Reflections on 30 years of Playday from
Play Scotland’s CEO Marguerite Hunter Blair

Playday is always a fantastic opportunity for families and children to have fun on their doorstep come rain, hail or shine. I have been involved with Playday for many years, from street play events around Community Centres in Belfast in the 80’s and 90’s to massive Playboard NI events at Oxford Island on the shores of Lough Neagh in the early noughties.

For the past 12 years I have been rolling out Playday with Play Scotland the Scottish partner, promoting research on the benefits of Playday and events from the Highlands and Islands, across the Central Belt to the Borders. From a range of low key family organised events to large scale events where thousands of families play in the rain, hail and shine. My own children have grown up with Playday and as my youngest gets ready to turn 18 I have pictures of them all face painting, kite making, den building, creating obstacle courses and doing some crazy bike jumps in all weathers. The muddier the better - in their view!

From Ghostbusters to Power Rangers, Batman to Barbie, Hero Turtles to Thunderbirds, Bob the Builder to Buzz Lightyear ... and Spiderman, every year seems to have its own craze that fuels the imaginations of children, parents, carers and Playworkers alike for new games, drama and fancy dress fun.

Research carried out for the 30th Anniversary of Playday provides a unique insight into how play has changed over the last thirty years from the perspective of those who have lived through these changes. The research highlights the demise of outdoor play with children today spending far more of their play time indoors than outdoors, and concern about children’s retreat from the wider neighbourhood and community. The rise of screen-based play together with less play with friends and less informal play spaces points to a growing dissatisfaction with children’s play.

Less playtime throughout the year and more restrictive play led to 30% of the two thousand respondents expressing concern that play would get “worse” or “much worse” in the future.

Building on our National Play Strategy, we need to do more in Scotland to halt the decline in children and young people playing freely outside. The level of parents’ satisfaction with play opportunities has fallen over the last thirty years. We need more places to play, better access to play spaces, more street play, and more tolerant attitudes from adults to children playing outdoors. Thankfully we have a growing number of Play Champions across Scotland, including our playful Minister for Childcare and Early Years, Mark MacDonald.
Why don’t you become a Play Champion today and sign Scotland’s 1st Inclusive Play Charter to support children and young people in their right to play and to ensure that play spaces are valued within communities. The Charter calls for children to be able to play in and around their homes and streets with family and friends, just like we all did when we were growing up.

Let’s bring back the sight and sound of children playing in our communities.

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Full details on Scotland’s Play Charter can be found at http://www.playscotland.org/who-we-are/scotlands-play-charter/

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