

MonLife Summer 2023 Play Report



Article 31 (leisure, play and culture) Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)



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Executive Summary

MonLife aims to enrich people's lives through participation and activity, build strong communities, and develop leadership skills for future generations. To meet these aims a variety of opportunities for children and families are available to participate in that support education, health, play, sport, and wellbeing.

Programmes delivered this year supported the priorities set out in MonLife Community and corporate plan including.

- Fair place to live where the effects of inequality and poverty have been reduced.
- Connected place where people feel part of a community, are valued, and connected to others.
- Learning place where everybody has the opportunity to reach their potential.

Through a combination of funding streams both targeted and open access programmes were delivered for children under the age of twelve. These included the Food and Fun programme, a Welsh Government initiative for targeted education and health to provide children with activities to develop their knowledge of healthy eating and healthy bodies, as well as fun ways to be active. We also provided Active Play sessions- open access play where children can attend and freely play. Stay and Play sessions were available for families to come together and play and we also held a National Play Day event.

1,401 hours of play were available for children and families to access and across all provisions provided there were 4882 attendances with an additional four hundred people attend our National Play Day. We also provided funding to heritage to provide craft sessions across our museums and castles. 396 children attended these sessions with 98% of people reporting that the sessions were positive.

“Everything you've done has been really good this summer holidays”- Parent of Child attending craft sessions.

“Been an amazing way to spend quality time with my grandson”- Grandparent of Child attending craft sessions.

Two of the programmes provided the children with meals in either the form of a hot meal or packed lunch. In total 8,950 meals were provided to children. 258 children in receipt of free school meals attended the Food and Fun program.

“Knowing that my son was safe, occupied and had two meals each day took huge financial pressure off us.”- Parent Monmouth Food and Fun

As well as increasing the capacity for Food and Fun this year MonLife also delivered Active Play Sessions and Stay and Play sessions in Bulwark, Magor and Undy and Rogiet. Within Chepstow and Monmouth, we also provided sessions targeted to families with children with additional needs. Magor Stay and Play was particularly well attended. While all other provision caters from age 5+ there is no age limit for stay and of play and these sessions were attended mostly by under-fives and parents reported that it was a nice session to break up the day.

As a long-standing programme of MonLife, The Monmouthshire Games (TMG) ran throughout the summer and 703 children attended across the four sites. This supported their overall wellbeing with 77% stating they tried a new sport, a 3% increase from last year. Children residing in Abergavenny, Monmouth, Chepstow and Magor and Undy were provided funded spaces for TMG, as identified through working in partnership with key stakeholders. There will be further spaces offered in other holidays for the remaining

financial year. This allows vulnerable children with the opportunity to participate in a variety of sport.

Within Food and Fun there were many children with diverse needs in attendance. Thirty members of staff provided one to one support or close supervision. These staff members were supported with detail from education on the individual needs and support plans for the children. Working in partnership with Action for Children (AFC) any children with needs that were unable to be met within the Food and Fun environment were provided with opportunities to attend playschemes with AFC. These provisions enabled children with complex needs to be supported by highly trained staff in environments designed to support their needs. This year Action for Children were based at three of the Food and Fun sites, this allowed even closer cross partnership working and we were able to provide Action for Children attendees with a breakfast and hot lunch. There were 168 attendances across all our provision that provided for children with diverse needs were.

We have created infographics that highlight the main headline data. They can be found in the links below.

[Monmouthshire Wide](#)

[Monmouth](#)

[Abergavenny](#)

[Caldicot](#)

[Chepstow](#)

[Magor and Undy](#)



Food and Fun

The Food and Fun scheme is a school-based education programme that provides food and nutrition education, physical activity, enrichment sessions, Play and healthy meals. Through working with partners in Education, the team delivered the programme across four Monmouthshire School settings this summer for three weeks. The programme supported parts of the four purposes of the curriculum. As well as supporting objectives highlighted within the Chief Officer: Children and Young People Annual Report June 2023 including providing a positive education experience and building strong community relationships.

The daily planning process of the programme focused around providing children with opportunities to learn new skills either creatively or through physical activity. There were also sessions delivered on nutrition and health bodies. These activities were delivered in a variety of ways to support different learning styles and interests as well as being adapted to be age and developmentally appropriate for the range of children attending. We continued with our hub approach model of delivery to allow for more children to access the scheme. Taking place in each of the four main towns all children from eligible schools could attend as well as identified children and children on eFSM from non-eligible schools. 480 children could access a space.



This year we continued to run from the primary site of KHS 3-19 as well as Thornwell primary school. For Monmouth and Caldicot we used the comprehensive schools. We found that using these comprehensive schools provided even greater benefit. The space provided more support for children with Additional Learning needs and also to be able to have the ability to split the younger and older children for part of the day which the children liked. It was also a good opportunity for those children accessing year 7 in September to have further transition opportunities.

