



**Thrive**  
**outdoors**

# Our Impact 2023/2024

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

INSPIRING SCOTLAND



Our mission is to catalyse change by inspiring people, communities, organisations, and government to work together to enable thriving childhoods within an environmentally and socially just Scotland.

# Foreword Celia Tennant, Chief Executive



“ We are delighted to present Thrive Outdoors Impact Report 2023/24. We have been reflecting on our year and two themes continue to come out strongly, collaboration and growth.

Meaningful collaboration with the voluntary, public, private, and academic sectors have enabled us to support rigorous and innovative social solutions through tried and tested models such as Active Play, Play Rangers and Outdoor ELC.

In the past financial year over £1,170,000 has been distributed to 35 charity projects, operating across 131 settings - a 12% increase compared to the previous year. Our approach will always be more than funding. We have used our relationship based funding approach to bolster key organisations and drive impact and change. We are delighted to work with other committed partners to support the health, wellbeing and happiness of Scotland's children through outdoor play.

We extended and expanded the Active Play Programme across new local authorities. New resources have been developed to share best practice, whilst guides and toolkits have been refreshed and updated to support the sector. Our bespoke Leadership Programme, co-produced with the sector, supported 42 future leaders of ELC and Outdoor Play.

Inspiring Scotland's not-for-profit trading subsidiary, Willow Den continues to thrive, providing outdoor Early Learning and Childcare provision in Falkirk and Edinburgh. We value the knowledge and experience that is shared openly amongst the outdoors sector and the relationships we have built with experts have helped us amplify the importance and value that Outdoor Play has in childhood. The International Play Association (IPA) world conference provided the perfect platform to do just that alongside the launch of Thrive Outdoors website and we were delighted to win the award for Right to Play.

Over the past 12 months the Thrive Outdoors team have had much to be proud of and we thank the portfolio of charities, practitioners, partners and stakeholders for your continued support and impact achieved.



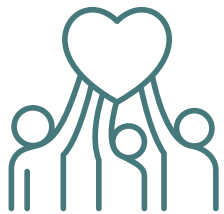
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# Thrive Outdoors in numbers 2023/2024

Thrive Outdoors sits within Inspiring Scotland's priority area of 'Improving the Life Chances of Children and Young People'. We work collaboratively with the sector and other stakeholders to support the health, wellbeing and happiness of Scotland's children through Outdoor Play. Across the year we have worked in partnership with a range of investors including the Scottish Government, local authorities, and private business. Through each of these partnerships our focus has been to direct resources in the most effective way possible and create meaningful change in children's lives.



35 charity projects awarded funding



13,722 children benefitted



£1,174,377 of funds awarded



£489,990 added value / leveraged support



16 local authorities engaged



460 practitioners supported



42 sector leaders supported



Launch of Thrive Outdoors Website

\*a further 38 charities accessed Thrive Outdoors support through our Leadership Programme, access to the Specialist Volunteer Network and direct advisory support.

# Our reach

Thrive Outdoors investment by local authority.



