

The work plan



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Preface

This work plan will provide the reader with an insight as to what this project is about.

The research was initiated and will be conducted by Peggy den Brok and Joran Effting.

We have spent some time working and learning at the Venture, in 2008 and 2009. We were surprised by many things, including the work methods, the atmosphere and most of all the way the children attending the playground. The venture works in a way quite different from anything we'd encountered before (or since). We quickly found out how well this playground adjusted to the wishes and needs expressed within the community. We were very interested in how this all came to be and why it was so effective. When we got the opportunity to conduct a research for our studies, we leapt at the chance of researching the Venture.

This document will explain what the Venture is, to a certain extent. The general consensus is that you can never really explain what it is or how it works; one has to see it to understand it. We've done our best regardless.

Apart from that, you'll find a description of the research itself – what we want to achieve, how we want to work and what literature we'll be using.

We hope this document will provide a clear insight into what we're doing and how we're doing it.

Chapter one: The projected results of the research

1.1 Our goal

Since the beginning of our project we had a clear goal in mind, which hasn't changed. Our goal will be the following:

Our main product will be a report chronicling the Venture's vast history. We'll try to describe how it first started, how it grew to be what it is today, what influenced this growth and which people were involved.

We will try to answer the following questions:

- *What makes the Venture effective in the community?*
- *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?*

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.
- A lot of positive comments from the people that used to visit the Venture when they were little.
- The Venture has been a recipient of many prizes concerning Social Work.
- The Venture receives parties interested in the Venture's unique approach to Social Work from all over the world.

Community in this context means:

Caia 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 speak about Caia Park to people from outside the estate, people are being very judgemental about the area, and most of the time they don'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).

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).

We will collect these answers in an easy to read, complete report which can be used by anyone interested in Adventure Playgrounds. The report will not be limited to the Venture, but can instead be used by anyone thinking about starting an adventure playground of their own. It will also be useful to introduce the Venture’s methods into other organisations.

The report won’t be a blueprint on how to create an adventure playground, but will give a clear and to-the-point view on how this particular version was created.

With this research we want to capture all important points in how the Venture contributes to the community. This because we want to see which factors are involved to start an adventure playground.

The following a little background information about the Venture as an organisation.

1.1.1 The Venture as an organisation



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. The biggest asset in making this possible is the very heart of the Venture: the adventure playground. 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, 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 opportunity's 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.

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.

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)

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.

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. 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 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.

1.1.2 Structure of the organisation



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. The building of new areas is an ongoing project, the Venture is always changing. During my 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.

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.

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.

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.

1.1.3 Operation

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).

Staff on the playground usually know 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.

Aim

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

Vision

The Venture has a 'holistic' approach in working with children and youngsters.

One of these is '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.

Another vision seen at the Venture is 'every child deserves to be valued as an individual'. 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.

1.2 Methodology choice

We decided to do interviews with young people, parents and people from the community that visited the Venture when they were little. We'll also interview staff and Malcolm, since he is one of the founders of the Venture.

At first we wanted to interview the youngsters by letting them answer questions we came up with. But we decided to do it in a different way, since we both feel that we would influence the youngsters too much in their opinion by doing so. They have to feel free to say whatever they want.

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 hope to gather honest and sincere information, without influencing them.

We also decided to interview the youngsters in groups so it would be easier for them to talk freely. Since we are doing the research they look up to us, especially since we worked there as staff. We want to prevent them feeling intimidated by us as adults. Besides that the youngsters can complement each other in what they want to say. We have to be careful that they are not influencing each other in discussing the certain topics. We decided to do the interviews with the younger kids and youngster during an activity, to prevent them saying what they think we want to hear. During an art session the children are 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 will do individual since these people are adults and are not as easily intimidated as children. They also have a wealth of knowledge, which will be easier to capture if we talk to them separately.

Since we are talking to a lot of different people, we have decided that we have to adjust the topics and questions on our target group. Some topics maybe relevant for the youngsters and some, like the

history of the Venture, aren't.

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

We want to make sure people feel respected by us as researchers and their opinion is very important for our research.

1.2.1 Interview topics

Topics

- The Venture: The likes and dislikes.
 How old the kids were when first attending the Venture.
 How often the kids are there.
 What they do when they visit the Venture.
- Play
- Staff What role they play in the life of the kids.
 What the opinion of the children about the staff is.

