



FAIR PLAY'S PROJECT PROTECTS YOUNG FOOTBALLERS

On 2nd July, former boys' soccer Manager, **David Lawrence** (60), was convicted at Bristol Crown Court on five nine charges of indecent assault against and one charge of indecency with children between 1972 and 1997. He used his position in charge of 2 football clubs (for under 10/s and 11's) to abuse boys, and was also a referee in a City-wide youth soccer leader. Lawrence had pleaded not guilty to all charges - he was found not guilty on charges of falsely imprisoning a child and on 3 other assault charges. He was jailed for 5 years. He had also undertaken work for the NSPCC and Barnardos.

For most of the years he had gained access to children through his involvement in soccer, he had never been subject to any form of check about his past. The simple reason is that his League and Club were unable to access Police Checks until 1997.

The youth league joined Fair Play and its **Child Protection in Playwork Programme** in 1997. The Programme enables those working in a play and leisure setting with young people to receive advice, training, information etc relating to good practice in child protection awareness, and to a national scheme of police checks, the VOCS, which is a Home Office/Dept. Health pilot scheme. Under this, a range of national voluntary bodies dealing with children and young people is able to access criminal records information, with the consent of the applicant. The resulting check discloses previous convictions (including any which otherwise would be deemed to be 'spent' under Rehabilitation of Offenders legislation). The participating groups appoint a Responsible Officer to operate the schemes with requirements of confidentiality, secure records etc.

The Value of 'Soft' Intelligence

Mr Lawrence would not, however, have shown up on such a criminal record check in terms of previous convictions. What did bring him to the attention of Fair Play for Children and, through them, his local clubs and league, was 'soft' police intelligence. In February 1998, *Jan Cosgrove*, National Organiser of Fair Play, and its Responsible Officer in the national VOCS scheme, was contacted by the Avon and Somerset Police through a letter which warned of Lawrence's having been known to the Police since 1978 as a man at the centre of concerns which included complaints, arrests, cases where no further action was taken, cases dismissed and other matters not pursued for lack of corroborative evidence, all relating to boys between 3 years and of juvenile years.

The senior Police Officer advised Fair Play that he was of the view that Lawrence was not an appropriate person to be a youth leader. Lawrence was sent a copy of this letter by the Police, which was also in line with Fair Play's policy of disclosure of enquiry results to applicants, as advised by ACPO (Association of Chief Police Officers).

Fair Play advised the league that there were very strong reasons to consider that Lawrence should not remain in membership or association of their organisation. With Fair Play's ongoing advice in a very difficult and traumatic situation, the league's officers interviewed Lawrence and he ceased his involvement with them and their clubs forthwith.

Subsequently, Lawrence was arrested, not for the first time, leading to the legal process culminating in his conviction.

In a recent letter to Fair Play's National Organiser, a league officer thanked Fair



IN THIS EDITION

- * Culture Department Misses Boat: Play Review "Mouse"
- * Children's Development in a Civilised Society: Leading researcher, Meyer Hillman
- * Keep Our Children Safe: Ian Burks Father of tragic victim writes
- * Ofsted Takes Over Childcare Regulation: Detailed Report and Comment

PLUS

- * Child Curfew Flop
- * Home Zones Pilot Schemes
- * First London Play Conference
- * Men in Childcare
- * Youth Exchanges Child Protection
- * NSPCC Open Space Campaign
- * Playing Fields Sell-Off Challenge
- * Discrimination Review
- * ChildCare Tax Credit News
- * Child Protection Act

AND

- * Digest: from the Media
- * The Back Page!

You can also see PlayAction OnLine at our Web Site [including larger Digest plus Events Diary - sorry, no room in this edition.

PlayAction OnLine is at:
<http://www.arunet.co.uk/fairplay/>

PlayAction is the journal of Fair Play for Children Association and Fair Play for Children Charitable Trust Ltd (reg charity 292134), and is made possible by a partnership between Premier Promotions and the Trust.

For this edition we thank Matthew Cosgrove for sub-editorial work, Janet Dalglish, Tony Stanfield, Ken McCormick, Stephen Rennie and many others.

Unless stated, views expressed in this journal are not the policy of Fair Play for Children.

Articles, comments, letters etc to The Editor, PlayAction, 35 Lyon Street, Bognor Regis PO21 1YZ, Tel: 01243-869922, Fax: 01243-862072 e-mail: fairplay@arunet.co.uk



CHILD PROTECTION IN PLAY

Play for its advice and support, in a very difficult time for all concerned. The league has now introduced a child protection contract for its volunteer adults.

'Nightmare situation'

Jan Cosgrove, for Fair Play, said that he was impressed by the very responsible manner in which the league had tackled what for any group is "the nightmare situation". He said that they had only just joined the scheme, only to be faced with the 'unthinkable' involving a man in whom they had reposed trust for so many years. "They had no way of accessing checks for twenty years, and yet in that time, he abused his trust which was enabled by his involvement. This cannot be a fair situation for any such organisation to be placed in."

He said that it was the access to information afforded by their membership of Fair Play and its child protection programme which had enabled them to remove Lawrence from access to children and young people. He paid very especial tribute to Avon and Somerset Police for their bold action in copying the letter with their concerns to Lawrence - "Avon & Somerset Police have a forward-looking attitude and practice towards child protection issues which Fair Play believes should be looked to by many other Forces."

Fair Play also recognises the civil liberties issues relating to soft intelligence but Mr Cosgrove felt that the handling of the issue, with the openness shown by the Police, together the safeguards in the Fair Play programme, established the right balance between the child's right to freedom from abuse and exploitation and the applicant's rights. The league had been advised by Fair Play of its view that Lawrence should be removed from access to its children and young people until and unless he could answer the concerns expressed by the Police. "This proved a wholly correct and morally justifiable position".

Scandal of denied checks

"What it also shows is that a man could use his position to abuse children and young people and get away with it until a system of checks and child protection awareness was in place. In my view, it is scandalous, after enough incidents, including Thomas Hamilton at Dunblane, that so many well-intentioned voluntary groups are being denied checks. This local league is fortunate - the majority of such groups are not - they STILL cannot access such checks.

"Our experience, over several years and many such checks, is that they WORK. In over 4 years, not ONE actual convicted paedophile has shown up through the checks. Which means they are not applying. Of course there are those not yet caught, but this scheme acts as a deterrent to ex-offenders who otherwise do gravitate back towards e.g. junior football clubs, swimming clubs, Scouts, play-schemes etc.

A System that Works

"We have also shown that a well-run system can weed out the suspect once concerns have been shared." Fair Play for Children is seeking to be involved in the new Criminal Records Bureau system due to come on-line in two years or so - with this checks will be made much easier to obtain, at various levels of disclosure. But Fair Play regrets the long delay in implementation - "there are other David Lawrences out there and they are still abusing children in situations in which parents entrust their children to people whom they think are safe. "



CHILD PROTECTION IN A PLAYWORK SETTING

Fair Play's Programme aimed at raising awareness, improving procedures and good practice in play organisations, after-school clubs, sports organisations, arts projects, youth groups, nurseries etc

* **Pack**, same title: 60 pages with advice about policy formation, checks, (police and others), what to do if ..., with examples, appendices, reading lists, more contacts, checklist: £10 [£7 Members]

* **Police Checks Service**, contracted Voluntary Member organisations only

* **Advisory and Information Service**, free

* **Training Events**, Joint Training ventures etc (costs negotiable)

* **Model Child Protection Policy** - now published

*Details: Freepost, Fair Play for Children, Bognor Regis PO21 1YZ,
Tel: 01243-869922,
Fax: 01243-862072,
e-mail: fairplay@arunet.co.uk*



CULTURE DEPARTMENT MISSES PLAY BOAT

After months of considering the future of "Children's Play: Centrally Funded Services", the Department for Media, Culture and Sport has missed boat, according to Fair Play for Children's National Organiser, Jan Cosgrove.

The Review into arrangements for the funding of central services for children's play came in the wake of several years of varied attempts to address the issues. In the early 1980's the National Playing Fields Association ditched its Children's and Youth Dept. after a row with government about funding. "This also scuppered Fair Play's funding for its national information service, but no matter, we have survived since which is more than can be said for several attempts by Government to find a solution to the issue of providing services and support to play at national level.

A [Fair Play] History lesson

"Take Play Board, a child of Ed Berman and Maggie Thatcher (now there's a vision) - Fair Play found itself shunned for suggesting it was too top down and would last maybe three years or so. No one loves a smart-ass, smart-ass.

"The noises of gurgling down the plughole were replaced by the new, wonder replacement, NCPRU (National Children's Play and Recreation Unit), which tried to re-act to the criticisms of Play Board, including a small, grant-aid function, all in the same budget level. But even NCPRU faltered - same criticism as levelled at Play Board, and so for a time, we were left with 'NCPRU-rump', which retained the National Centres for Playwork (4), and the National Play Information Centre (NPIC) - but on a budget reduced from £900,000 by a nifty switching of £500,000 from the NCPRU's budget into the coffers of the Sports Council which had hosted NCPRU.

"A review was put in place and around three years ago, NPFA returned to the fold with a contract from Heritage/DCMS to run NPIC and other services, same price tag. Some people asked what all the bother had been about - had NPFA continued to run the old Children's and Youth Dept. from 1983 instead of throwing in the towel, maybe (they argue) we would not have had such a history of mish-mash and faltering indecision."

Musical Chairs = No Game

But now the latest review has wrung the changes again. In a letter to national play organisations consulted about the future, a DCMS official has explained that Chris Smith MP, DCMS Secretary of State, "has had in mind his challenges to the play field on training and education, research-based practice, play outcomes and outputs and working together to a common agenda". But, if anyone thinks this means more resource for play at a national level, we get the next sentence: "We were also mindful of the budget that we have to work for and that any increase is unlikely".

From 1st April 2000, the current arrangements contracted to the National Playing Fields Association will be superseded by new arrangements farmed out to a number of agencies, but not so far including the NPFA. In Education and Training in Playwork, the DCMS has invited SPRITO to submit proposals for taking forward this work.

The DCMS says it is responding to requests for a policy resource by entering into negotiation with the Children's Play Council to fund a post with a small research budget, and also the Children's Play Policy Forum has been invited to submit proposals on how ad-hoc meetings on specific play issues could be organised, as a "sounding board". Tim Gill, Director of the Children's Play Council, has welcomed the news: "This decision confirms the merits of CPC's



HOME ZONES PILOTS

Roads Minister Lord Whitty has announced the location of nine pilot "home zones," residential areas where the needs of people rather than traffic come first.