Connected Communities



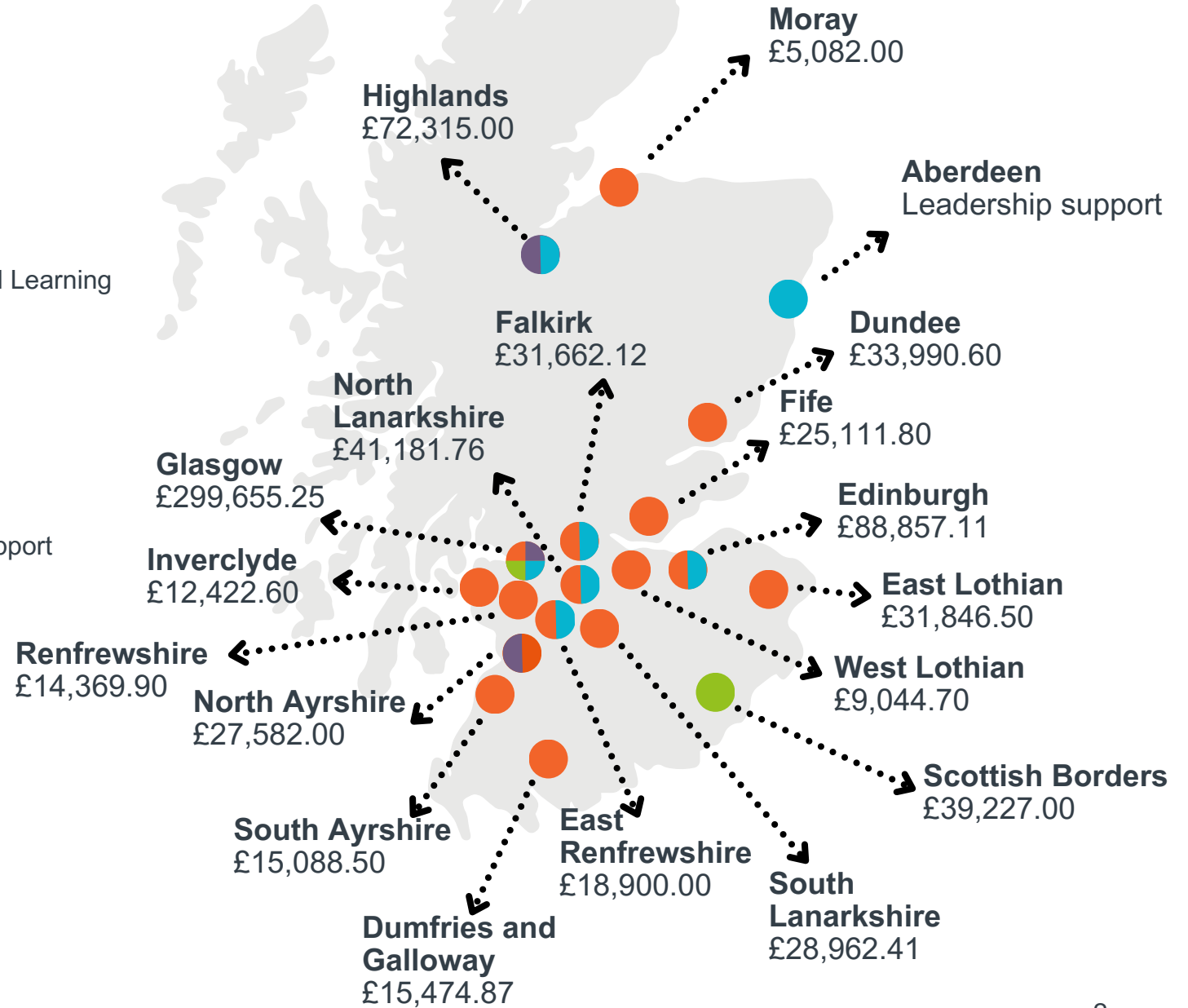
Outdoor and Nature Based Learning



Happy, Healthy Lives



Leadership and Sector Support



# Strategic themes

Our vision is for a sustainable Scotland where our children and young people can Play, Learn, and Thrive outdoors. In 2023/24 we continued to work towards our 4-year strategy, supporting through our strategic themes of Connected Communities; Happy, Healthy Lives; Outdoor Nature Based Learning; and Leadership and Sector Support.



## Connected Communities

Outcome : Improved Life Chances of Children, Young People and Families



## Outdoor and Nature Based Learning

Outcome: Improved Global Citizenship and Environmental Literacy



## Happy, Healthy Lives

Outcome: Improved Physical confidence, competence, wellbeing and resilience



## Leadership and Sector Support

Outcome: Strong, Resilient and Ambitious Practitioners and Organisations

# Connected Communities



## Connected Communities

Outcome : Improved Life Chances of Children, Young People and Families

We want more children and young people to be visible within communities, and we are working towards this through the Outdoor Community Play Fund .

