

Creating a Play-Friendly Community with Children

A Report on a Participatory-Ethnographic Research





Authors: Silvia Veiga-Seijo, Children Participants, Sarah Kantartzis and Jeanne Jackson.

The children co-researchers and authors are: Aarvi, Adam, Alba, Alfie, Alice, Ava, Callum, Cassie, Kian, Noah, Ruben, Sanvika, Sophie, Summer, Viktor, Willow and Zuza.

Silvia Veiga-Seijo, occupational therapist, doctoral candidate (MSCA fellow) at Queen Margaret University (Edinburgh) and University College Cork (Ireland), P4PLAY programme.

Dr. Sarah Kantartzis, senior lecturer, Queen Margaret University, P4PLAY programme, supervisor.

Prof. Jeanne Jackson, University College Cork, P4PLAY programme, supervisor.

Editor: Silvia Veiga-Seijo

Publisher: Queen Margaret University (Edinburgh, Scotland)

Published: 2023

ISBN: 978-1-3999-7448-6

DOI:

How to cite: Veiga-Seijo, S., Children Participants, Kantartzis, S., Jackson, J. (2023). *Creating a Play-Friendly community with Children: A Report on a Participatory-Ethnographic Research*. Queen Margaret University.

Corresponding author: Silvia Veiga-Seijo. Email: silviaveigasei@gmail.com



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. CC BY-NC-SA 4.0:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>



Funding: The P4PLAY project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 861257.

P4PLAY is a European Joint Doctorates programme in Occupational Science for Occupational Therapists to enabling play.

Funding of the film and local community event: East Lothian Play Association, partner organisation of this research project.

Contents



- 1 Key messages from the children**
 - 2 Welcome to our stories and project**
 - 3 How did we do it?**
 - 4 What did we find out about play?**
 - 5 What do we want?**
 - 6 What actions did we take?**
 - 7 What did this project mean for the children?**
 - 8 Adults' views**
 - 9 Research project**
 - 10 Conclusions and key recommendations**
 - 11 Support from policy-makers**
- 

Key messages from the children

- **"Everyone plays different here"** *Climber*
- **"Play is dying"** *Xbox*
- **"Some people are sad because they have no one to play with"** *Teen-Titans*
- **"There is nothing to do here"** *Sandwich*
- **"It is not safe to play out anymore"** *Phoenix*
- **"We don't want our fields to disappear"** *Cookie*
- **"Parents don't let children go to play"** *Blue*
- **"Things are broken, this is ruined, gloomy, dirty and rusty!"** *Crystal*
- **"People are really mean"** *Star*
- **"We nearly got run over by... by bikes"** *Doctor Investigator*
- **"We go to other parks cause it is more fun and there are children to play with"** *Investigator Sum*
- **"People have been racist to me because I'm from different countries"** *Xbox*
- **"You are a girl, you are too weak, not allowed to play"** *Snowflake*
- **"I think that people have too many things to do"** *Gressys*

- **"Everyone should be able to play"** *Climber*
- **"What we want is all children to play all together in the community and improve play in Whitecraig"** *Doctor Investigator*
- **"We want more people in Whitecraig to play with"** *Crystal II*
- **"Children are allowed to make a decision for themselves cause sometimes adults just make their decisions"** *Snowflake*
- **"We want the place to be more safe for us to go"** *Phoenix*
- **"We want a magical enchanted place to play"** *Cookie* and **"playful streets"** *Investigator Sum*
- **"Colourful choc-choc train for the kids to go to the park safer for welcoming children to play"** *Footballer*
- **"We need to make it fair for younger kids in Whitecraig"** *Teen-Titans & Star*
- **"Stop racism and bullying"** *Sandwich* and **"Girls are not weak"** *Doctor Investigator*
- **"You need to be respectful"** *Crystal II* and **"We want children to play more nicely"** *Rainbow*
- **"Upgrade the park for more kids coming to play"** *Purple*
- **"Because this is the best place to be"** *Footballer*



Welcome to our stories and project

This report is an outcome of the research “Creating a Play-Friendly Community with Children”, carried out by Silvia Veiga-Seijo (PhD student) with 17 children co-researchers aged between 5 and 12. The research project aimed to look into the perspectives of children and community members for developing a play-friendly community in Whitecraig (East Lothian, Scotland). The report was co-created with the children alongside Silvia, and it is founded on children’s voices and perspectives: **our voices, stories, and experiences of doing and living the project together.**

The motivation for writing this collaborative report emerged after celebrating a local community event organised and led by the children participants in their school. During this event, children presented their perspectives of play through a puppet show and two songs to families, community residents, school staff, stakeholders, and policy-makers. After their presentation, the children led a discussion on a question of great importance to them: “how are we going to help” with their call to action to play together in their community and make play better for everyone. Adults and policy-makers highlighted the need of elaborating a written report on the children’s perspectives and share it with both East Lothian Council and the Scottish Government. Likewise, the community suggested “spread the word of this amazing work to other parts of Scotland”. This report attempts to respond to these needs as part of these collective endeavors and actions.

How to read this report? This project is child-led and developed with the children, who are also authors of this report. For this reason, first, we present how we did the project together and what we found out, led by children’s voices. Then, we describe the further actions developed alongside the children and the community, the future steps, and what the project meant for the children. Adults’ views, including those of families, school staff, stakeholders and policy-makers, are presented. In a second part of this report, we give further information about the research project: its theoretical underpinnings as well as our developing understandings of community play. Finally, conclusions and key recommendations for policy and practice are outlined.

This report aims to reach beyond academic audiences, including children and communities (the general public), stakeholders, organisations, and policy-makers.



Welcome to our stories and project

Who are we? "We are children from different cultures, from different countries, and with different play" (*Snowflake*). *Crystal II* proposed "How about we say our names first, so they know us much more and then we talk about everything else? They need to know us first, we can all write our real names here". Children authors of this report are:

Ruben Zuza ♥ Summer Cassie Mba Camm Adam Aarui Kiah
 noah Alsie Viktor Shopie Ava Sahvika Alice Willow

Why this report? For children, the aims of the report and the films (songs and puppet show) are:

- To take action and make a better place to play in their community considering their wishes, needs, and dreams.
- To be listened to and heard, but also be acknowledged, included, and supported during decision making processes about their lives by their community, Council and Scottish Government.
- To make people think more about children's rights and make them true.
- To share the experience of this project with children, communities and schools in other villages, cities, countries; so they can make their own project.
- To help children play and be happy in order to improve kids' lives.

A **child-friendly version** of this report is represented in the **films**. Children decided to create two songs and a puppet show for reaching policy-makers (Council, Scottish Government) and other children "from other countries of the world". Watch here the films:

www.youtube.com/@CreatingAPlayFriendlyCommunity

How did we do it?

This project is a community-based participatory research. The children, as experts in play, were the protagonists leading the research and making decisions about the process. Through a rights-based collaborative approach, the intention was to understand with children their wishes, priorities, and actions that the community should make to move forward the play opportunities that children and the community need. Therefore, the project was based on listening and understanding children's needs. The initial methodology was co-created with an Advisory Expert Group based on East Lothian Play Association (ELPA). We undertook the next phases.

Building alliances and partnerships with the community

First, Silvia participated in Pop Up sessions organised by ELPA in the community. ELPA facilitated the contact with the school and the local community centre. The researcher participated in diverse events in the community and volunteered in the community centre to meet people and engage with the community.



With a huge and colourful magnifying glass, she went to the school and introduced herself and the project to all children in every classroom. All children received a flyer with the details of the initial meetings presentations to introduce the project. Finally, two initial meetings to introduce the project were held at the community centre. Some children and families came along to learn about the project, and to sign up to take part.

Walking, knocking and “opening” doors: Dreaming of being together to research our play

When the first children joined the project, Silvia asked them how we can research play in the community. Children’s response was that they wanted “**more children to come and join the project to play together**”.

We started researching play in the community by **PLAYING**. Through the doing of play, children taught the researcher the process of building relationships with the community, the value of listening, sharing everyday doings, time and space. The doing of play led by the children entailed a collaborative community engagement process that fostered trust and allyship.

Children suggested **walking through the community and knocking on people’s doors** to explain the project and invite children and families to join. Children created proactively their own flyers to encourage participation (examples on the right), leading the process of engaging and involving the community. Families supported this process.



This process reflects how children advocated for their right to **play together** since the beginning, doing **activism** in their community to drive change.

It also shows **collective ways of doing the project**: building the project day-to-day, doing the project together as a team, sharing moments, energies, emotions, and everyday doings, and sharing decisions and power. This informed all phases of the project. Research questions and activities were co-created and negotiated on a daily basis.



Snowflake



Doctor Investigator

Children as play investigators and “spies” of their community

Researching play PLAYING!



Children became play investigators or “spies” in their community. They created their magnifying glasses, made up their own name as play spies, and crafted their own ID.

With this and a microphone, we explored play in the community *playing*. Children led a tour of their play in the community: walking through the community, taking photographs and videos, and drawing.

Co-creation: Participatory, creative, art-based methods

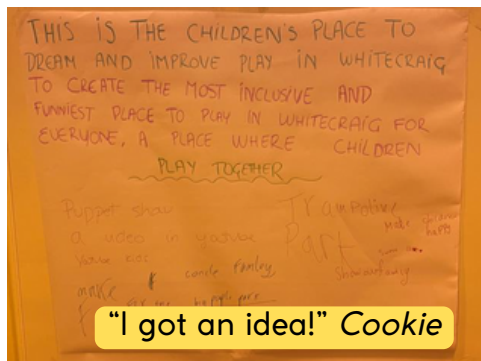
Co-creation and Co-empowerment process



“Run to wonderland!”
Footballer

“We are going to be
famous!!” Investigator Sum

Children participated in a co-design process to make decisions of what, how and to whom to tell our dreams for improving play in the community. This involved a co-empowerment process of believing that **we** could improve the community.



