CWLWM NEWSLETTER - WINTER TERM 2024





Cwlwm Newsletter – Winter Term 2024

Welcome to the Cwlwm Winter Term Newsletter which focuses on childcare benefits, the importance of play, and the positive experiences shared by individuals who work within the early years, childcare and playwork sector!

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 are priceless: addressing parental
 perceptions of 'expensive' childcare.
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1. Positive childhood experiences are priceless: addressing parental perceptions of 'expensive' childcare.

'Extortionate childcare?'
Let's explore what you get!

Introduction:

In recent years, media outlets have been quick to paint a grim picture of childcare costs, portraying them as extortionate and burdensome for families. While it's true that childcare expenses can be a significant portion of a family's budget, it's essential to challenge the media's potrayal that childcare costs are extortionate. The benefits of childcare are well-researched and evidenced, but are often overlooked in the discussion about the cost of a session. Let's delve into the positive aspects of childcare, highlighting how these services contribute to a child's well-being and development.



Play:

As children develop, they are continually trying to make sense of the environment they live in and how they fit into the world. Play is an essential vehicle for children to explore their world, their potential, and how they manage themselves in more formal situations like education settings. Through play, children develop socialisation skills, they refine their ability to self-regulate and control their behaviours and impulses, they explore their physical capabilities and their interests, and they develop their resilience. All these are skills that help the child in their development.

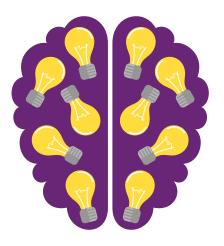
Despite changes to working patterns, it remains hard to facilitate the range and scope of play opportunities for a child whilst juggling work and childcare. All childcare settings centre play, as a learning and developmental activity, in stimulating and age-appropriate ways. The highly trained and attentive staff provide engaging invitations to play for children; the kind of activities and experiences that a child will thrive





Brain Development:

Childhood, and the early years in particular, are phases of incredible development within a child's brain. Research tells us this development is well-supported through attentive caregiving and engaging experiences. From birth and throughout childhood, the interaction between the caregiver and the child in a back-and-forth reciprocal manner helps to create positive pathways in the child's brain. As a child grows, these interactions become more



sophisticated, including both one-one interactions, and those facilitated and supported for groups of children. Every brain is born with 84 billion brain cells and across the world, the evidence continues to support the positive impact high-quality social, playful opportunities has on the brain development for children.

Socialisation and Emotional Development:

One of the main benefits of childcare is the socialisation opportunities it offers to children. In a well-structured childcare environment, children have the chance to interact with peers and other children, fostering crucial social skills. Learning to play together, share and communicate

are important factors of emotional development that are encouraged in quality childcare settings. The bonds formed during these childhood years can have a lasting impact on a child's social relationships throughout their lives. Furthermore,

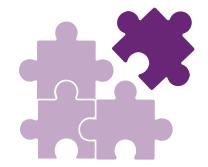
these socialisation skills and the ability to regulate emotional

responses to stimuli are the fundamental skills that help children as they develop socially, cognitively and behaviourally; starting pathways to future social and academic success.



Early Learning and Cognitive Development:

Quality childcare settings incorporate learning activities that stimulate a child's cognitive development. Engaging in age-appropriate games, music, and storytelling not only makes learning fun but also lays the foundation for future academic



success. Early exposure to structured learning environments can enhance a child's language skills, problem-solving abilities, and creativity.

Routine and Structure:

Children need routines and structures to help them develop. These allow children to develop a sense of belonging and to feel safe due to the predictable envoirment it creates. A childcare's organised routine, with regular meals, nap times, and play activities helps create a stable and predictable environment, promoting a child's overall development.



Diversity and Inclusivity:

Childcare settings often bring together children from diverse backgrounds, exposing them to different cultures and languages. Experiencing diversity early on helps children learn to appreciate and embrace differences, fostering a sense of inclusivity and global awareness. Through engaging learning and social experiences, the practitioners in childcare support the children's understanding of the world beyond the home, beyond their family

and the streets they grow-up on and enable children to understand the many and varied cultures and languages of the world.







