

Module: ECEY6012**Leadership Skills in Entrepreneurship****Portfolio Contents:**

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AI Declaration -

I acknowledge the use of Google Scholar [<https://scholar.google.com/>] between period:

(26/01/2026- (19/04/2026) to help search for relevant academic journals and literature which are not always available via the university online library.

The following prompt themes were used:

- Social Enterprise Business Models
- Social Entrepreneurship
- Theory of clay- based learning
- Clay-based learning for young children
- Benefits of clay-based learning for young children

I confirm the use of AI (Co Pilot) to produce a business brand logo which I have included as part of my business brochure.

I confirm that I have not presented any other AI generated text as my own work. I confirm that I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide as evidence.



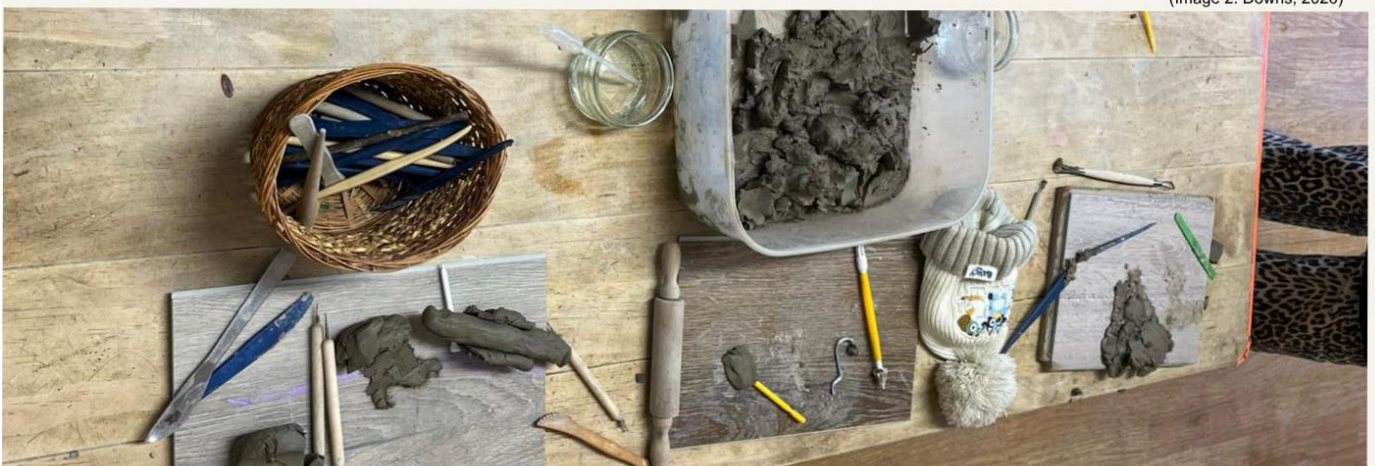
(Image 1: Downs, 2026)



ACCESSIBLE CLAY EXPLORATION AND LEARNING FOR EARLY
YEARS CHILDREN AND THEIR CAREGIVERS IN CARDIFF

BUSINESS BROCHURE

(Image 2: Downs, 2026)





(Image 3: Downs, 2026)

ABOUT ME.....

Hello, I'm Emily, a teaching assistant in the early years provision of a Cardiff primary school and an Early Years practitioner currently studying for an undergraduate degree in Early Years Education and Care. As part of my professional development this academic year, I undertook specialist Froebel training focused on clay exploration and learning. The use of Froebelian approaches within Welsh mainstream education is a growing initiative that emphasises child-led, experiential learning and links closely to play-based pedagogy, creativity and holistic development.

A prerequisite of this training was leading the implementation of clay learning as enhanced provision across Nursery and Reception. Since completing the training, I have worked with teachers and support staff to apply my knowledge in practice. I have been given responsibility for planning clay-based learning activities, creating dedicated learning areas and sourcing resources to support this provision.

Facilitating clay exploration over the last term has given me valuable insight into its benefits for early years development. This positive experience, alongside my academic studies and passion for early childhood education, inspired me to explore how this provision could reach more children, forming the basis of my social enterprise project, '**Clay Play**'.

THE BUSINESS IDEA

WHAT IS CLAY PLAY?



(Image 4: Downs, 2026)

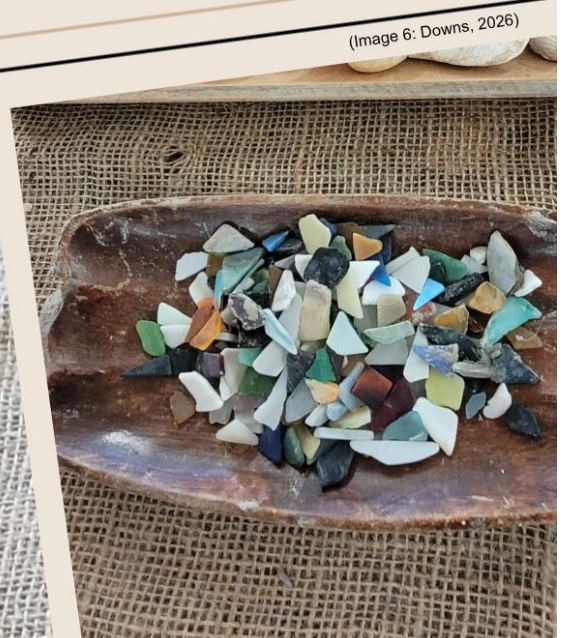
Clay-Play is a proposed social enterprise designed to support families with young children through accessible clay-based sensory play sessions. Social enterprises are organisations that use business strategies to achieve social and environmental aims, reinvesting profits to support their mission rather than maximising shareholder profit (Findikli and Erdur, 2020; Neessen *et al.*, 2021).

