

The Venture

—

An effective response to localised needs

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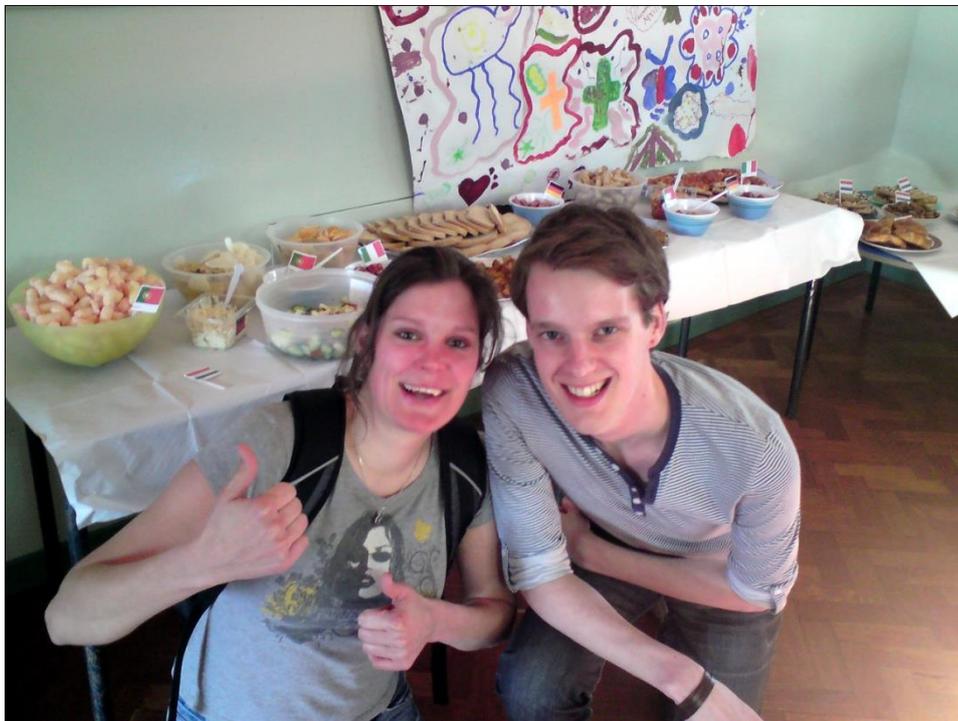
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Hogeschool Zuyd, uitstroomprofielen SP en MW

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Preface

As our work placement last year, we both worked at the Venture for a while. Both of us were struck by the idea of the Venture being 'owned' by the people in the community as much as the people in charge. We found this was a unique approach to Social Work, which we hadn't encountered before in the Netherlands. This led to us being interested in the Venture as an organisation and wanting to find out why it's as effective as it is. When the opportunity to research something in the field of Social Work revealed itself in the course of our studies, we both jumped at the chance to research the Venture.

We would like to thank the following people for their help in realising this project:

Malcolm King, as he is one of the founders and also the manager of the Venture, he has been very supportive during our work at the project. The interview we had with him, proved to be of great importance when writing our report.

Thoby Miller, for his support and feedback during the entire process of research. His knowledge and views have proven to be a very useful source of information for us.

Hans Schreurs for being a constant source of information and feedback.

Hannah King, for sharing all her knowledge about the Venture not only as a former service user but also as a professional Youthworker.

The staff of the Venture, for giving us all the support we needed, and by sharing their knowledge and passion about the Venture.

The volunteers at the Venture, for sharing their personal stories as well as their knowledge about the Venture and the community.

Carolyne Hofmans for her trust in our abilities and unconditional support.

Both of our families for their commitment and unconditional emotional support during our time away from home.

And last but not least, all the children and youngsters who have been willing to share their ideas and opinions, and for being a vital part of not only our research but for our personal growth as well. Without them, our research wouldn't exist.

Abstract

Chapter One: The Venture as an organisation

We will firstly describe what the Venture is and what its purpose is.

1.1 The statute of the organisation

The Venture is, first and foremost, a place where children and young people are allowed to play and be themselves.

1.2 Target group

In short, a lot of the children/young people who attend the Venture live in Caia Park, one of the most disadvantaged areas in the UK.

1.3 Structure of the organisation

1.3.1 Infrastructure

The main (and largest) asset of the Venture is its playground.

1.3.2 Staff

The Venture staff consists of a number of people all doing different jobs, but the one thing they have in common is that they all work with children and youngsters.

1.4 Operation

1.4.1 Procedure of intake

The playground is open access, so everyone can come and go as they please.

1.4.2 Aim

The main purpose of the Venture is to provide children with a safe place to play, learn and express themselves.

1.4.3 Vision

The Venture has a 'holistic' approach in working with children and youngsters. This means that each child is seen as an individual.

1.5 The Venture's philosophy

The Venture's main philosophy is based on the idea that play provides the best vehicle for a child's growth.

1.6 The Venture's culture

Without the children/young people present, it feels empty and 'sad'. Once the children enter the playground, the place lights up with life and laughter.

Chapter Two: How and why did the Venture start?

This chapter will give an insight into how the Venture was first started.

2.1 Caia Park in the seventies

The Venture was started in 1978. To understand why, we need to take a look at the community of Caia Park (then called Queens Park) around that time.

2.2 The beginning of the Venture

Mr. King strongly believes the best way to learn is from experience. The things you learn from doing stick with you longer than the things you learn from books.

2.3 The continuing evolvement of the Venture

It's in the very nature of adventure playgrounds to change and evolve, in order to comply with its service-users' wishes.

Chapter Three: The Venture placed in a broader perspective

In this chapter we'll try to describe the idea behind the adventure playgrounds. Where can we place them in terms of social services.

3.1 The origins of the adventure playgrounds

The origins of the adventure playgrounds lays in Denmark.

3.2 Child poverty and social exclusion

At the time the Venture started, Britain ranked third on the list of countries with the most child poverty . (Hills & Stewart, 2005).

3.2.1 The introduction of the SEU

In 1997 the creation of the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) was announced by Peter Mandelson.

3.3 The Venture as a professional organisation

"The Venture has been used as a model for the programme of Integrated Children's Centres in Wales, wherein one of the four key aspects is open access play". (www.playwales.org.uk).

Chapter Four: The different professions present at the Venture

Almost every organisation has multiple professionals working for them, each with their own specialties and qualities.

4.1 The professionals present at the Venture

4.1.1 Playworkers

This may be one of the most interesting professions present at the Venture. Not because it is unique for the Venture but since it is a profession not known in the Netherlands.

4.1.2 Youthworkers

These focus especially on the youngsters that are present at the Venture.

4.1.3 Early Years staff

These work with the little ones (0-5) inside the building and have their own department.

4.1.4 Joiners

These are very important to the Venture, especially since the Venture is all self-built.

4.2 The Venture's work culture

Although each profession has its own view and methods of work, people at the Venture have to adapt the philosophy of the Venture.

4.2.1 Staff meetings

Every week, a staff meeting takes place.

4.2.2 Supervision

All staff members have to have a supervision session once a month.

4.2.3 Lifelong learning

The Venture supports learning within the organisation, staff will have to follow courses within the organisation to promote and stimulate their knowledge.

Chapter Five: The Venture's response to the local needs

Their approach is certainly something we've never seen before in the Netherlands and a lot of professionals have visited the Venture to gain inspiration.

5.1 The importance of play

At the Venture, it is assumed that children are biologically predisposed to playing, and once they start, their whole life is being affected.

5.2 The Venture's main goals

During the years the Venture gained three main goals, working at reducing crime, education and health.

5.3 The Venture's fundamental values and principles

The Venture has, according to Fraser Brown, a variety of values and principles.

Chapter Six: The Venture's work methods as a response to the localised needs of the community

A clear description of each method will be given, along with examples of how it is utilised on the playground.

6.1 Learning through play

The Venture strongly believes the best way for a child to learn is through play.

6.1.1 Types of play

There are different types of play, each with its own qualities and learning opportunities.

6.2 Learning through educational facilities

Although these projects are always subject of change, according to funding, the educational needs of the children, or otherwise, there are always multiple ways for children and young people to improve their knowledge.

6.2.1 Structured learning at the Venture

The Venture has various forms of structured learning possibilities.

6.3 Other facilities

The Venture provides more than 'just' play and learning facilities. They are aware of the area they're situated in and respond to the very localised needs in a number of ways.

Chapter Seven: The opinions of the service-users

As the children and young people who visit the Venture are of major importance to the organisation, we've interviewed a number of them.

7.1 The interviews

Though some answers were unique to each child, there were similarities found in what they thought was important to the playground or described the Venture best.

7.1.1 Noted as very important:

There were several things the children/youngsters noted as very important to them.

7.1.2 Noted as things that could be improved/added:

They also noted some things that could be improved.

7.1.3 Noted as the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about the Venture:

We asked the children what the first thing they thought of was, when hearing the words 'The Venture'.

7.1.4 Quotes about the Venture

'I don't know what I'd do without the venture. I don't have any other place to go to after school.'

7.1.5 The main things that came out of the interviews were:

There are a couple of things that came out of all the interviews we held at the Venture.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion and recommendations

What makes the Venture effective in the community?

What follows is what we think is the answer to this question.

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Introduction

What led us to do this research was the unique approach in dealing with Social Work issues in a community found at the Venture. We wanted to research the Venture and how it grew from practically nothing thirty years ago to an organisation used by most people in the community nowadays.

This report is based on studied literature, interviews with children/youngsters and staff at the Venture, as well as information gained from people at Glyndŵr University and in the work field.

We decided to use a topic interview to gather information from the youngsters and see what they find is important to tell us. By doing this, we hoped to gather honest and sincere information, without influencing the interviewees.

We also decided to interview the youngsters in groups so it would be easier for them to talk freely. As we are professionals in training doing the research, they look up to us, especially since we've also worked there as staff. We wanted to prevent them feeling intimidated by us as adults. Besides that, the youngsters could complement each other in what they want to say. We decided to do the interviews with the younger kids and youngsters during an activity, to prevent them saying what they thought we wanted to hear. During an art session, the children would be more at ease and more likely to speak their mind. This method is used by Social Pedagogues back in the Netherlands.

The interviews with the staff and Malcolm, we did during individual sessions, since these people are adults and are not as easily intimidated as children. They also have a wealth of knowledge, which was be easier to capture by talking to them separately.

Since we would be talking to a lot of different people, we decided that we had to adjust the topics and questions to our target group. Some topics would be relevant for the youngsters and some, like the history of the Venture, are not.

Also, talking to the staff would require different skills than talking to the youngsters.

We wanted to make sure people felt respected by us as researchers and their opinions were very important for our research.

Our main goal in writing this report was to answer the question: *What makes the Venture effective in the community?*

Effective means in this context:

- People visit the Venture daily voluntarily.
- The Venture was built by the people of the community.
- The Venture has existed for over thirty-one years.

- The Venture has close contact with schools and other organisations.
- The Venture gets a lot of positive comments from the people that used to visit the place when they were little.
- The Venture has been a recipient of many prizes concerning Social Work.
“One of the best children’s organisations in the country, if not in Europe” Peter Hain, when Secretary of State for Wales.
- The Venture receives parties interested in the Venture’s unique approach to Social Work from all over the world.
 For example, a psychologist from the United States, the Head of a major Children’s organisation in Japan etc.

Community in this context means:

Caia park (also known as Queen’s park), where the Venture is situated. Caia park is a disadvantaged area in Wrexham, Wales. Caia park has coped with high crime rates and problems within families, such as; child abuse, drugs and alcohol abuse, high rates of unemployment.

The area in which the Venture is located has become known as an ‘underclass’ area throughout the years. Whenever we spoke about Caia Park to people from outside the estate, people have been very judgemental about the area, and most of the time they didn’t have anything good to say about the estate or the people living there.

Robert Macdonald’s defines the underclass as: *“a social group or class of people located at the bottom of the class structure who, over time, have become structurally separate and culturally distinct from the regularly employed working-class and society in general through processes of social and economic change (particularly de-industrialisation) and/or through patterns of cultural behaviour, who are now persistently reliant on state benefits and almost permanently confined to living in poorer conditions and neighbourhoods.”* (Macdonald, 1997).

Before the Venture started, the crime rates were very high in Caia Park in comparison to the rest of Wrexham and even entire Wales.

Patricia Mayo about Caia park, a statement made before the Venture was started: *“It seems reasonable to conclude that in the bad streets of the estate which we have identified as a delinquency area there is a delinquent subculture to which all generations of the families affected belong.”* (Mayo, 1969).

Caia Park has been compared to the housing estates in Marseilles. (Mayo, 1969).

The Venture was started to help to bring these crime rates down.

Today, crime levels are much lower than thirty-one years ago, when the Venture was started according to Malcolm King, one of the founders of the Venture and a councillor of the Wrexham Borough Council.

We hoped to find the answer on the main question by guidance of the following sub questions:

- *What makes the Venture unique as an effective response to specific local needs?*
- *Which methods does the Venture use in response to the localised needs of the community?*
- *What different professions are present at the Venture and how do they complement each other and work together as a group?*
- *What makes the children and youngsters voluntarily return to the Venture every day?*

In the first chapter, we will describe the Venture as an organisation, to give an insight into what the Venture's vision, mission and philosophy on providing services for the community is. We hope to give you a complete picture of what the Venture is and does as an organisation.

In the second chapter, we will give you an overview on how the Venture first started, and why the Venture came to be. It will describe how the Venture came to exist and how it is still evolving and changing, since it is based on the needs of the service users, and as they grow and change, the Venture grows and changes with them.

You can find the broader perspective of the Venture in society in chapter three. It will give more information about the placement of the organisation as a whole in the entire field of services for children/youngsters and community members.

Since every organisation has different professions present, we will give an overview about all the professions present at the Venture in chapter four. Especially since there is one profession present here, that is not known in the Netherlands. We would like to present you with some insight as to what this profession entails.