They are: Ealing, West London; Lambeth, London; Leeds, The Methleys; Manchester, Northmoor; Monmouthshire, Magor Village; Nottingham, Nobel Road; Peterborough, New England; Plymouth, Morice Town; Swale (Sittingbourne, Kent), Cavel Way.

The Integrated Transport White Paper said that home zones could prove to be a valuable tool in improving the places where people live and children play. It said that, with good design, many of their objectives could be achieved within existing legislation. The nine sites chosen will be part of a three year monitoring programme to test this assertion.

The report of Lord Rogers' Urban Task Force, published last month, recommended that home zones be introduced in this country "based on a robust legal framework". Announcing the start of the scheme from Ealing, West London, Lord Whitty said: "Home zones could improve the streets in which many of us live, by striking a better balance between the needs of drivers and of others such as children, elderly people and the local community. Although I believe that these pilot projects will provide an understanding of how we can return streets to residents, we nevertheless have to be sure they are effective in meeting the requirements of the whole community."

The home zones concept was originally promoted in this country by the Children's Play Council, based on initial ideas put forward by Fair Play for Children through its Freedom to Play Co-ordinator, Rob Wheway, who conceived the idea back in 1994.

Home zones are understood as residential streets in which the road space is shared between motor vehicles and other road users, with the needs of pedestrians, including children, and cyclists coming first. Although home zones may confer some road safety benefits,



PLAY AROUND

consensus-building, positive partnership approach, and is a vote of confidence in both our mission and our values, embodied in the New Charter for Children's Play".

DCMS says it is conscious of criticisms of the Play Safety Forum and have asked the CPC to look at broader play safety issues as part of the work and research programmes they have been asked to draw up.

The future of the National Play Information Centre has yet to be decided - DCMS say it is possible they will invite bids to house the NPIC, preferably with access to a wider library whilst DCMS funds an advice post. CPC has commented that it may be assuming responsibility for producing "Play Today", currently produced by the NPFA, although DCMS has not committed itself to either this course of action, or of keeping Play Today within the NPIC structure.

'Keen sense of disappointment'

Fair Play for Children has reacted to the proposals with a keen sense of disappointment, but with no surprise, according to its National Organiser, Jan Cosgrove. "One can tell there's not going to be any real change, just a re-pacelling of the same functions and the same level of inadequate resource, but doled out to different organisations. One really despairs of ever getting Government to take Play seriously when we get such a damp squib as this. Words, as with every Government, are much cheaper than what is needed."

In its submission to DCMS earlier this year, Fair Play recalled the various previous initiatives since 1983, including Play Board, the National Childrens Play & Recreation Unit, and the current NPFA contract, all of which had been doomed to failure because they had not addressed the needs of those working directly with children.

The submission called on DCMS to take a lead and criticised the lack of 'joined-up' government which had led to the situation of the proposal to create 30,000 new out-of-school childcare projects, but no addressing of the challenge e.g. to vet the 90,000 new staff for suitability.

Neither had DCMS been proactive in combating the trend to disregard the value of Play, nor incursions by education into children's freetime, and on other important matters such as freedom of assembly, the right to be consulted etc.

Fair Play's submission identified the lack of any real policy framework relating to Children's Play, which is focused on children's needs as they see them - this contrasted with the attention paid to the creation of the National Childcare Strategy which has an adult focus, that of providing childcare to enable adults to be released, available or trained for employment.

Fair Play's Submission

The submission outlined the need for a new Government policy framework for Play: "Fair Play for Children believes that the time is ripe for a new Framework for Children's Play and that it should be based on a sound policy which recognises and understands its benefits. The framework should include:

* commitment to the Child's Right to Play and to appropriate and equal opportunity for children to access recreational, artistic and cultural resources, and equally that children should be fully consulted about their play needs and consequent provision.

* acceptance that the task of Government is to enable the creation of safe and yet challenging environments within which children can exercise their right to play, in formal and informal contexts - this must embrace inter-departmental co-ordination so that, for example, housing and transport policies reflect the needs of children in their neighbourhoods as a central priority.

* a policy machinery to enable the Government to keep abreast of the issues facing children in their environments, and so that those affected by policy making can be consulted - this includes children whose views are rarely if ever sought

they are primarily aimed at improving quality of life.

Thirty-two areas submitted a total of 48 schemes, including two in Wales and one from a residents association. Following consideration by a panel consisting of the Children's Play Council, Transport 2000 and the Department, nine schemes were chosen for monitoring.

The Department has let a contract to the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) to carry out a three year programme of monitoring. It is expected that "before" studies will take place in 1999/00, with implementation in 2000/01 and "after" studies in 2001/02.

JOIN FAIR PLAY FOR CHILDREN

We exist to defend and promote THE CHILD'S RIGHT TO PLAY.

Fair Play is a growing membership organisation.

We are able to link individuals, organisations, local authorities across the country.

We offer important Programmes such as Child Protection in a Playwork Setting, Skills Exchange, and Freedom to Play

Also Publications, including PlayAction, Fact Sheets etc

We lobby Government on a Fair Deal for Our Children.

Membership details from:

Freepost, Fair Play for Children, Bognor Regis PO21 1YZ,

Tel: 01243-869922, e-mail: fair-play@arunet.co.uk

Fair Play has just about the best Web Site on Children's Play:

<http://www.arunet.co.uk/fairplay/>

ISN'T IT TIME YOU JOINED!



PLAY AROUND

- * better co-ordination of all departments' interests in play through DCMS
- * an equitable machinery to ensure local government complies with government requirements concerning fair distribution of e.g. grant aid.
- * likewise government departments and subvented organisations such as the Sports and Arts Councils.
- * commitment to providing adequate resources for information, quality assurance and training opportunities for those working in play
- * standards to guarantee children's safety in play and allied leisure settings - this includes child protection awareness and facility safety, through setting standards, adopting legislation etc.

OBJECTIVES WHICH CAN BE REALISED

Fair Play for Children proposes the following objectives as being essential if we are to enable children fully to exercise their right to play:

1. Legislation to ensure local authorities provide adequately, to monitored and agreed national minimum standards for the play needs of children in their areas, and that children receive an equitable share of leisure resources. Changes to local authority annual grants and spending formulae so that children's play has a distinct and prominent profile.
2. Changes to Part X of the Children Act 1989 to require activities for children of any age to be registered and to put quality assurance as the main engine of ensuring basic and improving standards - that such a regime include recognition of the experience of relevant national bodies concerning such activities.
3. A children's play policy unit within DCMS to advise the Minister, to liaise with the various sectors, and to foster interdepartmental co-operation and exchange.
4. Establishment of a Children's Play Advisory Council with wide cross-sector and departmental representation, meeting twice annually, chaired by the Minister, serviced by the policy unit, membership nominated by various sectors and appointed by the Minister.
5. Support to the Children's Play Council for its work in co-ordinating the national voluntary sector. This might extend to co-ordination between voluntary and local authority sectors given the broadening of membership adopted by the Council in recent times. However, the Local Government Association may also be an alternative choice for co-ordination of local authorities, leaving the Council to concentrate on its original remit, the national voluntary sector.
6. Resources to fund, either through a new national body or by contract to one or more existing bodies:
 - * national level information service, library
 - * a network of regional centres, building on the existing 4, whose remit includes field support, training, quality assurance, education, co-ordinated through a national office, with regional field staff whose primary task would be support of direct providers
 - * Play information points of contact, internet based, situated in many venues throughout the country - play projects, libraries, resource centres, colleges running playwork and allied courses, local authorities etc
 - * Adequate funding provision, not necessarily tied to the National Childcare Strategy, through Lottery grants, local authority funding, Regeneration programmes, community involvement programmes etc, so that children's play activities are not always the cinderella last to be considered and often first to be cut.
 - * Consideration of a legislative requirement on local authorities concerning a play service or provision."

The Fair Play submission called for a consortium approach to ensure the various

CHRIS SMITH ADDRESSES FIRST LONDON PLAY CONFERENCE

The Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport, Chris Smith, is to address the first annual conference of **London Play**, the new co-ordination and support body for children's play in the capital.

The conference entitled, "**Working for a Capital where Children can Play**" will held at the London Voluntary Sector Resource Centre, Holloway Road on the **6th October 1999** from 10am - 4pm.

Adrian Voce the Director of London play commented: "At a time when the need for more and better play opportunities for our city's children is reaching crisis point, this is a timely and very welcome display of support from the Secretary of State."

For more information about the conference and registration details please contact Kate Wanstall on (020) 7 609 7053, or Fax on (020) 7 609 7260.

INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF THE ENFORCEMENT OF UK ANTI- DISCRIMINATION LEGISLATION

The Faculty of Law, University of Cambridge, are undertaking research, funded by the Nuffield Foundation and the Joseph Rowntree Trust, to see how anti-discrimination laws are working - or not - in the UK.

RAD is preparing a response to the research consultation paper, and would like deaf people to tell us if they have felt discriminated against:

- a.. at work; recruitment, training, progression into management posts
- b.. socially; at theatres, other places of entertainment
- c.. medically; getting information about health matters; at appointments; finding a GP
- d.. when buying things; in shops, at banks, anywhere else.
- e.. or because of the colour of their skin, their religion, gender or sexual orientation.

If you can help, and for further details, please contact Ann Sayer, RAD Policy Officer, on 01306 882610 (text, fax and voice), e.mail annsayer@richeldis24.freeserve.co.uk



PLAY AROUND

current national bodies involved in aspects of play, such as Kids Club Network, NPFA, National Playbus Association, PSLA, Play Link etc co-ordinated their work, provided a coherent national information service and liaised with Government Departments, the Local Government Association etc.

Sports obsession?

However, the eventual outcome is a "mouse", a poor response to a golden opportunity. Whilst Government has recognised the failure relating to Sport and the young by proposing to invest £60 millions of lottery money for 600 'Active School Co-ordinators' to liaise between schools and local sports clubs, and £10 million is earmarked for the Football Trust for nurturing football in the community, this DCMS review has not resulted in any radical analysis, still less in any major additional resource. Fair Play calculated that in 1994/5, local authorities in England spent about £62 million on play, including fixed area playgrounds, or about 4.9% of their total spend on leisure - children make up 20% of the population. Another £60 million earmarked for Play would have started to redress the balance.

