

SPRING 2023

Winter Outdoor Play for Children of Families with Additional Support Needs

Winter Survey Result



Scottish Government
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For a sustainable Scotland, where our children and
young people can play, learn and thrive outdoors

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Introduction

Inspiring Scotland's Thrive Outdoors programme are funding a portfolio of five charity partners to deliver outdoor community play for children with additional support needs (ASN)*. This programme is funded the Scottish Government's Outdoor Community Play fund. Alongside delivery, the portfolio are exploring what makes outdoor play truly inclusive.

In 2022-2023 the portfolio of charities from across Scotland have delivered inclusive outdoor play opportunities to over 900 children with ASN and their families. This report is informed by the voices of 101 families from across the country who face multiple barriers to outdoor play.

Through the Winter Play Survey in February 2023, our charity partners gathered and shared information from families of children with ASN on:

- The importance of playing outdoors all year round
- The barriers to playing outdoors in winter months
- Factors that affect accessibility of outdoor play opportunities
- What an accessible outdoor play session should look like
- How the outdoor play sector and others can make playful opportunities truly accessible

This data was collected through an anonymous online survey and supported by anecdotal evidence from peer support meetings with the portfolio and conversations with parents during online meetings.

*In this report, we use the term children and young people with additional support needs. By this, we mean disabled children and children with health conditions and impairments, including children with complex needs. They may need extra help, different types of support or adapted environments to fully access and participate in play opportunities.

Accessibility of Outdoor Play

98% of families felt that it is important to play outdoors all year round. 83% of those families stated that they are unable to do so due a number of barriers.

The top four cited barriers were:

01

Availability of accessible facilities

Accessible facilities were the most significant barrier to outdoor play in winter for families of children with ASN. The availability of toilets, changing facilities, and seating were cited as most essential facilities required.

02

Availability of accessible shelter

Families noted that access to accessible shelter is a common barrier to outdoor play. Often children can become overwhelmed and need a quiet and sheltered space to escape to or to refuel with hot food and drinks. Parents also appreciate a sheltered space to connect while their children play.

03

Availability of practitioners that are confident supporting children with ASN

We found that practitioners who deliver outdoor play can lack confidence to open up sessions to children with ASN due to a lack of understanding of children's needs and how to support these through outdoor play. Children with ASN often require one-to-one support or smaller groups. Some organisations do not have capacity to offer this due to lack of funding, resource, or workforce availability.

04

Access to winter and outdoor clothing

Winter and outdoor clothing is increasingly expensive and often damaged during play. A lack of accessibility to affordable and durable outdoor wear is a significant barrier to outdoor play for children for ASN. This can be heightened by children's sensory preferences, which discourages them from wearing suitable clothing for outdoor play.

"A lot of the outdoor play areas don't have open changing facilities during winter"

"Lack of appropriate places to take my son, who has complex needs. Lack of support available. I'm unable to take my son and his younger brother outside on my own, due to his complex needs and potential risks. He needs one-to-one."

A Perfect Day of Winter Play

As part of the Winter Play Survey we asked families of children with ASN what a perfect day of winter outdoor play would look like to them.

"Run by staff who were approachable and friendly. Play encouraged and directed, with alternatives to suit child interest. Fun activities with water, fire and making things"

"Out as a family, wrapped up, crunching through the frost in a woodland. Maybe some icy puddles to slide on. A good carpark with no mud. A play park with a cosy shelter to sit in out of the wind while the children play - maybe even with a fire"

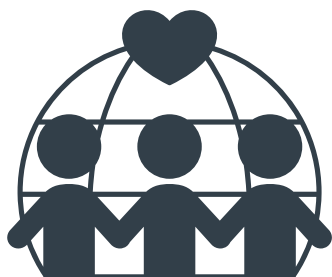
"Having other families there to talk to and to have other children there for my son to play with. Sheltered seating for having food/drinks. Accessible play equipment or an environment that can be adapted such as trees or branches to build tents. Away from traffic and busy areas. Somewhere with nearby parking. Open space to be able to run around in with my son"

"Enclosed enough that they can't elope but open enough to feel like we are in nature. Availability of boots and warm over-trousers to borrow, someone to support my non-verbal, complex child to play in the surroundings/ activities, someone to support my child with ASD to enjoy the activities whilst I sit somewhere sheltered with a hot chocolate talking to other parents"

"Lots of trees that provide shelter. Easy to access wild areas close to accessible paths. A mixture of 'playpark' and forest space. A cafe with accessible changing facilities! Coffee nearby!"

"Quiet supported groups, scheduled groups so not too busy, Warm food / drinks available to purchase. Warm shelter available if needed"

"Support from others who understand children with additional needs and so don't judge and can interact with them; and ideally to the point where the carer can get time to talk to other adults for support and to share experiences as their children are happy and able to safely (i.e. can't escape) interact and play with others."



55% of families cited presence of supportive and knowledgeable staff and other adults as key to their experience



76% said that availability of facilities such as toilets and parking were factored in to the decision to play outdoors



76% said a sheltered space for taking a break, chatting with parents, and getting a hot drink is important

What Can Organisations Do?

Families of children with ASN were asked what organisations who deliver outdoor play can do to make their sessions more accessible. There were three clear themes that were highlighted throughout the survey findings; the availability of shelter; facilities & communication and supportive staff. The respondents provided a wide array of answers, the key themes that emerged were:

01 Offer sheltered spaces
Outdoor play spaces should offer a sheltered space for children to take a break from playing and adults to connect with one another over a hot drink - whether that be an indoor space, under a tarpaulin, or simply under the trees.

02 Inclusive facilities and communications
Outdoor play spaces should have accessible toilets and changing facilities close to the site, as well as nearby parking. If possible outdoor play spaces should be accessible by wheelchair, such as using access mats. The available facilities should be communicated to families in promotional materials, using inclusive language and formats.

03 Provide confident and supportive staff
Staff should be confident including children with ASN in outdoor play sessions. Organisations should ensure staff have capacity to adapt sessions to different needs of children and families as well as being trauma informed.

Conclusion

The findings for the Winter Play survey highlighted the challenges that children with ASN and their families face when playing outdoors in winter. This report provides practical actions that can be taken to remove barriers to outdoor play, directly from the voice of families who are experts by experience.

The findings of this survey conclude that there are key areas of provision that outdoor settings can adopt to ensure outdoor play is inclusive and accessible to children with ASN and their families:



Offer sheltered spaces



Ensure Inclusive facilities and communications



Provide confident and supportive staff



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(c) East Lothian Play Association, SCIO & Can Do, 2023

Thrive Outdoors believe it is our shared responsibility to support and enable all of Scotland's children and young people to access our diverse open spaces and to empower them to enjoy these spaces for the purposes of playing, learning and fostering a connection to the environment.

Our vision is for a sustainable Scotland where our children and young people can play, learn and thrive outdoors.

For inquiries, contact thrive@inspiringscotland.org.uk

Acknowledgements

Thank you to portfolio charities and Thrive Outdoors network for sharing this survey with the families they support:



Thank you to the Scottish Government for continuing to support outdoor community play for all children and families in Scotland through the Outdoor Community Play Fund.



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