“I got an idea!” Cookie



Puppet show and songs



Involving community members





What did we find out?

"We are the Whitecraig children, and we want to improve play, so we want you to help us so we can get to play!" *Crystal*

"Come to Whitecraig to play!"
Sandwich

"The Council should think, we should make some changes in Whitecraig"
Cookie

"Please listen to us to take action and make a fun place to play. Team work makes the dream work"
Footballer

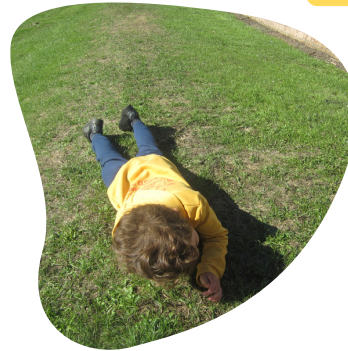
"Because this is the best place to be" *Footballer*

What did we find out?

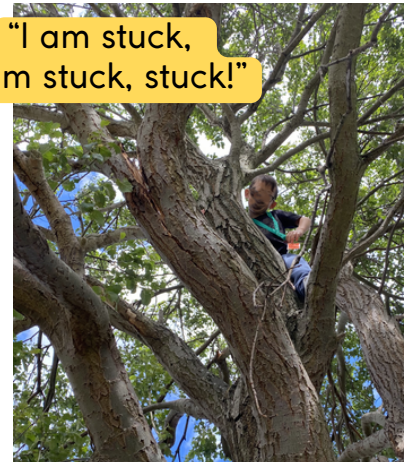
“Everyone plays different here” *Climber*

During the play-tour led by the children, Climber explained that “everyone plays different here”, therefore “we will need ages for doing the play project”. Footballer also said that “**we are all different**”. With this, children explain that community play is diverse.

Climbing everything
“cause you need to climb” *Climber*



“I am stuck,
I am stuck, stuck!”



For children, community play is an adventure. Children play using their spaces in multiple ways, in relation with their physical environment (trees, river, forest, banking, park, streets), animals, toys and human beings.



Play in the community means riding bicycles and scooters all through the community. Most children ride in the park and streets.



Children also want to play their games from their own countries and cultures.



"Play is dying" Xbox

Although there are "moments and pockets" of play, play does not happen at all times. Children report that play is dying and disappearing in their community: **"very sad"** Climber.

"There is literally no one here, it is deserted! A ghost town" Xbox



"Look it is empty, literally empty. We need people here" Crystal

"So I would say... I see people less at the park. Like, way less people at the park playing" Xbox

"Cause my x lives somewhere else and I can tell you... most of those parks are full and then the park here is empty (...) it makes you feel annoyed" Doctor Investigator

It makes you feel lonely, and it makes you feel like no one wants to play with you.... cause no one is there" Crystal

"Some people are sad because they have no one to play with" Teen-Titans

"There is nothing to do here" Sandwich

Children explain that there is a lack of things to do in the village, lack of resources and services. Furthermore, the play park is situated in one of the "corners" of the village and it is difficult to access for some children.



"I think that for children is very bad because like there's not much stuff to do" Crystal

"I live in this area and it takes me a long time to get to the park" Purple

"Whitecraig is boring" Teen-Titans

"Because it (play park) is a **dump**, it is a dump" Snowflake

The basket swing was taken away and not replaced: feeling abandoned



"Cause the basket is gone!!" *Climber*

"No one wants to come to the park to play. I think the children aren't playing, going outside to play because the basket swing is gone for a year now, actually, a year and a half and **people have been saying it is coming back when it is actually not!** Everyone wants it back! Everyone would wait to have their turn to get on that! It is taken away!" *Blue*

"The basket needs to come back, not a lot of people are coming, cause the basket is missing. That was the most famous thing in the park!" *Climber*

Things are being destroyed, broken or not looked after: many things to fix

"Because it (the fields) is getting all destroyed and then new houses are coming in these fields... They are making houses in the fields" *Cookie*



"We don't want our fields to disappear" *Sandwich*

"Things are broken, this is ruined, gloomy, dirty, and rusty!" *Crystal II*



"If you are in the night or morning, there could be electricity!" *Teen-Titans*



"The lamp posts don't really work!" *Climber*

"You must pick up your dog rubbish! People might even pick it up and play around with it!" *Phoenix*



"Everyone can't play in the park because they might be allergic to dog poo" *Crystal II*

"The park does not have that much colour that is why people is not going to the park" *Teen-Titans*



**You can hurt yourself:
It is not safe to play here**

"We don't want glass bottles everywhere"
Climber
"Cause people might get hurt" *Gressys*



"You can hurt yourself with the wood, we need grass and soft"
Teen-Titans

"Full of rubbish and dog poo"
Gressys

"People keep littering, and we don't like it for the planet" *Rainbow*

Scared of heights or falling and permission

"People can be scared of falling if it is too high (monkey bars in the park), if they feel it is really high" *Teen-Titans*

- "Children come here and climb the trees and they can fall and hurt themselves" *Phoenix*
- "Trees are amazing to play with. So annoying, why children are not allowed up here without a grown up?" *Cookie*



"It is freezing" *Star*



"Some people don't come because it is freezing and raining" *Star*

"People are not coming in the park now in the autumn and winter because it is raining too much because everything is wet"
Gressys



"I don't really go to play with this weather or like this season because it gets dark really early"
Investigator Sum

"It is not safe to go out anymore" *Phoenix*

"I don't go out to the park anymore. I wouldn't go by myself, so I go to my friends' houses"

Investigator Sum

"Kidnappers are coming and they're kidnapping kids, and kids are getting missing"

Crystal II

"Once I was taking my friend home and then there was like this man chasing us"

Phoenix

"I am scared of bxxxx man at night that kidnap children, people always say it (...) And it frightens all children, and it is not safe" *Rainbow*

"Poor people can't go to the park" *Crystal II*

"Some people need to go home so quickly, they can't even go... and some people don't have even time... Poor people don't go... poor them, because they never go there, and they never know the park is like" *Crystal II*

"I think that people have too many things to do!" *Gressys*

Some adults are busy, some adults are bad, some adults are going home and working and stuff like that"

Teen-Titans

"I can't go out to play because I need to do housekeeping and help my mother looking after my little brother"

Snowflake

"I really want to go outside each time to play. But sometimes... **it does not feel right to go... So, I stay in**" *Snowflake*

It is true!!!
Climber

"Their parents don't let them go"

"They don't want to go, because their parents...their parents don't let them go"

Crystal II

"Laziness"
Phoenix



"You need the watch to go to play so my granny can phone me" *Blue*

This watch is used for many children to be able to play outside. Not all children have access to it.

Being really mean to people: bullying, violence and exclusion

Children explain that people “are mean” (*Star*) and that is why children do not play together. They also report multiple cases of bullying, exclusion and racism.

“The roughness of people. The roughness, there is a lot of rough people” *Xbox*

There are some kids that are the *cool ones*, the naughties, they are mean and not behave well” *Doctor Investigator*

“Some children are bullied, that is why, because no one is playing with the children, that is why the playground is boring” *Teen-Titans*

“People are not going (to the park) because bullies are in the park because they don’t want to be bullied by it... So, they bully people... they fight people and that is not nice and maybe they can’t even stand up (...) so, they fight, and they don’t like to be in it, and they got rich parents so they can do nothing about it... So maybe they are sad, and they don’t want to go to the park” *Crystal II*

Big boys and big girls they are being like at really dark times in the park and they are being really mean to people at that time dark in the park because they don’t know grown ups will be around” *Cookie*

Violence and motorbikes: *scare people*

“Sometimes there are motorbikes here. People are coming here, and they might be dangerous. Motorbikes can ride people and hurt someone’s legs. Motorbikes can ride people and hurt people more and more and they might get to the hospital” *Teen-Titans and Crystal II*

“There was a bully that was just normally walking to the park, and he kept on going past his bike right next to my legs almost ran me over. And he didn’t even let me go to the park. So, my mom had to go with my sister for me... And he started swearing at my mum” *Footballer*

“Because they (motorbikes) always come up randomly. Just come on to the grass and then we all have to stay in the park so we’re safe” *Phoenix*

“We nearly got run over by... by bikes... they’re some of the people that are being mean to people and push you” *Doctor Investigator*

“And once some people got a rock and smashed the car window of one of our cars, they went out walking with “bam” *Footballer*

“And we had these neighbours that were so annoying and they went for a “ball” at Xbox window, and Xbox nearly had a heart attack ey?, like “Ahhhh”” *Crystal*

Racism

Children shared multiple situations of violence and racism occurring within play. A conversation is shared on the right.

"I wanted to talk to him but he straight up said "don't talk to me Indian". That made me feel really, really self conscious"

- "Well, people have been racist to me because I'm from different countries"
- "Me too, they've been racist to me"
- They call me a *Bulgarian bastard*
- People call me *Polish idiot*... What else?
- Oh, they also call me a Nxxxx
- You can not say that!
- That means you are black!
- You can not say that! you can say it, but we can't!
- It is because I'm tan, because I went to the beach. And they swear all around the park... Every time that I go to the park, each sentence, there's a minimum with one swear word.
- When I go to the park, there's minimally like 10.

