

Play Sufficiency Report Summary:

How Children and Young People View Play Provision in Fife

ScrapAntics CIC on behalf of Fife Council 2023



Contents	Page
1 Aim	6
1.1 Objectives	6
1.2 Outputs	6
2 Evidencing the Value of Play	7
3 What is Loose Parts Play?	8
4 Engagement	9
4.1 Engagement Methods	10
4.2 List of Schools and Community Groups Involved	12
4.3 Playworkers Feedback on the Consultation Proses	13
4.4 Key Findings	14
4.5 What Play Facilities Would Children and Young People Like in their Area?	15
5 Conclusion	18
5.1 Actionable Recommendations	19

Executive Summary

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.

The following report provides a comprehensive representation of young people’s feedback, and where possible their own words have been included. A number of key themes were identified primarily focused on how, when and why young people play, the types of facilities they would like to see and barriers to play.

Fife Council are considering different ways to ensure the voice of children and young people continues to be heard with regard to play provision and wider concerns affecting their area. With this in mind, an approach to support sustained engagement in representative structures has also been suggested.

A toolkit documenting the consultation process and how children and young people can be effectively engaged will also be developed. This will enable organisations to be aware of what needs to be considered, potential challenges and successful approaches. The toolkit will provide opportunities for reflection on the unexpected outcomes and possible barriers which can influence delivery of this type of consultation. It is always helpful to identify areas for improvement alongside positive results.

The play workers supporting this consultation process reported a genuine joy and excitement from children and young people in being asked for their ideas and opinions. Young people were active participants in discussing what their area needs and clearly valued this play based, creative, imaginative approach to consultation.

Different age groups were adept at finding less traditional play spaces such as abandoned buildings or graveyards in which to hang out and play, because they could be isolated and away from adult supervision or control. Even more organised play spaces such as skate parks were not always used as intended, often being seen as a general “hang out” space which sometimes excluded young people due to a lack of confidence or skills. The role of the adult within play was an often raised and potentially contradictory concern: at times young people want to be visible and reassured that they are safe, while also valuing privacy. Young people would like opportunities to learn certain skills in order to engage with play spaces, a responsibility which may be more suited to youth and community workers rather than parents or authority figures.

Friends and peers were important in choosing which play spaces to use. Certain ways of playing were identified as commonplace and much more enjoyable if others were present, such as hide and seek in supermarkets and shopping centres. This reinforces the innate importance of play in encouraging the development of intimacy, social and relationship skills. These peer bonds are also a challenge for young people with additional support needs or disabilities, who reported fears about friends “falling out with them” and leaving while outdoors as a barrier preventing them from engaging in play. For these young people many play spaces were simply inaccessible. Bullying and fighting also limited access to play and this was a more obvious concern for neurodivergent young people.

The consultation also sought to identify the particular needs of girls in relation to play. Within the 5-12 age group parks and green spaces were popular places for play, however although they did use the equipment this was more for the opportunities it presented for interaction. As an example, girls talked about how they enjoyed making videos for social media while playing on the equipment or just being with friends. This age group discussed how they would like more options for imaginative or creative play such as den making.



Older girls were vocal in sharing their desire for seating and covered shelters. They wanted spaces where they could “chill out” and relax with friends without necessarily feeling the need to participate in activities. This was a contrast to feedback from boys, who also requested shelters but spoke more frequently about finding fulfilment through active play. In recent years, there has been more research into how the design of our public spaces can exclude different groups because particular needs have not been considered. In urban environments such as towns or cities planners are being encouraged to reflect a greater range of experiences when developing design projects.

Natural environments were still valued venues for play with children reporting climbing trees, exploring forests and building sandcastles however this was very dependent on locality and the age of young people. For the very youngest children, parents saw clear benefits in events and activities being delivered close to home. Older children often wanted to travel for play opportunities and this could be both a shorter or longer distance. A significant barrier for young people in more rural locations was the long delay in receiving their free bus passes. It was an issue raised by CLD workers based in the smaller villages of NE Fife and limited access to play and recreation in larger towns. Travel was needed because often facilities nearby did not meet their needs or interests.

Children did have concerns about safety however these were often different in focus to those of parents. Young people knew the places to avoid because they felt unsafe due to older people drinking or using illicit substances, while adults had a general reluctance to place trust in their children to take appropriate risks. Studies have acknowledged the benefits to children’s neurological, emotional and social development through being able to assess and manage risk. The Scottish Government have noted that: “we have a responsibility to ensure that practitioners, parents and even the children themselves know the benefits that play and risk can bring to their education and wellbeing- we all have a part to play in promoting risk management rather than risk aversion” (Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation guide, (2010), Play Scotland).