In chapter five, we will describe the Venture's response to the local needs of the community. We will try to describe the importance of play within this chapter as this is a very important aspect of the Venture.

Chapter six will describe the different methods the Venture uses, in response to the local needs of the community. The Venture has different work methods in working with the children/youngsters and the community, and these will be described in this chapter.

Chapter seven will hold the opinions of what the children/youngsters (service users) of the Venture think about the organisation and what makes the Venture so interesting to visit on a daily basis.

In chapter eight we will answer the main question of our report:

What makes the Venture effective in the community?

This answer will be based on the information we gained during our research and is also described in the rest of the chapters.

Chapter One: The Venture as an organisation

Before we can describe the effectiveness of the Venture, it is important to know what the Venture as an organisation encompasses. This mainly because the Venture is place unlike any other organisation we know in the Netherlands. It is well known over the world and is described by professionals as a good example of an adventure playground. It has been visited by different professionals, like a psychologist from America and the head of a major children's organisation in Japan for inspiration.

We will firstly describe what the Venture is and what its purpose is. After that we will describe the work ethics, the staff and the unique culture found at the Venture.



1.1 The statute of the organisation

The heart of the organisation is the adventure playground. It is located in Caia Park and is surrounded by a big fence.

The Venture is, first and foremost, a place where children and young people are allowed to play and be themselves.

Here, children/youngsters can do whatever they want (within logical boundaries) in a safe and protected environment. They and their parents can rest assured knowing there's always staff nearby, ready to step in when something does go wrong.

However, the Venture is much more than 'just' an adventure playground. The list of activities goes on and on, including swimming lessons, mentoring projects, homework clubs, wall climbing trips, mountain biking, outreach work and street dance.

There's also a lot of play opportunities provided by the Venture, not often seen by those who don't take part in it. This can range from den-building to playing hide and seek, using all the nooks and crannies of the Castle building to the benefit of games.

The staff is a highly important part of the Venture. Not only are they there to step in when something gets out of hand, they also provide objects to play with, help with homework, offer a shoulder to cry on and are often regarded as good friends with the children/youngsters.

Building up relationships with the youngsters (Jefferies & Smith, 1999) is a very big part of the staff of the Venture. That makes it process based as the staff doesn't have any goals to accomplish with the youngsters themselves most of the time at the end of the day. The relationship itself is a goal on its own. But also providing a safe place to play and play opportunities are important to the staff. This because the Venture believes that play is a vital part of the development of the children and is highly valued. A lot of youngsters don't get that support at home.

The Venture relies heavily on donations made by a number of organisations. Because it's a registered charity, the Venture has access to funders other organisations can't apply to. Important funders include the Wrexham Council, BBC Children In Need and the National Lottery. The Venture is always looking for new funders, and the amount of funds they receive always changes.

1.2 Target group

The Venture is an open-access organisation, meaning everyone can come and go as they please. However, its main focus lies with youngsters between the age of five and eighteen. There's an Under Five's unit for the younger children, where they can learn and interact with each other until they're old enough to join the playground activities. They are in no way banned from the playground (there are frequently toddlers on the playground), but until they reach the age of five, they must be accompanied by an older person in order to be allowed on the playground. The relationships the Venture has with the community begin here, if people are new to the area. The Venture puts a lot of effort in building up relationships with the parents from children in the Early Years centre because these contacts can be helpful in later years when the little children are turning older and are able to attend the Venture on their own.

Usually, youngsters tend to come to the Venture less and less as they get older, so there are rarely people above the age of eighteen seen on the playground (excluding staff and parents). In some cases, 'older' youngsters do stay with the Venture, but they usually take on the role of volunteer. They will be trained by the Venture staff and sometimes become staff themselves after they reach adulthood. Many Venture staff members have visited the playground frequently before they became members of staff. This is highly valued by the Venture as an organisation, because the 'home grown' staff knows what it is like to attend the Venture playground and also know a lot of service users from the Venture. This makes the 'home grown' staff very important to the organisation as whole.

Obviously, the age at which [the child] reaches the various social stages in his play will depend to a certain extent on the play opportunities and social contacts a child has had.
(Cass, J.E. 1971)

The Venture is situated in Caia Park, known as one of the most disadvantaged areas in Wales. This means the children and young people often don't have the best of private lives, their families struggle to make ends meet. The area has suffered from having high levels of juvenile delinquency. This is the main reason the Venture has started in the first place, according to Malcolm King. See chapter two.

There are problems of neglect, abuse or otherwise unfavourable relationships within families. The Venture provides a safe place for children who have no such place, not even in their own homes. The Venture also provides help for families of youngsters, such as providing contact information for financial aides or referring them to social services.

This can work the other way around as well. If Social Services think a young person can benefit from being at the Venture, they can be referred to it as well. In these cases, the child/youngster will be introduced to the staff and there will be a meeting in which a plan will be made so the young person will get maximum benefit from being at the Venture.

The Venture also works with children/youngsters who have to do community service. These youngsters are referred to the Venture and if the staff feel both the Venture and the young person can benefit from the youngster doing their community service there, they'll be happy to support them through it. The Venture has close contact to a number of primary and secondary schools. It also has close contact with the police, social services, and the Play Wales team. This is in harmony with the holistic approach the Venture uses. They want to understand the children/youngsters in their entire life and not only one part of it. If any problems with a child/youngster occur, then they can tackle it in the first stadium possible. The Venture also offers one-to-one support. Some members of staff have private sessions with certain children/youngsters, in order to support them and enhance their personal or professional lives. However, the Venture's resources are limited. This is why there are Social Support workers working with the Venture. They come in once a week, to work with specific children/young people who need the one-to-one support these Social Workers can offer.

In short, a lot of the children/young people who attend the Venture live in Caia Park, one of the most disadvantaged areas in the UK. Their family lives are often unstable or problematic. They can show antisocial or violent behaviour, which is often a result of their family lives.

1.3 Structure of the organisation



1.3.1 Infrastructure

The main (and largest) asset of the Venture is its playground. It's surrounded by a big wooden fence and includes areas such as the fire pit, the sandpit, the American swings, the castle and the MUGA (Multi Utility Gaming Area).

Most of the structures were built by children and youngsters from the area, supervised by Venture staff.

Because children helped build it, they're very protective of the structures. There's a sense of ownership and if someone tries to vandalise a part of the Venture, the children are sure to let him/her know they won't stand for that to happen.

Malcolm King was heading the I.T. (Intermediate Treatment (Juvenile Justice)) programme in Wrexham at the time of the Venture's beginning. When he started working on getting the playground set up, he involved the young people he knew from his I.T. group. Explaining how he got these youngsters involved in his project:

'I just asked them. First of all, it is about forwarding the relationship with them, that is based on quality. So although they need to recognise that you do have some formal power, and certainly some responsibility... You're older, and you've got a job and so on. On the other hand, you need to have a relationship where they will do things for you. And they certainly won't do that if they don't like you. And they won't like you if you talk down to them. [...] And I asked them, 'do you want to do this together?

And that's what the Venture is based on; involving the kids who need it most, who are most naturally alienated, and drawing them in to become valuable citizens of the community.'

This basic principal of involving the kids in the community has never left the Venture. To this day, children and young people help build new structures or improve existing ones. They come up with ideas and inform staff about them, knowing their ideas will be considered and there's a good chance it can become reality. The Venture is owned as much by the children as it is by the adults.

The building of new areas is an ongoing project, the Venture is always changing. During our stay at the Venture, a new structure (a ship) was being built. Some other areas (the den area, the bouncy swings) were changed. This shows the Venture is always open to new ideas. Most of the changes made to structures or areas are directly influenced by children's ideas.

There's one main building in the Venture. Although it's not the biggest building (that honour is reserved for the castle structure), it's obviously the most important one. This is the building where staff have their offices, where the kitchen and toilets are located and where activities such as street dance and kickboxing are held. Although the Venture was started in 1978, the building wasn't built until 1988. This was a time when the Venture started to focus more on the educational aspects, as well as play. It's the same year the Early Years programme was set up, in order to provide children with enough stimulation and, indeed, knowledge to go to school. Before the Early Years programme started, there had been problems with children being behind on their education even before starting school.

The building also provided a place for the writing club, homework club and reading club.

The building is now used for office space, educational clubs, mentoring projects, after school

clubs, the Early Years programme and various parties.

Outside of planned activities, children and youngsters are normally not allowed in the building. They'll come in for computer sessions, cooking or to help staff, but they must always be supervised by a member of staff. If young people are found inside the building unsupervised, they will be asked to leave.

1.3.2 Staff

The Venture staff consists of a number of people all doing different jobs, but the one thing they have in common is that they all work with children and youngsters. Although each member of staff has certain tasks appointed to them (playground supervision, booking trips, mentoring), these tasks tend to overlap and most if not all of the staff are frequently found on the playground. This is very important, since the playground is where the young people are at ease and they can really be themselves. This is where staff can bond with children/youngsters, which is beneficial for just about every other aspect of working at the Venture.

A lot of the current staff members are 'home grown', that is to say they grew up with the Venture and worked their way up to becoming staff by doing volunteer work and being trained by regular staff. Even now, there are some youngsters being trained by current staff, in the hope that they might become Venture staff themselves in the future. Malcolm King has commented on the importance of a balance between home-grown staff and staff brought in from other places. He feels the home-grown staff know the area and what it's like to be a child in Caia Park, which can never be fully understood by people from other places. These members of staff have also already built up relationships with the children and young people, sometimes from a very early age. However, staff need to be brought in from other places for various reasons. First of all, they bring in fresh ideas. Other areas have other ways of looking at and dealing with things. These may be useful to incorporate into the Venture's way of work. Secondly, they'll have a more critical eye of how things work. When people are used to working one way, they often don't even think about ways to improve it. People who come in from other organisations can provide useful tips.

The Venture has always had a mixture of people from the community and people from outside. Recently, a lot of students have been doing their work placements at the playground. This again opens up new possibilities, as students provide a fresh eye on work methods. As the Venture regularly takes in students from other countries, other work methods are always on the horizon. These students are also an asset in that they can teach the children/young people about the country they come from. The children and young people on the playground are usually very interested in meeting new staff members, be they hired staff or students.

Some members of staff go to college outside of their work. The Venture does everything they can to help make this possible. There are also regular training sessions, in the past couple of months there have been courses about food & hygiene, risk assessment, anger management and more. The Venture is very accommodating for people wanting to keep on learning. Not only this, but the Venture also wants to keep their staff well trained and guided in their job. The staff working at the Venture are qualified as Playworker, a profession not known in the Netherlands because the Netherlands has a different approach to play. There are also Youthworkers present; these are comparable with the CMA social work profile in the Netherlands. There are also joiners; these also work on the playground and play a big part in the alternative learning projects. They are specialised in building new structures and can enable the children/youngsters to help them. See chapter four.

1.4 Operation

1.4.1 Procedure of intake

This heading is a bit deceiving, as the Venture doesn't have an intake procedure. The playground is open access, so everyone can come and go as they please. If a child is on the playground, and no member of staff on duty knows him/her, they will be asked to fill in a registration form. If a child hasn't handed in a registration form, he/she can't come along on trips (there are also parental consent forms to be handed in for every trip). This is a necessity for legal and insurance reasons. For one, the parents need to know where their child is. These consent forms must be handed in, so the child won't be thought of as missing. Staff on the playground usually knows if a child or youngster is new to the playground. If they break a rule, a member of staff will briefly explain the rules so they know what is and is not allowed. From that point on, the same rules apply to the new kid as well as all the other children on the playground.

The under five's unit has a stricter policy. All children attending have to be registered. This is mostly for legal reasons. Naturally, children under five are more dependent than children of an older age. They must be registered, which includes a form reflecting the parents' contact numbers and address, so proper actions can be taken if a child falls ill or there is need to contact the parent or guardian at any time.

1.4.2 Aim

The main purpose of the Venture is to provide children with a safe place to play, learn and express themselves see chapter 1.5. This helps them develop as responsible people who contribute a lot to society.

Living in Caia Park, a lot of children/youngsters have problems they're struggling with. One of the aims the Venture has is to work with them and help them through their problems. This

helping hand can also extend to the rest of the family. For example, when a family member of one of the Venture kids dies, the Venture offers support and aid for the entire family.

1.4.3 Vision

The Venture has a 'holistic' approach in working with children and youngsters. This means that each child is seen as an individual. Each is valued and appreciated for whom they are. As stated by Jason Leen, former vice manager of the Venture, "*all kids are like rough diamonds, they are good inside but sometimes their behaviour needs to be shaped up a bit.*" When a child shows disruptive behaviour on the playground, the Venture looks in to possible reasons for this, be they problems at school, home or otherwise.

'Every child deserves to be valued as an individual' is an important ethic of the Venture. This means, in effect, that children who have been abusive to staff or caused problems of any other kind, staff must try to overcome their personal feelings about that and try to see the good things these kids are capable of. Some staff have one-to-one sessions with specific children. During these sessions, the member of staff in question tries to find and bring out the positive sides of the child.

One of the statements of the Venture is that 'every child has a right to be heard'. Some children who attend the playground are ignored at home, or they go unheard in other ways. The Venture tries to listen to these kids, really hear what they have to say. A lot of children who don't disclose anything about their lives at home or at school, talk freely to Venture staff. This is probably because they know they won't be ignored and the culture present at the Venture described in chapter 1.6.

1.5 The Venture's philosophy

The Venture's main philosophy is based on the idea that play provides the best vehicle for a child's growth. *Play is the child's fundamental tool for exploring the world, their environment, their interpersonal and physical relationships, and their sense of self* (Brown, 2007). Play is the core of the organisation. The Venture employs a lot of Playworkers. They are there to create possibilities to play and to promote play.

At the Venture, it is assumed that children are biologically predisposed to playing, and once they start, their whole life is being affected.

For staff at the Venture, play is the base from which their relationship with the child and the community starts (Brown, 2007). Although the Venture has grown through the years, play is still their core activity. All the staff has to work on the playground at least one day a week, to keep up the relationships they have built with the children and youngsters. Building up relationships is very important to the Venture. In fact, that is one of their main goals; to get to know the children and their lives.

