

STAFFED PLAY PROVISION

— WHY IT'S IMPORTANT



Playworkers in staffed play provision — like adventure playgrounds and after-school clubs — provide a unique public service to local families and children and must be adequately funded.

Ongoing national funding cuts are leaving councils with large shortfalls, forcing them to make difficult decisions on provision of local public services. Staffed play provision is one of the public services suffering from continued cuts. Restricting the funding for such vital work can damage the life chances of vulnerable children and place further burdens on other public services, such as youth services.

Play England believes that play provision needs national investment, delivered locally. We urge all local authorities to support this call whilst doing everything possible to protect existing play services for children and families.

Supporting children through challenging ‘middle years’

Play is a unique public service which gives children vital support when they need it most. Playworkers support children aged 6 to 11 years in the ‘middle years’ of childhood between statutory early education and youth provision. This is a significant transitional period from primary to secondary school which can bring stressful changes for children and young people, including the breaking up of long-standing friendship groups and support networks. These ‘middle years’ can be particularly stressful for children with special educational needs.



Playworkers have unique role

Evidence shows that because of the children-centred approach of playworkers, children can build confidence to play games, take risks, test boundaries and socialise with others in a way that is not always possible at home, on the street, at school or in unsupervised playgrounds. This means that play workers are often uniquely placed to support particularly vulnerable children dealing with the significant challenges of unstable families lives, changing schools or wider social problems and can provide informal counselling, mentoring and coaching along with advice on drugs, sex and staying safe as well as sign-posting and referral to statutory services, including local safeguarding boards.

Staffed play provision good for communities

Making sure children have access to staffed play provision can positively impact on perceptions of their neighbourhood, transforming it into a trusted place in which they feel welcome, know their peers and others, and consider themselves at home. This is, again, crucial when children are in these middle years.

Staffed play provision also has a very positive impact on the lives of parents, providing important social support, crucial lifelines in deprived neighbourhoods and for parents in need. Most staffed play provision is located in areas of high deprivation. The ethos of enabling self-directed, freely chosen activity makes it more accessible to children otherwise at risk of exclusion. Such play provision builds important bridges between the statutory children's services and so called hard-to-reach children and families.

Play is good for children's mental and physical health

Evidence shows that when children play out they are three times more likely to be physically active. Giving children access to free outdoor play opportunities is the best way of tackling problems like obesity. Not only is active play physically good for children and young people, it helps their mental health too.

Resources:

Download our free publication 'People make play'

<http://www.playengland.org.uk/media/120465/people-make-play.pdf>

Play England is the national charity for children's play. We provide guidance for thousands of play providers: adventure playgrounds, after-school clubs, parks departments, parents, volunteers and schools. Play is an essential part of every child's life. It is vital for children's enjoyment as well as their social, emotional, intellectual and physical development.

Quality play services with skilled, qualified playwork staff greatly enhance children's play experience, helping them build resilience and confidence. This is particularly important for vulnerable children and those living in areas of high social deprivation.

Campaigning together, we can make a difference.

Join Play England today. It's free!

<http://www.playengland.org.uk/get-involved/join-us/>



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