



England Wales Northern Ireland

Issue 18: Oct 2012

Newsbrief

International Play Association EWNl

Promoting the Child's Right to Play

Playing Communities

Welcome to Newsbrief; our members tell us they find it useful and informative. As well as news from members, there are important opportunities to contribute to events and the work of IPA.

We focus this edition on **playing communities**.

If you have any short articles (400-500) or longer papers (1,000 words) on this theme, please send them to the Communications Group c/o mail@ludemos.co.uk

- January 2013 – UN General Comment (by 15 December please)
- April – IPA Play Statement (by 15 March please)

As you will see, there are other sections in the magazine, so please feel free to send in any relevant material.

In this issue:

- IPA work
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Editorial statement

IPA EWNl aims to inform, invigorate, critique and enhance research, policy and practice relating to play, environments for play and playwork

The views expressed in articles in Newsbrief and the IPA EWNl website are those of the author and may not reflect the policy of IPA EWNl, nor should publication be taken or assumed as an endorsement by IPA EWNl of those views.

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Every parent understands the importance of a secure environment for their children.

Spaces where they can play... where different generations can meet, binding the community together.

Nick Clegg, 2010

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – General Comment on Article 31; more background

Further to the article in last edition of Newsbrief, here is some background on the process so far. The General Comment is expected to be available in January 2013.

International Structure Formed to Support the Drafting of the General Comment

International Structure: The first step in the development of the General Comment on article 31 was to form a structure to support the process. This comprises Core and Working Groups, a Pool of Experts and an information exchange system incorporating key international organizations and agencies.

Children's Input: The project will include feedback from a number of existing children's groups in different parts of the world. Prior to the development of the final draft, these groups of children will reflect upon specific circumstances and experiences that impact their enjoyment of the rights embodied in article 31.

UN Focal Group: The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child established a Focal Group to work with IPA:

- Awich Pollar, Chair (Uganda)
- Aseil al-Shehail (Saudi Arabia)
- Yanghee Lee (Korea)
- Sanphasit Koompraphant (Thailand)
- Hadeel Al-Asmar (Syrian Arab Republic)

Time-frame: The UN Committee has recommended we aim for a final draft to be presented to its January 2013 meeting. This is a demanding schedule but we aim to achieve the goal.

- First draft to Core Group in March
- Second draft to Committee in April
- Meeting with UN Focal Group and Core Group in June
- Third draft to go for wider consultation in June – August
- Fourth draft to UN Focal Group and Committee in September
- Final revision and adopted by Committee in January 2013

Some main topics to be covered by the General Comment

The General Comment will define all elements of article 31 and explain their importance in the growth and development of children and their impact on children's overall well-being.

In the approximately twenty-page General Comment statement, challenges to implementation of article 31 will be addressed. These will include lack of awareness of adults of its importance (particularly of child-controlled play) inadequate space, excessive pressure for educational achievement, increase in structured and programmed leisure time as well as negative affects of technology, and the fact that children are rarely involved in planning for play (ref. UNCRC article 12).

Attention will also be given to groups of children requiring particular attention in order to realize their rights under article 31. Children with disabilities, girl children, children in institutions, working children and children in deep poverty are some examples of these.

Perhaps, most importantly, the General Comment also provides a detailed elaboration of the specific actions that governments need to take to ensure that all the provisions of Article 31 are fully implemented.

<http://ipaworld.org/category/general-comment-on-31/un-general-comment/>

Playworking Communities to Communities which Play

As playworkers interested in community-based work might argue that if play is 'what children do' (Ward, 1978) then children's local opportunities for play might be understood as a measure of how 'child-friendly' their community is. Frequently understood as an instinct and need, the expressions of the play drive (story-telling, den-building, ludic movement, etc) can also be seen as creating, sharing and adapting culture. This point of view positions children as community agents, and as the creators of social capital.

However, in many communities children's play behaviours are ghettoized, corralled into fixed equipment playgrounds, school break times, and the private home. As children's play is marginalized physically and temporally, so are children's first means of engagement with the world.

Play is also marginalized conceptually. The above quote may be reframed as 'play is what *children* do' (emphasis mine), as playful approaches to the world are often seen as 'impractical', 'frivolous', and so 'pointless'. This is admittedly an improvement from communities which regard it as satanic – but the strict adult regulation of the spaces and times allotted to children's play demonstrate the profound anxiety associated with it (Chudacoff 2007).

The freedoms and subversions, the *anarchistic tendencies* of children at play are viewed as potentially dangerous or wasteful. The instinct to play, which continues throughout the human life span, is then appropriated by corporations seeking to satisfy those needs for us through a consumer relationship – providing a 'safe' and 'valuable' outlet for these impulses, for a fee.