But Fair Play for Children's Chair, **Tony Dronfield**, poses the question: "Is the Government earmarking this lottery money for sport because it believes in children having the opportunity to access the resources they need for their individual development or for the future glory of the state? The contrast with the musical-chairs response to central play services is perhaps very telling. **Children's Play remains as much a Cinderella Service with this Government as with previous ones, mainly because none of them understand the immense value of play, despite the decades of lip service: 1 out of 10, Mr Smith.**"

RoSPA FACTS ON PLAYGROUND SAFETY

One of the concerns of many parents when letting their children out to play is safety, especially when it comes to playgrounds. RoSPA have provided some interesting facts on this issue. There are on average 40,000 accidents in playgrounds in a year, on average one these accidents will result in a fatality in a year. Recent research shows that many of the nation's playgrounds have defective play equipment and concrete surfacing.

Playgrounds come under the jurisdiction of the Health and Safety at Work Act, which means that playground operators have the same obligations and duties to assess risks and control safety as the managers, owners, of other work places where the public have access. Local authorities and local environmental departments are often responsible for maintaining safety and can be prosecuted if they fail to comply with the relevant regulations, or are seen to be negligent or at fault. The HSE (Health and Safety Executive) may inspect work places, and have prosecuted where serious injuries have resulted from poor maintenance of playgrounds.

If as a parent or a playworker you are concerned about a playground in your area then there are a few things to look out for.

- * Is it fenced in, to keep dogs out and young children in?
- * Is it clear of hazardous litter, e.g. broken glass, used condoms, syringes?
- * Does it have a safe surfacing, such as bark, rubber, or wood Chipping's?
- * Is there a notice stating the operator of the playground?
- * Do younger and older children have separate play areas?
- * Is the equipment suitable for age range the playground is aimed at?
- * Is the equipment in good condition?

If you are unhappy about the condition of playground then complain to the organisation in charge. Your local council may be able to help you find out who this is.

Your comments will be sent through to the University of Cambridge, and may help to make better laws for the future.

Jonathan Isaac, Royal Association in aid of Deaf people, Walsingham Road, Colchester CO2 7BP. Tel: 01255 830219, Fax: 01255 831186, Email: j.isaac@btinternet.com, Website: <http://www.royaldeaf.org.uk/royaldeaf/>

CITIZEN CARD COULD REDUCE SALE OF INAPPROPRIATE ITEMS TO YOUNG

Fair Play for Children along with many other organisations and professionals is concerned at certain products and services becoming available to children and young people and that is why we believe the new CitizenCard scheme could go some way to reducing the sale of items which are inappropriate.

In a bid to combat the sale of certain items to underage groups Camelot has launched the CitizenCard, retail proof of age scheme. The card aims to reduce the sales of cigarettes, alcohol, lottery tickets (games) and adult videos to underage customers by giving retailers a reliable means of checking a young persons age. All 36,000 National Lottery retailers have received a pack explaining how the new system will work.

The CitizenCard will be available at the ages of 12,14,15,16,18 and 21; this system reflects the different ages at which different products become available to legally buy. The card will initially cost £5 for the first card with subsequent cards costing £3. The new cards will be available at key birthdays.

The scheme is non-profit in nature and is privately funded by major retail and commercial organisations of which Camelot is one. It has been developed in close association with Trading Standards and the Government to ensure the most comprehensive and forge-proof method available of checking age.

Also to combat the sales of Lottery Tickets to those underage Camelot have launched Project Child. This project, the largest retail operation of its kind, is a new training venture aiming to provide awareness. Since its launch, there have been around 700 visits to various retailers selling National Lottery tickets and indicators show there has been a decrease in the number of retail outlets who are willing to sell to a person who appears to be under 16. Camelot is on target to achieve 5000 visits to retailers in the current financial year.



CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT IN A CIVILISED SOCIETY

*Mayer Hillman, Senior Fellow Emeritus,
Policy Studies Institute*



Earlier this year, the NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) started a campaign focused on the issue of child abuse. Had the term been more broadly defined, it would be apparent that, whilst we can draw satisfaction from the fact that only a very small number of children are victims of the forms of abuse under scrutiny, in some respects there are grounds for far more concern that most children are victims of another more insidious form of abuse, also with lasting consequences. To appreciate the significance of this statement, one needs to stand back and consider how critical aspects of children's lives today - their rights and freedoms, and their physical, social and emotional development - have been affected by changes in society over the last few decades, and the price that children have had to pay.

In my view, the source of the harmful effects can be largely laid at the door of our addiction to the car and the careless way in which we have allowed these effects to be overlooked in our quest for greater motorised mobility. It is yet one further substantial cost of the car culture. The great majority of parents have connived in this child abuse. If we were to think about its adverse impacts, or even perhaps to be aware of them, it seems unlikely that we would wish to be a party to it, let alone condone it.

The loss of children's independence

When comparison is made with the lifestyle of previous generations of children, there are strong grounds for concern that such a high proportion of them - nearly all able-bodied - are not allowed to travel to school, visit their friends, or go to the park on their own, that they are increasingly being chauffeured, and the outdoor environment is out of bounds to them at an ever later stage in their childhood. Not only have the journeys they make steadily increased in length but the number they make unaccompanied, and on foot or cycle, has fallen sharply.

Our research has shown that those in the age group 7 to 8 years are now about ten times as likely as they were 20 years ago to be escorted to and from school. It has also shown that, although most children own a bicycle, it is acknowledged by medical authorities to be an ideal means in an environment not threatened by traffic for promoting fitness and health as it can be so readily tied into the daily routine and that, compared with walking, it has the potential for extending their catchment of opportunities 10 to 15-fold, few are permitted to use it to meet their travel needs: for instance, only one per cent of junior schoolchildren cycle to school.

Parental fears

The reasons given by parents for restricting their children's independent mobility reflect a growing anxiety. Increasingly, the outside world is seen as a place where children are likely to be injured by a motor vehicle or harmed by a bully or stranger. The instinctive wish of parents to avoid their children being exposed to risk has been translated into them taking away their freedom - for adults it

MEN IN CHILD CARE

It has long been established that men have been seriously under represented when it comes to the field of childcare and other related professions. This is due to a number of cultural and economic factors. Childcare is often low paid part time work and is still seen as work that women do. **The Sheffield Children's Centre** has been trying to rectify this gender imbalance.

The Centre has now been employing men as carers for 14 years; the situation arose initially as a response to the employment crisis of the 1980's when traditional industries of steel and manufacturing were decimated.

The breakdown of the industries that men had been traditionally employed in created mass redundancies, as a result many women were forced to take low paid part time jobs in the retail and service sectors. Men found themselves having to take on more childcare responsibilities. Sheffield Children's Centre responded to the challenge- their philosophy was that childcare was a job that could be done by men and women with equal status.

Initially the attitude was not universally shared by men or women but the Centre persevered with its approach and showed that men could make a positive contribution to childcare. They could help to balance the negative stereotypes about men when it came to childcare. The centre allowed men to show women and children that men did care and could be responsible, that they could provide positive role models for children as fathers- men could cook, sew and play football.

The Centre currently has a policy of 50% male to female staff; their recruitment policy of men is unique in Europe. Britain still falls behind when it comes to engaging more men in childcare. As well as actively recruiting men as childcarers, the centre has been involved in a number of related activities. They have developed the National Men in Childcare Support Network, which is based in and serviced by the Centre. This aims to profile the role of men with children, advocating on behalf of men and working towards protecting children from abuse by addressing relevant issues of gender.

The centre also provides information, advice and training on the issue of men as carers within unit based provision and within homes. They have also established fathers groups, including a group for gay fathers within the city.

For more information please contact. The Sheffield Children's Centre, Shoreham Street, Sheffield S1 1SA. Tel: 0114 279 8236.



PLAY IS GREEN

would be called a right - to get around on their own. That freedom has been replaced by their time being more and more under adult supervision and structured by adults, with a rising and worrying proportion of children's waking hours being spent indoors in front of the TV or in playing computer games. This is a sad commentary on this social change of the last few decades in that its effects have largely gone unnoticed and that fear is its inspiration.

Parents' concerns regarding the risks of road injury to their children if on their own are justified. In the last 20 years, car traffic has almost doubled and that of lorries has increased by a half. Vehicle speeds have risen too: over two in three car drivers and one in two lorry drivers now exceed the 30mph limit. And the so-called 'improved' performance of motor vehicles has enabled drivers to accelerate to ever higher speeds in fewer seconds. All these changes have effectively imposed an additional requirement on



vulnerable road users such as children to exercise greater vigilance to avoid injury in the consequently more dangerous environment or, more commonly, to only be allowed to go out in the company of an adult. Failure to do so has led to the death or serious injury of 200,000 children (nearly two-thirds when they were walking or cycling) during this period, mainly through no fault of their own - unless normal innate carelessness in child behaviour is to be treated as blame-worthy. Yet, all too often, police or coroner's reports contain the condemnatory phrase 'contributory negligence'.

The other source of parents' fears is far less justified by the evidence. It stems from a concern about their children's security - bullying by school mates, abduction by paedophiles or murder by strangers. This risk needs to be put in perspective. An extremely small number of the 12 million children in the UK are murdered by strangers. It is far more common for them to be murdered by a person known to them. Indeed, it could be wryly observed that far more are killed by strangers behind the steering wheel of a motor vehicle than are killed by strangers on foot. However, excessive media coverage exaggerates their incidence and thus the degree of risk.

The other source of parents' fears is far less justified by the evidence. It stems from a concern about their children's security - bullying by school mates, abduction by paedophiles or murder by strangers. This risk needs to be put in perspective. An extremely small number of the 12 million children in the UK are murdered by strangers. It is far more common for them to be murdered by a person known to them. Indeed, it could be wryly observed that far more are killed by strangers behind the steering wheel of a motor vehicle than are killed by strangers on foot. However, excessive media coverage exaggerates their incidence and thus the degree of risk.

Physical health effects

The circumscription of the lives of children is of course well-intentioned. But its effect is damaging children in ways additional to taking away their freedoms. It is having a detrimental consequences for their physical development. A recent BMA report shows that UK children have the worst health in Europe, including a decline in their fitness and increase in their obesity. This is in large part attributable to the fact that they walk and cycle far less - over the last 20 years, annual mileages on foot and cycle among those of school age have declined by over 25 and 40 per cent respectively.