The development of adventure playgrounds in the UK is strongly influenced by Lady Allen of Hurtwood. She brought the adventure playground idea from Denmark to the UK.

“The Adventure Playground quite simply tries to answer one question: What kind of play did we all most enjoy when we were young and how can we best provide these opportunities in a crowded city?” (Lady Allen, 1961). (<http://www.ncb.org.uk>).

1.6 The Venture’s culture

The Venture is the result of thirty-odd years of being part of the community and changing when the community’s needs changed. Likewise, the community changed because of the Venture. The Venture being there, working with the Caia Park kids and youngsters on a daily basis, has influenced how these young people interact with each other and adults. Children are confident to talk to adults as equals. When new ‘adults’ arrive they want them to be part of their play and also want them to see the Venture through their eyes. As stated before, one of the key things the Venture tries to do is listen to the children. They are now used to this and expect adults to listen to their thoughts and ideas. They will not back off from telling an adult what to do.

There’s a very different feeling present on the Venture before it opens. Without the children/young people present, it feels empty and ‘sad’. Once the children enter the playground, the place lights up with life and laughter.

The staff that works there highly respects the children/youngsters and show this in every aspect of the interaction and in return the children/ young people show respect in return. Everyone who enters the Venture is equal to each other, children, parents, staff etc. The staff is there to keep an eye on everything that is going on, on the playground, but is not above anyone else. Not only the children/young people benefit from the experience of the staff but also the other way around. And that is one of the unique approaches of the Venture.

According to Jeffs and Smith, fostering democracy is important when you work with other human beings. Democracy is seen as a quality that runs through the whole of life, to the relationships between us as people. It’s moving beyond a focus on individuals. They also state that we are social beings and that we are what we are because of our interactions with others. This is also a very important idea at the Venture. It’s a place where people can meet each other, not only children and youngsters, but parents too. According to Jeffs and Smith, if we all are to flourish we must:

- Recognise that we share many common interests: this is seen at the Venture. The Venture makes sure that there are lot of different activities are going on, and that children and youngsters can choose their own play, based on their own interests.

- Commit ourselves to consider those interests (and hence the needs of others) when looking to our own. Also seen at the Venture. There are different staff members present at the Venture, all with their own interests and qualities. The difference in interests is a good thing at the Venture, because each child/youngster has a staff member interested in the same activities they are interested in, and so are stimulated to join in.
- Actively engage with, and seek to strengthen, those situations and movements that embody democratic values and draw people together.

The Venture has been threatened with closure a couple of times in the past, because of the redrawing of funding by the local council. Each time, the Venture managed to gather children/young people, parents, and grandparents to help them. For example, the 'Save the Venture' campaign in 2009, the children were very upset about the threat of the Venture being closed. The youngsters were involved in the campaign to save the Venture from closing, by writing letters to the council, demonstrating and helping to get as many signatures from the local people in Caia Park as possible. They were also involved in developing posters and banners for the demonstration in front of the guild hall. The youngsters' concerns were taken seriously and to engage them in the activities they feel like they can do something. They were seen and taken seriously by the staff and adults at the Venture.

Chapter Two: How and why did the Venture start?

This chapter will give an insight into how the Venture was first started, and why. Although it's impossible to provide a full account of the thirty-odd years that make up the Venture's history, a couple of key moments have been highlighted.

2.1 Caia Park in the seventies

The Venture was started in 1978. To understand why, we need to take a look at the community of Caia Park (then called Queens Park) around that time. Only then can we understand what inspired the Venture's birth and the circumstances in which it was begun. Queens Park has long since had a reputation of being a 'bad' neighbourhood. It's an estate with high levels of poverty, unemployment, substance abuse and domestic problems. Various projects were started to try and cut down the crime rate in the area. Most crimes were committed by people aged fourteen to nineteen. This wasn't uncommon, but this particular age group made up a larger percentage of the population in Queens Park (22.9%) than it did in other municipal estates (17.7%) (figures based on age group 10-19, Mayo, 1969). This led to actions being undertaken to appeal to these young people.

In 1965, a Youth Club was opened in Queens Park. This was devised as a way to occupy the young people and keep them off the streets. However, there was one major flaw in the plan – the 'bad boys' didn't want to go there. Patricia Mayo raises two important points about this in her book, 'The Making of a Criminal':

'There is a fundamental problem here: if a club appears to be imposed by the establishment, by 'them', it will automatically be resented if it seeks to 'improve' a delinquent subculture.' (Mayo, 1969)

This very clearly indicates that clubs presented to the youngsters, but which they had no part in founding, had very little chance of success.

'It is the value system which must be changed, since family life has little direct influence. Unfortunately those responsible for the well equipped Youth Centre in Queens Park were unaware of this development in the approach to the problem, and this is precisely what went wrong when the Youth Centre was introduced into Queens Park – the 'bad' boys stayed away.' (Mayo, 1969)

How does one get the 'bad' young people involved in creating a better environment?

2.2 The beginning of the Venture

In 1978, Malcolm King was working at the Intermediate Treatment Juvenile Justice programme (I.T.) in Wrexham. In fact, he was heading the programme.

Mr. King was working with young delinquents on a daily basis. With the I.T. programme, he

was working on projects the young people brought forth. This ensured they were interested in what they were doing, while an educational spin could be given on the projects at hand. Having heard about adventure playgrounds, he became interested in the concept. He read up about it and thought Caia Park could really benefit from having an adventure playground in its midst. He particularly liked the idea of re-using things, finding new purposes for items discarded by other people. He disliked the idea of things having only one use, while other potential was neglected. He felt the same principle was found in education. Every subject was bordered in and there was no room for experiments or, indeed, experiences. Mr. King strongly believes the best way to learn is from experience. The things you learn from doing stick with you longer than the things you learn from books. They become part of who you are, instead of merely fact you know. Mr. King says playing is one of the most important learning tools we have. Through play, we can express who we are, what we'd like to do (through play-acting, among other things) and what we know. But we also gain a lot from play – social interaction, building skills etc.

'Adventure playgrounds are the pinnacle of the play experience,' Mr. King said, talking about adventure playgrounds and how they influence play. Adventure playgrounds provide children with the opportunity to create and change the environment they play in. They can let their imagination run free and do what they want, while parent can rest assured their offspring is safe.

This is what Malcolm King wanted to create. Unfortunately, such things are easier said than done. He'd explained why he wanted to build an adventure playground to the Wrexham city council and gotten the go-ahead without problem. The hard part was to get the funding in order. Creating an adventure playground, even a small one, is an ambitious project and proper funding needed to be top priority. Mr. King was aware of the risks involving funding running out after some time, so he was careful to make sure these overlapped each other. While one funder would support the Venture for three years at a time (after which another contract would be negotiated), another would commit to five years. Different funders would all commit to different amounts of time before renegotiating the agreement. This meant that, when one source would run out, another could take its place.

Next came the building of the playground. Malcolm had developed positive relationships with the youngsters in his I.T. group. He's stated this is likely due to the fact he didn't talk down to them. He treated them as equals, something they weren't used to in other places. This simple but effective approach caused respect to grow on both sides. When Mr. King asked them whether they'd like to help create this new adventure playground, they said yes immediately. They became the most enthusiastic allies the Venture knew at that time. They even slept on the playground, making sure no one tried to harm it during the night.

This shows that from the very start, a sense of ownership was strongly present at the

Venture. These young people had helped create the playground and they were going to make sure nobody tried to break it down. The playground was as much theirs as anyone else's, a sentiment still found on the site today. The children feel the Venture belongs to them, a way of thinking very much encouraged by Malcolm King.

The Venture playground was built and just about ready to go. However, there came some bad news just two weeks before the official opening date. The insurance company told Mr. King they could only provide insurance if the playground had a perimeter fence around it. Problem was, there wasn't any money for it. There were only ten days to build a fence, or insurance would back out. Mr. King rang Jimmy McAlpine, the owner of a large building firm who lived in Caia Park, and told him of the problem. McAlpine was quickly convinced and agreed to build the fence free of charge. He became a fierce supporter of the Venture. The fence was built in time and insurance was ensured.

On July the 31st, 1978, the Venture was ready for business. The question was: how to start? Marten Kuiper, one of Malcolm King's colleagues suggested they'd light a fire. This quickly brought in children from the area, who wanted to see what was causing the smoke. Once they arrived at the playground, they became interested in what it was. They were told it was an adventure playground and they could always come there and play. From that time, the Venture has become one of the most important places in many young people's lives.

2.3 The continuing evolvement of the Venture

The Venture has always been subject to change. It's in the very nature of adventure playgrounds to change and evolve, in order to comply with its service-users' wishes. The playground belongs to the children and young people who use it – they have the right to change their play environment to their liking.

The Venture staff are always careful to note when children/youngsters express the wish for something to be added or changed on the playground. This will then be discussed with the people in charge (mostly for funding reasons), where it will be decided whether or not it's possible. If at all possible, the adjustment will certainly be made.

Over the thirty-odd years the Venture has now existed, it's changed beyond recognition. The main building was added in 1988, a full ten years after the playground had opened its gates. The MUGA (Multi Utility Gaming Area) was added only a few years ago and has become one of the most-used facilities of the Venture. Further additions include the Venture castle, the American swings, the stage and the nature area. The Venture always adapts to the wishes of the people who use it. It's impossible to predict how it will look in ten years time, and that's part of what makes the Venture so interesting. You never know what's going to happen next.

Chapter Three: The Venture placed in a broader perspective

As stated in chapter one, the Venture was built to reduce crime, and it was based on the idea of adventure playgrounds in general. But where did the adventure playgrounds come from? And what was their goal?

In this chapter we'll try to describe the idea behind the adventure playgrounds. Where can we place them in terms of social services?

3.1 The origins of the adventure playgrounds

The origins of the adventure playgrounds lay in Denmark.

C. Th. Sørensen, a Danish landscape architect, noticed that children preferred to play everywhere but in the playgrounds that he built. In 1931, he imagined "A junk playground in which children could create and shape, dream and imagine a reality." Why not give children in the city the same chances for play as those in the country? His initial ideas started the adventure playground movement. The first adventure playground opened in Emdrup, Denmark in 1943, during World War II. In 1946, Lady Allen of Hurtwood visited Emdrup from England and was impressed with "junk playgrounds." She brought the idea to London. These "junk playgrounds" became known as "adventure playgrounds" (<http://adventureplaygrounds.hampshire.edu/>). In appendix three, you will find the essence and the importance of adventure playgrounds.

Lady Allen was an important woman in campaigning and was the architect behind the Curtis report and the very first Children's act, and a founding member of the organisation for early childhood education (<http://www.adventureplay.org.uk/ladyallen.htm>).

This Children's act was passed in July 1948 in order to protect children, since the only form of protection children had was from the Poor Law (<http://www.timesonline.co.uk>).

As far as the Venture's concerned, it started to reduce the crime in the area. A lot of youngsters were at high risk to become an offender of the law. Besides that, a lot of children went into care. The Venture's idea was to start to tackle crime by giving the children and youngsters something to do, and a place to go to. Their target group was firstly the youngsters, but they felt they could mean something to their younger brothers and sisters as well. In this case, the Venture tried to prevent children going into care or children to become offenders.

3.2 Child poverty and social exclusion

At the time the Venture started, Britain ranked third on the list of countries with the most child

poverty . (Hills & Stewart, 2005). In the past, several anti poverty programs had been introduced. Especially after Britain joined the EU in 1973. (Hills & Stewart, 2005).

3.2.1 The introduction of the SEU

Over the years, social exclusion has been an important subject in political debate.

“In 1997 the creation of the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) was announced by Peter Mandelson.

The SEU defined social exclusion as:

“.. a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown” (Barnes, 2005).

Caia park was an area that fitted this description; there were high rates of unemployment, high crime rates and high rates of child abuse and children going into care when the Venture first started.

In the UK social exclusion is also defined in non-participation in four key activities. These were:

- *Consumption (the capacity to purchase goods and services);*
- *Production (participation in economically or socially valuable activities);*
- *Political engagement (involvement in local or national decision-making); and*
- *Social interaction (integration with family, friends and community).*

(Hills & Stewart, 2005)

The last three are promoted by the Venture.

The Venture tries to engage children/youngsters and even parents in activities taking place at the Venture. Not only as service users, but also as volunteers. Some of the youngsters work at the Venture as a volunteer for a couple of hours a week. This works both ways; for the Venture, it is useful to have a pair of extra eyes and hands and for the youngsters this means experience and something extra to put on their CV.

Political engagement is also being promoted. This is done through activities that get youngsters involved in expressing their opinions and also to let them know their right to be heard. The Venture used to have a youth forum in which youngsters came together and discussed topics they found important, and to express their opinions about the Venture.

The social interaction is very important to the Venture. There is time to communicate with others at the Venture. People interact with each other through play, but also conversations are taking place at the Venture. Equality is promoted at the Venture. They don't make a

distinction between children with or without disabilities, cultural differences, sexual preference. Everyone is welcome and respected.

“Since the Lisbon summit in 2000, the promotion of social inclusion and social cohesion have been central strategic goals of the EU” (Pantazis, Gordon & Levitas, 2006).

They designed four key objectives at a European level, while the member states design national appropriate policies and report the outcomes of these objectives.

The key objectives are:

- *“Facilitating participation in employment and access by all to resources, rights, goods and services;*
- *Preventing the risks of exclusion;*
- *Helping the most vulnerable; and*
- *Mobilising all the relevant bodies in overcoming social exclusion”* (Pantazis, Gordon & Levitas, 2006).

Several programs have been launched since then to promote the welfare of different vulnerable groups like youngsters, disabled persons and the elderly.

3.3 The Venture as a professional organisation

“The Venture has been used as a model for the programme of Integrated Children’s Centres in Wales, wherein one of the four key aspects is open access play” (www.playwales.org.uk).