"Cause some people like to be racist to other countries because they think that other countries don't have the right to be in this country"
Snowflake

"I like being with children from other countries because I feel that they will not bully me... because they know how hard it is to move from somewhere else to live" *Crystal*

Language

"Every single Indian I know, has become a South Indian and become a England too... South Indian is that they don't talk Hindi anymore. They only talk English" *Snowflake*

"When we talk in Hindi I get upset, my sister, everyone calls me, "come for your sister you know what she is saying!?" But my sister doesn't know how to talk Hindi anymore since she's spent a lot of time here (...) because at that time she didn't know proper English" *Snowflake*



Vandalism, graffiti and vaping

"We can tell you something, and is that people are putting graffiti that is like spread paint and all over the park" *Doctor Investigator*

"I think it is called, or in Polish, it's called vandalism, vandalism" *Xbox*

"And vaping" *Crystal*



"We go to other parks" *Investigator Sum*

Some children explained that they finally decide to go to other parks because it is funnier and there are children, so they get to play together. During the project, children repeated very frequently the names of other parks. They feel that surrounding parks are better than theirs, so they leave their community to play there.

"Children here go to Ormiston park even in their bikes through the banking because it is a better park and much more fun"
Doctor Investigator and Climber

"There is a new park in Musselburgh... Lewisvale Park"
Climber

"We went one time to Weehailes park and we loved it. It is an adventure play park"
Xbox and Crystal

"People also go to Dalkeith Park"
Rainbow

Choosing not to play or not being allowed to play

Through play, children can also feel excluded. We share two experiences: one of feeling forgotten when playing hide and seek, and one about gender inequality.

- "I am not playing this stupid game hide and seek (...) **Every time I hide, and everyone forgets about me (...)** yeah that is why I hate it (...) every time that I hide in this game, everybody forgets about me and stops playing and starts playing something else (...) and that is hiding for 10 minutes, and no one ever comes to find me"
- "Come on x!!! even if it is me or x and x, **all of us, we will always try hard to find you BRO, to FIND YOU!!! We can play, TOGETHER!**"

- "Some boys in my class say **"you are a girl, you are too weak,** not allowed to play football". They never let me play with them. I hate that (...) everyone think girls are the weakest in the world"
Snowflake
- "No! Any people can play football! Even girls!" *Climber*



**WE WANT TO
MAKE PLAY
BETTER SO WE
PLAY ALL
TOGETHER AND
WE MAKE
CHILDREN...**

LOVE

HAPPY

HONEST

KIND

INCLUDED

EXCITED

ENERGISED

NICE

SAFE

CONFIDENT

FEEL SPECIAL

CREATIVE

HEALTHY

RESPECTFUL

Children's voices

What do we want?

These are children's voices, perspectives, stories, experiences, and emotions to play together and drive change in their community



"Happy"

"Love, love"

"Kindness, respect and honesty are the values of the school, so they should be outside too!" *Gressys*



**“What we want is all children to play
all together in the community and
improve play in Whitecraig”**
Doctor Investigator

“Welcome everyone to the kind place to play”
Investigator Sum and Cookie

“We need people here” *Crystal*

**“We need to have more fun to play
together in W”** *Investigator Sum*

**“Children
need to come
to our
community to
play together”**
Crystal II

**“We want
everyone to
join us and
have lots of fun
here at
Whitecraig”**
Crystal II

“Everyone should be able to play” *Climber*



Sandwich

Children raised awareness about their play opportunities in their community. Now, children advocate for playing together in their community and have access to play. They also call for other children to come to play with them in their community, instead of them leaving and going to play in other places. The song titles “Dreaming we are playing” and “Everybody playing now” demonstrate their need for collective play in their community. With this, children also want to improve the lives of people in their community but also “from here to other countries in the world”, being aware of difficulties for play in other places as well.

"We want to play together forever"

Children want to play games together with their families and friends.

FUN WITH MY FAMILY
AND FRIENDS
FUN THE
CRYSTAL PARK

Crystal II

The play project enabled children to freely choose what they wanted to play and organise it. What children wanted is to play together. Most of the times, they wanted to play games, without materials, just them: people. Children also shared the importance of playing their games related to their culture and backgrounds. Some of their games were:

"Cheese touch"

Indian games

Shark and fishes

Musical status

Hide and seek

"Play gaga"

Red red river

Chinease Whispers

Polish games "ciuciubabka"

We want to go to the woods and trees

Tag

"Games are any fun if you are different, if you are different languages, different person, different countries... We can play your game, and we can play our games" Crystal II

"Kids shall play freely"

Snowflake

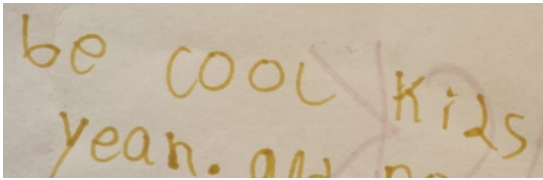
"Children are allowed to make a decision for themselves cause sometimes adults just make their decisions" Snowflake



Snowflake



"You need to be respectful": "We want children to play more nicely"



Sandwich

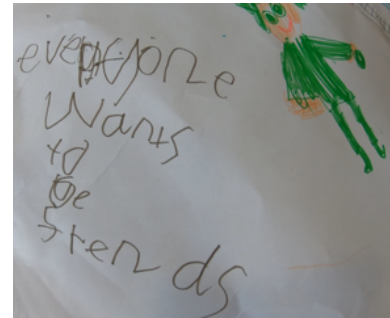
"Be cool, kids! Sandwich
Be kind, be safe and play, enjoy it!
Stop racism and bullying" Song

"We want
people to
play nicely!"
Rainbow

"If anyone that you're playing with
looks sad or anything, don't
ignore the expression, always care
if they are sad, cause you won't
be able to enjoy happiness if your
friend is sad, that is life"

Snowflake

"We can ban... we can
ask the Councillor and
everyone to ban
swearing, that can be a
tax if you swear, you
have to pay!" Footballer



Climber



Snowflake

"Girls can play
football"
Snowflake

No saying girls
are weak

"Don't shame kids
with no money!"
Snowflake

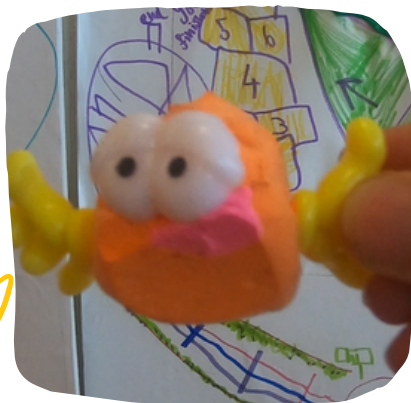
"No saying girls
are weak" and
"we need peace"
Doctor
Investigator

"I am writing rules for the park! Doctor Investigator

"The important is follow the rules and being
kind to each other and being nice, do not be
any mean, you need to be respectful" Crystal II

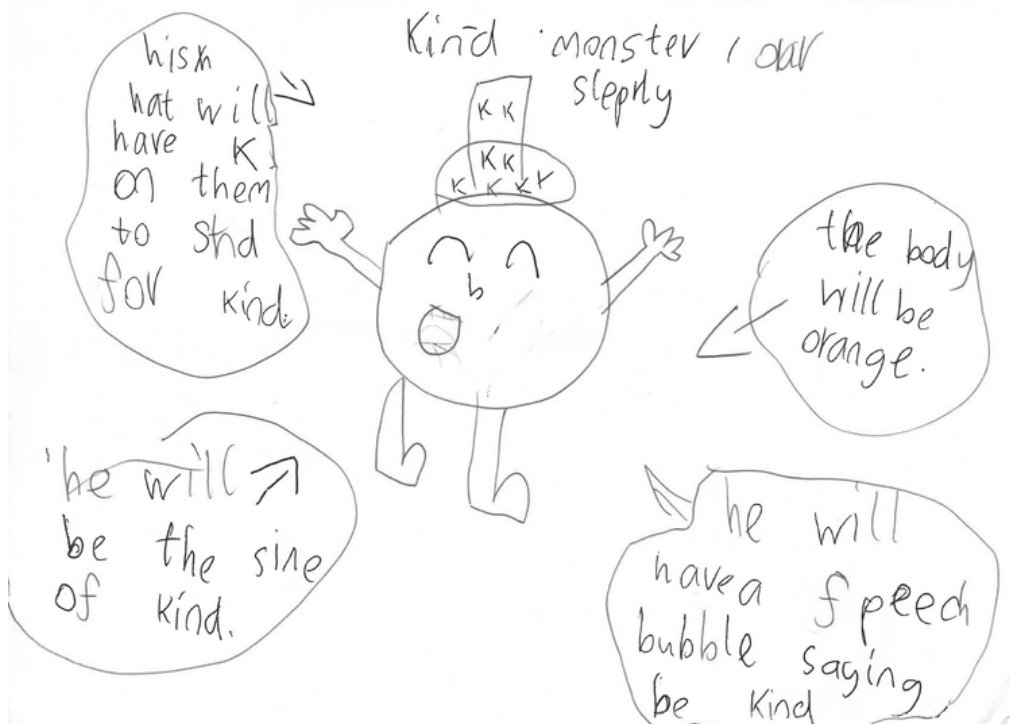
"I know it's like a fun place and that,
but you still need rules or people would
ruin the park and they need to be nice
and clean" Snowflake

"We made this
King Monster and
he will tell you if
you've been kind or
not, and if you've
been kind, that
means you will get
a big 5 hand"
Cookie



"If you
damage the
project, you
will be
banned for
a month or
a week"
Cookie





Cookie

"We need a welcoming sign: "be kind play park""
Cookie and Rainbow



"We want the place to be more safe for us to go" Phoenix

"We need more people in the park so we make it safer" Crystal II

"Like cameras in the place, in the park, so if any robber comes, like, we can deal with it, with the cops so then no no no kids get kidnapped"
Crystal II

Blue and Climber draw people on the picture because they want to have people there.



