

Active Play

FOR ATTAINMENT

INSPIRING

SCOTLAND

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Outdoors

Supporting Scotland's children to grow, play & learn outdoors

Active Play

About Active Play	02
How Active Play Works	03
Why use Active Play?	04
Aiding recovery and building resilience post COVID-19	05
Case Study - Active Play: The Glasgow Way	06
Next steps	08



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About Active Play

Active Play promotes greater physical activity for Scotland's children in a way that is fun, inclusive and active. It contributes directly to Curriculum for Excellence outcomes in health and wellbeing.

Active Play is a proven programme¹ which supports children to become more physically active. Designed to develop physical literacy and improve children's fundamental movement skills (FMS). Active Play is delivered within the curriculum and is fun, inclusive and – of course – active.

Physical activity is underpinned by competency in FMS as it has been suggested children who have a higher competency in FMS are more likely to be physically active.

- Johnstone et al. (2017)²

Active Play is not just a 'nice' idea. Our research, conducted by the University of Strathclyde, is backed up by growing evidence from USA, Canada and Scandinavia which demonstrates the importance of outdoor, physically active play in aiding a child's mental development: boosting cognitive ability, academic achievement, imagination, creativity and social skills.

Active Play builds positive relationships between the children and their teachers, with improved relations leading to better classroom behaviour and supporting better learning.

Active Play meets priorities 1,2,3 and 6 of The Scottish Government and COSLAs six Public Health Priorities (June 2018). It contributes directly to Curriculum for Excellence outcomes in health and well-being.

SOURCES

¹ [Johnstone et al. \(2018\) Utilising active play interventions to promote physical activity and improve fundamental movement skills in children. BMC Public Health \(2018\) 18\(1\)](#)

² [Johnstone et al. \(2017\). Pragmatic evaluation of the Go2Play Active Play intervention on physical activity and fundamental movement skills in children. Preventive Medicine Reports. 7. 10.1016/j.pmedr.2017.05.002.](#)



Active Play improves behaviour, improves learning and helps our children to be better citizens for the future.

- Maureen McKenna, Executive Director of Education Services, Glasgow City Council

How Active Play works

Active Play is simple. It boosts physical activity in children and helps them to learn and develop skills through playing physically active games and taking part in unstructured play outside.

The active play games have been designed to help pupils gain fundamental movement skills such as running, jumping, throwing, and catching as well as raising their levels of moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) essential for lifelong health.

Active play games have also been proven to help children build important skills and attributes such as confidence, teamwork, risk assessment, problem solving and emotional resilience.

Led by a play worker and observed by the class teacher, a Primary school class takes part in regular one-hour sessions combining semi-structured games and activities with unstructured child-led play.

Local authorities and schools can choose the length of delivery of the programme in their schools, with the minimum recommended being a 10-week intervention.

We source, train and partner with play experts from the voluntary sector to deliver the Active Play sessions in school. During initial weeks, the trusted local partner provider lead on delivery. These partners are often local play-based charities trained by Thrive Outdoors.

At the midway point, we expect teachers to take the lead and deliver the programme with the play providers in support. The aim is to ensure teachers feel skilled, confident, and able to deliver Active Play once the play workers finish the intervention.

Essential skills to deliver the programme and lead on it in the future then sit with the schools and the teachers who are trained and have participated in Active Play.

Inspiring Scotland's Thrive Outdoors team lead the programme, coordinating at Council level and with each school to provide programme training, delivery through trusted local partners, and evaluation. Inspiring Scotland also maintains contract management and ensures effective collaboration and partner support.

Additionally, an excellent online resource www.actify.org.uk/activeplay provides teachers with further tools for delivery.

Active Play has helped me to engage reluctant learners and helped them become more involved in class lessons.

- Class Teacher, Golfhill Primary in Glasgow

The pupils are better at listening and following instructions. They are better at winning and losing than before and better at working in teams.

- Support for Learning Worker, Blackfriars Primary in Glasgow

Why use Active Play?

By boosting physical activity, Active Play boosts children's development and contributes to raising attainment.

Active Play can help educators and Scottish Government to close the attainment gap and get it right for every child. Children who are more physically active perform better in school and are significantly more likely to have a healthier lifestyle into adolescence and adulthood. Better school performance helps to close the attainment gap and fully supports national performance outcomes.

Our Challenge

Physical inactivity causes problems in terms of physical health and attention capacity. The annual cost to the NHS of physical inactivity in children has been estimated at £94million per annum³.