Funded by the Scottish Government the Outdoor Community Play portfolio of 32 charities have enabled more and better outdoor community play opportunities that are free to access, child-led, and on the doorstep of those who need it most.

- 32 organisations supported
- 15 local authorities
- £550,000 funding invested
- 16,192 children and families benefitted
- 67 practitioners supported



“The young people who attend our service love the agency and freedom over their play which they are provided with in the Back Garden. They love climbing on trees, making structures out of sand, turning the sandpit into a paddling pool, tending to the fire, and more. They feel more confident in their play and abilities because they are encouraged to lead their own play and as such, are able to help each other and foster a supportive environment. **Concrete Garden**”



Outdoor Community Play fund outcomes:



97.5% of children report a positive experience.



88% of our children/families reported an improvement in mental health and happiness.



71% of parents/carers report increased understanding of the benefits of playing outside



70% of our charities encourage and support local volunteering opportunities in outdoor community play

““ Children enjoy playing outside, and this has a significant impact on improving their health and wellbeing, as well as having a huge impact on their physical stamina and fundamental movement skills. Families have been able to come together and enjoy time outside in the fresh air while joining in play and activities with their children. They have become more aware of their environment and natural resources. **Jeely Piece Club** ””

““ We have continued to hear positive comments about how “*buzzing*” and “*full of life*” the play space is during outdoor play sessions. A group of older people, who had been out for lunch at the café next door, came over to see what everyone was huddled around for. They were amazed to see that we had an actual fire and were making cinnamon and sultana baked apples to eat. One man said “*in my day we all knew how to build a fire*” and a wee voice piped up “*so do we, look I’ll show you*” and was chuffed as he could be when the elderly man couldn’t get a spark as quickly as the boy could. This interaction ended with the elderly party expressing how wonderful it is to see “*kids being kids*” and enjoying playing outdoors and making dens and fires together. **Include Us** ””

## Kirkcaldy YMCA Case Study

Carla\* is a 12-year-old girl who lives in the local community who has been attending the Outdoor Community Play sessions over the past few months. When Carla first started attending the play ranger's session, she would only stay for a few minutes to say hello.

Carla slowly stayed longer and longer throughout the sessions, but at first, she would not play with others or interact with the activities we had provided and when her peers were there, she would just sit and talk to them.

Slowly, over the past few months and with some encouragement from the Play Rangers, her confidence grew and now she is one of the first young people to arrive at the session and will join in with the different games /activities with other children. She has said "It's so much fun. I didn't used to like being outside, but I love it now!"

One of the activities available during one session at the beach was decorating wood cookies and making a knots and crosses game using natural materials. Carla really enjoyed this new activity, learning new skills and using materials which she had never thought of using before. She was even encouraging younger children to join in, showing them how to make the items for the game. The Outdoor Community Play sessions have helped Carla grow in confidence and allowed her to access new areas in her local area, meet new friends in her community, building positive relationships with the play team and other community members who attend the sessions.

\*all names used have been changed to maintain anonymity



Outdoor Community Play, East Lothian Play Association



# Happy, Healthy Lives



## Happy, Healthy Lives

Outcome: Improved physical confidence, competence, wellbeing and resilience

We want more children and young people physically active and mentally well. We are working towards achieving this through the Active Play programme.

We currently work with 5 trusted delivery partners and 1 training partner to deliver Active Play in schools, nurseries, and ELC settings across Scotland.

- 5 organisations supported
- 174 practitioners supported
- £472,650 funding invested
- 2754 children and young people benefitted

“ My favourite part of the activity was the free play session because I started playing basketball and now I play at home with my Dad a lot more often. **Child** ”



“ Active play has helped my entire class develop their confidence and fundamental movement skills. Now, more children can cope better with disappointments and are more resilient. **Class Teacher** ”

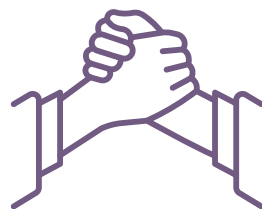
## Active Play Programme outcomes:



97% of our children are more physically literate.