Parental Productivity and Well-being:

While the financial aspect of childcare can be challenging for many families, it's important to consider the potential benefits for parents. Quality childcare allows parents the time and space to pursue their careers, contributing not only to the family's financial stability but also to the overall well-being of parents. Juggling work and family is difficult, but childcare can help strike a balance.

Additionally, many parents still do not know that they will probably be able to access some form of financial support from the Government to help pay for childcare costs. For the sustainability of your setting and to mitigate the impact of negative headlines, it is crucial that you go out of your way to promote the support available to them – talk to them about it, add it to your online and other advertising material, give them information when they visit! The support could be in the form of a UK Government 25% top up (up to a certain limit) when paying for childcare costs (via Tax-Tree Childcare system) up to 85% (via Universal Credit), as well as The Childcare Offer.

Sign up to Tax-Free Childcare if you're a childcare provider.

Return on Investment:

For all the reasons briefly outlined above, and more beyond the scope of this article, an important and overlooked concept for childcare is known as 'return on investment'. Childcare providers offer safe, engaging environments with a wealth of opportunities for children matched to their needs, their interests, and their developmental and cognitive abilities. Alongside safe, caring, and secure home environments, childcare provides the perfect environment and context for all children to have a positive start in life, and throughout their formative years. This helps ensure each child can reach their individual potential and the evidence shows, getting things right for children in early childhood supports their development and reduces the possibility that later and more costly interventions and support might be required to help children catch up. It's easier and cheaper on an individual, community and societal level to develop pro-social behaviours, good language competency, self-regulation skills, and set-up positive pathways for learning than it is to intervene later.



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Conclusion:

While media reports often focus on the financial strain of childcare costs, it's crucial to recognise the multitude of benefits that quality childcare provides to children and their families. Childcare plays a vital role in shaping the future of our youngest generation. As we discuss the costs, let's remember the priceless returns of happy, healthy and well-rounded children. Childcare is more than a

place children go to whilst parents go to work. It is a place well-positioned to build better brains, ignite children's imagination and to fill it with memorable experiences.



2. The Importance of Play

Playing is one of the most important parts of children's lives and as part of the <u>United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)</u>, children have a right to play! In 2004, the Welsh Government committed to using the UNCRC as the basis for its policies for children and young people and became the first country to establish this in law.



A Right to Play

Article 31 of the UNCRC tells us that every child has a fundamental right to play, rest, leisure, engage in recreational activities and free and full participation in cultural and artistic life. This article holds high importance with practitioners, who must ensure optimum time, space and permission are afforded to children to freely play and effectively develop their life skills within settings. However, the UN Committee were concerned that full recognition was not given to article 31 by governments, and General Comment 17 was introduced. This explains in detail the actions that governments must take to ensure implementation of the rights in article 31 for all children, and has three core objectives:

To promote understanding and advocate for the importance of article
 31 for children's confidence, resilience, life skills and their physical and emotional wellbeing and development.



- To ensure respect for and promote the implementation of the children's the rights under article 31, as well as all the other rights in the Convention.
- To ensure governments fulfil their obligations to consider the impact on children when they make laws and policy; and they must include children in consultation when making decisions that might affect them. It ensures that there are clear guidelines on the roles and responsibilities of the private sector, and guidelines for all individuals working with children.

General Comment 17 also reinforced the vital need for children to be given, time, space and permission to play. The International Play Association developed a useful summary of General Comment 17.

It still remains hard for children to enjoy a range and scope of play opportunities and enjoy their article 31 rights in today's busy world and whilst parents/ carers juggle work and home life. The summary referenced above cites a range of significant barriers that can exist and also specifically identifies girls and children living in poverty, with disabilities or from minority communities amongst those needing particular attention to fully realise their article 31 right.

Childcare and playwork settings are able to create and encourage time and space for children to engage in spontaneous play, recreation and creativity with a multitude of benefits. Quality play environments, support children's psychological, social, cognitive and physical development. It also supports their mental health and wellbeing.





Did you know?