- On average, children spend 50% of their waking day in sedentary behaviour.
- Fewer than a third of Scottish children aged 10-11 years meet the minimum daily guidelines of one hour of physical activity per day⁴
- Inactivity is a problem during school time too. Studies by Johnstone et al, ^{5,6} found 52% of the school day is spent in sedentary time, 8% in MVPA and remaining time is in light physical activity.

The impact of Active Play in Glasgow, (case study on page 6, 2016-2019) found:

- 100% of children taking part had improved FMS, fitness, stamina, confidence and motivation.
- 92% improved relationships with peers and made new friends.
- 85% improved teamwork.

- 75% now play games, are physically active, try new games at breaks, in the community or at home.
- 81% of teachers who experienced Active Play planned on continuing after the programme ended.

SOURCES

³ [Foster, C and Allender, S. \(2012\) Costing the burden of ill health related to physical inactivity for Scotland. British Heart Foundation Research Group report for SPARCOLL. NHS Health Scotland](#)

⁴ [McGrorie et al. \(2018\) Comparison of two methods to assess physical activity prevalence in children. BMJ Open 2018;8:e018369. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2017-018369](#)

⁵ [Johnstone et al. \(2019\) An active play intervention to improve physical activity and fundamental movement skills in children of low socio-economic status: feasibility cluster randomised controlled trial. BMC Pilot and Feasibility Studies 5.45](#)

⁶ [Johnstone et al. \(2017\). Pragmatic evaluation of the Go2Play Active Play intervention on physical activity and fundamental movement skills in children. Preventive Medicine Reports. 7. 10.1016/j.pmedr.2017.05.002](#)

Aiding recovery and building resilience post COVID-19

As we find creative ways to use the outdoors to support school return for children safely and positively after lockdown, Active Play can help.

Pre-existing issues are likely to have been exacerbated by COVID-19. Active Play can help as educators deal with complex and challenging problems.

Through lockdown, Thrive Outdoors supported Active Play webinars and listened to teachers' main concerns for children on return to school. These concerns covered:

- how to re-engage with friends
- lack of confidence
- need for creative expression, to play out their fears and anxieties
- loss of basic physical skills
- potential poor behaviour and concentration due to lack of routine
- the implications of social distancing and what may occur in localised lockdowns
- traumatic experiences children may have experienced through lockdown, impacting mental health and wellbeing

As the effects of the pandemic begin to surface, a trauma-informed Active Play programme *can* be a key resource for Scottish primary schools' post-lockdown support, not only for children, but for parents and schools, whether in the mainstream or additional support needs (ASN) sectors.

Active Play can assist in achieving robust recovery, resilience, and reconnection across all ages.

Active Play: Re-connecting Children Through Play

- Re-connection and re-engagement with classmates and friends
- Building new friendship groups
- Allows the processing of children's lockdown experiences, relieving tension and aiding recovery, leading to
- Improvements in mental, physical, social, and emotional health and wellbeing

Active Play: Helping Parents Lead Play

- Play at home: online and other support to deliver Active Play in the home
- Building family interaction, family fitness and family fun

Active Play: Assisting Staff in the New Look School Day

- A tried and tested programme to help children adapt to the new-look school day
- Identifies issues: issues which, if necessary, can be shared with school staff and other agencies

His face lights up when it's Active Play time. I can't believe it, I really struggle with getting him to take part in gym and when he does he seems to hate it.

- Class Teacher, Parkview Primary in Glasgow

Case Study

Active Play: The Glasgow Way

Active Play was piloted in 2014 in Glasgow and since then has been delivered across primary schools in the city as part of its Attainment Challenge Programme.

In Glasgow, Active Play is delivered by a partnership of three play specialist charities supported by the physical activity social enterprise Actify.

The programme has been aimed at Primary 3 and 4 classes and involves the whole class with support from class teachers and support for learning workers.

However, we have also found that Active Play is just as valuable to all primary age groups in mainstream and ASN schools.



At the end of the term long programme, participating teachers and pupils have the ability to continue Active Play with the use of our online resources, toolkits, videos, and additional training.

In this way, Active Play also contributes to Continuous Professional Development allowing teachers and support for learning workers to develop new skills and embed the programme into practice within the school.

