SPPA is Scotland’s largest third sector national provider of direct support services to community-led early learning and childcare groups and families.

SPPA works in partnership with a number of local authorities across Scotland. This enables SPPA to have staff based in these locations, supporting local groups. We also have member groups in all 32 local authorities.

SPPA strives to help give Scotland’s children the very best start in life through a two-generation approach to shared interactions and learning.
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Chairperson’s Report

This has been a very positive year for SPPA as it has gone from strength to strength. This is due in no small part to the enthusiasm and commitment that our Chief Executive, Jean Carwood-Edwards, has brought to her new role.

There have been many highlights, and in a time of change in Scotland when the importance of children’s early years has been recognised as never before, there can be no doubt that the profile of SPPA has been raised both nationally, and in local communities. Indeed the profile has been raised internationally with Jean accepting an invitation from the Chinese Government to visit China and present the Scottish perspective to 300 Kindergarten teachers at their annual Early Years conference.

Two events, amongst many, stand out for me. I was delighted to attend the official launch of our BIG Lottery Fund award which took place in one of our services in Glasgow. It was good to see at first hand the wonderful work being carried out in the community.

The other event recognised and celebrated the work which we do in conjunction with the Scottish Prison Service, by the awarding of the National Care Accolade in the ‘One to Watch’ Category. This highly regarded award is presented by the Scottish Government and the Scottish Social Services Council.

Finally, with the information gained from SPPA’s Supporting Voluntary Playgroups and Nurseries Members’ Sustainability Survey, I am certain that we will be able to support our member groups more effectively and promote the work that we do both nationally and at local level in the coming year.

My thanks go to the staff team who have supported and promoted the work of SPPA over the last year and to the Board of Directors for the support and encouragement they have generously given to me.

Barbara Dale

“ In a time of change in Scotland when the importance of children’s early years has been recognised as never before, there can be no doubt that the profile of SPPA has been raised both nationally, and in local communities.
A Message from our Chief Executive

I was delighted to be appointed as the organisation’s Chief Executive Officer in August 2013 following on from my time in office as a member of the SPPA Board. I would like to say a huge thank you to the committed staff and dedicated Board of Directors who extended such a supportive and warm welcome to me and have continued to work tirelessly and consistently towards our aspirational objectives. I would also like to pay tribute to my predecessor, Ian McLaughlan, who led the organisation over the previous twelve years and ensured that the changeover was well managed and as seamless as possible.

As you will read in this review, SPPA has increased its funding and activity levels substantially over the last year, strengthening, improving and increasing support and services to member groups and families experiencing disadvantage across the country. SPPA has been working increasingly in collaboration with partners and recognises that service delivery is dependent upon and made possible by, our range of funders, including Scottish Government, local authorities and others. On behalf of SPPA, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to all of our funders.

SPPA has increased its funding and activity levels substantially over the last year, strengthening, improving and increasing support and services to member groups and families experiencing disadvantage across the country.

We were particularly heartened towards the end of the year, to learn that our application to the BIG Lottery Fund for almost £1m was successful. This critical award which will run from 2014-19, will enable SPPA to build upon our successful foundations of work delivered this year, supporting young children and their families experiencing difficulty and disadvantage in local communities and in prison.

Partnership working has also been pivotal to our policy work this year, a historic year which has seen landmark legislation with the introduction of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. The Act covers a variety of key areas relating to the wellbeing of children and it will strengthen the role of early years support in children’s and families’ lives by increasing the amount and flexibility of funded early learning and childcare.

As SPPA goes from strength to strength, we, the full staff team and Board, are determined to work together to maximise our valuable and very much valued resources in order to support early learning and childcare groups and families with young children.

We now go forward into a new year with a pledge that we will do everything we possibly can to make Scotland the best place for our youngest children to grow and thrive.

