



**Information for Parents**  
**STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

**The Venture (Wrexham) LTD, Garner Road, Wrexham**

**01978 355761**

The Venture is an Integrated Children's Centre based in Caia Park, Wrexham. It provides a range of services, mostly to residents within the surrounding local community which contains three of the poorest wards in Wales. The services include a large self-built adventure playground, an Early Years Centre, various educational, training and sports facilities, youth club, nature area and early years area. The Venture is open 6 days a week throughout the year, closing only for a few days at Christmas. The Early Years Centre is registered separately with CIW. Its core services are based largely around its Flying Start groups which are supplemented by a range of parent support, health and other services.

The Venture's award winning adventure playground was started in 1978 and is now the longest surviving adventure playground in Wales. It is open 5 days a week throughout the year including Saturdays.

The playground aims to provide a rich play environment which is easily accessible to local children, young people and families during much of their out of school lives, where they feel able to have fun playing whilst developing their, physical, social, emotional and intellectual skills and capabilities and exploring a range of responses to different experiences encountered externally and during play.

## The Need to Play

Within the Welsh context, the importance of play to the development of children was forcefully expressed many years ago by the leading political figure of the day,

*“The right to play is a child’s first claim on the community. Play is nature’s training for life! No community can infringe that right without doing deep and enduring harm to the bodies and minds of its citizens.*

*Much that is unwholesome and dangerous to the nation comes from the overcrowding and congestion of our towns and cities, and in particular from the restrictions and frustrations to which they subject the lives of boys and girls who grow up in them.*

*Very heartily I wish God’s speed to the movement for providing room to play,”*  
Lloyd George 1925

Many years later, the Welsh Government have also recognised the importance of play to the healthy development of children and have developed play policies which now lead the world.

*“Play is the elemental learning process by which humankind has developed. Children exhibit a behavioural imperative and instinctive desire to play. It has contributed significantly to the evolutionary and developmental survival of our species. Children use play in the natural environment to learn of the world they inhabit with others. It is the very process of learning and growth, and as such all that is learnt through play is of benefit to the child.” (Welsh Assembly Government Play Policy 2002)*

Play is critical to children’s physical and emotional well-being and is central to a healthy child’s life. It impacts on the development of both their bodies and their brains. When given the opportunity to play, children are more likely to be physically active by running, jumping, dancing, climbing, digging, lifting, pushing or pulling. Through play, children experience a wide range of emotions including frustration, determination, achievement, disappointment, confidence and upset, and through practice, can learn how to manage these. By playing with their peers children also develop their social skills and build strong friendships, which lead to positive feelings of happiness and belonging.

Children deliberately seek out physical and emotional uncertainty in their play. From birth children are inquisitive and curious with a deeply rooted and compelling drive to explore the unknown and experiment with their

surroundings. By taking risks and having adventurous play experiences children can challenge themselves, test the limitations of the environment around them, develop problem-solving skills and find creative approaches to new situations. Ultimately play influences a child's ability to be adaptable and resilient, to cope with stressful events and therefore enables them to support their own well-being and ultimately, their independence

The Venture believes that play is of the essence of childhood, and anything other than free access to the broadest range of opportunities for **freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated** play, will have a very detrimental effect on the development of the child.

### **Open Access**

Whilst the term 'open access' currently only applies to registered provision for children under 12 years of age, such provision usually caters for children aged 5 to 15 years and in the Venture's case 16+. The purpose of open access play provision is to facilitate through trained playworkers, opportunities for children's play, supporting both children, young people and parents/carers to feel confident about playing out in their local communities. In open access play provision children are not restricted in their movements, other than where they are related to safety matters and are not prevented from coming and going from the setting as and when they wish.

