



Evidence for action briefing: access to green space

Note: This is one of a series of nine briefings that accompany our children and young people's profiles of Glasgow neighbourhoods, available at: www.understandingglasgow.com/profiles

Definition

Green space includes many types of land from parks to more natural areas (e.g. corridors along river banks) and can also be created through green roofs and tree-lined streets.

Why is it important?

There is increasing evidence and recognition of the positive benefits of access to good quality green spaces and natural environments for physical and mental health for everyone, but particularly for children and young people.

Regular access to natural environments has been shown to reduce symptoms among children with ADHD and reduced stress in children.

Urban areas with green spaces are associated with reduced antisocial behaviour and incidence of crime.

Improved mental wellbeing and reduced admissions for mental illness have been associated with increasing levels of green space in an area.

Living close to safe and accessible natural environments is associated with increased rates of physical activity. The benefits include:

- People who use parks and green spaces regularly, exercise more
- Increased accessible urban green space is associated with increased amounts of play for local children
- Children are more active when playing in natural environments
- Natural features, such as trees or hedges, can improve levels of creative play as well as play between different groups of children
- Children playing in natural environments appeared to have improved concentration and motor skills

Great Outdoors: How Our Natural Health Service Uses Green Space To Improve Wellbeing, Faculty of Public Health; **The links between greenspace and health: a critical literature review**. October 2007, Greenspace Scotland

There are many **educational** benefits from learning outdoors:

- connections are made experientially with the real world outside the classroom, helping to develop skills, knowledge and understanding in a meaningful context
- outdoor environments and surroundings act as a rich stimulus for creative thinking and learning.
- the multi-sensory experience outdoors helps children and young people to retain knowledge more effectively.
- learning in a less structured environment can provide a different learning experience from that of the classroom and one that is more relaxed

Outdoor Learning: Practical guidance, ideas and support for teachers and practitioners in Scotland, Education Scotland

In addition, urban green spaces, can provide psychological relaxation and stress alleviation, stimulate social interaction, and reduce exposure to air pollutants and noise. **Urban green spaces and health – a review of evidence (2016, WHO)**.

Use of green space is greatest amongst those who live nearby.

The links between greenspace and health: a critical literature review, Greenspace Scotland.

Current situation

In Glasgow, on average 80% of children live within 400 m of publicly accessible green space (e.g. public parks/gardens or residential amenity green space). However in some neighbourhoods only 46% of children live in close proximity (within 400 m) of publicly accessible green space, while in other areas as many as 97% of children live in proximity to green space. The latter areas tend to be in the affluent parts of the city.

Are there inequalities to consider?

Living close to greener environments may protect against the negative effects of income deprivation related health inequalities ([The Lancet](#)).

However, there are inequalities in access to safe play spaces and in access to good quality green space, particularly in urban settings in which more deprived areas tend to be less well served. More equitable access could contribute to reduced health inequalities.

Challenges and solutions

There are rising levels of obesity among Scottish children and very low levels of 11-15 year old boys and girls meeting recommended physical activity levels.

Active Healthy Kids Scotland Scorecard

Poor mental health is an acknowledged issue among adolescents (Scottish Health Survey).

There is a need for both small, local green spaces situated very close to where people live and spend their day, and large green spaces that provide specific recreational facilities (such as playing fields) and opportunities to interact with nature.

Urban green spaces and health - a review of evidence (2016, WHO)

Access to public open space and green areas in urban areas is unequal. More equitable access to high quality, safe green space with appropriate recreational facilities for all age groups is needed.

Investments that work for physical activity

Examples of positive action

1. Outdoor learning

Outdoor learning is given an integral role in the Curriculum for Excellence. Opportunities for all children and young people to enjoy first-hand experience outdoors exist within and across all the curriculum areas.

The Education Scotland website provides information on [how to deliver the Curriculum for Excellence through outdoor learning](#).

2. Young Place Changers

[Young Place Changers](#) puts young people in the lead role – bringing together the wider community to look at local spaces and plan improvements. The Young Place Changers programme has used a co-production approach to develop and pilot a training and support programme enabling young people to transform both the place they live, their relationship with it and the wider community.

3. The Children's Wood and Kelvin Meadow

The [Children's Wood](#) on North Kelvin Meadow, and the Meadow itself, was adopted by the local community who have successfully lobbied Glasgow City Council to ensure that the space cannot be zoned for housing. There are regular events, groups, clubs and an outdoor playgroup run by the community that are intended to connect children to nature, raise aspirations and bring people together. A PhD study was recently undertaken which found that using the space for outdoor play had a positive impact on primary school children's attention – [research on the Children's Wood](#).