Jean Carwood-Edwards
Supporting our Members
Information and National Helpline

With 1,333 calls to our helpline last year, our information service has given support to our groups on a variety of matters. These have included constitutional queries, employment issues, health and safety matters, PVG checking, committee issues, policies, qualifications, medical insurance, financial issues and the Care Inspectorate.

Insurance

SPPA’s insurance package for members is managed by RSA (Royal & Sun Alliance PLC). Our information service has dealt with many enquiries regarding insurance cover and has responded in a timely, professional manner.

Ensuring that effective, appropriate insurance cover is in place for groups is critical. It can, however, appear to be a challenging and confusing process for our groups, who may not have had any prior experience of arranging it. SPPA supports groups throughout the entire process making it simple and streamlined.

SPPA receives positive feedback which illustrates that groups find this service invaluable. One recent example of this was from a group manager, whose group required insurance for additional premises. She said, ‘As always your support in keeping us straight, all the way through the minefield of insurance, is very much appreciated! Thank you for all your help on this matter.’

Communications and Resources

Our communications with members and other stakeholders have continued to develop using electronic news bulletins and our increasing use of social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook.

Almost 24,000 visitors accessed our website over the year, with nearly 14,000 using it for the first time. The dedicated Members’ Area of our website which provides publications, sample policies and Frequently Asked Questions has been well used.

Our quarterly magazine, First Five, continues to be a valuable source of news and features on policy issues and practice in early years services.

Where local authorities fund SPPA staff, they have produced local newsletters which have complemented the face to face dedicated support.

“ The sample policies are a fantastic support to groups. This will really encourage groups to adapt the policies to reflect their individual setting.
Professional learning and training opportunities mean that SPPA staff have been able to deliver, for example, Bookbug sessions to children and parents.

Membership Surveys

We have canvassed our members’ views through two surveys, the Annual Membership Survey and the Supporting Voluntary Playgroups and Nurseries Members’ Sustainability Survey. The responses have helped us to gather information about issues that are affecting SPPA groups and SPPA is now better placed to use this to inform and influence Scottish Government, the Care Inspectorate, SSSC, Local Authorities and others so that the right kind of support may be found to ensure that voluntary playgroups and nurseries thrive and continue to serve and support young children and their families.

Staff Development

As part of our ongoing commitment to quality assurance, our staff have benefited from continuing professional development through our staff conference and Annual Conference, our in-house electronic newsletter Communication Update, and our website and intranet, which have provided information and guidance.

As part of our organisational review and planning processes, staff are encouraged and supported to keep up to date by undertaking professional learning opportunities as appropriate. They have attended other external training sessions as well as participating in bespoke programmes which were delivered specifically for SPPA by our partners including for example play@home, the Scottish Book Trust and the Early Years Collaborative.

Annual Conference

160 delegates attended SPPA’s Reflecting on Play and Learning Conference and AGM which took place in Edinburgh last October. The keynote speakers promoted the message that play is vital to children’s learning and development. For the first time ever, we filmed our speakers and then made the film available on the website for all to view. Our speakers included:

- Bob Hughes, Author and Playwork Specialist
- Alice Sharp, Managing Director of Experiential Play
- Ronnie Hill, Assistant Director National Services, Children 1st
- Margaret Westwood, Senior Play Development Officer, City of Edinburgh Council
- Theresa Casey, Play Consultant and President of the International Play Association
We didn’t really understand what being in a committee meant until we got the committee roles and responsibilities explained to us by our SPPA Development & Support Officer. She sat in at meetings and interviews for staff and guided us through the proper procedures. She supported us all the way until we felt we had the confidence and skills enough to deal with things on our own.

I am very proud of the support given by SPPA to small rural voluntary run groups like us. The group has a very strong community feel with parents as voluntary committee members. Support is offered to each and every committee, with SPPA staff coming out to the group when required.

"Due to the great support we have received from SPPA our group has gone from strength to strength."