Children and young people were very aware of some play facilities not being well maintained and the related impact of vandalism. They expressed frustration if facilities were removed or changed without prior warning and also at the absence of basic resources such as benches or covered shelters to just “sit and be”. A lack of engagement with young people about play provision also led to facilities being rejected. Although venues for play may be available in their area, young people sometimes compare these unfavourably with similar facilities elsewhere. An Astroturf surface for football or other sports was frequently requested during the consultation.

Finally, play workers acknowledged that there was a definite similarity across the age groups when imagining their “ideal play space”. It contained certain features such as shelter, gym equipment (requested particularly by girls), the opportunity to make fires, food and an option to adapt to different needs. It would be supported in some way by adults so young people could learn skills. Other facilities such as skate parks could be nearby.

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 establishes a 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 Klyta (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

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/

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.

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)

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.



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 Community Centre, Lochore

1 x session (8-12yrs), 7 girls, 10 boys
1 x session (12-13yrs), 4 girls, 3 boys
24 participants

Tulliallan Primary, Kincardine

1 x session (nursery), 6 families
1 x session (P1/2),
19 participants

Cupar Youth Cafe

1 x session (12-18yrs), 9 girls, 8 boys
17 participants

Bell Baxter High School, Cupar

1 x session (12-16yrs) (Learners from Department of Additional Support, including wheelchair users)
1 x session (12-16yrs) (Learners with Additional Support Needs)
28 participants

Anstruther Primary School

1 x session (P6), 1 6 girls, 12 boys
28 participants

Woodmill High School, Dunfermline

1 x session (12-16yrs) (school refusers), 2 girls, 5 boys
7 participants

St Agatha's RC Primary School, Leven

1 x session (P4), 15 girls, 13 boys
28 participants

Buckhaven Community Education Centre

1 x session (mixed ages 0-5, 5-12, 12-18 years)
(4 x community based, 7 x schools based)

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.

4.3 - Play Workers Feedback on the Consultation Process

- At each venue there was a welcoming, kind and positive reaction from both staff and young people. Children did not appear suspicious of the play workers and were very open to discussion and engagement
- It may have been helpful to have more time to become familiar with play spaces in the various locations, although there was an understanding that play workers with local knowledge could assist in this regard
- The majority of young people had not previously been aware of Loose Parts Play and very much enjoyed getting to know the materials and possible uses.
- The excitement at having the materials to play with did make it more challenging to obtain feedback from the younger age group. They really just wanted to be creative in their play. Play Workers adapted session plans to reflect this need.
- Many of the school and community venues were very happy to see children engaged in an interactive activity like LPP. There is a definite need for more similar activities in the region.
- For the early years and P1-P3 age groups the creative approach using arts materials was possibly more successful. Play Workers were able to consult with parents/ guardians of the 0-5 years group however the children enjoyed drawing or making a play space as a literal representation. Many children aged up to P3 children found it challenging to consider and respond to questions, even when adapted for the situation.
- The community based sessions were naturally more informal which enabled feedback to be gathered more easily
- Those sessions with fewer or no teaching or CLD staff involved were more successful in supporting children to share their opinions.
- Sometimes, staff felt the need to intervene or children may have been more reluctant to speak honestly with adults present. The role of the play worker and other adult staff is crucial within play environments. More information about how adult intervention can impact on a child's ownership and independence of play can be found in the earlier referenced report; "Playful Schools: The power of Loose Parts Play, (2020), Play Scotland"
- Play Workers 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 or zoo. 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).
- Play Workers 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 more ownership of play by young people
- None of the young people were aware of the UN Charter on Children's Rights, which informs PSA. This was true even for young people belonging to a Freedom of Rights group

4.4 - 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-hierarchical. 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.



4.5 - What Play Facilities Would Children and Young People Like in their Area?

- Popular Choice: Seating/Covered Areas

Everyone in the 8-12 age group at Benarty built a den with the LPP materials. They were very aware of the lack of benches and asked for somewhere to just "sit and be". The older girls said:

"see if they had picnic benches we could just sit and chill no fags or drink. We could be seen from home, my maw would feel better knowing she'd see us all and the drinking belters can hide in the woods"

There was a recognition that a lack of covered or sheltered areas was an issue for all ages. At Cupar Youth Café young people built a really good sitting area for relaxing. Interestingly, they preferred circular areas for seating rather than facing each other. Some were uncomfortable with direct eye contact. Covered structures were also built by the majority of young people at Bell Baxter High School, "so we can play out when it is raining". It is possible to make a correlation between the desire to play or hang out in abandoned buildings (popular with many of the participants in this consultation) and the shelter such spaces provide.

