

# Enhancing lives through enabling participation: Children as active agents in their communities

Rianne Jansens, Dr. Helen Lynch, Associate Prof. Maria Prellwitz. University College Cork Ireland and Luleå University of Technology, Sweden

**The P4Play Mare Skłodowska-Curie (MSC) Training network** is an innovative European Joint Doctorate (EJD) programme in Occupational Science for Occupational Therapists. This EJD was established in 2020 when 2.2m was awarded to a consortium of researchers and play advocates, in the highly competitive Horizon2020 scheme. P4Play is a collaboration between 4 academic universities in Ireland, Sweden, Scotland and Switzerland, and 15 partner organisations in Europe and the USA. The P4Play programme adopts a child's rights-based perspective and aims to investigate the nature of play through the lens of People, Place, Policy and Practice (P4Play). A refocus on play as a right requires further study as a central concern (or occupation) in children's lives. Occupational Science, a science dedicated to the study of humans as doers or as occupational beings, offers a unique lens to explore play as an occupation.

## Bringing children's participation into the doing of everyday.

**Introduction:** National governments deploy The Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) to establish child-centred policies and frameworks<sup>1</sup>. This includes a commitment to ensuring children have a say in their lives: also known as the right to participation. In 2015, Ireland was the first country to launch a National Framework on Children's Participation, to implement this **right for all children to share their views on matters that affect them and given due weight**. Hub na nÓg, the national centre of excellence and coordination on giving children and young people a voice in decision-making, is facilitating its implementation through training for professionals in education, welfare, municipalities and supporting tools.<sup>2</sup>

The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth is aware of the challenges in operationalising this right, as many children are under-represented: for example, young children and children with disadvantaged backgrounds or children with disabilities. **Therefore, the purpose of this research is to work with the DCEDIY to explore and examine best practices for enabling participation, particularly for seldom heard children, and in relation to outdoor play provision.**

The CRC provides health professionals a valuable tool to support the relationship with the client, the way the clinician approaches causes, symptoms and interventions of ill-health children, and facilitates expanded involvement in child advocacy and public policy development<sup>3</sup>.

Acknowledging people's rights is an important step towards social inclusion and **occupational therapists are well equipped in using occupations as transformative change, in supporting community members' development of skills for social inclusion, certainly for vulnerable groups<sup>4</sup>.**

## Exploring how children's participation is incorporated in guidelines, tools and policies for (re)design public playspace



### Aims:

- To investigate what guidelines, tools and policies exist for (re)design a public playspace in a municipality?
- To study what and how these guidelines, tools and policies for (re)design a public playspace in a municipality describe children's participation?

**Method:** Scoping review with also a grey literature search: (guideline OR tool OR polic\* OR recommendation) AND (public OR urban OR municipal) AND (playground OR "play space" OR playspace) AND child\*.

**Data analysis:** will be conducted with a framework, based on the Lundy model<sup>5</sup> and on the Council of Europe's Handbook on children's participation<sup>6</sup>.

### Preliminary results:

- Strategies related to structural elements, such as embedding children's right to participation in legislation and regulations, providing training for professionals involved,
- Strategies related to procedural elements, such as procedures to enable children to perform this right, child-friendly feedback mechanisms, promoting children's participation.
- Strategies related to outcomes, such as actively seeking children's participation, providing them with adequate information, supporting them in expressing their views, taking their views seriously.

Involving children in (re)designing a public playspace supports the creation of inclusive playgrounds, but moreover generates opportunities for children to take part in democratic processes and being an active citizen.

**Occupational therapists can play a key role in working in and with local communities as they can enable children to take part in decision-making processes in their community, especially for seldom heard children.**

Partner organisation: Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Ireland

Contact: [RJansens@ucc.ie](mailto:RJansens@ucc.ie);  
<https://www.p4play.eu/>

An Roinn Leanaí, Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige  
Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

References: <sup>1</sup> United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2009a). *General Comment No. 12 The right of the child to be heard*. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/671444>. <sup>2</sup> <https://hubnao.ie> <sup>3</sup> Waterston, T., & Goldhagen, J. (2007). Why children's rights are central to international child health. *Archives of disease in childhood*, 92(2), 176-180. <sup>4</sup> Hocking, C. (2019). A reflection on inclusion and human rights for occupational therapists. *New Zealand Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 66(2), 24-28. <sup>5</sup> Lundy, L. (2007). "Voice" is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. *British educational research journal*, 33(6), 927-942. <sup>6</sup> Council of Europe Children's Rights Division and Youth Department. (2021). *Listen-Act-Change. CoE's handbook on children's participation for professionals working for and with children*. <https://rm.coe.int/publication-handbook-on-children-s-participation-eng/1680a14539>. Print screens of different guidelines on designing a public playspace, chosen at random.