It is a disturbing reflection on the limited public and political perceptions of children's needs that the link between their loss of independent mobility and their declining fitness had gone largely unnoticed until recently. In 20 or 30 years' time, the incidence of heart disease - and costs to the NHS - could rise sharply owing to the insufficiency of daily exercise during the critical years of childhood owing to children's increasingly sedentary lifestyle, greater confinement to the home and more of their journeys being made by car. (It is unrealistic to think that PE and games on school days only - that is half the days of the year - can compensate for the loss of the medically recommended minimum of a daily dose of 20 to 30 minutes' physical exercise that walking, cycling and street play can so conveniently provide.)

Mental health effects

The damage of confinement is not limited to curbing children's physical development. It also has other closely-linked adverse consequences. The effect of steadily diminishing children's access to a safe environment outside the home in parents' narrow but understandable pursuit of aiming to protect them from harm seems to be incurring psychological costs, albeit difficult to measure.

PARENTS ON LOWER INCOMES TO GET MORE HELP PAYING FOR CHILDCARE FROM OCTOBER 1999

Millions of families need to know about the Childcare Tax Credit

The Childcare Tax Credit should provide the biggest ever boost to childcare in this country by helping parents on lower incomes pay for childcare, says the national childcare charity **Daycare Trust**.

Two-thirds of families in Great Britain need to know about the Childcare Tax Credit when it is introduced in October as part of Working Families Tax Credit. Nearly five million families will be able to make decisions about work, wages and childcare with the Childcare Tax Credit in mind.

Currently less than 40,000 families are eligible for help with childcare costs from the Childcare Disregard through Family Credit.

A major report published 18 August 1999 by Daycare Trust says that effective communication about the Childcare Credit is crucial to maximise the number of parents who will claim it. In a MORI survey published recently by Daycare Trust, three-quarters of parents with children aged 0-14 years said they had not heard about the Childcare Tax Credit.

'Making the most of the Childcare Tax Credit' urges employers, childcare providers and partnerships, local authorities and parent advisers to raise awareness of the new measure.

British parents currently pay the highest childcare bills in Europe. Typical childcare costs for a family with two children - one under five and one at school - are £6,000 per year.

The Childcare Tax Credit will cover up to 70% of eligible childcare costs - the maximum amount families could receive will be £70 for one child and £105 for two or more children. Income levels where eligibility ceases will be £22,000 for families with one child in childcare and £30,000 for families with more than one child in childcare. Only registered childcare will count.

'Making the most of the Childcare Tax Credit' explains how the Childcare Tax Credit will work, who will benefit and by how much - illustrated by family case studies. It also assesses the implications for developing childcare services, employers and Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships.



PLAY IS GREEN

Children's detention in their homes curbs their 'voyages of discovery'. It also inculcates in their impressionable minds a grossly misleading perception of the world outside as hostile - a world in which we, as experienced and responsible adults, consider that people one does not know, rather than being the source of friendship, advice and knowledge, could well be up to no good and that their locality may contain within it elements of danger to which they should not be exposed. Increasingly, one can observe urban children being dropped off so that they can make the last few yards on their way to school, hurrying and, in some instances, looking only straight ahead. The impression one gains from this behaviour is that they have had the message of stranger/danger very effectively instilled in them. Indeed, a recent Guardian article recommended parents to tell their children to avoid eye contact with strangers!

As a direct consequence of this form of indoctrination we, the strangers, are less inclined to engage in conversation with children we do not know - a perfectly healthy instinct - lest our motives be misconstrued. It also has the insidious effect of relieving us of our societal responsibilities for keeping an eye on other people's children and intervening when we judge it necessary. It all runs counter to promoting confidence-building in children and inter-generational conviviality within the community.

Allied to the growing dependence on car travel is that it tends to limit participation in extra-curricular activity, especially when parents have chosen a more distant school for their child. Patterns of friendship, so critical to children's emotional well-being, are more likely to be geographically-spread and to be more formally arranged - a very different character to the more spontaneous ones that can thrive when children are free to casually drop in on their friends. As a result, close relationships with adults are less likely to extend beyond one or two parents and with siblings, if any. In addition, it promotes the culture of self-interest in that parents are encouraged to seek the safest means for their children - the ordinary car if the Range Rover cannot be afforded - to get to and from their destinations, not just for school, without regard to the effects of that decision on creating more danger for pedestrians and discouraging cycling.

The outdoor 'classroom'

What is overlooked in this process is the role of the local neighbourhood which contains within it learning opportunities and stimuli that are crucial to children's understanding of the real world. Whilst it has lower levels of security than the home, and the loss of psychological assurance stemming from that, it does provide another - informal - learning environment which can contribute to children's maturation, namely giving rein to their instinctive desires not only to enlarge their geographical boundaries and develop their physical and practical skills but also their social and emotional skills - and for building on all of these.

This neighbourhood represents a unique locus for relating to real life situations the knowledge, information and social behaviour learned at school and in the home- when on their own unsupervised. They can learn how to make their own decisions in an environment free from adult surveillance, learn how to act responsibly and how to assess the motives of those they do not know. (It is worth recalling that, when accompanied by an older person such as a parent, a child's instinct is to leave decisions to that person in the same way that, when abroad, we tend if we can to leave conversation in a foreign language to someone fluent in that language - but, in that way, lose the opportunity of improving our language skills through practice.)

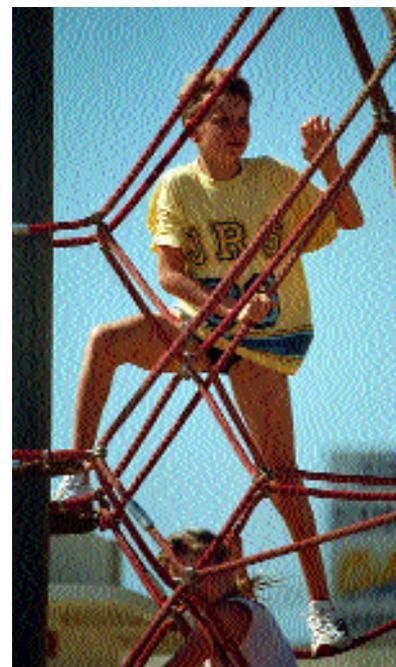
In this environment, children can gain self-esteem and self-confidence by being successful, reliable and punctual, by setting just-attainable challenges that give pleasure from meeting them, and by contributing to family and community life by shopping, visiting or running errands. They can also make mistakes and suffer the consequences, have adventures in what are to them relatively dangerous situations, be mischievous and take risks - all key elements of growing up. The 'information' gained in the process can then be placed in their 'memory bank' to call upon when making decisions in more demanding situations, such as when faced with a bully. (It is interesting to note from experiments on primates that

Colette Kelleher, Director of Daycare Trust, said: "The new Childcare Tax Credit will provide a much needed boost for childcare by helping parents on lower incomes pay for childcare when it is introduced in October. The Childcare Tax Credit is a linchpin to delivering a wide range of Government priorities, such as tackling social exclusion and promoting educational standards.

"The Childcare Tax Credit is more generous and much more widely available than current help. But its success in making a difference for families depends on extensive uptake by parents. The Government and local childcare providers must ensure that the Childcare Tax Credit is well publicised and easy to apply for."

More information: Daycare Trust Website: www.daycaretrust.org.uk or calling Daycare Trust's childcare helpline on 0171-739 2866. Copies can be obtained, price £2 each (inc p&p), from Daycare Trust, Shoreditch Town Hall Annexe, 380 Old Street, London EC1V 3LT; tel: 0171-439 2866.

We need PlayAction "regional Reporters" who can supply copy for this journal on what's happening in play in their areas. Modest payment offered if needed. Contact: Editor on 01243-869922 as per page 1





PLAY IS GREEN

damage to the development of their social behaviour by depriving them of the rough and tumble of their early years cannot be restored: survival rises with the extent of experience of risk-taking.).

New initiatives

One of the few aspects of children's personal mobility that has received attention during the last few years is the *Safe Routes to School* projects. These reflect a growing concern that more and more children are being escorted to and from school, albeit that its origins appear to lie in its effects in exacerbating rush hour road congestion for car commuters rather than in the damaging effects of taking away children's rights and opportunities to get around on their own! Laudable though the concept is, it reflects the conventional but false view that children's lives are, in the main, school-oriented and thus that the proper response to the greater danger to which children are now exposed from traffic lies in making the school journey safer. It is as if it is thought that the school journey is the only one requiring a safe environment in which to travel, overlooking the fact that children make many more journeys to destinations in their free time than they do to and from school and that 90 per cent of their fatalities occur on these other journeys.

Why not also Safe Routes to Leisure Sites and Amenities as the London Borough of Ealing project is attempting to provide for children - or more appropriately **Safe Routes for Children?**

The downside of other apparently worthy initiatives such as the Walking Bus for children on their way to school - as if going through a minefield; Safe Houses where children are told they can find help if they feel threatened; the ParentWatch schemes in which parents volunteer to supervise parks and play areas; and the Stranger/Danger campaigns such as that of Kidscape which advises parents to tell their children to Yell, Run and Tell if approached by a stranger, all contribute to a siege mentality in children's minds. The effect is not only to promote paranoia among children but among parents making them feel that they are not acting responsibly unless they are always with their children outside the home and irresponsible if they are unable to do so or to delegate someone to act in their place.

Conclusions

In our wish to do the best for our children we have unwittingly cast them in the role of second-class citizens through an oversight of the role of their personal autonomy in the outdoor world. The situation is far more serious than I think is realised: remarkably, society - central and local government, the educational system and, we ourselves - have all connived as active agents in the process of infringing children's civil liberties and, associated with this, damaging their physical, social and emotional development.

We need to rethink policy for our children so that it embraces the full spectrum of their lives, including its quality, its coverage of their activity in the evenings, at weekends and during holidays, and the role that this activity plays in the maturation process. It is clear that the conventional view about children's rights needs to be reviewed. Taking away their rights to a safe environment should perhaps be seen as a form of abuse. We need to set targets to enable more of their time to be spent free of overt adult supervision. Perceptions of car use as being anti-social - after all, 85 per cent of pedestrian deaths and serious injuries on the roads result from collision with a car - need to be heightened. Owing to the paranoia and fear that they can inculcate, the media must also act more responsibly so that the frequency of the rare instances of child murder and molestation is not exaggerated in the public mind through over-reporting.