“Integrated Children’s Centres are joint initiatives between local communities, the voluntary sector, education, health and social services. Each centre acts as a link between a network of providers such as parent and toddler groups, play groups, childminders, out of school clubs, adventure playgrounds and other leisure activities for young people. Through this link they are able to provide enrichment and skills for children, families and communities. Some centres include parenting support services and are a base for health visitors” (<http://www.childreninwales.org.uk>).

The ICC (Integrated Child Centres) all have four key elements:

- Open Acces Play
This is a free of charge provision for children and youngsters. It is supervised by staff and should be a stimulating environment for kids to play in. The Venture’s playground is the open access facility. All children and youngsters up to the age of 18 are welcome.
- Early Years education
This is a form of part-time education for children from the age of three.

The Welsh Assembly Government wishes to ensure that all parents and carers can have free access to this free form of education.

The Venture provides this kind of education in the Early Years section.

➤ Childcare

Within the childcare there are two different forms:

The unregistered one, which means there are no regulations or inspections regarding the providers of this service. This is only possible for groups that come together not more than two hours a day, like parent and toddler groups and groups that are not open for children up to 8 years.

The Venture has parent and toddler groups also located in the Early Years section. The second one is the registered one, which are provided with a registration certificate from the Care Social Standards Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) which they have to display. This certificate will state how many children can be cared for, the age range of the children and the number of staff that has to be available. At least half the staff has to have a recognised childcare qualification.

The Venture also provides this kind of service. The staff that work in the Early Years section are also a part of the Venture, but are especially trained to work in this area. They don't work at the playground itself.

➤ Training and community development.

“Training and community development is promoted, to include Early Years and Childcare training together with an appropriate range of family services e.g. baby and toddler facilities, family literacy and numeracy programmes, parent counseling and parenting skills courses, adult education, training for employment “
(<http://icc.powys.gov.uk>).

The Venture provides services for parents and toddlers as described above, but there is also a health counsellor visiting once a week. Parents can ask them questions regarding health issues for the little ones.

Chapter Four: The different professions present at the Venture

Almost every organisation has multiple professionals working for them, each with their own specialties and qualities. But which professions are present at the Venture, and how do they complement each other and work together as a team? We will try to answer this question in the following chapter.

Firstly, we will describe the professions present at the Venture and their main focus. Then we'll try to describe the work culture within the Venture.

4.1 The professionals present at the Venture

4.1.1 Playworkers

This may be one of the most interesting professions present at the Venture. Not because it is unique for the Venture but since it is a profession not known in the Netherlands. But also in the U.K. it is quite a new course and profession. As stated by the Play Wales team:

“Playwork is a relatively new profession that exists because children tend not to have the freedom to go out and roam and play in the ways they used to. There is a growing number of play spaces staffed by Playworkers - inside and out - that give children the freedoms and opportunities to play they wouldn't otherwise have” (<http://www.Playworkwales.org.uk>).

A few members of the staff have a degree, others are currently studying to get a degree in Playwork. The rest of the staff team is also encouraged to follow a short course on Playwork. The Playwork principles serve as the framework for the Playworkers. They are there to provide opportunities to play.

Almost all the staff members work as Playworkers, especially when they are on the playground. This is in harmony with the Venture's philosophy (described in chapter one) that every child has a right to play.

It is one of the core values of the Venture and all staff have to respect and work according to this.

4.1.2 Youthworkers

These focus especially on the youngsters that are present at the Venture. They try to engage the youngsters in activities and as volunteers at the Venture. Not only do they work at the Venture itself but they also do out-reach work in the area to see what the youngsters/children are up to, and talk to them on the street. They also try to engage these young people in activities at the Venture. This profession can be compared with the CMA-profession in the Netherlands.

4.1.3 Early Years staff

These work with the little ones (0-5) inside the building and have their own department. They allow children of a very young age to be brought in and interact with others, a skill that might be very useful later on. They'll also get acquainted with a number of educational areas, all of which are introduced through play. The Early Years programme was started in the late eighties and has become a staple of the Venture's facilities.

4.1.4 Joiners

These are very important to the Venture, especially since the Venture is all self-built. The Venture is continuously under construction, and is always changing.

They provide knowledge about building towards the children and youngsters, but also to the rest of the staff.

On the playground, they build three houses with the children, but this is only a small part of what they are doing.

They also provide alternative learning projects for youngsters. On the playground they also function as Playworkers (described in 5.1).

As you can see above, there are quite a few different professions present at the Venture, and although they all have their own qualities and educational background, their work areas overlap greatly.

Creativity is important at the Venture in developing new activities and projects.

Most of the staff members run their own projects, like the mentoring schemes, alternative learning etc. The Venture promotes new projects and activities and ideas of the staff to provide them.

At the playground itself, different staff members have different activities they try to engage in based on the interests of the children and youngsters present. Flexibility is a must for working down the Venture. Activities are planned with the youngsters and children present, but also beforehand. Think of football tournaments, art sessions etc. But during the day activities can change, since the children/youngsters are free to choose whatever they want to do, and when nobody's interested in the activity planned for that day something else has to be planned/developed.

The work environment at the Venture is not structured, the Venture is open from 16.00 till 19.45 during the week and from 12.00 till 19.45 in the weekends. The activities that take place are not bound to certain times, only some of the projects outside the Venture that are planned beforehand are. This is because appointments have to be made with other parties.

A holistic approach is also needed to work at the Venture, since it is part of its vision and philosophy. It is important to see the children/youngsters as part of different environments, since they bring the experiences, values etc from there on to the playground.

4.2 The Venture's work culture

The Venture has a team of staff working there with a lot of different professions. Although each profession has its own view and methods of work, people at the Venture have to adapt the philosophy of the Venture (see chapter one). Even though there are people working with a degree and people without, everyone's opinion matters and is respected.

The work atmosphere is very informal. People address each other by their first names, there is room for a laugh and people respect each other.

4.2.1 Staff meetings

Every week, a staff meeting takes place. In these meetings, children/youngsters and families with reason for concern are discussed. But also the things that happen on the playground like challenging behaviour, incidents or other causes for concern.

In the staff meetings, everyone's voice is heard. Matters ongoing are discussed within the team and decisions are made together.

4.2.2 Supervision

All staff members have to have a supervision session once a month. In this supervision session, work related problems/suggestions are discussed, but there is also time to talk about personal matters. This is important, because personal things can strongly influence the behaviour and attitude people show in their work.

4.2.3 Lifelong learning

The Venture supports learning within the organisation, staff have to follow courses within the organisation to promote and stimulate their knowledge. Some courses are a must when you work at the Venture, like the child protection course, food and hygiene course etc.

Chapter Five: The Venture's response to the local needs

What makes the Venture unique as an effective response to specific local needs? This question states that the Venture is unique in tackling problems and matters arising in the Caia Park area. Their approach is certainly something we've never seen before in the Netherlands and a lot of professionals have visited the Venture to gain inspiration. But what is it that makes the Venture so unique? Which approach does the Venture have, that no other organisation we encountered before possesses? We hope to provide this information in this chapter. Firstly, we describe the role 'play' has in this organisation, since this is a big aspect of their work. After that, we will describe the Venture's main goals and at the end of the chapter, we'll describe the fundamental values the Venture has, since that is one of the reasons the Venture is unique in its kind.

5.1 The importance of play

At the Venture, it is assumed that children are biologically predisposed to playing, and once they start, their whole life is being affected.

For staff at the Venture, play is the base from which their relationship with the child and the community starts (Brown, 2007).

The importance of play has been studied over the years by a lot of different people including Freud, Piaget and Erickson. Each of them has a different approach to play, for example whereas Freud was concerned about the relationship between imaginative play and emotion, Piaget's theory of play was closely bound up with his account of the growth of intelligence. Erickson made a division between adult play and children's play. He stated that adult play is more aimed at producing something whereas children play for play (Cass, 1971).

Play is something that is seen as a vital part of the lives of the children. It is just as important as food, water, a safe environment etc. *"It is an activity which is concerned with the whole of his being, not with just one small part of him, and to deny him the right to play is to deny him the right to live and grow.*

Society has been slow to recognise or provide adequately for children's play needs. Perhaps because play has no end results which can be considered as materially useful or productive it has been lightly dismissed or frowned upon". (Cass, 1971).

The Venture acknowledges the importance of play and provides space for children to play.

Although the Venture has grown through the years, play is still their core activity. And all the staff have to work at the playground at least one day a week, to keep up the relationships they have built with the children and youngsters.

Conversation is central to the work as informal educators and for the staff at the Venture, yet we often undervalue it. Possibly one conversation will mean more to a child than a million activities. However, most of the time, the outcomes will not show themselves immediately but they will have an impact on the youngster's life. Maybe the outcome will never reveal itself, but it is there.

This is also an important aspect of informal educators, it is very process based. It's not about the outcomes, but the conversation, activity, process itself. According to Jeffs and Smith, the conversations we engage in may seem fairly trivial –the everyday things of life- but that contact, that chance to interact, to be with others is affirming. We are a human with other humans. We are addressing each other. One of the most inhumane of all punishments is solitary confinement. Depriving people of contact can lead to breakdown (Jeffs & Smith, 1999).

5.2 The Venture's main goals

Over the years, the Venture gained three main goals, working at:

- Reducing crime: This is the main reason the Venture got built in the first place. Several Social Workers were enabled to reduce the crime rates in the Caia Park area, since this area scored the highest of all Wrexham in juvenile crime rates. See chapter two.
- Education: Over the years, there was a relationship found between high crime rates and school drop outs. Since people who were not attending school were more likely to engage in criminal activities, the Venture started to work on the educational aspect as well.
- Health: In the last few years, there was a raise in overweight children/youngsters. As a response to this, the Venture started health programmes to try and reduce the number of children getting overweight.

The Venture works from bottom to top; it signals problems in the area and tries to address these problems. But addressing the problems can be done in many different ways. The Venture works according to certain fundamental values and principles, described in the next chapter.

5.3 The Venture's fundamental values and principles

The Venture has, according to Fraser Brown, the following fundamental values and principles:

- *Adopting a child centred approach*
This means that all the activities have to be there for the children. This also means flexibility; you can have a plan for a day but because the children have other plans

maybe nothing or only a little bit of the original plan will be done. The Venture respects children and youngsters and sees them as a complete person. They are not looked down upon just because they are children. They are seen as a complete person, with his/her own views, opinions and values.

➤ *Being non-judgemental, non-stigmatising*

The children are seen as individuals with all their good qualities. None of the children or youngsters are judged on their behaviour, they're all appreciated for who they are. They are seen as rough diamonds, all with a good heart. The main reason for this is that children/youngsters attending the Venture live in one of the most deprived areas in North Wales. They often have challenging home situations etc. The Venture tries to bring out the best in the children/youngsters and to let them flourish through play and activities. They provide a safe place where they can play and develop themselves.

➤ *Never giving up on anyone – always offering a second chance*

The Venture works with some of the most damaged and abused members of society children who do not have well developed levels of social intelligence; children who are either emotionally not intellectually sophisticated enough to be fully responsible for their actions. (Brown, 2007) Children are always offered another chance. Even though they are banned from the playground for a while, this doesn't mean they're not welcome at all anymore. A ban is given as a time out, a cool down period, to reflect on behaviour. It is an intervention but it is never meant to punish a child. The Venture encourages children to come back, even though their behaviour has been bad, the child in question is not seen as a bad person. The staff keep faith in the children.

➤ *Being aware of, and trying to avoid 'adulteration'*

The staff at the Venture believe that play is very important for the growth of children and youngsters, and are therefore aware that adulteration has an effect on the development of the children.

➤ *Employing home grown staff*

This is a very important thing at the Venture. Home grown staff know the Venture and how it works, they know how children view the life of the Venture and this makes the bonding process easier. They know the culture that is present at the Venture and how to deal with that culture. Malcolm King, one of the founders of the Venture has stated that there has to be a balance between 'home grown' staff and staff from 'outside'. They can learn from each other and children/youngsters can benefit from it as well. Each person brings their own set of values and interests, as well as professional qualities with them, and Mr. King believes that they both can learn from each other and grow together. Learning and growing is very important for the Venture and not

only for the children and youngsters, but for the staff as well. They have to grow along with the organisation, in order to always be able to provide the best support possible.

➤ *Nurturing ownership by enabling children to create their own play space*

From an early age children can be observed creating their own space. Even babies arrange their favourite toys or objects in a way that pleases them. This phenomenon is often overlooked or misjudged as simply 'messaging about', but in fact the child is creating an environment for themselves in which they feel comfortable.

The Venture provides a self-built play space where children create and recreate their own environment on a daily basis, it is the ideal vehicle both to nurture a sense of ownership, and to create a feeling of control (at the same time as facilitating and enabling their intrinsically motivated cognitive and affective development). (Brown, 2007).

To engage the most challenging children/youngsters from the area in the building and decision- making process, they try to create ownership within the community. But engaging them will also prevent them from turning against the organisation.

➤ *Responding to the most challenging children and young people*

The Venture is located in one of the most deprived estates in Wales, it has been compared with the social housing estate in Marseilles. In the area there is a lot of child poverty.

➤ *Community involvement and ownership*

The Venture was started years ago to reduce the high Juvenal crime rates in the area. See chapter two for more information.

➤ *Starting early in children's lives and supporting their parents*

The open access playground is for children from 5 up to 18 but even younger children are allowed on, though they have to be supervised by their parents, or an older brother or sister. For the youngest children, there is the Early Years centre. This is for children from 0-3 years old and besides that there are also parent and toddler groups. Within the Early Years centre, the first contact with parents is being made, of even earlier when parents have visited the Venture when they were little. As stated before, building up relationships with the community is very important to the Venture. It is the way to create possibilities for help. By building up relationships with the parents, the Venture tries to gain the trust of the parents. This means that in case problems occur on the playground, it is easier to get in contact with the parents. It is also important for Social Workers to build up relationships with parents, so parents put their trust in them and the organisation. Once this has happened, it's easier to work with parents.