92% of children are more physically active



80% of adults have increased understanding of the Active Play Programme



75% of adults are more confident facilitating fun and inclusive Active Play in their setting



79% of adults are committed to facilitating more fun and inclusive Active Play sessions in their setting



*The collaboration between Inspiring Scotland and Education has ensured the children of Glasgow have increased confidence in participating in Physical activity during the school day. Delivered by Education Service's Physical Education Lead Officers and local charities who are supported by Thrive Outdoors this partnership has demonstrated that effective collaboration with 3rd sector partners is a vital link in our shared agenda and enhances the support and opportunities available to school communities. 3rd sector partners are uniquely positioned to understand the local challenges within the community. Across Glasgow this is a vital component and greatly enhances the collaboration and success of the partnership. **Sally Machane, PEPASS Manager, Glasgow City Council***



### **Active Play Additional Support for Learning Research**

Glasgow University, in partnership with Inspiring Scotland and GCC Inclusion Dept, are working together to test the feasibility of an Active Play intervention by running it in 4 ASL schools and comparing results to 4 control schools. The intervention will run for 15 weeks, with one 1-hour outdoor active play session per week. Sessions will include 30 mins of structured play and 30 mins free play and will work with approximately 10-15 children (aged 7 – 12 years) per school. Adults responsible for the children will also take part in training and will observe and shadow charity play leaders throughout the process

# Leadership and Sector Support



## Leadership and Sector Support

Outcome: Strong, Resilient and Ambitious Practitioners and Organisations

We want more and better outdoor play and learning opportunities for all children and young people.

- 10 local authorities
- £10,186.20 funding invested in the sector
- 42 Sector leaders supported
- 18 organisations supported



“ [I benefited from] being able to network with others. Realising that everyone in a leadership role goes through similar issues and you are not alone. Participant ”

## Leadership Programme

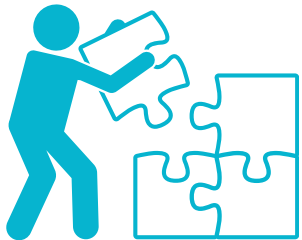
We are working towards achieving this by supporting the adults in the sector through the Thrive Outdoors Leadership Programme.

“ The wide range of leadership and managerial skills and knowledge as well as the emphasis on reflection through Action Learning Sets etc. has greatly influenced the culture of our organisation. While we have always prided ourselves on being reflective and working collaboratively, the Thrive Outdoors Leadership Programme provided us with practical tools to improve some aspects of this. It has also supported our development and strategy thinking and planning, uses, resources, and funding sources. **Concrete Garden** ”

“ Great course getting to connect with others from the sector and there was a vast variety of content delivered. **Participant** ”

## Added value

We support charities to deliver their best work, understanding that they are the experts in what they do. We focus on adding value - giving them the tools to do what they do best.



10 free capacity building training sessions



8 networking and skill sharing events



48 resource newsletters



£489,990 leveraged funding across all programmes



81% of organisations report improvements thanks to Inspiring Scotland support they receive.

## Jeely Piece Club Case Study

The newly appointed CEO of the Jeely Piece Club, Elaine McKenna, received mentoring support as she transitioned into the CEO role. Elaine's mentor had extensive experience in the nonprofit sector and provided valuable knowledge and expertise. The mentor has been able to share best practices, industry insights, and lessons learned from their own experiences.

Elaine's mentor has assisted her in developing and refining the organisation's strategic direction. This has helped her assess the current state of the service, identify areas for growth and improvement, and create a roadmap to achieving organisational goals. Through regular mentoring sessions, Elaine has gained guidance on strategic planning, resource allocation, and long-term sustainability.

Thrive Outdoors also hosted a visit to the Jeely Piece Club for the Glasgow City Council Child Poverty Lead and the Scottish Government Attainment Lead.

