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## Dublin City Play Strategy 2021 – 2025

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### Dublin City Play Strategy ‘Pollinating Play’ (2021 – 2025)

The new Dublin City Play Strategy; ‘Pollinating Play’ (2021 – 2025) is a key guiding document for Dublin City Council and its partners as a sound basis for fully implementing a comprehensive play strategy for the city and to realise the vision for Dublin as a ‘Child Friendly and Playful City’.

This strategy follows on from the Dublin City Play Plan (DCPP); Play here, Play there, Play Everywhere’ (2012 – 2017) and will be implemented in support of the plan as a continued local authority response in promoting and supporting ‘play’ for children and young people. The Dublin City Play Strategy is underpinned by the UNCRC Article 31; *the child’s right to play*.

#### Defining Play

The strategy vision, mission, principles, policy statements and actions are informed by the definition of play set out within United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and General Comment 17 on Article 31; which defines play as:

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

#### A Strategy and action plan to future proof ‘play’ for Dublin’s Young Citizens

Dublin City Play Strategy includes an action plan that involves specific focus on adopting and implementing ‘play sufficiency’ as a key principle in assessing quality in play provision and environments. This presents a holistic approach to supporting play in terms of the overall health and well-being of children and young people as active citizens who can participate in their city and local communities through positive childhood experiences in which they can *play now, play more and play better!*

#### Purpose & Scope

The scope of the new 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 ‘The National Children’s Strategy; ‘Better Outcomes Brighter Futures’ (2014) 0 – 24 age group

#### Context: Children’s Play & Policy

- **1992:** Ireland’s ratification of UNCRC
- **2000:** National Children’s Strategy
- **2003 - 2008:** Ireland’s first National Play Strategy ‘Ready, Steady Play!’ was launched in 2003
- **2012:** ‘Your City Your Space’ Dublin City Council Public Realm Strategy
- **2014:** Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) launched ‘Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures’ (BOBF) (2014 – 2020), a new policy framework for children and young people
- **Present;** The Dublin City Parks Strategy (2019 – 2022)

## **Aligning Strategy Progress with National Strategies – Aligning benefits of Play with 5 national outcomes for BOBF:**

- Active and Healthy
- Achieving their full potential in all Areas of Health and Development
- Safe and Protected from Harm
- Economic security and opportunity
- Connected and Respected
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## **Alignments and dual actions within with other relevant strategic documents**

- The Dublin City Parks Strategy (2019 – 2022)
- Dublin City Tree Strategy 2016 – 2020
- The Dublin City Biodiversity Action Plan 2015 – 2020
- The Heart of Dublin – Dublin City Centre Masterplan (2016) – Public Realm Strategy

## **Developing the Strategy through community engagement**

The consultation process to date has used a wide range of consultative methods. Parents/carers, children and young people gave their views by participating in the following:

- Approx. 600 completed online surveys 'Have your say about play',
- Pop-up play consultations in a number of the city's main parks
- Organisations/ youth workshops in recreation centres
- National Playday - large number of children participated in short interviews and playful and creative workshops
- Dublin City's Comhairle na nÓg -
  - completed the online survey,
  - participated in 'play strategy' workshops
  - Formed a sub-group to review the strategy draft.
- Ongoing; 'Children's views on COVID 19 Restrictions' – DCU report available on DCC administrative area.

## **Dublin City Play Strategy Action Plan 2021 – 2025**

The proposed Play Sufficiency Assessment 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 Strategic Action Plan includes comprehensive, practical actions and achievable timeline from 2021 – 2025.

<b>Policy Statement 1: Develop and Awareness of play and its value and importance in the lives of children and young people.</b>	
<b>Action</b>	<b>Measure</b>
Awareness & Promotion: 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 x information booklet/s highlighting the importance of play
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 & opportunities for child led informal play to happen.
Consultation: 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

Events: 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
Advocacy: Work partners and children and youth groups such as Comhairle na n'Og to develop and publish a 'Dublin City Play Manifesto'	Manifesto Completed Circulated and Displayed
Promoting Playwork Principles: 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
Irish Play Safety Statement: 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.
<b>Policy Statement 2: Create an Effective city-wide play infrastructure through collaborative design and planning with children and young people that enhances and responds to their existing infrastructure.</b>	
<b>Action</b>	<b>Measure</b>
Quality Assessments: 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 to achieve 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.
Play Sufficiency Awareness and Training: Facilitate interdepartmental & stakeholder awareness sessions on Play Sufficiency to support the completion of ongoing Play Sufficiency Assessments.	Increased interdepartmental awareness, understanding and support for actions that will secure play sufficiency.
Funding: 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
Addressing Play deficits: 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
Destination Playgrounds: 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.

Playground Development Framework: 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
Maintenance & Repairs: Fully commission the use of electronic means for routine playground inspections.	System in place and operational
Addressing rapid urban development and climate change: Develop a Pilot project to consider opening school grounds for community access.	Increased community play spaces
Community Play: Work collaboratively and maintain strong links with DCC Area Offices & Community Development Officers and/or 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
<b>Policy Statement 3: Place a key focus on accessible and inclusive opportunities for play for all children and young people</b>	
<b>Action</b>	<b>Measure</b>
Inclusion: Develop a toolkit for inclusion and accessibility in partnership with Department of Children, Education, Disability, and Integration & Youth (DCEDIY).	Publish toolkit Publish on DCC website list of availability of accessible and inclusive play facilities
Improved and increased Play Opportunities for Older Children/Teenagers: 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.
<b>Policy Statement 4: Work in partnership to support schools, early childhood and education settings to improve and increase child led play experiences.</b>	
<b>Action</b>	<b>Measure</b>
Benefits of improved and increased opportunities for Play in Schools: Develop a 'Play in Schools' Toolkit/Guide in partnership with Department of Children, Education, Disability, and Integration & Youth (DCEDIY).	Publish toolkit as booklet & online resource in DCC Website

**Policy Statement 5: support children and young people to enjoy and fully exercise their right to play by providing ease of access to engage in cultural life and the arts.**

<b>Action</b>	<b>Measure</b>
Art and Play: 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
Playful Galleries, libraries, Museums & Heritage Sites: 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

**Progress to date**

A report and final draft of the Dublin City Play Strategy 'Pollinating Play' 2021 – 2025 was presented at the May 2021 Arts, Culture, Leisure and Recreation Strategic Policy Committee (SPC). This resulted in agreement by the SPC that the final draft of Dublin City Play Strategy be included on the agenda for the June Monthly City Council meeting. The Report was considered at the July City Council meeting and it was recommended that the strategy be presented and discussed with each Local Area Committee. This consultation was completed in July 2021.

During the Local Area Committee Consultation it was agreed that 'Pollinating Play' would be used as a working title for the Dublin City Play Strategy and that children and young people throughout the city would be invited to enter a public competition to suggest an innovative and meaningful title for the Strategy. This will involve schools, youth groups and Dublin City's Comhairle na nÓg.

**Resolution:**

That Dublin City Council notes the contents of Report No. 233/2021 and hereby approves the contents therein.

**Richard Shakespeare**  
**Assistant Chief Executive**  
**Date 19<sup>th</sup> August 2021.**

# POLLINATING PLAY!

## DUBLIN CITY PLAY STRATEGY

2021 – 2025



## POLLINATING PLAY! DUBLIN CITY PLAY STRATEGY PARTNERS

**Partners in the Dublin City Play Strategy are made up of Dublin City Council Arts Strategic Policy Committee (SPC), with Dublin City Council as the lead Agency. The following agencies have also contributed to its development:**

*An Garda Síochána (AGS), Ballymun Regeneration Ltd (BRL), Children in Hospital Ireland (CHI), City of Dublin Youth Service Board (CDYSB), Department of Children, Education, Disability, and Integration & Youth (DCEDIY), Department of Education and Skills (DES), Department of Social Protection (DSP), Disability Equality Specialist Support Agency (DESSA), Dublin City Childcare Committee (DCCC), Dublin City Council (DCC), Dublin City University (DCU), Dublin City Community Forum (DCCF), Dublin City Comhairle na nÓg, Health Service Executive (HSE), Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO), National Parents Council (NPC), Office of Public Works (OPW), Rathmines Pembroke Community Partnership (RPCP), Revitalising Areas through Planning Investment and Development (RAPID), Súgradh (SI), The Ark.*

**Other City and County Councils:** South Dublin County Council (SDCC), Fingal County Council (FCC), Dun Laoghaire County Council (DLCC), Office of Public Works (OPW)

Government Departments review and endorsement of Dublin City Play Strategy: TBC

Department of Children, Education, Disability, and Integration & Youth (DCEDIY). – Olive McGovern - TBC

Ombudsman for Children's Office Dr Niall Muldoon

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## DUBLIN CITY PLAY STRATEGY; *POLLINATING PLAY* (2021- 2025)

### Executive Summary/Forward

#### LES MOORE – HEAD OF CITY PARKS

It is with great pride that I present Dublin City Council's work in developing and producing the Dublin City Play Strategy; 'Pollinating Play' (2021– 2025). In May 2012, Dublin was the first city in Ireland to produce and launch a city play plan wherein Dublin City Council was the lead agency in developing and producing a multi-agency citywide plan for play. The subsequent development of this play strategy is a welcome policy document in support of the strategic implementation of the Play Plan. I am very pleased to be leading Dublin City Council's initiative that involves commitment and support in providing improved and increased opportunities for play for children and young people throughout Dublin City. Taking a holistic approach is essential 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, abilities and socio-economic backgrounds. This has required a radical change in the traditional approach taken to supporting play and adopting a paradigm shift within governments, local authorities and society in general in understandings and perceptions of children's play.

The Dublin City Play Strategy 'Pollinating Play' (2021 – 2025) is underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Article 31; *the child's Right to play*. The strategy is informed by the subsequent publication of UNCRC's General Comment 17 Article 31 (GC17) that sets out in detail the obligations for states parties to support 'play' as rights based issue for children and young people. Adopting the key principles and recommendations of this General Comment has influenced the continued and slightly modified 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*.

Dublin City Council fully supports and promotes sound and up-to-date concepts and theories of play in addition to supporting play as a 'rights' based issue for children and young people. This approach 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 well-being. Supporting 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 will result in the development of rich and engaging play environments and experiences that are fundamental in supporting happy and healthy childhoods. This provides strong foundations that can support children and young people to be confident and well-functioning young citizens who feel included and are actively engaged in their communities and society in general.

In addition to guidance from UNCRC regarding children's play, the Dublin City Play Strategy 'Pollinating Play' (2020 – 2025) has adopted the principle of 'play sufficiency'. The Welsh Government Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 provides an example of best practice in terms of this principle as it places a statutory duty on all local authorities to assess as far as is reasonably practicable, secure and sufficient opportunities for play for children and young people. Adopting this principle also supports the process of developing

an organisational framework regarding the assessment of current and proposed opportunities for play that moves beyond playgrounds to encompass a more broad reaching approach that responds to children and young people's need to access to more informal and everyday opportunities for play. Therefore, one of the aims of this play strategy is work intra-departmentally, across departments and with partner and outside agencies to develop a contextual approach to assessment of opportunities for play that are unique to Dublin City. The value of working collaboratively supports the development of a common understanding of play and appreciation of 'collective wisdom' in supporting children's right to play and consider what might constitute a 'good environment for play'.

Many people supported the preparation of this strategy through participation of an ongoing consultation process that involved children and young people from various youth groups, schools and after-school clubs as well as parents, carers, youth workers and childcare providers who gave their views and informed the shape and scope of the strategy. Collaborative work also took place between the city council's play development, the Lab Arts Centre and the Ombudsman for Children's Office in hosting a series of consultative workshops that sparked conversations and thinking about children's right to play under article 31 and what it means to live in a child-friendly and playful city.

The development of the play strategy also required contributions from local communities, children and young people throughout the city. This process involved children and young people and their parents, who shared their views and ideas as part of a citywide online survey 'have your say about play' (2019-2020). This online survey was available alongside interactive workshops and conversations hosted at National Playdays 2018 & 19, Pop-up Play Consultations in some of the Dublin's local parks, and sub-group and general advisory meetings with the 2018, 2019 & 2020 Comhairle na nÓg. 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 which involved the Lab Arts Centre, Central Model School and the city council's network of recreation centres. Dublin City Council also consulted cross-departmentally and with partner organisations and outside agencies to obtain additional input, comments and agreements for the content of the new city play strategy.

Going forward the City Council will continue to build on conversations and research methods with the city's citizens and place particular focus on its young citizens by involving them in the planning and design of new play experiences and the redesign and reimagining of existing opportunities for play. The inclusion of children and young people in the design and planning of a diverse network of local community and public shared spaces has significant benefits regarding their development as active citizens. This has particular relevance to older children who benefit from positive experiences of shared public space that provides strong connections with identity and belonging. Providing inclusive public space supports older children to interact with peers and explore their freedom as they transition from adolescence to adulthood and recognise themselves as participating citizens with rights.

The newly developed Dublin City Play Strategy; 'Pollinating Play' (2020 – 2025) will include a comprehensive action plan that will ensure detailed and phased set of actions to realise the vision for Dublin as a child friendly and playful city where all children living in and visiting

Dublin City can enjoy and fully exercise their right to play. This measure places equal importance, value and focus on opportunities for play as part of children's infrastructure within the built and natural environment that supports and enhances their everyday freedoms and incidental access and playful use of public space.

On behalf of Dublin City Council, I want to thank the various departments with Dublin City Council that have contributed to the development of this strategy through review and agreement of strategy themes and approval and agreement of future collaborative working. I would also like to thank our many partner organisations, key stakeholders and individuals who contributed toward producing this document and making it fit for purpose.

I would like to express the City Council's sincere gratitude to Gloucestershire University (UK) supported by Dr Wendy Russell, Visiting Fellow at University of Gloucestershire and independent researcher into children's play and Olive McGovern Department of Children and Youth Affairs for their highly valued review and endorsement of this document.

The collaborative work proposed between Dublin City Council and Play Wales and Play Scotland will provide excellent resources and models of best practice. I also look forward to the continued and future cross-departmental, partner and outside agency collaboration at local and national and international level that will ensure further development and improvement of practices. I am confident that these collaborative partnerships will continue well into the future and support the City Council in moving forward to implement the strategic actions included in the new play strategy.

The Dublin City Play Strategy will be a key guiding document in developing informed understanding of the importance of play and will highlight government obligations as well as identifying roles and responsibilities of private sectors and all individuals working with children and young people. The successful implementation of the Dublin City Play Strategy; 'Pollinating Play' (2020 – 2025) will continue to respond to the child's right to play as a key priority for the city and improve the lives of its youngest citizens by realising the vision for Dublin as a child-friendly and playful city.

Leslie Moore

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Dublin City Council

Head of City Parks

Date: .../../..

### **A Message from the Ombudsman for Children – Dr Niall Muldoon**

As Ombudsman for children, I welcome the recent development of the Dublin City Play Strategy; 'Pollinating Play' (2021– 2025) 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 (DCPP); 'Play here, Play there, Play Everywhere' (2012 – 2017) . This measure has secured the continued local authority response to promoting and supporting 'play' for children and young people that will see the ongoing maintenance, development of improved and increased opportunities for play throughout Dublin City.

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 17 (GC17) Article 31 Article 31; the child's Right to play, as the key underlining principles for the Dublin City Play Strategy. The council has been guided by the by 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 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 has 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, has contributed greatly to the development of final draft of the Play Strategy. Taking on board the many views of its city's citizens and in particular it's young citizens, the Dublin City Play Strategy moves beyond the provision of conventional playgrounds and adopts a citywide and more broad reaching approach. This all-inclusive approach identifies the 'right' conditions for play to take place by considering time, space and understandings 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 their local neighbourhoods.

The focus for the Ombudsman for children's Office is supporting and improving the lives of children and young people. The Dublin City Play Strategy further demonstrates this focus by situating play at policy level. This presents a legacy for Dublin city that enhances the understanding and importance of play, and highlights obligations for governments and accountability of private sectors and all individuals working with children and young people.

The success of Dublin City Play Strategy; 'Pollinating Play' (2021 – 2025) is determined by its rights based foundations which place a key focus on the developmental benefits of play for children and young people in terms of their social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional development and their overall health and well-being.



**Local Playday Poppintree Park**

## **Dublin City Play Strategy 'Pollinating Play' (2021 – 2025) 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 well-being.

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 that will support children and young people's natural creativity and imagination and their everyday freedom to enjoy play in all its forms.

Applying a play-led approach to the development of a citywide play infrastructure will 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.

Auditing of current support for play and outline of rationale for further improvements is 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 active research with children and young people with regard to their use of outdoor space.

Universal design is key in supporting, promoting and providing non-discriminative opportunities for play.

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.

## INTRODUCTION

### Dublin City Play Strategy 'Pollinating Play' (2021 – 2025)

Dublin City has a child population of 321,741 children less than 18 years of age. As the city's main local authority, this presents the very real issue of access to high quality opportunities to play that includes but moves beyond playgrounds 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 almost all of their waking hours playing, 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 1999). They play in their homes, gardens, at 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, loose materials, toys and indoor spaces that provide a variety of stimuli such as a variety of toys and everyday items like pots, pans, water etc. that spark imagination and creativity. 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 and spaces. 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 GC17 Article 31, 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').

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 well-being of children and young people.

The Dublin City Play Strategy; 'Pollinating Play' (2020 – 2025) is a key strategic document that will enhance and further develop play facilities, and opportunities for play that will support 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 (Silva, 2011). UNCRC Article 31 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 to further development and interventions of designated and informal places and spaces that creates the network of streets, places, people and things that are interwoven into children and young people's everyday freedoms and infrastructures (Arup "Cities Alive" 2017). The strategy has adopted 'play sufficiency' (Children & Families Wales Measure 2010) as a key principle in presenting a contextual platform for the ongoing

development and assessment of a citywide play infrastructure. This approach acknowledges and responds to children and young people's unconventional use of space, their diverse cultures and the spontaneous and unpredictable nature of play as key approaches in the co-creation of a child friendly and playful city.

### Scope of the Dublin City Play Strategy

The scope of the new 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 'The National Children's' Strategy; 'Better Outcomes Brighter Futures'(2014) 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 in terms of choice and age range for youth work.

The newly developed set of themed policy statements and subsequent strategy action plan involves specific focus on adopting the principle of 'play sufficiency' as set out in General Comment 17, which is used as a guiding principle in assessing the quality of play facilities, services and opportunities to play as part of children's everyday lives. This will require a balanced set of measures that will support the ongoing development of rich play environments that incorporates 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'. (Arup "Cities Alive" 2017).

Since the launch of the Dublin City Play Plan 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 DCP was completed. The review of the Dublin City Play Plan; 'play here, play there, play everywhere' (2012 – 2017) has provided information that has impacted on and informed the policy statements and action-plan within the new Dublin City Play Strategy; 'Pollinating Play' (2021 - 2025). (See Appendix? City Play Plan Review – Summary Report).

### Using the Play Strategy

The newly developed play strategy and action plan will be a key document that will guide the implementation of strategic actions that will realise the vision for Dublin as a child friendly and playful city. The 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. The strategy and action plan can also be used as guiding documents for developing actions to improve children and young people's play experiences within the context of their specific service or setting.

The development of the Dublin City Play Strategy has presented opportunity to develop and implement a strategic action plan based on a comprehensive understanding of play. Although many playgrounds have been built in Dublin they are only one form of solution to



multi-faceted issues. Designs that are too specific and dictate where and what children play have potential to prohibit spontaneity, creativity and the heterogeneous nature of play. As each street, neighbourhood, city and country possesses individual characteristics of place, it is far more appropriate to support children in navigating and utilising their existing environment for play. Thus maintaining the 'chase' element of play, which impacts on the level of challenge risk and ordinary magic of play (Welsh Government, 2012, cited in Lester and Russell, 2013).

## DEFINING PLAY

Dublin City Council takes on a "whole child" approach in demonstrating acknowledgement of the concept and meaning of 'play' 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 importance of play. Wales and more recently Scotland have adopted the legal principle of sufficiency in response to General Comment 17 Article 31 and based on their respective definitions of play on the obligations for government set out within this article.