General questions (to ask if conversation stagers)

- What would change for you if the Venture were to close?

Malcolm King

- The very beginning of the Venture
- Funding
- Staff
- Caia Parc
- The evolution of the Venture. Malcolm has recommended a book about the Venture. It is a comparative research about Caia Park and another social housing estate in Marseilles. It describes the situation, in which the Venture was created 31 years ago. We're still trying to get a hold on that book since it is not available in the local library's.
- Involving the community

1.3 The projected results part one

1.3.1 Which governmental policies play a part and influence the organisation, and how does the organisation respond to this?

The Venture has always relied on the Wrexham city council to provide them with their core funding. Without this, the Venture cannot survive. Last year, the council tried to revoke much of this fund, stating the Venture didn't need it anymore. This caused the Venture to launch a 'Save the Venture' campaign. They received a lot of support from the community and a lot of people pitched in to help explain the Venture's value to the council.

This wasn't the first time the council tried to cut the Venture's budget. In the 1980's, a cut in funding was proposed. This proposal was rejected after a campaign from the Venture, in which the children

played a pivotal part.

In earlier years, when the Venture was just getting started, the government was very helpful and supportive. This is mainly because of the influence of the political debate about social exclusion. The debate was mainly focussed on social exclusion as a consequence of poverty (Stewart & Hills, 2005). The Venture is located in one of the UK's biggest housing estates. During the 19th century the welfare provision within the UK had shifted from the parish to the state, and created a more collective approach in dealing with poverty within the UK (Wilkinson & Frost, 2001). *Prior to the middle of 20th century the intervention in the lives of the population can be characterized as ad hoc and laissez faire, guided by the twin principles of "least eligibility" and of the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor, derived from the Poor Law of 1834.* (Wilkinson & Frost, 2001).

In first years after the Second World War the British government was very positive about its welfare provisions and the economic growth the country was facing. They thought nothing was impossible but during the late 70's and early 80's Britain, faced a economic recession in which they had to cut down the state welfare expenditure (Alcock, 1996). Maybe this explains why the local council has tried to redraw their funding in the Venture?

The Venture is mainly funded by organisations like BBC children in need, The lottery etc. It is a charity organisation. This means that a lot of their actions have to be aimed at applying for funding from these organisations. The down side is that a lot of organisations only provide funding for a set time period like a year or three years and most of the funding providers don't prolong this funding since they are interested in new projects.

Malcolm King, Manager of the Venture, is part of the Wrexham city council.

The former Secretary of State for Wales described the Venture as 'one of the best children's organisations in the country, if not in Europe' (http://www.the-venture.org.uk/cgi-bin/show_page.cgi?23, The Venture: More About Us, at 14.22 on 05-04-2010)

In 2003 [the Venture] was chosen by the Welsh Assembly Government as the model for its flagship programme of Integrated Children's Centres, now rolled out across Wales. (http://www.the-venture.org.uk/cgi-bin/show_page.cgi?22, The Venture: About Us, at 14.24 on 05-04-2010)

1.3.2 What is the Venture's viewpoint on their services and how do they work?

The Venture's main philosophy is centred 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 has employed 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. 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. 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 Venture has, according to Fraser Brown, the following fundamental values and principles:

- *Adopting a child centred approach*
This means that all the activities has 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.
- *Being non-judgemental, non-stigmatising*
The children are seen as individuals with all their good qualities. None of the children or youngsters is judged on their behaviour, they're all appreciated for who they are. They are seen as rough diamonds, all with a good heart.
- *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.
- *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).

- *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*

- *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.

- *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 as an individual with their own qualities, needs etc, none of them is favoured over anyone else.

- *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.

During our research, we had some meetings with the children at the Venture. We talked about the Venture during art sessions. We did this because we wanted the children to feel like they could talk freely about their opinions and we felt that the best way to do this was during an activity. It made the entire atmosphere a lot more informal. It's also one of the methods an SP'er would use.

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

- * 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.

- * 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 a 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.

- * 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.

- * 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.

The Venture has a holistic view on the lives of the children. This means that a child is never observed and seen as a individual on their own, but always in context of their environment.

