

***“I’d play  
all day  
and night  
if I could”***

**A REPORT ON CHILDREN’S VIEWS  
ON THEIR RIGHT TO PLAY**

**A CONSULTATION BY  
THE CHILDREN’S PARLIAMENT  
ON BEHALF OF  
THE INTERNATIONAL PLAY  
ASSOCIATION (SCOTLAND)**

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Throughout the report are examples of the children's artwork made during the consultation, alongside photos of children at play.

# CHILDREN AT PLAY



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## ABOUT THE CONSULTATION

### United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

#### Article 31

States Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

The child's right to play is recognised in article 31 of the UNCRC. It is often described as the article that most wholly represents the child's right to be a child. The importance of play in children's day to day lives for their health and well-being is increasingly recognised in a range of policies affecting children. Despite this article 31 is also described as one of the forgotten articles of the convention.

The need for better recognition of the child's right to play brought the International Play Association (Scotland) and the Children's Parliament together with children across Scotland to talk about what play means to them and how their experience of play could be better. We listened to children's voices on the meaning and importance of play and wish to share these voices. This report shares their views with local and national decision-makers in Scotland.

The Children's Parliament designed and facilitated 36 workshops in 28 locations across Scotland; visiting 14 of Scotland's 32 local authorities and engaging with 379 children aged between 2 and 13 years of age.

Participating children came from a range of backgrounds and were of different abilities. They live in urban, semi-rural and rural/island communities.

Workshops took place in after school projects, on the street, and in nursery and primary schools. Children played games, drew pictures and made models as they discussed play. You will see some of their artwork throughout this report.

We have structured the report so that children's views on who they play with, what they play, where they play, when they play and why it is important to them are presented, using quotes from children to provide insight. As well as reporting the children's views the report also offers points to consider for adults; these pointers support parents, carers, adults in the community and professionals to consider what they can do to help Scotland successfully implement article 31.

*"I like playing with my brother – pushing him around in the laundry basket, that's my favourite game. I don't know what it's called; just the 'pushing my brother around in the laundry basket game'."*

Boy, 6, Aberdeen





## WHO CHILDREN PLAY WITH

In their play workshops the children talked about who they play with. They identified the importance of peers, siblings, pets and adults.

### FRIENDS

Children think about playing as a social activity. They report that their friends are those they are most likely to play with. Play is seen as a way to build and sustain friendships.

*"Playing is important because it builds friendship."* Girl, 7, Glasgow

*"My favourite person to play with is my friend Cindy – we play hide and seek. It would make me cry if I had to play on my own."* Girl, 4, Glasgow

When children talk about playing with friends they talk about communicating with each other, about rules and boundaries and about including everyone;

*"Sometimes we take a vote to decide what to play."* Girl, 9, Midlothian

*"The rule in the den is – NO GIRLS ALLOWED, no stealing and don't hit people with sticks – we obey it – well, ish."* Boy, 5, Kelso

*"I like to play hide and seek because it involves everyone."* Girl, 11, Wester Ross

### PLAYING ALONE

Children also say they enjoy playing on their own. When discussing play on their own children talked about computer games.

*"It's sometimes nice to get away from people, get a bit of space."* Boy, 10, Wester Ross

*"You just have to know how to entertain yourself."* Girl, 10, Aberdeen

*"You can play computer games on your own – I prefer to play on my own."* Boy, 11, Bo'ness

### BROTHERS AND SISTERS

Children also identify brothers and sisters as playmates, however this can come with extra responsibilities for older siblings.

*"I don't play on the street because I play with my baby sister and she could follow me and she is not as good on the bike."* Boy, 6, Aberdeen

### PETS

Children talk about the enjoyment they get from playing with their pets and they often featured within the artwork the children produced.

*"My dog's called Smudge; when it's night time he looks out the living-room window and I wave, he goes mad barking, he thinks it's someone outside but it's only my reflection! Happy times!"* Boy, 11, East Lothian

## WHO CHILDREN PLAY WITH

### ADULTS

Children identify that parents and carers have a big impact on their play experience. They generally enjoy adult engagement with their play.

*"It's good when they play with you – like my friend's dad – he falls on the trampoline."* Girl, 9, Falkirk

*"My dad plays with the ball with me or we play with water guns – it's great fun."* Girl, 8, Midlothian

*"I love playing with my Granny and dressing up in all her clothes; we make the stairs our catwalk."* Girl, 9, Angus

Children like it best when adults take part on equal terms with them and have fun. When adults just come along, supervise or get in the way with instructions about tasks to be done this is not as much fun.