MANY OPTIONS

QUIET SPACE

FOOD AVAILABLE

SKATE PARK/FOOTBALL PITCH ALONGSIDE

SOMEWHERE COVERED/SHELTERED TO SIT

GYM EQUIPMENT

WELL MAINTAINED

ART SPACE

NO SAND

CONNECTION TO ANIMALS

PLACE FOR FIRE MAKING/BBQ

SUPPORTED BY ADULTS WHEN NEEDED

CHANGEABLE/ADAPTABLE

BENARTY, (12-13):

- ASTROTURF
- BASKET SWING
- MULTI USE PITCH FOR FOOTBALL, BASKETBALL ETC
- GYMNAS TIC EQUIPMENT (GIRLS)
- OUTDOOR SWIMMING POOL (WITH SOLAR COVER TO HEAT)

BENARTY, (ALL AGES):

- MORE FOOTBALL PITCHES
- CAMPING AREAS
- COVERED SHELTERS

BENARTY (8-12:)

- PICNIC BENCHES
- PLACES TO SIT

TULLIALLAN:

- VERY HAPPY WITH FACILITIES JUST IMPROVE THEM. DEVELOP ONE REALLY GOOD PARK WITH LOTS OF FACILITIES

TULLIALLAN, (PARENTS:)

- MORE ORGANISED ACTIVITIES
- EVENTS / IMPROVED FACILITIES (TOILETS, PLAY RESOURCES THAT DON'T REQUIRE AN ADULT)

CUPAR YOUTH CAFÉ:

- PLACES TO SIT
- CIRCULAR SEATING
- ANOTHER SKATE PARK
- RESOLVE TRAVEL ISSUE WITH BUS PASSES

BELL BAXTER HIGH SCHOOL

- COVERED SHELTERS
- SPACE WHERE NOISE CAN BE DEADENED
- SUPPORT TO ACCESS PLAY SPACES

ANSTRUTHER PRIMARY SCHOOL:

- GO-KART TRACK
- GIANT SLIDE
- OUTDOOR POOL (HEATED)
- ELECTRIC SCOOTERS WE COULD RENT (GIRLS)
- TRAMPOLINE PARK

WOODMILL HIGH SCHOOL:

- PARKS EASIER TO ACCESS BY WALKING
- MORE ABANDONED OR EMPTY PLACES TO EXPLORE (ADVENTURE)
- EASIER ACCESS TO ASTROTURF IN SCHOOL GROUNDS

ST AGATHA'S RC PRIMARY SCHOOL:

- FOOTBALL PITCH (CURRENT PITCHES ARE QUITE RUN DOWN)
- ROPES TO MAKE TREE SWINGS
- ZOO (ANIMALS USED TO BE IN SOME PARKS)
- LOOSE PARTS PLAY EQUIPMENT IN ONE OF THE PARKS
- BIG FLOOR TRAMPOLINE
- IMPROVED PLAY FACILITIES WITH MONKEY BARS AND A HAMMOCK

BUCKHAVEN:

- HUMAN SLING
- STATUES
- SWINGS
- OUTDOOR GYM MATS
- TREES
- SAFE PLACE TO BUILD FIRES
- SLIDES AND MONKEY BARS

WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE PLAY:

BENARTY,

8-12:

SKATE PARK	X 15
PLAY PARK	X 12
COUNTRY PARK	X 11
TOWN CENTRE	X 10
GRAVEYARD	X 7
STREET	X 2

BENARTY,

12-13:

HIDE AND SEEK IN SHOPS
MAKING TIK TOKS IN PARKS (GIRLS),
ASTROTURF IN SCHOOL GROUNDS,
LOCHORE MEADOWS TO PUSH EACH OTHER DOWN SLIDES (GIRLS)

TULLIALLAN:

LARGE GRASSY AREA NEAR SCHOOL WITH SKATE PARK,
CLIMBING TREES IN FOREST,
GOING TO BEACH

CUPAR YOUTH CAFÉ:

LOCAL PARKS,
ISOLATED SPACES (GRAVEYARD, ABANDONED BUILDINGS),
TRAIN TRACKS,
HIDE AND SEEK IN SHOPS

BUCKHAVEN COMMUNITY CENTRE:

LEVEN SKATE PARK

BELL BAXTER HIGH SCHOOL:

LOCAL PARK PLAY FACILITIES (SWINGS, ROUNDABOUTS),
GO TO LOMOND HILLS,
AN ABANDONED HOUSE,
SHED BESIDE A CAR PARK

ANSTRUTHER PRIMARY SCHOOL:

LOTS OF SMALL PARKS IN AREA NOT USED BY
CHILDREN,
BANKIE PARK IS WELL USED,
VISIT HARBOUR/BEACH,
CHILDREN OFTEN ATTEND ORGANISED
ACTIVITIES OR PLAY INDOORS

WOODMILL HIGH SCHOOL:

CALAISMUIR WOOD FOR BIKE TRACK,
ABANDONED BUILDINGS/ARMY BARRACKS
FOR HIDE AND SEEK,
SHOPS FOR HIDE AND SEEK,
TRAVEL TO DUNFERMLINE,
LEVEN

