A Toolkit for Creative, Play Based Consultation with Children and Young People

ScrapAntics CIC on behalf of Fife Council 2023













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Introduction

Welcome to this toolkit describing the experience of play workers from ScrapAntics Community Interest Company in delivering a consultation informing Fife Council's Play Sufficiency Assessment process.

This document is designed to provide an overview of the potential positive outcomes and challenges involved in consultation with children and young people aged from 0-18 years, within both school and community settings. The learning from Fife Council's Play Sufficiency Assessment "in-person" consultation has been translated into the "toolkit materials", that is a summary of what we recommend is considered when facilitating consultation with this age group.

Section One provides an overview of the consultation process. How the consultation was delivered can itself be recognised as part of the toolkit and is included to offer interested organisations an insight into the chosen methodologies. Section Two focuses upon the key learning from the process and how this may be interpreted to support other individuals or agencies involved in consultation with children and young people. As consultation is effective only when followed by action, a possible framework for empowering local communities around the design of play provision is also suggested.

The toolkit is a record of one particular consultation process and is not a definitive framework, however we hope that elements are useful and transferable to other settings involving creative or play based approaches. It is hoped that partner organisations from the statutory, voluntary and third sectors developing similar consultation will find the information within this toolkit useful for practical implementation.

We would suggest that the resource is most effectively used in close association with other materials, such as the "Getting it Right for Play Toolkit" deleloped by Play Scotland. The latter offers a thorough examination of various approaches designed to support children and young people's engagement with play spaces.

Background

ScrapAntics Community Interest Company were engaged by Fife Council to collect the ideas, opinions, and suggestions of children and young people living in various parts of the region, to support the delivery of a Play Sufficiency Assessment. From May to July 2023, ScrapAntics consulted with over 150 young people across three age groups (0-5 years, 5-12 years and 12-18 years). The purpose of the consultation was to find out:

- The differences in how children and young people play according to age
- What barriers may exist to play and how these may be reduced for children and young people
- What children and young people need in relation to play provision

The consultation was facilitated by experienced play workers and involved a minimum of ten in-person sessions based in outdoor locations. These were a mix of community and school based sessions. One session enabled play workers to obtain feedback from young people with disabilities or additional support needs.

The locations were chosen following guidance from Fife Council who wished to ensure a geographic spread covering urban, rural and more disadvantaged areas. They were also interested in hearing the views of girls and young women about play provision, as much previous consultation has focused on the needs of boys.

The consultation was delivered using Loose Parts Play (LPP), which involves young people building, sharing and expressing themselves through recycled materials such as pallets, barrels, tubing, tyres, planks and many other resources. The play workers role was to encourage young people to create their "ideal play space" with the materials, although this was not a prescriptive approach. While playing it was possible to record young people's responses using audio and written means with questions agreed in advance. Play Workers are skilled in reacting to the concerns and particular needs of young people, ensuring an inclusive and adaptable environment for effective consultation.





Section One

The Consultation Process

1. Aim

This consultation was focused on engagement with children and young people living in Fife to understand their views and needs around existing play provision. Children and young people aged from 0-18 years were invited to participate, with parents or guardians of those in pre-school also contributing their thoughts. The purpose was to record children's opportunities to play in open spaces, identify any barriers to play and how these may be addressed. Examples of public access spaces relevant to the consultation included free to use outdoor areas, such as play parks, parks, urban greenspace, woods, and beaches. Private gardens, indoor play centres, places where there is an entry fee, streets, school grounds, or golf courses are not included within this type of consultation.

Obtaining this direct feedback from children and young people is an essential requirement of the Play Sufficiency Assessment, providing material evidence for the Local Development Plan.

1.1 Objectives

- To record and assess the sufficiency of play in open spaces for children and young people (where do they play?, how do they play?, when do they play?)
- To ensure a geographic spread for the consultation covering west, mid and east Fife
- To arrange dates for the consultation with schools and community groups, in order to deliver sessions within large towns/small cities, Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation neighbourhoods and rural villages
- To identify potential barriers to play for children and young people
- To involve a range of age groups in the consultation
- To engage under-represented groups in the consultation, for example ensuring that the voices of girls are heard and children or young people with additional support needs or disabilities
- To use appropriate consultation techniques within an open, encouraging, welcoming and non-judgemental setting in order to achieve meaningful responses from children and young people
- To give children and young people an understanding of why their views are important and how their priorities can influence future decision-making
- To produce a report which details how children and young people play, which takes account of other relevant feedback and which can contribute to the Local Development Plan
- To develop a toolkit which offers a suggested framework for actively engaging children and young people in decision making around play and enables them to influence choices made in their local area. The toolkit can be used by other organisations as appropriate.

1.2 Outputs

- Delivery of a minimum 10 consultation sessions involving 0-5 years, 5-12 years and 12-18 years.
- 9 of these sessions to be geographic with a further consultation engaging children and young people with additional support needs and/or disabilities
- Each consultation to be delivered by skilled, experienced Youth and Play Workers
- Involving a minimum of 10 children or young people in each consultation, unless a specific group with fewer participants was identified
- Delivery of 5 community- based consultations in community settings and 5 in more formal education settings (nursery or school). These numbers may alter depending on responses.
- The 5 community- based consultations to involve 3 within towns and 2 in rural areas, or vice versa depending on responses.
- All 10 consultations to prioritise SIMD neighbourhoods
- Delivery of final report and toolkit



2. Evidencing the Value of Play

Play has long been recognised as essential to support and encourage children and young people in their physical, social, emotional, spiritual and cognitive development. It can be critical in building brain structure and enables them to understand how to form attachments, negotiate, take risks and solve problems. Play supports improved communication, language, literacy, creativity and an increased confidence in physical activity as well as stronger, healthier bodies. Children who have opportunities to play are more likely to be proficient in motor skills and able to build resilience to cope with stress and challenges. Play supports children to build their sense of identity and discover their place in the world. The Children's Play Policy Forum noted in 2019 that: "Children need time, permission and space to play...Play is a powerful builder of happy, healthy, capable children. In short, play builds children". Play Scotland recognised in their review of expert opinion and research that:

"Play is one of the most powerful and important elements in children's enjoyment of their childhood, wellbeing, health and development" (Getting it Right for Play, The Power of Play: an evidence base, (2011), Play Scotland,)

At a national level recent years have seen an increased understanding and acceptance of the benefits of free play. In 2013 the Scottish Government published their National Play Strategy for Scotland which recognised play as essential to healthy development from birth to adulthood. Scotland's former Chief Medical Officer, Professor Sir Harry Burns asserted that: "investing in children's play is one of the most important things we can do to improve children's health and wellbeing". Play Scotland themselves had noted the need for this change in approach: "there are many people in positions of power and influence across Scotland who do not consider the provision of play opportunities to be as important as other services, especially at this time of competing demands on relatively scarce resources" (ibid).