1.4 **The projected results part two**

1.4.1 **The goals and needs of the target group**

Micro level: The clients.

The definition of clients in this context is, the service users of the Venture.

For the youngsters and children:

They know we value their opinions and suggestions. During the interviews, they talked about things that they thought were important to tell us. There were some children/youngsters that came to ask us if they could join in our project. The main reason for this is that the Venture respects and values opinions the children/youngsters have. It is they who use the Venture and they know what they need better than anyone. They are used to talking to adults that respect them and see them as a human being instead of only a child who needs to be taught. All the information we have gathered during our research will be available for them as well, since they are the most important part of our research. The main questions for them are, why do they visit the Venture? What attracts them? What makes the Venture a 'good' place to be?

Meso level:

The organisation.

The main goal for the organisation is to capture the opinions and suggestions of the clients, as stated above. The Venture can't exist without the children/youngsters that visit the playground daily. The children/youngsters always have a say in what the Venture does and what activities are provided. This is a very important aspect of the Venture and one of the things that sets them apart from other organisations. This is also shown by the way the organisation is structured. In the management board there is also a representative of the children/youngsters present, who discusses wishes/needs and problems of the children/youngsters with the rest of the board.

The Venture is well known over the world, and a lot of professionals from other countries come to visit the Venture to see how they work. The Venture is interested in the opinions from other professionals from different countries, so that they can learn and grow.

The sponsor.

Our sponsor knows the Venture very well, and visits the playground once every three months.

He wants us to describe the culture of the Venture, since the culture that is present there is hard to explain to people who haven't been there. We both did our placement at the Venture and experienced first-hand the overwhelming feeling of social cohesion in the area and at the Venture. This could be used for other foreign students, to give them a better description as to what the Venture as an organisation stands for.

He also likes to have a report for other professionals, to show them a good practice example of youth and community work, and the uniqueness the Venture resembles.

1.4.2 **The focus of our research**

We decided to focus our research mainly on the needs and wishes of the children/youngsters. The Venture sees them as the heart of the organisation and, as stated above, the Venture wouldn't exist without them visiting. It is also in harmony with the vision (see chapter 1.1.3) the organisation has about children/youngsters.

Besides our main focus on the children and youngsters, we've also decided to focus on the organisation and their staff. We chose to do this, because the relationships staff developed with the children/youngsters is of high importance. The Venture is very process-based (Jefferies & Smith, 1999) and puts a lot of effort in building up relationships with the youngsters and their families.

1.5 The market approach

What are the specific results we want to achieve by doing this research?

The main result will be a report on our findings on the origins and the work ethic of the Venture. This report will contain the knowledge on how the Venture first came to be and how this self-built adventure playground works. It'll contain our findings from the various interviews, observations and other projects we hope to take part in during the research phase of our plan.

It also contains the work methods the Venture uses and why they are so effective.

Play and playwork are very important to the Venture.

We want to achieve a certain knowledge about the Venture and their methods, and this knowledge will be very useful for other professionals that work with children/youngsters to broaden their horizons.

They may also learn more effective ways to build up relationships with children/youngsters.

What are the demands to successfully finish our research:

- It has to be based on diverse theoretical models, since the Venture didn't just happen to be there. They adopted an approach that was already known somewhere.

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 the appendix you will find the essence and the importance of adventure playgrounds.

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

- We need to gain information from people who work in all the different projects the Venture provides, in order to gain more insights as to what the Venture does for its service-users.
- Our results gained from our interviews with the children/youngsters have to reflect all the different age groups, ethnicities, genders etc. that are present at the Venture to give a honest and reliable source of information.
- The main focus of our research is to collect the opinions of the service-users of the Venture and also the opinions of the service providers. They have to be in balance to keep the organisation successful. There is a shift going on from providing social services supply based to providing social services based on the needs and wishes from the people, the services are for. On the level of the organisation, this means that an organisation captures the opinions, needs and wishes from the clients, and base their

policies on them.