The Dublin City Play Strategy has adopted the definition of play provided within UNCRC General Comment 17; Article 31, *the child's right to play* wherein play is defined as follows:

*"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 Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) General Comment 17

Defining play in this way highlights the importance of play as part of a child's overall development, in particular their general health and well-being 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 that requires adults and key decision makers to pay close attention to children's use of space for playful engagements and responding appropriately in terms of location, and type of play spaces from their doorstep and outward to the wider community and in public and wild spaces citywide.

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 diverse play cultures of children and young people. This approach addresses creating the right conditions for them to access play facilities and services and engage in a wide range of opportunities for play in local neighbourhoods. 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**, it is embodied

and embedded in the environment, 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 develop a further sense of identity and belonging with people and place.

### How children play

Play can be viewed by children as something they 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 can include sitting or lying, 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 associated levels of movement and dexterity that are not usually be considered for this type of play activity, which holds equal importance to more visibly physically active, and dynamic play activities. The health and developmental benefits associated with the physical, social, psychological and therapeutic values that play incorporates requires flexible and often impromptu responses that are authentic to the unpredictable, spontaneous nature of play. Play is how children find the fun, novelty and wonder in the ordinary magic of 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, increasing traffic, over scheduling of children and young people's free time and fears for children's safety (e.g. 'stranger danger') and 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 Doctors waiting areas 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.

### What, where and how children play and who they play with

Supporting children's play requires a holistic and broad-reaching approach that moves beyond facilities and organised activities and gives key consideration to time, space and permissions as key measures in creating the right conditions for play to happen. 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. This framework will focus on preserving the unique definition, characteristics, value and aesthetic nature of play by adopting a more comprehensive understanding and awareness of play and its importance in children's lives.

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

*"Put more simply, play as we know it is primarily a fortification against the disabilities of life. It transcends life's distresses and boredom and in general allows the individual or group to substitute their own enjoyable, fun-filled, theatrics for other representations of reality in a tacit attempt to feel that life is worth living. That is what we called earlier viability. In many cases as well, play lets us exercise physical or social or mental adaptations that translate - directly or indirectly - into ordinary life adjustments."*

(Sutton-Smith, 2008)



*"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*

## PLAY POLICY STATEMENTS

### Dublin City Play Strategy; 'Pollinating Play' (2021 – 2025) Themed Policy Statements

The Dublin City Play Strategy includes the following set of themed policy statements that further emphasises play as a rights based issue for children and young people (see full details of strategy themes in Policy Statements section).

**DEVELOP AN AWARENESS OF PLAY AND ITS VALUE AND IMPORTANCE IN THE EVERYDAY LIVES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

**CREATE AN EFFECTIVE CITY-WIDE PLAY INFRASTRUCTURE THROUGH COLLABORATIVE DESIGN THAT ENHANCES AND RESPONDS TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE.**

**PLACE A KEY FOCUS ON ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PLAY FOR ALL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

**WORK IN PARTNERSHIP TO SUPPORT SCHOOLS, EARLY CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION SETTINGS TO IMPROVE AND INCREASE CHILD-LED PLAY EXPERIENCES.**

**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; 'Pollinating Play' (2021 – 2025)

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 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) General Comment 17 on Article 31; *the child's right to play*. This includes city planning, roads and traffic, arts and culture, community and capital projects, policies etc. that place international influence and accountability on local authorities to further support and provide for play as a right. Moreover, including realistic budgets and practicable timeline for implementation.
- Adopt key principles, concepts and theories of play in keeping with the Dublin City Play Plan 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.
- Involve 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 ensures adequate time and opportunities within the school day for rest, artistic and cultural activities and rich play environments.
- Align with the 'Five National Outcomes' adopted by the National Policy Framework for Children and young people 'Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures' (BOBF) (2015 – 2020); *Active & Healthy, Achieving, Safe, Economic Security and Connected and Respected*.

### Adopting the principle of Play Sufficiency as a methodology for ongoing monitor, review & evaluation of the Play Strategy Action Plan implementation

Throughout the duration of the strategy Dublin City Council will continue to engage the 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 and redesign and upgrading of existing play facilities. Everyday opportunities for play will be further addressed at more local level by working with communities, especially children and young people to gain understanding of their use of outdoor space in order to provide appropriate support such as time, space and permissions for play to happen alongside recording and acknowledging local play cultures and children and young people's play patterns that will inform and shape any future city planning and design.

### Budget

The subsequent actions regarding the strategy themes will include accurate costings and timeline to meet with short-term proposals and realistic and practical estimations for medium and long-term plans. The proposed budget will be in alignment with previous and current City Council budgets for play and recreational facilities. This will include the budgetary commitments of supporting City Council departments in maintaining a co-ordinated approach to supporting the Play Strategy and subsequent Action Plan.



UNCRC 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 and contextual action plan that is informed and guided by General Comment 17 Article 31 and 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 was adopted by all

countries around the world, apart from the United States of America and Ireland who signed the convention in 1990 and finally ratified the UNCRC 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. More recently Somalia became the 196<sup>th</sup> Nation to ratify the convention in 2015. 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) And
- That the child's views must be considered and taken into account in all matters affecting him or her (Article 12).

Article 15 is important right within with the list above as it presents a case for children and young people's clandestine use of space and how they are received and accepted within the public realm. This is an equally important right regarding children and young people's contested use of space, which may not meet with adult expectations or approvals. Additionally, article 15 also presents a case for *spatial justice* (Russell 2019) as it states that Children have the right to meet with friends, join groups, are entitled to the human right to freedom of association, peaceful assembly and be free to set up or join an organisation. (Article 15).

The report on UNCRC) General Comment 17 (GC17) sets out in detail the obligations and measures that governments and states bodies are urged to take in order to realise this right for all children and young people and involves the following three core objectives;

- 1) To Enhance Understandings of play
- 2) To ensure respect for and strengthen the application of rights under Article 31 as well as other rights in the Convention
- 3) To highlight the implications for the determination of obligations of governments, the roles and responsibilities of the private sector and guidelines for all individuals working with children.

Adopting a clear and comprehensive understanding of play as instinctive, intrinsic and vital components to the general health and well-being 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 Article 31, thus promoting and supporting play as a statutory basic human right for all children and young people. Dublin City Council has adopted this analysis and interpretation of Article 31 alongside the application of the principle of 'play sufficiency' in order to fully support and

uphold UNCRC Article 31 as set out in General Comment 17, Article 31, and as recommended within this general comment.

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.

All other rights under the Convention of the rights of the child are indivisible and interdependent. Article 31 is central to the realisation of many other rights (but in particular Article 2; non-discrimination): Article 3 (best interests of the child): Article 6 (life, survival and development): Article 12 (right to be heard). In addition to links with other relevant articles within the Convention; (Articles 13, 15, 17, 19, 22, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 34, 37, 38). The Dublin City Play Strategy includes the considerations within GC17 in addition to taking on board the recommendations associated with obligations for government/states parties to fulfil Article 31 Rights.

The indivisibility and interdependency to other rights clearly identifies the parallel requirements placed on 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. (See Appendix? 'GC17 Article 31; *the child's right to play*)



Poppintree Park Ballymun



## THE POLICY CONTEXT FOR THE DUBLIN CITY PLAY STRATEGY

### Children's Play & Policy

*"Cherishing all of the children of the nation equally"* was a key statement and aspiration within Ireland's 1916 Declaration of Independence. Prior to and since 1916 and historically over time there have been many societal, economic and cultural changes throughout Ireland that addressed Ireland's duty to support children as valued members of society.

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 well-being.

Over the years, different acts have highlighted the issues of the time in terms of children's rights and the state. Child protection issues and the accountability of parents and carers was addressed in the 1908 'Children's Act' with regard to the social rights of the child based on the accountability of parents and carers as opposed to a child centred issue. Industrial schools were abolished by the 'Young Person's and Children's Act' of 1920 and limitations of how many hours children could work were introduced in the Child Labour act' of 1938. A significant landmark leading into contemporary legislation was Donagh O'Malley's ground-breaking announcement of the 1966 'Free Education Scheme'. The outlawing corporal punishment in schools soon followed in 1982. Although this act was revised in 2016, the 1987 'Status of Children Act' continues to be known and cited under its original title. The 'Status of Children' act 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 act such as those mentioned above place further emphasis and acknowledgement the importance of children and young people's development from birth to adolescence and transition to adulthood. This includes the developmental benefits regarding access to good quality play opportunities that are clearly identified as a key component of childhood.

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 (United Nations General Assembly 1989). Consequently, the National Children's Strategy was developed in 2000. This entailed a national consultation process that involved over 2,500 children and young people who identified poor access to play opportunities and facilities as a major issue (The National Children's Strategy; *Our Children – their Lives* 2000). 2003 saw the launch of Ireland's first National Play Strategy; 'Ready Steady Play!' (2003 – 2008). One of the key recommendations within the National Play Strategy was the development of play plans and strategies by each city and county local authority to support Article 31; 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 a key development in the acknowledgement of 'play' as a right for children and young people.

Over the past 10 years, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) has set out a number of policies and strategies related to children, young people and families. Consequently, the establishment of the Children and Young People's Policy Consortium resulted in a whole-of-Government approach in bringing into alignment clear and corresponding policies. In 2014 'Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (BOBF): the national policy framework for children and young people was launched. 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 (BOBF, 2014 – 2020). During 2018, a mid-term review of the framework was completed, this will be followed by a final review which is currently being prepared. This policy/statement 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 policy also aims to ensure accountability through cross-Government co-ordination that ensures regular reporting, planning and reviews to keep policy progressing and revolving, thus providing possibilities for change (Moss, 2007). The Dublin City Play Plan sits well under the first heading of the five national outcomes, Active and Healthy. Additionally, the National Play Policy 'Ready, Steady Play!' (DCYA, 2003 – 2008) would have particular relevance as it supports the development of Dublin City Play Plan 2012 - 2017; *Play here, Play there, Play everywhere*. This plan is regularly referenced in BOBF as an example of best practice in how local authorities can support, plan and advocate for play. The current play strategy is a further demonstration of constructive actions undertaken in order to realise the vision for Dublin as a child friendly and playful city.

As we now enter into 2020, Dublin City Council has been tasked with the development and launch of the new Dublin City Play Strategy; *'Pollinating Play'* (2020 – 2025). This new play strategy clearly validates ongoing local authority commitment to supporting and upholding children and young people's right to play.

### Aligning Strategy Progress with National Strategies

Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (BOBF): The national policy framework for children and young people (2014-2020), 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, adaption, 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 and Cole-Hamilton, 2012). Peer led, self-directed play assists in developing motor skills (Low, Deiner and Qui 2005) in addition to reducing accidents (HC Netherlands 2004). With increasing rate of children being diagnosed with ADHD it has been found that play, particularly in a natural environment has assisted in reducing these symptoms Panskeep (2008) and HC Netherlands (2004). Therefore, careful consideration should be given to the therapeutic benefits of play in terms of children and young people's overall health and development that includes their physical health and also places equal importance on their mental health and well-being.

- **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 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 consideration must be given to the fact that play contributes greatly to children's social and emotional well-being 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 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. (Play for a Change, Lester & Russell 2008)

- **Safe and Protected from Harm**

Most professions require a code of ethics whether a shopkeeper, hairdresser or scientist, each will be faced with ethical issues of one form or another, some of which will be linked to legislation. Ethics have particular relevance to social and health professions as ethical considerations will apply to almost all of their work within everyday practice. In relation to children, there are standard procedures applied to all staff in relation to working with

children and young people; DCC Safeguarding Children Policy. The 'Child Safeguarding' procedures are available in various forms that are appropriate to different staff roles and professions i.e. close contact, minimal contact and so on. In terms of the Strategic Implementation of the Dublin City Play Plan, '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 e.g. parks landscaping, public domain.

- **Economic security and opportunity**

The introduction and launch 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 in 2018 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. This provides an innovative form of support to parents by finding alternative ways of paying for public time where demands have been put on the time of working parents to be involved in their children's 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 involving the Department of Health, Education and Skills. 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 Programme in mainstream pre-school settings.

- **Connected and Respected**

Creating a democratic environment for children enables and supports them to discuss and think critically on 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. This should include listening, observing and talking to children a process of developing a shared understanding of childhood and children (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 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. Consequently, 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 Better Outcomes Brighter Futures, 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 UK's Every Child Matters which have striking similarities to Ireland's. This comprehensive 'spider's web' diagram presents an illustration of the complexity and interconnectivity of the relationship between play, well-being and the Every Child Matters outcomes. Consequently, this is also the case with play and well-being and the five national outcomes for Ireland's Better Outcomes Brighter Futures.

### Alignments and dual actions within with other 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.

The Irish National Play Policy (2004) swiftly followed Ireland's ratification (1992) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Dublin City Play Plan (2012 – 2017) was a direct consequence of the National Play Strategy (2003 – 2008) and is in alignment with the New Policy Framework for Children and Young People (2012). These connections will instigate inter and intra-departmental and inter-agency and collaborative working that will assist in realising the vision of the play strategy.

**The Dublin City Parks Strategy (2019 – 2022):** Dublin City Council's Parks and Landscape Services prepared The Dublin City Parks Strategy (2019 – 2022). The newly developed 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 includes 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.

**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 kind of initiatives also present opportunities for play that supports children and young people's environmental and nature based play experiences.

**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 supports children's play.

**The Heart of Dublin – Dublin City Centre Masterplan (2016) – Public Realm Strategy:** This strategy includes identification of public space and places that hold the potential to be child friendly and playful.

Having a shared understanding of play by both government departments and local authorities is now embedded in current policies and strategies for children and young people. This avoids recent challenges in supporting and facilitating self-directed, unstructured play for play's sake, which can sometimes be overlooked through a misguided focus on instrumental and outcomes based approaches to play provision. The Dublin City Play Strategy contains multifaceted links to the National Children's Strategy that places emphasis on the importance of play, acknowledging of play as a right and the intrinsic nature and value of play regarding the general health and well-being of children and young people.

#### **Challenges in realising the Dublin City Play Strategy:**

Realising all of the themes 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 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
- 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 in cultural and artistic opportunities for children
- Marketing and commercialisation of play





## REVIEW OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Dublin City Council has consulted with partners agencies and organisations who contributed to the Play Strategy and who will also use the Strategy as a tool for developing their own individual organisational 'statement of intentions' with regard to play.

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 or public consultations with children and young people that featured informal conversations and playful engagements and observations of their use of outdoor space.

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, 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:

**Online survey 'have your say about play' (2019-2020);** This online survey was available on Dublin City Council Website and included 3 x questionnaires for specific categories- Adults, children under 12 years and teenagers

**Interactive workshops and conversations hosted at National Playdays;** as part of National Playdays in 2018 and 19 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.

**Parks Pop-Up Play Consultations:** Pop-up Play Consultations in some of the Dublin's local parks, that involved parents/carers and children and young people more.....

**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 2018, 2019 & 2020 Comhairle na nÓg where they participated in 'play strategy' workshops and formed a sub-group to review the play strategy draft and give their views on their experiences of Dublin as a child friendly and playful city. Additionally, the members of Dublin City's Comhairle na nÓg completed hard copies of the 'have your say about play' survey,

**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 Looking – Visual Thinking Strategy (VTS) was used 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 and the city council's network of recreation centres engaged in a series of workshops, which took place over 3 days.

**Greening Strategy Play Friendly Workshops;** During the development of the Greening Strategy for the North East Area of Dublin City, two key areas were identified to carry out mapping and observational research with local children from both the Stoneybatter and Sheriff St Areas. This involved 'Walk & Chalk workshops to explore children and young

people's current use of outdoor local and public space as both neighbourhoods and located within the heart of the city. This resulted in their views and ideas being included within the play strategy and more importantly, they have formed part of the greening strategies for these locations and provide examples of best practice for a citywide greening strategy.

Dublin City Council also consulted cross-departmentally and with partner organisations and outside agencies to obtain additional input, comments and agreements for the content of the new city play strategy.

More recently Dublin City Council Parks & Landscape Service – Play Development, commissioned a report extracted from an online Survey carried out by Dublin City University which focused on 'Report on the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on children's' play and friendships in the Dublin city area' (2020). Available at: (Barron.C & Emmet. M - 2020)

(See appendix? For full 'Report on Play Strategy Consultation')

Link to Youtube Video Ombudsman for Children's Workshop: [https://youtu.be/u\\_6aVUW9Wzg](https://youtu.be/u_6aVUW9Wzg)





## 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 produce and implement a strategic action plan. The newly developed and completed Play Sufficiency Assessments will feed into the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the play strategy 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 very 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 consequential strategies. Some stakeholders are obvious, for example, parks and landscape design, housing, community development, education, health, sport development, childcare etc. 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 play provision. As does 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 inter-departmental and interagency working. Based on their full understanding of the implications of their organisational commitment to both the city play plan and this subsequent strategy, each partner organisation will be requested to assist in delivering a key strategy action by signing up to the 'Play Declaration' 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 specific needs, marginalised groups etc. Developing the charter will include the city's youngest citizens and give them a voice in a key issue that affects 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 is a key challenge for governments' worldwide and subsequently local authorities. Often identified as the 'forgotten right', Article 31; *the child's right to play* needs more comprehensive support in order for this right to be fulfilled appropriately. A welcome development in 2014 was UNCRC General Comment 17 on Article 31: *the child's right to play (GC17)*. GC17 was developed to address concerns regarding poor recognition

and understanding of Article 31. This presents key deficits in how children access high quality and varied play experiences in the countries, cities and communities in which they live.

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 (See Introduction). 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 well-being of the child. This places a key 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, including decision makers must take their needs seriously, listen to what they say and attempt to facilitate them. Developing such a model of multi-agency, co-ordinated 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 well-being.

From birth and advancing through key 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. 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 response 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 and resilience in order to develop adaptive responses to expected and unexpected life events.

Children spend more time playing than any other waking activity (Playboard, 1990: 8, Cited in Sutton Smith, Hughes Evolutionary Playwork). When play is led by the child, 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 as some of the key benefits of play supports their 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. Many children and young people involve themselves in sport, which although hugely beneficial for their development, in itself is focused on specific goals and levels of achievement bound by a specific set of rules that may not always be attractive to all children. 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. Evidentially, 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. (Armitage. M. 2011).

Equality of access is of paramount importance in the delivery of high quality play opportunities and experiences for children and young people of all ages and abilities. Dublin City Council will endeavour to identify key barriers to play for those children requiring particular attention such as marginalised groups, children with specific needs, disabled children, gender equality, and diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

Parents/guardians, carers, providers and children are often significant stakeholders. The remarks and opinions of children and young people were very significant to developing the content, themes, 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, photos, walkabouts and

other creative methods that will assess how local spaces and facilities works or not for them. Adopting sufficiency leads to carrying out local research that provides local responses that can identify universal themes that will guide the design of child-friendly and playful neighbourhoods and play provision.

Taking all of the above into consideration demonstrates the commitment of Dublin City Council's advocacy for awareness of the concept and meaning of play and its value and importance in the lives of children and young people by ensuring that the play strategy includes strategic actions that contribute to the development a city that supports 'play for play's sake'. In this way, we prioritise the importance of the overall benefits of play in terms of general health, well-being and in particular mental health of children and young people. This has resulted in taking a more holistic approach to supporting play, rather than focusing on outcomes based agendas where utilitarian focus on play is solely for of academic achievement or social and economic gain. This utilitarian approach is noted within UNCRC GC17 as an infringement of children's rights under article 31 as it states:

*"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 their fundamental importance of those activities for children's well-being, health and development are poorly understood and undervalued."*

UNCRC GC17 ARTICLE 31



National Playday 2019 Merrion Square Park

### 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

Dublin City Council is committed to the 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. General Comment 17 Article 31; the child’s right to play, underpins all policy statements included in the Dublin City Play Strategy. Therefore, supporting play is based on sound and up-to-date knowledge regarding the concept and meaning of play and its importance in the lives of all children and young people. The quality indicators developed for this purpose will be based on these key concepts and play theories. 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, Managing Risk in Play Wolverhampton City Council Case Study)

Dublin City Council has adopted and implemented the principle of ‘Play Sufficiency’ in order to developing comparative measures on quantity, quality of play facilities, places, spaces and opportunities for play. The principle of ‘play sufficiency’ has been adopted and implemented to identify matters to 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 is influenced by the playing child, moreover everything that is done to support play places the playing child at the centre of this work (*Manchester Circles ‘Play For Real’ Lester & Russell*). The obligation to monitor, review and evaluate the Dublin City Play Strategy: *Pollinating Play* (2020 – 2025) is a key measure in successfully realising the vision of the Play Strategy: *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 in Dublin City will be a key aim for the city in order to monitor 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 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 Article 31, Dublin City Council has adopted the principle of 'play sufficiency' identified within the 'Children and Families Wales Measure 2010 as key underpinnings for the overall play strategy. The principle of 'play sufficiency' involves an ongoing monitor, review, evaluation and reporting mechanism that will assess the '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, p. 6). This formed part of the Welsh Government's Ant-Poverty Agenda which recognises that children can have poverty of experience, aspirations and opportunities (Play Wales - Play Sufficiency 2021). The completion of this publication coincides with the publication by the UN Committee of General Comment 17 on Article 31; *the child's right to play*, which specifically recommends that governments consider the introduction of legislation that addresses the principle of 'play sufficiency' (Lester and Russell, 2013, p. 6). As part of the Play Sufficiency Duty, Play Wales developed the 'Play Sufficiency Assessment Toolkit' that is used to assess, audit and measure the levels of play opportunities in each local authority in Wales. Subsequently, 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 involves a holistic approach that encompasses play facilities, services and opportunities for play in public parks, playgrounds and also extend out to local neighbourhoods and the public realm. This acknowledges the issue and 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. The process will place a key focus on the themed 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 Play Space Quality Assessment Tool
- Guidance on Mapping Play Spaces that includes playgrounds, open green space and public space
- A policy analysis framework for local authorities

This presents a clear picture of delivery of play facilities, organised activities and opportunities for play in addition to identifying any further actions that will strengthen ongoing support for play. Evaluation of current facilities, services and opportunities for play clarifies current quantitative and qualitative levels and deficits. If required, the assessments



will identify and make recommendations for further enhancement of current and 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 that may also prompt additional required assessments.

