive to a heritage site.

The play area itself and process of development has provided a vital component that will assist in developing good community spirit whilst developing a sense of belonging amongst local children within their neighbourhoods, and Dublin City.



Opening 1916 play garden with a splash!  
Photo: Fennell Photography

Nature's Playground  
Photo: Dublin City Council



## Section 7

# Strategy Action Plan

### Dublin City Play Strategy Action Plan 2022-2027

The Strategic Action Plan includes comprehensive, practical and achievable actions and a carefully considered timeline from 2022-2027. The proposed Play Sufficiency Assessments of Dublin City's play infrastructure will feed into the ongoing monitoring, review and evaluation of the overall implementation of the strategy action plan.

The action plan will address the issues highlighted within public engagement carried out during the development of this document. The implementation of this strategic action

plan will realise measures that will strengthen alignment of the Play Strategy with UNCRC Article 31 and the recommendations set out in General Comment 17 on Article 31 city-wide. Therefore, the development and execution of this strategy action plan involves a process of change that requires the introduction and reintroduction of new concepts to familiarise stakeholders and decision makers to 'get used to the idea' of understanding and supporting play through the right environment and the right attitudes (*Lester and Russell, 2013*).

Playground coming soon!  
Photo: Dublin City Council



POLICY STATEMENT 1: Develop an awareness of play and its value and importance in the everyday lives of children and young people.	
Action	Measure
<b>Awareness &amp; Promotion:</b> Provide information, toolkits and guides aimed at improving and increasing awareness of the importance of play in the lives of children and young people	Publish a minimum of 3 information booklets highlighting the importance of play
<b>Play Sufficiency:</b> Adopt and implement the principle of Play Sufficiency as a quality measure for monitoring and evaluation of play facilities and opportunities for play	System in place to ensure sufficient number and quality of play facilities alongside supporting and facilitating sufficient time, space and opportunities for child-led informal play to happen.
<b>Consultation:</b> Continue to facilitate ongoing consultation through active research with communities and in particular children and young people to ensure that they are included in the design, planning and mapping of existing and new play facilities and opportunities for play in the public realm	Number of consultations carried out each year
<b>Events:</b> Celebrate events that promote the concept, meaning and importance of play as a right for all children and young people; National Playday Annual Event, World Health Day, International Children's Day and Play Seminars and Conferences	End of year report & record of events provided annually
<b>Advocacy:</b> Work with partners and children and youth groups such as Comhairle na nÓg to develop and publish a 'Dublin City Play Manifesto'	Manifesto completed circulated and displayed
<b>Promoting Playwork Principles:</b> Provide annual workshops/training for DCC staff and voluntary youth and community groups and others to adopt a play-led approach based on good practice in alignment with Playwork Principles to support children's play under UNCRC Article 31; the child's right to play.	Number of workshops and training programmes provided annually
<b>Irish Play Safety Statement:</b> Support the development of an Irish Play Safety Statement as a position statement to support the replacement of current 'risk assessments' with 'risk benefit assessments'.	Irish Play Safety Statement endorsed and published as position statement to support the element of risk in play.

POLICY STATEMENT 2: Create an effective city-wide play infrastructure through collaborative design that enhances and responds to children and young people's existing infrastructure	
Action	Measure
<b>Quality Assessments:</b> Develop a Dublin City Play Sufficiency Assessment Toolkit, which includes a set of criteria that aligns with best practice as set out in Wales Statutory Guidance for assessment and analysis of sufficiency regarding play facilities and more informal opportunities for play.	Completed Play Sufficiency assessment of planned annual playground upgrades. Completed Play Sufficiency assessment of informal opportunities for play.
<b>Play Sufficiency Awareness and Training:</b> Facilitate interdepartmental and stakeholder awareness sessions on Play Sufficiency to support the adoption and implementation of the principle of Play Sufficiency and completion of ongoing Play Sufficiency Assessments.	Increased interdepartmental awareness, understanding and support for actions that will secure Play Sufficiency.
<b>Funding:</b> Continue capital programme based on results of Play Sufficiency audits and assessments, to enhance and enrich the quality standards of new play facilities and the ongoing annual upgrade programme.	Annual Programme based on completed Play Sufficiency Assessments of citywide play infrastructure
<b>Addressing play deficits:</b> Updating GIS system in order to continue to identify play deficits within this system to prioritise development of play facilities, alongside acknowledging and supporting the right conditions for informal play to happen	Fully equipped play facilities within 10 minutes walking distance from home and in areas with high population of children under 14 years Recorded local mapping sessions with children and young people to acknowledge and support informal play spaces and places
<b>Destination Playgrounds:</b> Identify existing playground locations that hold potential for development as destination playgrounds across Dublin city. e.g., north west, south central, south east and city centre	Number of new destination playgrounds developed

