

IPA – International Play Association: Promoting the Child's Right to Play

The IPA is the only worldwide multidisciplinary organisation devoted to the promotion of children's play as a fundamental right under Article 31 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child. It is open to all who are working to improve the quality of children's play. Sugradh is the national correspondent for Ireland on the IPA Council. At the Berlin World Conference last year each member state promised to double its membership by the time of the next conference in Hong Kong in 2008. For this we need 10 IPA members in Ireland for us to be the National Representative body for the IPA in Ireland.

Sugradh attended the IPA Council meeting in Bournemouth in September, where we gave a presentation on play for children with disabilities. Play projects from around the world were outlined, from a play bus in India, play in hospitals in Hong Kong, adventure playgrounds in Japan and toy libraries in Argentina.

The Playrights magazine, published twice a year, provides information for the IPA membership about developments within the IPA itself, but also on play projects from around the world, providing an opportunity for communication between members and discussion of key issues in the world of children's play. The recent issue includes an article on play and disadvantage in Romania and discusses the power of play in the face of material deprivation. It supports the view that play deprivation is a more serious problem than material disadvantage. The lesson learned is to avoid simplistic explanations between child development and the child's economic status. Children with a stimulating play environment and supportive families are likely to make the most of their existence. Other articles include city farms in Germany, play in the natural landscape, principles for playworkers, and an account of the 16th IPA World Conference in Berlin.

Playrights E-Journal provides a scientific base of information on children's play and provides a means for researchers to share their work as well as providing a tool for play advocates in their promotion of the importance of play. The journal can be accessed via the ipa website, www.ipaworld.org. The latest edition includes papers on:

“Cultural change and play – schools misunderstanding of teenage knowledge”,

“Child's Play is God's Stuff”

“Engaging Mind and Body –the case for a constructivist theory playground”

“Play of Japanese pre-schoolers”

Please join the IPA, a membership form is enclosed, and support play advocacy throughout the world

Forthcoming Events:

Next Knowledge Forum Tuesday 7th November 2006

- Who designs our playgrounds?
- Could they be better?
- How can we get them designed better?

You are very welcome to come along and join in the informal discussion.

At 5.30pm on 7th Nov. at 159 Capel St. Dublin 1

(Walk up from the Liffey and we are on the left with a red door marked Dublin City Council)

Sugradh Annual General Meeting

All members and people who would like to join are requested to attend this short meeting following the Knowledge Forum. (see above)

At 7.15 pm on 7th Nov. at 159 Capel St. Dublin 1
(Walk up from the Liffey and we are on the left with a red door marked Dublin City Council)



Play ireland

The newsletter of Súgradh: Ireland's national play forum

Autumn 2006

Welcome to the autumn issue of Play Ireland.

The aim of the Newsletter is to provide a forum for those interested in play in Ireland – parents, playworkers, children, teachers, everyone...

In this issue we are pleased to announce two key projects, the launch of the National Play Resource Centre and Ireland's first National Play Day. Outcomes of our Knowledge Fora are also included. Our thanks go to the People in Need Trust for funding this newsletter.



Sugradh is an independent charity supported by donations, member's fees and commissioned work. Membership is open to individuals and bodies that support the child's right to play. Current members include play providers, local authorities, children's organisations, community groups and parents. A membership brochure enclosed, please support Sugradh and encourage others to join.

Springfields, Ballywaltrim Lane,
Bray, co Wicklow
www.playireland.ie
email: sugradh@indigo.ie

National Play Resource Centre

This year has seen the launch of the National Play Resource Centre, a joint project of Súgradh and the IPPA. We are delighted to welcome Steve Goode, the Play Executive Officer of the Resource Centre. The National Play Resource Centre was launched by the Minister for Children, Brian Lenihan, TD on 28th June in Merrion Square Park. Key guests at the launch were children from a local primary school who invited the Minister to join them in their games. Dublin City Council organised a number of play activities including the hugely popular parachute game.



Minister for Children, Brian Lenihan, with young guests on Merrion Square.

The Minister praised the work of the centre which included an audit of playgrounds in the country.



Back L-R: Steve Goode, Play Executive Officer and Margaret Webb, Sugradh. Front L-R: Evelyn McGrath, IPPA Chairperson, Paul O'Toole, Young People's Forum, and Irene Gunning, IPPA CEO.

Children have been invited also to comment on their local playground.

An informative website has been set up at www.playireland.ie. The aim of the centre is to be a focal point for information on play and to assist the play development officers in local authorities.

Anne O'Brien spoke about the importance of the centre and also launched the National Play Day that was held in July. Miriam O'Callaghan closed the day and spoke about the benefits of play for the family.

Our thanks are due to Dublin City Council for kindly allowing the park to be used.

National Play Day

A very significant play event took place in Ireland on Sunday 16th July this year. Thousand of children with their families got out and played to mark National Play Day.

Initiated by Dublin City Council in 2005 the idea was expanded this year by the local authorities in 5 other counties and coordinated by the National Play Resource Centre. Those counties were South Dublin, Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown, Laois, Wexford and Louth. Local community groups got involved in some to the events.