Play Sufficiency Assessments are therefore a vital response which ensures the voices and needs of children and young people can be heard. They support the view that

"children must be able to play freely and safely while learning to manage risks. Children should be able to make choices about where, how and when they play according to their age, ability and preference" (Playful Schools: The Power of Loose Parts Play, (2020), Play Scotland).

In their summary of published evidence Play Scotland referenced: "the value of play and play provision to children, their families and communities", at a time when there has been increasing fragmentation of experience within local areas. Changes in how we live our lives and external pressures can lead to a loss of community cohesion. For this reason, the report highlights " in particular, the value of outdoor play and the importance of providing local neighbourhood spaces where children can feel safe and confident to spend time outdoors playing and socialising with their friends" (Getting it Right for Play: The Power of Play: an evidence base, (2011), Play Scotland). Outdoor play has wider benefits, with adults also able: "to form new friendships and social networks" while observing their children's play. Outdoor spaces can provide many more opportunities to experiment and be stimulated both physically and mentally. Lester and Russell, (2008, p 13), make this observation citing Kylta (2004): "Where children can range independently, their environment becomes a field of "free action" in which they can follow their own desires and create situations of wonder and uncertainty. An appreciation of the relationship between the nature of play and an environmental field of free action is crucial in designing play friendly neighbourhoods". (Play for a change:, play, policy and practice: a review of contemporary perspectives: Summary report, Play England, London)

Other countries have recognised the value of outdoor play and have fully integrated this principle into urban design. In Rotterdam, this ensures; "that all public space is a potential play area and that all new and renovated developments should allow a clearly defined amount of safe, easily accessible, attractive space for children to play" (Getting it Right for Play: The Power of Play; an evidence base, p33). This need for positive play opportunities has arguably never been greater than at present. The Covid-19 pandemic has been challenging for so many people, however for children the impact of restrictions and subsequent limited opportunities for interaction has exacerbated concerns about their personal and social development at a crucial stage of their lives. The necessity of children having access to high quality play opportunities and the associated benefits in mitigating the effects of Covid-19 are fully documented in the Play Scotland report ("Playful Schools: The Power of Loose Parts Play, (2020)).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child makes explicit the need to involve children and young people in decisions around play which directly affect them:

- Article 12 Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously
- Article 31 states that every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities
- · Article 3 The best interests of the child must be a top priority in all decisions and actions that affect children
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3. What is Loose Parts Play?

ScrapAntics are passionate about play and its importance to the development of effective life-skills learning and community cohesion. The organisation's work focuses on how therapeutic play improves the emotional wellbeing and resilience for children and young people across both school and community settings. Loose Parts Play (LPP) involves recycled resources that can be played with, built and broken in a multitude of ways. These include: tyres, plastic tubes, guttering, ropes, cable reels, wheels, wooden pallets, barrels, wooden blocks and planks and an assortment of other objects.

Children and young people use the materials to promote positive interaction and real world learning. Participants are supported to play out lived experiences and to explore different outcomes and solutions. Within school settings teachers consolidate ways to relate these experiences to curriculum subjects. Young people involved in sessions improve transferable problem solving and conflict resolution skills, recognised as essential to successful educational progression and future employment.

Playing with loose parts requires imagination, making it an inherently creative activity. The term 'loose parts' first emerged during the 1970s after the publication of Nicholson's (1971) article 'The Theory of Loose Parts: How Not to Cheat Children'. Nicholson argued that we are all born creative but that formal education and cultural norms restrict the natural urge to invent, explore and discover. In contrast, loose parts or the 'variables' in life such as materials, shapes, smells, fluids, sounds, motions, fire and plants, enable children to 'play, experiment, discover, invent and have fun.' (cited in Playful Schools: The Power of Loose Parts Play, (2020), Play Scotland).

Participants in both school and community settings are encouraged to use the materials to be imaginative in their play, building creative skills by turning often neglected objects into valuable tools for learning and discovery. Casey and Robertson (2019), in their "Loose Parts Play Toolkit" note that LPP is an activity that creates a richer environment for children, allowing them to do what they need to do, to follow their interests and go where their curiosity takes them (ibid). LPP is promoted and enabled as a vital form of health and wellbeing support in parallel to the school curriculum, through the supply of resources, play sessions and training. The work of ScrapAntics, supported by Dundee City Council, has explored the many different positive outcomes of LPP for children and young people. These include improved confidence, teamwork, communication, social skills, educational attainment, curricular engagement and transferable skills.

The role of the play worker in all LPP sessions is to create an environment which offers different types of play experience, enabling children to choose how they play while ensuring expression is located within an atmosphere of safety, tolerance and mutual respect. The Playwork Principles (see appendix) are critical in providing a framework for practice. Through regular participation, it is possible to observe play evolving for children as they follow three defined but complementary stages in their development: familiarity and trust, ownership and independence, achievement and gratification. These are known as the "Foundations of Free Play" ("Playful Schools: The Power of Loose Parts Play, (2020), Play Scotland).

Loose Parts Play increases the choice for children by enabling them to use everyday objects as possibilities within play. Each child will interpret how an object may be used in their own way, for each child is unique. The value we place on an object, or the importance a child affords it has been recognised by psychologist James J. Gibson in his study: "Affordance Theory (1979) (cited in; "Playful Schools: The Power of Loose Parts Play, (2020), Play Scotland). Gibson suggested that an object will have different values and meanings depending on who perceives it. This interpretation is at the heart of Loose Parts Play as children are given the freedom to build according to their own desires, for example a car tyre can be a wheel, part of an obstacle course, something to roll upon or perhaps the foundation of a building.