Active Play numbers

106

Schools supported

375

Teachers and SfLWs trained

2,803

Children took part in Active Play

1,049

Play Champions trained

1,056

Active Play sessions

848

Play Champions sessions

18,967

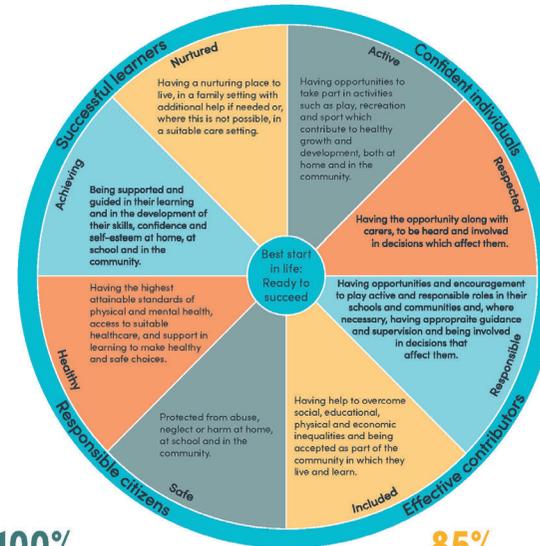
Active Play attendances

5,776

Play Champions attendances

345 SCQF-rated Hi5 awards attained by pupils

Active Play and SHANARRI



92%
Improved relationships or gained new friends.

58%
Improved relationships with teachers.

100%
Improved fundamental movement skills.

81%
Teachers planning to continue Active Play.

100%
Improved fitness and stamina.

100%
Improved confidence and motivation.

100%
Sessions run in a safe environment.

85%
Improved teamworking.

75%
Pupils now play games, are physically active, try new games at breaks, in the community or at home.

55%
Attending new clubs.

86%
Play Champions delivered sessions to others in the school or community.

90%
Play Champions delivered games themselves.

78%
Motivated to learn and lead games.

60%
Improved focus in class leading to increased attainment.

Active Play stories

Archie, aged 8, is on the autistic spectrum. He found it hard to play with other children or participate in group activities. He didn't join in or try the play equipment and would wander off alone during physical games.

Encouraged to play, staff introduced him to different equipment and to develop skills such as throwing, catching and playing tennis.

By week six he was joining in games and having lots of fun, trying different things and other children started to invite him to play with them. By week 10 Archie was taking part in all games and playing with different children during free play without needing support from adults.

Normally felt more comfortable with girls, but had now built great relationships with the boys and made new friends to play with.

Case study from an Active Play school

At the beginning of the programme Tyler would barely speak to anyone in his class and when he did speak, no one could hear him as he spoke really low and didn't have the confidence to speak up and let himself be heard.

Now he has stood up in front of his whole class and the Active Play class and has explained a game that everyone could hear in a group of around 40 people.

This shows the magnitude of achievement for him. Tyler was really proud of what he had accomplished and started to support his class peers to be more confident also.

Case study from an Active Play school

There are a few new children who do not speak English and it has been quite difficult to get them engaging in class.

However, when they are out in Active Play I was so surprised to see them fully engaged in the sessions and having smiles on their faces was a new thing. The children have picked up the games really quickly and this has helped them make friends in the class. I could not be more positive about the importance and impact that Active Play has had for the children. The teacher has said the children are settled in class and can focus more.

Staff found children who shy away from physical activity found it easier to take part in Active Play sessions.

Headteacher from an Active Play school

Next steps

We want to help. Active Play is proven to be effective in supporting children's health and wellbeing as well as their cognitive and emotional development. At this time, it could be argued this has never been needed more.

Active Play can help children re-engage with friends, to share their experiences of lockdown, to build their confidence through creative expression, and increase their physical skills. All of this is experienced outdoors. It is easy and inexpensive to implement, providing schools and teachers with the skills and confidence to deliver into the future in a way which is mapped against the curriculum. Active Play is enjoyed and valued by children and schools that have participated. The evidence base proves it works.

We believe that, as schools prepare to return after the summer break, Active Play could help your school, its pupils and staff adjust to the new environment we all live in. We can support your school with Active Play. If you would like to hear more about it, please contact us to discuss what we can do together.

Email thrive@inspiringscotland.org.uk

Twitter: @Thrive_Outdoors

Facebook: @ThriveOutdoorsScot

INSPIRING SCOTLAND

Registered Office: Riverside House, 502 Gorgie Road, Edinburgh, EH11 3AF
T. 0131 442 8760 E. enquiries@inspiringscotland.org.uk
www.inspiringscotland.org.uk

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