



### 1 GET THE PICTURE

This is a brief introduction to toy libraries, their worldwide history and appeal. Considering the value of play and the contributions toy libraries can make to both children and families, the following information will provide an overview of toy library projects and suggests some reasons why you may want to think about opening one yourself!

#### What is a Toy Library?

A toy library is a community resource for play which may include equipment, toys for loan, dedicated space and skilled staff or volunteers.

All toy libraries are different - some cater for families, whilst some support childcarers in particular, and others do both. A wide range of resources can be offered by toy libraries, such as toys, videos, books, pushchairs, cots and safety equipment. Some are mobile projects whilst others offer home visiting and play sessions. They can either open one session per week, or open Monday to Friday from 9 to 5 - perhaps even offering a weekend and/ or evening service. Anything goes!

Toy libraries promote the principle that play matters to children, and they often provide preventative services which aim to fill the gaps that exist in services for families and those with children with special needs. By offering a friendly, supportive toy loan service to parents and carers, toy libraries support shared play at home.

**All children need to play and have a right to play. Children of all ages should be able to play freely and confidently on their own and with other children.**

**The Charter for Children's Play (1998)**

#### A Brief History

Toy libraries exist around the world. It is believed that the first toy loan library opened in Los Angeles during 1935, and was conceived in the summer of 1934 during the Great Depression. In South Africa, 'Active Learning Libraries' aim to allow children living in marginalised homes to access educational toys, whilst in Croatia, toy libraries began in Zagreb in 1976 and remained open during the war. In the United Kingdom, the first British toy library was set up in 1967 by Jill Norris with the aim of meeting the needs of families with a young child or children with additional needs, for whom there was at that time little provision outside the home. In Scotland the play bus movement started in the 1970s, and now there are an estimated 500 toy libraries in the UK.

UN Convention and The Rights of the Child In 1991 the UK Government agreed to be bound by the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child. The Scottish Parliament was thus required to make a positive commitment to adopt and implement the UN Convention in Scotland under its devolved powers. This includes Article 31, which reads as follows:

*"States Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts."*

*"States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision and appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activities."*





### The Value of Play

The toy library movement is founded upon the primacy of play for children. Play is a crucial factor in children's development, linked to intellectual, motor and personal and social development. Play is also directly related to creativity, healthy brain development, self-confidence, resilience, health and fitness. Through play, parents are also able to directly affect the development of their young children, with parent / child play strengthening attachment bonds and supporting creative and social development.

### Children and Play Deprivation

Research suggests that children who are deprived of play are at increased risk of psychological, intellectual and social deficits. Play deprivation may also have an adverse impact on personality and neurological development.

One major cause of play deprivation is poverty, which can create an inequality in children's access to books, play equipment and materials. In addition, where children are living in unsuitable housing conditions, there may be fewer opportunities for outdoor play. Furthermore, children with additional needs may be denied opportunities for play because of limiting disabilities and may also be disadvantaged by income poverty, because their needs mean that their parents are unable to work.



### The Contribution of Toy Libraries

By enabling the loan of toys, toy libraries help to redress some part of the imbalance between the supply of play equipment available to children from more affluent homes and those growing up in families affected by poverty, as well as ensuring that children with additional needs will not miss out on play and any specialist equipment they may require.

Toy libraries are able to:

- Provide opportunities for children to play with their parents in a stimulating environment.
- Create a useful forum to demonstrate ways to play with children and tackle issues of discipline and control without stigmatising individual families.
- Provide toys that have been carefully selected to enhance learning skills.
- Develop its volunteers' skills, from answering the telephone through to cataloguing and using a computer database.
- Promotes self-esteem in children and confidence for parents.
- Offer support for families and reflect our pluralistic society.

**Play is not just important to the quality of life and children. It is of great importance to the creative industries, the economy, and to the country's future.**

**Chris Smith, Secretary for State and Culture (1998)**

### Smart Play Network Members Support

Member you have access to telephone and email support. For more information about the topics covered in this guidance sheet, or any other queries you may have about your group, please contact us using: 0131 554 2620 or [admin@smartplaynetwork.org](mailto:admin@smartplaynetwork.org)

It is free to be a member of Smart Play Network, for more information on how to become a member please refer to our website: [www.smartplaynetwork.org](http://www.smartplaynetwork.org).