For these reasons, LPP is especially suitable as a methodology for consultation with children and young people. It enables children to quickly build trust and promotes accessibility; for example by minimising challenges around different languages as participants use the materials to express themselves. For the purposes of this consultation children were able to use the Loose Parts resources to design their "ideal play space". This was not a prescriptive approach as LPP is based on the principle of free play, that which is "spontaneous and unpredictable...for no external goal or reward... something that the child chooses to engage with for no motivation other than the enjoyment of play" (Playful Schools; The Power of Loose Parts Play, (2020)). However, Play Workers understood that for many children building a den or shelter is an instinctive reaction to being presented with LPP resources. This offered an opportunity to introduce the consultation questions in a way which ensured ownership remained with the child.

More information about the purpose, implementation and policy framework of Loose Parts Play can be found in: "Loose Parts Play- A Toolkit" at www. playscotland.org/resources/loose-parts-play-toolkit-2019-web-2/



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4. Engagement

It was an important requirement of this consultation for engagement with children and young people to take place in-person. Fife Council had responsibility for delivering an online consultation with children to complement this report. They also accessed open space data and audited the quality of play spaces as supporting evidence for the Play Sufficiency Assessment. This feedback can be requested through Fife Council.

An initial challenge soon presented itself in relation to making contact with schools and community groups across Fife. Sessions needed to be representative of the range of rural, urban and Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) areas within the region. ScrapAntics are established as an organisation using play based approaches in Dundee, however we are less familiar within Fife.

Although a number of sessions were booked quickly, the process became more challenging as time passed. It became apparent that some of the suggested school or community contacts (primarily Head Teachers or Community Learning and Development Workers) were very busy and failed to respond to email and phone requests. Progress was made following the intervention of a local Councillor and our partners at Fife Council.

Within the project proposal it was suggested that delivery would constitute an even spread across the age groups (for example 3 sessions each with 0-5 years, 5-12 years and 12-18 years). There was a recognition that this was likely to change depending on the logistics of facilitation and responses from schools and community organisations.

ScrapAntics were able to deliver eleven consultation sessions in total with different age groups (0-5, 5-12 and 12-18 years) and within both school and community settings. An inclusive session was facilitated involving children with additional support needs or disabilities. Unfortunately, despite arrangements being made with a local school for a girls only consultation, this did not take place due to unforeseen staffing issues. Attempts were made to deliver this session with an alternative school or community group however this proved impossible given the timescale for consultation and report delivery.

While it was disappointing not to be able to facilitate this session we are confident that the voice of girls and young women is adequately represented in the final report. We would recommend that further efforts are made to organise a girls only session. As previously stated, consultation has too often focused on boys needs in relation to play and it is important to enable equality of access to such opportunities.

Engagement in the consultation totalled approximately 151 children and young people across 11 sessions. 6 families also participated in a session with the 0-5 years age group. This provides an average of 13.7 (14) participants per session. This exceeds the agreed target of reaching a minimum ten participants for each consultation and enables us to be confident that the views expressed are representative of young people's needs and concerns.

It should be noted that by definition the consultation engaged children and young people already accessing some kind of recognised provision, whether attending a community group or at school, although a group of young people not regularly attending mainstream education (often called "school refusers") were involved. There may be some different responses from children and young people who do not regularly access organised activities. It was accepted that this kind of engagement was not possible within the limited timeline and expectations for the consultation. It is possible that these voices were captured through the online consultation facilitated through Fife Council.

As this consultation was limited in scope there was not capacity to build longer term relationships with participants. Increased interaction with participants would allow for more in depth conversations and further ownership of the consultation process.

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4.1 - Engagement Methods

- Loose Parts Play Workshops

Play Workers facilitated a total of eleven consultation sessions which were attended by approximately 151 children and young people and 6 families. The final consultation at Buckhaven Community Education Centre involved engagement across the three age groups (0-5, 5-12 and 12-18 years) although the lively nature of this session made it difficult to record numbers. Sessions were delivered in outdoor settings, either using green spaces within the community or school grounds. On occasion delivery moved indoors due to poor weather and one consultation took place inside a community venue. The various locations for this consultation were identified by an Admin Worker with ScrapAntics who contacted schools and outdoor community venues to organise sessions. Local networks are an important resource and ScrapAntics engaged with Fife Council who suggested relevant contacts. The Admin role also included promotion and co-ordination of the project, with a template poster created to be easily adapted and shared with participating schools and community groups (please see appendix for an example).

The chosen locations were decided in consultation with Fife Council to reflect the size and geographic spread of the region, with implementation in west, mid and east Fife. The sessions were delivered in both large towns/small cities and rural villages. There was an emphasis for both school and community consultation on prioritising neighbourhoods recognised as disadvantaged within the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. Play Workers did take some time to become familiar with play facilities in each consultation area, however the relatively short timescale for project delivery did mean that those workers who already had some knowledge of the Fife region were important in this regard. There were variations in the length of each session depending on the location. Loose Parts Play delivery with schools most frequently takes place for 45 minutes to an hour, reflecting a typical school period. This model was followed for the consultation. Within community based settings play workers had more flexibility and sessions could last for an hour to an hour and a half. When LPP sessions are not open, in other words the same group of children are participating for the whole time, an hour and a half is sufficient time to obtain feedback.

There was no obligation for children to participate in the consultation. It was made clear to staff and parents/guardians that children were able to withdraw from the session at any point and did not have to contribute to the consultation. LPP is child led and it is therefore important that they feel in control of their choices. Nearly all of the children did participate and many expressed sadness when the sessions ended.

There was a similarity in the numbers of children involved per consultation session. Numbers ranged from 17 participants at Cupar Youth Café to 28 pupils at three of the school locations. The exception to this standard was the session at Woodmill High School which involved young people not attending mainstream education provision. It was considered important to obtain information from these young people who may otherwise not have participated in the consultation. The Play Sufficiency Assessment Regulations specify the need to consult with children by agreed age groups and this approach was followed in the delivery.