Bookings were based on a priority system. First stage was children and families identified by eligible schools as well as those on eFSM. The second stage allowed non-eligible schools to send the booking link to children in their school on FSM and those the school felt should access the programme. Schools provided us with information on children's needs and if a 1:1 would be needed. The final stage included opening up to all children in eligible schools. Eligibility was based on schools having 16% or high eFSM

When asked what impact parents felt the program provided responses included.

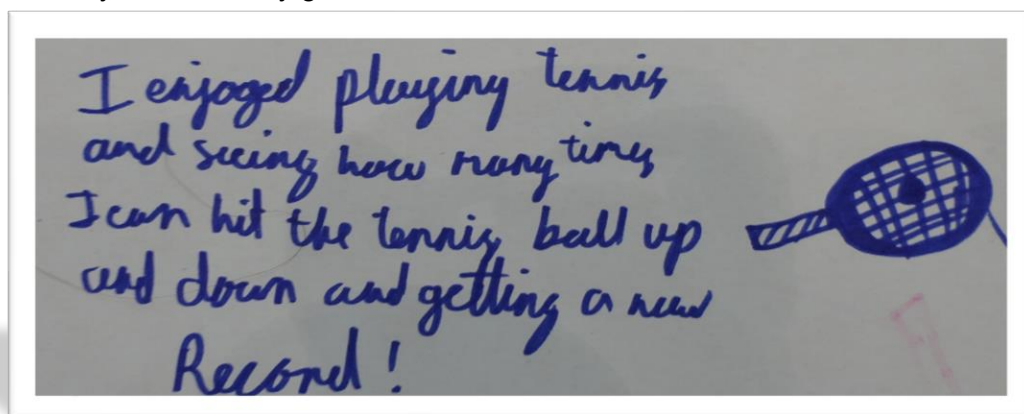
“It helps to keep them mentally stimulated so when they go back to school it isn't so much of a shock”.

“Routine for my child and a chance for him to socialise, make new friends and means I can get some work done.”

“My daughter is an only child, and the food and fun programme offered a great way for her to socialise during the school holidays.”



4445 attendances were noted, and all children were provided with a breakfast as well as a hot lunch. The morning consisted of structured education-based activities and the afternoon was freely chosen play supporting the Playwork Principles as stated in Wales – a Play Friendly Country- the statutory guidance for local authorities.



I have enjoyed
doing arts and
crafts because
you can
express
yourself! ☺



I have really enjoyed food & fun
it has made my summer better
because I am interacting
with more things!
Such as
sports, meeting new
people.



National Play Day

Playday is an annual celebration of children's right to play. Playday was established in 1987 and takes place on the first Wednesday in August.

It is an ongoing campaign that highlights the importance of play in children's lives, focusing on a particular issue each year.

Matter F of the Play Sufficiency Assessment contains criteria on the positive promotion of play to families and communities. Local Authorities across Wales complete a variety of methods to recognise National Play Day and use the day as an opportunity to promote the importance of play to their residents. Some Authorities do this by holding an event where children and communities can take part in a variety of play activities. There are further tentative links within the PSA with particular focus on Matter I which contains criteria on how other services are including the importance of play in their remit.

As play is being developed in Monmouthshire and becoming more prominent, we felt it was important that we held such an event on National play day.

The day also connected to the community and corporate plan. This event brought communities together and was run by stakeholders who work with these communities.



“Monmouthshire will be a place where people's contributions are valued, they feel part of a community and are connected to others.”

The day was held at Caldicot Leisure centre using the outdoor space, the dance studio and the café. The event was shared Monmouthshire wide and was open to all residents or the Authority.

Identifying support from the Play Strategy Group a variety of services across the authority supported with the event. This included a smoothy bike provided by the Wellbeing and Tackling poverty team. Toys from the past to play and create from the Heritage team. Youth services provided crazy golf and glitter tattoos. Outdoor education brought the climbing wall and did bush crafts including roasting marshmallows. We had external providers such as Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Club provide messy play as well as Monmouthshire Housing Association providing a silent disco that everyone enjoyed. A local inflatable company provided sumo wrestling suits, tug of war and soft play.

Weather was not the best on the day but despite this we had around four hundred people attend the event. One family stated.

“We have stayed all day! There was just so much fun things to do!”



Active Play

Our Active Play sessions run throughout all school holiday periods except Christmas. These 2-hour sessions encompass the Playwork principles as highlighted in 'Wales - A Play Friendly Country Policy'. The Playwork principles state that the play process for children is freely chosen, intrinsically motivated and personally directed. The children were given the opportunity to choose from a variety of resources and activities that supported their physical, emotional, social, cognitive, and creative development.