"We need to make it fair for younger kids" Teen-Titans and Star

"If you are in the monkey bars it can be scary for little kids, younger kids. We need to make it fair for younger kids" Teen-Titans



"It is not fair for the babies because they only got a little bit, and I don't know why they only made one for them. And it is really not fair"
Star

We need to add magic: “magical fun bus and enchanted world of play”



A magical place

“These are enchanted bugs, and these are enchanted trees. It is an enchanted forest for all the unicorn mythical animals. There is a magical lion and is pink, and enchanted birds. Yeah, like, like a park with lot of colour trees and colour birds” *Cookie*

“Sometimes we agree to play tag and everything and my sister adds that I am only going to play with you if you add **magic** to the game” *Snowflake*



“We want to have a **fun bus** that will take you around Whitecraig if you are new, to look around in the park, to go to different stations (...) It will be very colourful. **We want children from other places to come to Whitecraig in this magical bus** and it will take them over to the park so they can play with the friends they know from here and they can have lot of fun!” *Cookie*

“And a **colourful choo-choo train** for the kids to go to the park **safer** for **welcoming children to play**” *Footballer*

“Decorate the vennel with nice flowers and nice little path with rainbow and it ends with a Pokémon base” *Cookie*

Colourful playful streets and paths



“This is a play street with tic tact toe, chalk, hop scotch, and different versions of hop scotch where you have to follow colours... Children may not want to play in the park, but over here” *Investigator Sum and Rainbow*

Play street (located in different areas of the community)



“Rainbow paths, rainbow gates and rainbow slides to access play in the community” *Snowflake and Crystal*

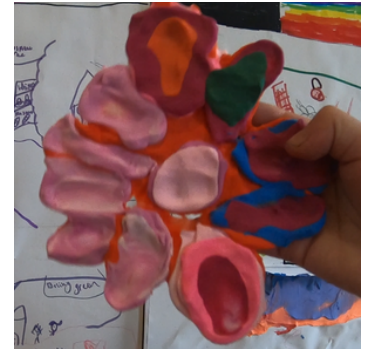


"We need safe roads to ride a bicycle" *Teen-Titans*

"Pokémon because lot of people like Pokémon. We want this to be here open every day" *Phoenix*

"Rainbow crosswalks, Mickey Mouse playful streets" *Teen-Titans and Crystal II*

"Flowers need to be here, because they are lovely and part of nature and make us happy" *Crystal II*



"Upgrade the park for more kids coming to play" *Purple*

"This park has not been fixed or been upgraded in ages, so I think we need an upgrade in the community to play"
Investigator Sum

"We need to make it closer to some houses for some people like...it basically take you like 30 minutes to get there!" *Climber*



Whitecraig
Play Project
Improvement

1. in whitecraig Play Park they should have A Big Swings For Bigger kids.

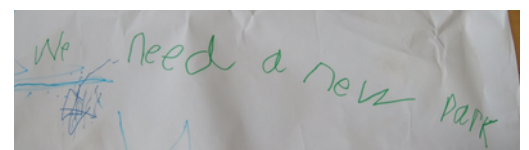
Bring the basket swing back!
Gressys



"We need a new park, with colours" *Star*

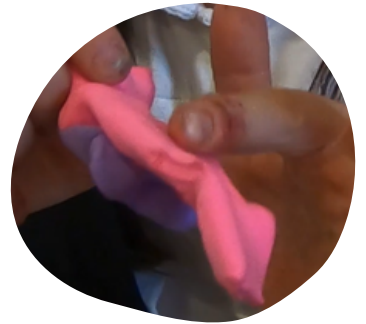
"In our current park there are not really any swings" *Investigator Sum*

"I think we need to add slides or swings" *Rainbow*



"I want to transform the park with brand new big big slides" *Crystal II*

"We should have new slides, 'cause they are fun!"
Gressys

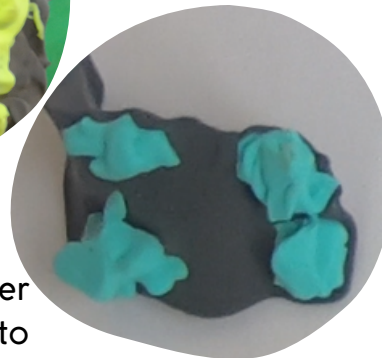


Everybody climbing now!

"A new climber frame
cause you need to climb!
A walking wall, climbing
slides with climbing ropes,
swinging ropes"
Climber and Gressys



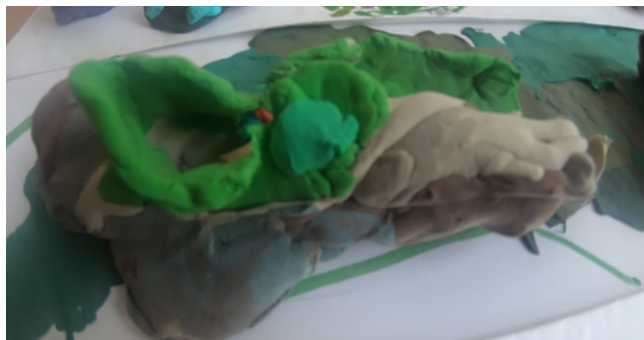
"Volcano: colourful bits are the
climbing stone and a climbing
wall and we will have general
paths so nobody falls and hurts
themselves" Cookie



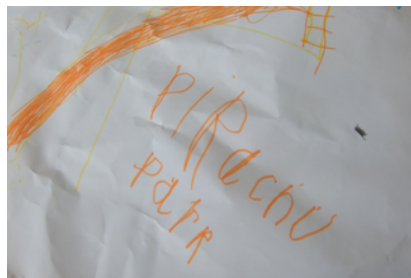
"Skate Park" Climber

"Trampolines (...) to get the
energy out" Investigator Sum

"Smaller trampoline for babies or younger
people because we want babies to be able to
jump as well and we want to make it fair for
younger people in Whitecraig" Investigator Sum



Tree house



"A Pikachu Park! Pika
could play in the park"
Climber



"A map for a treasure
hunt. You need to
follow the map" Gressys



"Foxie!" and "robots"
Purple



"We need a Bennie boo tree
house" Bye and Phoenix



"We need a bin because people keep littering" Rainbow



"This is a bin because people keep littering and we don't like it for the planet" (picture) *Rainbow*

"We need litter pickers!" *Phoenix*

"Because people just litter and it would just ruin the world and the world would become a bad place to play" *Cookie*

"We have to take care of our things, if not, we can't play" *Crystal II*

"A relaxing area to be" *Footballer*

"A library" *Doctor Investigator*

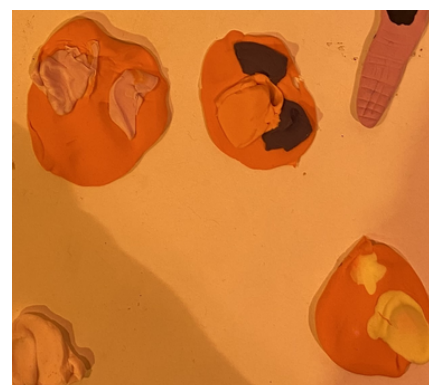
"We have to tell them: it is fun, nice and kind" Crystal II

Crystal II reflected the importance of changing the views people have about the community and invited other children to come and play. With all the ideas presented by the children before, this is what the children want: to have more children coming and joining.

"I need people to know that Whitecraig is fun, and kind, and we can play a lot of games, your favourite games to play"

People are not coming because they don't know how much [the community] is fun, that they don't know what it's like [community] can play and being friendly, but they don't want to go... so **we have to tell them: "It is nice"**

"Children don't know how much fun is and nice, fun and nice, and they don't know that it is really kind for you"



Crystal II

"Come and join us: We need more people" *Crystal II*

"We enjoy the project, but we need more people"
Doctor Investigator

"We want more people in Whitecraig to play with"
Crystal II

"More people can come to play in the park and live in Whitecraig!"
Purple and Climber



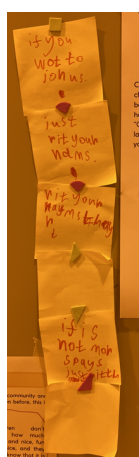
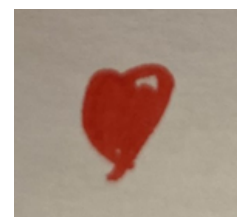
If we grown up, other people have the chance to be like this, and you can be like us (...) a play investigator!! *Crystal II*

What children want is to "transform this so more people can play with us" *Crystal*. Children want to make change for supporting all children's right to play in the community.

"They can really have us" *Crystal II*

"Can you also write...? we need to change it (play), so other people can also play at the park. Don't cry and be sad all the time, they really need to go, and have fun with others that they don't even have friends.

They really can have us, because they can play with everyone else, and they cannot be sad anymore and also make everyone happy!! Because people are sad, they have like sad lives, and we really want not them to have sad lives!! **We really want them to be happy with us, and join us!!** That would be super grateful for them, **to come and join us into the play project!"**



"If you want to join, just write your names right, right here. If you.... if it's no space, you can write it just here"

The results of this report briefly presents the children's perspectives and ideas for a play-friendly community in their village. For further information, please listen and watch the **videos** of the two songs and the puppet show on YouTube. These were the ways children chose to explain their perspectives. These videos are also tools that might be used by the community to drive change.

<https://www.youtube.com/@CreatingaPlayFriendlyCommunity>

"The song has
come out amazing!"
*Snowflake and
Crystal*

INTRODUCTORY VIDEO

Silvia Veiga-Seijo

This introductory video presents a summary of the aim, methodology, results and actions undertaken in the project so far.