Each consultation was facilitated by a number of play workers with defined roles. A session plan was prepared on all occasions although this was adapted as required. It was decided that one play worker would introduce each session, often using a game to engage the interest of children. An example of this would be the "This or That" game, in which children were able to run to a corner representing a play area or provision in their locality. This enabled play workers to receive some immediate feedback on where children like to play. Two other play workers led the LPP session with children given the freedom to become familiar with the resources in the first instance. A description of the LPP resources has been provided earlier in this report and included larger items such as drainpipes, barrels and pallets, smaller items such as steering wheels or golf balls, and items useful for imaginative and creative play, such as telephones, tarpaulin and chairs. Softer items such as fabric and carpet squares were also available. A full Loose Parts Play resource list can be found in: ("Playful Schools: a toolkit for delivering Loose Parts Play in Covid-19" (2020), Play Scotland)



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Play Workers were provided with a set of questions designed to be open and encourage different responses from the children (these consultation questions can be found in the appendix). Play Workers were aware that the questions offered them a framework for the consultation however, sessions should be delivered more informally as is normal for LPP. One play worker took responsibility for leading the consultation, while another ensured there was an audio recording of the entire session. This audio was later transcribed by the Admin Worker as information for the report. A play worker also made note of numbers, emerging themes and challenges or positives associated with the delivery. This approach was deliberately designed to ensure consultation responses could be effectively captured within a busy play session. As has been noted, LPP offers a rich environment for children to explore the creative imagination and many chose to use the materials in building their "ideal play space" or a representation of an area where they enjoyed playing.

The final consultation at Buckhaven Community Education Centre was delivered differently. This was an indoor space with a number of other activities taking place at the venue. ScrapAntics also use the arts as a tool for engagement and we are fortunate that our play team includes a number of creative practitioners able to facilitate small group or 1:1 support with children and young people. For the Buckhaven consultation children under 5 years and of primary age were able to use creative materials to illustrate the spaces where they play and design their own play area, with a number of ideas emerging. The older age groups also participated in this process. There was a lot of noise in the venue which made intensive consultation more difficult however, the images of potential play spaces provide positive documentation of the session.



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4.2 - List of School and Community Groups Involved

The consultation sessions were delivered with the following schools and community groups from May to July 2023:

Benarty Communit 1 x session 1 x session 24 participants	y Centre, Lochore (8-12yrs), (12-13yrs),	7 girls, 4 girls,	10 boys 3 boys
Tulliallan Primary, 1 x session 1 x session 19 participants	Kincardine (nursery), (P1/2),	6 families	
Cupar Youth Cafe 1 x session 17 participants	(12-18yrs),	9 girls,	8 boys
Bell Baxter High So 1 x session 1 x session 28 participants	t <mark>hool, Cupar</mark> (12-16yrs) (12-16yrs)		epartment of Additional Support, including wheelchair users) ditional Support Needs)
Anstruther Primary 1 x session 28 participants	r School (P6), 1	6 girls,	12 boys
Woodmill High Sch 1 x session 7 participants	ool, Dunfermline (12-16yrs)	(school refusers),	2 girls, 5 boys
St Agatha's RC Prin 1 x session 28 participants	nary School, Leven (P4),	15 girls,	13 boys
Buckhaven Commu 1 x session	nity Education Centr (mixed ages 0-5, 5 (4 x community bo		sed)

A consultation session was also arranged with a girls only group at a school in the Kirkcaldy area, however as previously noted this did not take place as a consequence of staffing challenges.

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4.3 - Key Findings

Peer relationships were identified as important in defining where, when, and how children play. Non -traditional play spaces such as shopping centres were popular for games including hide and seek. Older children in particular valued more isolated spaces to "hang out" such as abandoned buildings or graveyards, due to the absence of adults. Sometimes, negative relationships with others of a similar age restricted where young people could play. Parks and equipped play spaces were also used, however often young people found the available provision disappointing.

They requested more choice, excitement and responsiveness to their needs from those planning provision. Wooded areas offered more options for challenging play and adventure. Research has indicated that because natural environments change over time, children can explore creative, imaginative play and decision making (Getting it Right for Play, The Power of Play: :an evidence base, (2011), Play Scotland).

Young people with disabilities discussed concerns around accessibility of play provision, including many feeling excluded due to the impact of loud noises and crowded spaces. This is perhaps not a challenge often considered in play space design however it highlights the importance of enabling diverse voices to be heard. They expressed their fears about "falling out" with friends and being abandoned while out playing.

Girls and young women spoke about the importance of shelter as they enjoyed places to "sit and be". Girls also had other interests around dance and making Tik Tok videos, the latter being a popular past time for younger girls in play spaces. Older girls in particular felt some disengagement from existing play provision, partly because the lack of covered spaces inhibited opportunities for conversation. Using traditional play equipment can favour more physically able or active children and potentially boys rather than girls. Girls approach to play was often non -competitive and non- hierarchal. The adult role within play was complex, with children both looking for spaces where they could be alone and sometimes requesting support with learning how to skate or make a fire. The adult presence was perhaps more suited to a community or youth worker role than an authority figure such as a parent.

Safety was viewed differently by adults and children, with parental tracking using technology increasingly predominant. This monitoring was not always consensual and there are indications from research that this approach will change the nature of play as well as familial relationships. Young people wanted an element of risk in their play but understood boundaries and "unsafe areas".

Parents of children aged 0-5 years would like to see more organised events in parks and play spaces. They often travelled by car for activities and this was also true for those with children aged 8-12 years. Access to a car or funds for bus travel was identified as a potential barrier to play. Older children were happy to travel further by bus, often into larger towns. This could be to hang out in shops or for entry fee provision.

For all age groups, there was an awareness that play facilities were often not well maintained and this led to further vandalism. On occasion basic facilities such as toilets were unavailable, which was a particular barrier for families with young children. Play Workers reported a lack of ownership by young people around existing play facilities.