This summer they ran once a week from Chepstow, Abergavenny, Caldicot and Monmouthshire for 4 weeks. The first week was held in the Leisure centres as they do throughout the year. While being held in the leisure centre the children are also provided with the opportunity to have a session in the pool where they play in the water how they choose.

For the remaining three weeks Active Play was held within the Food and Fun schools. The intention of this was that those who were not eligible for Food and Fun could still experience part of the programme while they have the opportunity to play freely as part of the Playworks ethos. All Active play children were also provided with a pack lunch to take home with them.

Fifty-four children attended Active Play over the summer with healthy lunches provided to each child. These lunches are a regular fixture of the Active play sessions that run throughout the year. In quarter one this financial year Active play has run in May half term and the first week of the summer and has seen 195 children attend. Not only has this provided children with the opportunity to participate in freely chosen play it also supports the cost-of-living crisis by providing lunches for families in a way that is not stigmatised.



Stay and Play

Stay and play is a programme we run regularly during all the holidays. These sessions follow the same ethos as Active Play with a variety of play resources and families attend and play together or watch their children play freely in a safe and enriching environment. In the summer we continued to run these from Magor and Undy community Hwb and Bulwark community centre. We also added a session at Rogiet this year. Since May Half 165 people have attended our stay and Play sessions.

“This is a great session to break up the holidays.”- Magor Stay and Play parent.

Inclusive Stay and Play

It was identified after summer 2023 that there is a disparity between provision for children with additional needs and neurotypical children. This is prevalent across the Country and reasons for this include a lack of funding and difficulties in developing a workforce to support. Acknowledging this, we have been providing inclusive stay and play sessions where families with children who have additional needs can access a play space that is suitable for their children. This includes a limited number of spaces to support overwhelming the children. Sensory play is provided in Chepstow sessions and in Monmouth the sessions are held in the soft play where the space is closed to the public. During the summer there were fifty-six attendees. Since May 2024 we have seen ninety-one attendances.



Action for Children

Action for children is funded by Monmouthshire Disability team to provide after school and holiday care for children with additional needs in a program that is designed to meet the needs of individual children. For the third year, MonLife have provided additional funding to the team to allow Action for Children to provide an additional session throughout the school holidays.

There continues to be cross departmental working between all of these services to support those families who need this additional support. This year we were able to provide the opportunity for Action for Children and the Food and Fun programme to run alongside each other at the same venue. This took place in Abergavenny, Monmouth and Caldicot. This allowed us to be able to provide the children attending Action for Children breakfast and lunch as well as the Food and Fun children. In a lot of cases children who attend Action for Children are eligible based on school and eFSM to attend Food and Fun, but the programme is not always suitable to meet the children's needs. This allowed us to offer elements of the programme to these children while they were cared for in an environment appropriate to their needs.

Action for children had 112 children attend their service with a total of 224 meals provided.

“Really glad there’s a playscheme available for children with additional needs - thank you.”- Parent.

The Monmouthshire Games (TMG)

The Monmouthshire Games is an all-day sports provision delivered across our four MonLife Leisure Centres. The programme aims to promote the learning of new skills, develop confidence, meeting new people, and most importantly having fun through sport. Each day is action-packed, with a range of sporting activities for children and young people to enjoy. 703 children attended TMG during the summer with 97% of children stated they would attend TMG again. Through support from the Town Councils, we had opportunity to provide children with funded spaces at TMG. To date sixty children have been allocated these funded spaces and they can use these either all in the summer or spread them out throughout the year. This will support vulnerable children and MonLife work closely with stakeholders to identify children who are most in need of these spaces.



MonLife Heritage and Attractions.

For the past two years Monlife Heritage and Attractions have developed their museums and castles to become Playful Spaces. The objective of this is to ensure children feel they are free to play in these spaces. As well as developing areas with pay resources the venues plan craft and play sessions each holiday for families to take part in while visiting.

During the summer craft sessions took place weekly at Abergavenny Museum, Caldicot Castle, Tintern Station, Shire Hall, Chepstow Drill Hall and Chepstow museum. These sessions are both self-led and staffed. We are very lucky to have a team of community volunteers in Chepstow that lead on these sessions with support from MonLife Attractions Education Manager.

These sessions were very well attended during the summer with very positive feedback from those in attendance. 396 children attended across the sites with 98% feeding back that these sessions are positive.