SONG

"Everybody playing now"

Alfie, Kian, Noah, Ruben
and Sophie



PUPPET SHOW

Alba, Alice, Cassie,
Sanvika, Summer
and Willow



SONG

"Dreaming we are playing"

Aarvi, Adam, Ava,
Callum, Viktor and Zuza



What actions did we take?

Community event led by the children in their community

Children suggested to do a community event where families, the community, organisations and policy-makers were invited to listen to their project and perspectives. The agenda of the event can be seen in the picture on the right. The event was hosted at Whitecraig Primary School.

Aims

- To celebrate our project by bringing the community together.
- To create a space for raising awareness, amplifying, and listening children's voices of their play possibilities.
- To collectively create an action plan with the children and community according with children's perspectives.
- To advocate for children's rights to play and mobilise community actions.

The event was co-created with the children who made decisions about what activities to include in the agenda, their speech, space, and time and who was going to be there. For example, *Snowflake* suggested "I want to invite my teachers to demonstrate what we are able to do (...) because some people think that kids' imagination and doodling is just something dumb and play project is proving that wrong. So, I would really like some people to help us".

PROGRAMME COMMUNITY EVENT FOR THE PROJECT "CREATING A PLAY-FRIENDLY COMMUNITY IN WHITECRAIG"

13:30	Registration
14:00	Welcome: Introduction of the event
14:10	Activity: "Envisioning play in Whitecraig"
14:20	Projection of puppet show and two songs
14:50	Collective dialogue about an action plan
15:10	Feedback and comments
15:20	Acknowledgements
15:30	Surprise
15:45	Go to the park with East Lothian Play Association!

Date and place: 2nd June 2023, Whitecraig Primary School



ORGANISERS:

Children play investigators - Aarvi, Adam, Alba, Alfie, Alice, Ava, Callum, Cassie, Kian, Noah, Ruben, Sanvika, Sophie, Summer, Viktor, Willow, Zuza -
Silvia Veiga-Seijo (Doctoral Candidate, P4PLAY programme, MSCA fellow)

SUPPORT:



Children as children's rights advocates for their play and life in their community empowered themselves but also the community members present, creating a space for dialogue and raising awareness. Through their dreams and voices, children stimulated their community to drive change.

Children speaking their voices at their event



Stakeholders and policy-makers attended and engaging in dialogues

- Children and families
- School Parent Council
- School (teachers, cleaners)
- Community Council
- Councillors East Lothian Council
- Members of Scottish Parliament
- Organisations: East Lothian Play Association, Children's Parliament, Children and Young People Commissioner of Scotland, Inspiring Scotland
- Queen Margaret University



Celebration with piñata and Pop-Up Play Session (ELPA)



Suggestions and proposals by children, community and policy-makers

The picture presents the big wall with the ideas of the attendees when answering the children's question: "How are you going to help us?". A summary of actions by topics is here presented.

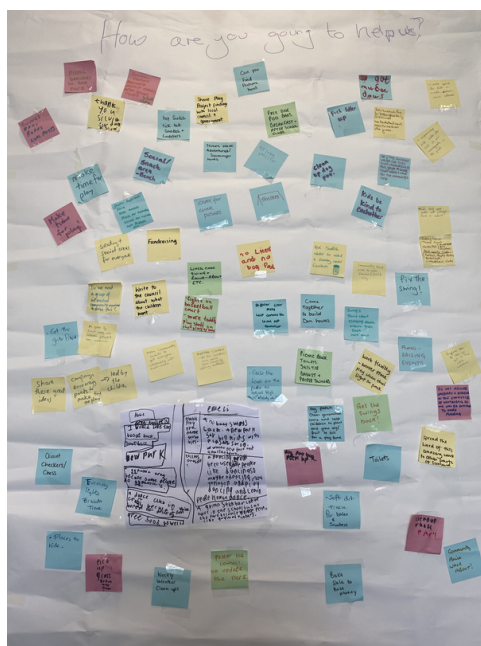
Make time for play and bringing the community together through play (community plant, den houses, adventures...)

More community events to get everyone together and connecting

Campaign encouraging parents to make time to play, led by the children

Proper food banks, breakfast and after school clubs, free food, summer camps

Look after environment: Pick litter, dog poo bags, broken glass, weekly volunteers



A new play park and transform spaces (bike track, nature trail, places to hide, giant chess, trees around the park...)

Places to be and use in the community (seating/social area: picnic tables, toilets, fountain...)

Places to be and use in the community (seating/social area)

Community policy walk about

Activities (drama, music, crafts), sports, outdoor classes, going out in winter

Evening lights for winter time

Fundraising events (veg patch, bake sale). Do not include Whitecraig in statistics with other communities

Encourage children to do short presentations to local groups

"Do we need a group of interested community members to drive this?"

Share play project findings with local Council and Government

The basket swing and baby swings are back: “Cause us!!”



Some weeks after the event, the basket swing and the baby swings were back in the park. Children said that this was “**cause us**” and thanks to the community event. Children felt empowered seeing that they could make changes in their community. More children are now playing in the basket swing and in the park.

“We brought back the basket swing” *Xbox*

“When are we going to the Scottish Parliament?” *Climber*

“I should have asked for a skate park!” *Climber*

Event at Queen Margaret University “Children advocating for play”

When the children planned the participatory stage, one of the places and people that they wanted to target was Queen Margaret University. Children wanted to go to the university. On the day of the local community event in the school, Dr. Sarah Kantartzis invited the children and families to come to the university.

Occupational therapy students and staff were involved in the organisation of the event.



This event was an opportunity to bring together the university and the community, for students and staff to hear about the project, to meet the children and hear their ideas around Children's Rights to Play. At the same time, it was an opportunity for the children to be welcomed into the university, to visit the various rooms and grounds, and to hear about life as a student.

People also felt that “this was a great and emotional experience, we could do networking during coffee and tea and meeting new people”. It was also an opportunity for stakeholders and policy makers to speak about play in the community and exchange ideas.

Mural in the school

Whitecraig Primary School included the research project within their school improvement and development plan. Furthermore, the school asked to do a display or mural about the project to inspire new children that enter in the school, so they can see that they can take part in a project like this. Children created the mural with Silvia, and they wrote messages about what the play project meant for them. The mural is situated in one of the big walls in the entrance of the school, where children and families walk. Children were really happy with this saying excited **"We see this every day!!"** Gressys



"The play project will never stop (...) It will be forever, so it keeps going on so more people and more babies can play in it" *Crystal II*

"I think the play project should stay" *Rainbow*

"You can make new friends" *Sandwich*

"I like it also because we were improving our small community and she make us believe in ourselves" *Inv Sum*

"We love to play! Play is the most important thing in the world, and we are family!!" *Purple*

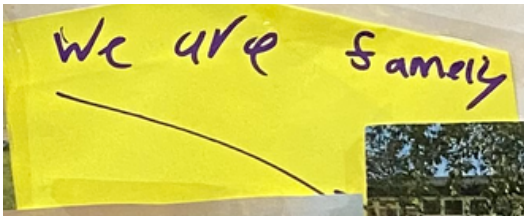
"Everyone helped and everyone had fun" *Gressys*

"Never give up" *Doctor Investigator*

What did this project mean for the children?

"We are family... This is home for us": being and doing together

Children expressed the importance of this project for them in their daily lives and how meaningful it was for them to take part, beyond being a "club", to become family.



"This play project is family, it is home for us (...) It's my home and I love it and I feel like it's my family and I just never want to leave, I can't live without it" (...) I want to stay here forever" *Purple*

"We are going to stay together, forever" *Song Everybody Playing Now*

It made us happy and believe in ourselves

"The play project made us happy" *Children*

Learn

Nice

Exciting

Amazed

Very fun,
very fun,
very fun

Excitement

Engaging

Lovely

Wonderful memories

A common saying is that "nothing last forever, but the memories do"

Empowering through being together and playing

"What did the government say about the event?" *Cookie*

"I can go now to play one day per week, and I already spent it on Monday" *Snowflake*

After the event, children commented how they had created a group of play investigators for meeting and to keep running the project: "We started a new project about play, about what play means, on Fridays for playing together (...) we created a group of investigators. We do the spies! We do not have powers but basically..." *Snowflake*. "We got our own group" *Footballer*. However, *Snowflake* recognised that "it is getting difficult because people are busy with other things, and they don't come".

Children have encouraged to talk more about rights in their community and school.

How wonderful and great the
play project made Whitecraig
and kids life!

1. have helped kids play more;
2. made people think more about rights;
3. helped me be more happy;

Please help us spread this joy to
other places, city, villages!



"The play project also inspired them, the school, to do more about our rights, because it made us more clear about our rights and kids are much more happy" *Snowflake*

"The play project changed how children and adults think about kids' play and we have increased our rights, health and wellbeing"
Snowflake

"Can we re-do the play project?" *Snowflake*

"It's not good... It's amazing and awesome and great. On top of that, excellent!!" *Snowflake*

"Yes, I've seen the best club or something like that ever" *Xbox*

"This is my favourite thing in the world at school, almost" *Gressys*

"I will always remember this in my heart" *Crystal II*

Children want to continue the play project and "re-do it" again:

"We want more time and months for the play project because it is amazing. Mostly because we need this, this is really nice, and everyone should be able to play" *Purple*

"I think the play project should stay" *Rainbow*

"We miss the play project a lot" *Star*

"We want the play project to come back"
Footballer

"The play project will never stop (...) it will be for seventeen years, no... forever! It keeps going on so more people born, and more babies can play in it" *Crystal II*

What did the event mean for the children?

Children said: "We were so lucky" *Rainbow* and "this was a miracle" *Cookie*.