Children's responses and resistances to this systemic oppression are customarily misunderstood, by adults who were raised under a similar system which they are now in a position to benefit from, suffer from, and perpetuate. The behaviours of children deprived of play are often distinguished by withdrawal and aggression, by the 'rapid firing of play cues' (Sturrock and Else 1998) and by poor skills at social negotiation. Panksepp (2007) noted that there are many cases where great play urges of children are unfulfilled and often diagnosed as ADHD or ODD, or simply 'acting out'. This is not to say that the underlying cognitive or social circumstances given these terms do not exist – but that they are exacerbated by a stringent adult definition of 'appropriate behaviour', and by few opportunities to for the release and self-regulation experienced during free play. Once medicalized or pathologized, children displaying these behaviours are often seen as proving the systems 'right' – demonstrating that children are inherently unruly and unreliable, ignoring suggestions that they are made this way by adults.

Morgan Leichter-Saxby
(Pop-Up Adventure Play)

<http://playeverything.wordpress.com>

Inclusive play provision which supports children's self-directed processes of spatial, social and conceptual exploration have demonstrated the remarkable and immediate benefits of play in children's lives. Playworkers believe that, outside the most extreme of cases, children know how to play instinctively and are experts in their own play. This faith in children to teach themselves ways to negotiate boundaries, assess and take risks, and to recognize and meet their individual needs given the chance is in direct contrast to the suspicion adults frequently expressed towards them. All children have needs with are 'special', and all benefit from environments rich in multi-sensory potential, staffed with trained empathetic professionals and populated by a group of children diverse in age, background and ability. By helping to remove the physical, social and internalized barriers that stand between children and free expression of their drive to play, playworkers open the possibilities for children's engagement with and co-creation of social capital, culture and community.

Organizations such as Pop-Up Adventure Play (PUAP 2012) offer programming designed to open public spaces such as parks, libraries and gardens to these playful expressions. Events such as Pop-Up Adventure Playgrounds and Pop-Up Play Shops (PUPS 2012) create celebrations of play which are enormously persuasive to a range of community members internationally. Local organizers of these events cite such secondary ambitions as the rebuilding of social networks broken by war (Colombia), the reclaiming of streets for children's play (USA), and the rejuvenation of ailing city centres (UK). Opening playwork provision to the observation and participation of all ages begins to heal generations of social rupture and repression of the play drive through shared humour, novelty and joy. They provide an alternative framework for understanding challenging behaviour (Russell 2006) and encourage visitors to create memories, build friendships, and become involved in a global movement for play.

These events and programs also create opportunities to playwork *whole communities* by engaging local residents in conversation and in play. Playwork's emphasis on loose parts (Taylor 2008) demonstrates ways in which scrap can be reused and recycled as low- and no-cost opportunities for play. Issues such as obesity and ADHD are reframed by positive messaging, through the sharing of joy, appreciation of risk and bravery, practice of non-judgmental support, and a fundamental trust in children. By valuing play, we recognize children as experts in their own play and creators of social capital – and in so doing, move them and their play from the periphery to the centre of community life.

© Morgan Leichter-Saxby

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Battersea Park: The playground that won't go quietly

Battersea Park Adventure Playground is a tough old thing. It survived the snip-snipping of local councillors – never fans of good old fashioned play – that wanted to save money by introducing charges in 2011. They got as far as installing tollbooths at the playground entrance before media coverage and ingenious, residents-led last minute legalities scuppered their 'paying for play' plans.

Unfortunately, while the much loved playground stood firm, so did the Wandsworth councillors' determination to cut the staffing and play structures that have made the playground such a hit with children for over forty years. Dark days lay ahead that would culminate in a council meeting in May 2012 where tempers flared and tears flowed.

A few months before that council meeting I got a call from a Wandsworth resident asking what London Play could do to save Wandsworth's three adventure playgrounds from destruction by a council now seemingly revelling in their media persona, pitched somewhere between *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang's* child-catcher and the relentless bulldozing developers at the beginning of Pixar's *Up*. The resident was desperate for London Play to achieve a happy ending to the approaching Wandsworth play massacre.

So we did what we could, with the clock ticking. Aside from the moral shortcomings of the council's plan, a major flaw lay in the council's insistence that despite the installation of manufactured equipment, Battersea Park would still have an adventure playground. I contacted minds of a higher voltage than mine to elicit definitions of Adventure Play so that I could demonstrate Wandsworth Council were not playing straight. I got predictably idiosyncratic responses from, among others, play veteran Sandra Melville, theorist Bob Hughes, academic Perry Else, and writer and broadcaster, Tim Gill.