"We couldn’t have tackled all the management issues a committee has to deal with without the support of our SPPA Development & Support Officer."
Working with Children and Families
Dumfries & Galloway Play Service

Woodland Sessions

One of the SPPA Play Practitioners has delivered sessions for families who have enjoyed exploring the woods. They have, for example, collected flowers, branches, leaves, made mud pies and dens, gone pond dipping, watched tadpoles and frogs swim and dragonflies and butterflies fly. They have looked for bugs and sung songs.

Direct Support Services

SPPA Development & Support Officers have provided direct support to voluntary sector managed pre-school groups and also to toddler groups. Business health checks have been carried out with committees and support offered on financial, business and management issues including recruitment and self-evaluation of their service and committee roles.

Stay and Play/Stay and Play PLUS

Stay and Play sessions have been held in Aberdeen, Glasgow and Dumfries & Galloway. SPPA Play Practitioners have worked alongside families during interactive play sessions to improve experiences for the children and their parents, reduce the risk of increased disadvantage on the part of individual families, and to help parents to improve their children’s health, wellbeing, learning and development.

SPPA Play Practitioners have provided open access, drop-in play sessions which have included a variety of activities such as games, imaginative and messy play, a healthy snack, and story and song time. These relaxed, fun sessions have helped to improve children’s levels of well-being, confidence, communication skills and learning, and have improved parents’ confidence, knowledge, skills and motivation to be more responsive to their children’s needs.

“"The forest sessions made me more confident about taking my children into the forest myself and about ideas of activities to do."

“"The painting activity was great. I’ve been too scared to try it with her but it was easy and she loved feeling the paint. I now have the confidence to do more of this at home."
Baby Massage

SPPA Play Practitioners have provided courses in baby massage, which is highly beneficial for both parent and baby.

A young, first time mother, who was very shy and nervous about attending any sort of group told the SPPA Play Practitioner, ‘I feel like I’ve lost all my confidence’. By the end of the baby massage sessions, she had not only learned a new skill which has positive health benefits for her baby, but the bond between them had increased. She told the Play Practitioner how much better she’d felt by coming along to the group and how she would try going along to another local group with a mum she’d met. She said ‘I can’t believe I nearly didn’t come that first week...and my baby loved it!’

Supporting the ‘One Glasgow’ Initiative

SPPA Play Practitioners have worked together with staff in early years settings to offer support to families with children under the age of three. The aim of this project was to promote attachment, child learning and development and parents’ enjoyment and confidence in playing with their children. SPPA encouraged parents to use local facilities and the Play Practitioners signposted them to other relevant services.
Working with Young Mothers and their Babies

Young mothers and their babies have been supported in Clackmannanshire by an SPPA Play Practitioner. The Play Practitioner delivered a variety of participative workshops chosen by the families and this increased their knowledge and understanding about the importance of playing and interacting with their child. A focus on parents’ nurturing skills and their relationship with their child has also been of great significance throughout the project.

The SPPA Play Practitioner delivering the workshops in Clackmannanshire commented, ‘The young mothers were not very forthcoming at first as they thought I was there to judge their parental skills, but they have grown to trust me. Their increasing understanding of healthy life choices for both themselves and their children has boosted their confidence. The workshops have also brought to the fore how some of the mothers have never played with resources such as playdough before. Now they are at home making it themselves.’

One to One Service - Supporting Individual Families

SPPA Play Practitioners have provided support for families experiencing disadvantage or difficulty and who were identified as being likely to benefit from individual intervention. Sessions have taken place at the family home or in other appropriate settings, such as the local nursery. They have been planned in accordance with the needs of the child and parent. SPPA practitioners have supported parents to support their child through shared approaches to developing and strengthening relationships, bonding, learning and interactions. The frequency and duration of sessions have been planned in line with individual needs, preferences and circumstances, and an emphasis was placed on facilitating transitions into group and/or mainstream provision. These transitions have been promoted and supported as a matter of priority to ensure that independence rather than dependence is valued and encouraged.