"We can do something! We can show people what we done!" *Teen-Titans*

"show people how we can... What did the government say about that?" *Blue*

"The event meant a lot. I will never forget it. It meant like all our hard work and that maybe Whitecraig will be a better place to play, finally, after all our time trying which is our main goal" *Xbox*

"I thought it was fascinating... Because I thought like well, 12 people would come to the event (...) But it's fascinating how much now like people came and cared that "oh these kids made this show (...) and I can tell you... so many people came, over 50 (...) there were no seats left for them" *Snowflake*

"I love it (the event) because it is the best thing I've ever experienced" *Purple*

What is next? Future actions with the children

- Foster the creation of a community member group: the purpose is developing a plan alongside children, community, ELPA, policy-makers
- Go to the Scottish Parliament with the children
- Inform decision and policy making from children's voices
- Continue the analysis of results for further information
- Continue doing activism and advocacy
- Being in a group to...



Adults' views

Adults took part in an interview with the researcher (Silvia) to give their perspective about play in the community, the project, and the community event. Community members (families), teachers, staff from community centre, and one member of the Community Council took part. A summary of adults' perspectives is here presented.

"We are the forgotten village": "we are scraping"

"It is a very small rural community, and everybody knows everybody. They tend to: if you're born in Whitecraig, you stay in Whitecraig, it's that kind of small town, small village mind set"

"Whitecraig with nothing. We are a quite poor area. We are in a position now that they can't give you money, **everyone is struggling**. And our problem is trying to get some funding"

"It is terrible. We are the forgotten village with the bus service, with the school, with the shops, with the doctor surgery... We need a doctor surgery. Trying to get through to the doctors is ridiculous. Absolutely ridiculous. I've phoned 244 times the other day to get my son an appointment. A child under five... That's shocking..."

"I think it is a great community. But we're the forgotten village because we get clumped down with Musselburgh, Whitecraig and Wallyford so when they do like a survey about the area, we are put together with other areas, so the numbers all match up. **They don't do one just for Whitecraig to find out what we think about all the community.** So, it's all just mixed"

"We're the forgotten village because we get no resources, nothing, we get nothing, and **we're basically scraping**"

"There is isolation as well. People work long hours. People are busy, busy, and people are tired..."

"The school is completely forgotten. We are in the new Parent Council, and right now the P7 are going to school camp. I've never known any other school that charges... it's struggling to find the money for the camp. We are now trying to fundraise to get the money for 13 kids. That's nothing. Families can't even afford it!!! But all the other schools in East Lothian, they've got the money, they've got it!!! We're struggling so much to get the money"

"A zombie village with like no kids:

It is not fair for the kids, because it is taken away their experience"

"Play in Whitecraig is very limited to the children. All what they really have is one park and they don't use it, they're bored, there's nothing there, the swings are away. There's nothing in that park for the kids, and they don't spend enough time there. And so they're just getting in trouble or staying inside. There is nothing else for them to do, they've got all this green space that they're not using. It could have so much more for the kids here. Other villages like Orminston, they've got a great bike track for the kids, their park is fantastic. We could have something like that here. Because we're forgotten about, children are never given anything. And there will be more houses, more children, tiny park, with nothing on it"

"We were in the park and there was nobody there. It's empty. This is the only park that kids have got. Why aren't they in it? Why aren't even using the green space that's out with the park, the basketball court? Why aren't they there? You know, you would think this is like, a **zombie village with like no kids** (...) our park was supposed to go to phase two ages ago and still not done"

"One thing I've heard from a lot of other parents is that they go to other parks... to Orminston, to Musselburgh, because these are the parks around us that are good, these are the ones that our kids enjoy being at. They don't enjoy being at that park. So... they're gonna out of the community to spend their time at the park with the kids"

"I don't often see children out playing (...) There isn't what I would expect in a small village: children to be out playing"

"I think that's something that Whitecraig really does lack, all the Active Schools, or opportunities, they're not in Whitecraig. **That's limiting the experiences that children are going to have**"

"Wallyford is only a short distance away, and they've got so much, they've got summer groups, after school clubs, before school clubs. and we have nothing"

"If children want to join a club or be involved in activities, you have to leave Whitecraig"

"maybe if there was a skatepark and from 5-6 on a Tuesday night, the kids could go along. and if they then built up their confidence, they might be able to do it more by themselves. you can't just say "here there's a skate park, use it""

"The lighting (in the park) is not great, and it is too dark. Families are nervous about children being there. There's something about the exposedness of the play park..."

"Sometimes is really dangerous"

"Planting the seeds" and "I think it's lit a fire under us as well"

"A big thing in this community is having options for all kids. There's a lot of kids in this community with learning support needs, and there's not a lot of options for those kids with different sorts of abilities and disabilities. So we need things that are **accessible to all kids, so it's inclusive, and they can all play together**"

"Normal swing with normal height"

"The Council and Government really do need to invest money in this community. We really need opportunities for kids here to play too without having to leave the community"

"A wee wavy surface for them to go with the bikes, or with stops and traffic lights painted, with different maps and themes, so children can get imagination running through the streets, around the neighbourhood"

The event and the project: **"We don't often ask children"**

"It gives them a voice. And it's kind of sparked ideas with them. And as well, **I think it's lit a fire under us as well**, to kind of keep pushing to get a better place for the kids."

"It's about the children getting the opportunity to see what they could do, you know? it's almost like they don't know what they don't know"

"Give them a bit of responsibility (...) they were speaking a lot about how they really enjoyed it. I think because they feel a responsibility. They were so engaged in it and so excited about it"

"My son really felt like he was being listened to, that people would actually listen to, so he felt like his voice was being heard and was getting the opportunities. That was really good to see"

"A lot of events that are supposed to be based for the kids, it's more adult based. But here you could totally tell the kids were... it was theirs"

"I think the fact that it came solely from the children, led by them, and children voice... I think was so powerful"

"I thought it was really informative (...) it was a really quite thought provoking"

"We need to get the parents on board"

"You need people to run things... And it is a commitment. That's people, that's investment of people"

"We need to promote play more and bring the organisations of the community together to build network"

"Provide information in newsletters"

"Close the streets in summer. Turn it into a play experience"

"It would be nice to have more things like East Lothian Play Association because the kids love it"

"This project can help here in the community and go to the bigger audience. So someone can do something"

"One thing that I took away from it was... we often think we know what children want. And we often don't ask them. And **we need to ask them more. And really listen to what they have to say.** Because there was a lot in that. And, you know, you sat back, and you thought, gosh, what they're seeing there through the rap? They're talking about not feeling very safe... you know, these are things that they're telling us"

"Particularly a couple of children who are normally quite quiet, it really brought them out. And they spoke more than I've heard them speak"

"What I would say is that I'll put money on the fact that if those children got the opportunity to do it again, they absolute will, you could ask them"

Research project

Theoretical underpinnings

This research is contextualized within the P4PLAY programme (P4PLAY, 2023). The study is conducted in collaboration with the partner organisation ELPA.

Play is a right recognised internationally by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) and an essential occupation in children's lives. However, researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers are concerned about the lack of access to play opportunities for children living in disadvantaged communities, which threatens the children and community's human rights and wellbeing. Particularly, in Scotland, there are policy-makers, organizations, and researchers who call for promoting outdoor play opportunities.



Despite Scotland's Play strategy and policies (2013; 2021), the recent concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2023) for the United Kingdom calls to "strengthen measures to ensure that children with disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds" have access to play. The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation is used to identify socio-economically deprived communities in Scotland.

Nevertheless, we do not clearly know how is the play of children living in these areas from their perspectives and what play they would like to experience in their communities. Occupational therapy and scientists can help to uncover this.

Aims

To understand children's and community members' perspectives for developing a play-friendly community in a neighbourhood labelled as deprived in East Lothian (Scotland).

Understand children's perspectives of their play occupations (what, how, with whom, where, when, why)

Identify strengths and barriers for children's play from children and community's members perspectives

Create a collective understanding for a play-friendly community from children and community members' perspectives

This study received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Panel of Queen Margaret University (reference REP O270) and by East Lothian Council.

Children's participation throughout the process

The vision of this project is that children are citizens and protagonists of their own rights, having the right to make decisions about their everyday lives. Children were involved as co-researchers, being active participants in the decision-making processes of the project. As this report describes and shows, the research was co-designed with the children, and therefore, children's views and decisions were heard, considered, and acted upon. Furthermore, children shared their perspectives about play along the process.

Both elements (making decisions about the project and hearing children's perspectives) respond to Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In this regard, this project was inspired by Roger Hart's Children's participation conceptualisation (Hart, 1997), CESESMA projects (2011), and the Lundy Model of Participation (2007), but also by participatory and communitarian approaches, and principles informed by social and communitarian occupational therapy and occupational science (Benjamin-Thomas et al., 2019; Esquerdo-Lopes & Serrata-Malfitano, 2021; Galvaan & Peters, 2014; Rivas-Quarneti et al., in press; van Bruggen et al., 2020). Children made decisions throughout the process in diverse stages, from the beginning to the end, such as:

- Ongoing development of research questions and methods. For example, when children decided to create a puppet show and two songs, they made decisions about how to create them but also what views to include. Besides, most children wanted their faces to appear on the films. This led to re-think ethical issues and consent forms with families too.
- Leading the process of building alliances with the community, making decisions of how to create relationships, conversations, and trust with community members.
- Organising, creating, and leading an event in their own community (who will speak, what to say, aim of the event, how the room is organised, or who was invited to the event).
- Children's understanding of play also influenced the way this project was carried out. For example, children decided what we played within the project.