**Playworkers on an open access site do not have a responsibility to ensure that children stay on site for a whole play session. This fundamental condition of open access play sets it apart from other child care settings.**

Throughout their attendance at the Venture children have the freedom of choice as to what range of play activity they wish to undertake and with whom they play, and they will be encouraged to use the play resources in whichever way they choose. Playworkers aim to facilitate a rich play environment and support children to extend their play experiences. Playworkers will only become involved in the children's play if they are invited to do so or if they feel it necessary due to health and safety reasons.

### **Registration Processes**

When a new child or young person visits the playground for the first time, a member of staff will approach them in order to welcome them to the playground and to introduce themselves as a member of staff. Their name is entered onto the 'Daily Attendance Register' and inquiries are made as to the

proximity of their home and or parent/carer. If their parent/carer is with them they are approached and asked to complete a registration form. The child is asked to provide basic contact details and is requested to take a registration form home with them when they have finished that play session so that it can be returned at their next visit.

Alongside the registration form is a information leaflet which provides information about our provision and our contact details. The information provided by parent/carers also informs us of any individual requirements, allergies or medical conditions or disability impairments which may impact upon a childs ability to play. It also provides emergency contact details should issues arise. Parents/carers are always greeted by staff and offered a cup of tea or coffee. This time given to parents is also an opportunity to discuss any issues and our policies are always available on request.

Owing to the fact that getting a filled in registration form returned can and very often does take several attempts the register is populated with 'Temp or a U' for those who are UNregistered and acts as a prompt to remind the playworkers to follow up on requesting a completed form. Further to this we regularly encourage children and young people to return home with a form and receive a reward as an incentive upon their return. At the time of writing this Statement of Purpose we currently have 1090 children and young people registered (September 2022). All children's and young people's registration details are available to staff in a confidential document kept onsite in the playteam's office .

### **The Venture - Playscape**

The Venture has a varied landscape with a lot of built in play equipment. However, children are also able to access loose parts, water, building materials, tools, art and craft resources and sports equipment and are free to direct their own play and build their own environment. Children attend throughout the year and in all weathers and there are several areas to shelter from wind and rain. We also have a fire pit and children enjoy learning about safety around fire building and keeping a fire going and cooking especially during the winter months. We ask that children arrive in appropriate clothing (definitely not school uniform) and parents are helped to prepare for their children to arrive home 'messy' sometimes.

The Venture's objectives are to continue developing quality play opportunities within our local communities and we support children with additional needs by aiming to provide an inclusive environment and a flexible approach which is informed by training, information provided by parents, playworker observations and reflective practice. We have been a significant feature in the lives of our local communities for over 40 years and are alsway looking to strengthen our

relationships with other community groups particularly those concerned with the welfare of children and young people. We also organise several large community and multi agency events throughout the year and we will continue to promote and advocate for children's right to play, rest and leisure (UNCRC Article 31) whilst contributing to section 11 of Welsh Government Children and Families Measure (2010) for the provision of Sufficient Play opportunities.

The Venture is funded to work with children and young people aged 5 to 15+ years and is registered with the Care Inspectorate Wales to provide minimum standards of care regarding children aged 5 to 12 years of age. As an open access provision, all children and young people are welcomed, however, children under the age of 5 must be accompanied by an appropriate adult.

Malcom King OBE (Manager) is the 'registered person' and has over 40 years experience of running adventure playgrounds. Professionally he is a qualified community & youth worker and specialised in adventure playgrounds during his training. The deputy manager Linda Platt who is the 'person in charge' and our most senior playworker has over 10 years experience of providing open access play opportunities on the Venture. All the Venture staff receive ongoing training in play and playwork commensurate with their particular length of employment.

### **Playwork Principles**

These Principles establish the professional and ethical framework for playwork and as such must be regarded as a whole. They describe what is unique about play and playwork, and provide the playwork perspective for working with children and young people. They are based on the recognition that children and young people's capacity for positive development will be enhanced if given access to the broadest range of environments and play opportunities.

1. All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate. Play is a biological, psychological and social necessity, and is fundamental to the healthy development and well-being of individuals and communities.
2. Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons.