*"This knowledge transfer is helping me to navigate challenges, identify opportunities, and make informed decisions that should contribute to the success of the organisation."*

**Elaine McKenna, CEO, The Jeely Piece Club**



# Outdoor and Nature Based Learning



## Outdoor and Nature Based Learning

Outcome: Improved Global Citizenship and Environmental Literacy

We want more children and young people accessing outdoor play and learning daily in ELC and schools. We are working towards this by partnering with local authorities in Scotland to improve outdoor opportunities in ELC settings.

- 29 nurseries/schools supported
- £151,727 funding invested
- 2 local authorities
- 186 practitioners supported
- 1605 children and young people impacted



“The training sessions have been very informative with lots of signposting to further resources and practical support. Jo and Mairi have been amazing at providing advice as to how we can enhance our outdoor provision, helping us to think about our core provision and areas of improvement. The training around fire safety and bushcraft skills, along with knot tying for tree swings and hammocks has been great. **Claire Webb, Early Years Officer**”



## **Glasgow City Council Early Learning & Childcare**

Over the course of 2023/24 Thrive Outdoors have continued our partnership with Glasgow City Council's Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) service, supporting their vision for outdoor play and learning to be an integral part of the ELC offer across the city. Our work with the Council ELC team is wide ranging and has included strategic guidance and development as well as bespoke, localised professional development advice at setting level to encourage, improve and develop outdoor play and learning.

We are co-leading a working group to develop guidance for Glasgow's 110 council ELC settings on Quality Outdoor Early Learning Environments. This guidance will be finalised in the Summer Term for launch next academic session.

Through our setting based support, we have engaged with nursery teams to establish and embed outdoor play and learning opportunities through our Professional Development Programme taking them through a process of professional dialogue and reflective practice to improve their outdoor spaces, experiences and interactions.

## ***Scottish Borders Outdoor & Nature Based Learning***

We have been working with Scottish Borders Council in four areas to support their ambitions for outdoor and nature based learning in ELC and in schools.

This work has included:

- practical advisory support to an established outdoor ELC satellite setting attached to a nursery class,
- assessing the potential for the creation of an outdoor service to support a rural community to access both ELC and School Age Childcare,
- leading a place-based approach to outdoor play and learning through supporting a multi-sector group of providers – council, voluntary Funded Providers and a childminder – to work together to engage children in their local community.
- tailored facilitation of professional development to cultivate a comprehensive school-wide strategy for outdoor and nature-based learning from ELC through to primary school.



Feedback from Lilliesleaf Primary School:

“ Both Jo and Mairi were friendly, highly enthusiastic, knowledgeable and well informed about current practice and issues in outdoor education. I gained confidence to plan and deliver a series of outdoor learning lessons, and to plan lessons across the curriculum for delivery outdoors. I benefitted from the practical sessions both in terms of upskilling and potential health and wellbeing benefits. **Andrew Zimmerman P4/5 teacher** ”

“ Across the school and nursery, children participate in regular outdoor learning which helps them to explore, investigate and learn an important range of life skills. **HMIE report** ”

“ With Thrive Outdoors support, outdoor learning is a reality for all our ELC children. The quality of the outdoor space has greatly improved. In addition, staff confidence in using the outdoors and planning for high quality outdoor learning experiences has grown. **Robbie Oliver-Devlin Headteacher.** ”

### ***Training & Professional Development***

Thrive Outdoors has also delivered several training and professional development sessions to nurseries, schools and third sector organisations wishing to establish, develop or extend their outdoor and nature based learning offer to children and young people. These sessions have taken place as half or whole day sessions, twilights and inservice training.

# WILLOW DEN

WHERE CHILDREN THRIVE OUTDOORS

Willow Den outdoor nursery offers outdoor early learning and childcare for children 3 to 5 years.