It is important to mention that children made decisions about the entire process, which means to think about the smallest and day-to-day decision-making (e.g., the title of the song) to the largest (this report's focus). All levels of participation are necessary and relevant for children's rights, ownership, and citizenship. It was also very important to provide diverse, safe, playful, and meaningful ways of participation to ensure that all children have the right to take part.

Children as authors of this report and films: Influencing dissemination and policy-making

This participatory research is creating the dissemination plan with children, including the developing of actions (community event, going to Queen Margaret University, creating a mural in the school, etc.); publishing the films on YouTube and being authors of them; or writing this report based on our experience and their views. Children provided feedback and suggestions to the first seven points. The decision to involve children as authors of the report and films is intentional and shared: 1) children wanted to create them and be authors, and 2) these are their experiences, perspectives, and project: it belongs to them.

We think it is necessary to emphasise this, since few participatory studies include children in a meaningful way in this stage (Horgan & Kennan, 2021). We hope this also inspires to further develop projects where children's voices are at the centre, from the beginning to the end, with the intention of making transformations with children at policy and practice level.

Alternative understandings of play: preliminary findings

In parallel to this report, Silvia is developing her findings as part of her doctoral thesis. In this section, a summary of these developing understandings of community play are presented with the intention of sharing alternative notions of play that may help us to broaden the way we see play in our daily lives, practice and policy. These are based on children's perspectives, the experiences of doing this research together and Silvia's work. These findings will be developed further in Silvia's doctoral thesis.

Children's play is plural, diverse, creative, complex and in ongoing movement throughout the community.

Play is diverse because "every child plays differently" and occurs in an ongoing movement through the community with the human and non human. Children invite us to break categories and types of play and rethink about what we, as society, may consider as "normal play" and expand our views about what play is.

Play is where life happens and occurs with other everyday doings.

Play happened alongside other everyday doings: children did not only play, but they also looked after each other, shared home, food, memories, listening to personal life experiences, and other everyday doings. I propose to understand that play is life, a way of living, and play is where life happens.

Play can also oppress and children might choose not to play. Play must not be romanticised or idealised: it is not always a choice.

Apart from children feeling that "play is dying" and that things need to be fixed, this project exemplified that through play, children experience different oppressions and exclusions (situations of racism, violence, gender inequality, classism), making the play experience difficult. These situations make them decide that they do not want to play.

Children advocate for playing collectively all together in their village, to feel included and happy. They demand other children to come and play with them in their community.

Children want to make their own decisions and being free within play.

Children want to extend their play park, and engage in magical play with colourful and playful places, also in their natural spaces.

Children want to make a kind place to play in their community: respect each other, stop racism, violence, classism, and gender inequality.

Children's dreams, energies and excitement to play together is transformative

Play is movement, abstract, complex and relational

This project understands play as a movement that encloses the energies, spirits, emotions, feelings, and thrills of children to be together playing in their place. "Play is in our heart" (*Crystal*), exemplifies how their desire for playing together in their village holds a transformative and embodied process through the mobilisation of themselves and others in the community to come together and improve the lives of their community. The collective human energies, relations, relationships and connections to make play better mobilised this transformative process.



This movement and spirit of children to play together is **empowering and transformative**. Children's desire was to make other children join the project to play together. The process of going to people's houses and asking them to join the project, allowed children to be and play together in an ongoing movement. This is connected with the children's relational aspect, energies, souls and their hearts connected for play. Children walking and moving through the community, occupying the different spaces, came together in a collective process of playing. This collective play required co-living to, learn to negotiate, discuss, respect each other, respect diversity, create peace, resilience and equity. This process was transformative since children mobilised their community to come together and play in their plural ways of understanding play. Through moving within the community, children also empowered each other, families and therefore the entire community.

The project was transformative in itself when co-creating opportunities for playing, led and organised by the children, making shared decisions, based on their choices and negotiations, resolving conflicts and upset moments for then flourishing and play. The play project itself was providing children with the possibilities of play that they needed and wanted. *Snowflake* expressed: "I enjoyed the play project because I had the opportunity to play... Most people now don't like to play because they are in videogames... We could be together, in the park, documenting our play", or Footballer "here I can do something, and not being at home doing nothing". For some, this was the only way of participating with their community "this is the only project that my child could and was able to take part in" (*mum*). The doing of the puppet show and the songs as play itself also entailed a transformative process that advocated for play: *Crystal II* said "With the puppet show we can make people come to play with us".

The collective process of coming together, doing the project, play and speaking up was empowering for mobilising change, daily activism, resilience, solidarity, and confidence. Children became a family and aware of their own needs.

Belief in human beings and communities make them flourish. Actions created in alliance with communities (community-based rights approach) led by the children as children's rights advocates is key.

Conclusions

This report is a co-creation of the outcome and dissemination of the research with the children participants, based on their voices and perspectives, and our experiences of doing the project together. This report, the songs and the puppet show act as advocacy tools to raise awareness about children's play but also campaign for their right to play.

Children explain that play is dying in their community, which makes them feel lonely and sad. Children advocate for their right to play in their community, recognising plural ways of being, doing, knowing play. They would like to play all together in their village and having children from other communities coming to play with them. Children want to have a kind place to play, where they can feel included, stop bullying, racism, classism, and gender inequality.

The play project was an opportunity for participation in the community led by the children. Being, doing together and improving the community was the most important element for the children, who shaped in meaningful ways the community where they live.

Through this human project, we engaged in a collective process of activism for mobilising change in the community: being a family, playing together, sharing dreams, hopes, energies, empowering each other through solidarity, raising awareness, and fostering resilience.

In conclusion, doing and believing in ourselves from our heart.

Key recommendations: policy and practice

Families, communities, professionals, stakeholders and policy-makers must:

- Take play seriously and not take it for granted. "Playing together in the community" is an urgent priority that needs to be created alongside children and communities.
- Consider the whole picture for improving play opportunities: it is not only about creating a new park, but exploring the community dynamics, and paying attention to emotional, socioeconomic and other elements such as violence, racism, bullying or gender inequality.
- Consider inequities during play.
- Focus on people's motivations and dreams, and involve them in the community life through collective activities (like play).
- Allow children to decide how they want to have a voice, considering plural ways of having a voice: verbal, non verbal, art (puppet show, writing a song...).
- Learn from children's ways of being, doing, living and knowing through play.
- Consider children's voices as part of decision-making processes and policy development.
- Get to know and believe in children as human beings in their communities.
- Listen to children's voices, which implies more than hearing and acting: it is accompanying them, and engaging in a dialogue and co-creation with their voices or perspectives.
- Invest time for listening, engaging, and involving children and communities in a safe, meaningful and playful way.
- Create alliances with children and communities from our heart.
- Value the power of collective process during communitarian projects, even though it implies uncertainties and discomfort.
- Recognise the value of occupational therapists and scientists as allies in communitarian processes when researching play.

Support from policy-makers

Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland

"This report shines a crucial light on children's right to rest, relax and play. It also highlights the importance of involving children in decision-making. It was written with the help of 17 child co-researchers, acting as young human rights defenders. Including them, listening to them, and acting on what they said means that the report covers significant points across a range of their rights in the own community. It is clear that the children have been truly working alongside Silvia to create this work; a beautiful reminder of the value children place in trusted relationships and what can be achieved when they are at the root of meaningful participation and co-production. We know that the right to play is crucial for developing language, gaining self-confidence, independence, and resilience. We also know that there are often barriers which limit some children's opportunities to play. Decision-makers need to not only listen, but act upon what the children have so powerfully shared with them."

Nicola Killean, Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland

East Lothian Play Association

"Understanding what makes a play-friendly community has to start with children, and be rooted in the spaces they spend time. It requires respectful conversations, listening, creativity, fun and time. How do children experience the local spaces they use on a daily basis? How do they feel there? Who is included (and excluded?)

These questions matter to East Lothian Play Association (ELPA). Through this project we have been privileged to gain insight into the process of engagement carried out so carefully by researcher Silvia, as well as the perspectives of children which have emerged so vividly. This type of work is critical to implementation of children's right to play (article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child). At ELPA we strive for a rights-based approach and recognise that supporting the capacity of children to advocate for themselves is a vital element of this. We saw the trusting relationships built over time that enabled children to give voice to their views through creative and child-friendly processes. We need to know what's important to them and be prepared to listen even when it's uncomfortable.

The community event where children shared their findings was an excellent example of how able the children were to create a space to engage with adults. The air crackled with enthusiasm! As children welcomed us into their space, all the children, families and adults were part of a truly transformative moment."

Theresa Casey, from East Lothian Play Association

Appendix. Song “Everybody playing now”

Everybody playing now!

Let's go to play! Let's go to play!

We are Blue, Purple, Star, Pika Climber and
Greensys!

And we are the play investigators
of Whitecraig!

And we are a team, that we love to play.

We are very playful!

We want to play!

Cause it is fun to play!

And we are happy, happy, happy
happy, happy, happy, happy, happy!

Play for youu, play for you, play for you, play
for everybody!

Play bo bo bo bo!

Play is important

But children are not coming to the park

Cause is not fun... very sad!

No one goes out, no one goes to the park

The park is now boring.

There is not a swing basket which was the
most famous and best fun thing on the park.

Some parents don't allow children to go to the
park

Because some people have mean parents.

'Cause they are mean! Flow!

Some children are mean to other children
To be mean!

It is to hurt somebody, shout or push them on
the floor and fight, and we are not happy!

It is not nice to be mean

because people will be sad and end up going
home... Home!

Some people swear a lot bad words!