The idea was to draw attention to the fact that children want and need active participative play in the outdoors. The day was made up of opportunities for children to get dirty, make things, dress up, and generally exhaust themselves.

Many events for children in this country over recent years have been made up of entertainment where children's involvement was inclined to be passive. Play Day was to have the opposite atmosphere with messy play, creative play, traditional street games, pillow fights, obstacle courses etc.

The whole thing was designed so that any community or groups of parents could replicate it on their own street or in the local park on the day or any time during the summer. A web page gave ideas for activities www.playinireland.ie and Dublin City Council produced a booklet giving ideas and information for communities who may want to organise an event for more than just their own children. www.dublincity.ie/living.

Events like Play Day can put children's play needs in the public arena and the groups involved intend to stimulate discussion and commitment to those needs. Next year we are hoping that many other councils, community and voluntary groups will join in and make National Play Day even bigger.

Knowledge Forum – a new development in sharing experiences

The purpose of Sugradh's Knowledge Fora is to inform ourselves of subjects relevant and current to children's play. We welcome any others who are interested to join us in these discussions, which have proved to be useful and informative.

Childcare into After-School Hours

The Forum in March was on the subject of play and the increasing extension of childcare into after school hours. The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform set up a National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee who reported in June of 2005 with guidelines for the development of quality school age childcare in Ireland. These guidelines include a comprehensive list of aspects that are needed to provide good quality childcare.

Phil Lynch from the IPPA, the Early Childhood Organisation, told us that they were collaborating with Barnardos to look at various aspects of the situation and the IPPA has been given the task of preparing a proposal for a VTEC level 5 course for people interested in working in childcare for the after school age children.

Our concerns in Sugradh are that children need free play and how adequately can childcare services cater for children's play needs? Children all too often are not allowed to run around in school. The guidelines state that after school services would have to have access to outdoor space but it is not quantified. A small square of soft surface or a plain bit of concrete will not cater for the imaginative or adventurous needs of a lively eight or nine year old.

In the United States after school childcare has to have an academic emphasis which, in our opinion, devalues play and leaves the child less time to play freely, to socialise and explore their neighbourhood or learn in more creative ways. There is an increasing development of 'wrap around' care in the United Kingdom also with breakfast and after school sessions taking up the whole day. Research shows that play seems to be the first thing to be cut from school curricula, but these activities may be more important for child development than the academic subjects the children are doing.

If children, particularly older ones, are in childcare all day and then driven to sports or other activity sessions by parents, do they ever feel like they have their own space or time to explore their surroundings or learn how to occupy themselves by themselves?

The motivation behind the many new childcare services that are being developed is coming from the needs of the economy and not from the needs of children. The agencies and individuals developing the guidelines may have the interests of children at heart but there seems to be little understanding of the vital role of free play in child development. However, Sugradh, would question whether adequate funding or standards will materialise into a service that will cater for children's after school needs with good quality play environments.

Sugradh consider that effective after school provision should have:

- a staff of trained play workers, not teachers or child carers
- open access free play staffed facilities
- funding for staff
- adventure playgrounds
- landscaped open space
- an environment for children to be challenged in terms of their development.

Anne O'Brien

Planning for Play, Knowledge Forum. May

While the topic was on planning, many of the issues revolved around maintenance and it was felt that to some extent, these problems could be reduced at the planning stage. There are serious issues now arising with maintenance, partly due to local authorities claiming that they have no budget for looking after playgrounds, although this may get short shrift from the Minister for the Environment, who claims that local authorities are "awash with money", funny if it was not so serious, but also from the length of time it takes playground companies to respond to orders for replacement parts, sometimes up to a year. A supply of spare parts is now being asked for by local authorities before a playground is handed over. Such a request would be essential for communities who have to look after their own playgrounds. A maintenance programme from companies with initial training to staff and a contract for perhaps quarterly checks is also being requested by some authorities. A data base on good equipment was suggested.

A good design brief is essential, rather than leaving it all up to the supplier to come up with something at a price. The play equipment is only the furniture in the room, the wider play environment should also be considered. The focus should be on creating an attractive place for children to meet, rather than an emphasis on equipment. Play value is a key aspect - how many activities can take place on a piece of equipment. A play value checklist for equipment and the wider setting of play may be downloaded from the RoSPA website, www.rospaplaysafety.com. What does it feel like as a play environment should be the key question. It was felt that we are making playgrounds too small, through a desire to keep costs down, and sites need to be more spread out to include more natural space so children can get more exercise.

The next Knowledge Forum will be held on Tuesday 7th November at 5.30 at 159, Capel Street, Dublin 1, followed by the Sugradh AGM at 7.15. Our topic will be playground design – all are welcome.

Irish Play Safety Forum

It is widely accepted that play and risk is essential for child development, yet opportunities for play are being increasingly restricted. In addition, areas designated for play are being designed to reduce risk to such a level that it significantly reduces their play value. One reason for this is the fear of litigation and the costs of insurance. Many schools have banned running in the playground for this reason. The effects of reduced activity are being seen with the increase in child obesity.

