

Flintshire Play Memories 1910 - 2014

'The right to play is the child's first claim on the community. Play is nature's training for life. No community can infringe that right without doing enduring harm to the minds and bodies of its citizens.'

David Lloyd George (1925)



Campaign

The Flintshire Play Memories campaign was an in depth social history project to gather and record the memories of the residents of Flintshire regarding their own play experiences. The project ran from January 2011 until July 2014. It was designed and facilitated by the staff of the Flintshire County Council Play Development Team with support from numerous community organisations that form the wider Flintshire Play Network.

The project gathered evidence about the changes in children's ability to play that have occurred within living memory. It is widely accepted that in recent decades children's freedom to play has been restricted in a number of ways. Both the time and space available to children to play has been restricted, leading to some children experiencing a poverty of play opportunities.

The decision to conduct the Play Memories campaign was taken as a result of Flintshire County Council's concern that the reduction in children's opportunities to play was having an impact on the physical and mental wellbeing of the child population. It was felt that gathering detailed evidence about the changing nature of children's ability to play freely, would afford the local authority a deeper understanding of the barriers that limit both the time and space available to children to play.

'There are more restrictions to outdoor playing and significant decrease in open spaces for play.'

'I think today's children have lost their freedom ... sad.'

'Made friends. Fell out with friends. Found new friends ... I'm still here and it's all good. It prepared me for the realities of life!'

'Children are in institutional activity from morning to night - school, after schools, clubs etc. rather than free outdoors.'

'Children are far too adult orientated today. They are more concerned about what they have rather than what they can do.'



Observations

Simply reminding adults of their own play experiences is enough to trigger a significant emotional response. This is a useful and necessary advocacy tool for supporting children's right to play. Therefore the act of delivering this Play Memories campaign has made a significant contribution to supporting children's play.

Adults acknowledge how important play, freedom and independent mobility were to them when they were growing up. The majority of adults now view the world as unsafe for children to play independently and seek to 'protect' them by limiting their freedom to play unsupervised.

Adults acknowledge and are often saddened that children in modern society don't have the same freedom to play that they used to experience. What has emerged very clearly is that children's play, as a unique set of behaviours, doesn't appear to have changed at all.

However, what does appear to have changed significantly is the availability of time, space and permission for children to be able to play freely. This has meant that for some children, their opportunities to play have been greatly constrained and inevitably this will be impacting on their mental and physical wellbeing.

Some of the reasons that have curtailed children's freedom are very real, however some appear to be based upon misperceptions that are not uncommon within the general population at large.

The Play Memories campaign has demonstrated that there was a time when it was accepted that children, once they were old enough and confident enough to negotiate the outside world independently or with friends and siblings, played outside and ranged within their neighbourhood freely.

Playing contributes to the wellbeing and resilience of human beings – particularly young ones. Having welcoming places, enough time and the company of others to play with every day, is of great consequence to all children and young people – as adults we need to foster environments that support this.

Time, space and permission to play

Having access to time and space for every child to access their right to play is critical to the wellbeing of children and therefore society as a whole. As David Lloyd George pointed out in his inaugural speech to the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) in 1925:

'We cannot infringe that right without doing enduring harm to the minds and bodies of our citizens.'

Collectively we have somehow infringed that right in a variety of complex and inter-related ways. Our challenge now must be to ensure that every child can access their basic right to play and reverse the negative trends that have emerged from the real and emotive memories that have been afforded to us from the minds and hearts of our community here in Flintshire.

More information

For more information on how you can get involved and support children to play please visit:

www.flintshire.gov.uk/psa

Tips for supporting children to play out confidently

We all have a responsibility to support and prepare our children to play out confidently in their community. Playing out benefits children as well as their parents, carers and the wider community. Supporting children to play out in their community contributes to creating a play-friendly and cohesive community. To encourage parents and carers and local communities to support children playing out confidently these top tips may help:

1. Prepare children to be road safe

Streets make up the major part of public space within communities. We can prepare children from an early age by telling them and showing them ways to keep themselves safe on and around roads.

2. Look to our own driving habits

Parents are often concerned about traffic when giving children permission to play out. As drivers, we can drive at safe speeds in the same way we would wish others to drive in the residential streets where our children play.

3. Help children get to know their neighbourhood

If we are less reliant on travelling by car ourselves in our local communities, children will get to know their local streets. Walking to and from local facilities such as the shops, school and the park can help us identify solutions together with our children to keep themselves safe.

4. Be community friendly

We can get to know local people, neighbours and other families, and agree with each other to keep an eye out for children. This fosters a sense of a safe community, allowing more children to play out more, and to be safer doing so.

5. Trust children

We can make agreements with children on where and how long they go out to play. If they know their local area, their address and phone number, whom they can call on, and tell the time, it helps to make those arrangements.

6. Be realistic

Keeping our worries in perspective and knowing neighbours and local residents on which you can call if you have any concerns will help. The benefits of playing out far outweigh the risks.

7. Make a change

We can join with others locally to campaign for changes to our neighbourhood that may make our local areas places where children can play out confidently. We can promote the importance of playing out to other people within our neighbourhoods by word of mouth or holding community events and letting others know about them.