Community life needs to be promoted by encouraging social interaction between children and adults. Children should be encouraged to learn and gain confidence from communicating with strangers and discouraged from treating them as potential molesters. And we - 'the strangers' - should see one of our public duties as keeping an eye on other people's children, creating a climate of confidence, as they do far more on the Continent, by intervening where behaviour appears to be verging on the dangerous or too anti-social. It is perhaps appropriate to recall the African proverb that **'it takes a whole village to rear a child'**!

YOUTH EXCHANGES CHILD SAFETY CONFERENCE

Delegates from 29 Countries
discuss issues.

The vast number of children and young people participating in Europe-wide exchanges each year (it is estimated around 1 million affecting the UK alone) raises issues concerning child protection awareness. These matters were examined in depth at a 4-day conference organised by Avon and Somerset Police in August in Bath.

The Avon and Somerset Force have been at the cutting edge of police action to work with local community groups to improve awareness, and are also the force whose information helped removed child offender David Lawrence from a children's football league through the league's involvement in Fair Play for Children's Child Protection in Playwork Programme. The force has also launched its own local initiative, Child Safe, aimed at local sports organisations working with children.

The extension of Child Safe, concerned with good working practices, to youth exchanges was seen as natural in the light of studies which showed a wide range of perceptions and practices within countries where exchanges are common. Delegates heard keynote presentations from Chris Gould of Somerset and Avon Police, a key person in the Force's development of its programme, and whose description of research confirmed that, whilst the overwhelming majority of exchanges were safe and pleasurable for children, the small minority of 'rotten apples' were a catalogue of distress, neglect and various sorts of abuse.

"The Buck Stops Here"

Jan Cosgrove of Fair Play for Children attended to give a workshop entitled "the buck stops here" and which drew from Fair Play's long experience of working with groups on the key issues. One of these was to identify the areas of responsibility of each stage of the exchange - at each stage in the link of child - parents - [school club college etc] - sending organisation - receiving organisation - local organiser - host family - child.

Whilst the research had dwelt on host family issues - whether they should be police checked, the differences in national practices concerning e.g. age of consent, criminal procedures, public attitudes - Jan drew his workshop's attention to the role of the good host family which he likened



PLAY AROUND

At the heart of the problem lie two complementary aspects which reflect society's careless attitude to children. The first is the relentless pursuit of minimising even the slightest risk of them being harmed. It has led to taking away the rights of literally millions of children to a safe environment outside the home. We have ignored the effects of this practice on children's development. The second is that formal education in school, important though that is, is seen to be so significant to children's learning that other less formal environments in which children are able to practice practical, physical and social skills can be largely ignored. These skills needed for the transition from the limited capabilities of childhood to the widely embracing competence and prospective independence of adulthood are by no means solely gained in school. The local environment has the potential for serving as the informal locus for their maturation as responsible, fit and healthy members of society.

As the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states, children are individuals whose inalienable rights are of no less value than those of adults. They have a valid claim to a safe environment. Now that we have evidence of the deleterious effects on their health and development of growing restrictions on their independence outside the home, it is difficult to believe that a civilised society will not wish to reverse the process which has brought that about.



to the delivery end of a good playscheme - "after all, these are the people on whom we rely, and from whom the child expects a good experience".

The workshop drew up a series of the draft guidelines which they felt should be at the heart of sound child protection awareness and good practice in exchanges. One concerned a system for ensuring checks for suitability on host families and on their local organisers. Another, the need for an independent advocate contact for the child in trouble, and also the desirability of ChildLine style phone numbers which would be answered in the child's language.

Workshop delegates came from Iceland, Eire, Cyprus, Wales, Lithuania, Scotland, Turkey, Slovenia, Belgium, Holland, England and the Czech Republic. One commented "This workshop was obviously drawn from a lot of detailed and practical knowledge. I was impressed in the conference with your insistence we look at things always from the child's perspective". Delegates also felt that the workshop's emphasis on ensuring we listen, and on how we listen had been instructive "especially when we thought of the good host family as perhaps being one of the contexts in which a child might say something about his/her own family life never before disclose - few people have even thought of the ramifications of that across national borders".

Conference delegates heard also Tony Butler, Chief Constable of Gloucester and from the Association of Chief Police Officer's Crime Committee in an impressive address on work between national police forces. A chilling account was given by Det Sergeant Mick Jones of the National Crime Squad on Operation Cathedral, a major inter-country investigation and police action to smash a huge internet child pornography network.

The Conference was funded by European Community money, and endorsed the principles of Child Safe whose Web Site is at: <http://www.ache.org.uk>

Right Fit

Glaxo Wellcome and Barnardo's have launched a three-year programme costing £3 million aimed at improving the health of young people. The programme is based on the belief that the best way to improve healthy living is to give young people the tools to make informed decisions themselves rather than be passive recipients of health information. The Right Fit programme is particularly interested in three key factors, which affect the health of young people, diet, fitness, and smoking. These key areas were highlighted in the 1998 Green Paper, 'Our Healthier Nation' and in a MORI poll conducted for Right Fit last year. In the poll over half the young people said that they wanted to see fruit and vegetables in fast food restaurants, and a third wanted the age at which cigarettes could be bought raised to 18.

In the first year of the project over £540,000 was shared between 45 projects. Although it is easy to see the importance of such a project some will question the true motives of a large pharmaceutical corporation, whose turnover is measured in billions not millions, willing to spend the time and money in such a project and some may find even more worrying is the fact that a well respected and major childcare organisation has 'jumped into bed' with them.

NPFA CAMPAIGN CHALLENGES GOVERNMENT ON CHILDREN'S PLAY

The National Playing Fields Association has launched the country's first play poster campaign aimed at increasing awareness of the importance of play for the nation's children. Announcing this new campaign, NPFA Director Mrs Elsa Davies challenged the Secretary of State to say where the government stands. She warned that increasing concentration on study groups, out of hours school-work, computer clubs and organised sport threatened to turn an entire generation into "robots, nerds and anoraks".

"If the government wants to demonstrate its commitment to education, it should start with time for play", Mrs Davies said. "There is more than enough pressure on our children today: what they need is most is time to create their own worlds, enjoy their own adventures and create their own experiments". The two NPFA posters carry the slogans 'No play, no childhood' and 'Let them play: childhood is short enough'. Parents know instinctively that their children need time to play but all too often they are persuaded into agreeing to well-intentioned schemes that cut into play time," said Mrs Davies. "Our campaign is aimed at everyone concerned with children, wherever they are".



Keep Our Children Safe

Ian Burks



When we send our children out to play in organised play areas, it would be reasonable to suggest that these places were suitable for our children to playing relative safety. Sadly this is not always the case.

In May 1992, I received a telephone call from Glasgow, stating that my son had been tragically killed in a swing park accident. A swing broke and sent my son crashing onto a concrete surface below the play equipment. He suffered a massive skull fracture, which took his life and also devastated my life forever. Since that time I have campaigned tirelessly to have such play areas outlawed.

I stated at the time that it was only a matter of time before a similar accident would take the life of another child. In 1997 I was informed of another death in Somerset. A young girl of 13 suffered the same needless death as my son Simon, when she also suffered fatal head injuries. After hearing this I knew that it was time to expand the campaign and raise awareness as to the potential dangers that still lurk in many play areas around the country.

I contacted Esther Rantzen who covered the death of my son on 'That's Life' in 1992, and asked her to assist in my campaign. She is now patron of 'Keep Our Children Safe Campaign' and has also highlighted the campaign on her new programme 'That's Esther'. The Rt. Hon Robert Maclennan MP is also very actively seeking primary legislation in this area.

My most recent correspondence from Mr Maclennan was rather disheartening to say the least. In a reply from Tony Banks MP who is [was] the Sports Minister, he stated "Although any fatality is of course tragic those occurring because at playground accidents are very small in numbers compared to those caused by traffic accidents".

I was not aware that we as parents were in the habit of sending our children to play on roads and in other dangerous places. He also stated that "If specific legislation on the actual type of floor surfacing to be used was introduced, it is highly likely that it would quickly become outdated and obsolete due to technological advancements". I certainly do not think that the parents of dead and injured children would agree with this statement. It is unbelievable for a government minister to make such a comment and obviously take such a serious issue so lightly.

Section 3 of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 requires all reasonably practicable steps to be taken to ensure the health and safety of children who use play areas. But it also states that it might not be reasonably practicable to eliminate all risks, and the cost to reduce those risks may be spread over a period of time. I must stress that there is no specified time limit placed on any undertaking. The HSE can only intervene in cases of playground safety on a retrospective basis, after a complaint or the occurrence of an accident. In reality, the lives of children are being balanced against cost, and this I believe is totally unacceptable.

The HSE law as it stands is all encompassing, covering adults in a dangerous workplace to children in play areas. I suggest that we as adults have the capacity to foresee and take preventative measures to ensure our safety. Young children do not have this same capacity to foresee potential danger, and therefore

NSPCC Encourages Supervised Open Spaces for Children

The NSPCC is working with local authorities to encourage families and children to use parks and open spaces. It is calling for more park rangers and play supervisors to help to make parks more child friendly. The initiative follows a new NSPCC survey which finds that 81 per cent of children's play areas in open spaces are unsupervised.

NSPCC campaigners carried out an audit of local parks in August to help develop child friendly communities as part of the FULL STOP Campaign. Five thousand campaigners visited parks around the country to discover how suitable they were for children.

The campaigners found that although 85 per cent of parks have separate play areas for children only nineteen per cent of the play areas were supervised. In all, two thirds of the respondents felt that the play areas could be made safer for children.

The NSPCC, the Local Government Association, the Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management (ILAM) and 40 local authorities are seeking to introduce measures which reassure parents and meet the needs of children and young people. Measures include:

- * audits of play areas in local parks and open spaces
- * more park rangers and play supervisors - vetted and visibly present in parks
- * child protection training for park rangers
- * more designated play areas for children and their carers
- * control of anti-social behaviour including substance and drug misuse
- * good lighting and visibility, well-maintained facilities, restrictions on local traffic, and parks free of litter, dog mess and other hazards
- * consideration of child protection concerns in local play policies and strategies and when designing new parks and open spaces

NSPCC Director Jim Harding: "The NSPCC is



PLAY AROUND

I believe, should not be covered by the same legislation.