#### Developing contextual 'play sufficiency assessments' for Dublin City

The principle of 'play sufficiency' presents a methodology that can be developed to support a proposed contextual quality plan for Dublin City Council. Adopting and adapting this principle and subsequent toolkits to the needs of Dublin City Council and within the organisational structure, is a vital developing a citywide play infrastructure (see policy statement 2 'Developing a citywide play infrastructure').

The development a contextual quality requires liaison and collaboration with Play Wales in order to ensure up-to-date and accurate knowledge and advice on sufficient play provision. 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 (2010). This will enable Dublin City Council to carry out bespoke assessments of local authority supports for play that assists in the development of a citywide play infrastructure.

The tools and templates provided by Play Wales are robust measures based on matters identified that need to be taken into account within Wales Statutory Guidance (Wales 2014). The policy statements featured within the Dublin City Play Strategy are in alignment with these matters, as the key principles that are in alignment with General Comment 17; Article 31. Developing an organisational toolkit will provide key resources to support Dublin City Council as a local authority to collate and analyse sufficient information to measure against a set of newly developed quality indicators within and 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:** In clearly identifying and acknowledging that local authority responsibility for play is not just about providing playgrounds, there are a list the different 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, after-schools clubs and summer project schemes that are facilitated by designated trained staff
- Structured Recreational Activities: as above and sports clubs etc. 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 where practicable in securing and developing 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 – LDCC Policy, Plan and Strategy 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 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 if 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.

**Quality Indicators – How is Dublin doing?;** Drawing on the different matters identified by Wale Play Sufficiency Assessments and the themes within the play strategy will assist in developing a key set of quality indicators that take into account the recommendations within UNCRC General Comment 17 Article 31; *the child's right to play*. The results gleaned from analysis of findings within 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 in terms of children and young people's experiences and concerns about play opportunities where they live.



- Assessing the impact of local opportunities to play with regard to maintaining existing provision and planning and developing 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

**Continuing the city's conversation about play and responding appropriately;** The key focus of the monitoring, evaluation and review process is based on implementing an organisational framework within policy that places the 'playing child' and local communities at the centre of all development processes for high quality play environments. A consultative process with key stakeholders that involves innovative, creative and active consultation primarily with children and young people and the wider community. Maintaining a dialogue with key stakeholders and developing clear and comprehensive conversations that trigger reflection and dialogue will result in gaining a comprehensive picture of the city's citizens, in particular children and young people's satisfaction regarding 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 in order to continue dialogue with key stakeholders but particularly the city's youngest citizens:

- 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 geographical 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 strong relationship between 'play' and the built and natural environment. The desired outcomes of this initiative is to increase the number of children playing outside and ensure 'overall performance' of high quality play infrastructure for Dublin City. 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 the city's citizens that focuses on play will bring about attitudinal change that is informed by advocacy for Article 31; the child's right to play 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.*

*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 that assist in measuring the desired outcomes, level of satisfaction with and performance of local authority responses to supporting play:*

- *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*

**Expected Outcomes;** the findings from the evaluation and reviews are measured against a contextual set of quality indicators that provide information regarding the implementation and progress of the quality plans and strategies for the city. The key 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, greens spaces. Additionally, a more holistic approach is used to support children and young people's movement through, use of the built and natural environments, local streets and open public space as part of their everyday lives, and play experiences.

**Reporting mechanisms, keeping good records and maintaining access to information:** Play Sufficiency Assessments and subsequent reports supports the practice model of keeping good records and ensuring easy access to it. 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 provide vital information that will enable Dublin City Council to provide:

- Annual, tri-annual and final strategy 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.

**Policy analysis framework for local authorities, collaborative working and knowledge sharing;** a key measure in securing consistency will focus on collaborative working and liaison with other local authorities regarding quality plans for supporting play by identifying agreed benchmarks, quality indicators and comparisons of findings and achieved levels of excellence. Adopting the principle of 'play sufficiency' focuses on a holistic approach to the needs of 'the playing child' and avoids the negative development of a 'defensive response' to supporting play. The development and implementation of a contextual 'Play Sufficiency Assessment' as a key action within the Dublin City Play Strategy will further establish the process of improving play facilities, services and opportunities for play in local streets, neighbourhoods and outdoor public space thus providing a model of best practice model for Dublin City.

**Timeframe – when will it happen?;** The initial Play Sufficiency Assessment of facilities and amenities will be carried as set out within the Wales Play Sufficiency Assessments and out in alignment with the timeframe of the Dublin City Play Strategy e.g., short, medium and long-term actions from 2021 – 2025. This will be the beginning of 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, legislation etc., which may occur.

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, how they interact with built and natural environment in order to assess if and what kind of further support is required.

Currently within Dublin City Parks and Landscape Services are working to an interim three year playground improvement and development plan. This can be adapted to a contextual Play Sufficiency Assessments across Dublin City Council's five administrative areas. The proposed Play Sufficiency Assessments will be carried out as follows:

- 2021 - 2025; Annual Play Sufficiency Assessment & Active Research Projects Reports
- 2023; Overall 3 year Play Sufficiency Assessment & Active Research Projects Report for the Dublin City Play Strategy Mid-Review Report.
- 2025; 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 report will form the basis for a further 5-year Play Sufficiency Assessment e.g. 2025 - 2030 as an ongoing process for Local Authorities to support and maintain sufficient opportunities to play.

**Adopt the theory and concept of 'Playwork Practice' as a play led approach to providing play services and managing facilities and opportunities for play in different contexts such as public space, neighbourhoods, play schemes, hospital and direct provision etc.**

The concept of 'playwork' is to identify a framework of practice for those working with children at play. Playwork practice is an approach to working with children that addresses the diminishing freedom and autonomy children currently experience with regard to accessing rich and meaningful play experiences. Playwork Practice provides a way of working within a context that supports children and young people to play spontaneously and retain control over their play (Armitage 2008). Further constraints to play are increasing traffic and founded and unfounded 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 space to play as much as is practicable. Moreover, where adult involvement and interventions are mainly at the behest of the playing child.

In general, the issue of professionalisation and professionalism is vital in developing the professional identity of playwork. In advocating for playwork as a profession, it is worth considering the overarching purpose of playwork. Russell's (forthcoming) chapter will provide 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, cited in Lester forthcoming). A similar initiative took place in Dublin in approximately 1917 when the Presbyterian Church implemented similar social supports in order to remove wayward working class children from Dublin Streets. This was followed in the early sixties and seventies by the 'Civic Institute' and to date by 'Catholic Youth Care' (now Crosscare) and the play and recreation of all children and young people are the key responsibility of local authorities and national and regional youth organisations.

The more contemporary 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 (Kowan.K. 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 (Russell, 2010). There is also the argument that the more obvious constraints such as speeding and increased traffic, stranger danger, violence etc., have forced children and young to retreat indoors resorting to technological play and social media as a new and readily available alternative to outdoor play, playing with friends, exploring etc. It is for these reasons that adults are required to consider how developing a balance of these forms of play can be supported in order to further deal with the constraints in supporting children's play can be addressed (Russell, 2010).

### Playwork Principles

Playwork practice involves its own related conceptual theoretical framework that in response to the unique characteristics of play. The strive for quality service has the dual goal of supporting children's play as rights holders in addition to promoting the reputation of the local authority which takes pride in providing play facilities in the form of play grounds, public space and play services.

Another characteristic of playwork practice is analytical and reflective practice where narratives require 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 (Lester, 2005).

The Playwork Principles (Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group 2005) present guiding principles for practitioners that support the theoretical concept of play as an innate, biological, psychological and social necessity. The Playwork Principles (PPSG 2005) of which there are eight in total, were developed to support the nature, value and importance of play. As a code of practice for the playwork profession, the playwork principles present a practice framework that resembles a moral code as all principles contain elements of virtue, care, duty and responsibility. These principles act as guidance for practitioners. However, supporting Playwork as a profession requires the additional application of a code of practice that can be applied specifically to working with children and play. This implies the identification and clear basis for a code of conduct and practice.

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. (See appendix. 'Playwork Principles')

### 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 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 in co-ordinating collaborative working and initiatives with the 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:

- Co-ordination 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 UK however, there is a dedicated education and training curriculum that is underpinned by theoretical concepts of play that supports the development a framework for professional practice for those working with children at play - 'Playwork Practice'. In order to adopt this approach, it would be necessary to adopt and endorse the establishment of playwork as a professional practice for those working with children and young people at play in Ireland. This informs the practitioner in developing an insight into play and Playwork by obtaining sound and up-to-date information and training that enables them to support children's play by taking a play-centred approach (Sturrock et al, 2004). This ensures support for play as set out in GC17 Article 31 as a human right for children and young people and forms an understanding of how to support and facility play behaviours based on the theoretical concept, value and meaning of play. Moreover, adopting a play-led approach supports the development of a meaningful response by local authorities, parents/guardians, caregivers and providers to the authentic, unpredictable and spontaneous nature of play. This is a twofold approach to supporting play by (a) supporting and upholding Article 31 as set out in GC17 on Article 31; the child's right to play, and (b) responding to the intrinsic nature of play by addressing children's playful disposition and autonomy in directing and creating their own play. Ireland has a long history of people working with children in settings that



supports their play. The City Council play and recreation centres, after-school programmes and school breakfast clubs, schoolyard assistants and special needs assistant and youth workers. All work directly or indirectly with children and play and they are doing so without the benefit of an effective support structure that exists in some other countries e.g. UK, Sweden, and America (Armitage 2008). This presents a significant challenge for the City Council in bringing about real change in thinking about children and young people in terms of play. This involves creating something brand new, in terms of both content and structure of delivery of service and training and form a baseline in developing foundations within an Irish context, to develop a new way of working with children and play.

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 assist the relevant staff in developing ownership of the content and intent of their by having a working 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 16<sup>th</sup> year have provided examples of 'best practice' and provided a basis of understanding of what play and Playwork could look like if developed further.



Playwork Practice Project - Dominick St Pop-up Park

**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 Play’?

*Play and uncertainty go hand-in-hand and adults need to understand this element as part of the ‘unique design features of play’, the presence of risk allows children to assess and manage it*

(Lester 2015).

The concept and importance of ‘wild’, ‘deep’ or ‘risky’ play is a key element of 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 well-being (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 2010 categorised the element of risk in play under six categories (Sandseter 2007, 2010):

- 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 conflicting requirement for parents and providers to support opportunities for risk in play alongside the consequential responsibility to manage and assess the benefits of providing conditions for risk in play to take places in a safe and secure environment. Consideration must be given to the key characteristics and understandings of play as an unpredictable, innate, self-motivated human behaviour.

Diminishing access to natural landscapes and the progressive built environment has led to the current decline in opportunities for risk in play. Additionally, increased and speeding traffic and increased time children and young people spend indoors are all key factors in poor access to opportunities for playing outdoors. This presents the reality of limiting valued play experiences that hold the potential to assist children and young people in experiencing and understanding of *assessing and taking risks*. As a compensatory measure, it is the responsibility of parents/guardians and decision makers to provide play facilities, services, and opportunities for play 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.

GC 17 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".*

GC 17 Article 31 (2013)

### Why is Risky Play so important?

The rationale for providing for and facilitating 'risk' in play is associated with the many developmental benefits for children when they engage in this type of play. Risk and challenge within play experiences support children and young people in developing resilience, problem solving, facing fears, developing physical intelligence etc. Overall risk in play supports children to embark on a journey of self-discovery and experimentation with the elements and their emotions and engage in the exploration of place making that enhances community connections with people, places and things. 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, repetition, adventure, exploration and freedom are key in developing the skills associated with deep, wild and risky play. In this 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 risky play

Addressing the issue of risk in play presents a particular dilemma for local authorities in terms of providing sufficient places and spaces for play that address the more obvious health and safety concerns whilst also taking a common sense approach to incorporating risk and challenge within play provision. The United Nations, the United Kingdom Government, Health and Safety Executive and the Welsh Government presented a key landmark addressing risk averse organisations and individuals who are burdened with fear of serious hazards, litigation etc. This was achieved through the development and implementation of 'position statements', guidelines and policies that support the management of 'risk' in play provision. The development of the 'The European Play Safety Forum' resulted in the submission of a manifesto to launch *Child in the City* in London in 2017 (CITC London 2017). The manifesto subsequently influenced the revision of EN1176 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' that 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 Statement 2002 & UK Play Safety Guidelines 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 Play Safety Forum 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 in the unachievable goal of absolute safety"*

UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE UK 2005).

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.

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. This would

present a national or organisational supportive 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 2008). Additionally, the concept of 'dynamic risk assessment' is key in facilitating risk in supervised play provision and is also a useful resource for parents and guardians. Developing such a document would require collaborative working with government departments such as the National Health & Safety Authority and the Department of Children Education Diversity Integration & Youth (DCEDIY)

For those facilitating play, in either play clubs, schools, youth clubs etc. an additional set of skills is required in order to engage in a practice that can address making 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 methodology 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.

*(Brown,F.)*

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 throughout the built and natural environment e.g. parks, playgrounds, green spaces, local streets and open spaces, public realm, play clubs, schools after-schools, early years education and care settings, hospitals etc.

#### Play environments that support opportunities for 'risky play'

In support of the 'best interest of the child', listening to children's experiences and concerns should be the mediating principle for determining the level of risk that children and young people need to experience. It must also be acknowledged that perceptions of risk vary among diverse cultures and lifestyles. For example, Dublin City Council's administrative area includes 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. Therefore, urban, suburban and rural parts of the city will have varying levels and types of risks e.g. 'stranger danger', trips, slips and falls and also present hazards such as busy roads, derelict sites and pollution. Some of these risks and hazards are more associated to more urbanised parts of the city whereas children living in the more rural areas are exposed to poor road conditions, farm machinery, animals and slurry pits (AgriKids 2020). Additionally children living in areas of varying privileges and disadvantage have different life experiences. In a broader perspective children living in 'developing nations' will experience greater freedom, responsibility and exposure to hazards (e.g. environmental disasters) in comparison to their peers in 'first world' countries where there is less freedom, increased surveillance, traffic etc. Children themselves present potential hazards and danger in that they can be a threat to each other e.g. bullying,

gang violence, 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 and extend risky 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 and understanding and appreciation of the benefits of risk in play as a key support to children and young people's overall development but focusing mainly on their physical, social and emotional 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 Summary Statement 2002

Taking an international perspective, the International School Grounds Alliance (ISGA) 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 38 made up of organisations, 16 countries and 6 continents. The Declaration is based on global research on risk benefit and encourages decision makers, parents, schools, legislators and insurers to devise policies that and processes that permits 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."*

Risk in Play & Learning Declaration: *Ubud-Höör Declaration*  
International School Grounds Alliance

### Risk in play within an Irish Context

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 will be developing a balance of facilitating and supporting simulated risk experiences for children and young people within the context of providing well-maintained challenging play facilities and opportunities for play that satisfy their need for challenging and exciting risks in play. Equally, the challenge for children and young people is developing 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 e.g. 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.

During 2013, a '*draft Play Safety Statement*' was developed within an Irish context (Webb 2013). 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. Further liaison is required to identify and engage with appropriate government departments, other local authorities and relevant agencies to work collaboratively in generating the development and endorsement of an Irish 'Play Safety Statement'. The presence of reasonable real and virtual risks in play will highlight its importance as part of children and young people's overall development in terms of supporting them to develop the skills that supports the benefits of their enjoyment and experience of assessing and taking risks. The Dublin City Play Strategy includes action points focused on the theory and concept of risk in play to ensure that this type of play experience will be included within the play infrastructure of play facilities and services and opportunities for play throughout Dublin city.

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

Technology is part of the progressing world which now plays an equal part in children and young people's current play cultures as they use technology and digital media for a broad range of educational social, play and recreational and purposes. This type of activity takes places mainly out of adult gaze and supervision which can present the potential risks of exposing children and young people to serious dangers such as cyberbullying, pornography, cyber grooming etc. This also raises questions regarding the contested impact of technology in terms of over stimulation of brain cells and the negative impact of this on cognitive development particularly in children under 18 months (Rainer ..../..). Moreover, children and young people's growing use of technology is feared to be impacting negatively on social skills, resilience, physical activity, playing outside in addition to developing poor sleep patterns. Exposure to violent games, particularly among boys involves arguable evidence regarding their impact on giving negative messages that stimulate increased violent behaviour and 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 ?/?/?/?). For example, in Dublin, It was evident that throughout the current Corona Virus Pandemic (2020), children and young people's engagement online had increased (Barron 2020). This evidence is directly linked to Covid19 Restrictions and during the initial national lockdown where children were restricted in making physical contact with peers and outside activities were also restricted which greatly impacted on their enjoyment of and time spent playing with friends. This has been particularly hard on single child families and those with

specific needs as siblings and usual formal family supports have not available to them for play and social interaction during this time. In this instance, technology provided a positive alternative virtual environment where children could meet, play and interact with peers thus maintaining friendships, and enjoying creative and playful activities through virtual arts, sports, and social media platforms.

In order to address the perceived fears alongside the proven dangers and benefits of children and young people's use of technology, there is a growing need to investigate how it affects human behaviour by factoring in cyberspace as place and an environment (Dr Mary Aiken). Although this may is not a key direct responsibility for Dublin City Council, consideration should be given to including cyberspace within the hierarchy of play environments alongside playgrounds, parks, local streets, public space etc. in terms of young people's use of technology as part of their play e.g. providing Wi-Fi in playgrounds and public space. Moreover, this leads to certain levels of responsibility regarding children and young people's safety when engaging in this digital play which also involves risks and potential for serious harm to children and young people. This requires an understanding and perception of cyberspace as an environment that contains dangerous places such as the 'deep web', 'dark net' as equivalent to real world places of danger for children and young people such as 'bad neighbourhoods' (Aiken 2018). This presents a case need for children and young people to develop *media and digital literacy* as an informed and balanced approach in arming themselves with the appropriate tools to cope with these hazards and supports their capabilities in assessing and managing online risk (Sonia Livingstone 2018).

Technology is a part of the progressing world and children and young people should be supported in being part its advances whilst at the same time addressing the issue of their agency and control over content and consumption as well as their involvement in devising systems to protect themselves. These skills will enable them to navigate safely through cyberspace with the knowledge and skills regarding how to behave and identifying areas to avoid. Adopting a balanced approach and understanding of technology as part of children and young people's lives and in particular during their free time requires a paradigm shift in terms of adult views and understanding of Children's growing use of technology in this digital age.

The work of Dr Sonia Livingstone and Dr Mary Aiken offer a dual approach that involves securing mechanisms for age verification alongside support in navigating within this element of their play. This involves the development media and digital literacy skills required to assess and understand the risks regarding online safety regarding how to behave and areas to avoid. These two concepts play a key role in the newly revised Audio-visual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) and is further strengthened by their combined impact on the protection of minors is strongest if applied in combination (Aiken 2018).