*"Adults are boring – they don't do much. When I'm out on my bike, he just walks with me – they should come out and play – be like a little kid."* Boy, 10, Edinburgh

*"A lot of the time I can't play because my toys have to be tidied away."* Girl, 6, Aberdeen

While some children recognise that adults provide a sense of safety (*"It's good to have adults around in case you hurt yourself."* Boy, 12, Falkirk) children also report that adult concerns with safety can get in the way of children playing as they would like.

*"It's not good to have adults around when you're playing because they stop you doing secret stuff...it spoils the game."* Boy, 5, Kelso

*"If you do anything cool – ok sometimes stuff you shouldn't be because you MIGHT hurt yourself, but it is still cool – they shout at you."* Boy, 10, Edinburgh

*"Adults don't really care about you playing – they are too worried you will hurt yourself."* Girl, 8, Dumbarton

*"You need to be protected but not that much that you can't learn anything."* Girl, 11, Dunbar

## WHO CHILDREN PLAY WITH: REFLECTION

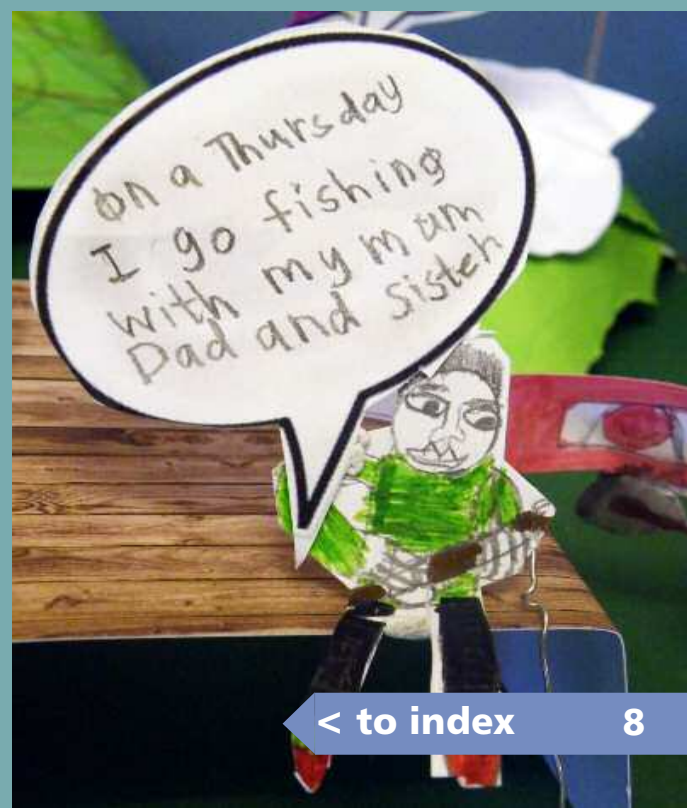
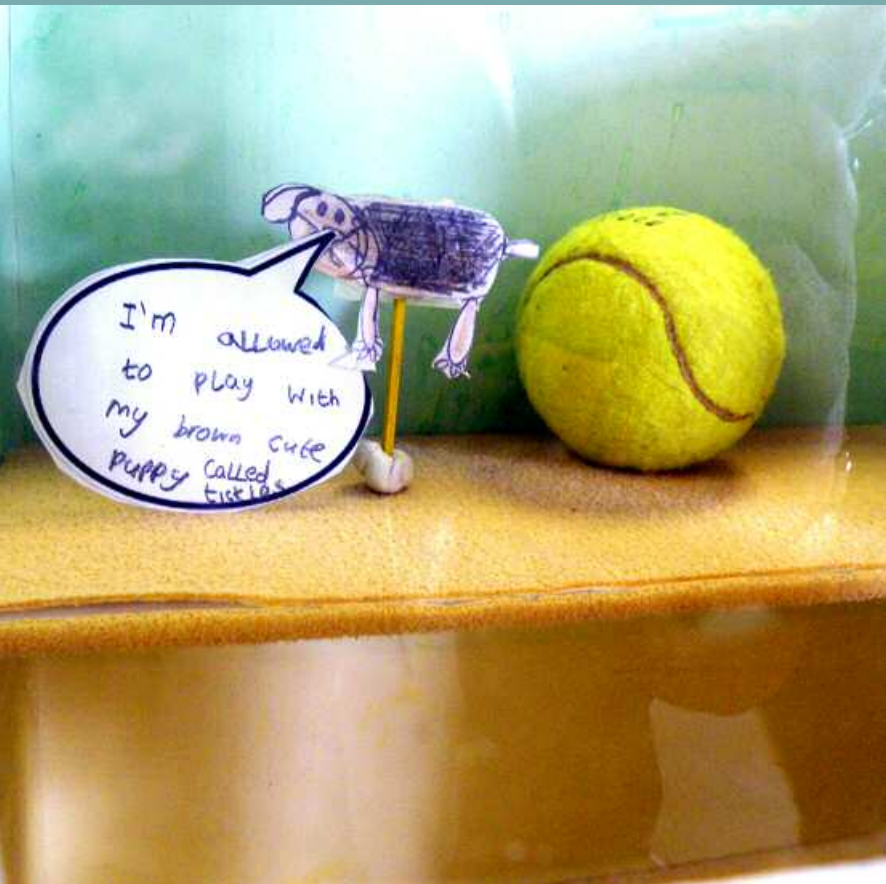
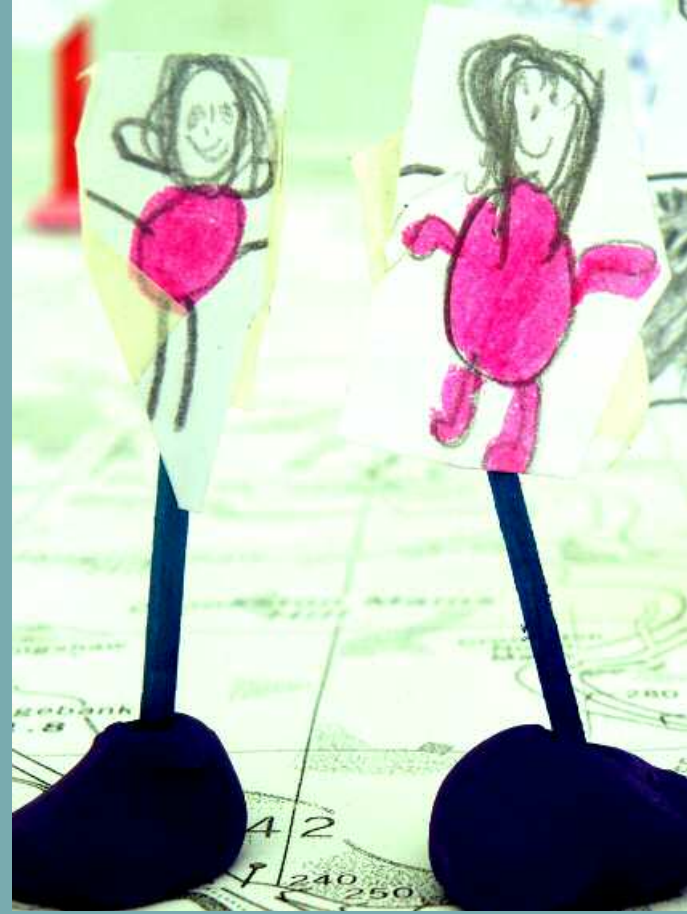
Children identify the importance of playing with others. They also identify that they can play when they are on their own. If adults want to support children's play they need to let children lose themselves in their play without expressing too many fears about safety. Adults should also consider that sometimes children appreciate when adults join in with play, so long as they don't take charge.