Though playgrounds are considerably better than they used to be, many local authorities I suggest do not take the safety of children seriously enough. The debate on impact absorbing surfaces has gone on for over twenty years and still to this day, no legislation, has been put in place to stop these tragedies. The latest figures given by ROSPA stated that 40000 children annually are injured in playground accidents. These figures I suggest could be much higher if every accident was reported.

Many parents are sadly very complacent regarding such matters and only become involved when an accident has affected them personally. 'Keep Our Children Safe Campaign' can bring accidents to the attention of the media, but to bring about lasting change, we need the help of ordinary people to continue lobbying local authorities and demand that our children be able to play in relative safety. Children are our future and I believe it is their fundamental right to have a safe place to play and develop their skills.

Keep Our Children Safe Campaign would like to hear from any parent whose child has been involved in a playground accident or who would like to express their concerns about playground safety. Fair Play for Children is endorsing this Campaign.

**Please write to: Ian Burks, 147 Iveson Drive, Leeds LS16 6NR,
Tel/Fax 0113-2612958, E-mail: ian@burks.freesevice.co.uk**

working with a range of groups to develop communities where children can play safely outside. Playing is not just fun for children. It improves their health, confidence and social skills. Through play, children develop vital skills which help protect them in the wider world.

"Parents do not want to limit their children's freedom by being over-protective but they do care for their safety. Supervised play areas help reassure them. The answer is not to keep the child out of the community but to make the community safe for the child.

"The good news from our survey is that the vast majority of parks have fenced-off and well-maintained play areas for children. Many local authorities are already bringing in new measures to improve their parks. The NSPCC is supporting them and their representative bodies in addressing the needs and concerns of children and families."

The NSPCC campaign for supervised open spaces is supported by a range of organisations including: The Prince's Trust, the Association of Police Authorities, ChildLine, Kids Clubs Network, the Local Government Association, and the Institute of Amenity and Leisure Management.

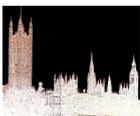
A new consultation report on neighbourhood wardens by the Government's Social Exclusion Unit outlines a national strategy for neighbourhood renewal. The report says agencies have gradually withdrawn park keepers and other staff from neighbourhoods over the last 20 years. This has led to a reduction in the number of people who can exercise the sort of informal surveillance which enhances safety and deters crime.

CHILD CURFEWS - THE BIG FLOP

According to The Guardian on 17th August, Home Office figures show that Jack Straw's Child Curfew powers (Sections 14 and 15 of the Crime & Disorder Act 1998) have been shunned completely by local authorities and the police. This fact emerged as other parts of the Act, including use of parenting orders, and various youth offending measures have been more widely accepted. The Child Safety Order provision, however - the individual child restriction order - had been used just once whilst the blanket curfew measure had not been taken up at all. As the Guardian put it, "the Home Office had planned a monitoring exercise for curfews, but this becomes difficult if there are no curfews to monitor".

Speaking for Fair Play for Children at this year's National Volunteering Convention in early October, where he was presenting a workshop on 'Where do the Children Play?', Jan Cosgrove re-iterated Fair Play's total opposition to the dubious principle of the child curfew. "Whilst so far no local authority has taken the bait of this tainted fish, we must be concerned on grounds of civil liberties, and our obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the European Convention on Human Rights, that this squalid measure remains on the statute books. It's there, waiting to be used - yet, the police and many local authorities have expressed clearly enough they don't WANT such powers. They do not help the situation of children being at risk from offending. One only wishes that Governments were as quick to identify the sense of proper investment in community play provision nationwide. That would go a long way to providing a framework of early intervention. Blanket curfews in a civilised society are an anathema. We see this particular measure as being the work of a bullying mentality which Government would not dare try to impose on any other segment in our society: the odious principle of the restriction of the many for the misdeeds of a few individuals. This law should go, soon."

Fair Play Fact Sheets are available via the Fair Play web site or by post. They cover a range of topics on play issues such as playground safety, The Children Act and play, City Farms, organising a summer play-scheme etc. A list of topics can be obtained from the address on the first editorial page or via the Fair Play web site. The printed versions can be obtained for a self-addressed C4 envelope and 3 stamps. The web site versions can be read on-line or downloaded, for free. **The latest titles feature Mobile Play and Child Protection in Playwork.**



OFSTED-

COMMENT

1. ONLY HALF A JOB?

The announcement by DfEE Minister, Maragaret Hodge, of an Ofsted-style inspection regime in place of current Social Services registration and inspection regimes for regulation of childcare leaves many questions unanswered, especially as regards activities involving children aged 8 and over.

The change to a nationally-based Ofsted-style inspectorate covering all aspects of early years childcare and education, in order to create consistency of approach, was foreshadowed in the DfEE consultation document. Fair Play was one of many bodies which responded to the consultation, and broadly came down in favour of such an approach, with the following provisos:

* that the system included all activities involving children up to age 16

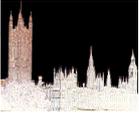
* that the inspection machinery involved people who knew about the actual types of activity they were registering and inspecting.

“On these two fundamental points, the Minister’s announcement has left us with misgivings. If Ofsted, as we know it now, is to be the means of further encroachment into the free, play time of the under-8’s, we will be very worried indeed. We need guarantees for that space that children need, and we wonder if Mr Woodhead’s outlook will be a guarantee of that.”

This concern was voiced by **Ken McCormick, Vice-chair of Fair Play**. “And we are entirely nonplussed by the vagueness of Mrs Hodge’s proposals as regards the 8’s and over age range. We welcome, of course, a fit person test for suitability of workers, especially after the recent David Lawrence case (does Mrs Hodge include junior football leagues in her determination of who shall be checked?)

“But we cannot understand the logic, in terms of good play, childcare and child protection practices, for not extending the proposed new regulatory regime to this age range. Surely, if the child is at the centre of all this, isn’t s/he as worthy of protection and good standards as the child under 8? This is another missed opportunity.”

Cynics may point to the influence of the greater deregulation task force who opposed any inclusion of the older age group in new regulatory provision - Fair Play questioned their knowledge of children’s needs in its submission. The Government, anxious to achieve a good part of its target to create 30,000 new out-of-school activities, may have been concerned that a high



NEWS AND VIEWS

standards regime may have delayed implementation progress.

However, **Jan Cosgrove** of Fair Play questions what the new regime will mean for those activities which have both under8's and 8+ children attending - "the majority of out-of-school activities, I would hazard". He points to the current confusing system of regulation which also ignores the 8+ children:

"How can standards be set for such situations where there are going to be regulations and standards relating to e.g. space, adult:child ratios etc relating to the younger children but not the older. This is plainly daft and the DfEE needs to think this out more carefully before committing itself to a situation little better than what we have now."

The new regime will have major implications for the whole field of early years education and childcare, whilst there is much to be done to convince the Government that all children deserve the guarantee of good standards of the right sort of regulatory machinery.

2. DAYCARE TRUST WELCOMES OFSTED REGULATION OF CHILDCARE SERVICES AS END TO 'INCONSISTENCY AND INCOHERENCE'

The National childcare charity, **Daycare Trust**, has welcomed Government plans to introduce one system of regulation under OFSTED for childcare and pre-school services in the UK.

Daycare Trust has long argued for such changes to improve the quality of services for children and boost parents' confidence. It says the Government's proposed move is crucial to creating high quality services for all children and will help the integration of early years education and childcare services.

The current proliferation of different forms of regulation under the Children Act and various Education Acts and the omission of some children's services from any form of regulation is confusing, full of anomalies and threatens the quality of services. Inconsistencies include:

- * staff:child ratios for four year old children range from 1:3 for childminders to 1:13 in nursery classes with no limits in reception classes

- * nannies, childcare services for over eights and services in independent schools are not regulated

- * some facilities are inspected annually and others every four years



NEWS AND VIEWS

Colette Kelleher said: "The current system of regulation is an incoherent mess which does not consistently ensure basic quality standards. These proposed reforms - together with investment by Government - should provide a greatly improved quality framework to ensure that the increasing number of children's services are of the highest possible standards. We look forward to seeing the detail of the proposals. The real test will be whether they improve quality for children and give parents the confidence they want."

3. SOCIAL SERVICES UNITS IN OFSTED TAKE-OVER?

Concern about the future of existing Social Services Registration and Inspection Units seems to be the subject of a pre-emptive strike as reports circulate in some areas of numbers of existing social services staff being 'taken over' onto Ofsted's payroll.

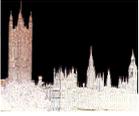
"We had hoped for some consultation about this as many of us do wonder sometimes what grasp some R&I units had on the concept of open access playwork. What we really wanted to see is a regime where those inspecting have some idea of what it is they are inspecting - so, it would make sense for Ofsted to a) consult e.g. the National Playbus Association about codes of practice for mobile play work, and b) for such inspections to be undertaken by people who know that specialist field.

"We can only hope this current situation is to enable Ofsted to take on its new duties smoothly - but we would like to see that consultation. And we have to get the powers-that-be to see that formal education, wonderful though it is, is not the main reason we run Play projects, nor why Children need them." **Maureen Williams**, Merseyside Network Co-ordinator for Fair Play, voicing her concerns.

FAIR PLAY PUBLICATIONS

We have a range of Fact Sheets on play-related topics: e.g. playground safety, equal opportunities, city farms, special needs, local play policies, right of assembly etc. We also publish packs and guides such as Aids and Playwork, Playground, Safety Checklist, Child Protection in a Playwork Setting etc.

For full list ask for our Publications leaflet by contacting: Freepost, Fair Play for Children, Bognor Regis PO21 1YZ, Tel/fax: 01243-869922, e-mail: fairplay@arunet.co.uk



NEWS AND VIEWS



PLAY RESEARCH SUMMARY PUBLISHED

A summary of over 500 national and international play research projects has been published by the National Playing Fields Association. For the first time, consultants, playworkers, researchers and academics have easy access to this invaluable information.

'Research into Children's Play: an executive summary' covers research into a wide variety of play situations from early years to adolescence including gender and play, development and play, play fighting, play and children with disability, television video games and computers etc.

NPFA Publications, 25 Ovington Square, London SW3 1LQ, price £10.00

PlayAction OnLine is at:
<http://www.arunet.co.uk/fairplay/>

THIS SPACE

For a modest cost, your job or play resource advertisement can reach those most likely to want to read it:

Play Units, Playworkers, Youth Workers, Leisure Departments, Play and Childcare Organisations, Commercial Play Firms, National Organisations, Social Services, Volunteer Bureaus, Playing Fields Associations, Community Organisations etc etc

= THE PERFECT MATCH!