➤ *Providing a broad range of engaging activities to counterbalance the ills in their lives*

A lot of children don't have the opportunity to go on holidays, because there isn't

enough money. The Venture organises trips which children can participate in. Trips like tennis, swimming, crockey walk, rock climbing etc.

Also the Venture undertakes activities that children can participate in, like the healthy living project, which often provides fruit to children on the playground, something they don't often get at home.

➤ *Accepting that children's and young people's inclusion is of paramount importance*

The Venture promotes inclusion of all the children visiting the Venture. All the children are welcome. Children with disabilities, or without, children with learning difficulties, other cultures etc. Everyone is welcome, and accepted. Everyone is included by the staff. Although every child is viewed at as an individual with their own qualities, needs etc, none of them is favoured over anyone else. Inclusion is very important. But this is also a political aspect.

➤ *Promoting positive reinforcement rather than criticism*

At the Venture, it is the duty of the staff to observe constantly and find the tiniest thing to praise. Help is being appreciated. For some children, making a cup of tea for the rest of the staff is a reward. They feel strong and trusted by the Venture staff. This is only a small example. It is a gesture of trust.

Chapter Six: The Venture's work methods as a response to the localised needs of the community

This chapter will give an insight into the methods the Venture employs in helping the community. A clear description of each method will be given, along with examples of how it is utilised on the playground.

6.1 Learning through play

The Venture strongly believes the best way for a child to learn is through play. It is through play that they can express who they are, find out their interests and improve social skills.

Malcolm King, manager of the Venture, stated '[children] learn so much more through their experiences. Things you learn through experience stick with you, they become part of you.

Things you learn from books don't have that sticking power.'

That doesn't mean the Venture doesn't recognise the use of learning through books. This is highlighted later in this chapter.

The venture encourages children to come up with their own games and imaginative play activities. The Playworkers on the playground are there to facilitate playing, not to tell the service-users what to do. This way, the children and young people can engage in play that suits their interests and personalities. This helps them to figure out what they like and don't like.

6.1.1 Types of play

There are different types of play, each with its own qualities and learning opportunities.

Although play can't be neatly defined by categories, knowing more about them can help when facilitating play behaviour.

➤ *Motor/Physical Play*

Physical play stimulates children to be active and get to know their bodies. They run around, climb things and discover all sorts of ways to get from point A to point B. This is the type of play where children are most likely to hurt themselves, but provided these accidents aren't too big, that's not essentially a bad thing. It teaches them to know their limits, something they'll remember so they won't make the same mistake again. Motor/physical play is a big part of every child's play activities.

➤ *Social Play*

Children learn to interact with one another from a very early age. Through play, they learn how to recognise other people's social cues, be it to come play, stay away or anything in between. They learn how to share and how to make others know what

they want. Social play is very important; without it, children are likely to develop social skills at a slower rate than others, which will cause problems later on.

➤ *Constructive play*

Constructive play teaches children several things. On the Venture, it's found in abundance. Children can help build new parts of the playground, make things on the sandpit or build a den in the den area. Constructive play teaches children basic building skills, such as how to use a hammer or which materials to use. It also allows them to improvise and be creative – they can use any object to build a den, it's up to them to make it work. Constructive play can grant children and young people a sense of accomplishment, when something they're worked on turns out well.

➤ *Fantasy play*

A big part of any child's life, fantasy play allows them to indulge in their fantasies and act out what they want. It encourages children to use their imaginations, but also teaches them valuable skills. When playing with others, improvisation is important. The fantasy can change at the drop of a hat, and the child will have to react in one way or another. It's also important they make clear what the fantasy is, so others can understand and join in. This improves their verbal skills. Fantasy play often involves motor/physical play as well.

➤ *Games with rules*

This is the type of play most found when adults facilitate play. It's the type easiest to keep under control, as there are rules to be obeyed. With these types of games, children learn to know these rules and behave accordingly. They know what to do and how to do it, so the object of play becomes to do it the best way they can. This again teaches social skills – how to behave in a structured play environment, how to deal with winning/losing, how to play in a team. Structured play can be found anywhere children play. They like to be competitive and try to be the best in any given game.

6.2 Learning through educational facilities

As stated before, the Venture does recognise the virtues of learning in a structured environment. This is why they provide several opportunities for children/young people to do so. Although these projects are always subject of change, according to funding, the educational needs of the children, or otherwise, there are always multiple ways for children and young people to improve their knowledge.

6.2.1 Structured learning at the Venture

➤ *Computer club*

Computers are very important tools in today's world and nearly every school utilises them. Some schools put homework assignments on the internet, where children have to download their assignments at home. However, some children/youngsters in Caia Park don't have a computer or internet at home. The Venture provides them with an opportunity to download their work and not get behind on their assignments.

Apart from this, there are separate computer sessions. Children come in and play on the computers. There's always a member of staff present to supervise and provide help/tips when needed. Through these sessions, children learn how to use programmes such as Word and Powerpoint, as well as using the internet for fun and games. Computer sessions are very popular amongst the youngsters.

➤ *Educational trips*

The Venture organises educational trips to places the children/youngsters might not go otherwise. For example, they might take a group to Mount Snowdon. This teaches children about their environment and allows them to see more of the world than what they're used to. It's also a nice day out for everyone involved.

➤ *Homework club*

Homework club is where children/young people come in and do their homework, with a member of staff present to help them when needed. Usually, children come in when they have trouble with a subject, asking the member of staff to help them with it. They then work on it together, making sure every step in the way to the solution is clear to the child. Homework club is on at least once every week, but children are always free to come talk to a member of staff when they have trouble with their assignments.

➤ *Alternative learning*

This is a 'club' organised for young people who don't go to school, for whatever reason. Some have been excluded, others feel there's no point in going to school. Fact is, many young people who don't go to school, do attend these classes. That's a testament to the effectiveness of the class. Different subjects are handled every time, from geography to the dangers of drug-use. These classes are as much about the lives of those attending as it is about the educational needs of the youngsters.

➤ *Reading club*

The Venture has a vast library of children's and teenage literature, all of which can be freely accessed during reading club. Children and youngsters can come in and read, or have a book read to them (for younger children). They can read as much as they like, and keep track of where they are in a special folder where they fill in the name of

the book and page number when they leave. This has proven to be a very popular club.

6.3 Other facilities

The Venture provides more than 'just' play and learning facilities. They are aware of the area they're situated in and respond to the very localised needs in a number of ways.

➤ *Arts*

The Venture provides arts sessions for children who wish to create something. It has been widely researched and accepted that children often express themselves through art. They enjoy creating things they can take home afterwards. Children/youngsters often talk about their lives during art sessions. They're prone to be more open about things that bother them or things that interest them. Arts have proven to be a useful tool in getting to know the children/young people better. In the Netherlands, this method is mostly used by Social Pedagogues.

➤ *Boys group/girls group*

Boys group and girls group are very different, and yet the same at heart. They both meet once a week, when they partake in activities which, while fun, teach the attending kids about specific topics. For the boys group, this included anger management, general health and smoking, as well as swimming and football.

'The aim of these sessions are to provide the young people with a better understanding of the importance of maintaining a balanced diet, improving fitness levels and promoting overall general health. It is hoped that the sessions will demonstrate that keeping yourself healthy is not difficult, it can actually be fun and that it is the responsibility of the individual.' (Winks, 2010)

Both the boys group and the girls group are very well-attended and seen as a highpoint in many of the attendant's weeks.

➤ *Camps*

As many people in the area don't have sufficient money to go on holiday, the Venture organises summer camps. There are various camps for different age groups. There are at least two members of staff present, usually assisted by volunteers. These camps are very much looked forward to by many children and a regular subject of conversation on the playground. For many, it's the only kind of holiday they have in the summer.

➤ *Cooking*

The Venture has regular cooking sessions. These can take place in the kitchen or on the fire in the fire pit. In both cases, children get to learn basic cooking skills,

supervised by members of staff. The food made at the Venture's cooking sessions is always of the healthy kind, such as jacket potatoes or vegetable soup.

➤ *Junior mentor scheme*

The mentor scheme is a one-to-one approach to help children/youngsters who need it the most. These children are usually referred to the mentoring project by staff members, information from school and social services. The age these children are must be between six and thirteen.

There are long term and short term mentoring projects, depending on the needs of the child. The child has an active say in what happens during these sessions, which has proven to be a successful approach. There is a minimum of time set of for closing down periods, because of the strong relationships children and mentors build up between them. Because of this closing down period, children will be able to cope with the ending of the mentoring project better.

The mentoring project has proven to be helpful to a number of children and young people, who have stated they feel more confident after attending the mentoring sessions.

➤ *TAC (Team Around the Child)*

"An estimated 20 per cent to 30 per cent of children and young people have additional needs at some point in their lives. This could be for a limited period, or on a longer term basis" (<http://publications.>

[Everychildmatters.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/LeadPro_Managers-Guide.pdf](http://publications.Everychildmatters.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/LeadPro_Managers-Guide.pdf)).

TAC is a team that consists of professionals from different organisations, such as schools, police and the Venture. This team co-operates together to provide a more integrated service. They work together as a team, to provide the best support possible.

➤ *YIP (Youth Inclusion Programme)*

"Youth Inclusion Programmes (YIPs), established in 2000, are tailor-made programmes for 8 to 17-year-olds who are at high risk of involvement in crime or anti-social behaviour. YIPs generally work with either the 8-12 age range (Junior YIPs) or the 13-17 (Senior YIPs)" (<http://www.yjb.gov.uk/en-gb/practitioners/pervention/YIP/>).

The venture only applies the Senior YIP programme. Younger children can usually enrol in the mentoring project. The venture provides activities especially aimed at the youngsters in the 13-17 age range, such as bike outings. The venture also takes part in meetings with other organisations, such as schools and police, to discuss which youngsters are most at risk of getting involved with crime or anti-social behaviour.

During school holidays, the Venture also provides splash activities, aimed at youngsters between 13 and 17 years old.

Chapter Seven: The opinions of the service-users

As the children and young people who visit the Venture are of major importance to the organisation, we've interviewed a number of them. These interviews were held with randomly selected youngsters. This chapter will describe some of the key points they mentioned in these interview sessions.

7.1 The interviews

We've asked children what they like and dislike about the Venture. Though some answers were unique to each child, there were similarities found in what they thought was important to the playground or described the Venture best.

7.1.1 Noted as very important:

➤ Staff

Many youngsters named the staff as a very important part of the Venture. They said it's nice to have someone around who listens to them and plays along in their games. They like when new members of staff join the playground, as they enjoy getting to know new people. New staff are usually shown around the playground by children, immediately creating a bond between them.

➤ Multi Utility Gaming Area (MUGA)

The MUGA was mentioned quite often during the interviews. Most kids enjoy playing games (football, basketball etc.) on the MUGA. This is also apparent when visiting the Venture; the MUGA is always in use.

➤ Meeting up with friends

One of the most important things about the Venture is that it gives youngsters a place to meet up with their peers. This came up multiple times, the children and young people see it as one of the best things about the Venture. The Venture is a safe place for them to go, and this is seen as important by both them and their care-takers.

➤ Firepit

The firepit is mostly used during wintertime, when it can be quite cold on the playground. People sit around the fire and talk with each other, creating a very relaxed atmosphere.

➤ Nature area

The nature area is seen as a nice place for fantasy play and den building.

➤ Parties

The parties were remembered very fondly. The Venture organises a number of them

each year (for Easter, Halloween, Christmas and so on), and they're always a success. As proven by the children's testimonies on the subject.

➤ Camping trips

The camping trips are unanimously thought of as a great outing, organised by the Venture. Everyone who talked about the subject did so with passion and joy. They recalled specific things happening during a past camp or were looking forward to a next one.

➤ They have their own space

This is a very important remark, made by one of the younger interviewees. It was stressed how they enjoyed having a place where they're free to do as they please and be themselves.

7.1.2 Noted as things that could be improved/added:

➤ Closed on Mondays

The playground is closed on Mondays. Children/youngsters would prefer it to be open on all days.

➤ Could be cleaner

The Venture organises a litter pick each Sunday, and whenever possible during the week. However, there's only so much you can do to keep a playground clean. It's a factor that sparks annoyance in a number of children/young people, but not one that is easily remedied.

➤ New staff

Children/youngsters would like to see new staff on the playground. As stated before, they enjoy getting to know new people.

➤ More structures

The venture is surrounded by a large structure, on which children can climb, run and engage in all sorts of play. They'd like this to be expanded upon. The Venture is currently creating such an expansion, in the form of a wooden ship.

➤ Rugby poles

Some kids have stated they'd like rugby poles to be added to the MUGA.

➤ More games

One of the youngsters commented there aren't as many structured games on the playground as there once were. They liked how the entire playground participated in these games and would like to see more of them.

7.1.3 Noted as the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about the Venture:

We asked the children what the first thing they thought of was, when hearing the words 'The Venture'. What follows is a sample of the answers given.

- Bike
- Friends
- Football
- MUGA
- Playground
- Playing games

7.1.4 Quotes about the Venture

What follows are some quotes from the children/youngsters about the Venture.

'The venture is a really good place for [Caia Park]. It can be a rough area, but the Venture is a secure place.'

'If the Venture wasn't here, I'd be sitting at home, bored.'

'The kids that visit make the Venture special.'

'I don't know what I'd do without the venture. I don't have any other place to go to after school.'

7.1.5 The main things that came out of the interviews were:

- The staff play a big role in the effectiveness of the Venture. The staff are the ones that build up the relationships with the children and are there almost every day.
- Children use the Venture almost daily after school. There aren't many places children can go after school, that are supervised. The parents know children are safe at the Venture, which makes it an okay place for them to meet up with friends outside of their parents' houses.
- Children use the Venture as a means to gain social contacts. To meet up with friends, talk about their day and have a laugh.
- Most of the children we have interviewed have visited the Venture since they were little, about 5/6 years, some of them even younger. That means that a lot of children have been coming down to the Venture for years and keep coming back. They also mentioned it goes down from generation to generation. Many of the younger kids who visit the Venture now have older siblings or parents who used to come down when they were younger. They remember how much they used to enjoy it, and now encourage the younger children to come down.
- Most of the children own a games console and some of them even own more than one. But despite the fact that they own a games computer, they are still found on the

playground daily. They said they do this because it's more fun to meet up with their friends and play outside than to stay at home and play video games. They like the active play they engage in at the Venture.