**POLICY STATEMENT 2:**

Cont'd

Action	Measure
<b>Playground Development Framework:</b> Revise procurement procedures regarding playground development that will avoid contractual constraints and facilitate scope for creativity and specific cases where Dublin City Council can develop a wide variety of playground types for parks and public spaces with varying themes and bespoke features In addition to realistic budget for same	System in place and operational
<b>Maintenance &amp; Repairs:</b> Fully commission the use of electronic means for routine playground inspections	System in place and operational
<b>Addressing rapid urban development and climate change:</b> Develop a pilot project to consider opening school grounds for community access	Increased community play spaces
<b>Community Play:</b> Working collaboratively with DCC Area Offices & Community Development Officers to formalise 'Community Play Committees' or working groups to ensure that children and young people have a voice and are active participants in all project consultations and developments regarding play in streets and public space at local level	5 x Community Play Committees for each Local Area

**POLICY STATEMENT 3: Place a key focus on accessible and inclusive opportunities for play for all children and young people**

Action	Measure
<b>Inclusion:</b> Develop a toolkit for inclusion and accessibility and identify appropriate funding support from Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth (DCEDIY).	Secure appropriate funding support from DCEDIY with regard to sourcing specialist support to develop toolkit Publish toolkit Publish on DCC website list of availability of accessible and inclusive play facilities
<b>Improved and increased Play Opportunities for Older Children/ Teenagers:</b> Explore and address the issue of constraints to play and generally 'hanging out' for older children/teenagers and provide a positive response within children's existing infrastructure, planned upgrading and refurbishment of parks, green spaces, local area regeneration and public realm and arts and culture capital programmes	Annual report on play for older children/teenagers that highlights positive responses within upgrading of existing and development of new play facilities, parks and shared public space

**POLICY STATEMENT 4: Work in partnership to support schools and early childhood care and education settings to improve and increase child-led play experiences**

Action	Measure
<b>Benefits of improved and increased opportunities for Play in Schools:</b> Develop a 'Play in Schools' Toolkit/Guide in partnership with Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth (DCEDIY)	Publish toolkit as booklet & online resource on DCC Website that will be available to all city and county councils countrywide

**POLICY STATEMENT 5: Support children and young people to fully exercise their right to play by providing ease of access to engage in cultural life and the arts**

Action	Measure
<b>Art and Play:</b> Identify opportunities to link with DCC Arts Office to ensure the inclusion of playful arts programmes and interactive art commissions and installations within the public realm and DCC Parks	Increased number and diversity of children and young people engaging in arts activities and co-creating art installations for their city
<b>Playful Galleries, Libraries, Museums &amp; Heritage Sites:</b> Liaise with Hugh Lane Gallery & DCC Library Development to develop the potential for; interventions, pilot projects and indoor and outdoor play resources at places of art, heritage and culture.	Increased engagement by children and young people



# A Final Word

## Ombudsman for Children

As Ombudsman for Children, I welcome the recent development of the Dublin City Play Strategy “*Everywhere, Any Day, You Can Play!*” (2022–2027) as a key guiding document and sound basis for Dublin City Council to implement a comprehensive play strategy for the city. This strategy will support Dublin City Council and its partners to realise the vision for Dublin as a child-friendly and playful city where all children and young people can enjoy and fully exercise their right to play.