([http://www.marionwelling.nl/Artikel%20Vraaggericht%20werken%20in%20de%20jeugdhu
lpverlening.pdf](http://www.marionwelling.nl/Artikel%20Vraaggericht%20werken%20in%20de%20jeugdhu%20lpverlening.pdf))

Within social work there are many examples and discussions about working in partnership. Increasing complexity in service provision in recent years has created an imperative to work in partnership with service users, with the aim of improving public services (Edwards et al 2008). (<http://www.eadtu.nl/conference-2008/Proceedings/USBM%20-%20Billington%20and%20Davies%20-%20Working%20in%20Partnership.pdf>)

- We have to have access to all the information available and keep in mind that the opinions of the service providers always will be coloured by their own success.

Chapter 2: The organisation of our project

2.1 Money

Our research will cost nothing, since we're delivering a report about the Venture and this is free of charge.

The only thing we, as researchers, need is time and accessibility to the information needed, and the ability to interview the children and staff.

2.2 Organisation

Our end goal is a report on the Venture about their methods of work and why they are so effective.

The Venture is an organisation that has existed for 31 years and is still one of the organisations that is awarded by different parties from all sorts of organisations, such as the BBC, Play Wales and the government. (www.the-venture.org.uk/cgi-bin/show_page.cgi?22).

We have had several meetings with Thoby Miller about the progress of our research.

2.3 Time

Date	Activity
January 7 th – February 8 th	Studying relevant literature (topics: adventure playgrounds, play work, youth and community, participation in the community, empowerment) literature on social policies within Europe and the UK.
February 8 th	Arriving in Wrexham, start of research period
February 8 th – February 21 st	Taking interviews with the children. Gathering information Attending Venture board meetings to see what is going on at the present time.
February 22 nd – February 28 th	Organising information gained from interviews
March 1 st – March 14 th	Taking interviews with the youngsters and gather the information.
March 15 th – March April 4 th	Renewed study of literature, connecting to our findings
April 5 th – April 31 st	Interview with Malcolm King and reading 'the making of a criminal', a book written about a comparative research done in the area where the Venture is located, Caia Park. It compares the housing estate of Caia Park with a housing estate in Marseilles and is one of the reasons the Venture was started.
May 1 st – May the 21 st	Working on report Writing our dissertation Dealing with unforeseen circumstances

The preparation phase will end at the 31st of April. This is the date when all the interviews have to have been taken with the parties involved. This will ensure that we have enough time to abstract the information we need from them. It also gives us time to do interview the children/youngsters again if necessary.

We also hope we have taken the interviews with the staff and Malcolm King by then, so we can compare the information we have gained from all the interviews.

On the first of May, we will start writing all of our findings down and gather the information we obtained during the preparation phase.

We will start writing the final paper. We have gathered most of the information already, during the interviews and reading the literature that was handed to us. We have also used our own backgrounds as Social Workers within this research.

2.4 Activities

We've chosen to inform our sponsor, clients and supervisor together, as a team. This is the way we do our research and write our report, so it makes sense to do this together as well. It's become apparent through meetings with other people, that we complement each other when talking about the project. This ensures people get the whole picture, as opposed to assigning one person to tell them, as that would likely lead to aspects being forgotten.

This manner of divulging information to others has proven to be successful in our case.

2.5 Quality

Values

Sponsor:

Our sponsor wants us to write our report based on what we've encountered at the Venture, and to give an honest insight in to what the children think about it. He feels there's a very special atmosphere present at the Venture, stimulating children/youngsters to talk freely about their daily lives and be in contact with responsible adults on a daily basis (which they don't always get at home). He wants us to include this aspect of life at the venture in our report.

Our sponsor has given us very useful tips on how to perform our research. He's advised us not to use the head-on approach when interviewing the children, but rather to provide them with topics to talk about. This ensures more honest answers, and children are more likely to talk about what they view as important. It helps us not to influence them too much when asking them about the Venture.

2.6 Activities

Who checks the quality of the project, and will provide options to steer it in the right direction?

This is the task of our sponsor in Wales, Thoby Miller, and our supervisor in the Netherlands, Hans Schreurs. We'll be in regular touch with both of them and they'll have the opportunity to provide feedback and ideas to help make our research better.

They are also the people who will judge the final report. We'll give a presentation about our research, where Thoby Miller and at least one person representing the Venture will attend. This presentation will be videotaped and sent to Hans Schreurs, who will then discuss it with us. A final mark will be given after the presentation is seen by and discussed with Hans Schreurs, after our arrival back in the Netherlands.