- Most kids we spoke to were very interested and excited about the Venture trips (like swimming, tennis etc.) and the summer camps. The summer camps are discussed by the children very often, be it talking about shared memories or possible new adventures on future camps. The summer camps are very present in the children's minds.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion and recommendations

In the previous chapters, we have tried to answer the sub questions of our research. By answering them, we gained an answer on the main question we wanted to answer by doing this research:

What makes the Venture effective in the community?

What follows is what we think is the answer to this question.

Firstly, there is the sense of ownership. This has been part of the Venture since the very start (as described further in chapter two) and remains a key factor to this day. This is something we've never encountered in the Netherlands and we believe it to be of great importance to the Venture's success. When it was first started, it was done so with the help of youngsters from the community. This played a big part in it becoming a success. As children and young people are encouraged to help improve the Venture at all times, and the Venture listens to and incorporates their opinions and advice, this sense of ownership has never left the playground.

Another key factor is the fact that the Venture never talks down to its service-users. They listen to what they have to say and respect them as people, regardless of age, sex, religion or whatever other factors might come into play at other places. The Venture works with their service-users, instead of for them. The children/youngsters have influence over the way the Venture works. They know and appreciate this, and know they are just as important as anyone else on the playground.

Thirdly, there is the special culture of the Venture, as described in more detail in chapter one. The children/young people attending the Venture are used to talking to adults as equals, and having their voices be heard. People respect one another, be they Playworkers, children, managers or volunteers. There is an overall sense of equality found at the Venture, which we haven't found to this extent in the Netherlands. This equality does not mean that the staff have no authority on the playground. Children/youngsters do have to keep to the rules and listen to the staff, since they have to keep the playground and the children/youngsters on it safe.

As fourth, the Venture is very process based. It is all about the relationships present at the playground. As described in chapter five, building up the relationships with children/youngsters and parents is one of the main goals of the organisation. The Venture may not have a detailed report about all they did at the end of a day, but a single

conversation can mean more to a child than a week's worth of structured sessions. The Venture acknowledges this and encourages its staff to engage in everyday conversations with the children/youngsters.

As the fifth factor, play is seen as a very important aspect of the lives of children/youngsters. The Venture believes that every child has a right to play, as they are convinced that learning through experience is more valuable than being taught from books. They respect children/youngsters and view them as a complete human being. All the aspects of the lives of the children/youngsters are seen as very important. The holistic approach to children and their lives is very helpful in tackling problems.

The sixth factor is that the Venture welcomes new ideas and encourages staff and children/young people to think about improvements. The mix of 'home grown' staff and staff from outside the community is a good example of this, as described in chapter one. Furthermore, students are welcomed and encouraged to bring in ideas and comments.

The Venture works with a large age group, with five to eighteen year-olds being the main demographic. However, younger children can attend when they're accompanied by an adult, and older young people can still come down if they feel they get something out of it. In effect, the Venture welcomes people of all ages.

The last factor that makes the Venture effective is that the Venture works bottom-up. The Venture signals problems in the area, and tries to develop a plan to help to solve these problems. When the Venture first started, it was mostly there to reduce the high crime rates, but when it was noticed that there were a lot of children/youngsters dropping out of school they developed a program based on educational purposes. The latest contribution of the Venture is developing health programs, like the healthy living project, to reduce the high rates of obese children/youngsters in the area.

With this report we hope to give future students an insight in to how the Venture works and why it works in this manner.

We believe this report gives an example of good-practise in Social Work, specifically in adventure playgrounds. We hope other organisations can learn from the way the Venture works.

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Timetable Joran Effting

Date	Time (in minutes) approx.	Activity
09-04-2009	180	Writing first idea proposal
14-04-2009	30	Discussing project with Hilde van Schaeren
15-04-2009	180	Adjusting idea proposal
27-04-2009	30	Discussing project with Hilde van Schaeren
15-09-2009	120	Discussing project with Peggy
16-09-2009	120	Adjusting idea proposal with Peggy
22-09-2009	45	Discussing project with Peggy and Hilde van Schaeren
28-09-2009	180	Working on renewed idea proposal with Peggy
13-10-2009	300	Working on project concept with Peggy
15-10-2009	180	Working on project concept with Peggy
20-10-2009	30	Discussing project with Hans Schreurs
22-10-2009	240	Adjusting project concept with Peggy
Dates unknown	720	Graduation group meetings
Dates unknown	120	Discussing with graduation group
Dates unknown	240	Preparing for time abroad
Dates unknown	720	Working on essay
04-02-2010	180	Working on project concept with Peggy
15-02-2010	300	Working on project with Peggy
16-02-2010	60	To Glyndŵr library, finding relevant information
17-02-2010	240	Studying relevant literature
18-02-2010	120	Discussing the literature, we've read with Peggy
19-02-2010	240	Studying relevant literature
22-02-2010	60	Meeting with Thoby Miller
23-02-2010	300	Working on project with Peggy
24-02-2010	180	Attending Venture staff meeting
25-02-2010	180	Working on project with Peggy
26-02-2010	180	Working on project with Peggy
01-03-2010	180	Working on the workplan with Peggy
02-03-2010	60	Meeting with Thoby Miller, enrolling in Glyndŵr
03-03-2010	180	Attending Venture staff meeting
04-03-2010	240	Working on project with Peggy
05-03-2010	300	Working on project with Peggy
08-03-2010	240	Working on project with Peggy
09-03-2010	180	Studying relevant literature
10-03-2010	180	Attending Venture staff meeting
11-03-2010	240	Discussing the project with Peggy
12-03-2010	120	Studying relevant literature
15-03-2010	240	Studying relevant literature
16-03-2010	120	Discussing approach interview with Peggy
17-03-2010	180	Attending Venture staff meeting
18-03-2010	300	Interviewing people at the Venture
19-03-2010	180	Collecting and organising data from interviews
22-03-2010	180	Discussing data
	120	Discussing feedback
23-03-2010	300	Interviewing people at the Venture
24-03-2010	180	Attending Venture staff meeting
25-03-2010	120	Collecting and organising data from interviews
26-03-2010	300	Interviewing people at the Venture
29-03-2010	180	Collecting and organising data from interviews
30-03-2010	240	Gather all the data till so far
01-04-2010	300	Working on work plan with Peggy
02-04-2010	300	Working on work plan with Peggy
06-04-2010	300	Interviewing people at the Venture
07-04-2010	240	Attending spring event at the Venture
08-04-2010	240	Discussing results

09-04-2010	300	Interviewing people at the Venture
12-04-2010	120	Glyndŵr library and meeting with Thoby Miller
13-04-2010	180	Working on work plan with Peggy
14-04-2010	60	Finding new relevant literature at Glyndwr
15-04-2010	240	Studying relevant literature
16-04-2010	360	Working on work plan with Peggy
19-04-2010	360	Working on work plan with Peggy
20-04-2010	360	Working on work plan with Peggy
21-04-2010	300	Attending staff meeting and interviewing Malcolm King
22-04-2010	120	Collecting and organising data from interview
23-04-2010	300	Discussing results with Peggy
03-05-2010	300	Working on report with Peggy
04-05-2010	300	Re-adjusting the report together with Peggy
05-05-2010	180	Attending Venture staff meeting
06-05-2010	300	Collecting data together with Peggy
07-05-2010	300	Working on the project together with Peggy
09-05-2010	180	Play Day in Chirk
10-05-2010	360	Working on the project with Peggy
11-05-2010	300	Working on report with Peggy
12-05-2010	180	Attending Venture staff meeting
13-05-2010	360	Working on report with Peggy
14-05-2010	360	Working on report with Peggy
17-05-2010	360	Working on report with Peggy
18-05-2010	360	Working on report with Peggy
19-05-2010	180	Venture staff meeting
20-05-2010	360	Working on report with Peggy
21-05-2010	360	Working on report with Peggy
24-05-2010	360 120	Working on report with Peggy Individual evaluation
25-05-2010	360 120	Working on report with Peggy Individual evaluation
26-05-2010	360 120	Working on report with Peggy Time table
27-05-2010	360	Finishing report with Peggy
28-05-2010	300	Working on presentation

Timetable Peggy denBrok

Date	Time (in minutes) approx.	Activity
12-04-2009	180	Writing first idea proposal
14-04-2009	180	Adjusting idea proposal
15-09-2009	120	Discussing project with Joran
16-09-2009	120	Adjusting idea proposal with Joran
22-09-2009	45	Discussing project with Joran and Hilde van Schaeren
28-09-2009	180	Working on renewed idea proposal with Joran
13-10-2009	300	Working on project concept with Joran
15-10-2009	180	Working on project concept with Joran
20-10-2009	30	Discussing project with Hans Schreurs
22-10-2009	240	Adjusting project concept with Joran
Dates unknown	720	Graduation group meetings
Dates unknown	120	Discussing with graduation group
Dates unknown	240	Preparing for time abroad
Dates unknown	720	Working on essay
04-02-2010	180	Working on project concept with Joran
15-02-2010	300	Working on project with Joran
16-02-2010	60	To Glyndŵr library, finding relevant information
17-02-2010	240	Studying relevant literature
18-02-2010	120	Discussing the literature, we've read with Joran
19-02-2010	240	Studying relevant literature
22-02-2010	60	Meeting with Thoby Miller
23-02-2010	300	Working on project with Joran
24-02-2010	180	Attending Venture staff meeting
25-02-2010	180	Working on project with Joran
26-02-2010	180	Working on project with Joran
01-03-2010	180	Working on the workplan with Joran
02-03-2010	60	Meeting with Thoby Miller, enrolling in Glyndŵr
03-03-2010	180	Attending Venture staff meeting
04-03-2010	240	Working on project with Joran
05-03-2010	300	Working on project with Joran
08-03-2010	240	Working on project with Joran
09-03-2010	180	Studying relevant literature
10-03-2010	180	Attending Venture staff meeting
11-03-2010	240	Discussing the project with Joran
12-03-2010	120	Studying relevant literature
15-03-2010	240	Studying relevant literature
16-03-2010	120	Discussing approach interview with Joran
17-03-2010	180	Attending Venture staff meeting
18-03-2010	300	Interviewing people at the Venture
19-03-2010	180	Collecting and organising data from interviews
22-03-2010	180	Discussing data
	120	Discussing feedback
23-03-2010	300	Interviewing people at the Venture
24-03-2010	180	Attending Venture staff meeting
25-03-2010	120	Collecting and organising data from interviews
26-03-2010	300	Interviewing people at the Venture
29-03-2010	180	Collecting and organising data from interviews
30-03-2010	240	Gather all the data till so far
01-04-2010	300	Working on work plan with Joran
02-04-2010	300	Working on work plan with Joran
06-04-2010	300	Interviewing people at the Venture
07-04-2010	240	Attending spring event at the Venture

08-04-2010	240	Discussing results
09-04-2010	300	Interviewing people at the Venture
12-04-2010	120	Glyndŵr library and meeting with Thoby Miller
13-04-2010	180	Working on work plan with Joran
14-04-2010	60	Finding new relevant literature at Glyndwr
15-04-2010	240	Studying relevant literature
16-04-2010	360	Working on work plan with Joran
19-04-2010	360	Working on work plan with Joran
20-04-2010	360	Working on work plan with Joran
21-04-2010	300	Attending staff meeting and interviewing Malcolm King
22-04-2010	120	Collecting and organising data from interview
23-04-2010	300	Discussing results with Joran
03-05-2010	300	Working on report with Joran
04-05-2010	300	Re-adjusting the report together with Joran
05-05-2010	180	Attending Venture staff meeting
06-05-2010	300	Collecting data together with Joran
07-05-2010	300	Working on the project together with Joran
09-05-2010	180	Play Day in Chirk
10-05-2010	360	Working on the project with Joran
11-05-2010	300	Working on report with Joran
12-05-2010	180	Attending Venture staff meeting
13-05-2010	360	Working on report with Joran
14-05-2010	360	Working on report with Joran
17-05-2010	360	Working on report with Joran
18-05-2010	360	Working on report with Joran
19-05-2010	180	Venture staff meeting
20-05-2010	360	Working on report with Joran
21-05-2010	360	Working on report with Joran
24-05-2010	360 120	Working on report with Joran Individual evaluation
25-05-2010	360 120	Working on report with Joran Individual evaluation
26-05-2010	360 120	Working on report with Joran Time table
27-05-2010	360	Finishing report with Joran
28-05-2010	300	Working on presentation

Individual evaluation of the process – Joran Effting

I first got to know about the Venture when I was looking for an organisation in the UK to do my internship at. When I read the description of the organisation, I was less than enthused to work there. It seemed to be just a playground, where your work consists of nothing more than keeping children in check. I was ensured students who did their placements at the Venture previously had all enjoyed their time there, and agreed to give it a try. This turned out to be one of the best decisions of my life.

The Venture blew me away. I'd never encountered anything like it; from the vast adventure playground to the way the children/young people interact, everything was so different and special, I couldn't believe my luck working there. I quickly became invested in finding out how and why the playground worked, but my schedule at the time didn't leave much room to investigate this fully.

The process of the research project started well over a year ago, when I first thought of researching the Venture as part of my last year of studies. Back then, I planned it to be a project to be completed on my own. The project itself was quite different, as it involved researching how an adventure playground could be started in the Netherlands. I was told this was too ambitious and I should drop the part about starting a playground and rather focus more on what made the Venture as successful as it is. I'm very glad I was given this advice, as the project I ended up doing proved to be quite demanding. Of course, having a project based on a smaller premise also meant I could delve deeper into the material, which was a definite plus.