*"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

The establishment of the Royal Surgical College Institution (RSCI) Cyber Psychology Department, which is headed up by Cyber Psychologist Dr Mary Aiken, has placed Ireland as a centre of excellence and leading the way in research of cybercrimes against minors. The need for this can be seen within the 2017 *Cybersafe Ireland Annual Report* where the majority of Irish teachers (62%) deal with online safety incidences in the classroom with 35% dealing with between 2 and 5 incidences in that year (Ciaran Kissane – or BAI 2018).

There has been crosscutting level of work carried out within the European Regulators Group for Audio Visual Services (ERGA) in support of the protection of children and young people in Audio Visual Media Services. Additionally, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment on Child Rights in the digital environment is further commitment to the protection of minors. This general comment sets out in details that as rights holders, Children and young people have the right to provision and participation in the digital age. This is the subject of a body of research that is multi-disciplinary and involves a multi-method approach that requires further investigation to support the argument of protection versus education. It also supports the question of what is the evidence for harm and can media literacy be a solution to it (Livingstone 2018).

*Children have the right to provision and participation in the digital environment as well as protection, and balancing these rights in a proportionate and evidence-based manner is crucial.*

*(Livingstone. S. 2018.)*

*“All children need a place to play. They need space, informality, and freedom to move around and make a noise, to express themselves, to experiment and investigate. Disabled children need this freedom even more than others do. In surroundings which stimulate their imagination and challenge them to face and overcome risks, they will be given opportunities to build their self-confidence and independence.”*

Lady Allen of Hurtwood, 1968

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



**'Runamuck' Playwork Programme - St Anne's Park**

### **Engagement Focus for Dublin City Council**

The focus for Dublin City Council is to implement actions that assist in promoting awareness of the meaning and importance of play, maintain links across city council departments and with partner agencies in order to initiate inter-departmental 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.

### **Case Studies**

#### **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"*

*Wales a Play Friendly Country* is Statutory Guidance to each Local Authority on assessing and securing sufficient play opportunities for children and young people in their areas. It is published by Welsh Ministers to give detail to the duties on Local Authorities under section 11, Play Opportunities, Children and Families (Wales Measure) 2010 and which fully came into effect on July 1<sup>st</sup> 2014. In March 2018, local authorities were required to complete and submit their 5 x year Play Sufficiency Assessments and Play Action Plans to achieve play sufficiency for the following year to Welsh Government Ministers.

*"Children's Right to Play in Wales; Six Years of stories and change since the Commencement of the Welsh Play Sufficiency Assessment Duty"* was carried out by Dr Wendy Russell, Ben

Tawil and Mike Barclay (Ludicology) and Charlotte Derry (Playful Places) and was published by Play Wales in October 2019.

During 2018, Play Wales commissioned a research study regarding the impact of the Welsh sufficiency Duty. 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 study report presents the findings of a small-scale research project undertaken between January and March 2019, included three parts:

- documentary analysis of 2013 and 2016 Play Sufficiency Assessments, policy documents, research, and additional documentation provided by local authorities, with a brief analysis of some 2019 PSAs possible within the timescale
- interviews with 18 Play Sufficiency lead officers, Play Wales staff, Welsh Government officials and a representative from the Office of the Children's Commissioner
- Work with three case study local authorities, including interviews and focus groups with professionals, and using creative methods to talk to children and families.

The Wales Play Sufficiency Duty had been 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. Moreover the study report stated that despite local authorities being faced with significant challenges mainly associated with the austerity agenda resulting in cuts to services and staff that placed major constraints in securing play sufficiency, a lot of work had been done to achieve this measure. Additionally, there have been significant improvements on partnership working across local authority departments and partner agencies as a result of increased awareness among adults recognising their responsibilities regarding children and their play.

*"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."*

(Wales, A Play Friendly Country – Welsh Government Statutory Guidance July 2014)

### **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. It has been recognised within the council's Play Development Team (four members of staff) that this method of risk management is not viable within play settings as it does not take in to 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, a risk management system that 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 whether we could adopt a RBA process and whether this would contravene any policies and procedures. The outcome of this conversation was positive but it was highlighted that, in order to do so, it was necessary to show valid justification for the amendment to the existing risk management system.

With that in mind we approached Play Wales, given their vast experience in this area, to assist us in presenting a case for change to Council representatives. A seminar was held for Council representatives to attend, which involved a presentation by Tim Gill and Marianne Mannello. The aim of this seminar was to present valid evidence in support of the adoption of RBA system.

Council representatives from various relevant departments including Health and Safety, Law and Standards, Youth Service, Parks and Recreation and Development Services. All attendees were engaged and enjoyed healthy debate regarding the justification for using RBA and the viability of introducing it into the Council's Play Service. Law and Standards were particularly enthused by the idea of using the system as they felt that it would be a more open system and therefore reduce claims made against the Council.

Following this seminar, further talks have been held with Health and Safety and a new risk management system was piloted with 40 staff across six settings during October 2015 half term playscheme. This involved 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. It ensures that they focus



their attention on real risk not perceived risk, in a practical way while allowing the 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, with the need for an updated Play Policy for the 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, the Council has taken a dramatic step towards changing the shape of risk management within play and the Play Development Team will endeavour to extend RBA to all their settings through 2016 and beyond.

In relation to the Play Sufficiency Audit, this process has improved many target areas set:

In Matter D, supervised provision:


In Matter F, access to space/provision – information, publicity and events:

In Matter G, securing and developing the play workforce:

In Matter H, community engagement and participation:

In Matter I, play within all relevant policy and implementation agendas – health and safety:-

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





## 2. CREATE AN EFFECTIVE CITY-WIDE PLAY INFRASTRUCTURE THROUGH COLLABORATIVE DESIGN AND PLANNING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE THAT ENHANCES AND RESPONDS TO THEIR EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE

Developing a citywide play infrastructure is the 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 implicates when necessary, the need for collaborative working intra-departmentally, cross departmental, with partner, and outside agencies. This will ensure a much broader focus on creating conditions that support play that includes but is not limited to conventional playgrounds and designated play areas.

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 need to support play within the following contexts:

- Public parks and green spaces e.g. playgrounds, natural landscapes that provide lots of different things for play e.g. play equipment, trees, hills, rocks, secret places.
- Supporting and enhancing existing opportunities and characteristics of streets and the natural and built environment that support children and young people to play outside e.g. removing constraints to play such as reduced speeding and parked traffic and traffic enforcement, informal seating, different types and levels of surfaces, public art that facilitates playfulness, 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 wherein old games and new can be played each day.
- When possible and practicable provide local play services where play activities are supported and supervised by adults in alignment with the Playwork Principles e.g. Local Parks "Play Ranger Programmes".

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

The current typology of the City Council's play support is provided in detail within the 'Review of Dublin City Council's Current Play Provision'. This review is focused mainly on 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 of the city's play infrastructure that will involve a much broader scope of play support that moves beyond conventional playgrounds and designated play areas. This will extend to include active measures that address the issue of children and young people's everyday play experiences within their community and how they navigate through and experience local streets, greens, parks, public and wild spaces for play both at local and citywide level.

The associated themed policy statements and action plan included in the Dublin City Play Strategy; 'Pollinating Play' (2020 – 2025) will involve a comprehensive audit and assessment of opportunities for play based on the principle of 'play sufficiency' (See policy statement 1 'Play Sufficiency'). This type of assessment will include but also move beyond provision of standard fixed playgrounds to include mapping where and how children and young people use green space, incidental and public open space in terms of the type of play and social interactions that each space might afford. In the interim of the development of a contextual 'Play Sufficiency Assessment' process for Dublin City Council, the following review of current provision and local standards is based on public play facilities that are located within Dublin City Council's administrative area and managed by Dublin City Council's Parks & Landscape Services. For many children and young people Play can mean football and other ball games. Ball games are considered as play when they are informal and led by the young people themselves. Once teams and organised competitions are involved, it becomes sport. For this reason, multi-use games areas known as MUGAs, usually placed near playgrounds, cater mostly for informal games and can also be used as 'hanging-out' space for older children

and therefore are also identified, managed and maintained as play facilities. (See appendix? for full review of play provision of play facilities).

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, 67 of the city's parks includes playgrounds facilities that are managed and maintained by Dublin City Council Parks & Landscape Services. Housing playgrounds located mainly in flat and apartment 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 (2020 – 2025) 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.

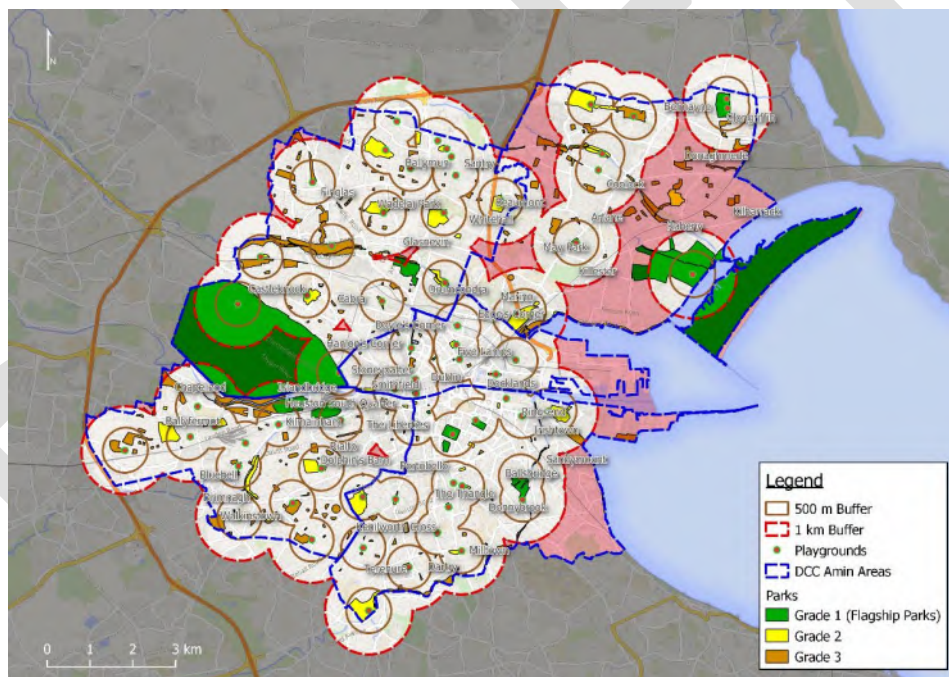
**Provision and Standards;** In order to prioritise the provision of new playgrounds, Central Statistics Office (CSO 2016) data was reviewed to identify and address deficits in provision of play facilities for the whole of Dublin Administrative Areas. Indicative walking distances can be determined from the accessibility guidelines as set out below:

- 1) 500m (5-10 minutes' walk) this walk-in zone provides a good level of local community access

- 2) 1000m (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 National 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 map included in this section indicates how well Dublin City Council are doing in terms of provision by displaying the level of current play facilities as well as identifying deficits in certain areas. The map shows the 'hot spots' (red blob) in terms of population density of children aged 0 - 14 years living in each of the city's local areas. The map below also shows the location of playgrounds in each local area and access to them within certain area distance buffer zones; Area (Pink Blobs) within 500m (Blue) and 1000m (Pink) Buffer Zones.



#### Examples of Deficit Areas:

By including, the population density in small areas in relation to play facilities within a 500m (Blue) and a 1000m (Pink) blobs radius, the map above indicates clearly the deficits in provision of play facilities in the each administrative area.

**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 that includes 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 the highest maintenance standards. Independent specialist inspections are also carried out on Multi Use Games Areas (M.U.G.A.'s), Outdoor Gym Equipment and Skate Parks.

DCC Parks & Landscape Services Health and Safety programme also impacts on project management of new capital projects, maintaining and improving standards of existing play facilities, allocation of appropriate annual budget regarding capital and revenue project 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;*** As the main local authority in charge of the play areas throughout the city's administrative area, 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) are fully trained to conduct inspections to the required levels of competence. Dublin City Council or any other local authority are 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 annual schedule of playground inspections:

***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 etc.

***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 annual 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 € TBC
- 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 of existing and increase to current 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 average amount available for new play areas is on average €55,000.

**Annual Playground Renewal/Upgrade Budget;** In the interim 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

DCC Housing Maintenance has no allocated budget for Playground upgrades or renewals. As mentioned above funding for this type of development of amenities is usually dependant on availability of discretionary funding provided through local area offices. The average amount available for upgrade or renewal of play areas is on average €?? TBC.

**Opening Times;** the play facilities in parks are open from Dawn to Dusk. Play facilities located on open green space are open as they can be available at earlier and later times.

**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 that involves mapping exercises regarding current access and use of existing play facilities and use of 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 and re-design of existing play facilities.

**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. There are an additional 61 (approx.). Playgrounds in DCC housing and flat complexes that are more available to those living in the immediate area as opposed to parks playgrounds that are more publicly available. For this reason, the review of play provision focuses mainly on play facilities that are more accessible to the public. However, these facilities although not included in maps provided should be taken into consideration in terms of provision of local play facilities within deficit areas, for example, there is a high number of housing playgrounds located in the Central Area of the city.

#### **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
- 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 Playgrounds
- South Central Housing Area – 16 Playgrounds
- North West Area – 1 Playground
- North Central Area - 4 Playgrounds
- Central Area - 24 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 area. In order to address key play deficits, the Dublin City Play Strategy includes themed action points that will ensure the removal of barriers that restricts children and young people of all ages and abilities to access locally based play facilities. These key 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 qualitative and quantitative methods of further addressing deficits in play provision and 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 play 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 other local authorities; Fingal, Dun Laoighre and South Dublin County Councils.



**Kilbarrack Park Playground (involving children and young people in design and planning)**

**Adopting and implementing the principle of ‘play sufficiency’ as a methodology for monitoring and evaluation of Dublin’s city’s play infrastructure that encompasses play facilities and everyday opportunities for play.**

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, adaptability and open-ended potential for change and modification, change with the seasons 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 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). Thus broadening the scope of play support that places a more in-depth focus on children’s infrastructure within urban landscapes to support and create the right conditions for play to happen.

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 and will assist in identifying key deficits and support measures (see page ??/or section ‘matters to be taken into account p.38). This information will also be useful in guiding design and content of future city planning to ensure that design, planning and installation of new play facilities and opportunities for play are given equal consideration and included throughout the city’s landscape that facilitates time, space and permissions to play for all children and young people living in and visiting Dublin city.

Assessments will focus on each of the 5 x local administrative areas alongside the city parks districts division (see above) wherein boundaries are slightly different albeit both methods will be incorporated into proposed ‘Play Sufficiency Assessments’; in both instances Dublin city is divided as Central, North West, North Central, South Central and South East. 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 key 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:

- Consultation 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, 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 e.g. older children/teenagers 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 play greening, public realm and arts strategies that will support the creation of a child-friendly and playful city**

Both the Dublin City Council Parks and Play Strategies include priority actions that will form 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 a hierarchy of a citywide play infrastructure that includes parks, playgrounds, open spaces, local streets and the public realm. As mention above, the planned development of more comprehensive audits and assessments that involves 'Play Sufficiency Assessments' within a Dublin context and will address matters such as; levels of play value, immersion, flexibility, accessibility, inclusion, and freedom of choice featured with formal and informal opportunities for play. Collaborative working is key in identifying and acting on aligning actions highlighted within Dublin City Council's Greening and Play strategies as both identify the ecological and health and well-being benefits of the ongoing development of a green infrastructure for Dublin city. This is in keeping with a more holistic and forward thinking approach required to include creative, innovative and broader reaching measures that includes the built and natural environment and extends to a children's infrastructure that involves a network of streets, nature and design interventions to support their everyday freedoms regarding use outdoor spaces for play (ARUP 2017). This will involve more broad reaching measures that includes a hierarchy of play facilities but is also encompasses everyday opportunities for play that support a diverse range of play experiences involving places and spaces throughout the city and local neighbourhoods that hold the potential to provide varied opportunities for play (Lester Play and space). Opportunities for play are found throughout the city's existing infrastructure and the extent to which they are experienced by children and young people presents a clear rationale to map and identify these spaces in terms of connectedness, identified routes and place making within local neighbourhoods and public space. These play experiences and opportunities can be found in many places such as:

- Grassland/scrubland
- Woodlands and amenity greenspace
- 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 communities, especially children and young people to address this complex issue and identify ways in which this local authority can support and extend the potential of these spaces to ensure that conditions are right for play to happen.

### **How active research with children and young people will support the development of Dublin as a child friendly and playful city - mapping and making use of the evidence**

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 Stress'. Furthermore, technology is now also 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 understand and support children and young people's engagement and enjoyment of technology as part of modern day play cultures alongside other traditional outdoor play experiences. (See theme 1 'awareness of play - play and risk')

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 (Kytta, 2004). Developing a more broad reaching citywide hierarchy of play facilities and opportunities for play throughout Dublin City requires a place-based approach in order in terms of identifying meaningful places, the mode of travel, varying levels of independent mobility and accompaniment and the opportunities for play and social interaction that these places hold.

Supporting children and young people at local level to become active researchers in their own neighborhood and city is key to identifying journeys and routes that feature spaces and their considered main functions such as land use, openness, and communality alongside their everyday play experiences. This will take into account physical and parental fears physical design, habitual engagement and children's play patterns. Consequently, this presents a key causal effect on the current trend of a 'risk averse' society (Gill 2007). Gill claims that the opposite of 'risk aversion' is to assess the benefits of risk and management of risk factors. Therefore adults need to take a new perspective in their care for children and young people and ensure that acknowledging and understanding that risk and challenge are included within their everyday play experiences that support in developing resilience and assessing and taking risks.



When planning urban space, children and young people's everyday lives need to be taken into account with regard to the levels of freedom either independently or accompanied, that they negotiate, explore and engage with existing features and opportunities for play within the broad range of places and spaces that the city provides. 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 and are then acknowledged and supported by including design features that facilitate social and playful interactions with urban space. These elements of outdoor space are quite basic requirements that should not be underestimated as vital measures in realising and supporting the active role of material and social environment in supporting children and young people's mobility and their freedom to actualise public space. The challenge for Dublin city is in acknowledging and preserving spaces and places that hold meaning for children and young people as places for play that offers them a sense of belonging and identity with people and place.

Children and young people's level of independence regarding their mobility in the public realm is an issue for children in urban as well as rural areas and can result in the institutionalisation of children through over scheduling and organised activities (Kytta 2004). Increased and speed of traffic, stranger danger, bullying and violence are only some of the barriers presented which impact negatively on children and young people's freedom to range and explore places and pathways to discovering 'special places'. In most modern contexts, children and young people are rarely out on their own as they are often with peers or siblings. In the absence of adults, their activities are usually monitored in some way through agreed or negotiated protocols or by mobile phone and through their intimate connection to situated knowledge of spaces in terms of knowing the safe and scary spots and people. However, one of the key barriers to children and young people's freedom of movement is high volume and speeding traffic. Adult presence outside can offset this and subsequent fears such as stranger danger, bullying, violence etc. and lessen related anxieties. 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.

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 where they are allowed to roam. The 'mechanics' of how these places are selected involves seeking the basic components of a secret playful space. (Kytta et al 2018 TBC). Adults have a part to play in creating the right conditions for this type of play behaviour to happen. By understanding the value of these 'other worldly' places and making them more accessible and safe gives credibility to their creators. This requires an adult understanding of these places as those 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 adult barriers such as real and perceived fears and improving the environmental quality of these spaces to afford physical features and locations such as

trees and bushes that give the sense of secrecy but also include transparency and marked boundaries. Consequently, adults covertly sanction these spaces by preserving and/or modifying their potential affordances that facilitate children and young people's everyday freedoms to enjoy different play experiences at different times (Lester and Russell 2008) (Kytta 2004).

The Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) is a UNICEF-led initiative that supports governments and local authorities in realizing the rights of children and young people at local level using the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as its foundation. It also provided a network for cities to bring key stakeholders together with a particular focus on the involvement of children and young people who wish to make their cities more child friendly. 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 strengthens the work of the city council regarding the key area of family time, play and leisure as a key priority 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 the ongoing focus of the city council to continue to care about children and youth and implement relevant actions to support this aim. This also requires collaborative work with other local authorities and partner and outside organisations to ensure that all key areas of the guidelines for creating child friendly cities are met as participation and in alignment with the Child Friendly Cities Model.