The completion of this new play strategy is a welcome development as continued support of the Dublin City Play Plan “*Play here, Play there, Play Everywhere.*” (2012-2017).

The Ombudsman for Children’s Office supports children’s rights as a key priority in positively supporting a good quality of life for children and young people. Therefore, I commend the City Council’s adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and General Comment No. 17 (2013) on the right of the child to play as the key underlining principles for the Dublin City Play Strategy. The council has been guided by the obligations for states bodies as set out within General Comment 17 Article 31, to adopt an approach to supporting children’s play as a rights based issue. The realisation of Article 31 is not a stand-alone issue. All rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) are indivisible and interdependent. Therefore as Article 31 is central to the realisation of all rights, equal investment in respecting all other rights



National Playday  
Photo: Dublin City Council

in the convention is vital in assuring the realisation of Article 31. This further supports the implementation of a play strategy for Dublin as a child-friendly and playful city where all children and young people can experience a childhood filled with the pure enjoyment and pleasure of growing up in a society that supports them in engaging in play for play’s sake.

The various consultations and research methods carried out by the City Council have provided information that has influenced and shaped the overall strategy. In this way, the views and ideas provided by so many people, especially children and young people, have contributed greatly to the development of the final draft of the Play Strategy. Taking on board the many views of its citizens, in particular its young citizens, the Dublin City Play Strategy moves beyond the provision of conventional playgrounds and adopts a citywide and broader reaching approach.

This all-inclusive approach identifies the ‘right’ conditions for play to take place by considering time, space and understanding and acknowledgement of the importance of play in the lives of children and young people.

Adopting the principle of Play Sufficiency is a welcome element of the Play Strategy as it informs the delivery of an action plan and

ongoing review of play provision that will ensure a comprehensive range of play experiences. This will involve a balanced approach to play provision that extends beyond facilities and organised activities by placing equal value on the everyday opportunities for play in children’s local neighbourhoods.

The focus for the Ombudsman for Children’s Office is on supporting and improving the lives of children and young people. The Dublin City Play Strategy enhances this focus by outlining measures to implement the Play Plan. The strategy highlights obligations for the government and accountability of the private sector and all individuals working with children and young people. It presents a legacy for Dublin City on the importance of play and how it is understood in children’s everyday lives.

The success of Dublin City Play Strategy “*Everywhere, Any Day, You Can Play!*” (2022-2027) is determined by its rights based foundations which place a key focus on the developmental benefits of play for children and young people.

**Dr Niall Muldoon**

**Ombudsman for Children**  
July 2022



DCC Runamuck Outdoor Play Programme  
Photo: Dublin City Council



Anne O'Brien Former City Council Play Development Officer (R.I.P.)  
Photo: Dublin City Council

# Footnote



National Playday  
Photo: Fennell Photography

The journey to developing the Dublin City Play Strategy has involved ongoing public engagement, especially with the city's youngest citizens, who shared their views and ideas which helped to form the direction of the Play Strategy.

While it is impossible to mention everyone, a special acknowledgement must go to Anne O'Brien, Dublin City Council's Former Play Development Officer for her drive, tenacity and energy in leaving a legacy of embedding 'play' into the City Council's organisational policies, plans and strategies.

Dublin City Council now holds key responsibility for the implementation of the Dublin City Play Strategy. This will involve intra and interdepartmental

collaboration alongside the adoption of a level of ingenuity and creativity in working with the uncontrollable and unpredictable characteristics of play as children's natural disposition. This will rely on shared knowledge and collective wisdom to identify playful connections throughout Dublin City. Adopting a play-led and whole child approach will strengthen the city council in moving forward to engage in a 're-enchantment' with play and subsequently the built and natural environment in the development of Dublin as a child-friendly and playful city.

