

20 places

£9.3m start fund

5 years

A new UK-wide collaboration for outdoor play

Play is how children build confidence, friendships, physical health and mental resilience. Yet, the freedom to play outdoors has narrowed and concern about children's mental health and inactivity has grown. Together, we will work for a local and national cultural shift on how parents, educators, settings and the state think about and resource play – and leave a legacy in terms of spaces, provision and sustainable funding.

This initiative acknowledges play as a right and builds on a long history of practice and research. It learns from and with a sister programme already underway in Canada, and is a practical proof of concept for the place-based implementation of the recommendations from 'Everything to Play for', the 2025 Play Commission report. It also arrives at a moment of renewed policy interest: a Prime Minister with a play track record, a revitalised All-Party Parliamentary Group on Play, new investment and the announced social media ban for under-16s.

In partnership

Developed over the last year with funders, community foundations and the wider sector, including a play education programme delivered by experts for each community foundation before starting in each place in spring 2027. 20 community foundations will work on the ground locally with UKCF providing nationwide insight, convening and advocacy – supported by learning partner Renaisi. Ongoing steering from a sector guidance group including Play England, Save the Children, and other academic and sector experts like Dr Helen Dodd. A cross-border peer learning community also joins us – 22 places are already underway delivering a sister programme in Canada.

Priorities and approach

Adventurous and child-directed play

Research links this with better outcomes for wellbeing, physical activity levels and resilience.

Widening access, intersectionality, funding good practice locally.

Growing the conditions for increased sustainable provision.

Culture shift

More than a funding programme: a whole system approach.

Mapping provision, understanding barriers, convening, capacity building and learning over time.

Rooted locally, with national impact.

Insight and evidence

Testing what works locally, understanding patterns nationally. In person convening every year.

Tangible contributions to the evidence base, assets for policy and advocacy work.

An outcomes framework built with the sector.

An invitation to co-invest

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