3. The prime focus and essence of playwork is to support and facilitate the play process and this should inform the development of play policy, strategy, training and education.
4. For playworkers, the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas.
5. The role of the playworker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play.
6. The playworker's response to children and young people playing is based on a sound up to date knowledge of the play process, and reflective practice.
7. Playworkers recognise their own impact on the play space and also the impact of children and young people's play on the playworker.
8. Playworkers choose an intervention style that enables children and young people to extend their play. All playworker intervention must balance risk with the developmental benefit and well-being of children.

(Endorsed by SkillsActive – May 2005)

### **Staffing Ratios**

The Venture is committed to offering quality play provision to children and young people who attend whilst also ensuring their safety and well-being. With this in mind all its staff and volunteers receive training in safeguarding and first-aid as well as ongoing training around Play and Playwork and underpinning issues such as Reframing Behaviour and Risk Management.

For children aged 5 to 7 years a minimum staffing ratio of 1 staff to every 13 children will be adhered to at all times. This is in line with the National Minimum Standards for Open Access Play Provision. For children aged 8 – 12 staffing ratios should be “sufficient and proportionate, contributing to a positive environment for all children attending”. Children aged 12 and above are not currently covered by CIW regulations, and The Venture recognises that by the age of 12 most children will be playing out independently in their local communities and therefore are normally capable of looking after themselves. However, staff are on hand if they need support, which of course they regularly do!

The staffing ratios at the Venture are based on several critical factors which the calculation of staffing ratios take into account:

### **1) Knowledge of the Site**

The Venture only operates its adventure playground at Garner Road which it has done for over 44 years. The physical environment itself was entirely created by staff, volunteers, parents, children and young people. The vast majority of children young people and families who use the site are very familiar with the site having used it many times, in some cases thousands of times. New structures and equipment are always introduced gradually, generally with children and young people participating in both their design and construction. This minimises risk, including risk of damage to or misuse of equipment and makes experiences much more beneficial.

### **2) Activities**

All activities are supervised, at least from a 'distance' by experienced and qualified staff and many are planned and prepared carefully, however most activities are child initiated and led, with staff on hand if necessary or invited. Activities are either specifically or generically risk assessed. The relevant experience of staff as well as their qualifications are key factors in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of young people.

### **3) Local Knowledge**

The Venture is a very local organisation. Nearly half its staff live and were brought up in the area and most of them grew up through the Venture. Caia Park has a challenging reputation which means that playworkers are at their most effective the more knowledge they have of the context in which they practice and even more, the backgrounds of the children we work with and in particular their individual needs. The greater this knowledge, the more effective playwork and other professional interventions can be. Whilst playwork is a universal tool it is a blunt instrument without contextual direction. Again this detailed knowledge and experience is a vital component in safeguarding the wellbeing of participating children and young people

### **4) Age**

Whilst the ages of children is only ever an approximate guide to a child's capacities, it is important that distinctions and allowances are made, especially for younger children. The Venture has for many years included

in its staff rota a member of staff who is allotted to ensure that younger children are properly catered for and defined on the rota as an under twelves worker. This is not to say they work exclusively with under twelves or that other staff avoid or have no responsibility for under twelves, but rather that this designated worker ensures that the needs and wellbeing of this younger age group are given sufficient and appropriate consideration by the whole team, and the organisation as a whole.

#### **5) Gender Balance**

With the gender balance of children and young people attending the Venture being roughly equal, it has always been important that the staff team taken as a whole, as well as the daily staffing rotas, reflect that gender balance.

#### **6) Abilities and Needs of Children**

Every child everywhere is a unique individual with equally unique abilities, interests and frailties. Age, gender, background, health or even self-declared interests should be only clues, and not hard and fast determinants of how we adjust our responses to individual or even groups of children. Again, it is vital that playworkers or other staff and volunteers acting in the role of playworkers, recognise and respond to a myriad of messages about how they can influence the best play setting that helps the child's development, whilst protecting and enhancing their wellbeing.

