

HEADLINERS

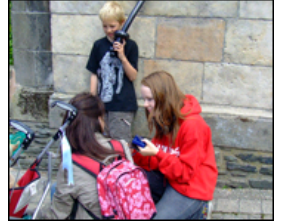
Playing outside is right up 'our' street

Headliners reporter Eabha Doherty joins in the fun as young and old play all day around Derry's walls

Headliners Foyle reporter member hit the streets of Derry this summer only to discover that, deep down inside, young and old love to hop, skip and jump!

Games such as hopscotch, marbles, skipping and kerby all bring back memories of childhood fun that has been around for many generations, says 15-year-old Eabha Doherty.

But with the increasing popularity of screen-orientated games with children as young as three and four, are the classic street activities of yesteryear a definite thing of the past?



This summer [The Children's Commission of Northern Ireland](#) held a Play Day all around the historic walls in Derry's city centre called "Our Streets Too".

The day was a brilliant success as children of all ages flocked to the walls to play in the summer sunshine. Parents and toddlers, teenagers and grandparents alike took part.

For Una Carlin, a parent from Derry, the day was a journey back to childhood. She said: "When I was young my favourite street game was playing with two tennis balls against a wall. It was great fun!

"Children nowadays just don't know how to play games like that. It's really sad that the older activities have died out."

Favourite games

A similarly nostalgic John Scally thinks that playing has become too complex: "Chinese ropes were my favourite game. My sisters and I used to play it all the time when we were young. I liked the simple poems and rhymes that went with it. There was no TV involved! It's great to see that there can be no technology out here today and my children are still enjoying themselves."

Indeed, simply plugging in the TV is a very convenient way to keep children entertained. From chatting to people of all ages at the play day event, everyone seems to be in agreement that although outside is better, sometimes it just takes a bit of extra effort to get up and out rather than pressing the 'on' button on the control and sitting back, especially when small children are concerned.

With so many children spending their spare time inside and sitting down, is the virtual character running and jumping around on the computer game the only one who gets exercise these days? Can events such as this actually make any difference?

Enjoying something new

"My sons were talking about the Playstation the whole way here today so it was nice to see them trying the skipping and enjoying something new," said Julie Baldrick.

Louis Baldrick, (7), added: "I have a skipping rope at home so I think I'll bring it to school to use. I want to play outside more."

It seems that play day events can bring only positive changes! Between rounds at the giant Connect Four station and the giant Snakes and Ladders board, the day brought along a chance for everyone to rediscover the city.

"Today has put a whole new slant on the Derry walls," said one mother, "It's now a place for socialising and leisure as well as being a piece of history. The summer is a perfect time to hold the first type of event like this as there are lots of tourists in the city who are getting involved too."

Despite the fact that the walls are on our doorstep, many people who live in the city never find a reason to visit them. Chris Morrison, who has three children, explained: "Everyone comes into the town to go the shops and then they leave," he says.

"We take for granted that there's a perfectly safe spot for children to roam around and play in which is also just in the centre of the town. There's no traffic and no danger."

The walls may be a safe place to play, but as Rosa, (5), well knows, there can sometimes be problems when she and her friends want to play in the street.

She explained: "My friend got hurt by a car because he ran out from behind it," said Rosa, "It was really scary."

Ellen, Rosa's mum, said: "The kids need to be let out to do their own thing. It's not really playing if adults are there telling them what to do. They need to be allowed to figure it out for themselves, but for parents it can be hard to let them go it alone. I would like to think that I do let them go out to the street and play when they want, but sometimes it's difficult to negotiate because it can be dangerous."

Both Ellen and Rosa agree that having a play day is a great idea and the general consensus is that everyone would love more events around the walls and more opportunities to play there.

Hopefully this can be the beginning of a new way to use our very own historic walls and will be the first hop, skip and jump of many to come for the young people in our city.

About this article

This story was written by Eabha Doherty, 15, from Foyle and submitted to the [Derry Children's Commission](#) to use in their in-house publications

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