

Ensuring the Sustainability of Investment in Play

In recent year's we have seen an increase in the awareness by Government of the importance of Play for children, young people and families. BIG Lottery Funding and the more recent Playbuilder and Play Pathfinder initiatives have started to address the quality of play provision that was available.

In 2008, the Government launched its National Play Strategy and 10 year plan to make this country the best in the world for children to grow up. This was backed by £235 million to develop 3500 play areas over a 3 year period.

The first phase of this initiative (Year 1 - approx 500 play areas) has resulted in an 8% increase in the satisfaction levels with parks and play areas from the Tellus4 survey¹ (NI 199). The API believes that this can be hugely increased in future years through continued investment.

Research by University College London² found that outdoor and unstructured play is one of the best forms of exercise for children and that play provided children with more calorific benefit than any exercise other than PE classes.

There is evidence that the provision of high quality, well maintained play areas can significantly benefit the health and fitness of children. Our briefing paper "The Politics of Play" outlines the importance of play, not only to children, but to families and the wider community. In particular we would like to highlight the following areas:-

- Play keeps children fit and healthy
- Play helps children develop their sense of risk
- Active children become fitter and healthier adults³

Play therefore needs to be linked to both the sport and health agendas as it has the potential to increase participation in sport and therefore reduce future healthcare costs through a healthier and fitter next generation.

The API believes that regular funding of play is essential and will have many benefits for children, families and communities. The best way to achieve this is, particularly in the current climate, is for funding for play facilities to become a statutory requirement at a local authority level. Such a statutory budget requirement would ensure that play facilities were of the highest quality, well maintained and used by local communities. Our children would be able to enjoy new and richer play experiences in a safe and appropriate environment.

¹ Statistical Release 11.02.2010 Local Authority Measures for National Indicators supported by the Tellus4 survey. Further details available at: www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/STR/index.shtml

² Making children's lives more active paper 2004: <http://www2.cege.ucl.ac.uk/cts/research/chcaruse/trandh87.pdf>

³ World Cancer Research Fund: www.wcrf-uk.org/preventing_cancer/children_health/activity.php