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44 - What Play Facilities Would Children and Young People Like in their Area? MANY OPTIONS QUIET SPACE FOOD AVAILABLE SKATE PARK/FOOTBALL PITCH ALONGSIDE SOMEWHERE COVERED/SHELTERED TO SIT WELL MAINTAINED ART SPACE GYM EQUIPMENT CONNECTION TO ANIMALS PLACE FOR FIRE MAKING/BBQ NO SAND CHANGEABLE/ADAPTABLE SUPPORTED BY ADULTS WHEN NEEDED 0-5 YEARS: WOULD LIKE MORE PLANNED EVENTS FOR FAMILIES IN PARENTS OFTEN TRAVEL FOR ACTIVITIES. LOCAL PLAY/GREEN SPACES 5-12 YEARS: PLAY CLOSER TO HOME IF FACILITIES ENGAGE THEIR INTEREST, MORE LIKELY TO ATTEND ORGANISED ACTIVITIES 12-18 YEARS: HAPPY TO TRAVEL SHORTER OR LONGER DISTANCES, MORE LIKELY TO PREFER ISOLATED SPACES





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Section Two

The Toolkit

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5. Developing the Toolkit

5.1 Key Themes to Consider

Initial pre-consultation discussions between Fife Council and ScrapAntics focused upon ensuring the process achieved a number of key outcomes. The toolkit would provide both a record of learning and inform next stage development:

- Comprehensive: The consultation and toolkit would support change within neighbourhoods by identifying particular needs in relation to play provision, and a methodology for subsequent action
- Age-sensitive: There would be a recognition that children and young people of different ages have potentially conflicting needs and wishes regarding play provision
- Participative: Children and young people may not often have an opportunity to inform strategic policy development, so capturing their voices was crucial to successful engagement and planning of play provision
- Inclusive: The process would actively seek out the involvement of children and young people who may traditionally be excluded from decision making about public space, such as those from minority ethnic communities, children who are disabled or have other specific needs and girls and young women
- User-friendly: The toolkit would aim to be simple, practical and flexible enough for people from a range of backgrounds to use in a variety of contexts. Although describing a particular process of consultation, organisations would recognise key learning transferable to their own situation

5.2 Toolkit Aims

- To consolidate the learning from this consultation into an accessible and manageable resource for different stakeholders
- To suggest a framework for actively engaging children and young people in decision making around play and enabling them to influence choices made in their local area.
- To raise awareness of the value of Loose Parts Play as a resource for consultation with children and young people
- To provide an understanding of Loose Parts Play for those who work with children and young people of all ages

5.3 Who is the Toolkit for?

The Toolkit will be useful for:

- People working directly with children and young people, in many types of setting who are committed to creative and/or play based consultation as an essential evaluation tool.
- People in management and leadership roles who are required to carry out consultation with these age groups, including those seeking to commission this process
- Organisations and networks dedicated to the provision and expansion of play opportunities



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6. Learning for the Toolkit

6.1 Pre- Consultation

Planning for the Consultation.

A significant challenge which emerged in the delivery of the consultation was successfully confirming bookings with schools or community groups. Once Head Teachers or CLD Workers were able to understand the process and associated benefits for children in terms of active participation and improved wellbeing through play, they were keen to collaborate. However, the waiting and "chasing up" could be frustrating for all concerned as there was a limited timescale for delivery.

Things to consider...

Involve the commissioning organisation in actively laying the groundwork for consultation. This may require some additional time and could involve activities such as formally introducing the delivery partner, championing the importance of the project and sharing information with other interested stakeholders including local councillors. The latter may be willing to intervene to support engagement. Publicity tools such as digital posters can be developed as a partnership between the commissioning and delivery partner, to be distributed in advance of the consultation.

Mapping of Play Areas/Facilities

ScrapAntics are a Dundee based organisation with significant experience of play delivery within this region. It was noted when planning the Fife consultation that play workers would require familiarisation with locations and existing parks or play provision. The short, quite intensive timescale for consultation did make it more challenging for workers to gain this understanding. It was certainly helpful for this consultation to draw upon the knowledge of Fife based play workers, however it is recognised that this was fortuitous rather than planned.

Things to consider...

It would be helpful for the local authority or other commissioning partner to support those delivering the consultation with access to relevant information such as play mapping. This is possibly an easier task for local authorities who have the required context and detail than for a consultation partner with little knowledge of the area. Information sharing can be a partnership process in the initial planning stages and continuing as consultation venues are finalised.

Involving Experienced Play Workers

In order to ensure a successful consultation the choice of play workers or delivery staff is crucial. There will be a need to be flexible and to adapt consultation tools such as session plans at short notice, in response to particular situations. Staff should have an awareness of the value of play and be comfortable in allowing children to lead the process. This ability to stand back and observe behaviours is a skill learnt over time. It avoids adults leading the consultation towards specific outcomes.

Things to consider...

Play Workers or delivery staff should be familiar with the Playwork Principles, which are documented in the appendix. These provide a framework for engaging children in play and support an open, welcoming and inclusive environment for consultation. This type of consultation requires some previous experience on the part of delivery staff as challenges will arise. There is also a need to quickly build trusted relationships with children and young people, which is a skill frequently developed by more experienced staff.

Reaching Children and Young People who are Traditional Non-Participants

The consultation process was designed to include the voices of children and young people with disabilities or additional support needs, as well as girls and young women often excluded from conversation around play audits. The play workers recognised that in each setting they were largely engaging young people already accessing some type of organised provision, whether through education or community group activities. This was inevitable given the agreed focus and timescale for the consultation.

Things to consider...

Consider how to involve young people not accessing school or community work provision. Is it possible to deliver a consultation by visiting an area where young people "hang out", perhaps organised with the knowledge of CLD Workers? There would need to be an awareness of potential risks with an appropriate assessment completed, however this is not an unusual approach as youth workers often meet with young people on a similar informal basis. Could the consultation be delivered over a longer period of time, to ensure "harder to reach groups" can be engaged? It may be helpful to have more than one option for consultation with groups whose voice is less often heard, such as those from a minority ethnic background or girls and young women. This offers another opportunity in the event of cancellation. There will be organisations in your area who can assist in facilitating these conversations. Organising a specific session for girls only can be very beneficial in allowing them to share their thoughts more freely and enabling them to feel their opinions are valued.



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6.2 Puring Consultation

Be Aware of the Different Needs of Age Groups

The very youngest children were unable to give feedback and therefore consultation took place with their parents. Play Workers discovered that younger children, from 0-5 years to Primary 3 (7 years) very much enjoyed handling the Loose Parts Play materials and getting involved in creative play. Loose Parts Play was often unfamiliar to the children and this sparked their interest and imagination. On occasion this did distract from the consultation (particularly with larger numbers) and the 5-7 years age group struggled with even more informal questions. However, when given the opportunity to draw or design an "ideal play space" using arts materials, they became increasingly engaged in the process. Children and young people were generally keen to participate however ensuring a non-judgmental environment was essential. Choosing not to get involved was equally acceptable. for all concerned as there was a limited timescale for delivery.

Things to consider...