Contact: PlayAction Ads, Fair Play for Children, Tel/fax: 01243-869922

WE ARE LOOKING FOR VOLUNTARY NETWORK CO-ORDINATORS

in various parts of the country, to work with the National Co-ordinator to develop networking, skills exchange, inclusive play, child protection awareness, internet project and membership growth:

London West and Home Counties, South (Hampshire, Surrey, non-coastal areas of East and West Sussex etc, West Midlands, North (Cumbria, North Lancs etc)

We are also seeking voluntary County Co-ordinators to work within existing Fair Play regional network areas with priority for: Greater Manchester, Birmingham, South Yorkshire, Hampshire, Cheshire (but any other offers equally welcome). Expenses are payable. The area and commitment are entirely negotiable. The person can work from home or as part of a Fair Play member project willing to host - this happens in Merseyside, the South Coast, Tyneside, South London, and the West.

Contact: National Co-ordinator

JOIN FAIR PLAY FOR CHILDREN



DIGEST and NEWS

Winning makes comeback as pupils told: score for Britain. - Denis Campbell and Patrick Wintour – *The Observer* 20/6/99. [1/Au9] In a bid to recapture Britain's sporting glories of the past school children will be encouraged to adopt a more competitive and play to win attitude. Chris Smith has announced a revival of inter school leagues and a £60 million scheme to create 600 new schools sport co-ordinators in England and Wales to underpin competitive sports in schools. The Institute for Public Policy Research has called for a 'windfall levy' on Premiership football clubs and a unified UK football team. It has also called for the targeting of 12-15 sports where Britain can seriously expect to win medals.

Boys' exam results go into freefall. - Martin Bright – *The Observer* 20/6/99. [2/Au9] Despite the 'best' efforts of educationalists, politicians and other experts the worrying trend of boys underperforming when it comes to exams seems to continue. Figures obtained by The Observer show that 11 percent more girls are obtaining five or more A-C grades than boys are. Ministers are concerned about the link between educational under performance and crime. Boys are five times more likely to be excluded from school and three times more likely to be involved in crime.

Ofsted to oversee childcare services. - Rebecca Smithers- *The Guardian* 4/8/99. [3/Au9] The education watchdog, Ofsted, is to be given new powers to regulate childcare services. Its remit will cover the 100,000 childminders in Britain as well as nurseries and playgroups. The move as been hailed by ministers as the key to simplifying the regulation of childcare and "early years" education for three to four year olds. In announcing the new service, the then Minister for Employment and Equal Opportunities said it was time to create a "new seamless service and an end to the confusion, duplication and unfairness" The decision has been criticised by Local Government Officials and by the opposition. Theresa May, the Shadow Education spokeswoman said. "It is not right to start inspecting childminders. Ofsted provides a first class inspection regime for education facilities. But Childminders are not primarily educators. The Government need to think seriously about whether Ofsted is qualified and equipped to inspect people primarily providing care for people, not education."

Let formal lessons start at three, says Ofsted. - Alexandra Frean – *The Times* 23/6/99. [4/Au9] According to Chris Woodhead, the Chief Inspector of Schools, children as young as three should be given formal lessons in numeracy and literacy. Mr Woodhead claims that fears that structured teaching in these subjects before the start of school may damage children are unfounded. He said that he wanted to lay to rest the "sterile" public debate between supporters of "play based, child directed" learning and those who benefit from "structured learning involving some direct teaching." It seems that his comments will re ignite a row between experts in pre-school education and government advisors over how soon children should start formal learning. Some have argued that children would benefit from delaying traditional lessons until the age of six.

Life is too hard, say children aged four. - Alexandra Frean. *The Times* 14/6/99. [5/Au9] Interviews with four-year olds in nursery and reception classes around the country have revealed a growing sense of anxiety about expectations for them to succeed at school at a very early age. Some have spoken seriously about "not getting a job if I don't work hard." Jacqui Cousins, an advisor to the United Nations on early education, spoke to 130 children and found that they complained of being too hurried to play. One girl who appeared exhausted said. "All the time it's 'Hurry up! Hurry up!' I hate hurrying up", and another girl said "she had to work hard and not play so she could get ready to pass my Key Stage One tests", (the tests given to five to seven-year olds) Part of the problem it seems, is that with both parents increasingly working there is little time for anyone to sit down and listen to what the child has to say. Parents assume this happens at school, and the school assumes this happens at home. Dr Cousins says part of the problem is that parents and some teachers or childcare workers were so anxious for their children to do well that they over pushed them. Children frequently learnt most and enjoyed themselves when they were able to play- often spontaneously. They needed to develop at their own pace and not be placed in rigid learning structures. (Take note Mr Woodhead)

Suffer the little children. Why must the nursery always be a place for cruelty and loopy experiment? - Libby Purves – *The Times*. 15/6/99. [6/Au9] Libby Purves criticises the decision to push children as young as three into formal education and gives historical comparisons of children being forced to fit into adult theories, especially "privileged" children. She cites the examples of children being beaten and humiliated by adults often for their own 'moral' good. The Puritans New England Minister, John Hersey had this to say. "Break their will betimes... let a child from a year old be taught to fear the rod and cry softly. Make him do as he is bid if you whip him time times running do it." She welcomes the report by Jacqui Cousins, a UN advisor on early education, who has released a summary of her findings to *Nursery World* magazine. The findings are highly critical of children being forced into education early as three years old. She has found that despite the lip service paid to the value of play, the proposed new requirements are having a noticeable effect on the way children spend their days. Most other European countries are amazed that we send our children to school so early. Even in the UK, the Scottish Curriculum recognises the right of children to be educated through play, which is gently guided. Libby Purves argues that the trend to impose rigid learning structures on children is a dangerous one. "After all given a sand, water and a bucket an infant will unaidedly do physics, maths, restraint materials technology, design and (if burbling) language. What is served by interfering with this personal curriculum because it is time to chant ABC, or colour in tedious worksheets? Adult convenience is served, certainly; and parental neurosis about education and government statistics fed by measurable results. But you've wrecked the game and impoverished the child."

Po and Pals reap £32m for the BBC. Carol Midgley – *The Times*. 23/6/99. [7/Au9]. The Teletubbies are the biggest money-spinner in the history of the BBC, earning the company an estimated £32 million on programmes and marketing last year. The figures surpassed the expected total worldwide sales of £29 million and were 40 per cent higher than the £23 million achieved during the previous year.

Teachers say Ofsted 'harmful to schools' – *The Times*. 14/6/99. [8/Au9]. A recent survey for the Association of Teachers and Lecturers has found that half of all primary school teachers believe that Ofsted inspections do more harm than good. This contrasts sharply with the views of head teachers, three quarters of whom said they found the inspections helpful.

Harnessing the power of the pesterers. Jamie Doward. *The Observer* 15/8/99. [9/Au9] An interest-

Each of the Digest pieces has a ref number after the title and credit [e.g. 1/Au9]. The articles from which these digests have been taken will be kept for a while. If anyone wishes to have the full copy, please send an SAE (A4) plus 2 second class stamps, quoting the ref number and we will send the item to you. Send to: Freepost, Fair Play, Bognor Regis PO21 1YZ. We cannot respond by phone, fax or e-mail on this service.

SPORTING SUCCESS AT RISK AS PLAYING FIELD SALES CONTINUE

Despite the government's pledge to halt the sale of playing fields, the action does not match the words. The National Playing Fields Association (NPFA), the organisation set up specifically to protect playing fields, endorses The Central Council of Physical Recreation's joint governing bodies initiative to highlight the need for greater national investment in sport and, in particular, playing fields.

"The NPFA already has 710 fields on its list of threatened fields and we suspect the real number at risk is much greater", said Elsa Davies, NPFA Director. "As far as school playing fields protection is concerned, only ONE has been saved. The new regulations requiring all disposals of school playing fields to come before David Blunkett MP, the Education Secretary, began on 1 October 1998. Since then, only ONE playing field (Foster's Field, Sherborne) has escaped the developers - against 81 fields where consent has been given for disposal."

"Coupled with such a dismal record on playing field protection, the NPFA is concerned about the quality of fields which remain", continued Elsa Davies. "How can we ever produce a winning cricket team when the fields where our children learn the game are being sold off and turned into building sites? Sports fields or recreation grounds – it's the same story. The ones that are sold will never be recovered and the ones that are left are often too dangerous or rundown for players."

The NPFA believes that every playing field should have an annual healthcheck to inform its maintenance programme. The NPFA is so concerned about the issue of playing field protection that it has launched a Fields Fighting Fund to enable it to campaign more vigorously for statutory protection for playing fields.

NSPCC Welcomes Protection of Children Act

The NSPCC has welcomed M.P. Debra Shipley's Protection of Children Act which received Royal Assent recently. The NSPCC believes the new



DIGEST and NEWS

ing piece on how the drink 'Sunny Delight' was sold to the households of Britain through appealing to children. This phenomenon is known as 'pester power', and through it Sunny Delight has gone from nowhere to being Britain's third most popular drink in just 18 months. The makers of the drink, Procter and Gamble have spend millions on an advertising campaign linking the drink to a healthy lifestyle for children aged seven to fifteen, the adverts frequently feature children enjoying roller skating and other similar outdoor activities. In case anyone didn't get, the message Sunny delight also sponsors the English Basketball Association and blitzed schools with balls bearing the drinks logo. A quick note, although it is sold as a healthy alternative to Coke and other soft drinks, Sunny Delight has only 5 per cent fruit and as much sugar as a can of coke.

Targeting Children. – *Jamie Doward. The Observer. 15/8/99. [10/Au9].* According to the National Consumer Council computer games and football, shirts are two examples of pester power product. The goods are usually advertised on television and aimed explicitly at children. "There is an increasing tendency to target children. Ads are shown at particular times to gain maximum visibility with children." Said Anna Bradley, director of the NCC.

Second Cig Ad Blunder At Special School. – *Kelly Redmond. The London Press, 23/7/99. [11/Au9].* Parents and teachers have been up in arms at the Beormund Special School after two adverts for well-known brands of cigarettes were placed near to the school. Under a voluntary agreement between the government and tobacco manufacturers, cigarette adverts shouldn't be placed less than two hundred metres from a school entrance, on the children's route to the school, or be visible from the building. The agreement was signed in 1995 and the Committee for the Monitoring of the Agreement of Tobacco Adverts and Sponsorship (COMATAS) was set up to handle complaints. At present however the code is only voluntary and, there is no real penalty for tobacco companies who breach it.