 Outdoor play gives children the opportunity to develop resilience, test their physical capabilities, express themselves and build their selfconfidence, all of which contributes to their physical and emotional wellbeing.

It is important that we see the value of play both for children and adults; after all it is fun!

- Play Builds Friendships
 - playing allows children to interact with others, develop relationships, deal with conflict, and learn respect and tolerance.
- Play Builds Health and Wellbeing – being active through play helps children physically and emotionally, contributing to their health and happiness.

- Play Builds Resilience
 - playing boosts children's confidence, creativity, problem-solving skills and perseverance, enabling them to cope with stress and challenges throughout life.
- Play Builds Communities
 - playing allows children to
 learn about the world around
 them, make connections, and
 develop a sense of identity and
 belonging.



Fun Fact!

Play is not just all about the fun! Play has been found to make brains bigger. Stuart Brown (2009) reports, play helps sculpt the brain and supercharge its growth.





Benefits of Play

Written by: Debra Winney
Regional Development Manager (South Wales)



As we already know, research and many theorists across the world all evidence that children learn through play. The benefits of play are endless, and all play types contribute towards children's development in all areas. For children to be creative whilst developing their imagination, play is an essential aspect in support children's learning, development, and well-being.

Right from the start newborn babies need to have their essential needs met, from feeding, washing and changing to playtime. For healthy brain development, playing with babies is essential and gives them an opportunity to learn and explore, and especially through a sensory experience, along with





moving and copying adults, therefore adults can play a vital role by supporting and encouraging play with babies.

Giving children the time and space to explore play all contributes towards them gaining self-esteem and confidence. This gives them assurance to try out new things and problem solve. Children are inquisitive and want



to explore the world around them. They take risks during play and learn their boundaries.

Whether a child plays in a solitary way or with friends, all play helps with brain development. For those children who prefer to play independently, they make decisions on their own, as well as solving problems and doing what they are comfortable with. Some children may not feel relaxed or comfortable around other children or adults, however they still have fun and enjoying playing by themselves, being creative and learning about the environment around them and learning their likes and dislikes, and this helps them develop a sense of independence.

Children who play with others benefit from learning new experiences, sharing of ideas, exploring their own feelings as well as learning important communication skills like listening and socialising and interacting with others, which all contribute to life skills as adults.

Let's not forget the great outdoors and natural experiences! As children explore new environments and the world around them, they'll develop new skills. Physical activities will strengthen their muscles, bones and promote fitness while maintaining health and well-being. Outdoor play is a great way for children to develop sensory experiences, including the smells of the different seasons, the weather, colours, textures, and sounds. Children start to learn how to use their bodies, by running, climbing and taking challenges, which improves their gross motor skills, and strengthens connections in the brain.

There are so many benefits that children get from playing that all contribute and extend into adulthood. It's all a learning journey to build those lifelong skills and build upon physical health and emotional well-being, and of course it's fun and enjoyable.





Advocating the Right to Play

Written by: Catherine Smith Training Officer North Wales, Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs



In today's society, children are having less and less freely chosen, self-directed play and are taking part in more organised activities. As children, many of us would have experienced this freedom to choose our own play, including playing out in the street, exploring and going on adventures, building dens and playing street games with friends. Sometimes our parents didn't know where we were and more often than not, this was a good thing: whilst out on our

own, we had to make all the decisions for ourselves managing risks by crossing roads and developing independence.

This is why as Playworkers we must provide the children of today's society with the same adventures that we were able to enjoy and benefit from. We must try our best to provide a compensatory play environment, allowing children to deal with risk for themselves, as we did growing up.

Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states ALL children have the right to rest and leisure and to be able to participate freely in play and recreational activities. General Comment 17 also recognises and highlights the vital need for children to be given, time, space and permission to play (General Comments strengthen each Children's Right, raising its importance and increasing accountability among countries like Wales that have signed up to the Convention).





So how can Out of School Childcare Clubs and other playwork and childcare providers, which are underpinned by the Playwork Principles and the UNCRC, ensure that they are doing this to provide children with the best opportunities and also meet children's needs and rights?