Older children engaged very effectively with the consultation using available loose parts materials. Younger ones enjoyed exploring the same materials but wanted more time for play. It would be helpful to plan different methods to ensure participants can contribute fully to the consultation process. Think about how to deliver consultation with participants under 5 years, in particular how to engage with parents while their children are enjoying play. Be sure to emphasise that no child should feel forced to participate and make allowances for this possibility when planning sessions. It may be beneficial to split larger numbers of younger children (for example a school class) into smaller groups to maximise responses. There could also be less of a focus on specific questions and more on gaining feedback through the builds or drawings.

Recording Feedback

How responses from children and young people are recorded is very important. For the consultation play workers used different techniques including pre-arranged questions, observation of young peoples' builds using Loose Parts Play materials, drawings and more quantitative information (such as how many children play in a particular space). Feedback was recorded using audio and later transcribed for the play sufficiency assessment report. Photographs were also taken at some sessions and direct quotes from young people noted. Images from consultation sessions can be a visual stimulus to recalling important moments, especially within noisy settings where conversation is difficult. There were some challenges in ensuring an accurate record of numbers using particular play spaces or provision within consultation settings featuring large numbers of children or in busy environments. This was addressed by the play workers themselves who designated responsibility for recording quantitative feedback to one staff member at each consultation.

Things to consider...

Ensure that everyone is aware of their role in relation to recording feedback and develop different approaches to capture responses. Be aware that gaining effective feedback from those with additional needs may require more consideration. Would engagement with parents or carers help this process with those who are non-verbal? Another suggestion may be to involve an interpreter (carer or family member) for those with communication needs. In very busy or noisy environments photographs can be very helpful when reflecting later on feedback. These can visually document children's ideas. Quotes from children and young people are powerful and need to be recorded accurately, if possible in their own words. Audio recordings work well and can be transcribed if an organisation has someone available to do this. If the budget exists perhaps sessions can also be filmed as a permanent documentation. Relevant GDPR permission would need to be obtained to ensure consent. Discuss in advance with delivery staff how to most effectively monitor quantitative feedback such as the numbers of young people accessing traditional or unusual play spaces.

The Role of Staff

The most effective consultation took place in settings where there were few or no staff present from schools or community provision. Research has identified the ways in which adult intervention can impact upon children's play and their confidence. One source for further information is the report "Playful Schools: The power of Loose Parts Play, (2020), Play Scotland". Play workers reported that children appeared increasingly honest and comfortable in sharing their views about play provision if the adult presence was minimal.

Things to consider...

Think carefully about which staff from schools or community groups will be present for consultation. If possible discuss with them in advance how consultation will be delivered and what role (if any) they should have in this process.

Time for Consultation

Within community based settings play workers had more flexibility in terms of the length of consultation sessions. These were often more informal environments which also assisted in achieving feedback from young people and meeting consultation outcomes. The play workers were experienced in school settings and were therefore able to encourage feedback in a shorter time frame, often 45 mins to an hour. This was a typical length of time for a school period.

Things to consider...

If possible negotiate extra time for a consultation session to maximise engagement and responses. This may require choosing certain days within a school calendar and will be dependent on the agreed timeframe for a completed consultation process. Have clear objectives appropriate to both formal and informal settings to ensure consultation is successful and recognises the potential challenges within different environments. Longer consultation processes offer increased opportunities for relationship building, however effective feedback can be obtained even when participants engage for one-off sessions.

Sharing Thoughts and Feedback

Opportunities were provided for play workers to meet in-person with other ScrapAntics staff, both for support and to share their key observations. This was beneficial for all concerned and assisted greatly with the report writing following the consultation. Email contact was also maintained with the option of online update meetings if required. Staying in touch offered opportunities for ongoing evaluation and agreement about adapting delivery as needed. The challenge can be organising these meetings around other work commitments, which is possibly where online contact can be advantageous.

Things to consider...

Those delivering the consultation and (if relevant) involved in report writing need to feel supported and able to raise concerns if needed. Contact should also be maintained between the commissioning and delivery partners, with necessary adjustments to the process made following discussion. Building in time for face to face or virtual support meetings is important to the process. Recognise that there may be both additional benefits and/or challenges to in person or online contact.



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6.3 Post Consultation Reflection

Keeping Children and Young People Involved

Play Workers found children and young people to be welcoming, open to engagement and often excited to contribute their views to the consultation. Fife Council were clear that the play sufficiency consultation provided a baseline for continued participation of young people in decision making structures and processes. The Council had identified the consultation and toolkit as resources supporting a framework for this next stage engagement. Play Workers also recognised some common themes which together reinforced a need for more ownership of play spaces and provision by young people and families:

- a) They observed that many children appeared to play so little in an "unstructured way". Research has indicated that Covid-19 and the lockdowns may be partly responsible for this. There are also sometimes limited play resources in an area. A possibly related fact is that children didn't seem to be passionate or animated about any of the play parks, suggesting a need for young people to have a much more active role in the development of facilities
- b) It was noted that the ideal play spaces suggested by children were limited by the scope of their imagination and strongly influenced by lived experiences. Many children either designed a space which expanded on current resources or was unobtainable, such as a rollercoaster. Dens, shelters and covered areas were popular and this is of course valuable feedback. The familiarity of the structures built was perhaps to be expected and there is recognition that children require more opportunities for free play following recent major events such as Covid-19 (see "Playful Schools: The power of Loose Parts Play", (2020), Play Scotland" for examples of the creative benefits of play). The opportunity to participate in wider planning processes will support young people to become more aware of how play spaces can be creatively designed to benefit all ages and increase social cohesion
- c) Relationships between adults and young people were often poor, frequently as a result of different approaches to safety and risk. Giving ownership to local communities in the development of play provision can bring adults and young people together.
- d) None of the young people were aware of important legislation such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which informs play sufficiency assessments and other consultation impacting on the age group. This was true even for young people belonging to a Freedom of Rights group. Involving young people in decision making about their area offers opportunities to introduce these policies as part of the process

Things to consider...

It is crucial to consider how the voices of children and young people will be sustained for the longer term. Ideally, there would be some initial discussion about sustainability between the commissioning and delivery partners in advance of consultation. Young people will have contributed many suggestions about play provision and these need to be acted upon. Feeding back the findings to the participants and the wider community is important, and this must be communicated in an accessible way which suits the audience. This may mean more emphasis on the visual for younger people, or using simplified language if appropriate. If young people can have a definite role in the design and development of play spaces this can maintain their excitement at being asked for their opinions. There are examples of previous models which have placed local communities at the heart of decision making about play in their area. Evidence suggests that a whole community approach improves intergenerational understanding. The process of community engagement needs to be creative, to ensure people of all ages remain interested in what could be a long term strategy for play space development.