Among their definitions, two key features were repeatedly mentioned: trained staff and an evolving, exciting space where, as Play England's Mick Conway put it, 'children are encouraged to play in ways not often possible elsewhere'.

Armed with an expert consensus on what an Adventure Playground was we firstly met with the council and then community groups and parents of users of the three playgrounds. There was certainly support out there but it was hard to provide the focus for it. With local support in place we put a plan to the council that would see London Play set up a Wandsworth-wide voluntary sector play organisation, something achieved before in Lambeth and Tower Hamlets. The new Wandsworth Play Association (WPA) would locate itself in Battersea Adventure Playground's building and would be overseen by a group of trustees consisting of local people. WPA would maintain the playground and continue to offer a

Playground Playground

Paul Hocker Play Development Team Manager, London Play explains the long campaign to help save a community's adventure playground



playworker presence during sessions, ideally on all three playgrounds. London Play would be paid to establish WPA (at a fraction of the cost the council had put aside for their new manufactured structures) and then withdraw as WPA became self-subsisting through funding unavailable to the council. In short, Wandsworth gets a Play Association, staffed Adventure Playgrounds and London Play does a neat bit of capacity building within the capital's voluntary play sector. Oh, and one more thing – Wandsworth Council get to make a dignified transition from the child-catcher to something closer to Mary Poppins. At first it looked like they might go for it.



The day before the council committee meeting that would decide the fate of playgrounds I met with the councillors and officers responsible for the new playground plans and sitting across from them on a huge oak table in the Town Hall, I put our WPA plan to them. They were charming throughout and listened and took notes and nodded agreeably as I spoke and I left the meeting satisfied I'd sold the idea as well as I could.

I arrived at the Town Hall the following evening accompanied by Melian Mansfield, London Play's chair of trustees. By the gate 50 to 60 protestors held 'Save the Playground' banners. Half were children and they were lots of supportive horn hoots from the passing rush hour traffic. I was one of a handful of representations to the council that evening, each with 10 minutes to put their case to save the playground to the 15 or so councillors.

The council chamber was full with rows of council officers sitting behind the councillors and most of the earlier protesters now filled the public gallery. There was an intense hum of conversation, as people waited for the meeting to start.

Members of local campaign group, Wandsworth Against Cuts, addressed the meeting first, their presentation included an articulate and heartfelt contribution from some of the young people that use and love the playgrounds.

Then I was called and put in front of a microphone with my papers spread out on the table. The focus of my 10 minutes was to distinguish between an adventure playground – and what it offers young people and the community – and contrast it with the council's plans. Only by understanding what they were removing might there be a chance that they back our WPA plan. After my presentation a few councillors posed questions about health and safety and the cost of the plan, which I answered with figures and facts and then I was done. I returned to my seat in the public gallery and waited to see if my words and those of the speakers before me had changed minds.

But before the crucial vote, one of the councillors I'd met with the day before had an opportunity to speak. Knowing I no longer had a right to respond she gave a less than faithful rendition of some of the points we'd discussed at our meeting and then made a series of disparaging statements about

adventure playgrounds in neighbouring Lambeth.

The vote predictably carried the council motion, with only the two Labour councillors on the committee standing against it. More than forty years of children's laughter and excited shrieks were silenced by the raised hands of a dozen middle-aged dignitaries. The meeting ground to a halt when the protestors' frustration could no longer be contained. The councillors were lambasted with cries of 'shame' and 'lapdogs' while some of the children were in tears. It was a horrible, heart-breaking moment.

Over the next few days at London Play I reluctantly accepted the council's decision and shifted my focus back to other play matters. Toward the end of August, Wandsworth playground staff were issued redundancy notices and Battersea Park's final session was scheduled for the last week of September with bulldozers rumbling in not long after.

Then Dr Tonya Hoffman rang. She was resident in neighbouring Kensington and Chelsea and was appalled to discover Battersea Park Adventure Playground was soon to close. She told me she was a seasoned campaigner and had recently saved a local independent pub from property developers and that she wanted to join the fight to stop the playground bulldozers. Over a series of phone conversations between us, Tonya began to formulate a strategy; in particular she honed in on the park's Grade II* listed status, something I had researched months earlier with English Heritage but never fully pursued.

Within a few weeks Tonya had energised the save the playground campaign and unified all the various local interest groups under the umbrella name Save Our Adventure Playgrounds (S.O.A.P.). A string of meetings were held and well attended, a local lawyer began exploring the listed status route, a website with video and an online petition suddenly emerged (www.saveouradventureplaygrounds.com) and somehow Ben Drew, aka rapper Plan B, was twittering about it.