We must endeavour to provide a quality play provision, where children are able to engage in freely chosen, self-directed play that contributes to their healthy holistic development and well-being. Playworkers should be encouraging independence, allowing the children to feel as though they are standing on their own two feet. This approach will equip children with the necessary skills to remove themselves from tricky situations, or resolve it in the best possible way as there may not always be an adult ready to step in to help. This in turn will provide better play opportunities for children enriched with the enjoyment and benefits that can be derived from risk and challenge.









Following Children's Interests and Supporting their Play

Written by: Zara Smith PACEY Advisor

In Wales there is a clear focus on the importance of following children's interests through play and child-centred practice is at the heart of the Curriculum saying that 'If we get to know the children in our setting, their development needs and their interests, we are more likely to foster enjoyment in, and positive dispositions to, learning.' It is also an approach reflected in the National Minimum Standards in Wales.

So why is following children's interests so important and what does this mean?





We have all seen a child play with something that they are interested in and fascinated with. Think about a child playing in this way; consider what you have observed and how you knew they were interested and fascinated with their play. You are probably recalling a child that you have observed to be deeply engaged, curious, enjoying themselves and having fun. This is because they are playing with



something or in a way that really interests them and consequently, they are intrinsically motivated to keep engaging with their play.

Allowing a child to follow their own interests is meaningful and relevant to young children. They are in control of what they are doing, of how they are doing it and when to change and adapt the way they are doing it. When they are around attuned adults to help, these adults observe their play and able to see appropriate opportunities to extend and scaffold their play or provide additional resources to the play environment, ensuring that children are develop stretch their knowledge and understanding and increase their skills.

This is learning at its best and this is why following children's interests is so important for their learning and development.

Our role, as childcare and early years practitioners, is to ensure that our setting is providing an environment that ensures children get the maximum benefit from their interest-led play. This learning environment includes both the physical environment, indoors and out, but also includes the emotional environment. The physical learning environment should incorporate children's interests, whilst also being engaging, challenging, well-resourced. Where the learning environment is purposefully thought out and planned, so the available continuous provision meets children's needs and interests, helping them to grow, learn and develop. Take a look at our <u>Spotlight on Inspiring Environments</u> for a collection of ideas and inspiration and a toolkit for settings.



#ReflectOn

Are we really looking for children's genuine interests and incorporating them within our learning environment or are relying on what we think or hope these interests are, perhaps because that is what the children seemed to enjoy last year?



To ensure the setting is emotionally supportive, the adults who are working with the children need to be kind, caring, attuned to the children, skilled at providing high quality interactions and responsive to children's needs. These adults create is a comfortable happy atmosphere at the setting which helps children feel safe, secure, valued, and important.

So, how do you know what children are interested in, particularly children who are new to your setting? For children joining your setting, there are opportunities to capture this information throughout all phases of the registration and induction process. Remember that parents and carers know their children, are their enduring educator and are best placed to share this information with you, but don't forget to capture the child's voice. Mostly importantly of course, the children themselves will be telling us lots about their interests. Some children will be able to vocalise this, but we simply need to watch and listen to find out what children like, enjoy and are interested in. Once you have captured this information, you can use it to ensure that you are planning great learning environments that inspire, interest and challenge children.

In conclusion, ensuring that we understand and know children's interests, means that we can adjust and adapt our learning environment that helps children to learn and develop. Play does not only facilitate the best kind of learning, but it is also a fundamental right of childhood: Article 31 of United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child states that every child has the right to play. Play Wales' vision is one of 'A future where play is valued in Wales for being crucial to a healthy and happy childhood. A country where children can freely explore, discover, develop and grow through play.'



3. Workforce Case Studies

A Day in the Life of a Playwoker: meet Sam Gocher

My name is Sam and I am the Manager of Little Disciples Childcare based in Penymynydd, Flintshire. Our setting provides a breakfast club, wrap around care, after school club and holiday club for children from 3-11 years of age.

When I was a child, I always enjoyed riding my bike around the lanes in our village with my friends and playing in the local park. I always knew from a young age I wanted to work with children. Seeing the children achieve, have fun, and share their ideas always puts a smile on everyone's face!