Sponsor deals will continue. *The London Press, 23/7/99. [12/Au9]* A row has broken out over the sponsorship of some schools by tobacco companies. Schools, which receive private funding from these companies, will not be affected by the ban on sponsorship deals, providing the cash is purely a gift and there is no suggestion of promotion. The DOH has said that although it discourages contact between tobacco companies and public bodies the final decision is down to governors at individual schools. A three-year deal was signed in 1996 between Archbishop Michael Ramsey School and British American Tobacco (BAT) worth a £100,000 to transform the school into a technology college. The voluntary-aided Church of England school in Farmers Road, Camberwell, also received a further £100,000 in match funding from the Department for Education and Employment, plus an additional £100 per pupil. The money helped pay for new teachers, new computer rooms and refurbish the science lab. The company also provided new governors for the school and took Kids on day trips to the company offices.

Britain has 4m children who 'live in poverty'. *Alexandra Freaan. The Times. [13/Au9].* Children in Britain today are the "new poor" according to Paul Gregg co-author of a report published by the Institute for Fiscal Studies. According to the report, the number of children living in households with below half the average income has tripled since the 1970's. This means four million children, one third of all those under 18 are living below the poverty line. Paul Gregg added. "Ten per cent of children have not gained at all from the rise of living standards across Britain in the past 20 years."

Car trips are dads' time for bonding. *Alexandra Freaan. The Times, 16/6/99. [14/Au9].* According to a study carried out by the Family Policy Centre, and funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the car journey, traditionally seen as the setting for many family rows is taking over from communal meal times as the most likely places where fathers can bond with their children. Men who act as an unpaid taxi service often find that taking the children to school or football provides an excellent opportunity to chat and dispense parental comfort or pearls of wisdom. The study found that men's involvement with children often goes unnoticed because it takes place in a non-traditional setting. It also shows that home computers serve a similar bonding role, giving fathers, and their children a chance to take part in a shared activity.

Listen without mother. *Harriet Lane. The Observer Review, 6/6/99. [15/Au9]* This article focuses on the growing number of single fathers who take on the responsibility of childcare after divorce or separation. 1.7 million of the UK's lone parents are men. The article also looks at, in some detail at the pressures and anxieties faced by single fathers.

Weighed down by books. *Adam Sage. Unsourced. [16/Au9]* French pupils it seems are being weighed down with textbooks, leading to a rise in complaints amongst children about back problems. French pupils at the age of 11 often carry between 10 and 40 kilos which is 40 per cent of their own body weight. One pupil Sebastien 17 said. "Our parents spend £150 a year on text-books, which weigh us down and which we don't often use. All we get for the money is back problems."

Unsuitable cases for treatment. *Zosia Kmietowicz. The Guardian, 3/8/99. [17/Au9].* Many children are now being treated for asthma, often for long periods, even if they don't have the disease. Michael Silverman a consultant paediatrician at Leicester Royal Infirmary along with Dr Duncan Keeley, a GP in Thame in Oxfordshire has published a critique of the way asthma is diagnosed in children. They wrote the article, which appears in the current issue of Thorax, after noticing an increase in the number of children being referred to hospital specialists because they weren't responding to asthma treatment. "The reason they were not responding is that they did not have asthma," says Silverman. The drugs used to control asthma, corticosteroids are generally considered safe, but there is a worry that they may stunt children's growth especially if they do not need it.

Little boy lost on council day trip. *Matthew Knowles. The Daily Mail, 13/8/99. [18/Au9]* A boy of four was left stranded 25 miles from his home in Whitehawk, Brighton after the bus drove off without him. The boy was accidentally left behind after a day trip to the Tilgate Nature Centre in Crawley. Another visitor to the park noticed him and she tried to take him home but took him to the wrong address, she then called the police who contacted his father, who had to leave work and drive over to collect him. Commenting on the incident a council spokeswoman said. "Basically we've messed up. A huge mistake has been made and we have apologised."

ALL THINGS BRIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL?

Act, which places the Department of Health Consultancy Index on a statutory footing, is an important step in ensuring that those who abuse or are suspected of child abuse are not allowed to work with children.

The NSPCC supported Debra Shipley's Bill as it progressed through Parliament. Under the new legislation, childcare organisations will be required to provide to the DoH List the names of anyone suspected or convicted of harming children or putting them at risk. The Act will ban childcare organisations from employing anyone on the list.

The Act creates an additional level of protection for children because statutory agencies must consult the list, as must private employment agencies, such as nanny and nursing agencies who provide staff to childcare organisations. However the NSPCC would have liked to have seen its remit widened to include the vetting of staff and volunteers in non-statutory organisations who will be working with children.

A further concern of the NSPCC is that private individuals employing people such as nannies to work with their children are not covered by this legislation. The NSPCC supports the establishment of a system of registration for nannies, either through a national nanny register or by requiring local authorities to register nannies in the same way as childminders.

This Act is a precursor to the setting up of the Criminal Records Bureau - a one stop shop of all those deemed unsuitable to work with children - announced by the government last year and due to be operational within two years. The NSPCC would like checks with the CRB to be mandatory, free and available to all organisations who provide services to, or work with, children, including volunteers.

The NSPCC notes that the Act recognises concerns that individuals may be falsely accused of abuse and welcomes the fact that the Act, for the first time, gives individuals the right of appeal against inclusion on the Consultancy Index and the right to know when they have been included. However while the NSPCC is concerned that individual civil rights are not unnecessarily restricted, the charity supports the interests of the most vulnerable members of society - children - and their rights not to be harmed.

'Debra Shipley's Act recognises the importance of information being shared when an individual leaves employment with children because of concerns that they pose a risk. Any future employer will now have to consult - and act upon - the information on the Department of Health register.'

PLAYCARE PACK

THE BACK PAGE



The final BBC documentary on St Paul's Cathedral examined the effect of the pressures on the boy choristers of a punishing schedule which would have put a Manchester United Player to shame.

The position of head chorister is clearly a prized one, and one boy was shown to have a great desire to achieve that status. He clearly loved his singing - he said he did, he was aiming for a career in music, and was so dedicated that he put in more

effort than was good for his voice.

The Choir's conductor appeared a well-disposed, if somewhat obsessive character for whom the struggle to achieve was right and natural. Great emphasis was placed on his leadership and example. The particular boy had problems arising from his over-strenuous use of his voice - nodules had been diagnosed in his vocal chords, symptomatic of over use. The problem had been increasing generally in the choir as demand for its services, in the cathedral, with its demanding acoustic, and for e.g. recordings.

One found it hard to fathom how supposedly Christian clergy could have been asking, as they were, for even more services from these boys, yet they did - this as part of regular 13 hour working days in which there was precious little time for play. The boys, all anxious to please, and talented enough singers to have gained places in the choir, were easily persuaded, an exploitation of their natural enthusiasm and goodwill.

The boy seeking election of his peers as head chorister feared his recurrent problems with nodules, with long periods of enforced rest for his over-worked voice, would mar his chance of achieving his goal. Yet, he and a rival candidate achieved a parity of votes, leaving it to the choirmaster to make the choice. Knowing the problems, the boy was yet chosen, much to his delight - only to have to step down a short time into the new term. We were not shown his disappointment.

Whilst everyone may love the sound of the boys voices in a great cathedral choir, for the sound of purity and innocence it conveys, we ought to ask, is this the price bright and talented kids should be paying, and for why? Too-long hours, not enough free time to play, an over-punishing schedule. PlayAction suggests the Dean of St Pauls and his colleagues take a look at what they are asking, And ask if they might have a mistaken view of "suffer the little children"?

Children are like that [or, Teddy Sexing for Beginners] My play project recently mounted an activity at a community event, and ran a Name The Teddy fund-raiser which proved popular enough. Kerry aged 10 was one of the hopefuls. Given a list of names in alphabetical order, and after a lot of indecision, she then demanded: "Well, at least give me a clue. Is it a boy's name or a girl's?" I told her that wouldn't really be fair on the other children and adults who were taking part.



Kerry took matters into her own hands, literally: "Well, let's SEE then" and with that, she picked up said Ted and closely examined it. "Hmm, how does anyone ever KNOW?" she demanded. [This was one of the occasions where a) mum said "I'll swing for her, I swear it" b) strangled noises similar to playworkers stuffing fists in mouth could be heard audibly c) I swear the kid knew she was being dam cute. Any more such gems from our readers out there? [Oh yeah, send 'em in ...]

The National Extension College (NEC) in conjunction with Kids' Clubs Network (KCN) has published the Playcare Pack. This is a series of flexible training resources for developing and advancing the skills of playcare professionals. The pack has a unit based, activity focused approach which makes it ideally suited to the needs of N/SVQ based training, individual staff development, or topic based short training programmes.

The pack provides extensive coverage of the N/SVQ in playwork at levels 2 and 3, and is also mapped to national standards for Early Years Care and Education. It is suitable for training a wide range of staff both in out of school playwork settings. The pack comes as two ringbinders each containing a range of fully photocopiable units suitable for the appropriate level for the N/SVQ, and comprehensive candidates and trainer's guides.

NEC are also collaborating with City and Guilds and KCN to create an innovative distance learning programme which will lead to a new nationally recognised vocational qualification. This will be based on the City & Guilds level 2 progression in Playwork and Playcare and is ideal for anyone working or planning to work in out of school childcare. All candidates who enrol with NEC will get a specially commissioned pack of seven self-study units and a personal distance learning tutor. To gain the Certificate in Playwork and Playcare, they will need to successfully complete seven tutor marked assessments, and sit two written tests at a local City & Guilds centre. Vocational credibility will be ensured by observation at work in an out-of-school setting.

For more, Information about prices and details of the NEC's Playcare Packs. Please contacts the sales team on 01223 450309.

Sorry, no room for **Events Diary** this edition or details of our Network Co-ordinators - but you can find both of these, updated regularly, on our active Web Site at: <http://www.arunet.co.uk/fairplay/>

 **curfew watch** is Fair Play's campaign to monitor the effects on children's rights to play and assemble of section 14 of the crime & disorder act 1998.

We need YOUR involvement if we are to defend their right to play and to assemble. contact: Fair Play for Children at the address, tel/fax and e-mail numbers on page 1

WE JUST LOVE GETTING LETTERS FROM YOU [HINT]