Founded by Inspiring Scotland as a not-for-profit trading subsidiary, Willow Den reflects the ethos of Inspiring Scotland who built expertise in Early Learning and Childcare through their Thrive Outdoors work. Inspiring Scotland identified a lack of outdoor ELC provision, then mobilised funding and key partners to increase the availability of high-quality outdoor nurseries in Scotland.

Our first nursery, Willow Den at Spartans made history as Scotland's first outdoor nursery in a football stadium bringing nature based play and learning into the heart of an urban community. Willow Den at Falkirk Wheel brings another unique partnership, with Scottish Canals.

## Willow Den nursery model



64 children attend a Willow Den Outdoor Nursery



387 hours of outdoor play and learning accessed



120 hours of free stay and play sessions



1 new fully outdoor nursery setting opened



35,762 hours of outdoor early learning and childcare delivered

# Looking Ahead

Looking at the year ahead we will continue to connect, enable and influence individuals, communities and cross-sector organisations to strive for thriving childhoods within an environmentally and socially just Scotland. In doing so we will listen to the voices of the sector, practitioners and children.

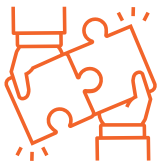
The Thrive Outdoors programme will be underpinned by four key pillars:



Growth and scaling up of Thrive Projects; building on what we know works we will reach more children and young people enabling more and better outdoor play opportunities.



Business Sustainability and Stability -we will invest in our future and our people.



Collaboration, Research and Development- we will learn, share and influence policy and practice.



Marketing and Visibility - we will continue to raise the profile of Outdoor Play and Learning and attract resources.



# Thank you

Thank you to all the partners and supporters from across the private, public and voluntary sectors we have collaborated with over the past year. From generous and committed funders partnering with us, to charities and organisations and their dedicated teams working directly with people and communities across Scotland, through to the network of specialist volunteers giving their time and expertise to help transform lives.

By working together we can ensure a sustainable Scotland where our children and young people can play, learn and thrive outdoors.

## Our portfolio:

3D Drumchapel  
 Actify  
 Avon Outdoors Ltd  
 Belville Community Garden Trust  
 Bridegend Farmhouse  
 Care and Learning Alliance  
 Canongate Youth  
 Children 1st North Ayrshire  
 Children First South Ayrshire  
 Dads Rock  
 Earthtime For All Ltd  
 East Lothian Play Association SCIO  
 FARE  
 Getting Better Together  
 Include Me 2 Club SCIO  
 Include Us  
 Jeely Piece Club  
 Kingsway Community Connections  
 Kirkcaldy Ymca  
 Licketyspit  
 Little Acorns CIC  
 MADE4U IN ML2

North Edinburgh Arts  
 Outlet Play Resource  
 Parent Action for Safe Play  
 PEEK - Possibilities for Each and Every Kid  
 Play Scotland  
 Play Works  
 Pollokshaws Afterschool Service  
 Project 31 SCIO  
 Ralston out od school care  
 Renfrew YMCA SCIO  
 Royal Botanic Gardens- Early years  
 Royston Youth Action  
 Scotland Yard Adventure Centre  
 Smart Play Network  
 Scottish Sports Futures  
 Stramash  
 The Concrete Garden  
 The Ecology Centre  
 The Venchie Children and Young People's Project  
 Under the Trees  
 Urban Roots  
 Willow Den  
 YMCA Edinburgh SCIO

## Our funders:





### **Vision**

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

### **Mission**

To catalyse change by inspiring people, communities, organisations, and government to work together to enable thriving childhoods within an environmentally and socially just Scotland.

### **Join Us**

We believe in the power of outdoor play to improve the life chances of Scotland's children. Our children's health and happiness are fundamental to a successful present and future. Outdoor Play has many benefits to supporting children's health and wellbeing and their cognitive and emotional development. Importantly, it is fun and children readily engage with it.

Join us to embed playing and learning outdoors as an everyday activity for ALL children, celebrating it as a fundamental part of growing up in Scotland.

[Read the National Position Statement for Outdoor Play and Learning here.](#)

**INSPIRING SCOTLAND**

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