Play is so important for children and young people as it provides a foundation for their social skills, promotes their imagination and creativity, and is essential for their physical and emotional wellbeing. I absolutely love observing children utilise loose parts resources to enrich their play opportunities indoors and outdoors.





In our setting, we pride ourselves on providing excellent wellbeing opportunities for children. Providing activities and opportunities to chat about the children's wellbeing, allows them to express themselves, build resilience and cope with challenges to support their mental wellbeing.

On a typical day, as soon as I arrive at our setting, I work with staff to ensure that the play space is set up as a safe and stimulating place to optimise the children's play, also ensuring that daily risk assessments are completed. We then welcome our children into the hall, complete the register and talk about what indoor and outdoor play opportunities and activities the children would like to access.

During the session, we ensure that we support the children in their play and respond to any play cues. We also respond to any questions and provide additional resources to enhance their play experiences.

When children are collected, we communicate with parents/carers, providing feedback about the child's day, any important messages and their achievements. At the end of the play session, we always evaluate and reflect on the activities provided and free play opportunities, taking into consideration feedback from children. We also make sure the setting is clean and ready for the next day.

I have been working in the playwork sector for 15 years and I started my career working in a primary school. I was asked if I would like to apply for a job as a relief playworker and was successful. This role became permanent and I grasped opportunities to access qualifications, firstly achieving a Level 2 in Childcare, Learning and Development and then a Level 3 in Playwork. This enhanced my practice and also allowed me to further develop my career prospects. I became a manager 9 years ago.

My career advice would be to have fun, play, and laugh with the children. Working in the playwork sector is really rewarding, fun and uplifting.



A day in the life of a Cylch Meithrin Leader: meet Carrie Guest

The day usually starts at 8.00am when I go and get the snacks that we are due to have for that week. I will then arrive at the cylch setting around about 8.30am. At this point, I will risk assess the indoors and outdoors before the children arrive. I will then put the snack away checking the fridge temperature. Staff will arrive approximately 8.50am, at this point I will do a brief welfare check with the staff ensuring that they are ok, and then we will discuss what needs doing for the day, activities for the children and the various duties we are all responsible for within the day, e.g.

- Nappies/toilets
- Snack time
- Staff in the room full time

Children will arrive at 9.00am and all staff greet the children and parents. It is at this point that some parents may want a chat with me about things that have gone on at home, ask about more hours in the cylch, or just sometimes they just want a general chat.





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We will then do amser cylch all together before going on to do activities and free play. I will take this opportunity, if I'm on snack or nappies duties, to check emails and respond to anything that needs doing as well as catching up on paperwork. I will also take this time to advertise Cylch Shotton as well as advertising Ti a Fi Shotton. I'll complete some observations, send parent packs out and spend time claiming for children funding as well as sorting out fees. During the free play, it is my job to role model good practice within the setting and ensure that all children and staff are happy within our environment.

At lunch time we all sit together and have our lunch with the afternoon children and model the Welsh language while encouraging healthy eating. We will then have amser cylch with the afternoon children before going to do our free play and activities.

At the end of the day, children will be picked up by parents or carers, and it's at this point some parents will approach me to keep me updated about problems they may be having at home or outside of school which may affect the children within the setting. They may also have some queries about the funding for childcare, or they may just need someone to listen to them and be a support.

Once the children have all gone home, the staff and I will have a run down on how the day has gone, and if there is anything that we may need to discuss in the staff meetings held on a Thursday. I will then ensure that the room is shut down and ready for the cleaner to come in, so that we are ready for a new day in the cylch!

Explore NDNA's <u>#Firstfiveyears count campaign</u> which was launched to celebrate the early years sector and all they do to make the first five years of a child's life count. There are toolkits, hints and tips to encourage people into the early years sector.



4. The Professional Registration of the Childcare and Playwork Workforce

The Deputy Minister for Social Services has <u>announced</u> the launch of the Welsh Government <u>consultation</u> on professional registration of the childcare and playwork workforce.