A family was in need of support with their twins who were about to start nursery. Due to particular circumstances the family was quite isolated. As a result of this the children required help to enable them to become confident outside of their home environment, to make progress with their speech and language and to mix happily with other children. The SPPA Play Practitioner worked closely with the parents to address their needs. Within six weeks, they were all out and about visiting parks, cafés, children’s events, woodland, nature trails and lots of public places where they met other families. The twins successfully started nursery and are learning and developing positively.

“ I was living in a new area and didn’t know anybody. I wanted to meet other mums and I wanted my son to interact and play with others. It’s been wonderful. We have both made friends and really look forward to the group mornings. My son is thriving and I know the group has a lot to do with that. His speech also has greatly improved through being there and interacting with other children and adults.”
Off to a Good Start Early Explorer Workshops

SPPA staff have worked in toddler groups in North, South and West Glasgow and Forth Valley to provide two generation shared play based experiences. As well as enjoying and learning from the sessions, the children and parents have found that interactions and relationships have strengthened and their knowledge and understanding of the importance of healthy diet and exercise has developed and increased.

Supporting Toddler Groups in North Lanarkshire

An SPPA Play Practitioner has supported a toddler group through participative play workshops. She used the Early Years Collaborative ‘small test of change’ improvement model to evaluate the change for the group, which included working in partnership with parents to promote early language and literacy.

This work has resulted in SPPA being funded by North Lanarkshire Council to appoint a new full-time Play Practitioner to work in partnership with parents attending toddler groups, so that they can improve the overall quality of experience and outcomes for themselves and their young children.

“The children really enjoyed the workshop. I’m looking forward to making playdough with my son and have realised that there are lots of fun learning opportunities when playing together.”
SPPA in Prisons: Learning Together Through Play

SPPA understands that the breakdown of family relationships, when a parent is in prison, can lead to a higher risk of re-offending and children growing up to become offenders themselves. SPPA has therefore worked in three prisons, HMP Dumfries, HMP Low Moss, Glasgow, HMP & YOI Grampian. Working in partnership with prison staff to support prisoners, their partners and children, the families have been provided with opportunities to improve interactions and attachments so that relationships with their children are more likely to stay strong, leading to more positive outcomes for the children.

In Dumfries Prison the SPPA Play Practitioner has organised Pre-visit Play Sessions for prisoners’ partners and children, which have reduced stress before the visit itself, and supported the partners to provide enriched interactions and home learning environments for their children. She has worked with the families to facilitate shared approaches to play, learning and healthy living during family visit sessions.

The Play Practitioner has delivered a popular Fathers’ Programme, working with the prisoners to increase their knowledge of, for example, the importance of play, healthy living, positive behaviour management, communications, early literacy, child development and brain development. Fathers have had the opportunity to engage in practical play experiences and build their knowledge and confidence when playing with their child during family visits. They have also enjoyed baby massage with their babies. Follow on play sessions in the community have been arranged for prisoners on release, and they have been signposted to other support agencies. Awareness raising sessions have been held with prison staff and other agencies.

In HMP Low Moss, a ten week programme has taken place with SPPA Play Practitioners providing family play sessions in the prison visit room, where a welcoming and exciting area for play that stimulated both children and parents to interact together, was created. A balanced variety of activities for the children to choose from was provided. These addressed all areas of learning and catered for different learning styles and preferences. The Play Practitioners supported, modelled and facilitated family play. Information was shared on child development and learning, in order to support the parents and partners so that they could repeat or expand this at home.

Evaluation and feedback confirmed that the families enjoyed coming to the sessions. The most frequently expressed benefits were family bonding, strengthening of relationships and development of attachments. These were the key aims of the programme.

