

## A Playful City

Cork is one of seven partner cities involved in the URBACT Playful Paradigm (exploring use of play for promoting social inclusion, healthy lifestyles and energy awareness, place-making and economic prosperity). **Cork City Libraries** has a representative on the *Let's Play! Cork* Steering Group. The Steering Group explores ways of increasing opportunities for access to play in all its forms throughout Cork city. Play and stories are intertwined making the public library a natural advocate for the right to play for all ages and all communities.

## Why Play Matters

Play is an essential ingredient for individual and community wellbeing. It is through play that children get to explore and discover themselves and the world around them. Play allows us to imagine and to believe anything is possible. Play helps us to develop social skills, to negotiate rules and compromise, and to work in groups. Play encourages us to move, and it also allows us to unwind and relax. Play can be active or restful and structured or unstructured, depending on what mode of play we choose.



### What is play?

### Why is play important?

### Is play just for children or can adults play too?

### Does the library have a role in play?



## Let's Talk About Play

In August 2019 Grand Parade Library's Conversation Café invited two representatives from *Let's Play! Cork* to lead a conversation on the topic of play.

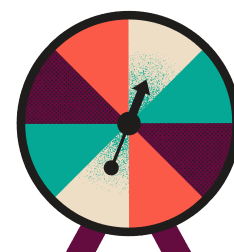
Martha Halbert, a social inclusion specialist with Cork City Council, and Eibhlín Cassidy, Executive Librarian with **Cork City Libraries** spoke about play, the ambition for Cork to be a playful city and the role of the public library in promoting and providing access to play.

The participants spoke about the variety of types of play, the importance of memories of childhood play in providing a sense of connection and belonging, and the value of recognising that adults benefit from play.

In December 2019, a representative from *Let's Play! Cork* spoke to staff at the annual **Cork City Libraries** Staff Awareness Training Day. Grace Walsh of Young Knocknaheeny discussed the concept of play, why it is now a policy theme for cities and what role the public library can play in delivering Playful Paradigm objectives. Grace's session gave staff lots to think about regarding the role public libraries have in providing access to play through collections, programming, and promotion.



# Cork City Libraries as a Play Partner



## The Role of the Public Library Service in Supporting Access to Play For All

*Eibhlín Cassidy, Executive Librarian, Cork City Libraries*

### Playful Collection Development

**Cork City Libraries** has developed a new toy collection that will be available for members of all ages to borrow across our library network from August 2021. Aligning with the sustainable development goal of responsible consumption, as people can borrow rather than buy toys, this collection will also support the needs of families in short-term accommodation scenarios who have limited space. The collection caters for children and adults, and items range from board games and jigsaws to play resources that support the development of motor skills and coordination and encourage active play.

In collaboration with Cork Sports Partnership we facilitate the lending of play bags to community groups. Cork Sports Partnership, in conjunction with Healthy Ireland, provided funding for the play bags and community groups can borrow these bags from their local library. This is a new relationship that has come directly from our involvement in Playful Paradigm and has the potential to grow and lead to innovative ways of reaching individuals, families and communities.



### Playful Library Programming

Our new library Lego clubs provide a space for children to play with others while developing their creative potential. They are provided free of charge and are an example of how indoor play can happen in a library environment. We also have a scrabble club for adults and chess clubs for all ages.

The first national Play Day took place in 2020. Covid-19 restrictions did not allow us to hold in-library events, but we were able to work with our Playful Paradigm partners to highlight the importance of play. Our library network distributed "Let's Play! Cork" booklets and play packs, while an artist chalked street games onto the pavement outside the City Library, Grand Parade. This approach was repeated for National Play Day 2021. Our 2021 Summer Reading Challenge *Play by the Books* uses play as its theme, encouraging children to read for fun.

We are exploring ways to use play as an opportunity for outreach projects that take the library out from our static buildings and into community settings, allowing us to engage with people who may not usually visit libraries.

*"We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing." George Bernard Shaw*