*“I have fish but I’m not allowed to play with them, my mum tells me to leave them alone.”*

Girl, 3, Angus





## WHAT CHILDREN PLAY

The children talked about the games and activities they played and they discussed whether toys were necessary at all. They also discussed how age or gender might influence what you play.

### PLAYING WITH TOYS

One of the key questions we asked was if toys were needed for play; less than a quarter of the children thought that this was the case but the question caused some debate:

*"I need toys; I'd be bored otherwise."* Boy, 6, Aberdeen

*"If you didn't have toys – you wouldn't be playing."* Boy, 9, Argyll

Others felt that toys were only really important if you had to be inside for play. When you were outside the environment itself provided opportunities for play;

*"You need toys for days when it's dark and stormy."* Girl, 10, Mallaig

*"Use the area around you for toys – we use fences to make dens."* Boy, 7, Kelso

*"You don't always need toys to play; you can play with your imagination."* Girl, 8, Midlothian

The children also recognised the cost of toys and that many children had no choice but to play without them;

*"Your mum or dad might not have lots of money to buy toys."* Boy, 5, Kelso

*"Loads of people in the world don't have toys and they find other ways of playing."* Boy, 10, Edinburgh

### AGE AND GENDER

Some of the older children report that they don't identify with the word 'play' so much anymore, but rather talk of spending time with friends.

*"I don't really play anymore just go about on my rollerblades or hang around with my friends having a laugh, telling each other jokes."* Boy, 12, Angus.

There was a definite feeling that some toys or activities are specifically for either girls or boys;

*"I don't like to play with bricks; they're boys ones – they have to be pink to be girls."* Girl, 4, Angus

## WHAT CHILDREN PLAY: REFLECTION

Although children appreciate the toys they have they do not feel they are absolutely essential for their play experience; the outdoors and their own imaginations can provide all they need. If adults want to support children's play they might consider focusing less on buying commercially produced toys and consider how in their playing, planning or interactions with children they can make better use of the outdoors and imagination.

