

Wales – A Play Friendly Place

Wales – A Play Friendly Place is a Play Wales campaign to help build a network of support for play across Wales. Share what's happening locally which is either protecting or prohibiting children's right to play on the Facebook campaign page. on.fb.me/playfriendlyplace

A PlayPod® comes to Palmerston primary's playground

Mark Sainsbury shares his experience of supporting the first Bristol Children's Scrapstore Playpod® to be installed in a primary school in Wales.

This is the story of how a Scrapstore PlayPod® came to a playground in Palmerston Primary School, Barry. It won't win a Pulitzer Prize, and it won't set the playwork world alight, but the experience taught this old playworker a few things.

Joanne Jones, Vale of Glamorgan's Play Development Officer asked if I would like to become a mentor for the Bristol Children's Scrapstore PlayPod® scheme. Connor, another Vale playworker, and I attended the mentor training in Bristol before visiting the school overlooking the vast chemical works in Barry.

The playground was a large, flat, featureless stretch of tarmac, fully exposed to the wind whipping across the Bristol Channel – not the most inviting playspace, but one which the school was determined to improve. The chemical works had given a generous donation to develop the playground and so Bristol Children's Scrapstore was approached to deliver the first Scrapstore PlayPod® in Wales.



There have been play pods in Wales before now, and there have been plenty of containers with lots of scrap which have been called many things. The difference is that Bristol Children's

Scrapstore has developed a tried and tested scheme with pods of different sizes filled and replenished with carefully selected scrap, all underpinned by training and mentors to help get it off the ground.

This is where Connor and I came in. We joined the training which was being provided to all those involved with lunchtime play at the school. The first

surprise was how many people were there. I'd expected 10 at the most, but owing to the exceptionally high number of children with support needs, all the one-to-one staff, together with lunchtime supervisors, teaching assistants and others meant that Dan, the trainer had over 20 to take through the course.

The second surprise was how much resistance there was, and how strongly it was being expressed. At this initial stage there were some entrenched risk-averse people. The third surprise was how, over the next few weeks, the most vocal arguments were challenged, and how far the resistance became positive support.

The fourth surprise was how smoothly the first week, following the Scrapstore PlayPod® installation, went. I'd expected the children to explore the new resources vigorously, and they did, but not how easily the staff were able to adapt, relax and enjoy the process. Sure there were challenges and conflicts, but the training had provided enough examples of 'what if..' that the staff could abandon the whistles and strictness. Connor and I were there to watch and support, which was seen as a big help.

Our mentoring visits became less and less frequent, as the staff became more comfortable with the changes in their roles and the children continue to extract every bit of play out of every bit of scrap.

In the future, scrap to replenish the Scrapstore PlayPod® will be sourced from Wales rather than importing it from Bristol.

Re-Create Scrapstore (Cardiff and Vale Play Services Association) is already on board to support the project.

Watch out for more Scrapstore PlayPods® in Wales – there's more on the way!

Scrapstore PlayPod®



Palmerston Primary School:

'Our PlayPod is a huge success and has enormously increased the children's play opportunities. It has improved the quality of the children's play, with significantly fewer disputes; and imaginative, adventurous play across all ages is observed.'

The Scrapstore PlayPod® is a holistic process that works with the entire school community to change both the human and physical play environment transforming play in school lunchtimes. The benefits include:

- Happier children
- Significantly fewer incidents and accidents
- Children returning to class ready to learn
- Empowered lunchtime staff
- Positive parental responses.

The process involves:

- Training and mentoring
- Consultancy and support
- Materials and resources
- Purpose built structure

www.playpods.co.uk