

skills and trust in their own actions. Create the environment. These skills are

Children and young people also spoke about how the absence of things to do had significant consequences for many aspects of their lives, including their health, physical and emotional well-being and risk of engagement with anti-social behaviour.

This points to how access to play and leisure is directly connected to the ability of children and young people to enjoy a range of other rights enshrined on the UNCRC, such as rights to health and wellbeing. In turn, children and young people may not be fully able to access their right to play if they are denied other rights relating to health and wellbeing, disability and inclusion, or freedom of association and peaceful assembly.

UNICEF<sup>7</sup> highlights the need to make sure equality of access to play and leisure for all children and young people and the 2008 NICCY Review raised concerns that several groups, including children experiencing poverty, children living in rural areas, children who had caring responsibilities and children with disabilities, did not have equal access to play and leisure. It must be noted that these groups represent some of our more disadvantaged and marginalised children.

The UNCRC provides a comprehensive framework which presents Government and public authorities, such as Councils, with a clear definition of the nature and importance of play and sets out their responsibilities in ensuring children's right to this is protected and promoted.

**1.** Government should make sure children and young people have access to safe, affordable, accessible and age appropriate play and leisure opportunities

In NI, play and leisure is not the responsibility of one department. For example, the Department of the Environment is responsible for planning, Culture, Arts and Leisure for sport and arts and Education for the Extended Schools Programme. In this context, OFMdFM has coordinated the development of the Play and Leisure Policy and the Implementation Plan which provides an opportunity to ensure a strategic approach is taken to play and leisure.

The Policy notes that "to recognise, respect and resource play is to recognise, respect and value childhood"<sup>8</sup> - the translation of this into the Implementation Plan represents a considerable challenge. NICCY has been an observer during this process and welcomes the approach taken of developing cross sectoral groups and of examining the needs of both young people under and over the age of 11 years.

As the Implementation Plan is nearing its final stages of development it must reflect the rights based approach and obligations of the UNCRC and include the range of actions needed to deliver the vision of the Play and Leisure Policy Statement.

This includes making sure clear timebound objectives, actions and resources are detailed in the Plan, documenting the lines of responsibility to duty bearers and identifying a lead department for play. This should ensure it is an effective mechanism for the realisation of children and young people's right to play and leisure.

*Duty bearers: All departments, particularly OFMdFM*