Child in the City (CITC) is an independent foundation that has been operating since 2003 focusing on the key objective to strengthen the position of children in cities, promote and protect their rights. The foundation also advocates for the Child Friendly Cities Initiative. The CITC Foundation has carried out this work by, connecting people around these shared objectives and giving a platform for the exchange of research results and good practices directed at the creation of child-friendly cities. The foundation observes 5 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 aligns with the key aims the CITC Foundation in working towards the creation of a child-friendly and playful city. This holds particular relevance to strengthening the position of children and young people in cities with regard to opportunities for play and giving them a voice and opportunities for active participation in urban planning.

Arup (independent firm of designers, planners, engineers, architects, consultants and technical specialists) who work across every aspect of today's built environment, have produced 'Cities Alive' which presents global research focused on human centered approach to rethinking how the future design of cities is managed (ARUP Cities Alive 2017). ARUP's research focused on urban childhoods

explores how a child-friendly approach to urban planning is vital for the creation of cities that work better for everyone. This places a key focus on mapping existing the city's infrastructure and planning for the future based on a child-friendly approach to 'everyday freedoms' and 'children's' infrastructure' in order to create more sustainable and resilient cities that focus on supporting children's overall development and well-being. Case studies that focus on time spent outdoors, ability to get around independently and level of contact with nature present strong indicators of how a city is performing for children and young people (Cities Alive, Designing for Urban Childhoods 2017). The research has shown 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 it's play infrastructure for children and young people in Antwerp, a unique approach was inspired by Wim Seghers who was given the key responsibility of developing the city's playgrounds (Antwerp's 'speelweefselplan' - Play Space Web 2013). By making full use of Antwerp's world-class city data and adopting a more holistic approach of beginning this process with people and neighborhoods and working beyond this 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 etc. and developing ways to make these routes and locations more child-friendly and playful. Currently Dublin City Council Parks and Landscape Services uses GIS mapping to identify distribution of play facilities throughout the city. This highlighted within this play strategy and in the City Parks Strategy that also includes mapping of green infrastructure such as parks, green spaces, brownfield sites, wild spaces etc. This presents the appropriate tools and for Dublin City Council in developing a citywide play infrastructure to work with residents and merge their lifestyles, issues and children and young people's play patterns and infrastructure with the existing infrastructure of the city's local neighborhoods and open public spaces.

Making use of the Dublin City's GIS system to map 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 e.g. home, school, parks and playgrounds, sports grounds, youth and after-school clubs.

Antwerp City's Play-Space Web

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

Natalia Krysiak – Cities for Play and Child Friendly Cities

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

Roel Camps (Antwerp Participation Officer 2019)

In a recent UK neighbourhood planning report 'Neighbourhood Design: Working towards a Child Friendly City, Dinah Bornat and Ben Shaw propose new ways of working with children and young people when planning neighbourhoods. This new way of working presents a focus on understanding children and young people, understanding spaces, developing new and novel ways of mapping and devising new ways of engaging with children and young people. This involves placing them at the heart of research and listening to them on their own terms when planning neighbourhoods (Bornat.D & Shaw.B. 2019)

*"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.D & Shaw.B 2019*

Dublin City Parks Strategy includes actions to develop a greener more liveable city. This has presented the opportunity for intradepartmental working for DCC's Play and Parks and Landscape Services and working collaboratively with private sectors to bring about positive change in Dublin City to provide child friendly and playful public space. Consequently, as part of the consultation process for the North Inner City of Dublin 'NEIC Greening Strategy', a diverse group of children and young people were engaged in a series of interactive and participative consultation workshops based on the concept mapping and observational research. (See case studies)



### *Sherriff St 'Walk & Chalk' Workshops*

*"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."*

Russell et al Making it possible to do play Sufficiency 2020

**Integrated strategy actions to support play on streets and in public space**

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 required to engage in consultative processes as they hold direct relationships with local community and public open spaces. Children and young people require particular attention regarding involvement in 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 with design features that include ‘characteristics of street’ that present affordances for play. This concept of ‘Home Zones’ in housing development requires detailed community engagement and careful consideration. For example, the regeneration project in Ballymun involved housing developments that featured ‘home zones’; however, as residents were poorly informed on the potential for these schemes, the opportunities for reducing traffic speeds and recreational use were misinterpreted as innovative car parking and the opportunity for space for children’s play was lost.

Additionally, Dublin City Council’s Public Realm Strategy and subsequent Public Realm Masterplan (2016) involves open space strategies that will directly or indirectly address the concept of 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 development of space in the public realm; this will involve redesign and opening up of existing and hidden spaces and explore the possibilities of developing used and unused sites that hold potential as spaces for play, social interaction, and recreational use.

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

This provides compensatory measures to address modern day constraints to outdoor play. In order to accommodate children’s current geographies either at home or playing out, careful consideration is required to assess and acknowledge their use of these spaces and the extent of their ranging to enhance their independent mobility and realise as many affordances as possible to ensure they gain rich and varied play experiences.

It is clear that there are similarities within the visions and strategic actions included within the various City Council department strategies regarding the development of streetscapes and outdoor public space; a co-ordinated approach involving inter-departmental working

within the City Council will address issues regarding outdoor play in local streets, neighbourhoods and public space.

The completion of a Play Sufficiency Assessment will ensure a more planned and co-ordinated 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 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 also extend to equipment-based larger playgrounds that will be further developed through assessment and subsequent enhancement and redesign of existing and new playgrounds through creative, innovative and sometimes bespoke projects. Taking all of the above elements of play provision into consideration, ensure the qualitative design of 'good' play spaces that consider location, include natural elements, allow for change and adaptability, are inclusive and accessible and encourage a sense of identity with people and place. Additionally, in considering children's independent mobility, designing and planning for play should include affordances within local neighbourhoods that can be measured in terms availability and actualisation given the extent of adult attitudes and perceptions.

**Support and encourage the development of play-friendly communities to provide time and space and permission for 'everyday street play' opportunities and experiences.**

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 design processes and perceptions and the unique design features of children and young people's play (Lester 2009). 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 they will be the most likely to affect them if they are disturbed, constrained or even enhanced 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 more proactive approach in identifying alternatives to 'segregated spaces' for example street spaces, wastelands, derelict sites and wild outdoor spaces that can be transformed to places of play when used by children. The challenges for the Dublin City Play Strategy is in supporting children and young people's play whilst managing the societal focus; the utilitarian destination of achieving adulthood alongside the playful approach of providing time, space and permission to play. Children's play generates a 'culture of childhood' in which children and young people experience the world differently (Lester, 2009). It is important to consider these 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.



Adults can sometimes have the tendency to '*recapture lost visions of playing*' when making comparisons of how they played as children to current play behaviours. This often presents the risk of striving to achieve a nostalgic notion of their own childhoods rather than acknowledging the reality of how children play now. For some generations, childhood play was afforded freedom, time and access to space in addition to low levels of adult involvement, resulting in permissions to roam and play in a multitude of 'forbidden places and activities'. Adults also must not underestimate that today's children have not lost their ingenuity to devise ways of playing in 'constrained' environments.

A key purpose of this play strategy is to advocate for and support play in current 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. Urban development, increasing populations and the city's urgent need for social housing, increasing traffic and fears for children's safety have affected availability and access regarding outdoor space for play. This presents a rethinking of play support for the City Council who are tasked with the dual challenge of setting aside lands and alongside acknowledging and supporting children and young people's natural playfulness and clandestine and shared use of existing space. This takes into account the particular places close to home and mapped journeys to destinations and in-between spaces of meaning where they have agency to 'get on with it' themselves (Lester, 2009).

#### How communities can support/respond to children and young people's use of local streets and public space

Traditionally children and young people have used spaces and places immediately near their homes and specific destination 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 within the built and natural environment (Gibson../../). Incidental prompts for play can be found in pathways, kerbs, walls, bollards, sculpture, steps, gable ends etc., 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 alongside. 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 and public open spaces for play. Emotive language is used to sustain and support contemporary views of childhood and promote related thinking or suggested actions where policies, legislations, byelaws etc. may enhance or prohibit children's use of public space. There is a tendency to here to take a nostalgic view of play and the perceived negative effects of modern living on children's development as detrimental to their future. However, this view can cause failure to notice or take into account the more holistic concerns regarding access to good quality opportunities for play within their own time and space context which contributes greatly to their general health and well-being, during their childhood (Myers, 2012). This can lead to

poor access to the outdoor environment. Public outdoor space or the street is traditionally the space where children and young people 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.

The ongoing challenge for Dublin is to address this culture of childhood through sensitive design, planning and permissions that have positive impacts on children and young people's engagement with the outdoor environment. This approach will require clear actions that will enhance the streetscape and 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. For older children/teenagers the provision of youth and sports clubs are valued supports. However, as they usually take place once or twice a week and 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 (Armitage, 2008) Carrying out small scale local research that records and pays attention to the outdoor environment and what it affords in terms of the right conditions for play to happen is key is supporting young people to play out (Russell et al 2020).

The presence of older children can be accepted and supported as they use the street and public space for e.g. 'play lounges' to facilitate positive social experiences where they may just 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.

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 that will address these issues. This will involve a micro-neighbourhood approach which may result in simply acknowledging, understanding and permitting use of spaces and/or include changes or modifications to traffic, enforcement of rules of the road and physical landscapes as supportive actions to clearly recognise and prioritise and map particular places and spaces that have been identified as play spaces by children and young people living in the local area.

The action points within the Dublin City Play Strategy are aimed at removing as many obstructions as possible to facilitate street play and allow 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 as those providing support and those presenting barriers to play. Some adults complain about

children's behaviours as being noisy and disruptive, others who engage in threatening or anti-social behaviours also presents dangers for children and young people. 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 concerned adults who live nearby and often overlook where children and young people play. This brings about feelings of independence alongside adult support as enablers and supporter of play. Children and young people 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 not likely to happen (Bornat.D & Shaw.B 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 initiative that support children's play in local neighbourhoods (See case studies). Although the initiative is implemented across the UK there where legislation may be different to that of Dublin City Councils. This presents a challenge for Dublin to develop a contextual process to provide a legal basis and framework for implementing a Playing Out initiative across Dublin City. This will present Dublin City Council with the opportunity to work a local level with communities to support street play as an everyday occurrence for children and young people living in and visiting Dublin city. The concept of 'Community Play' projects and initiatives are ways in which adults can provide support by acknowledging play as a vital component in the development of sustainable and cohesive communities. Support and encouragement is vital in the development of play -friendly communities that facilitate time and space for 'everyday street play' for children and young people. This level of community cohesion supports their 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.D & Shaw.B 2019

### Local authority response to 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 etc. 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, parked cars, founded and unfounded fears of abduction, rat running, speeding cars etc. have placed huge obstructions to the children and

young people who want get from one place to another in order to play, walk, skate, cycle, run etc. The layout and design of a particular road or street can also present barriers such as obstructing vision of oncoming traffic that presents a higher risk than that of a road or street with better visibility. 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. It is acknowledged, however, that there are a number of parks and playgrounds throughout the city, many of which are within considerable walking distance from home. All of these issues combined have extremely negative impacts on children and young people's independent mobility, as they presents real hazards resulting in adults' safety concerns for children and young people in their care. 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 co-ordinated 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 regarding opportunities for play by exploring design, landscaping and health and safety issues. Moreover, identify location(s) on the street that can be landscaped play spaces including grass, sand and planting and could 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 working interdepartmentally with DCC Road Safety Department, Planning and Roads and Traffic to develop relevant initiatives that will address street play issues regarding traffic and how to safely engage in street play activities particularly chasing games, ball play and wheeled play
- Public art provided through the resource of DCC Artists in Residence to create features that extend outdoor play opportunities e.g. pavement art signalling children to 'play here!'
- Carry out landscape audits that determines the use of hard landscaping i.e. pavements, kerbs, gateways, posts and bollards for street games i.e. ball wall, hopscotch skipping etc.
- 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 etc.
- Co-ordinate and develop community projects that include 'equipment banks' to increase play and leisure opportunities. An example in 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.

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



Herzog Park Natural Play Area

### The effects of Climate Change on Children's Play

Environmental conditions have direct impacts on children's right to play through their everyday interactions with the outside world. Whether in their own gardens, local streets or public space, the outdoor environment presents a myriad of physical, emotional, creative and multi-sensory qualities for them to experience and enjoy. The effects of Climate change on the environment is a global challenge for cities. The new urban agenda requires cities across the world to develop a balance between the demands of urbanisation and development as both will impact greatly on the built and natural environment. More recently, climate change has gained close attention and activism from children and young people. 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. However, for children and young people the deterioration of the environment places them as the most vulnerable due to the impacts of climate change on their overall health and well-being. Extreme weather conditions, such as heatwaves causing hotter and longer summers, flooding, wild fires, and heavy downpours and air pollution place major constraints on children and young people in terms of poor environment for outdoor play and socialisation. In terms of children's play, the environmental condition of outdoor space involves biodiversity rich green open spaces, clean air and healthy climate, all of which are features of the places and spaces where children and young people play and interact socially. As play is such an innate behaviour children and young people can easily overlook

advocating for the effects of spatial and 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) 'Under the same Sky' (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. The International Play Association (IPA) were part of this day and prepared a paper to demonstrate the role of the environment in creating healthy places for children to play (IPA Play and Environment Discussion Paper). 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). During the development of this play strategy, 2020 has seen the unprecedented crisis of the Corona Virus Pandemic that has had huge impacts on children's play environments worldwide. This crisis has clearly shown how time and particularly space to play and being able to play with other children is crucial to children's overall health and well-being. In particular, this 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 International Play Association have worked together to develop and disseminate 'Play in Crisis' (2020) as a key support for parents, carers and children to help them to cope with the constraints to play during this extremely challenging and historical event.

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 Parks Strategy 2019) is in alignment with the City Climate Change Action Plan to "tackle climate breakdown" (Climate Change Action Plan 2019) and action points within both strategies present obvious links with those included in 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 compensatory measures that address climate change. One such approach in cities internationally is the installation of playful and interactive water fountains, which present excellent play value and support children playing outside during extreme heatwaves. Identifying key responses to the effects of climate change on their play will



involve listening to children and young people and 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, cycleway, forests, green walls and walkways. Working collaboratively is key in developing initiatives and actions that will minimize Children and young people's exposure to environmental risks when playing outside.



### 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, such as Sport and Recreation, Arts and Culture, Events, Community and Social Development, Libraries, Dublin City 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 e.g. Dublin City Council Summer Activities Programmes, Sports programmes etc. 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 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 of the heterogeneous, unpredictable and spontaneous nature of play that is a vital part of children's overall development and general health and well-being (Lester & Russell 2008). The opportunity to resolve this issue can be easily found through the exploration of collaborative working to further enhance these services. Adopting a 'Playwork' approach will enable the City Council to develop play provision in terms of 'play services' for children and young people. (See theme 1 'Playwork Practice')

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

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

[Lester and Russell 2008]







### Local Playday in Whiteacre Park Ballymun

*“where I live there are not enough trees, hundreds of cars, gas fumes, damage to playground equipment, not enough time to do, I get bored easily” – girl aged 9 years*

*“where I live is good, community, good school, close to everything, dolphin park” - girl aged 9 years*

*“Survey the children about their thoughts and let the data do the talking”- Adult*

### Engagement Focus for Dublin City Council

Adopt and implementing the principles of ‘Play Sufficiency Assessment’ 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.

## Case Studies

### 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, Lucy Colbec and Ceilidh Jackson initiated the Bristol Playing Out Movement after they had become increasingly frustrated at the fact that their children's level of access to outdoor, child-led and locally available opportunities for play was diminishing at a rapid rate. 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 rationale which included the principle that Play is vital for children's physical and emotional development and for their social learning and as a human right under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. (Bristol Playing Out 2009).

Starting with one street, the simplicity and genius of the Playing Out initiative is in 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 on local streets and in the local neighbourhood. The results of Bristol's initial one off event were amazing as it generated interest and gained momentum and the support of the Bristol local authority who put in place the Bristol Temporary Play Street Order (TPSO) which is valid for 12 month period. Based on the existing 'street party road closure', the TPSO was developed 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 which is now a small not-for-profit national social change organization run on a voluntary basis by parents in Bristol and 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.

More recently 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 has presented key example of how community-led initiative can support children and young people's overall health happiness and well-being 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*.

### 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 refurbishment of open space in their local areas. Encouraging communities to think 'outside the box' has resulted in the providing local residents with the basic components to improve and increase the play value of identified sites 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 will bring about the following impacts in relation to their overall growth and development and general health and well-being.

The 'Outside the Box' play project presented communities with an alternative to standard fixed playgrounds. The project was introduced by developing a process that involved 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 for the project was secured through the successful funding application to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) Playground Capital Grant that provided €15,000 and an additional €15,000 in kind provided by Dublin City 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 action plan was unique to each site. The initial amount of €6,000 - €10,000 was allocated to each site/community 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.

Since 2012 DCC Play Development worked collaboratively with the relevant DCC departments in a consultative process that involved active research with six community groups to create and extend play opportunities in their local area. The 7 x sites identified for this initiative were located at

- 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 and extending and increasing existing opportunities for play in a challenging small space.
- St Theresa's Gardens; development of a natural playscape as a temporary play space during an area regeneration project.
- Mount Brown; Creative and innovative re-design of existing and challenging sloped landscape to create additional opportunities for play in existing community play space.
- York St; The re-enchantment with a piece of waste ground by building on its potential as a play space for the local community and introducing open-ended play prompts and space for informal street games.
- Ross Road; Playground vs. Space to play. Re-imagining and redesigning local derelict playground and creating a space to play as opposed to reinstating traditional playground in an urban location.
- Mount Bernard Park' Development of natural playground that involved land forming and bespoke play units, willow weaving. The space incorporated some traditional playground equipment to provide dynamic active play opportunities as was requested during local consultation with children and young people which further complimented the design.

Working with relevant DCC Departments, local residents and children and young people resulted in the development of design and action plans that were individual to each local site and require the following developmental works in order to extend and increase their play value. As the programme developed, additional creative additions evolved in response to children and young people's involvement and engagement in play.

The benefits of the programme has greatly improved access to play opportunities for local children and young people. Redesigning and re-imagining public space has particular relevance to the implementation of the vision of Dublin City Play Strategy; Play here, Play there, Play everywhere 2020 - 2025; *"Dublin will be a child-friendly and playful city where children and young people can enjoy and fully exercise their right to play"*. 'Outside the Box!' project has 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 - North East Inner City (NEIC) Greening Strategy

As part of the consultation process for the North Inner City of Dublin 'NEIC Greening Strategy', a diverse group of children and young people were engaged in a series of interactive and participative consultation workshops based on the concept mapping and observational research. 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 as part of the development of a sustainable strategy that supports children's connection with people and place and nurtures a mutual respect for it. This process involved 'Walk & Chalk' workshops as a geographical study of how children and young people navigate and utilise their outdoor environment for place making and most importantly for 'play'! This research determined the extent and content of how local children and young people used outdoor space and 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.



Ross Road Community Play Area



1 Bishop St Play Area



**York ST Play Area – Outside the Box**



**Mount Bernard Play Area- Outside the Box**



**Sheriff 'Walk & Chalk' workshops**

### **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 has developed his passion for water as since creative director of Sweden's IceHotel in Jukkasjarvi in 1991, and has worked with German fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld, has spearheaded the Rain Gothenburg project. This project was designed to mark the city's jubilee and help it create "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 adopting an appreciation of how visitors tend to know how to dress for elements of any kind and funded projects such as a “rain playground” where there is better fun to be had when is lashing and splashing down on a rainfall climbing frame.

Renströmsparken Park consists of a beautiful pond with water lilies and surrounding willows. It is a popular place, both for play and as a central gathering point. The proposed playground was supposed to have playful functions even when it rained. The creative team consisted of 02Landskap and the two artists Annika Oskarsson and Thomas Nordström who operated in close collaboration in order to create an imaginative site for children well attuned to the existing landscape of the site. In addition to that, 02Landscape had a positive cooperation with the client- the Municipality of Gothenburg. One of the important challenges of the project was to combine the different activities and necessities of the playground with hydrological functions as well as to create realistic construction plans based on the artistic drawings. Artists worked with engineers on and city storm water management projects, and on rainwater recycling and other initiatives around climate change, he explains. An important part of the process was also to find craft-workers, especially blacksmiths, who could realize the drawings.