The council might be viewing this as the end game but there may yet be a last-minute twist, as there was with their plans to charge entry. If Wandsworth Council does prevail it will be a pyrrhic victory. They have carelessly picked away at a vital thread in the fabric of the community. And as any tailor will tell you, weak fabrics quickly fall apart.



Paul Hocker
Play Development Team
Manager, London Play
September 24th 2012

Playful Communities – Play England



The Engaging Communities in Play programme operated by Play England was funded from September 2010 to March 2011 by the Department of Education.

‘Community involvement is increasingly important in creating opportunities for children to play.

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‘Play is a way of bringing communities together, overcoming barriers and providing a focus for different agencies to work more closely with local people to improve the quality of life for children, parents and families.’

Lots of useful resources are available at the Play England website: <http://www.playengland.org.uk/our-work/training-and-services/engaging-communities-in-play.aspx>

The Playful Communities project has emerged to continue the work of the initial programme. Its website provides information, advice and resources for individuals, local community groups, voluntary and community sector organisations and others who are developing play provision in their local neighbourhood.

The Playful Communities toolkit is for anyone wishing to get involved in creating, improving and maintaining places where young people can play and spend their free time. It is available as a series of guides from <http://www.playfulcommunities.org.uk>



Playful Cities – USA

Playful City USA is an application-based national recognition program to honour cities and towns that make play a priority and use innovative programs to get children active, playing, and healthy. Playful City USA communities make a commitment to play and physical activity by developing unique local action plans to increase the access to play in their community. In doing so, some of the most innovative concepts and cost-effective programs are being developed in Playful City USA communities. In the sixth year of the annual program, 69 communities claimed their first Playful City USA designation.

How does a city qualify?

Playful City USA designees need to map local playspaces, complete a needs assessment, and develop an action plan that identifies a minimum of three policies, programs, or initiatives aimed at increasing access to play at school, in neighbourhoods, and through community engagement.

- **Map Local Playspaces**
Learn more about the number, quality, and location of playspaces in the city by conducting a playspace audit. Use this research to identify Play Deserts—child rich, playspace poor areas.
- **Complete a Needs Assessment**
Evaluate existing play policies and initiatives in the community and determine areas that could be strengthened or where new programs can be developed.
- **Share Best Practices**
Highlight three best practices based on the needs assessment that provide the framework to implement a minimum of three policies or programs. Improve access to play at school, in neighbourhoods, and through community engagement.

For more details see:

http://kaboom.org/take_action/playful_city_usa/program_details

Child in the City 2012

When children are playing, the street becomes their street, the square their square, the district their district, the city becomes their city and their domain. The children become part of the city. If we are concerned about the future of any city, we must consider how to involve children in its network, and in its economic and social life. And the best way to involve children is through play - children are really experts at playing. The city must create space for them to stimulate their expertise and it can also profit from this expertise.

<http://www.childinthecity.com/>



Join IPA EWNI

If you would like to join IPA EWNI, an organisation devoted to promoting and protecting the child's right to play please visit: <http://www.ipa-ewni.org.uk> see 'Membership' and download an application pack.

Keeping in touch

Have we got your current contact details? If not please contact Bob Hughes, Membership Secretary: playeducation@ntlworld.com

Contribute

If you are an IPA EWNI member and would like to contribute to future issues of this Newsbrief please contact the editor, Perry Else: mail@ludemos.co.uk

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We are part of IPA World:
<http://ipaworld.org>



It shouldn't happen here

The charity Save the Children has launched a fundraising campaign to help children and young people in the UK for the first time in its 93-year history.



This is a response to the report 'It shouldn't happen here' which states that:

There are an estimated 3.5 million children living in poverty in the UK and this figure is expected to soar by 400,000 in the coming years. A lack of jobs, stagnating wages, increased living costs and spending cuts are placing enormous pressure on families up and down the UK. Children's experiences of poverty and the recession are often overlooked.

The report cites research that states:

- The majority of all children (58%) think it is getting harder for their family to pay for everything.
- Over half of children in poverty (52%) agree that not having enough money makes their parents unhappy or stressed.
- Over a third of children in poverty (36%) say their family struggles to pay the bills.
- More than 4 in 10 children in poverty (43%) 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that their parents are cutting back on things for themselves, such as new clothes and food.

See: <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/uk-child-poverty>

Please feel free to share your stories of organisations surviving and thriving... it's tough out there.