Older children talk less about "playing" but appreciate spaces to socialise with friends, relax and have fun. This might influence the development of play spaces for older children.

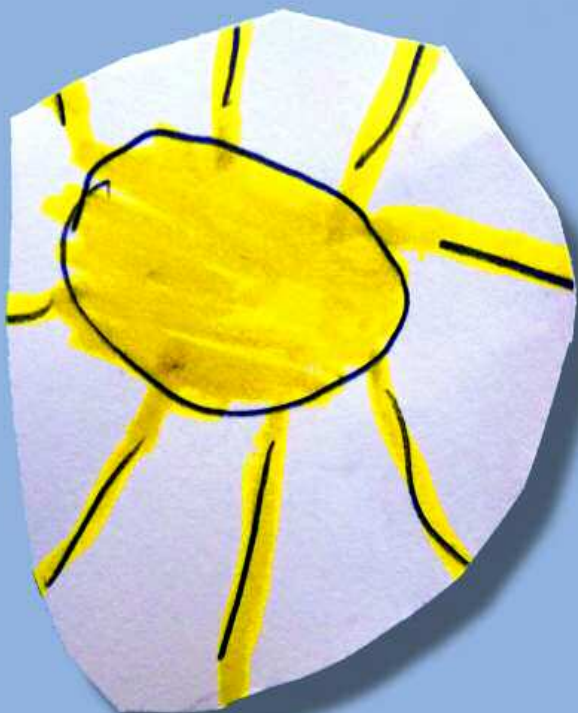
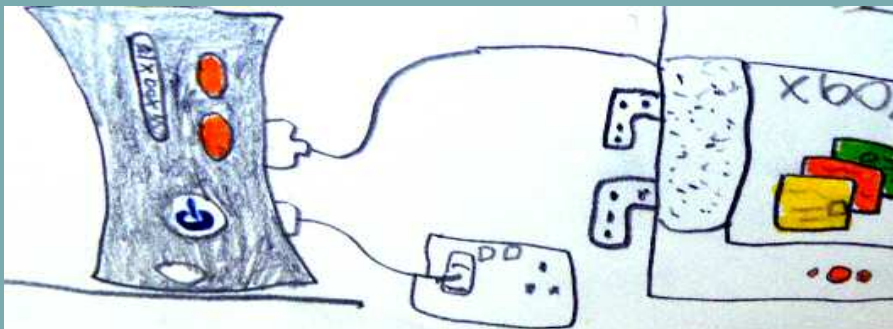
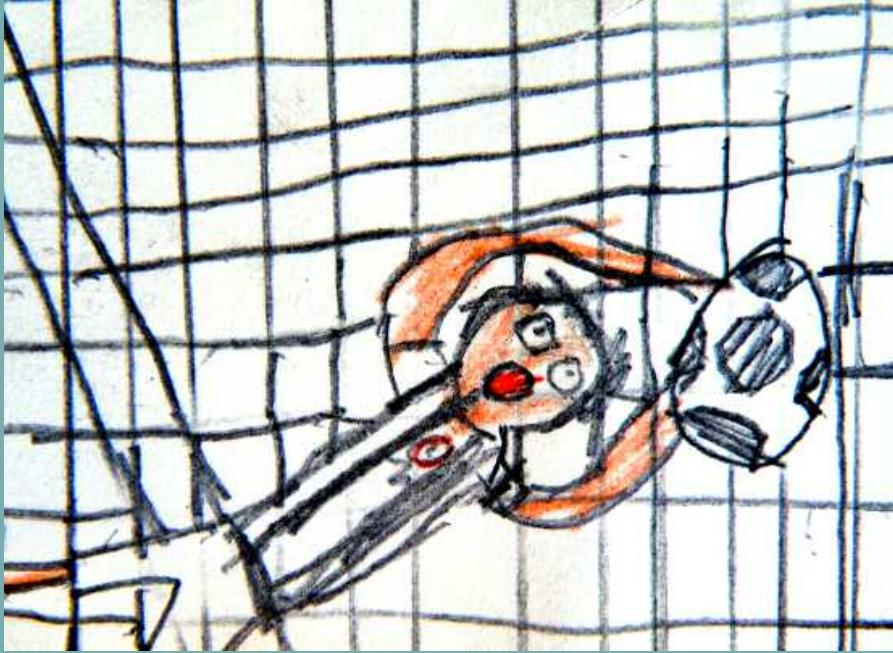
From an early age children seem to be identifying certain toys or colours as gender specific. Adults have a key role to play in either reinforcing such limitations and stereotypes, or challenging them.



*"It would be good to have streets where cars can't get up – where spiders come down and stop the cars getting up...hmmm or cones"*

Boy, 4, Aberdeen





## WHERE CHILDREN PLAY

The children talked about where they play. They talked about playing outside in their neighbourhoods or local parks and about playing indoors too.