#### **7) Experience**

The current playwork team have a total of 84 years experience of working at the Venture.

#### **8) First Aid**

It is our aim for all staff to hold a current first aid certificate. Certainly the daily staff rota always includes at least one staff member who has a current first aid qualification, but usually all of them do.

#### **9) Risk Assessments**

The Venture has fully adopted the risk / benefit principles and process developed by Wrexham CBC Play Development Service and all staff have undertaken training led by the Play and Youth Support Team and are



aware of the need to employ this process at all times. Examples of risk/benefit assessments are included at appendix 1

In summary then all these factors are taken into account in calculating the staffing ratios and staffing team for the daily staffing rota.

The Venture is big enough to accommodate very large numbers of children and young people. There are a range of spaces around the playground which children access on their way to or from the playground. The Dunks, a large open space in the middle of the estate for example is used regularly by children and young people. Given the statement contained within 'Principle 2' in that play is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated, The Venture playworkers enable children and young people to access a range of equipment or materials with which they can undertake the play opportunity of their choice and this compliments the design of the playground in which there are areas for den building or art and craft, quiet areas and other areas for games of football etc.

There are always a minimum of two playworkers on duty and one of them has a particular overview on the needs of younger children. At the moment our service is delivered primarily in English language although we do employ welsh speaking staff and provide signage in Welsh and English, we are also provide some information in Polish and Portuguese. All staff are trained in First Aid and Safeguarding and we have a stocked designated First Aid cabinet with a file for recording any accidents/treatment given. As different children attend at any time, emergency procedures in the case of a fire etc. are discussed with children and young people on a regular basis. There are several trained and appointed fire marshalls in the staff team. Dogs are not allowed on the playground, and people arriving with dogs are politely asked to take their dog away, having explained the strong health and safety reasons for our no dogs policy.

A prime duty of Playworkers is their need to judge if they have enough play opportunities for the number of children at any one time. Problems can arise if children become bored due to a lack of play opportunities or if they have to wait for what they feel is an unreasonable length of time to take part. Whatever the number of children on site playworkers will have to look at what is on offer to gauge if it is enough and that there is enough staff capacity to supervise it appropriately (according to the relevant risk benefit assessment for that activity). Simple things can be employed such as spreading resources out which can split groups of children up so that their play frames do not clash.

Getting something new out of the container can help to engage children who are looking for something to do. Adding more of the same can also help, so adding an additional football or box of art and craft equipment would reduce times children have to wait for a turn at an activity.

When planning for an event to happen during a session, playworkers need to consider if more staff will be required. From experience, events where food is offered tend to attract high numbers of children. Extra cover needs to be considered for sessions where children may have spread the word that something is going to happen. It is better to have extra help ready and not need it, than be looking for help at the last minute. The highest number of children attending the playground has recently risen to above 100. Three members of staff are usually sufficient to supervise this number of children however, we have recently appointed three additional sessional workers who augment the staff team when high number of children are expected, for instance during the summer holidays. The Venture has become an integral part of the community. Strong relationships have been built up between parents, teenagers and staff, which means there are always people keen to offer support when needed. Older teenagers and parents frequently offer support particularly with practical tasks (although caution always needs to be taken that they are not given too much responsibility or left on their own with children). Playworkers supervise this involvement and where possible and appropriate encourage them to become a formal volunteer where they will undergo a DBS check and receive training.

The Venture organises regular special events both on and off site. The annual Birthday party attracts the greatest number of children and young people on site, owing to its celebratory nature (and free food!) and a diverse range of activities. Despite this, our evidence suggests that we do not exceed 200 children under the age of 12. To meet this demand and manage the provision of activities all of the staff team and volunteers are in attendance, and this is complimented by older young people who are keen to be of assistance and many parents who have often grown up through the Venture and helped at many events as young people. This then becomes a community event for the local community, provided by the local community to meet the needs of the local community.