An SPPA Play Practitioner is continuing the work at HMP Low Moss and an SPPA Play Practitioner has been appointed to work in HMP & YOI Grampian. Learning Together Through Play has been recognised by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) National Care Accolades, with SPPA being announced as the overall winner of the ‘One to Watch’ award.

The Fathers’ Programme at HMP Dumfries has given the prisoners the opportunity to engage in practical play experiences and help build their knowledge and confidence when playing with their child during family visits.
Working in Partnership & Influencing Policy
Partnerships

SPPA has been represented on Scottish Government national multidisciplinary working groups and initiatives, including: the Early Years Task Force: Sub-Group on Changing Culture, Play & Risk Debate, National Play Strategy, Early Years Collaborative, Play Talk Read Campaign, the SSSC’s Childhood Practice Development Group and NHS Health Scotland’s Early Years Reference Network Group.

SPPA has worked in partnership with Local Authorities’ Social Work and Education Departments, Community Learning and Development, third sector agencies and Health Boards. Partnership with funding bodies has sustained our support for our member groups through SPPA Centre services and direct support services in seven Local Authority areas. We have represented the organisation, our members and the early years voluntary sector interests, on childcare and community planning groups and with the NHS. Staff have carried out this work too on local working groups, GIRFEC groups, parenting sub-groups and voluntary sector groups.

In partnership with the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) we have pioneered a ‘Think before you phone home’ poster for prisoners to use. It provides guidance to help improve interactions when prisoners speak to their children on the phone.

Policy

We have informed and influenced the early years policy development agenda by working with the Scottish Government and other partner agencies. One example of this is SPPA’s membership of the National Play Strategy Group and the National Play Strategy Implementation Group and sub-groups.

We are committed to working with our partners to help Scotland’s children have the very best start in life.
Total income for the year was £1,252,755.
Net incoming funds for the year was £111,213.

**Summarised Accounts**

**INCOME**

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Total Income: £1,252,755

**EXPENDITURE**

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**Other Operating Costs**

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Total Expenditure: £1,141,542

**SURPLUS FOR YEAR**

£111,213
Thank you to our funders

We would like to offer our most sincere thanks to all of our funders. We are grateful for the support we have received from the Scottish Government, local authority funding from Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Dumfries & Galloway, Fife, Glasgow City, North Lanarkshire Council and Scottish Borders, funding from the Big Lottery Fund, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, Cattanach Trust, Community Food and Health (Scotland), HMP Low Moss, HMP &YOI Grampian, Aberdeenshire Alcohol & Drug Partnership, Aberdeen Early Years Childcare Partnership. We are also grateful to Edinburgh City Council for providing sponsorship for our annual conference and AGM.

Corporate Funders

We would also like to extend our appreciation to TTS Ltd. for their financial support towards our annual conference and AGM and donations of products for readers of First Five magazine, Cool Milk and Mackay Corporate Insurance Brokers who have sponsored publications, Yorkshire and Clydesdale Bank Community Awards, Land Securities, Westerton UK Ltd, Nexen Petroleum UK, PK Hydraulics, John Lewis (Aberdeen), Rybka and ASCO.

Pro-Bono Support

Ernst & Young have provided SPPA with meeting rooms throughout the year, which has been extremely helpful and greatly appreciated.

Board of Directors

SPPA’s Board of Directors for the year 2013-2014:

- Barbara Dale
  Chairperson
- Nicholas Johnston
  Vice-Chairperson
- Beverly Malcolm
  Finance Director
- Fraser Sanderson
- Alison Stewart
- Graeme Alexander
- Anne McPherson
- Marion Flett
  (re-appointed October 2013)
- Jean Carwood-Edwards
  (until May 2013)
- Lindsay Cully
  (until September 2013)
- Catherine Johnston
  (until December 2013)
SPPA wishes to thank Cool Milk and Mackay Corporate Insurance Brokers for their support in the production of this year’s annual review. MacKay Corporate Insurance Brokers is a trading name of Alan R MacKay & Co Ltd who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Services Authority.