### OUTDOOR PLAY

The children report that they prefer being outside than indoors; gardens, streets, local parks and other open spaces are named as some of their favourite places to play. Fresh air, sunshine and vitamins are seen as good reasons for going "out to play". The children also recognise that playing outdoors gives you more space and freedom for play. We heard many different experiences of playing outdoors.

*"We took some paper planes out to the ditch to test them out – we tried to do it at home but the stairs were too small."* Boy, 10, Bo'ness

*"When I'm inside I go noisy – crazy; but when I'm outside I'm calm – I can climb trees."* Boy, 10, Edinburgh

*"We play in the field after its cut with the combine; we can play in the den with the tap from the viaduct."* Boy, 8, Kelso

*"Snow's the best weather to play in – we have great hills for sledging at the Machair, but you have to be careful of the stones."* Girl, 13, Lewis

*"I love it at the beach – body boarding is ace; it's cold and windy but a wetsuit stops you getting cold."* Boy, 9, Aberdeen

### COMMUNITY AND NEIGHBOURHOOD

Traditional outdoor games remain popular with Scottish children, regardless of the weather. Children made mention of skipping, den building, kerby, tig and hide & seek in twenty-one of the thirty-six workshops. The children report that adults in the community can help or hinder them in playing these games.

*"Elderly people live in my street and they complain."* Girl, 9, Midlothian

*"The neighbours don't mind as long as we don't hit the windows."* Girl, 9, Bo'ness

In the context of discussion about playing the children talked about the importance of feeling and being safe. Some adults provide comfort and supervision but there are fears about strangers and abduction.

*"I know everyone on my street and they don't shout at me when I play. It's safe because there are people around."* Girl, 8, Midlothian

*"If I see a stranger, I run back into the house – Stranger Danger"* Girl, 8, Argyll

*"If you played on the street; someone might steal you or you might get lost."* Boy, 4, Kelso

## WHERE CHILDREN PLAY

Bullying and fear of older children also impact on where children play.

*"Bullies stop you playing because you have to sneak away in case they see you."* Girl, 9, Inverness-shire

*"It's not so good when teenagers are about; teenagers that take your ball off you; teenagers with knives; in our area there is a guy who pays people to jump people."* Boy, 12, Edinburgh

Children who live in rural communities feel that playing outdoors is safer for them.

*"There would be too many strangers in the city."* Girl, 10, Mallaig

*"The city is dirtier and you have more space here with less traffic – you can go across roads."* Boy, 10, Easter Ross

### CARS

Traffic is seen as a major barrier to where children play in both urban and rural communities

*"I mostly go to my friend's houses, I don't play in my area – I wish there were no cars because I think I could get knocked over."* Girl, 7, Glasgow

*"We need speed cameras here; it's a 30 zone but everybody still goes at 50."* Girl, 10, Easter Ross

### PARKS

Local parks are seen as important places for children to play and were mentioned in twenty-nine of the thirty-six workshops. Some children have very positive experiences;

*"My park is awesome; new swings have been added."* Boy, 12, Falkirk

*"We have the park; it's a great space – loads to do here."* Girl, 13, Lewis

However most children feel their local play parks do not provide a good environment for play. Park equipment can be old, broken or vandalised. Litter and dog dirt also spoil parks and open spaces. Sometimes play equipment in parks can be too focused on a particular age group. Some children also report that play areas disappear when there is housing development.

*"We live in Cuiken and have to go to Cornbank to the park – it's a good park – swings, slides... but I'd prefer one near us – they took down the park for houses."* Girl, 10, Penicuik

*"We used to have a roundabout but people vandalised it; it would be good if there were people in the park stopping vandalism."* Girl, 9, Edinburgh

## WHERE CHILDREN PLAY

*"My park's good but it has broken glass in it – sometimes my mum says not to go there."* Girl, 4, Glasgow

*"Everything in the park is for babies; too small."* Boy, 11, Dunbar

### AT HOME

When children play at home they are more likely to report using toys or other commercially bought items.

*"I like to play with the Wii – especially Guitar Hero."* Boy, 10, Angus

*"I can play with my computer or my console for like a couple of days."*  
Boy, 8, Dunbar

Although, the popularity of computers or games consoles is reported, children also talk about what might be seen as more traditional toys.

*"I have a wee house; me and my brother play in there with our babies – just toy babies."* Girl, 3, Clackmannanshire

*"I like to do jigsaws."* Girl, 7, Bo'ness

*"I like playing with my building blocks at home – don't want anyone to play with me though – no thank you! They might knock them down."* Boy, 4, Clackmannanshire

*"I like to play with my plastic animals."* Girl, 6, Lewis

In discussing play several children mentioned reading;

*"I love reading; books are TV inside your head."* Girl, 8, Mallaig

Younger children especially report spontaneous opportunities for play at home.