7. Developing Ownership: A Possible Model for Involving Children and Young People in Decision-Making

The consultation feedback reflected the sense of a divide between adults and children regarding access to play. Children and young people often perceived parents to be "preventers", reducing opportunities for them to be outside and creating barriers, often focused on the issue of "safety". The adult role was seen as more positive if travel was needed as they could transport children to other play locations or to organised activities.

Young people were very excited to be asked their opinions about play and for their thoughts and ideas to be taken seriously by adults (in this instance the play workers). The consultation offered a chance for new experiences and an alternative to more destructive behaviours: "thank you so much for coming tonight, if you hadn't been here I would have been out getting into bother" (boy, aged 12-13 years at Benarty).

Participants had many interesting and achievable ideas for developing play spaces which often involved incorporating more challenge in the design of facilities and an increased awareness of local needs and interests. It would be helpful to consider how to effectively harness the enthusiasm displayed by these young people in order that their voice continues to be heard.

There are many different potential models to engage children and young people in decisions about their area and play facilities. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation supported an innovative research project which documented the experiences of five community groups directly involved in the development of local play areas ("Neighbourhood play and community action, (2006), Joseph Rowntree Foundation").

The process led to the creation of a toolkit for improving public play spaces and services for children and young people. It was recognised that finding ways to sustain the participation of both adults and children in the planning and delivery process was essential to project success. Evaluations noted the need to

"be creative in how children are consulted and involved and recognise that children can be at the centre of the consultation process rather than adults" (Neighbourhood play and community action, (2006), Joseph Rowntree Foundation)

In one area a "children's play focus group" was initiated using the expertise of an external agency, with participants identified through local schools and parents. Young people involved in youth or community work provision could equally participate.

The focus group complimented the adult steering group: "The children talked about things they would like to change in their area to help them play. They also compiled a list of things they wanted the adult steering group to consider in partnership with themselves" (ibid, p28). This collaborative approach reduced potential barriers between age groups and misunderstandings, as well as ensuring decisions were representative of those who actually use play provision. Another project agreed that children themselves would carry out consultations in partnership with adults around new communal play opportunities. The basis for this was again ownership by young people but also; "opportunities for children and adults to work together and create a sense of belonging to the community" (ibid, p28).

A programme of activities was developed to support consultation with children, including discussions with playground maintenance teams. The purpose was to

> "demonstrate that children need to play, that there are different ways in which they play and that their views are critical to the development of successful play areas" (Neighbourhood play and community action, (2006), Joseph Rowntree Foundation)

There were various original methods employed to support young people to remain actively involved in decision-making structures. The main aim always remained developing play spaces, however environmentally themed activities, fun days in local parks, new after-school clubs, play schemes, mural design projects and trips to other places to find out more about the value of play accompanied this process. The outcomes were positive: "These activities maintained cohesion...interest in the toolkit process and helped build the groups' confidence because they created a sense of achievement. Some of the activities had a direct impact on the reduction in complaints from adult community members because the children were participating in activities organised by the community members" (ibid, p15).

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The inherent value in this type of approach to young people's engagement is the implicit understanding (evidenced through this consultation) that

children and young people's use of public space is often contested, whether by other adults, their peers, parents or sometimes local authorities.

Consensus building is therefore a necessary part of any successful longer term participation by this age group.

A Developement Officer post was funded to provide ongoing support to all of the projects. The most successful projects focused on a multi-agency approach with local authorities providing essential support and information to guide progress. This included local councillors as well as planning authorities. It also minimised some of the challenges faced by communities involved in the toolkit projects, which included one local authority deciding to build a new playground without consulting the steering group or young people.

Identifying the appropriate person or lead agency to act as a "community champion" was invaluable, they: "paid attention to process as well as outcome, making sure the pilot project steering groups were supported and encouraged" and "would have a clear commitment to implement any actions needed, facilitate the groups and hold the vision" (ibid, p11). A strong champion was able to publicise the project effectively and influence partnership working. The role included enabling the representation of young people in decision-making structures.

There are already Community Learning and Development workers based in different localities who may be suited to this type of role, or at least in supporting engagement by different age groups. Project evaluations highlighted how, in addition to the Development Officer: "it would have been useful to have access to a local development worker who had knowledge of local issues and the local area" (ibid, p12).

The learning from each of the participating projects was combined with additional research to produce an extensive resource, designed to support community engagement in the development of play provision. This incorporated some key areas for consideration and action planning, relevant to other similar consultation:

- Starting points a definition of play?
- Developing and supporting a steering group of local people
- Involving the local community, especially children and young people
- Assessment and planning, including a play audit
- Rules and regulations to be aware of
- Designing for play
- Getting publicity for the process

All of the projects involved in this process found that taking part in a structured programme was hugely beneficial, as the communities had little previous experience of play space development: "The toolkit provided some boundaries encouraging focus on play opportunities, rather than any other issues- outcomes were clear which helped to harness energy, time and resources" (ibid, p 10).

Things to consider...

Devolving decision making about the design of play spaces to local communities can create real benefits in terms of increased ownership, skills development, confidence building and improved social cohesion. Consider how play can bring people of all ages together. Importantly, the development process must be actively supported by local workers and Council's or other appropriate bodies. These partners should be involved in steering groups from the start. Local authorities provide recognition, can assist with play mapping, establishing land ownership and offer additional support to community members when needed. CLD Workers or other professionals based in localities have the knowledge of an area, experience of facilitation and established relationships with people of all ages, so could be appropriate "champions" for projects. They could also support training opportunities which encourage community members to become "activists" for play in their area. Identifying funding for activities which can maintain participant interest such as mural projects, model making and visits to other play areas can consolidate a sense of purpose and ownership. Children and young people can be at the centre of the process. A separate children's participation group can be developed, but this should be an integral part of adult steering groups. Action plans help to keep people focused on what is important and provide a measurement of progress, however these should be flexible. Finally, be sure that consultation is realistic and does not raise expectations which cannot be met, for example if funding has not been secured for development.