Peggy [den Brok] got involved because of our teacher, Hilde van Schaeren. Peggy and I had both done our work placements at the Venture the previous year, and it turned out we'd handed in the same basic idea proposal for our research projects. Without knowing of each other's projects, we'd handed in proposals that were nearly identical. Tackling the project together was a no-brainer. Again, this is a change to my initial plan that worked out for the best. This project would have definitely been more difficult to do on my own, and it's hard to say whether I'd have had the perseverance to complete it. Having someone there to talk things over with and make sure everything is up to code is very valuable.

Peggy and I had the added benefit of having worked together during our work placements. We knew what each other's strengths and weaknesses are, and how we work together as a team. This certainly proved useful in delegating the workload; we didn't have any problems concerning work we didn't want to do. We decided to do most of the work together. The preparations, interviews and most of the writing were done as a team. We only decided to split the workload on the writing of the report, as it can be very tedious for two people to work on one computer. We split the chapters between us, working on them separately. We then

read each other's work and discussed what could/should be improved. This is where our personal interests came into play. Whereas Peggy concentrated on the chapters having to do with social policy, I worked on the ones involving Playwork and the importance of play in a child's life. Because we discussed at length and re-wrote much of what was written separately, we both ended up sharing responsibility for the finished report. It's very much the result of a collaborative process.

We were helped a great deal by various people, helping us shape the eventual project. We came to Wales, knowing what we wanted and how we wanted to do it, but it was because of other people we decided to change our approach. Such changes include not asking questions, but rather giving the interviewees topics to talk about and doing so during art sessions to take the pressure off. Again, I feel these suggestions have been very helpful. Some children didn't feel comfortable talking too much, but they expressed their views with drawings. We wouldn't have gotten the results we have now, if we'd have approached the interviews as a formal event (which our original plan was, though we never realised it until it was pointed out).

As for things that could have been better; first and foremost is a personal situation I've been in through the course of the process. This has both been upsetting and time-consuming, and I feel I would have been able to do more if I'd have been in a more positive state of mind. However, it's a situation that can't be resolved overnight and I am working to improve it, so I can't see how I could have resolved it earlier to get on with the project. It has been a learning experience, in that I've learned when to take time and concentrate on such matters, rather than trying to keep working on the project, knowing it's not working at that time. In such cases, it might be better to pause and continue when the worst has passed.

Apart from this, there's not much I would do different. It's true I had the benefit of knowing my colleague, knowing the Venture and the people working there, knowing the interviewees beforehand and knowing the people at Glyndŵr. Had this not been the case, things would have gone quite differently and I think the process as a whole would have differed dramatically. As things were known to me from the beginning, there were no start-up problems, no worries about getting to know the workplace or the people, no worries about working together with Peggy, or any other problems that could possibly have arisen from starting a project in an unknown environment.

As a whole, I'd say this project has been a fantastic experience. I've learned a lot (as described in the joint evaluation), been able to understand both the Venture and social work in the UK better than ever before and had a good time doing it. As far as I'm concerned, there's not much more I could have asked for.

While preparing for our research, Peggy and I set up a number of goals. I will now describe

these goals and whether or not I feel we succeeded in completing them.

Segment 1: The competence in the assistance and services to and for clients.

- *What is the reason kids and youngsters, groups that usually turn away from organised events, return to the Venture on an almost-daily basis?*

We found this answer through an interview with Malcolm King. The most important notion he gave us on this subject was that he never spoke down to the young people he was working with. Many people still talk down to children and youngsters and, in his experience, children respond better to people who treat them as equals.

- *What does the Venture do to ensure people keep using the playground and other facilities?*

As described in chapter two, the Venture keeps evolving and changing to suit the community's needs.

- *What activities does the Venture organise that are very well-received, and how could these be integrated in existing organisations?*

It's not so much activities that the Venture organises, but rather the way they work that is effective and could be integrated into other organisations. The way the Venture works with people rather than for them is something that interests me personally. I'd really like to see other organisations utilising the same approach.

- *There are many volunteers from the neighbourhood working part-time at the Venture. What influenced their choice to become a volunteer?*

Mostly, these volunteers had been coming to the playground for a long time, before becoming volunteers. They were asked to volunteer by staff.

Segment 2: The competence related to working within and from a health institution or rescue organisation.

- *Why does the Venture work as well as it does? Why do people keep making use of the facilities they offer?*

This became the main question of our research and is answered in chapter eight.

- *The Venture organises a lot of projects within Caia Park. How were these first set up and what makes these projects such big successes?*

When working on our research, we found this question actually wasn't that important in the big scheme of things. We decided to forego answering this question, so we could focus more on the ones that we felt better represented what we ultimately wanted to achieve.

- *How was the organisation first brought to life?*

Thanks to an interview with Malcolm King, along with some literature on the subject, we were able to answer this question in chapter two.

Segment 3: Working on professionalism and professionalization.

- *Which social work factors and goals are present there?*

This is answered in chapters four, five and six.

- *How are the methods and activities altered to assist people from Caia Park in the best manner possible?*

This is answered in chapter six.

- *The staff working at the Venture do so in a very informal manner. How did this come to be and how do people feel about it, from an outside point of view (children/youngsters)?*

This is answered in chapter four.

- *What can we as students learn from the way people at the Venture do their jobs?*

This is difficult to answer and defers from person to person. I have learned a number of things through the Venture. One of the main things is how I like working in an environment where the service-users have a say in what activities are organised for them. Where everyone is treated as equals. This is a notion that comes back various times throughout this report, which indicates how important it is to us and the Venture.

- *How does working at the Venture differ from Social Work in the Netherlands?*

Working at the Venture differs from working anywhere else, not only the Netherlands. This is because of the way the Venture grew with its community and the culture that was grown from that. This is further elaborated upon in chapters one and two.

Looking back at the questions we first set out to answer, it's clear we gained a lot of information throughout the research process. We've answered each question save one, even though we didn't consciously work with these questions anymore. I am satisfied with the results we've gotten from our research.

When I started this academic year, I also had some personal goals I wanted to work on. The first goal was not to procrastinate working on the project. I must say this goal was met quite well. Procrastination is a part of me and it does take effort to work on things when the deadline seems ages away, but this project didn't leave much room to dawdle. There was always something to do, which led to another thing. I was pretty much working on the project at all times, but because there were so many different aspects to the research, it didn't feel like I was stuck doing the same thing. I did notice it felt better to have something out of the

way rather than waiting to the last moment to finish it. I'm hopeful I can keep this up.

The second goal was to show more initiative within groups of people. During this project, Peggy and I were the only ones actively working on it. As such, it's difficult for me to say whether or not this goal has been met. This goal was never set up to complete during the research, but rather the half-year spent at college. I'll keep this goal during the half-year of college I have left to do, in order to see if it has been met/can be met.

The third goal I'd set up was to gain a better understanding of what I need to feel at home within an organisation. During my second work placement last year, I felt the work environment wasn't at all to my liking. That's why I wanted to gain more perspective into what makes for an appropriate work environment for me. I've now realised one of the main things I liked about the Venture was how its staff never talks down to anyone, everyone is respected. Children, young people, volunteers, staff, everyone is equal to each other and treated as such. This is very important to me and I don't think I can work in an environment where the gap between hired staff and students/volunteers is that big again. I've also come into my own much more; I feel I would speak up about my rights sooner than I would have done a year ago. Going back to the Venture was undeniably the right thing to do for me, as I now understand the organisation, myself and social work much better than I did before.

Individual reflection on the process by Peggy den Brok

Since I went to the Venture for my placement, I knew that I wanted to do my final project there. It was an organisation I had never seen before in the Netherlands. It had a good reputation in the community and the community cared for the organisation. The children and youngsters were positive about the Venture as well. It got me wondering, how an organisation got to that point of involvement. And how it came to be that the youngsters came back there on a daily bases.

It seemed that the approach they had was very effective and so I wanted to investigate further, how they became that effective and why they were effective.

I think knowing this would be very valuable not only for me as a person, but also for other professionals. I thought it was a good practise example from an adventure playground located in Wales. Especially since it had existed for over thirty one years.

In the beginning of the project I was nervous for not getting the information we needed to bring the research to a good ending. I was afraid that maybe the children/youngsters and staff weren't interested in a research about the Venture. But when I entered the playground for the first time and explained the children/youngsters we were doing a research about the Venture to see why it works as good as it does, they were very helpful. They were proud at the Venture and willing to share their experiences in order to help us. We weren't sure how to do the interviews since we didn't wanted to influence the children/youngsters in their answers. We were afraid that they were going to tell us the things we wanted to hear. So we thought quite a while how to approach the children/youngsters. We talked to our sponsor and the staff at the Venture and in the end we made it more like an activity. I was quite disappointed that I didn't came up with that myself since I'm training to become a Social Pedagogue and they use that kind of method to work with children/youngsters. I was quite happy to start the interviews with the children/youngsters now we knew how to do them, but I was also a little bit scared that we wouldn't get any information. We got to work and all my fears washed away, when we had the first interviews, since they more than willing to answer some of our questions during the activity. I defiantly keep this in mind for the next time a have to do a research or something equal to that, since it had worked out. It was not only the method that worked but it was also the way the children/youngsters were used to talking to adults. I think that definitely helped in pursuing our research.

Competences on segment one

As said before, we had a little bit of start problems with interviewing the children/youngsters but it worked out in the end.

In writing the report we had to capture the Venture's culture since this is very important information for the main question of our research. I found it very hard to capture the experiences and the feeling you get when you walk onto the playground. There is a certain atmosphere present and the sponsor would like us to capture that atmosphere and put it in our report. But I found it hard to capture the feeling on paper. When I heard about the Venture back in the Netherlands, I thought: I don't want to work on a playground. But the Venture is not just a playground, it is so much more and to describe all of that was quite difficult for me since I had to picture myself in the position of a person that had never visited the Venture before.

But not only I had to picture myself in the position of another person but also in the position of the children and youngsters that visited the Venture, and see the Venture through their eyes. It was a very difficult process since I am an adult and I see the Venture different from the children and youngsters that use the Venture. Also I wasn't used to an organisation like the Venture.

As I did my placement at the Venture I had to be careful not to influence the children/youngsters in their opinions, I have done this by asking children/youngsters why they thought certain things and not letting my own emotions and opinions play a part in the interviews. But it was hard sometimes since I already had an opinion of the Venture and certain prospects on what the answers would be. I have learned a lot from the youngsters especially. They shared personal things with me, which they didn't really have to since I was not working with them as a Social Worker/Social Pedagogue. It was interesting for me to see how the relationships I had built up over the year had evolved and had grown.

Competences on segment two

We stayed in touch with the Venture the entire time of the process. The staff team was very supportive, which I really appreciate.

Each week we went to the staff meetings to see what was going on at the Venture and in the lives of the children/youngsters present.

I have learned very much from the staff members of the Venture, especially the viewpoint from the Playworkers. I find Playwork a very interesting profession and I agree totally with their viewpoint on children and play. They made me review my own views on children and their process in growing out to be an adult. They inspired me and helped me look at things differently than what I was used to. An example, when a couple of youngsters were climbing up the structure I was worrying that they might fall off, and wanted to go over to tell them to get down, but a colleague of mine who studied Playwork asked me not to interfere, since they were testing their abilities, if I had interfered I would also have interfered in their personal experience. Also I would have taken the change away from them to learn more about their own abilities.

I admire their creativity in dealing with certain behaviour and situations, and in organising activities. I feel inspired to bring some of their opinions and views into my own professional career. It got me thinking about my own childhood and own professional behaviour towards the people I work with. I know now that even a conversation, that I maybe hardly can remember can have an impact on the life of the youngsters in a way I cannot oversee now. And maybe I never will, but during the entire process of the research I gained inspiration and a passion that I want to be a part of the lives of these children/youngsters. And later on also in the lives of other people. When I can mean something to another person just by listening to them then I will. It made me realise that something so small for me can be something major for the people I work with and for.

Also the respect towards the children/youngsters I will gladly take with me in my further career.

It was very helpful to work together with Joran. It was much easier since we had each other for help and advice. When one of us didn't know what to do with certain information the other knew.

In the beginning of the project, I set myself as goal to discuss our work together so that we wouldn't do the same work twice. Since the last time we worked together we had some problems in doing so and ended up doing the same work separately. We discussed on a regularly basis what we would do each week, and each day. This was very comforting for me, because it was clear what we were going to do and when. Still I had some insecurity's about the project, especially when we were collecting the data. We had to do several

interviews and since we were not actively writing our report in the beginning it felt like we were doing nothing, while that wasn't the case. We did a lot of work but it didn't show itself on paper. When I'm working on something I like to see results of my work, but in the beginning of the project that wasn't the case and it felt like we didn't do anything useful. I should think of this when I have to do another research, since I don't want to stress myself.

We had divided certain tasks among both of us and that felt good. I had had some problems with handing over the responsibility of certain tasks, like writing a chapter for our final report since I like to be in control of the product I'm making. I want to be involved but it was not really practical, writing a chapter together since it was too time consuming. So we divided the chapters and after we had finished one, we would read it through and change what needed to be changed. In that way we both knew about each other's work but also had our own individual input.

Before we had started the project we had decided that we wouldn't work according to our individual profiles. We wanted to use the methods that represent Social Work as a whole. We wouldn't use the methods distinctive of our personal profiles.

This is because we have different profiles. I study SP, while Joran studies MW. These profiles are both alike and different in the way they work. Because we had decided to work together on this project, we had decided to use the methods we both had learned.

Looking back at the entire process I noticed that we did use some of the SP methods, like the activities we did with the children to gain information from them.

But also the Venture's approach towards children was something the SP'er did. The holistic approach was something I noticed straight away. And to be honest I felt quite good studying to become a Social Pedagogue. Malcolm King has asked us to write an article about the Venture to put on the website of the Venture. I haven't this yet but it is quite interesting to do this from the point of view of the Social Pedagogue.

Competences on segment three

During the entire process I gained a lot of information about the way social services in Wales and the UK are arranged. Also I have learned more about charity organisations.

