

Child's Play; how we risk giving our children everything except the freedom to play.

“Play is children’s way of perceiving the world they have been called upon to change”. It was with this thought that Christopher Clouder opened the first Alliance for Childhood event in Scotland, at the Scottish Parliament on April 23rd. After music and singing from the pupils of Edinburgh Rudolf Steiner school, Christopher went on to tell the audience of politicians, policy-makers, academics, teachers and play-workers how vital play is for fostering imagination and creativity as well as the ability to relate to ourselves, others and the world around us.

Sue Palmer, tireless campaigner and author of ‘Toxic Childhood’ shocked us with facts on screen saturation and the power that commercial forces and marketing have gained over children and childhood and the lightning changes that the digital age are bringing. In 2008, the average screen time for children in the UK was five hours 20 minutes each day. This year that has increased to six hours.

And we heard from Marguerite Hunter Blair, chief executive of Play Scotland, about their work to ensure that play is firmly embedded in the national Early Years Framework as well as in the wider policy areas governing things such as planning and health. Green MSP Robin Harper, convenor of the Scottish Parliament cross party group on children and young people supported the event by placing a motion in Parliament congratulating the Alliance for Childhood on its first event in Scotland and calling for a review of planning policy in Scotland to ensure that play is fully taken into account.

Organised by the Scottish Association for Steiner Waldorf Education, the Child’s Play event also happened to coincide with the launch of the Scottish Government’s year-long, nation-wide debate on play and risk, which will further explore how we risk giving our children everything except the freedom to play.