The newly designed “rain playground” 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. Traditionally there are swings, a slide and key play 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 new plan also included the reuse of existing paving stones in new classic patterns, large trees, the old statue, perennials and shrubs and metal fences were designed with inspiration from classic models with a modern touch which connected 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, the park, 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. Additionally this space accommodates a playful way to enjoy a coffee and 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



### Splash Pool - Boxhagener Platz

Boxhagener Platz is one of the most important meeting places in the Friedrichshain district. A weekly market takes place here on Saturday mornings and on Sundays, the square's accommodate a weekly flea market, after which people can enjoy brunch in one of the surrounding cafés. However in the summer, families can also enjoy an additional attraction at Boxhagener Platz. This public space also features the famous 'Splash Pool with Spray Nozzles' which is not just a playground, but also a 25 x 14 m splash pool, supplied with fresh water from a spray nozzle. The water's only calf-deep in order to support younger children to play and especially have fun and enjoy this space. This free public play facility is inspired by the four existing bronze penguins 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.





### 3: PLACE A KEY FOCUS ON ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PLAY FOR ALL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

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

All children and young people want and need play. The Dublin City Play Strategy advocates and supports play for *all* children and young people. This includes those requiring particular attention based on physical and intellectual abilities, socio-economic status, cultural backgrounds and all gender Identification. Consideration is also given to home settings where children may be living with immediate family, are in foster care, in orphanages, experiencing homelessness, or living in countries or cities where there are wars, conflict or natural disasters. Therefore, ensuring equality of access is a priority action for the strategy to ensure the provision of accessible and inclusive play facilities, services alongside everyday opportunities that supports *all* children and young people to fully exercise their right to play.

Specific attention is required with regard to children and young people in these situations in order to support them in having the opportunity to play and continue to enjoy their lives. Children and young people who require specific attention have been identified in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) General Comment 17 (GC 17) as follows:

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

Identifying particular groups of children and young people in this way presents the risk of overlooking one or more particular groups or individuals with specific needs in addition to diverse needs within different contexts. The world is constantly changing, evolving, and new and different issues for children can arise and place further constraints on their access to everyday opportunities to play. This presents a challenge for Dublin in supporting children's right to play in a comprehensive and meaningful way that places priority on the most vulnerable of the city's youngest citizens.

Furthermore, equality of access to play regarding burden of costs associated with commercial enterprises is an infringement of Article 31 as it presents excludes children and young people of certain economic status and therefore places a barrier to accessing opportunities to play. The development of facilities and supporting and facilitating everyday opportunities for play is the responsibility of local authorities in providing public amenities and space for play, leisure and recreation. The guiding principle when supporting play for children and young people is to apply the '3 x F's' to facilitating freely chosen, child led opportunities for play; **F**ree of charge, **F**ree to come and go and **F**reedom to choose regarding where, what and how they play and who they play with.

### Supporting play in a diverse and multi-cultural city

Children of all ages and abilities have a right to equality of access to play and therefore appropriate provision regarding their individual abilities is required. This is realised through the promotion and development of accessible and inclusive play experiences for all children and young people. Universal design is used as a guiding principle in the development of play facilities and public space; however, this mainly addresses access to designated play facilities. Therefore, a more comprehensive and realistic approach demands considerable attention to design and planning that assists in overcoming the barriers to children and young people's access to inclusive opportunities to play not only in designated play facilities but also in local streets and neighbourhoods and public space. This requires particular attention to and understanding of inclusive play in order to avoid exclusion and isolation. All children should be able to engage in play that supports them in developing friendships where play activities take place. According to the latest Central Statistics Office (CSO) figures, there are 173784 children and young people in Ireland with diverse and varying levels of physical, psychological, emotional, intellectual, visual and aural disabilities. 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 number of children and young people aged 5 – 19 years 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 inclusion regarding the importance of developmental benefits of play and placing equal importance on the role of play regarding children's general health and well-being, particularly their mental health. With the largest percentage of Irish children and young people living with a disability residing 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. 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. In order to shift the disproportionate focus on this issue the play strategy will address diversity across mobility, hyperkinetic issues and neuro diversity.

One way of doing this is by adapting and modifying hostile play environments and developing them to include acceptable standards that facilitates inclusive play. This type of provision avoids tokenism and ensures that children and young people with disabilities are involved *in* playing and are afforded choice such as playing alone or with peers, rather than watching from the side-lines, who they play with and where and what they play. The play strategy aims to address this issue by including the level of accessibility and inclusion within proposed Play Sufficiency Assessments, renewal of existing and design of new play facilities and street and open space design. This approach extends to creative use of accessibility and inclusion guidelines applied to public space where playful engagements, recreation and social interactions should be included within the potential of public open space that as accessible to *all*. This would involve further research with key stakeholders to explore additional and appropriate inclusive opportunities for play.

**Supporting children living in poverty, experiencing homelessness and from ethnic minority groups;** Society has come a long way in terms of discrimination and inequality with much legislation is in place to address and resolve these issues. Despite these measures, it is unfortunate that such inequalities still exist throughout the world. By taking a more broad reaching approach to issues of equality of access and inclusion regarding play, the Dublin City Play Strategy also includes meaningful response to children and young people of various socio-economic backgrounds, various countries of origin and particularly in Dublin the very real issue of supporting children and young people from indigenous and minority communities. All of these children and young people can face many barriers to play through hostility, assimilation policies, 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.

For Ireland and especially Dublin as a capital city, the past 25 years has seen growing numbers of non-Irish nationalities taking up residence in Ireland. This is made up of those seeking refuge from countries where there is war and conflict, natural disasters and have come to Ireland to seek a better life. Consequently, the increase in non-Irish Nationalities has also influenced the number of children and young people experiencing poverty and homelessness. There is also the issue of hidden homeless who in addition to those recorded as living in temporary and emergency accommodation and sleeping rough, there are also a children and young people that are temporarily accommodated (usually with friends or family) but are living in precarious and unsustainable situations which are not included in CSO 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. At the time of writing this strategy, approximately 193,000 children and young people under the age of 18 years are living in poverty in Ireland (CSO 2016). The largest proportion of this figure are those living in Dublin.

Placing a focus on Ireland's indigenous background, the overall population of the Irish Traveller Community is 30,987, making up 7% of the overall population (CSO 2016) and with the highest percentage living in Dublin (5089). In 2017, the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, University College Dublin, the University of Edinburgh and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem conducted a study on the travelling community. This study resulted in identifying the Traveller Community as having a distinctive culture, tradition, shared language and customs that differ somewhat from the settled Irish population. Identifying the travelling community as an 'ethnic group' contradicted the prevailing view that Travellers needed to be rehabilitated, then forcibly assimilated into the settled Irish population (*Martin Collins 2019*). The results of this study contributed significantly to Irish Travellers official designation as an ethnic minority. In 2017, the Traveller Community given official definition as a group within a community holding different national or cultural traditions from the main population.

*"Travellers originated in Ireland, they are genetically different from 'settled' Irish people, to the same degree as people from Spain, Genetic"*

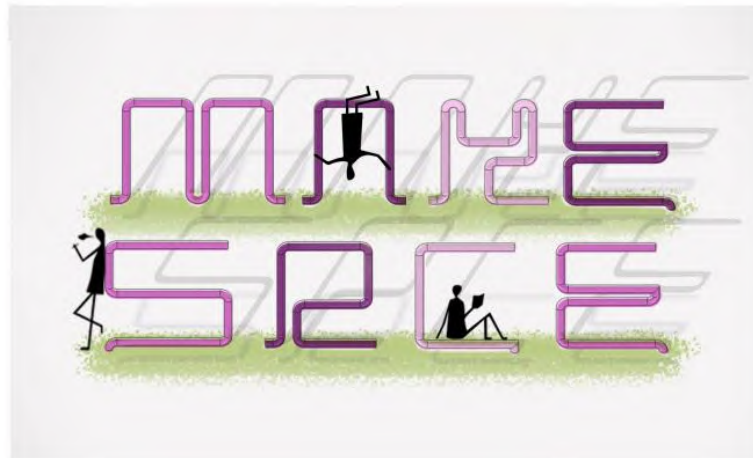
(Heather Buckley, 2017)

Additionally there has been a growing increase in the Roma population in Ireland, which is now at 5000. Both Traveller and Roma children have been identified as some of the most marginalised children in the state. (Report 20...). Racism, inequality is not always clearly visible, however many members of these communities have had negative experiences either through indirect institutional, indirect, hidden or unwitting racism and discrimination. In a study carried out by the Pavee Point & 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 & Roma Centre 2018).

### Equality opportunities to play for girls and young women

Equality for girls may not seem like an obvious issue for Irish Children as living in an egalitarian country indicates modern attitudes and equal status for women and girls. However, in certain cultures and family situations, girls are burdened at an early age with family responsibilities that impede on the time and space for them to play. In some cultures, 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. Girls should have equal access to play opportunities despite their ethnic, religious, or socio-economic backgrounds. Games and toys should be equally available to girls. Gender specific toys can present exclusions to girls within certain contexts and cultures. The provision of gender-neutral toys, equipment and materials for play can go some way in addressing this issue.. A campaigning charity recently developed 'Make Space for Girls' examines the issue of gender and access to outdoor opportunities. This involves campaigning for parks and public space to develop designs that include girls and young women as well as boys and young men. The initiative also strives to raise awareness of this issue through research and ensuring that the voices of girls and young women are heard in the planning process. This initiative has come up with a number of innovate ways of addressing this issue e.g. 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. The consultation process for the Dublin City Play Strategy included the voices of girls and young women 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 key 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 or more importantly complete avoidance of gender specific opportunities for play.



#### Supporting play for children coming from situations of conflict, humanitarian and natural disasters;

National emergencies, conflict and humanitarian and national disasters are not often high on Dublin's list of concerns as a progressive European capital city. The more prominent list of necessities identify matters that are more basic such as survival, food, shelter, care and medicines. Nevertheless, it must be understood that play is key to human existence and survival as an innate, instinctive and child-led process that enables us to function as human beings. The therapeutic, healing and rehabilitative nature of play is vital for children in these situations as it brings a sense of normality and calm and some joy to children who are exposed to extreme and emotionally disturbing experiences such as loss, displacement, violence and trauma.

Dublin is not usually subject to this type of situation, however isolated incidences have occurred in the past such as 'the troubles' (Northern Ireland Conflict) and the more recent storms, flooding and other extreme weather conditions brought on by Climate Change and Global Warming. These conditions can impact on the child's right to play and therefore should not be overlooked when providing support for them to cope with these situations. 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. This has placed play as a subject for social media opportunities, rather than focusing on the importance and value of self-directed play for play's sake especially with peers, human interaction and maintaining friendships and the detrimental effects of poor access to this type of play on children's overall health and well-being. At a

national level Ireland has responded to this issue by adopting the more holistic approach highlighted by the International Play Association 'Play During a Pandemic' (IPA). This has 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 support their children' play in this time 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 on July 2021 as a play resource for each city and county throughout Ireland.

**Children in care institutions - Dublin /Ireland;** Some of our city's children and young people are growing up in orphanages, residential homes, and schools, hospitals, detention centres, prison services, temporary accommodation and foster care and in many of the cities across the world where children and young people are experiencing homelessness as unaccompanied minors. In 2015, the overall number of children and young people in care by 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 support 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 can to misinterpretation of the child's actions and be 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 that are not their own. 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 interrelated and not just stand-alone issues for children and young people. For example, racism, inequality, poverty, homelessness and exclusion all affect one another and can further exacerbate situations. It is clear that in order to address these issues in a meaningful way that 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 non- Irish nationalities, those seeking refuge, living in poverty, Roma and Traveller community need to feel safe. They have a right to access these places without fear or racial attacks and feelings of inadequacy in assuming they are not accepted and respected or permitted to use these public spaces, places and facilities for play. This issue needs to be challenged and resolved to permeate through all interventions an initiatives that confronts inequality of access and inclusion regarding opportunities to play.

Observing, talking and listening to key stakeholders regarding their use of public facilities and space for play will be vital 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 public realm and housing projects that address overcrowding and lack of private outdoor space regarding how children and young people navigate and use these spaces for play and recreational activities as part of their everyday lives.

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 local and public play and recreational facilities, services, places and spaces. It is the role of governments and local authorities to ensure that all play facilities and services are neutral 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 governments departments.

The Dublin City Strategy will strive to ensure that all children and young people living in and visiting Dublin City will have equality of access to 'good' quality play experiences. This should happen no matter what age, socio-economic status, physical or intellectual ability, gender or whether you live in a country or city that either at peace, in conflict or experiencing disaster.

*"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 Project Worker – Barnardos "Hidden Homeless - What's the problem" 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 are less specific play and recreational opportunities for them than those for younger and middle year's children (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 - 12yrs. 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 that is out of adult gaze and where they can simply 'Hang Out' with peers. From this perspective, it is clear that outside of youth groups/clubs and after school clubs, there is poor provision for 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. Much of our society regards older children on the street with suspicion and mistrust where they are discouraged from using public spaces when simply 'hanging out' with friends. This is often viewed negatively based on fears or assumptions of anti-social behaviour resulting sometimes in harassment from An Garda Síochána who often perceive this behaviour as breach of Public Order Acts. This type of experience mainly applies to older children/teenagers in general rather than specific evidence of systemic racism that is more clearly documented and evidenced in United Kingdom, America and other European countries. The issue of "black lives matter" has received a level of controversial attention here in Ireland/ Dublin where 'worrying patterns' of racism in general and institutional racism appear to be emerging (Irish Times 2019). Claims that Ireland/Dublin does not have a problem with racism do not stand up scrutiny of the report on the study of European Fundamental Rights Agency that showed incidents of racism in Ireland were above the European Average (Irish Times July 2020). Consequently, this is a more complex and contextual issue, which deserves more in-depth discussion and examination within more relevant strategies and policies focused on racial inequalities in Ireland. Therefore, the focus of this policy statement is aimed at promoting positive perceptions of older children as respected and connected members of society where the issue of time, space and permission to play presents a case of spatial rather than racial justice.

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 will support them in accessing sufficient time, space and opportunities for play and social interactions with friends. Currently this issue is not sufficiently met and therefore should be further emphasised and highlighted within this and any future policies or strategies regarding children's play. Subsequently, this play strategy acknowledges and includes relevant policy statements and clear and comprehensive action points to ensure the implementation of sufficient opportunities for play for older children aged approximately 12 – 18 years of age.

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 (Older Children Play Too – Wales 2019). Therefore, provision of facilities and acknowledgement and understanding of children and young people's infrastructure and how they utilise the natural and built environment promotes the concept and understanding that time, space and permission to play are key supports for them to engage in play as part of their everyday lives.

In 2004, the national play strategy 'Ready Steady Play!' (National Children's Offices -NCO) was published. The strategy focused mainly on the play needs of younger children with



particular focus on school-aged children. Following on from this, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs published a national recreation strategy for young people; 'Teenspace' – the 'National Recreation Policy for Young People (2009), 'Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (2014) - The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People. During this time the Dublin City Play Plan; 'Play here, play there, play everywhere (2012 – 2017) was also launched. The recreation strategy and the play plan identified children as those aged 18 and under, the national policy framework identified children as those aged 24 years and under. For the purpose of this policy statement, this age cohort will be referred to as 'older children' mainly 18 years and under. The national recreation Policy for young people (Teenspace) contains 11 key objectives of which the most pertinent in highlighting awareness and understanding play and recreation in the everyday lives of older children/teenagers are the following:

Objective 1: Give young people a voice in the design, implementation and monitoring of recreation policies and facilities

OBJECTIVE 4: Maximise the range of recreational opportunities available for young people who are marginalised, disadvantaged or who have a disability

Objective 3: Ensure that the recreational needs of young people are met through the development of youth friendly and safe environments.

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 and Youth Affairs (DCYA) for the implementation of National Quality Standards Framework (NQS) and the subsequent NVSQ Volunteer-led Youth Groups (NQS-VYG). 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 regarding staff-led youth services regarding funding for staff and to support building renovation projects for refurbishment of premises/club houses etc. 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 informed the Government, local authorities and youth organisations through ongoing consultation, specifically regarding the development of the above-mentioned policies and strategies and through the formats of 'Comhairle na nÓg and Dail Na nÓg (Young people's parliament), they have clearly 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 (CDYSB) raised concerns regarding their confidence in realising the broad ambitions of the plan with regard to facilitating opportunities for play for 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* to play for this age cohort such as over policed facilities were expressed. More positive alternatives were identified which involved ongoing dialogue and collaborative working in order to follow through with the concept of play being placed on organisational agendas and service practice of Youth organisations and services and subsequent policies and strategies. The implementation of Strategy actions that highlight awareness raising and practical information alongside physical examples of addressing play for older children within the cities physical infrastructure will present clear demonstrations of this concept where older children and 'seen and heard' as active and playful members of society. (Jones.C. 2012 CDYSB)

In order to comply with these policy developments and as a model in 'Good Practice', community groups, local authorities, youth organisations, private sectors, 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 for example, active play, the arts, casual sports or simply 'hanging out with friends' are given equal and careful consideration when ensuring that conditions are right in order to support play for older children. 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. Addressing these issues demonstrates how local authorities, providers and parents/carers can exercise their concerns for older children/teenagers, as they often feel they are not included in their community simply because there is no play/recreational provision made for their age group.

More recently the restrictions which have been imposed to combat the Covid 19 Global Pandemic has further restricted young people's presence, movement and time spent in public space. In a survey carried out by Dublin City University (DCU) young people aged between 10 - 18 years who were asked about any changes in their indoor play behaviours 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 and 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*'. Additionally, 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.

Moreover, since the beginning of the Covid 19 Pandemic and the consequential and varying levels of restrictions and number of full lockdowns, the two outstanding issues that caused the most difficulty for parents was a) the reality that children could not meet up with, and

play with their friends and b) working from home. These two issues presented parents with the ongoing dilemma of clearly understanding the importance of socialising with peers for the children themselves, which is further exacerbated in certain circumstances e.g. only children and children with special needs. In this instance parents reported that technology was not an option for maintaining friendships for younger children e.g. 5 year olds may not be able to use Facebook, zoom etc. in general his report showed 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 themselves reported that a lot of this contact took place at restricted physical distances such as talking to friends over the garden wall.

When asked, children and parents requested that measures to enable them to address the issue of physical distancing so that they could socialise and play together. This was identified as one of the most important things in relation to social supports and that the government could do to support play during the Pandemic. It was also the preferred option over the reopening clubs or playgrounds. Within this context, both parents of children (aged 4-13) and children themselves (10-18) agreed that the most important factor for enabling play was interaction with their friends, rather than public spaces. (Barron.C & Walker.M 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 , Dublin). (Barron.C & Walker. M 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). (Barron.C. & Walker.M 2020).

*'I can't play with my friends on our scooters and bikes'* (Boy aged 10, Dublin).

General Comment 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 that:

**(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 presents an appropriate alternative to sports participation. There is a growing need for acceptance and understanding the 'play cultures' of young people regarding their place in society and 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 these play facilities and local and public space demonstrates consideration and acceptance of this age group making it easier for them to 'fit In' and feel 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 - 13yrs. 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 20..). Therefore, the need to consult with young people and involve them in the design and planning of these facilities is paramount in addressing their play and recreational needs.

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' regarding the various stakeholders and should have the potential to be perceived in various ways by its many 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 facilitates their Urban Agency in proclaiming and designing youth friendly places and spaces throughout Dublin City.

*"outdoor spaces often become sites of resistance where young people rebel against adult defined rules."* (Tucker 2003- Cited in Barron 20..)

### Place making, connectivity and young people's spatial engagement within local streets and neighbourhoods

The recommended response required to support play for older children is developing a balance of designated and informal shared spaces and design features that provides informal seating, transparency and reasonable shelter where they can meet and socialise safely within their community and the public realm - somewhere to "hang out" (Wales – Older children play too 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. In order to make these kind of facilities safe for users it should provide light with time switch and partial screening, as this enables 'soft policing'. The main purpose of this type of interventions is to provide play spaces for older children where they where can meet and "hang out" as accepted members of their community.

Dublin City Council has the potential to provide this type play infrastructure through the actions identified with 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 in designated play areas, the consensus from local communities and the public would be vital in successfully supporting play for this age cohort in local neighbourhoods and within the public realm.