2.7 The presentation

The people who we would like to invite is firstly our sponsor, and the staff of the Venture, so they can see what we have been doing the entire period and maybe they can benefit from our research results.

Resources

- Alcock, P. (1996). *Social Policy in Britain: Themes and issues*. Houndmills: Macmillan Press LTD
- Brown, F. (2007). *The Venture: A Case Study of an Adventure Playground*. Cardiff: Play Wales
- Carpendale, J. & Lewis, C. (2006). *How children develop social understanding*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd
- Cass, J.E. (1971). *The significance of children's play*. Trowbridge: Redwood Press Limited
- Mayo, P.E. (1969). *The making of a Criminal: A comparative study of two delinquency areas*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson
- Stewart, K., & Hills, J. (2005). *A more equal society? New labour, poverty, inequality and exclusion*. Bristol: The Policy express

Consulted websites:

- The website of adventure playgrounds consulted at Monday the 19th of April 2010 on the World Wide Web:
<http://adventureplaygrounds.hampshire.edu/history.html>
- The Website of the home of British adventure play consulted on Monday the 19th of April 2010 on the World Wide Web:
http://www.adventureplay.org.uk/history_timeline.htm
- The website of Marion Welling consulted at Tuesday the 20th of April on the World Wide Web:
<http://www.marionwelling.nl/Artikel%20Vraaggericht%20werken%20in%20de%20jeugdhulpverlening.pdf>
- The website of the Venture consulted at Monday the 19th of April 2010 on the World Wide Web:
www.the-venture.org.uk
- <http://www.eadtu.nl/conference-2008/Proceedings/USBM%20-%20Billington%20and%20Davies%20-%20Working%20in%20Partnership.pdf>

Appendix one:

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.

The Website of adventure playgrounds consulted on Monday the 19th of April 2010 on the World Wide Web:

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

the History of Adventure Play

Quick Reference Timeline

1931
First use of the term "Skrammellegepladsen" or "Junk Playground" by Carl Theodor Sørensen in his book titled 'Open Spaces for Town and Country'

August 1943
The first "Skrammellegepladsen" or Junk Playground opens in Emdrup, Copenhagen in Denmark.

March 1946
Lady Allen of Hurtwood visits Emdrup

November 1946
Lady Allen of Hurtwood's article about Emdrup is published in the Picture Post, receiving a wave of responses.

1948
The first British Junk Playground is started in Camberwell. It runs for three years.

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

The Website of the home of British adventure play consulted on Monday the 19th of April 2010 on the World Wide Web:

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

Appendix three:

These are the findings we have gathered so far, and are not complete. It is just a start.

Our main question for our research is:

What makes the Venture effective in the community?

Sub questions:

- What makes the Venture unique as an effective response to specific local needs?

What makes the Venture unique in the community work in Wales/ the UK?

The Venture is very much a product of its environment. It was started with the help of people from the community and prides itself upon always listening to the wishes and needs of its service users. This means the Venture is, in essence, as unique as the estate is. Any organization so in tune with its surroundings will be unique, as no area is the same.

- Which methods does the Venture use in response to the localised needs of the community?

Why has the Venture adopted a child centered approach?

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.

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

According to Joan E. Cass, play is as necessary and important to a child as the food he eats, for it is the very breath of life to him, the reason for his existence and his assurance of immortality. *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.* (Cass, 1972).

Play develops skills of both body and mind. And it brings about understanding, warmth and sympathy towards others (Cass, 1972).

One of the reasons the Venture adopted a child-centered approach is that children learn through experience (Experience-based learning). They gain self- confidence.

Why has the Venture adopted a one-to-one approach?

The Venture has a mentoring project; within this project, children are guided by professionals on a one-to-one basis. The idea for this project started years ago when the Venture noticed that a lot of children could use more individual help. One of the ideas behind this was that children could use a “good” adult role model who would spend time with them and build up a relationship of trust.