*"I play in the bath with my boats and sea plane; you go to get clean but it's a good place to play."* Boy, 4, Argyll

*"You could play with your teddy bear in bed and in the car – he makes you warm when you cuddle him."* Girl, 3, Argyll

## WHERE CHILDREN PLAY: REFLECTION

Children play everywhere: at home and outdoors. Play can happen in specially designed play spaces but it also happens spontaneously wherever children are. Adults should consider that every moment is an opportunity for play and play can be supported in many public places.

When they are outdoors children are conscious of their safety; there can be fear of other children and strangers. Using outdoor spaces for play is negatively impacted by vandalism, litter and dog mess. When it comes to play in the street, or independently getting to play spaces, cars limit where children can play. Adults might usefully consider whether the public/play spaces in the community meet the needs of children and foster play or whether poor upkeep or traffic limits children's right to play.



*"I'd play all day and night if I could."*

Girl, 10, Mallaig





## WHEN CHILDREN PLAY

The children talked about the time they get to play at home and at school and how the weather impacts on playing outdoors.

### TIME TO PLAY AT HOME

Children have different opinions about whether they have enough time to play at home. The main things that get in the way of play time are childcare (and the getting to and from there), homework, domestic chores and being part of organised clubs and activities. Although children understand the importance or necessity of these things there was a feeling that they act a barriers to their time for free play at home.

*"Going between my grandparent's house (babysitter) and own house takes away play time."* Girl, 9, Midlothian

*"I have homework, music and art clubs. I don't have much time for just playing."* Boy, 6, Aberdeen

*"Sometimes your mum and dad give you chores to do before you go out to play and then the good weather is gone."* Boy, 9, Aberdeen

*"I have to go places, visiting – I'd like more time to play."* Boy, 8, Clackmannanshire

### TIME TO PLAY AT SCHOOL

The children see break times and "Golden Time"\* as times they have the opportunity for play in the school day and identify this time as an important part of their school day. Children report that they were unhappy about scheduling of other activities in school squeezing out the chance to play.

*"It gives you more energy."* Boy, 10, Dunbar

*"It encourages you to work hard during the week."* Boy, 11, Dunbar

*"It stops you getting stressed, if you are struggling with something in the class."* Girl, 11, Wester Ross

*"I prefer break-time to lunch-time now – the school changed the time of lunch-time and you only have time to get your lunch – there is no time to play."* Girl, 7, Dunbar

### WEATHER

The Scottish weather does not affect children's desire to play outside. Different weather presents different opportunities and inspiration for play.

*"We went out today and it was stormy and it rained – I loved it! You try and fight the raindrops – you know you win because the rain stops."* Girl, 6, Clackmannanshire

*"When it's sunny you can play with water – squirting with my Dad. I'd scoosh myself to cool down."* Boy, 4, Clackmannanshire

## WHEN CHILDREN PLAY

Children mention that adults are often less keen for them to play outdoors in inclement weather. They understand however that with the right clothes you can play in any weather.