And some children do not come to the park

And some children can not go to the park
from home

Children play videogames on the screen

They want to play videogames and
they do not come to the park

Playing videogames all the time is not good
for kids and you can't see so good because of
the screen

Some people do not come to the park
because it's freezing

It is not fair for babies

'cause they only have one little bit

We do not want glass bottles on the ground

'cause people may get hurt

Play for you, play for you, play for you,

Play for everybody! (music)

And we are happy, happy happy!

We want to play! We want to play!

Do not worry, we can fix it fast!

But help to play more!

A lot of things have to be improved!

Yeah! Everybody playing now!

We want to improve play because

more people can come to play in the park
and live in Whitecraig!

We need a new park, with colours

We should have new slides,

'cause they are fun!

A new climber frame (climber frame)

cause you need to climb!

Everybody climbing now!

Appendix. Song “Everybody playing now”

A walking wall, climbing slides with climbing
ropes, swinging ropes
A pillow house
A house made of pillows inside
A bouncy, bouncy castle
Foxy! A fox, a giant foxy tree!
Purple! A giant purple house with lots of stuff
on there
A banana slide!
With a swimming pool at the bottom
Trampoline and roundabout
We want to go to the woods,
to the trees and having dogs
A slingshot
A thing created by Alfie and Kian

Please bring back the basket swing,
all the kids want it back.
Please bring it back!
We need a portaloo,
a portaloo toilet in the park.

Play for you, play for you, play for you!
Play for you, play for you!
Let's go to play together! Together!

You have to be nice to your friends that
love you
We want to play, hide and tag!
We want to play, hide and seek!
Play gaga!

We want to be happy and
have fun playing in Whitecraig!
If you are by yourself, be careful
Play for you, play for you, play for you
Play for you, play for everybody!
Let's go to play together!
You should play more!

This play project is now our home,
This is home for us!
We are gonna stay together,
and we are so excited!

We want more time and months for the play
project because it is amazing.
Mostly because we need this,
This is really nice and
everyone should be able to play.

What we want is play time,
to play together.

Play for you, play for you,
PLAY FOR EVERYBODY!

Appendix. Song “Dreaming we are playing”

*There is literally no one here. It is deserted!
Sometimes after school people go here, but,
not a lot anymore. There used to be a lot
more in the summer, but still... This place is
dying, it is literally a deserted place. A Ghost
Town.*

Look! It's empty, literally empty.

*The Play Investigators! They are trying to
find out the play. Come on, let's see what
they're doing!*

Because we need people here!

We are the children of Whitecraig,
Whitecraig!

And we want to improve play here!

We need your help!

Come and join us!

Follow the Rainbow path,

Follow the Rainbow path to Whitecraig!

Please, help us, improve play here!

We are the group of play investigators
in Whitecraig!

Doctor investigator in the Skies as Ava,

Sergeant Sandwich as Callum,

The Footballer Viktor, Xbox as Adam,

Crystal as Zuza, Snowflake as Aarvi,

that's all in our group!

Play is important to feel included,
to enjoy life, to feel joy and special!

You become more creative and fun,

we want to be playful and creative

We! want to play, together,

forever,

Because we are more happy, happy!

We need to improve play for people,
from here to all the countries of the world!
Because our park is deserted,
the park is empty, gloomy,
and if no one is playing, there are not gonna
be stories to tell your kids.

If the park is deserted, there will be no park
for younger ones.

The park paint is getting older and rusty,
it is very dirty!

(Rap)

Please help us improve the park, with the tree
house, gymnastics, trampolins, new slides
including the Tunnel slide, the pool, swings,
the basket swing, please! Professional football
pitch, hammock and a kite

We need a sleepy area and
a relaxing place to be.

A bus for the kids to go to the park

A library, Aeroplane, water dispenser, baking
area with a baking chef,

a shelter, hay!

A duck pond, rolled ice-cream cart.

Could you please decorate, repaint and clean
the park?

We should look after the Earth,
because the Earth looks after us.

We need more fun things for children to play
with.

We want children to play more nicely.

Make sure you enjoy play,

and make sure you are safe!

Appendix. Song “Dreaming we are playing”

(Rap)

Be cool, kids!

Number one rule is be cool!

Rock this space

Be kind, be safe and

play, enjoy it!

Stop racism and bullying

And remember, girls can play any sport that
boys can.

Girls are not weak!

Please listen to us to take action

and make a fun place to play.

Team Work makes the Dream Work.

Otherwise... what will we do?

We enjoy the project, yeah!

But we need more people, so...

How do you play in Whitecraig?

How do you play in Whitecraig?

How do you play in Whitecraig

and how do you improve it?

We also wanna know,

we also wanna know,

we also wanna know,

How do you like it?

We've been in lot of spaces,

but this is the best place to be.

(Song)

Благодаря ти.

Dziękuję.

شكراً

Thank you.

Acknowledgements

Thank you very much to everyone who made this research project possible. Thank you very much to the children co-researchers Aarvi, Adam, Alba, Alfie, Alice, Ava, Callum, Cassie, Kian, Noah, Ruben, Sanvika, Sophie, Summer, Viktor, Willow, Zuza. Thank you to all our families for their support on this journey. Thank you to those who have listened to us, supported our dreams and energies to drive change and witnessed the growth of our project. We, all together, created a powerful project that is already creating change.

Thank you very much:

- Supervisors: Dr. Sarah Kantartzis (Queen Margaret University) and Professor Jeanne Jackson (University College Cork), P4PLAY programme.
- East Lothian Play Association: Theresa Casey, Susan Humble, Ethan James, and Stacey Marko.
- Whitecraig Primary School. Specially Miss Isla Crann, Viv Short, teachers, secretary, cleaners and janitors.
- Whitecraig Village Hub: Specially Jane Cummings and Donna Thomson. Participants of Youth Clubs and senior citizens of Bite and Blether Group.
- Community Council of Whitecraig. Specially Shona Bennet.
- Support and advice of the Children and Young People's Commissioner of Scotland. Specially Nick Hobbs, Elaine Kerridge, Caitlin Hamilton-Jones and Nicola Killean.
- Support and advice of Children's Parliament. Specially Cathy McCulloch.
- Thank you very much Jesús De la O (Kira Sound Studio, EthicArts) for your support in the audio recording of the songs; and Carlos Lorenzo Gómara for your support in video editing.

References

- Benjamin-Thomas, T. E., Laliberte Rudman, D., Gunaseelan, J., Abraham, V. J., Cameron, D., McGrath, C., & Vinoth Kumar, S. P. (2019). A participatory filmmaking process with children with disabilities in rural India: Working towards inclusive research. *Methodological Innovations*, 12(3), 4. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2059799119890795>
- East Lothian Council. (2017). *East Lothian Play Policy 2017–2020*. Available: <https://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/playpolicy>
- Esquerdo-Lopes, R., & Serrata-Malfitano, A. P. (2021). *Social Occupational Therapy: Theoretical and Practical Designs*. Elsevier.
- Galvaan, R., & Peters, L. (2014). *Occupation-based Community Development Framework*. University of Cape Town.
- Hart, R. (1997). *Children's participation: The theory and practice of involving young citizens in community development and environmental care*. New York: UNICEF.
- Horgan, D., & Kennan, D. (Eds.). (2021). *Child and youth participation in policy, practice and research*. Routledge.
- Lundy, L. (2007). 'Voice' is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. *British educational research journal*, 33(6), 927–942. <https://doi.org/10.1080/O1411920701657033>
- Play Scotland. (2013). *Play Strategy for Scotland: Our Action Plan*. Scottish Government. Available: https://www.playscotland.org/resources/print/Scotland-Play-Strategy-Action-Plan.pdf?plscctl_id=18546
- Play Scotland. (2013). *Play Strategy for Scotland: Our Vision*. Scottish Government. Available: https://www.playscotland.org/resources/print/Scotland-Play-Strategy-Vision.pdf?plscctl_id=18543
- Play Scotland, Scotland's Play Council and Strategy Group and Dr Susan Elsley. (2021). *Progress review of Scotland's Play Strategy 2021: Play in a COVID-19 context*. Play Scotland. Available: https://www.playscotland.org/resources/print/Play-Scotland-Play-Strategy-Review-Play-in-Covid-2021.pdf?plscctl_id=20943
- Rivas-Quarneti, N., Viana-Moldes, I., Veiga-Seijo, S., Canabal-López, M., Magalhães, L. (in press). Politicizing children's play: a community photovoice process to transform a school playground. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 78(3).
- UNCRC, Committee on the Rights of the Child. (1989). *Convention on the rights of the child*. UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. Available: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/crc.pdf>
- UNCRC, Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2013). General comment No. 17 (2013) on the right of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life, and the arts (art. 31). UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. Available: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/51ef9bcc4.html>
- UNCRC, Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2023). *Concluding observations on the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*. UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. Available: https://tinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2FC%2FGBR%2FCO%2F6-7&Lang=en
- Van Bruggen, H., Craig, C., Kantartzis, S., Laliberte Rudman, D., Piskur, B., Pollard, N., Schiller, S., & Simó, S. (2020). *Case studies for social transformation through occupation*. European Network of Occupational Therapy in Higher Education (ENOTHE). <https://enoth.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ISTTON-booklet-final.pdf>
- Young Consultants of Santa Martha, CESESMA. (2011). *Rights and Wrongs: Children and Young People of Santa Martha Coffee Plantation Research the Relationship between Business and Human Rights on the Plantation*. San Ramón: CESESMA.

Data availability statement

All outputs of this research project will be archived in the P4PLAY community of Zenodo, under Silvia Veiga-Seijo's research. You can find the YouTube videos and data here: <https://zenodo.org/communities/p4playh2020/>



Creating a Play-Friendly Community with Children

A Report on a Participatory-Ethnographic Research



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. CC BY-NC-SA 4.0: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 861257.