Supporting play for older children requires cross community involvement and an interagency approach that involves relevant youth and community organisations and agencies, and in particular local authorities play and community officers and an Garda Síochána. This collection of community representatives will be vital in setting up steering committees or working groups in order to ensure full public engagement and agreement for the successful implementation of all of the following elements of with this type of initiative.

- Appropriate planning and public engagement.
- High level of involvement of young people though active research and participative consultation.
- Locally agreed design and location of the proposed play facilities, places and spaces.
- Securing permissions /community and public agreement and 'buy in'.
- Identifying and securing funding if required.
- Ongoing maintenance, monitoring, review 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 but may assist in addressing them alongside 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. Addressing these issues shows the community's concern for young people, as they often feel they are not included or respected simply because there is no play/recreational provisions made for their age group.



*“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.

### **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 place 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 local area; Scoil Mhuire and Shellybanks Educate Together. 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 'Adventures on the Sea Shore'. The children were then asked to think about what they play and what kind of things they would enjoy in the new playground. Due to time constraints regarding school timetables and planning deadline, 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. The idea was to create an outdoor adventure, imaginative, fun, challenging and exciting play in nature and by the sea. Children came up with a broad range of ideas for inclusive play activities where they would have the lots of things to choose from, create their own games and adventures and have the freedom to decide for themselves what and where to play – and have friends to play with if they wanted to. The children 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 Sandymount Beach, the red and white lighthouse and the two big chimneys at the Poolbeg/Ringsend generation station. The children 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.

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 also affect the final design. The children from both schools gave a lot of time and energy to ideas that would make sure that the playground would have play equipment for children of all ages and children with special needs. Seating and spaces to sit, rest, talk or daydream were also included as important things to have in the playground for all children and parents. The results of the creative workshops provided a design brief from the children that included a list of ideas, drawings and models for the new playground which was sent on to playground designers to include in the final playground design proposal.

The playground was designed and built by successful design tender proposal from 'Hawthorn Heights'. The preferred design proposal included as many of the children's ideas as was practicable and possible. The official opening celebrations took place in July 2019 and was attended by all of the children involved in the design and planning process where a special word of thanks and appreciation was expressed to 'Sandy mount Tidy Towns Community Association' who were local community group responsible for initial

research and funding which realised the idea of a new playground for all children and young people living in or visiting the Sandymount and Ringsend area. 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 new coastal play facility.

Since July 2019 hundreds of children and young people are enjoying the completed new play area at Sean Moore Park in Sandymount as a place where children of all ages and abilities can find lots of things to play with; adventure, nature and imaginative play as well as swings' slides, zip lines, seesaws and so much more. 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 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 as it signals fun, challenge and excitement and inclusive opportunities for play, inviting children and young people to visit the playground and enjoy endless 'Adventures on the Sea Shore'.

### **Glazer Family Playground at St Peter's Pier**

The marine-themed Glazer Family Playground at the St Peter Pier 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 the City of St Petersburg and 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 a true 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 kids (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 - Irish Architecture Foundation – Matheson Foundation- Ballyfermot Youth Action Project - FamiliBase  
Community Placemaking for Youth within the public realm

*“We embarked on a project to build a Play and Skate Park in Ballyfermot through and innovative collaborative People First Design Process and international design competition co-funded by the Matheson Foundation and Dublin City Council.”*

This initiative commenced in July 2015 and set out to transform the Lawns at Le Fanu Park in Ballyfermot as 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 + BMX facilities

The project is born out of a shared mission between the Irish Architecture Foundation (IAF), the Matheson Foundation and Dublin City Council Parks to develop a world class play and skate space in Ballyfermot. The completed works involved the provision of a new skateboard bowl consisting of a concrete skate plaza, skate bowls and skate transition area. The project also included fencing, grass, mounding, pedestrian paths and bicycle stands with provision of CCTV and public lighting in addition to play areas. The works allow for excavation, earthworks, drainage and extensive planting.

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 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 located adjacent to a campus of youth and leisure facilities (Leisure Centre and FamiliBase) which opened in 2008 and the Play Park initiative is seen as a further extension of these resources.

Ballyfermot is an area of Dublin with a young population, but has typically been classified as an area of social disadvantage and low economic and social development. Since 2012 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, with the focus being 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 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 continue to work closely with us 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 were prioritised at every stage of the project and competition 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 and respect for this €1.6 million project. 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.



**Le Fanu Skate/BMX & Play Park**





Le Fanu Skate/BMX & Play Park



Sean Moore Park Play Area Sandymount

#### 4: WORK IN PARTNERSHIP TO SUPPORT SCHOOLS, EARLY CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION SETTINGS TO IMPROVE AND INCREASE CHILD-LED PLAY EXPERIENCES.

**Work in partnership to support schools to facilitate play as a right for children and young people by improving and increasing play opportunities that place particular emphasis on outdoor, unstructured and self-directed play.**

*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 as they get to go outside and play with friends. Contrariwise, an educators experience and perspective can present a number of difficulties in supervising playtime during the school lunch breaks. The ongoing challenge for those responsible for children's education is in allowing them the freedom to be physically, mentally and socially active whilst ensuring safety and adequate supervision.

Increased provision in early education has resulted in more than 65% of four years olds and almost all five years olds spending a considerable amount of their day in school (Department of Education 2008). *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 extend 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' revealed the extremely concerning issue where almost every teacher surveyed – 97% globally - said that time to play outdoors is *critical* for children to reach their full potential (Persil 'Project Dirt' 2018). Schools potentially 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).

According to the Department of Education and Science's regulation (Primary Circular 11/95 'Time in School') gives a 'minimum' of 40 minutes of break-time which is usually divided into 10 minutes in the morning and 30 minutes at lunchtime which equates to 12 to 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 2001). In research conducted in 2008 for the Dublin City play audit, most schools believed that the currently allocated break and lunchtime breaks are what is statutorily required of them. Schools believe that there is no choice to allocate any additional 'break' time when in fact, it is the advised minimum. There was also often 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

In terms of exploring ways to improve children and young people's play opportunities in an educational setting, schools welcome any kind of initiative or solutions that assist in addressing these issues. Developing school environments for play requires the commitment of school boards of management to adopt a "whole child" approach. This enables schools to participate in a consultative style of engagement to demonstrate their acknowledgement and



support of the concept of play as crucial to a child's physical, social, intellectual, creative and social development and therefore significantly valuable in terms of physical and mental health and well-being of the child. This presents a challenge for schools to implement initiatives that will support children by improving and increasing play opportunities in the school environment. 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.

In the past Dublin City Council has engaged in collaborative project 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 and increasing focus on the benefits of early education and on play as the way children learn in the 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 & Blatchford 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 on their return from break time (Armitage 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, programmes and daily routine will result in providing the following benefits and incidental outcomes:

- 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 202)

### School environments that support play

The approach to play provision for both primary and second level schools is the same. Although the type of activities desired by each age group may be different e.g. 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, listening to music etc. In order to address this issue constructively it would be helpful to talk to children and young people and include their opinions and ideas as a key part of this consultative process. This affords children and young people the experience of working alongside their parents and teachers and gaining a deeper understanding of their role. Thus allowing them to experience the ‘fun’ and more informal side of school life.

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 use of existing spaces, improve and increase play opportunities as opposed to developing facilities such as elaborate and expensive fixed play equipment. School streets and School Zones also provide a welcome addition to promoting active and play friendly journeys to school where families are encouraged to walk, cycle, scoot or roller skate to school in a safe and child friendly environments. There has been a significant increase in the development and implementation of School Zones and School streets as a positive measure to support social distancing and reducing car and public transport use as cities move out of lockdown and develop a culture of safe practices that are compliant with Covid 19 restrictions. During the most recent lockdown, Dublin City Council installed a large number of School Zones. Developing innovative measures to address health and safety restrictions due to the Covid 10 Global Pandemic has presented the opportunity for Interdepartmental working between DCC Parks, Play and Traffic and Transport departments in collaboration with the outside agencies such as the National Transport Authority and Green-Schools programmes. This presents the opportunity to develop greener and more play friendly designs for this type of intervention that aligns with all relevant policies and strategies for each department and agency.



### 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 12 x north central locations in Dublin (Ballymun) and 1 x city centre location at Warrenmount Primary School which have resulted in developing a school playground development template for schools citywide that will support them in developing school playgrounds. 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 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. School environments provide part of the stability needed by children and young people to enjoy school, maintain friendships and cope daily issue of the school day. Supporting this type of intervention demonstrates Dublin City Council's commitment to support all aspects of childhood including the improvement of children and young people's play experiences in the school environment.

Building on this Pilot as a key example of how schools can support children's right to play suggest ongoing development to formalise a process for development of school grounds for play that will benefit schools throughout Dublin City. An example of this is provided by the 'EU Play Friendly Schools' initiative which 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 and further support in achieving this is provided by the inclusion of a specific playwork training

course for staff. The overall initiative and criteria for achievement of a play friendly schools label was drawn from the expertise provided by UK based Outdoor Play and Learning (OPAL) which is a mentor supported schools improvement programme.

### 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. 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. This issue is more appropriately addressed within theme 2 of the strategy in relation to play infrastructure. However, it would be a positive move if schools were to find ways to explore mobility routes to and from school to coincide with providing space and security for wheeled play activities on school grounds and as part of the play offer during school break times. 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 and access for future pupils to child-led play activities in school.

The development of child friendly and playful schools can also include providing safe access to schools. 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 traffic restrictions on motorised traffic on a road outside a school during school drop off and pick up times, offers practical solutions for school communities to tackle air pollution, poor health and road 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 (School Streets Initiative). For example, a key support regarding the implementation of School Streets in the UK is that Local Authorities there 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 and more recently 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 the need to provide additional space for walking and cycling during the Pandemic. 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 and promotes 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 facilitating outdoor, unstructured self-directed play in early childhood education and childcare settings.**

The role of play in childhood has the potential for practitioners to gain a deeper understanding of the role of development in the human experience particularly in the key development stage of 'Early Childhood' (Pellegrini 2009). The cultural norm for the vast majority of children within modern day society is that many parents are working either on a full or part-time basis. From the age of approximately 2 ½ years, the desired choice for many parents/guardians in terms of childcare is within a pre-school/Kindergarten setting. This is based on a strong research based belief that early years education programmes are key in supporting the growth and development of very young children. Since their introduction, these social norms have led to the growing placement of children in early childhood education and childcare as opposed to home based childcare. These type of settings place an increasing focus on academic developmental targets and formal learning that incidentally place restrictions on young children in terms of their natural disposition to engage in play for most of their waking hours.

Neuroscientific research on biological brain structure and ability to learn is applied to the study of children's growth and development in the last months of pregnancy and from birth. This has provided evidence of the impact of children's experiences as they grow and develop on their biological brain structure and ability to learn. From birth, there is an upsurge in the growth of nerves, neural pathways, and their connections that becomes even more apparent from 2 years through to adolescence. Up to the age of five years 5 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 and therefore poor environments can result in drastic reduction in neural pathways. 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 full potential of brain development. This leads to the earliest discussions on children's play regarding its purpose and what is happening while they play. Similar and conflicting discussions on the many perspectives of children's play such as instinctual (Fagan 1991), evolutionary (Hughes 2001) and biological heritage of humanity (Garvey 1991) to mention but a few. This is further explored by examining the common features within a plethora of play literature.

The knowledge base of differing, conflicting and complimentary arguments and perspectives on the role and value of play in children's lives requires shared clarity regarding the purpose and value of play in early childhood. This is highly important as parents/carers, providers and educators navigate within these paradigms to ensure that rich and varied play opportunities and environments provide support and facilitate the healthy growth and development of the very young children in their care.

### **Providing 'good' play environments in early childhood education and childcare settings**

National guidelines and regulations related to the health of children childcare state that early childhood education and childcare settings should include playing as one of the



activities available to children and that there should be ‘adequate and suitable facilities for a pre-school child to play indoors and outdoors’. A further departmental policy document in relation to play in early childcare situations ‘We Like This Place’ (NCNA 2005) gives plenty of ideas for good quality indoor and outdoor play and contends, “Operating a childcare facility without the inclusion of an outdoor play area is unthinkable”.

Justification for a play-led approach within an education and in childcare context can be difficult to establish. However, there is a growing awareness and acknowledgement that ‘play for play’s sake’ is a key element in child development. In order for play to happen spontaneously, the correct conditions for play 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 whilst playing. Existing and newly developed settings of this kind can still benefit from a play led approach and guiding principles of ‘play sufficiency’ to ensure creative design that includes provision of interesting, challenging, and varied play opportunities and facilitates a wide range of play types that includes interaction with and access to outdoor natural landscapes. The provision and/or development of rich play environments both indoor and outdoor will improve and increase play opportunities and provide positive long and short-term impacts for children, parents/carers and service providers.

Adopting a play-led approach to play provision within early education and childcare settings also requires an inter-disciplinary approach to ensure that high quality environments for play are provided. Collaborative working will contribute towards creating a synergy of quality and standards among providers and practitioners. This will address the issue of playwork practice as a supporting framework alongside early years practice frameworks (Play Scotland). This can be established by joined up thinking and shared knowledge regarding the adoption of the principle of ‘play sufficiency’ as a method of assessing and developing high quality play facilities in early years settings. Applying this concept in terms of quality in service will ensure that key elements for play are provided. This will include other children, natural landscapes including flora and fauna, equipment and materials to facilitates 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 (Wagland – 2015 Cited in ‘Resources for Play Toolkit’ – Play Wales July 2017).

### Adult Roles, practice frameworks and the positive impacts of early childhood policy, legislation and initiatives

During early childhood, 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 in 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 (Sander, Griffiths & Goodall 2007).

Current practice frameworks for early childhood education and childcare settings include key 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 childhood education and childcare 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 well-being. 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 National Council for Curriculum and Assessment in the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework for children from birth to six years in Ireland. The Aistear framework contains four interconnected themes; 1. Well Being, 2. Identity and Belonging, 3. Communicating and 4. Exploring and Thinking. Aistear also provides key resources and supports linked to these themes which places a key focus on play 'learning and developing through play' 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 childhood settings successfully meet the requirements for quality assessments through the provision of rich play experiences and environments.

Additional policies and strategies have had positive influences on the quality and standards for early years education and childcare. Guidelines and information on best practice can be found in the National Childcare Nurseries Association 'We like this place' (NCNA 2005), 'The National Children's Strategy; Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (BOBF 2014), Early Childhood Ireland Play Curriculum (ECI 2016) and the National Play Policy 'Ready, Steady, Play' (DCYA 2003 – 2008).

The Siolta guidelines produced by the National Quality Framework for early Childhood Education (Siolta 2007) were produced to provide guidelines for early years practitioners and childminders to provide quality services within their settings. An emphasis on play was highlighted as critical within the criteria for providing settings that supported the physical and emotional well-being of very young children and central to their overall development. Siolta ensures the regulation of principles, standards and components of quality within early childhood education and care settings. From a play perspective, Siolta 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"*

Siolta 2007

Relational themes for the play strategy and early childhood education and childcare

In terms of the Dublin City Play Strategy, it would appear that the provision of outdoor play space is an ongoing issue and challenge facing the development of outdoor play facilities for childcare providers and early education practitioners. Consequently, 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 would seem 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. A vast majority of children under four years spend a large proportion of their day in educational or childcare settings. This presents key challenges for providers to facilitate child-to-child contexts of play that involves self and peer scaffolding and child-initiated play as compensatory to the diminishing play opportunities for 'soft learning' and the dynamics for thinking, creativity and imaginative elements of play that children experience when they are supported to play independently, usually outdoors and with other children.

The Dublin City Play Strategy presents key arguments and action points that support the concept and theory of a 'play-led' approach to play provision that focuses on giving priority to self-directed unstructured outdoor play and the use of open-ended materials and equipment that facilitate freely chosen, intrinsically motivated and personally directed play. In this way, the provider is required to observe and record learning outcomes as opposed to providing organised activities aimed at achieving specific learning outcomes. This approach is a much less complicated method which also requires planning and fits well with outdoor play provision and the early childhood education and childcare curriculum. During early childhood, playing is an important part of the day for very young children, especially when they are being cared for by someone other than their parents or carers. Young children are cared for by 'other' appropriate adults in the context of education and care settings should be afforded play experiences that involve freedom of choice regarding where, what and when they play and who they play with. Early Childhood Ireland (ECI) advocates and supports for child-led outdoor play as vital in supporting children's overall health and well-being as children are at their most natural and animated state when engaging on play. ECI states that providing time space and materials for play in early education and childcare settings is key in achieving the desired outcomes associated with the early years curriculum regarding the Siolta and Aistear programmes but more importantly play is a vital component in supporting children's health and happiness.



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

*"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 key *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 all article 31 rights within early education and childcare settings.

#### Case Studies

##### EU Play Friendly Schools

The European Union (EU) Play Friendly Schools initiative offers two good reasons why schools should think about a play friendly school environment:

- the first is that 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;
- the second is that 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 placed further emphasis on this 'forgotten right' by outlining governments' responsibility for recognising, respecting and promoting article 31 rights, and 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 5 x 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) which is a mentor supported schools improvement programme. The implementation of the programme focus on two UK Models Play and a project to introduce better opportunities for playing in schools.

The assessment and evaluation document includes the following set of 5 x Quality Criteria which are centred on rationale based on scientific research, indicators and guidance and suggestions for evidence of how individual schools meet the criterion:

Quality Criterion 1: The school has a leadership structure that supports children's play

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 3 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 UK to learn about the UK OPAL Programme and field research within each partner country. The outcomes of the programme included the development of respective National Adaption 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 Adaption Plans'

### **Dublin - Ballymun School Playground Improvement Programme**

In 2008 Ballymun Regeneration Ltd - Play development 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' (2008). The programmes was successfully implemented in ten primary schools and two second level schools in the Ballymun area. The project was promoted through local education committee meetings and separate meetings at primary and secondary schools. The programme was adopted by schools to address the daily challenges schools staff are faced with when supervising play during school break times. Schools staff were faced with the ongoing dilemma of supporting children and young people's the freedom to be physically, mentally and socially active whilst ensuring safety and adequate supervision. Finding positive and innovative ways to challenge these issues was a welcomed initiative that would assist in finding proactive solutions. School boards of management adopted a "whole child" approach wherein each School Principal agreed that each individual school in their charge took part in a project that involved a consultative style of 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 initiative required a consultative process and subsequently Marc Armitage- "Malarky - independent play consultant", was engaged to work with BRL Play Development Officer to deliver the "Ballymun School Playground Improvement Programme". The Programme involved a high level of school engagement in which 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 project had been tried and tested by Mark Armitage who had developed the methodology proposed for this project in a significant number of schools in the UK and Sweden. The programme received a participation certificate as part of the Ombudsman for Children (OCO) "Connecting Communities" Award. The assessment panel for the programme noted the high level of involvement by children and young people's 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 by both as a model of best practice, providing a template that can be used for school playgrounds at regional and national level.

By providing an in-depth understanding of the concept of play, the Ballymun School Playground Improvement Programme has provided school staff and volunteers with the skills in identifying the difference of use of play by teachers and the use of play by the child controlling the activity. This in turn has provided both staff and volunteers with an understanding free play and the consultants view on free play and associated concepts, such as acceptable and unacceptable risk and risk management

The Ballymun School Playground Improvement Programme produced a broad range of school playground development plans that were unique to each of the 12 schools involved in this project in the Ballymun area. This relates to the difference in location, landscape and current provisions for play from one schools to another and therefore shows that any school can adopt the project. The regeneration programme in Ballymun provided the unique opportunity for this pilot project to take place in all schools. The main costs for the programme was in relation to consultants' fees and equipment required when the action plans were implemented.

The diverse and innovative approach that this project applied in developing and addressing the provision of play opportunities in schools, allowed each individual school to apply this project to each of their individual settings. The project can be used as a model of best practice for other schools and regeneration projects on a regional and national level. Completing the 'Ballymun School Playground Improvement Programme has resulted in the provision of positive play experiences in all 12 schools in Ballymun. By providing positive play experiences in the school environment, this type of intervention has equally positive effects on the use of new and existing public play facilities where which children play in their own neighbourhoods during and after school hours.