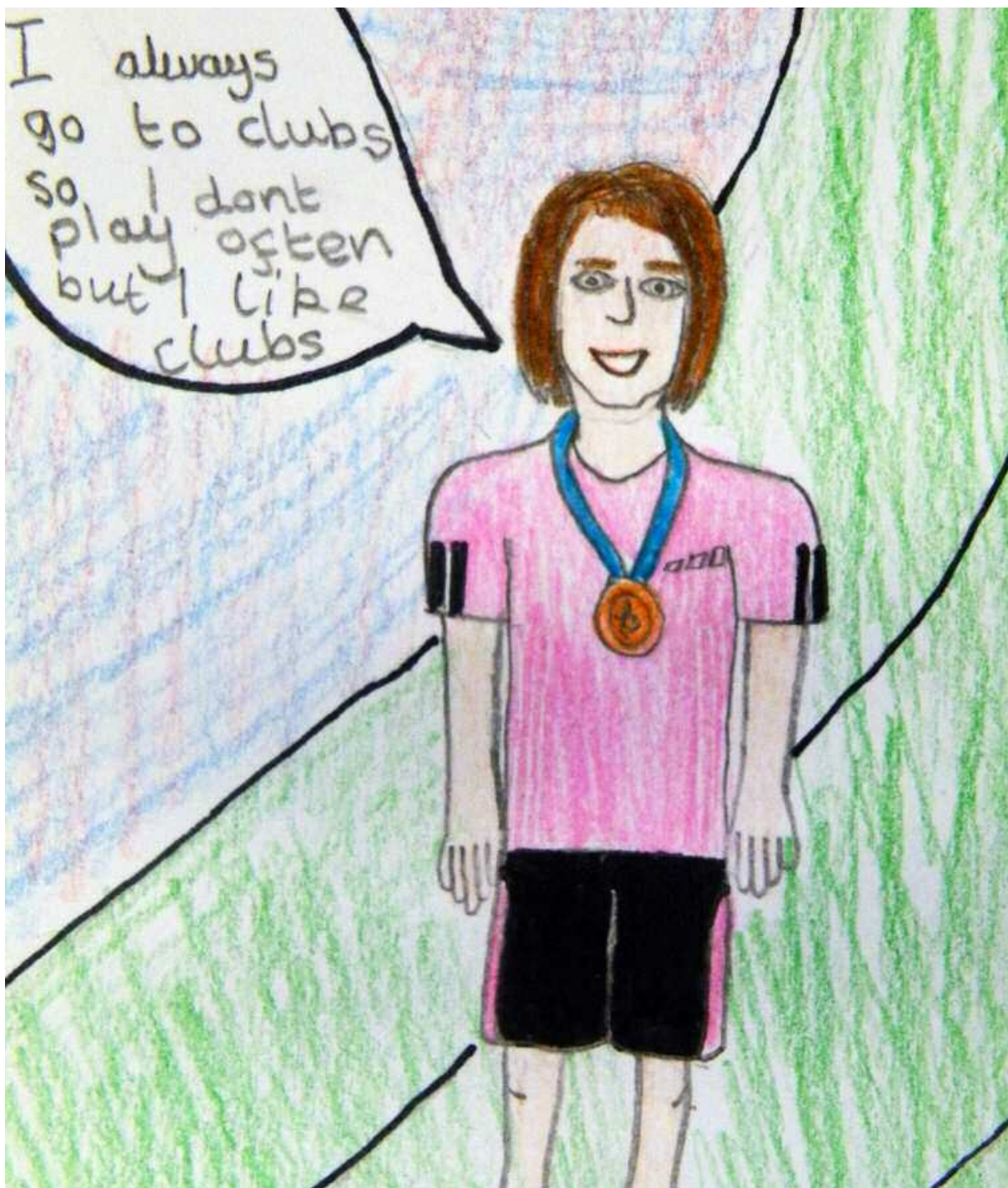
*"I'm not allowed to play in the rain; my mum worries about me catching the cold."* Girl, 4, Angus

*"You can play in the rain, if you put on your coat and wellies; you can play catching rain in a bucket, jumping in puddles, tig and tag... if it's sunny you can play anything but you need sun-cream and sunglasses."* Boy, 3, Aberdeen

## WHEN CHILDREN PLAY: REFLECTION

Children want more time for free play within their home life and at school. It seems that opportunities for play are limited by other demands including childcare arrangements, travel, organised activities and clubs and other work at school which is prioritised over play. Where adults have control over the child's schedule or choice of activities more consideration might be given to the value of free time to play.

Adults who worry about playing in all types of weather should understand that Scottish children love playing outside despite our unpredictable climate; they feel that with the right clothes all weather can and should be played in.



*"I like playing in the rain because it makes my hair spiky"*

Boy, 6, Aberdeen





# WHY PLAY IS IMPORTANT TO CHILDREN

The children discussed why they played; they identified benefits to their health, learning and relationships. They also felt it was important to have fun in their lives.

## HEALTH

Children report that playing helps you to be fit and healthy. It is also seen by children as a way to relax and to learn new things.

*"It's important to play for exercise; you'll get stiff and square eyes if you watch TV all the time."* Boy, 8, Argyll

*"You have school, clubs – you need time to relax just like adults get."* Girl, 11, Edinburgh

*"Play is important but you don't need to do it, you'd just be sad if you didn't; work is more important though."* Boy, 5, Glasgow

*"You might learn new activities like how to go a bike or a scooter."* Boy, 10, Inverness

## SOCIAL SKILLS AND FRIENDSHIPS

Developing social skills and the opportunity to make and cement friendships are also seen as important aspects of playing. This was said to be particularly important for children who didn't have siblings

*"You get to know new people say if you just moved here – playing in the park is a good way to get to know friends."* Girl, 13, Lewis

*"Playing is important because it builds friendship."* Girl, 7, Glasgow.

*"I think it's important that you go outside to play with your friends especially if you're an only child."* Boy, 9, Aberdeen

## BENEFITS FOR ADULTS

Children also recognise that their playing has some important benefits for the adults in their lives;

*"Adults probably think it's important; after all they can get peace and quiet!"* Boy, 10, Edinburgh

*"Adults think it is important so they can get out of work by playing with their children!"* Girl, 6, Wester Ross

## PLAY IS FUN

However, one of the most important reasons children like to play is because it is fun.

*"Because if you don't play, you don't get any fun."* Boy, 7, Glasgow

*"It's what makes children fun."* Girl, 8, Dunbar.