It is planned to set up an Irish Play safety Forum to address the issues effecting risk, play value and safety in children's play. The Forum will be led and supported by the national Play Resource Centre and will include representatives from central government, Local Authorities, the safety sector, childcare and play sectors, insurance industry and playground manufacturers.

The aim of the Forum is to provide the major stakeholders in this area a place for discussion so as to identify the key factors effecting children's play in Ireland. The Forum will produce an agreed Play Safety Statement that can be used to influence policy decisions, the design of play areas and children's play opportunities in schools/childcare. It is planned that the Forum will have its first meeting in the New Year. If you have any comments on the work of the Forum, please contact Steve Goode at www.playinireland.ie.

Study Tour of Playgrounds in Berlin

In March this year a number of us were invited to visit the Sik Holz play equipment factory to the east of Berlin, the visit proved to be thought provoking. Sik Holz have been making playground equipment for many years and it is distributed in Ireland by The Children's Playground Company. The equipment is made from the wood of Robinia, or false acacia from natural forests in Brandenburg and Hungary. The wood is very tough and has a naturally high resistance to decay so it does not need chemical treatment. It is also very resistant to cutting, burning and general vandalism so is an ideal material to use for play equipment. Because of its toughness, the natural shape of the timber is retained while it is being worked. This gives the equipment a natural charm and playfulness which lends itself to developing a theme and a unique creativity to playground design.



A tour of the manufacturing process was followed by a presentation about the company and its approach to play and a discussion of the issues that we face in Ireland in relation to playgrounds. We found the whole atmosphere to be very creative and playful and we all wanted a 'witches house' mini-office back home.

The following day we visited some of their playgrounds in Berlin. These were most inspiring and seemed to be well used. One very large playground was themed on the Arabian Nights, in a Turkish area of Berlin, and was packed with families. It was fascinating to see how the designs and layout of the playground encouraged children to use their imaginations, which is at the heart of good play, rather than just the usual swinging and climbing.

In Ireland, The Children's Playground Company is producing some of the most innovative playgrounds in the country, with examples in Tullamore, Tymon Park in Tallaght, Castlecomer, Thomastown and Deerpark in Dun Laoghaire. These have been remarkably free from vandalism and are very popular with the children. For further information see: www.thechildrensplayground.com and www.sik-holz.de

The visit gave us much food for thought as Anne O'Brien describes "I was shocked by the difference between the way in which we as a nation and the Berliners cater for the play needs of children. In a relatively disadvantaged area we saw a wonderful playground built in Robinia wood with lots of imagination and huge variety of play pieces. The most fascinating part for me was that the safety surface here, and indeed in all the playgrounds we saw, was sand.

Plentiful, beautiful clean sand, that was in itself, providing many creative play opportunities. There were several groups or single children pouring, piling

or making designs with the sand. Older children as well as the younger ones were busily lost in their imagination.

Every where you turned in this playground there was another piece of equipment that had not been obvious when you entered. This was because it was built in wood and the frames of the equipment melted into its wooded background. There are no playgrounds half as big as this in Ireland or with such a relaxed and comfortable feel about them.

There was not a cigarette butt, waste paper or empty can anywhere to be seen, let alone a discarded syringe. Dogs are kept out of children's playgrounds as a matter of course.

There is a culture in Germany that says our children deserve good quality play areas, we are responsible enough to keep them clean and we do not claim when a minor accident, which is part of growing up, happens to a child. This means that the priority and the funds that are allocated to children's play are higher and they are concentrated on the quality equipment rather than expensive surfaces and litigation.

Why do we continue to have dirty streets and parks, have small and often unimaginative playgrounds for our children? Why are we afraid to use wood, which can be very hardwearing and feels lovely? Why are we so afraid to install sand or wood chip that provide play items in and of themselves as well as provide a safety surface. Why do we allow dogs, dirt, or anti social behaviour to limit the standards and variety of our children's play opportunities?"



Insurance

A note from Dara McGuigan in Clare County Council raises some hope for community groups who are looking for insurance for their playground. "The National Council for Community and Voluntary Bodies has entered into an agreement with BHP insurance brokers regarding providing insurance cover for the activities of community and voluntary groups, including the management and maintenance of playgrounds. The quotations received by community groups here in Clare have been very competitive. The County Council has required that the level of Public Liability cover meets the recommendations of their insurers (IPBML - generally €6.5m)".

Child Protection in Play

We all need to ensure that the people we employ or who volunteer to work with children in our care are as suitable to have continuous and close access to children and young people and that their management practices are conducive to child protection. Accessing Garda clearance is one hurdle, but accessing a background check on someone from the UK has been difficult. However, one route is to work through the organisation Fair Play for Children. It is a Registered Umbrella Body with the Criminal Records Bureau and thus is able to carry out Enhanced CRB Disclosures. For further information, contact: fairplay@arunet.co.uk