I learned a lot about the way the state had grown through the years and the services they make.

I think this is very important for me as Social Worker since I'm planning to work in the UK.

But I could also find the European influence into the social work within the UK.

I've gotten very interested in social exclusion and the way the government is dealing with that. I have read several books on social exclusion, inequality and youth the underclass, they provided some interesting information to me as a professional.

I also got to know more about the Maastricht treaty and the European context of Social Work and social exclusion. This is very important for my further career since I'm going to do the MACESS course in September. The information gave me the certainty that I had made the right decision to do that Master.

The profession of the Social Pedagogue is not known here in the UK as it is in the Netherlands and the rest of Europe, this made me think harder about my own role and how I could develop my own Social Pedagogue profile.

Goals we wanted to achieve by doing this project

Segment 1: The competence in the assistance and services to and for clients.

- What is the reason kids and youngsters, groups that usually turn away from organised events, return to the Venture on an almost-daily basis?

This was a very important question to me, since I wondered why they came back time after time. I realised by doing this research that the youngsters and children had grown really attached to the place. They have so many activities they can engage in. The staff there listens to the children/youngsters. And they are engaged in the activities as well. They develop activities together with the children/youngsters and involve them in planning and organising them. In the past few weeks some youngsters help to build a chill out room in the castle. One of the older youngsters was in charge together with a member of staff. They help the youngsters in developing their own activities instead of developing them for them.

- What does the Venture do to ensure people keep using the playground and other facilities?

The Venture organises playschemes, these are activities done in the community. On certain days, especially in the holidays the Venture takes a lot of stuff to play with and go to places where children/youngsters often play (these are discussed before). The Venture listens to youngsters and respects their opinions. There is actually a youngster on the management committee to speak for the rest of the children/youngsters. The Venture does its best to respond to these opinions and wishes. The relationships they have built throughout the years are being cherished. I found this very interesting, that youngsters have an input in the organisation.

- What activities does the Venture organise that are very well-received, and how could these be integrated in existing organisations?

The summer camps are one of the activities almost all the children/youngsters speak about. Being away from home with other children/youngsters and doing lots of activities is very well received. I had the opportunity to take part in two of the camps and I experienced the atmosphere myself. It was interesting to see that some children behaved totally different than when visiting the playground. It made me realise again that the environment, the children are in influences their behaviour. This is very important for me later in my career, since I want to work with children and youngsters and it is very important to know what kind of influence the environment has on the behaviour of the children/youngsters present.

- There are many volunteers from the neighbourhood working part-time at the Venture? What influenced their choice to become a volunteer?

A lot of youngsters, when they get older like to volunteer at the Venture. They want to stay involved by doing so. They volunteer on the playschemes and the summer camps, which the Venture organises and also on the playground itself. Because the youngsters grew up there they gained respect from the younger children and youngsters. This I found very interesting since I was sometimes struggling during my placement in order to gain respect from the youngsters and children.

Segment 2: The competence related to working within and from a health institution or rescue organisation.

- Why does the Venture work as well as it does? Why do people keep making use of the facilities they offer?

The informal education was very fascinating to me. Since it was all about the process instead of the product. A conversation can mean really much to a child/youngster. Maybe they aren't being heard at home by their parents, or maybe they just need a talk. And that is something that stayed with me the most. Maybe I won't remember a conversation taking place but for that child/youngster it is very important.

- The Venture organises a lot of projects within Caia Park. How were these first set up and what makes these projects such big successes?

I learned a lot more about the history of Caia Park and the Venture. I found the book of Patricia Mayo: The making of a criminal a very important part of the history of the area. I didn't know that there was a book already about Caia Park. And that Caia Park was compared to the housing estates in Marseilles. For me personally this research was very interesting since I'm going to do the MACCESS course in September and this was a comparative research done years ago.

- How was the organisation first brought to life?

I found my answer in talking to Malcolm King, he was very helpful in the process of capturing the Venture's history. I didn't know that the Venture was actually set up to bring down the high crime rates. I found this a very helpful discovery. Using an adventure playground to bring down crime rates in an area, was something I had never heard about. In fact I only just found out the existence of adventure playgrounds. The start of adventure playgrounds in Denmark was something else that got me interested. Children playing with things that were marked as junk, was something I had noticed before. I had seen a lot of kids playing with everything but

their toys and that's why adventure playgrounds were so interesting. Building tree houses, dens and play with the elements got me attracted. It is something I will remember for the rest of my life, and maybe I will try to set up an adventure playground in the Netherlands since I think a lot of kids could benefit from this type of learning and play.

Segment 3: Working on professionalism and professionalization.

➤ Which social work factors and goals are present there?

I could very much relate to their holistic approach since that is something a Social Pedagogue has as well. I found it very interesting to notice a variety of methods that the Social Pedagogue would use, since they don't have Social Pedagogy as a profession here in Wales.

The bans are an example, when children/youngsters are abusive to staff or break one of the few rules that are present at the Venture, they are being banned for a certain period. This is seen as a time out, to rethink their behaviour and to learn from it. Afterwards the staff member who banned them is going over to talk to them, to explain why a person is/was banned and talk about their behaviour. I think this is very helpful since a lot of children are just used to a certain behaviour that they don't notice it themselves.

➤ How are the methods and activities altered to assist people from Caia Park in the best manner possible?

The way they work, from bottom up I have experienced as a very vital way in the way the Venture deals with problems. The Venture started as an organisation to tackle the high crime rates but grew into an integrated children's centre over the years. Education became a very important aspect of the organisation since a lot of children were struggling in schools. They developed programmes to help to reduce the rates of children struggling in school.

➤ The staff working at the Venture do so in a very informal manner. How did this come to be and how do people feel about it, from an outside point of view (children/youngsters)?

Everyone's opinion matters during staff meetings, everyone is equal to each other and there is a very informal atmosphere, which makes it easy to express your opinion on a certain matter.

➤ What can we as students learn from the way people at the Venture do their jobs?

I think I have learned to work more with people instead of for them. The respect the

children/youngsters and staff have towards each other is very admirable I think. Also the confidence of the children in talking to adults is very intriguing.

➤ How does working at the Venture differ from Social Work in the Netherlands?

One of the main things is that the Venture is a charity organisation and funded by different other organisations. The flexibility the Venture has in dealing with problems of children, funding etc has been very useful for me. The learned me to adapt more easily to situations that happen during the day, week, month, years.

Personal goals I wanted to achieve during this project

- I wanted to gain a better balance between my work and private life. And more moments to recharge my own battery.

In one way I have accomplished this goal, since I took enough space for myself to recharge and to get my mind of things.

But on the other hand I still got stuck in a pattern. Since I went to Wales together with Joran to work on the project, we spend a lot of time together, not only on work related issues but also in my private life. In the end this began to be too much since we were spending so much time together. I need my own space and felt I didn't have enough space for myself. This resulted in some tension between the both of us.

- I wanted to have a clearer vision on what to do during our project and the rest of the year to successfully finish my course.

When we first started we had a clear course in mind, but not everything can be planned and we had to readjust our plans during the process. This is natural but caused stress for me. I was afraid we hadn't done enough, or that we weren't on the right track. Still now I'm not 100% sure. This is something I need to give a constant attention through my professional career, since I always have a feeling of doubt about my own qualities and own work. It makes me feel insecure, in one way it is a good thing because I ask other people what they think, but in the end I need to make my own decisions and I can't constantly depend on others. On the other hand was quite clear on how I wanted the report to be. I have my own opinion and am not afraid of speaking my mind and thoughts but there is always some tiny bit of insecurity there.

Appendix One: The Playwork principles

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.

Appendix Two: The Youthwork principles

“Youth work provides or facilitates:

- places and relationships within which young people can enjoy themselves, feel secure, supported and valued, learn to take greater control of their lives, and recognise and resist the damaging influences which may affect them;*
- non-formal, informal and structured educational programmes which challenge both the institutions and young people themselves to enhance their personal, social and political development;*
- access to relevant information, advice, guidance and counselling which includes the understanding of rights and responsibilities.*

Youth work is provided through both the voluntary and statutory sectors. It might, for example, include:

- centre-based work;*
- detached, outreach and mobile work;*
- curriculum specialities like arts and culture, first aid, sport, etc;*
- information, advice, guidance and counselling services;*
- project work;*
- residential work;*
- targeted provision for specific groups;*
- one to one work;*
- partnership working;*
- mechanisms for involving young people in decision-making processes;*
- opportunities for volunteering.*

The purposes of youth work in Wales are:

- to promote and actively encourage opportunities for all young people in order that they may fulfil their potential as empowered individuals and as members of groups and communities;*
- to support young people through significant changes in their lives and assist them to understand their rights and responsibilities;*
- to encourage young people to develop knowledge, understanding, attitudes and values which enable them to make constructive use of their skills, resources and time.*

Youth Work is driven by the voluntary principle which recognises that young people have the right to choose whether to engage with youth work provision.

Youth Work through its practice should:

- *promote opportunities and access for all young people whatever their race, gender, sexual identity, language, religion, disability, age, background or personal circumstances;*
- *challenge oppression and inequality;*
- *recognise the importance and value of the Welsh language and the need to promote its use;*
- *recognise that Wales is a country with a diversity of languages and cultures;*
- *recognise the importance of sustainable development;*
- *recognise that citizenship encompasses responsibilities and rights as global as well as local and national citizens.*

The Four Pillars of the Curriculum Statement

Youth Work, through its voluntary relationship with young people, offers inclusive opportunities for learning that are:

EDUCATIVE

Enabling young people to gain skills, knowledge, understanding, attitudes and values needed to identify, advocate and pursue their rights and responsibilities as individuals and as members of groups and communities, locally, nationally, and internationally.

EXPRESSIVE

Encouraging and enabling young people to express their emotions and aspirations, through creative, sporting and challenging opportunities which raise an awareness of:

- *cultural identity;*
- *bilingualism and the value of one's own language;*
- *heritage;*
- *respect for diversity;*
- *citizenship and respect for others.*

Youth Work, through its voluntary relationship with young people, offers inclusive opportunities for learning that are:

PARTICIPATIVE

Where young people are encouraged to share responsibility and to become equal partners, fundamental to the learning processes and decision-making structures which affect their own and other people's lives and environments.

EMPOWERING

Encouraging and enabling young people to understand their rights and responsibilities so that they, as responsible citizens of the communities of which they are a part, are able to engage with the personal, social and political issues which affect their lives and the lives of others”.

(<http://www.cwvys.org.uk>)

Appendix Three: Adventure Playgrounds

Learning and the development of social relationships:

Children learn through contact — direct contact with different environments, materials, and people. They learn through their relationships with other adults and children, they learn by doing things and manipulating their environments. At adventure playgrounds children gain knowledge through experience-based learning, by thinking through problems and ideas with adults and other children.

Creation:

Children's ideas inspire the creation of their own activities, structures, and games. Adventure playgrounds might be initiated by adults, but they are invented by young people. Children build the structures, create the activities, and in turn have an immediate impact on the nature of the playground.

Community:

Community is important for children and for adults. Adventure playgrounds provide an opportunity for children to meet one another and make their own community through games, activities, and the development of friendships.

Adventure playgrounds become centers, accessible to the entire community, with both indoor and outdoor play areas. Adventure playgrounds can be located within a child's neighborhood, providing a free and open space that both children and adults come to whenever they want.

Children in the city:

All children need a space that they can call their own, a place where they can be loud, dirty, silly, spontaneous, and anything else they feel like. Adventure playgrounds can provide such a space even in the middle of a large city.

A place for play:

Adventure playgrounds provide a space for children to play freely. Play is a right of all children as stated in Article 31 in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Play is essential for children to develop intellectually, physically, and emotionally.

At adventure playgrounds children get to play how they choose; they are not limited by fixed play equipment or by organized activities or games. Children are given the safety of an enclosed supervised environment. Playworkers are always present to mediate disputes between children and help them when necessary.

A place for interaction:

The environment of an adventure playground encourages social interaction. It is a social space in which children interact with adults and children. At conventional playgrounds, children tend to play mostly with their siblings, friends or caretakers. At an adventure playground, children create new relationships. Adults do not need to be present, stressing the importance of child-child interaction and relationships.

Children spend a great deal of time building structures, and doing so requires the help of their peers. Children converse to a greater extent with other children at adventure playgrounds than in conventional and contemporary playgrounds [two types of playgrounds with fixed equipment]. At an adventure playground children learn to negotiate their relationships.

A community space, a place for children to call their own:

A child at an adventure playground in Berkeley, California made a sign that said "our home." Children feel ownership over the adventure playground, and they take responsibility for the space because it exists as a result of their efforts. Adventure playgrounds provide a space for children and adults which brings the larger community together.

A place for development:

Adventure Playgrounds provide a space for children's developmental growth. At the Mark Twain adventure playground in Houston Texas a combination of surveys and standardized tests revealed that children's aggressive behavior was reduced and opportunities for solving problems were increased. Children also made significant gains in social responsibility and social problem solving.

(<http://adventureplaygrounds.hampshire.edu/essence.html>)

Appendix Four: The history of adventure play

the History of Adventure Play

Quick Reference Timeline



1952

The second Junk Playground opens in Clydesdale Road, North Kensington, London

1953

Lady Allen of Hurtwood decides to change the name from Junk or Waste Material Playground to Adventure Playground

1953

The National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) Playground Committee is formed to co-ordinate adventure playgrounds

1955

Lollard Adventure Playground opens in Lambeth, London,

1962

The London Adventure Playground Association (LAPA) is formed

1970

The first adventure playground for children with disabilities opens in Chelsea, London

http://www.adventureplay.org.uk/history_timeline.htm

Appendix Five: The Venture in images

As adventure playgrounds aren't well-known in the Netherlands, it may be hard for people to imagine what one looks like. We've included some images of the Venture to give you a basic idea, although we do keep to the idea that you have to visit in order to really know what it's like.



The main gate



The castle structure



The sandpit



The stage and the slide



The firepit