“Everything you've done has been really good this summer holidays”

“Been an amazing way to spend quality time with my grandson”



The progression of play in Monmouthshire

“Play encompasses children’s behaviour which is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. It is performed for no external goal or reward and is a fundamental and integral part of healthy development – not only for individual children, but also for the society in which they live.” Welsh Government Play Policy (2002). Play is vital in children’s lives, for both its recreational value and for the part that it plays in children’s physical, social and emotional health, and well-being and in their personal development. Play deprivation in children can lead to low self-esteem, impaired emotional development, isolation, depression, and poor resilience. Children have a right in law to play and to ensure this is met, the Local Authority must assess the sufficiency of play opportunities in its area; and must secure sufficient play opportunities for children, as far as reasonably practicable. This is known as a Play Sufficiency assessment (PSA) and needs to be completed every three years with annual reviews. The overall aim of this is to ensure that there are more children playing - more often and that they are given time, space, and permission to do so. MonLife provides free to low-cost community play and sport opportunities for children and young people through a mixture of inclusive programmes in partnership with Welsh Government, Welsh Local Government Association, Community and Town Councils as well as wider partner services.

In 2022 MonLife employed a Play Development lead to focus on the statutory play duties for the local authority. Within this time Play has developed significantly and there has been a more consistent programme of play. Active Plays and Stay and Plays are now running on the same day and time every holiday, so parents know what to expect from each holiday. As part of this we have worked closely with the marketing team to ensure that play has a large presence on social media and a clear page on the website. Completing this insured that we improved matters on the PSA from amber to green.

There is a focus now to develop the workforce to ensure that we are able to monitor and over consistency in the quality of play we are providing. To support this, we have employed staff from the summer Food and Fun programme whose skills and knowledge in Play and Childcare were recognised as being an essential element to retain. There is now a regular staff member with play experience working within Chepstow and Caldicot Play provisions who are developing the programme further and ensure there is monitoring of impact to high standard.

In previous years we have promoted National Play Day on social media but have not had a particular focus. With the development of the play event to celebrate National Play Day we have identified that this is an important opportunity to bring communities together while promoting the importance of play. The success of this year’s event has allowed us to draw on the things that worked and the things that can be developed further and there is intention to run this again next year.

A full Play sufficiency Assessment needs to be completed in June 2025 and work on this has already begun. As part of this work there is a need to complete consultations with children and parents. Due to the development of relationships between play and other services there is large scope for these to be completed working alongside other programmes. Play has played an integral part of the Bronze Young Ambassadors program and Play makers festivals that are led by the Sport and Community team. These programs work with schools to develop leadership skills with year 5 and 6 children. At this year’s events play will use time to complete consultations. A play survey similar to the school sports survey will be produced and this will be implemented concurrently with the school’s sports survey to be able to reach as many children as possible. We will also work with Leisure centres to have QR codes for surveys available at swimming lessons and other classes for parents to complete. This

development of cross partnership working over the past two years is going to be incredibly supportive in the development of the PSA.



Future Ambitions

Statutory play duties have now sat with MonLife Play for two years and a lot of progress has already been made. Within this time ambitions identified have been built upon and although there is still work to be done to increase further opportunities there is a clear plan and a team to focus on these objectives. Opportunities are already planned for the rest of the financial year, and we intend to work on the following.

- Continue with Active play running each holiday being held at the leisure centres with a dedicated team whose focus is on the continuity and quality of this provision.
- Develop play workforce to include regular CPD and ongoing training.
- Implementation of regular workforce allows for quality assurance scheme to be implemented.
- Complete further work with schools to support in playfully mindful breaktimes and after school play provisions.
- The completion of the next full PSA due June 2025
- Begin planning for next summer food and fun based on evaluation of this summer.

All Communication with regards to play provision, activities and future opportunities that can be developed on a local level can be sent back to play@monmouthshire.gov.uk. Officers would welcome a conversation as to how we can continue to develop a partnership approach with all key stakeholders.



A note of thanks...

The fantastic opportunities that have been provided over the summer, and the opportunities to continue to plan provision throughout the year, would not be possible without the support of the following organisations and partners.

We would like to take this opportunity to extend our thanks to the following:

Welsh Government

Welsh Local Government Association

Chepstow Town Council

Abergavenny Town Council

Monmouth Town Council

Magor with Undy Town Council

Rogiet Community Council

Monmouthshire Comprehensive School

Caldicot Comprehensive School

King Henery 3-19 School

Thornwell Primary School

MonLife Leisure Centre's

Thank you to the following partners who have helped facilitate inspirational play opportunities, as identified in this report.

Action For Children

Gilwern Outdoor Education Centre

Hocky Wales

Tennis Wales

MonLife Library Services

Sian Kidd- Food Security

Clybiau Plant Cymru

MonLife Youth Service

MonLife Heritage

MCC Wellbeing and Tackling Poverty

Monmouthshire Housing Association.