ST AGATHA'S RC PRIMARY SCHOOL:

HIDE AND SEEK IN SUPERMARKET,
BROOM PARK,
SKATE PARK,
LEVEN POOL,
BEACH,
LETHAM GLEN (WITH PARENTS)

0-5 YEARS:

PARENTS OFTEN TRAVEL FOR ACTIVITIES,

WOULD LIKE MORE PLANNED EVENTS FOR FAMILIES IN
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

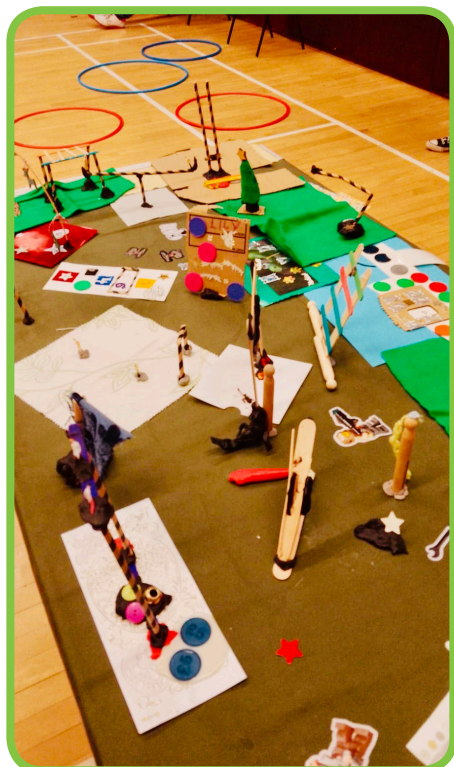
5. Conclusion

The consultation identified several core themes impacting on children's and young people's play. There were concerns around the design of play spaces which too often did not seem to take account of the needs of those who would be using them. This included worries about accessibility but also a lack of challenge in the design, which failed to keep young people stimulated. Young people spoke about enjoying discovering non-traditional play spaces which enabled an element of risk to enter their play. There was a recognition that such spaces will be used and what is important remains ensuring young people remain safe. Although young people do want these more isolated spaces they are also looking for supervised activities which support them to develop skills.

Traditional, more established play spaces such as play parks were still used, although certainly for older children this may not be as originally planned. Young people often found other forms of play in skate parks, play parks and similar equipped spaces. An opportunity exists to engage young people in the process of redesigning these spaces to reconnect more fully with the communities who will use them. There are possibilities to reimagine how we view play in order to create common ownership of spaces. Too often during the consultation young people would speak about feeling that they were excluded from play areas, whether through parental concern, poor design or fears about older adults and children. Well-designed play spaces can support increased social cohesion and improved family dynamics. As evidence for this, some families (adults and children) involved in the consultation talked about valuing their local park space because it was easily accessible and visible from their homes.

Play facilities were sometimes poorly maintained and this had a subsequent impact on how young people perceived them. There was an acceptance that equipment would be damaged and not repaired. If local authorities do not value the facilities enough to look after them why should young people engage?

Finally, there were some practical barriers affecting opportunities for young people to play. Free bus passes were not easily accessible for young people in smaller villages. This should be an issue which is resolvable by local authorities. In these more rural locations it was often necessary to travel for more varied or exciting play opportunities. For many families this meant being able to drive or having access to a car.



5.1 - Actionable Recommendations

This is a moment of significant opportunity for children and young people across Fife. They have contributed their thoughts and ideas to a document which will help to inform future planning of play provision by the local authority. Now is the time to be ambitious through involving these young people and others across the region in meaningful engagement around play space design.

Past developments elsewhere aimed at putting communities in control of transforming play provision have recognised the crucial role children and young people have in the process. Many of the suggestions young people have made in this consultation to improve their play experience could be incorporated into locally led projects which have an understanding of community needs. Young people have requested better designed play spaces closer to home, opportunities to learn new skills such as fire making or how to skate, more consideration of the different needs of girls and those with disabilities and better relationships with adults in their area. Each of these actions can be delivered through community led initiatives which bring together adults and children to create collaborative approaches to play space design.

In order for communities to be able to facilitate this type of place based development local authorities will need to offer sustained support as key partners with the experience and contacts required. Maintaining the interest of children and young people will be vital to successful delivery, and could be achieved through youth or community activities, regular family events in spaces, new play opportunities such as play schemes or visits to other places to explore the idea of play. This could include an exploration of successful models in other countries aimed at place based play development.

Continued consultation will be the first step in successfully meeting young people's expectations. If adults and children are included and supported to lead on play provision, there will be notable benefits through improved connectedness, increased social interaction and cohesion and the promotion of positive physical and mental wellbeing for communities.



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Notes

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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,
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