## WHY PLAY IS IMPORTANT TO CHILDREN: REFLECTION

Reflecting on their play children recognise the health and social benefits that they derive. What also emerges is a strong sense that play is a natural and essential activity and not being able to play makes children sad. A view of play as fundamental to the child's well-being is a call to all adults to understand and fulfil their responsibility to implement the child's right to play.





## A SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS FOR REFLECTION

Children's reflections on play need to be matched by equally serious consideration by adults on what they can learn from this report. At the end of each thematic section of the report these paragraphs have captured what we, as adults, might usefully consider further.

### **WHO CHILDREN PLAY WITH**

Children identify the importance of playing with others. They also identify that they can play when they are on their own. If adults want to support children's play they need to let children lose themselves in their play without expressing too many fears about safety. Adults should also consider that sometimes children appreciate when adults join in with play, so long as they don't take charge.

### **WHAT CHILDREN PLAY**

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Children want more time for free play within their home life and at school. It seems that opportunities for play are limited by other demands including childcare arrangements, travel, organised activities and clubs and other work at school which is prioritised over play. Where adults have control over the child's schedule or choice of activities more consideration might be given to the value of free time to play.

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### **WHY PLAY IS IMPORTANT TO CHILDREN**

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## STATISTICS

As part of the workshop we asked children if they agreed or disagreed with certain statements; here are some of the results:

Only **21%** of the children thought they needed toys to play.

Only **35%** of the children felt happy and safe playing in their street.

Only **45%** felt that adults thought it was important that they played.

**54%** of the children didn't feel they had a local park they could play in.

**63%** of children thought playing was important.

**70%** felt they needed their friends to play.

**79%** thought it was good to have adults around at least sometimes when they played.

# THANK YOU

We would like to thank children and staff in the following places for their involvement and support:

- Paradykes Primary School, Midlothian
- Loanhead Community Nursery, Midlothian
- Roslin After School Club, Midlothian
- Robert Gordon's College, Aberdeen
- Sunnybank Community Centre, Aberdeen
- Rosemount Nursery School, Kinross, Perth & Kinross
- Bellsmyre Schools Out Club, West Dumbartonshire
- Bounce Higher at St Andrew's Parish Church, Bo'ness, Falkirk
- Aberlour Outreach Falkirk
- Bambury Childcare, Glasgow
- Angus Council
- Rosemount Nursery School, Dollar, Clackmannanshire
- Castlegate Nursery, Kelso, Scottish Borders
- Streetwise, Castlemilk, Glasgow
- Eorpie Dunes Park, Lewis, Western Isles
- Midlothian Association of Play
- North Glasgow Arts and Regeneration Network
- Possibilities For East End Kids, Glasgow
- Dunbar Primary School, East Lothian
- Childcare Connections, Edinburgh
- Cauldeen Primary School, Highland
- Duncan Forbes Primary School, Highland
- Marybank Primary School, Highland
- Kinlochewe Primary School, Highland
- Hill of Fearn Primary School, Highland
- Mallaig Primary School, Highland
- Innellan & Toward Family Centre, Argyll & Bute
- Strone Primary School, Argyll & Bute
- Talented & Special Kids, East Lothian

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## ABOUT THE ORGANISATIONS

### THE INTERNATIONAL PLAY ASSOCIATION AND ITS WORK IN SCOTLAND

IPA is an international NGO, founded in 1961, with members in close to 50 countries. Its purpose is to protect, preserve and promote the child's right to play as a fundamental human right. IPA Scotland is a branch of IPA, which works towards the same goals and develops projects, such as this consultation, Scotland-wide and in local communities.

Internationally, IPA initiated work to raise awareness of article 31, including a request to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child for a General Comment on article 31 to elaborate on the meaning of this article and support compliance. IPA also carried out a series of Global Consultations on Children's Right to Play, consulting adults in eight countries around the world on infringements of the right to play.

**You can find out more about the work of the International Play Association here;**

[www.ipaworld.org](http://www.ipaworld.org)

**and their Scotland branch**

[www.ipascotland.org.uk](http://www.ipascotland.org.uk)

### THE CHILDREN'S PARLIAMENT

The Children's Parliament is an independent national charity whose focus is on direct work with children through their participation in a group, project, consultation or event. The Children's Parliament focuses on empowerment and participation, creating spaces where children learn and work with others to shape their lives and communities. The Children's Parliament works with children, in the context of family, school and community life to affirm the positive and aspire to do what we can to make the world a better place for ourselves and for others.

**You can find out more about the Children's Parliament's groups, consultations and events here;**

[www.childrensparliament.org.uk](http://www.childrensparliament.org.uk)



IPA(Scotland) is grateful for generous funding from Awards For All for making this project possible