## Risk – Benefit

The Venture has adopted Wrexham County Borough Council's Policy for Risk Management in Play Services in its entirety. The Council states that:-

*“This policy has been developed to provide a coherent, consistent and balanced approach to the management of risk in services and facilities for children and young people across Wrexham County Borough Council and to ensure greater clarity of understanding around this issue. In doing this the policy aims to present some challenge to the existing risk averse nature of our society which can limit children's play experiences, therefore better supporting Local Authority employees in their role of working with, and on behalf, of children and young people.”*

This policy compliments and builds upon the work of the WCBC Health and Safety Policy and the Wrexham Play Policy.

“Children deliberately seek out physical and emotional uncertainty in their play. From birth children are inquisitive and curious with a deeply rooted and compelling drive to explore the unknown and experiment with their surroundings. By taking risks and having adventurous play experiences children can challenge themselves, test the limitations of the environment around them, develop problem solving skills and find creative approaches to new situations. Ultimately play influences a child's ability to be adaptable and resilient, to cope with stressful events and therefore enables them to support their own well-being.”

Wrexham Play Policy, 2009

The Venture recognises that childhood is full of new experiences, which necessarily involve some degree of risk taking, whether it be physical or emotional, because they require the individual to engage with that which is uncertain.

We aim to create places that stimulate, engage and excite children, in which they can explore and adapt and be inspired to play in many different ways. In doing this we will provide “safe enough” environments where children can feel confident to play and are unlikely to come to serious physical or emotional harm but in which they can experience risk (and therefore challenge) of their

own volition, whenever possible, unconstrained by the potentially limiting actions of adults.

Decisions about what is “*reasonable*” and the desirability of children engaging with hazards will be made using a risk-benefit approach. This process involves considering the potential benefits afforded by an opportunity alongside any potentially negative outcomes and then making a judgement about whether the potential for loss or harm is proportional to the benefits i.e. do the potential benefits justify allowing a significant risk of injury to remain?

### **Principle Policy Statements:**

There is intrinsic value in children experiencing uncertainty and personal challenge through their play.

We recognise that children are capable of managing some risk for themselves and that their competency will develop as their experience grows.

Children need to feel free to experience risk of their own volition and they will only be able to do this if adults allow some degree of uncertainty to remain.

There is a need to strike a balance between ensuring appropriate levels of protection and preserving reasonable levels of risk.

We aim to manage risk so that whenever reasonably possible the risk of harm children are exposed to is proportional to the potential benefits associated with the situation.

Any potential control measures must be justified by being proportional to the risk involved and consideration should be given to any negative impacts that could arise from implementing these controls.

Our risk management system incorporates a number of different elements which work together, enabling us to continuously improve our practice.

Whilst we recognise that children and young people’s play will reflect their need to ‘play out’ issues, frustrations and emotional responses, it is vital that other children and young people’s safety is not compromised. All children and adults accessing The Venture are aware that we have two simple rules – To respect the children, staff and other adults within the setting and not to do anything which hurts others. Behaviour which is considered to ‘cross’ these boundaries is immediately challenged in a calm manner and given time for discussion. Continued negative behaviour may result in a ‘time out’ and

sustained, extreme or dangerous actions may result in a time limited 'ban'. Should this be the case, parents are informed of the circumstances and reasons for the sanction. It is important to note that a ban is considered as a final resort and only after all other sanctions have been tried.

Our Open Access Playground is open:

<b>Term time:</b> Tuesday to Thursday 4pm – 7.30pm Friday 4 - 6pm Saturday 1pm – 6:30pm	<b>School Holidays:</b> Tuesday to Thursday 1pm – 6.30pm Friday 1 – 6pm Saturday 1pm – 6:30pm
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This statement of purpose will be reviewed annually or when any changes in our provision occurs and a revised copy will be forwarded to CIW by the person in charge.

Reviewed: March 2024