As Ireland moves forward in the reopening of schools the gradual easing of Covid 19 restrictions. It will be a key requirement for schools countrywide to rethink how play and learning can be better facilitated within the schools outdoor environment. The opportunity for the schools involved in the Ballymun School Playground Improvement Programme can explore the possibilities of further development and support for Article 31 within the school environment by adopting the concept provided by the EU Play Friendly Schools initiative and work in collaboration with Dublin City Council Play Development and Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration. And Youth (DECDIY). This will involve completing the Criteria, assessment and review of the work these schools have done thus far in order to develop a contextual 'Play Friendly Schools' Label which can used as a template for Ballymun, Dublin city and countrywide.

### 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 and childcare. 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 supports children in developing skills related to a multiplicity of tasks and activities such as problem solving, listening to 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 national curriculum framework from the National Council For Curriculum and Assessment, and **Síolta**, the national quality framework from the Dept. of Education state that play is key in achieving the most important outcomes for early childhood.

ECI provide a wealth of information and resources to assist those provide parents/guardians and those working in early education and childcare settings to support and facilitate play through careful planning in order to provide sufficient time, space and materials and prompts for play in to identifying the role of adults involvement that allows for outdoor, child-led opportunities for play. This rich resource for Outdoor Play in Early Childhood and Education settings 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 the following ideas information and resources on Outdoor Play:

Encouraging Outdoor Play Experiences – this explores adults attitude to outdoor play, setting policies for outdoor play, curriculum and engagement with parents/carer and also includes the 'Garden of Possibilities' Booklet and DVD

Developing an Outdoor Play Policy – provides information on the basic steps to develop an Outdoor Play Policy such as health and safety, equality and inclusion, rules for outside etc.

Risk Assessment (the importance of including 'risk' in play) - explores the concept and provides information on providing play environments that include that affords children to experience, assess and take reasonable risk during their play.

**Outdoor Environment** - This provides information regarding the components of a rich outdoor play environment that includes facilitates physical moving play, biodiversity rich environments, sensory , tactile and open-ended elements, loose parts and overall a playful and challenging and interesting landscape with pathways tree, mounds etc.

**Ideas for Outdoor Play** - Further information and ideas on outdoor play such as creative and moving play, music, wood kitchens, construction, exploring, fairy houses and den building.

The key challenge in facilitating outdoor play is often just getting started. Providing a resource to initiate this process is key encouraging and enabling staff in early education and childcare 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 in this fabulous journey of discovery” (ECI)*



**Ballymun School Playground Improvement Programme**



### Ballymun School Playground Improvement Programme

*“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”*

GC17 Article 31

## 5. SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TO FULLY EXERCISE THEIR RIGHT TO PLAY THROUGH ENGAGEMENT WITH CULTURAL LIFE AND THE ARTS.

The vision of the Dublin City Play Strategy; ‘Pollinating Play’ 2020 – 2025 is underpinned by United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Article 31; *the child’s right to play. (See paragraphs 1 & 2 of Article 31 in strategy ‘Introduction’ section)*

General Comment 17 Article 31 sets out in further detail the obligations for states parties. The comment also notes obligations for states parties that are specific to paragraph two of Article 31 in ensuring children and young people exercise their right to fully engage in cultural life and the arts.

This is noted in Paragraph (F) GC 17: **Cultural Life & the Arts:** *“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 2014*

### **Supporting and responding to paragraph 2 Article 31 regarding equality and ease of access to engage in cultural life and the arts**

Following on from themes and recommendations of the city play plan, this subsequent play strategy places a key 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 collaborative and partnership working with relevant agencies and departments and in particular Dublin City Council Arts Department. This collaborative working is included within thematic actions as set out in this section of the strategy that are linked to both the play and arts departments of the City Council. The primary aim of this partnership is to address key relationships between ‘play’ and ‘the arts’ for children and young people in alignment with supporting and upholding Article 31. 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 key focus for the play strategy will include the following areas of interest associated with ‘play’ and ‘art’:

- 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



**National Playday 2018 - Merrion Square Park**

### Play as Childhood Culture

The perspective of global recognition of the right of children and young people to have access to and engage in cultural life and the arts pays attention to the two key dimensions of engagement and access. This is also indivisibly linked to other relevant rights with particular emphasis on Article 12; *the child's opinion* and Article 13; *freedom of expression*. Adopting the obligations as set out in GC17 Article 31 also demonstrates the acknowledgement of 'play' as a culture of childhood that is individual to countries, religious cultures, and the movement of people worldwide and within the cities and community cultures of the children and young people who live there. The Dublin City Play Strategy contributes greatly to this obligation, as it involves re-imagining and redesigning space in addition to introducing children and young people to art and culture 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 for states parties within GC17 Article 31 that embrace paragraph 2 of article 31 regarding engagement and access to arts and cultural life.

### Playful and interactive sculpture and art installations in parks and public space

Through public consultation, open spaces that have not been designated for future development plans can be identified for environmental upgrading or public design works. These spaces may not be suitable as public playgrounds, as they would require a more intense form of maintenance and supervision. However, as they are usually located in

neighbourhoods that would require spaces for children to play, 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 art expressions in the creation of public play space may feature Sensory materials - sand, water, plants, scrubs alongside interactive and playful sculptures that can be touched, sat on, climbed and hold the potential to prompt imaginative play episodes.

The provision of this public play spaces 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. Play space projects should be carried out by following the 'Sound Play Principles' as set out by "Playlink" which is as follows:

- 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

The vision of the Dublin City Play Strategy states that *Dublin will be a child-friendly and playful city where all children and young people can fully enjoy their right to play.*

Additionally the focus on this theme regarding the relationship between play and the arts holds particular relevance in creating an effective city play infrastructure and improve the design and access to a hierarchy of play facilities.

The Dublin City Parks Strategy (2020) includes relative and 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 (Holden 2006). The development of a 'Sculpture Park' is a key action within the strategy that presents the opportunity for collaborative working in order to implement related action points with the Dublin City Play Strategy. Additionally the Citywide 'Public Arts' policy presents similar opportunities in exploring the scope of commissions to include interactive and playful engagements in support of the development of a child friendly and playful city.

The purpose of providing interactive art as play a stimulus for playful engagement is an innovative way of acknowledging the play needs of children living in cities and local communities and at the same time dealing with barriers that installing conventional playgrounds at sensitive locations can create. This type of initiative provides the opportunity to develop a space that can be shared by the whole community and lend itself to different interpretations that are subjective to those who interact with it. These installations also address the intrinsic value of play, through unique design and specific

location according to each community's particular issues, 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."*

Playlink - Richard Broome, Outerspace

### Playful Places of Arts, Heritage and Culture

Throughout Dublin city, there are a number of galleries, studios, places of heritage, libraries, museums and theatres. 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 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. Places such as the National Animal Museum (Dead Zoo) and National Art Gallery and smaller local art centres such as the 'Lab' Foley St and 'Axis' Ballymun can provide exciting, interactive, creative and playful opportunities that present endless opportunities for artistic and cultural engagement. In this way, the arts can also be utilised as a medium for play where children and young people can experience creativity as a playful experience through the interconnections between art and play e.g. painting, drawing, drama, dance and sculpture. 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'
- Play-friendly places of culture e.g. interactive and engaging museums, galleries and heritage sites.

Working collaboratively with the City's Arts Office and Library Development can present a springboard from which a more collaborative approach can be taken in developing, coordinating and delivering a playful element to Dublin's cultural/historical sites that will also include the active participation of local children and young people.

An exemplary model of best practice is seen in the initiative by Odense City that provides 'The Culture Passport'. This initiative aims to enable 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 for children and young people.

Additionally the 'learning libraries programme' developed by play theorist Dr David Gray, is underpinned by child-led experiential learning where children are self-taught and explore the elements of the library to satisfy their own particular areas of interest.



The ongoing issues listed below present key barriers to playful engagements for children and young people when visiting cultural institutions:

- Socio-Economic Status
- Costs /admission fees can be barriers to accessing art exhibitions etc.
- Spatial restrictions such as access to certain areas and freedom of movement within art and cultural spaces particularly indoor spaces, can be a put-off for children and young people
- 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



**'Follow the Leader' Little Rock Arkansas Sculpture Park**

### **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 places a key focus on the "the playful human urge to create and explore" (Conway 2018 Eastbourne). This particular concept examines Neolithic origins through questioning; why do children under 5 years just 'do art'?



?and why children over 12 years feel they are no good at art?. Additionally, many art forms may be even overlooked as art and therefore not necessarily viewed as such but have become integral parts of children's play behaviours e.g. drawing, dancing, role play, dress up, singing, creating stories and narratives for their play frames and using materials to create and change places for play.

The Live Art Development Agency (LADA) Centre for live arts commissioned a research residency exploring live art practices and methodologies in working with children and young people in London (LADA 2017).

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 the disempowered communities of youth, the elderly, the displaced and those excluded through socio economic barriers (LADA 2017). Play holds parallel disempowerments and exclusions in terms of accessible and inclusive play, effects of socio-economic backgrounds on opportunities to play and the struggle for agency and self-efficacy in child-led self-directed play where children control the content and intent of their play. Some of the barriers to accessing or attending museums, exhibitions, performances etc. are presented by attitudes, perceptions, and accessibility demographics of places of heritage, culture and arts. The issue is not the level of attendance to these institutions; moreover, there is evidence that broadening the audience and participation profile from the 'usual support' to include a more diverse profile of participants is required. In providing evidence that more does not necessarily mean better, the MORI Report carried out in London in 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 Report 2003). Similar challenges are evident regarding play provision and opportunities that are inclusive and accessible and where cost is not an issue in terms of access, demographics or entry. The publication of 'Arts and Culture in Dublin City' included documented conversations with a dozen young Dubliners who discussed their opinions, experiences and engagement with the arts, culture and heritage. Many of the young people expressed that some of the key barriers to engaging in the arts included 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 (Young Dublin 2017). Older children/Teenagers claim 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 (modern poetry) 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 also autonomous, similar to the key characteristics of play. At an even more informal level, the way that young people/teenagers use public space is often perceived as potentially dangerous as opposed to the merely playful behaviour that they seek to use these spaces for (Child 'youtube' 2016). During most of their free time children and young people experience, enjoy, and engage in this type of activity for no ulterior motive or goal other than the joy and excitement of the experience and they do so at a time of their choosing, of their own choice and in places of their choosing.

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 mystique. 'Playing Out' emotions and experiences draws on play as a coping mechanism where children and young people can try comprehend real life situations in their own way and at their own pace.

*"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."*

Sybil Peters 'Live Art and Kids' 2017

Through a collaborative process, the Dublin City Play Strategy will 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 and Cultural activities and to visit and interact with places of heritage. In doing so, children and young people are presented with a wealth of interactive and accessible national and locally based 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

*"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 partnership working to implement 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.

### Case Studies

#### Manchester Museum - A more playful museum

##### Exploring issues of institutional space, children's play and well-being

Manchester Museum is a world-renowned space with an extensive collection of anthropological, archaeological and natural historical artefacts. The museum receives over 450,000 visitors to view exhibitions as visitor attractions and academic resources. The museum is well known as a family friendly informal space with that includes an established programme of organised activities. However, as part of the museums focus on developing 'Happy Museums' initiative, further focus was required in order to fulfil the expectations of its young visitors by embedding child-led play within it's policies and practices. Subsequently, the museum worked with play specialist to explore to understand children and young people's use of museum space.

During 2013 and 2014, Manchester Museum implemented the 'Happy Museums' Project' in order to develop a more playful approach of engaging its young visitors and developing skills to support child-led play. This initiative required the Manchester museum to take part in an experiment to look at how museums can be transformed into places that are more playful and the positive impacts of this type of intervention on children and young people's well-being. The project involved design, implementation and changes as a result of participation and provoking a wider discussion on how children's presence and engagement in traditional museums space, notions of playing and the slippery concept of well-being (Lester 2013). Play Specialist and Author Dr Stuart Lester led a key part of this project as 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 overall project involved the following measures in order to develop a process to permeate playfulness within the traditional museum culture:

The key development and outcome of this action research project was the development of a 'rule book' for play. The key tools used in the development of this key resource for museums was the 'story of change' which challenged the 'business as usual' approach and understanding of the traditional museum setting to become places where children and young people would be supported and encouraged to talk, sing, run, play, explore, make and create. The 'Rules for a Playful Museum' is now a quick reference guide of key concepts and an accessible and practical resource for examples of best practice underpinned by play and playwork principles and approach as an innovative framework of practice in encouraging and recognising playfulness in museums.

'Rules for a Playful Museum', has been a key resource in supporting Manchester Museum to become a 'playful museum'. This initiative has situated play as a permanent element within a museum environment by adopting a flexible approach to responding to children's and young people's playfulness within a museum setting and providing improved and increased opportunities for playfulness.

*"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."*

Anna Bunney, Engagement Manager, Manchester Museum

**Dublin's 1916 Play Garden** - involving children and young people in the design of a public play space located within a historical sight.

Ireland's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1916 Rising and the Proclamation of Independence took place in 2016. As part of the consultation process within the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, children and young people from across Ireland took part in consultations on

the theme 'Imagining our Future', and the suggestions made by the children and young people for commemorating the children who died in 1916. The result of these consultations was the suggestion by children and young people to create a play garden in memory of the children who lost their lives during the 1916 Easter Rising.

During discussions both children, young people and adults expressed key elements that should not be included within the proposed site:

- The space should not focus on one particular age range and overall should be an intergenerational space holding meaning for all key stakeholders.
- The space should not resemble a standard fixed playground – 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 mode
- The title '1916 Play Garden' should not be completely decided on as title or naming of the space – An opportunity to agree on existing or develop a more appropriate title if at all, should be afforded.

The location of the proposed '1916 Play Garden' was identified and the play area is now located at St Audoen's park in the central district of Dublin city centre. The target market for this development was primarily children and young people of all ages living and visiting Dublin City. Due to the historical nature of the overall site, the proposed play space now includes elements that attract and accommodate adults/parents and older 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 proposed '1916 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. They also expressed that these spaces do not require notices of cleanliness, safety or any other aspects of behaviour as they are subject to the play behaviours of the children who use them. This affords the 'players' to engage in risky, adventure, pretend, rough and tumble and imaginative play. Overall the children and young people wanted a public play space may feature the following:

- Sensory materials - sand, water, plants scrubs etc. Providing natural materials will create a play
- 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 etc.
- Art features - structures that prompt play activities

- Play Sculptures - Themed non-technical play equipment i.e. Bridges, animals etc., that can be touched, sat on, climbed on etc. and are used to prompt interactive and imaginative play episodes.

The purpose of providing this type of public plays space is a way of acknowledging the play needs of children living in the community and at the same time dealing with barriers that installing a conventional playground can create.

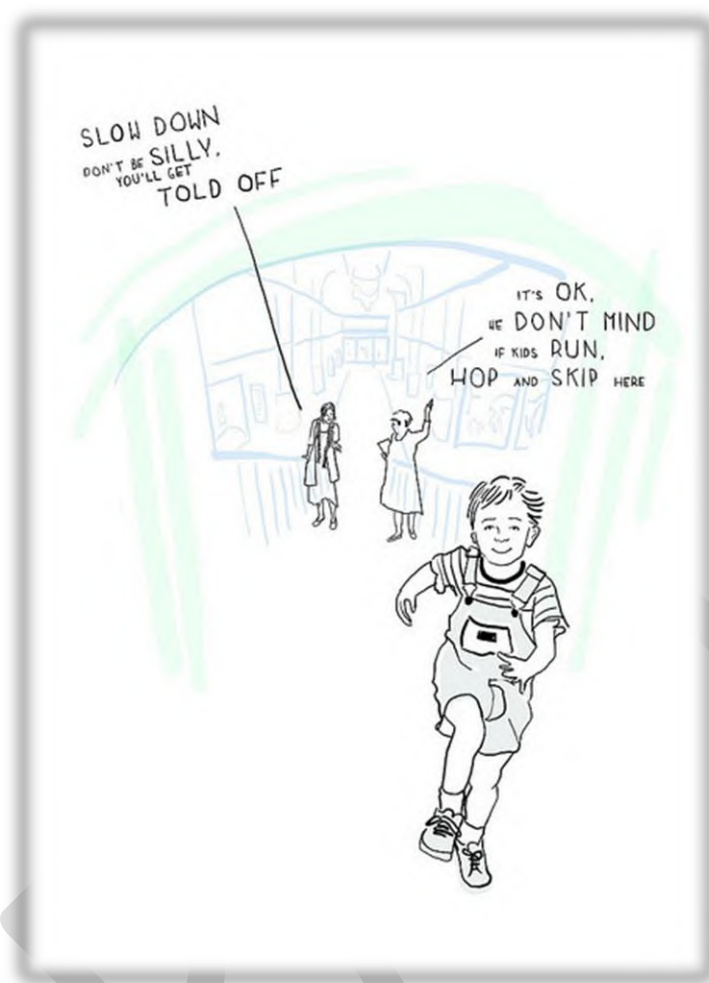
Dublin City Council parks department appointed Artists and Landscape Architects Team for the project in December 2016 and the overall project was completed in the overall project by the end 2017 or mid-2018. The official launch and opening of the 1916 Play Garden was attended by local residents and school children and the surviving relatives of some of the children who had lost their lives during the 1916 rising.

The development of the 1916 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 individual in design and in accordance with particular issues and concerns – in this case the historical events of 1916 and the challenges of creating a play space within a 16<sup>th</sup> century heritage site. The provision of this type of public play spaces has provide an imaginative approach to implementing accessible and inclusive opportunities for play within a shared public space where children and young people are seen and heard. This play facility 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.



**Manchester Museum**





### Dublin City Play Strategy Action Plan 2021 – 2025

The proposed Play Sufficiency Assessments Dublin City's play infrastructure, will feed into the ongoing monitoring, review and evaluation of the overall implementation of the strategy action plan. The Strategic Action Plan includes a comprehensive, practical and achievable actions and timeline from 2021 – 2025.

### Dublin City Play Strategy Action Plan 2021 – 2025

#### **Policy Statement 1: Develop and Awareness of play and its value and importance in the 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 x information booklet/s highlighting the importance of play

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 partners and children and youth groups such as Comhairle na n'Og 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 '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.
<b>Policy Statement 2: Create an Effective city-wide play infrastructure through collaborative design and planning with children and young people that enhances and responds to their existing infrastructure.</b>	
<b>Action</b>	<b>Measure</b>
<b>Quality Assessments:</b> Develop a 'Dublin City Play Sufficiency Assessment Toolkit', which includes a set of criteria that aligns with best	Completed Play sufficiency assessment of planned annual playground upgrades.

practice as set out in Wales Statutory Guidance for assessment and analysis of achieve sufficiency regarding play facilities and more informal opportunities for play.	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 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.
<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. Timeline 2021.	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

<p><b>Community Play:</b> working collaboratively with DCC Area Offices &amp; 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.</p>	<p>5 x Community Play Committees for each Local Area</p>
<p><b>Policy Statement 3: Place a key focus on accessible and inclusive opportunities for play for all children and young people</b></p>	
Action	Measure
<p><b>Inclusion:</b> Develop a toolkit for inclusion and accessibility in partnership with Department of Children, Education, Disability, and Integration &amp; Youth (DCEDIY).</p>	<p>Publish toolkit Publish on DCC website list of availability of accessible and inclusive play facilities</p>
<p><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 and planned upgrading and refurbishment of parks, green spaces, local area regeneration and public realm, arts and culture capital programmes.</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p><b>Policy Statement 4: Work in partnership to support schools, early childhood and education settings to improve and increase child led play experiences.</b></p>	
Action	Measure
<p><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, Education, Disability, and Integration &amp; Youth (DCEDIY).</p>	<p>Publish toolkit as booklet &amp; online resource in DCC Website</p>
<p><b>Policy Statement 5: support children and young people to enjoy and fully exercise their right to play by providing ease of access to engage in cultural life and the arts.</b></p>	

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

The Dublin City Play Strategy “Pollinating Play” 2021 – 2025 and action plan will address the issues highlighted within public engagement carried out during the development of this document. The implementation of the strategic action plan will realise measures that will strengthen alignment of the play strategy with UNCRC Article 31 and the recommendations set out in GC17 on Article 31 that are more finely thought through. This 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 adopting positive attitudes in supporting and creating the right environments and conditions for play to happen. This will be achieved by engaging 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.



Useful Documents - TBC

References – TBC

Appendix TBC



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