- Which methods and human views are present? Historically?
As stated in the appendix, Lady Allen of Hurtwood first introduced the adventure playgrounds to Britain. More information about Lady Allen Hurtwood can be found in appendix two. The theories present at the time were those of deserving and undeserving poor, the responsibility of the state and charity organizations.
- What different professions are present at the Venture and how do they complement each other and work together as a group?
Playworkers, Youthworkers, Joiners, Social Workers, Early years staff, home grown staff.
- Why has the Venture chosen for the structure of the organisation the way it is now?
We still have to get more information about this, during an interview with Malcolm King.
- What makes the children and youngsters voluntarily return to the Venture every day?
Some of the key points mentioned by the children are: staff, safe place to play, social contacts who visit, activities, trips, parties.
- Why is the Venture accessible for all youngsters and children?
Social inclusion and equality theories: still have to look for them.
- Why did they choose the underclass in a disadvantages area?
As Fraser Brown describes:
“In 1978 Malcolm King was in charge of the Intermediate Treatment (Juvenile Justice) programme for Wrexham. [...] The aim of I.T. programmes was to keep young people in their communities, rather than locking them up. Intermediate Treatment was specifically targeted at young people who were thought to be at risk of offending or re-offending. Fifty per cent of the relevant target group came from the Caia Park estate, even though it only made up around 6% of the total population of the area. A quick survey showed that these youngsters had nothing to do in their spare time. Many ended up in care. With strong support from Paul Eyre and Tony Chilton, the NPFA’s play advisors, King suggested an adventure playground to the I.T. Liaison Committee.” (Brown, 2007)
The Venture was rooted in its community from the very start.
- Which historical philosophy was present at that time?
The underclass theory and the theories of deserving and undeserving poor.
- Which views on welfare and society?
From individual to collective responsibility.
Post war economic growth and the recession in the late 70’s early 80’s.
Social exclusion and inclusion theories.

Appendix four: Summary

Since the beginning of our project we had a clear goal in mind, which hasn't changed. Our goal will be the following:

We'll try to describe how it first started, how it grew to be what it is today, what influenced this growth and which people were involved.

We will try to answer the following questions:

- *What makes the Venture effective in the community?*
- *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?*

Methodology choice

We decided to do interviews with young people, parents and people from the community that visited the Venture when they were little. We'll also interview staff and Malcolm, since he is one of the founders of the Venture.

The focus of our research

We decided to focus our research mainly on the needs and wishes of the children/youngsters. The Venture sees them as the heart of the organisation and the Venture wouldn't exist without them visiting. It is also in harmony with the vision (see chapter 1.1.3) the organisation has about children/youngsters.

Besides our main focus on the children and youngsters, we've also decided to focus on the organisation and their staff. We chose to do this, because the relationships staff developed with the children/youngsters is of high importance.

The main result will be a report on our findings on the origins and the work ethic of the Venture

We want to achieve a certain knowledge about the Venture and their methods, and this knowledge will be very useful for other professionals that work with children/youngsters to broaden their horizons.

They may also learn more effective ways to build up relationships with children/youngsters.

The organisation of our project:

➤ **Money**

Our research will cost nothing, since we're delivering a report about the Venture and this is free of charge.

➤ **Organisation**

Our end goal is a report on the Venture about their methods of work and why they are so effective.

➤ **Time**

The preparation phase will end at the 31st of April. This is the date when all the interviews have to have been taken with the parties involved.

On the first of May, we will start writing all of our findings down and gather the information we obtained during the preparation phase.

➤ **Activities**

We've chosen to inform our sponsor, clients and supervisor together, as a team. This is the way we do our research and write our report, so it makes sense to do this together as well

➤ **Quality**

Sponsor:

Our sponsor wants us to write our report based on what we've encountered at the Venture, and to give an honest insight in to what the children think about it. He feels there's a very special atmosphere present at the Venture, stimulating children/youngsters to talk freely about their daily lives and be in contact with responsible adults on a daily basis (which they don't always get at home). He wants us to include this aspect of life at the venture in our report.

➤ **Activities**

Who checks the quality of the project, and will provide options to steer it in the right direction?

This is the task of our sponsor in Wales, Thoby Miller, and our supervisor in the Netherlands, Hans Schreurs. We'll be in regular touch with both of them and they'll have the opportunity to provide feedback and ideas to help make our research better.

➤ **The presentation**

The people who we would like to invite is firstly our sponsor, and the staff of the Venture, so they can see what we have been doing the entire period and maybe they can benefit from our research results.