The consultation is seeking views from those managing or working in childcare and playwork settings across Wales on some fundamental questions regarding whether the childcare and playwork sector should have a workforce register and if so, who should be included in that register.

The full consultation document outlines what a workforce register is, how it could impact the childcare and playwork sector and proposes who should have to join a register.

All of those working in the sector are encouraged to respond to the consultation providing their views by the closing date of **7 March 2024**. FAQs are also available.





5. The Structure of the School Year



Welsh Government <u>want your views</u> on proposals to amend school term dates. So that terms are more equal in length, with more evenly distributed breaks, for maintained schools in Wales.

A <u>consultation</u> opened on 21 November on changing the school calendar, so breaks are spread out more evenly, including a 2-week half term autumn break.

The current school calendar means that the autumn term is longer than others. Research suggests this term is tiring and challenging for learners and staff, as more teaching is squeezed into this term than any other.

The number of days of school holidays and teaching days will not change.

Under the new proposal, a week would be taken from the start of the summer break and added to the October break, so that staff and learners get more time to rest during the long autumn term.

Teachers and pupils will still get 13 weeks of break, but some will be moved so they happen when they provide the most benefit.



These changes would be made from September 2025, meaning schools would get a two-week break in October 2025 and a five-week summer break in 2026

The consultation will also explore additional changes that could be taken forward in the future, but not from 2025. These changes include the option of moving a second week from the summer break and adding it to the Whitsun break. This would help make terms similar lengths and make the summer term more consistent, making it easier for pupils to learn and teachers to plan.

Easy Read



Consultation on the school year

What do you think?



This document was written by Welsh Government. It is an accessible version of: Consultation on the school year.

November 2023

Keeping the spring break at a constant midpoint and separating it from Easter would make the term more consistent. Easter Monday and Good Friday public holidays would still apply, teaching time for these days would be made up elsewhere in the year.

Please consider the impact on you, your service and the children and families you care for, including learners well-being and fatigue, those with additional learning needs, socio-economically disadvantaged learners and supporting development of the Welsh language.

Please see <u>Consultation documents</u> and how to respond. Submit your views by **12 February 2024**



6. WeCare Wales

WeCare Wales is supporting the next generation of our childcare workforce. By dispelling myths and showcasing career progression routes, we hope to attract more people with the right skills and values to work in care in Wales.





Free training

We are offering an **Introduction to childcare** for people interested in working in the sector. The two-day online programme is available for anyone living in Wales. The training covers the essentials needed to start working with children such as communication, safeguarding and working practices:

WeCare.wales/training/

Supporting employers

Do you have vacancies to fill? If so, why not advertise them for free on the WeCare Wales jobs portal? We promote our jobs portal on TV, social media, through print and digital advertising.

If you'd like your job vacancy to appear free of charge on the portal, please register and create a profile on our website:

WeCare.wales/submit-job



Apprenticeships

Have you thought about offering an apprenticeship programme in your setting?

The WeCare Wales website has information about the value of apprenticeships and the benefits of recruiting apprentices into your workforce:

WeCare.wales/apprenticeships/



We're looking for people who can motivate and inspire people to make a difference by considering a career in care.

WeCare Ambassadors can be at any career level but must be confident, committed, and good communicators.

This role is voluntary and requires employer's support:

WeCare.wales/ambassadors



Gofalwn | WeCare .wales





7. Flying Start Expansion– Thank You

As the Flying Start Phase 2 expansion plans progress, it's important to acknowledge the hard work of Local Authorities and providers. Through dedication and effort, 3817* additional childcare places have been offered within a Flying Start setting since April 2023. The impact of this expansion will make a real difference to many families across Wales.

*Financial year to date up to and including October 2023.



8. Choosing Childcare Booklet and Poster

Have you seen the choosing childcare booklet? You can access the simple guide to help parents choose childcare in Wales here.

There is also a useful <u>poster</u> that you may like to display in your setting.



www.cwlwm.org.uk

The Cwlwm partnership consists of the following organisations:



CLYBIAU PLANT CYMRU KIDS' CLUBS

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EARLY YEARS WALES



MUDIAD MEITHRIN



NDNA CYMRU



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