

The State of (Adventure) Play

- Introduction to adventure play and playgrounds
- Methodology
- Research findings
- Changes and possible reasons
- What does adventure play mean now?
- How can adventure play be supported?



Adventure play is...



...what happens when children are given

- a physical outdoor space,
- tools,
- materials,
- time,
- permission and
- ownership

to do what they want

An adventure playground...

1. Is staffed by skilled and qualified playworkers
2. Allows for spontaneous free expression of play
3. Offers opportunities to engage in the full range of play types
4. Enables exploration of physical, social, emotional, imaginary, symbolic and sensory spaces
5. Free flow in giving and responding to play cues
6. Is a shared flexible space, magic to children
7. Constantly evolves, where children can play all year round in all weathers
8. Children create and modify the space – a varied landscape
9. Is at the heart of the community
10. Is inclusive and accessible to all children
11. Free of charge, children are free to come and go, free to choose how they spend their time there
12. Bases risk management on principle of risk-benefit assessment

What we asked....

- Name of playground
- Town / city
- Region
- Contact email
- Phone number
- Website
- Staffed
- Open access
- Where is funding from?
- How many children attend?
- Do children have to register to attend?

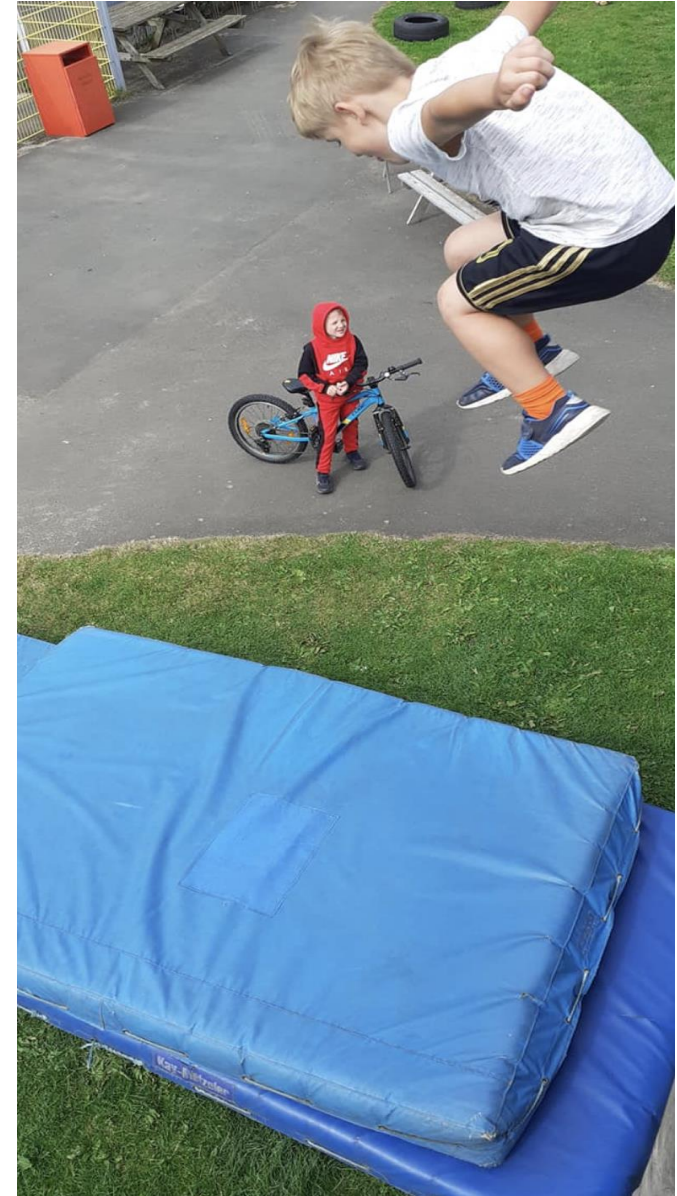


Research Methodology

Internet searches for contact details

- Websites
- Charity Commission / Companies House registration
- Recent posts on social media: Facebook, Instagram

Phone calls and emails





Defining 'adventure playground'

- Outside space (with structures) affording playful behaviours
- Staffed (by playworkers)
- Free of charge
- Attempting an open access ethos

Barriers

- Some councils don't publish their phone number
- Council staff working from home
- Lack of response to emails
- Lack of playground info on council websites
- Lack of websites/ online profile in voluntary and community sector (VCS)
- Out of date information



Findings

2021

South East	9
South West	12
East Midlands	11
Yorks & Humber	7
West Midlands	5
East	6
North East	1
North West	7
London	68
Total	126

2017

South East	11
South West	12
East Midlands	10
Yorks & Humber	9
West Midlands	4
East	11
North East	2
North West	12
London	76
Total	147



Why?

- Lack of funding?
- Lack of good or committed management?
- Land reclaimed by councils for new housing / offices / factory units?
- Vandalism? Structures in disrepair / rotten?
- Competition from other services?
- Concerns over child safety / risky play?

Local Authority run playgrounds

2021

South East	6
South West	0
East Midlands	3
Yorks & Humber	2
West Midlands	0
East	5
North East	0
North West	1
London	11
TOTALS	28

2017

South East	9
South West	2
East Midlands	1
Yorks & Humber	5
West Midlands	3
East	11
North East	2
North West	6
London	38
TOTALS	77

Voluntary & Community Sector run playgrounds

2021

South East	3
South West	12
East Midlands	8
Yorks & Humber	5
West Midlands	3
East	1
North East	0
North West	5
London	56
TOTALS	93

2017

South East	1
South West	10
East Midlands	9
Yorks & Humber	4
West Midlands	1
East	0
North East	0
North West	6
London	38
TOTALS	69

Discrepancies



Hybrid playgrounds not included in the tables

- Shiremoor in North Tyneside, North East
- Sycamore in Dudley, West Midlands
- Leasowe in The Wirral, North West

Why the move to VCS?

- Squeeze on Local authorities' budgets
- Local authorities want to maintain a play offer – in many cases they provide significant funding to keep the playground going
- Communities see benefit in having adventure playgrounds and want to keep them
- Communities benefit from lack of local authority constraints and can access funds not available to councils



Funding streams accessed in VCS

Local authorities

Lottery: A 4 All, Reaching Communities

Children in Need

Comic Relief

Groundwork

Sport England

National and local trusts

Hire fees for building and grounds

Events

Donations and bequests

Earned interest



Other findings....

Some local authority playgrounds had been turned into fixed play areas, and staff made redundant

Most playgrounds required children to register, occasionally for a small fee/donation, then sign in

A lot of playgrounds reduced their hours / days during the pandemic and had not increased them

A small number of playgrounds required bookings

VCS playgrounds tended to use social media more

VCS playgrounds tended to have better websites with more information than those run by councils

A few playgrounds offer other services: childcare, food banks, youth clubs, lunch clubs

Now over to you.....

What does adventure play mean for children now, post-pandemic?

How can adventure play be supported in the coming months and years?

<https://www.playengland.org.uk>