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References

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Playwork Principles

1. All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate. Play is a biological, psychological and social necessity, and is fundamental to the healthy development and wellbeing of individuals and communities.

2. Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons.

3. The prime focus and essence of playwork is to support and facilitate the play process and this should inform the development of play policy, strategy, training and education.

4. For playworkers, the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas.

5. The role of the playworker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play.

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6. The playworker's response to children and young people playing is based on a sound up to date knowledge of the play process, and reflective practice.

7. Playworkers recognise their own impact on the play space and also the impact of children and young people's play on the playworker.

8. Playworkers choose an intervention style that enables children and young people to extend their play. All playworker intervention must balance risk with the developmental benefit and wellbeing of children. (Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group, Cardiff 2005. Endorsed by SkillsActive, Sector Skills Council for Playwork, 2005) www.scrapantics.co.uk | info@scrapantics.co.uk

Play Sufficiency Project - Questions

5-12 years, 12-18 years and parents/guardians of children aged 0-5 years consulted.

1. Can you give us some examples of where you go to play or hang out?

Follow up: What kind of activities do you like to do when outdoors? Are the activities you enjoy usually indoors or outdoors?

2. Is going outdoors for play or other activities something you do often?

Follow up: Does it change at all during the week or school holidays? We would like to ask you about play facilities in your area. These are play parks, grassed areas or spaces such as skate parks where children, young people and families can go to play.

3. Do you think your area has play facilities that you/your friends or families want to use?

If so, what kind of facilities do you enjoy? If not, what would you like to see in your area?

4. Is there anything which can prevent you from going outdoors to play or take part in other activities?

Prompts: Safety at night, facilities too far away/lack of suitable facilities, family concerns, anti-social behaviour etc

5. How do you feel when you are outdoors playing or taking part in activities on your own or with family and friends? Do you prefer to be with other people or by yourself?

(Here responses may indicate how play or activities improve connectedness, increase social interaction and cohesion and promote positive physical and mental wellbeing for children, young people and communities)

Free play session!

- Where does your family play?
- What would you like to see in your area?
- Are there any barriers which stop you or your family from playing outdoors?

ScrapAntics is running a free play session as part of a children's consultation commissioned by Fife Council.

Tulliallan Primary School Nursery Class Thursday 8th June 3pm - 4pm

> Only limited spaces, please book through the nursery. Completely free, all materials provided.



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Fife Play Sufficiency Project Session Plan (12-18 years) June 2023

UN Convention - rights of a child, consultation, their voice, their choice, outdoor play, hang out space, social space, relaxing spot, location, duration, purpose, solo, group, time of day, barriers, wants, needs, positives, negatives, legacy

Intro - Who we are, why we are here?

You are our future - what does the social space of your future look and feel like? How does it compare to the spaces you use now?

'We all have the ability to help make positive change for the future of our world and our place in it. Knowing our rights is so important as we think about ourselves, how we connect to each other, and our environments and how we can stand up and take action for the things we believe in.' Every one of you has the right to share thoughts freely, and the right for your voices to be heard. Understand that your voice matters, and you can make a difference. We are aware that you probably spend a lot of time being talked to and at, with not much chance to have your voices heard, that can be really frustrating! We are here to listen to your voice and record what you have to say, either on paper or audio and report on it.

Whatever you share with us will then be put into a report and used to inform Fife council's Local Development Plan. Alongside the report, a toolkit documenting the consultation process will be created which can be shared with other Councils and organisations who would like to do the same for the young people who live in their areas. So really, you are the leaders/pioneers in this, this starts with you, and will impact many other young people locally and further afield. No names will be used and we will create a summary of the report which you will also be able to read if you or your families/carers/teachers want to! The Council is also keen to offer an ongoing platform for young people to influence decisions about their area.

FAIR Agreement

- F is for FUN! We definitely want you to have fun and enjoy this time. It's one of the most important things to us and about LP, as is finding out how and where you have fun and go to relax
- A Awareness we want you to know that this is a safe space, no names will be used and you are free to say whatever you want, without fear of judgements or repercussions. We also stay aware of each others differences and keeping ourselves and each other safe emotionally and physically as we interact together and the LP
- I This is where we tap into your minds, your imagination, your wildest dreams. That's why we are here, tell us your wish-list
- R respecting everyone's voices, differences of opinions and most importantly your voices giving you the opportunity to have a say in what and where, are your ideal outdoor social or relaxing spaces



<u>Ice breaker - "Would you rather game" - Playworker starts game then offers up the game lead to young</u> people

Maybe start with some far fetched ones - bottom of the sea or top of Big Ben! Use to record statistics, record suggestions given by the young people when they are leading

- Hang out in a play park or car park?
- Hang out in skate park or street
- Hang out in the woods or beach
- Hang out in a field or country park
- Town centre or graveyard

Group work and collecting resources

Small group - work individually. Medium group - work in pairs. Large group - groups of 4/5

Challenges - 20 mins to build - give each group a different build

All playworkers to use this opportunity to ask questions whilst young people are building

- 1. Build an outdoor gathering/seated space
- 2. Build your ideal outdoor hang out spot
- 3. Build an outdoor space you use now
- 4. Build an outdoor space you wouldn't dream of hanging out at
- 5. Build the worst outdoor space you know
- 6. Build the outdoor social space of the future

Gather all together at the end of build time each group to share builds - go to each build. Finishing at the gathering space.

Playworkers - 1 asks set questions, 2 document answers

Consolidation

All sit at the gathering build, ask further questions for documentation. Playworkers to complete session form, make audio recordings and notes of own observations. Collate audio, written and image feedback to be sent to team. www.scrapantics.co.uk | info@scrapantics.co.uk

Notes



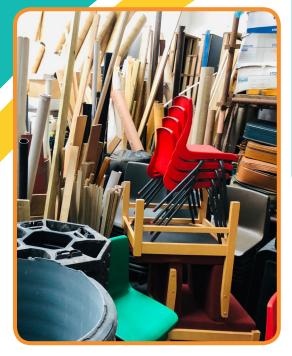
Play Sufficiency Assessment Report:

How Children and Young People View Play Provision in Fife

ScrapAntics CIC on behalf of Fife Council 2023

To find out more about ScrapAntics and what we do, please visit our website or get in touch www.scrapantics.co.uk | info@scrapantics.co.uk







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