**Debby Clarke**

**Play Development Officer**  
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**The Dublin City Play Strategy was edited by:**

**Dr Jackie Bourke:** Urban Researcher

Dublin City Council 'Outside the Box' DCC Playful Community Project.  
Photo: Dublin City Council



# Useful Documents

- **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**
  - View online
  - <https://downloads.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/unicef-convention-rights-child-uncrc.pdf>
- **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) General Comment 17 on Article 31; the child's right to play**
  - View online
  - <https://www.refworld.org/docid/51ef9bcc4.html>
- **Play here, Play there, Play everywhere, Dublin City Play Plan Dublin City Council**
  - View online
  - [https://www.dublincity.ie/sites/default/files/media/file-uploads/2018-09/Dublin\\_City\\_Play\\_Plan\\_2012-2017.pdf](https://www.dublincity.ie/sites/default/files/media/file-uploads/2018-09/Dublin_City_Play_Plan_2012-2017.pdf)
- **The Play Rights of Disabled Children - IPA Position Statement International Play Association (IPA)**
  - View Online
  - <http://ipaworld.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/IPA-Disabled-Children-Position-Stmt.pdf>
- **Declaration on the Importance of Play International Play Association (IPA)**
  - View online
  - [http://ipaworld.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/IPA\\_Declaration-FINAL.pdf](http://ipaworld.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/IPA_Declaration-FINAL.pdf)
- **The Playwork Principles Play Wales**
  - View Online
  - <https://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/playworkprinciples>
- **Play and Digital Technology Play Wales**
  - View Online
  - [https://issuu.com/playwales/docs/play\\_for\\_wales\\_issue\\_48\\_spring\\_2017?e=5305098/47630028](https://issuu.com/playwales/docs/play_for_wales_issue_48_spring_2017?e=5305098/47630028)
- **Creating Accessible Play Spaces – A Toolkit Play Wales**
  - View online
  - <https://playwales.org.uk/login/uploaded/documents/Publications/Creating%20accessible%20play%20spaces.pdf>
- **Design for Play – A Guide to Creating Successful Play Spaces Play England**
  - View online
  - <https://www.playengland.org.uk/designforplay>
- **Play Sufficiency Information Sheet Play Wales**
  - View online
  - <https://www.playwales.org.uk/login/uploaded/documents/INFORMATION%20SHEETS/Play%20sufficiency%20in%20Wales%202020.pdf>
- **Play in Crisis – A Support for Parents & Carers International Play Association (IPA)**
  - View online
  - <http://ipaworld.org/resources/for-parents-and-carers-play-in-crisis/>
- **Children's Right to Play and the Environment International Play Association (IPA)**
  - View online
  - <http://ipaworld.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/IPA-Play-Environment-Discussion-Paper.pdf>
- **Older Children Play Too Play Wales**
  - View online
  - <https://playwales.org.uk/eng/news/1102-older-children-play-too--new-info-sheet->

# Useful Videos

## Children and young people's voices and experiences

- **Help Me Remove The Barriers Video** International Play Association (IPA)
  - View online
  - <https://ipaworld.org/ipa-video-this-is-me-the-childs-right-to-play/>
- **Virtual Play Space; Let's Play Inside Out!** Dublin City Council
  - View online
  - <https://www.dublincity.ie/ga/node/8561>
- **Right To Play Workshops;** Creative consultation with children and young people on their right to play – Dublin City Council Play Development, Lab Art Studio & The Ombudsman for Children's Office
  - View online
  - [https://youtu.be/u\\_6aVUW9Wzg](https://youtu.be/u_6aVUW9Wzg)
- **Jump In Puddles Champions** Dublin City Council Play Development
  - View Online
  - <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=243690980710059>

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<https://silo.tips/download/c-hild-s-p-lay-f-acilitating-p-lay-on-h-ousing-e-states-r-ob-w-heway-and-a-lison>

Hand drawn animations  
by artist Patrick Sanders