Clay-Play aims to establish inclusive, community-centred environments for children aged 0–7, integrating creative play with the promotion of positive relationships with carers. It is specifically targeted at areas of Cardiff experiencing higher levels of deprivation, where disparities in early childhood outcomes are more evident and access to early years services remains limited, particularly among economically disadvantaged communities (Thomas, 2024; Robinson and Wales, 2024; Oxfam Cymru, 2023).

Workshops will be offered free or at low cost, supported by additional income streams (e.g. after-school clubs, private events) to enable cross-subsidisation. This reflects a blended social enterprise model that draws on multiple income streams to support social activities and enhance financial sustainability (Fathi *et al.*, 2025; Collavo, 2022).



(Image 5: Downs, 2026)



(Image 6: Downs, 2026)

MISSION, VISION AND VALUES

Mission

To nurture creativity, connection and early development through accessible clay-based sensory play sessions.

Vision

A connected Cardiff where all families can access creative, calming spaces supporting child development and wellbeing.

Core Values

- Inclusivity and accessibility
- Creativity and exploration
- Community connection
- Sustainability and simplicity
- Emotional wellbeing



(Image 7: Downs, 2026)

WHY CLAY?

THE THEORY AND BENEFITS

Clay-Play is grounded in Froebelian theory, which emphasises play, creativity and learning through meaningful activity (Bultakova, 2024; Bruce, 2020). Froebel's concept of "occupations" includes hands-on experiences such as clay, allowing children to explore and transform materials (Froebel Trust, 2024; Parker, 2020). Clay is a core Froebelian material, offering open-ended, sensory, three-dimensional exploration. Its responsive nature supports sustained engagement and deeper thinking compared to materials such as playdough (Parker, 2020; Kriegler, 2025).

By exploring clay, children can develop:

- Symbolic representation, imagination and language (Gilchrist, 2024; Roskos, 2023)
- Problem solving and cognitive skills (Parker, 2020; Kohli, 2025)
- Executive function and self-regulation (Bredikyte and Brandisauskiene, 2023; Gibb *et al.*, 2021)
- Emotional expression and wellbeing (Caruso, 2025; Guido *et al.*, 2026)

Workshops are child-led and supported by trained adults who scaffold learning through modelling, interaction and discussion, aligning with Vygotskian sociocultural theory, which emphasises guided participation within the Zone of Proximal Development (Sanchez, 2025; Skene *et al.*, 2022; Aubrey and Riley, 2016). The provision aligns with the Curriculum for Wales, particularly in developing creative, confident individuals and supporting Expressive Arts outcomes which emphasise exploration, perseverance and self-expression (Welsh Government, 2022).

As well as supporting communication skills, creativity and wellbeing, Clay-Play workshops aim to support the development of children's motor skills as supported by research (Maharani and Jannah, 2018; Lockman and Tamis-LeMonda, 2021), while enabling inclusive participation, including for neurodiverse children (Danniels and Pyle, 2023; Gibson and McNally, 2024).

INNOVATION AND UNIQUE SELLING POINT (USP)

Clay-Play integrates clay-based sensory learning with caregiver support and inclusive pricing, supporting both children's development and family wellbeing. Unlike traditional playgroups, it prioritises open-ended clay exploration, identified by Parker (2022) and Paterson and Lee (2023) as an underused yet developmentally rich medium (Parker, 2022; Paterson and Lee, 2023). It addresses key challenges in Cardiff, including limited affordable provision and social isolation (Thomas, 2024; Cardiff Council, 2022), while offering calming, sensory-rich experiences for neurodiverse children and fostering positive caregiver-child relationships (Murphy, 2025; Cardiff and Vale Regional Partnership Board, 2026).



(Image 8: Downs, 2026)



(Image 9: Downs, 2026)

STRUCTURE AND PRICING

WORKSHOP FORMAT

- 70-minute sessions for up to 12 children with caregivers
- Delivered weekly (term time) in 2-hour venue bookings
- Includes introduction, open exploration and reflection



(Image 10: Downs, 2026)

WHAT'S INCLUDED?

FOR CHILDREN:

- Open-ended clay exploration
- Natural tools and textures
- Sensory and outdoor play opportunities
- Low-cost or free refreshments

FOR ADULTS:

- Low-cost or free refreshments
- Informal peer support
- Calm, welcoming environment

LOCATIONS AND DELIVERY

Sessions run for 36 weeks annually, rotating across areas such as Splott, Ely, Grangetown and St Mellons, in community venues (e.g. community halls and hubs).

PRICING MODEL

Pricing follows a pay-what-you-can model, with free places reserved for low-income families and optional low-cost add-ons.

A flexible and inclusive pricing model:

- £0–£3: Supported rate (for low-income families)
- £5–£7: Standard rate
- £10: Pay-it-forward ticket



(Image 11: Downs, 2026)

This reflects inclusive pricing strategies used in social enterprises to reduce inequality of access, as pay-what-you-can and sliding-scale models enable participation across income groups by allowing individuals to contribute according to their means (Mendoza-Abarca and Mellema, 2016); British Broadcasting Company, 2020).

ADDITIONAL INCOME STREAMS

To ensure the long-term sustainability and accessibility of its core community workshops, Clay-Play will offer a range of chargeable additional services. These services support a cross-subsidisation model, a common hybrid strategy within social enterprises, where income generated from paid activities helps to fund free and low-cost provision (Le *et al.*, 2024; Iyigun, 2020).

The proposed services will include:

- After-school clubs
- Holiday workshops
- Private events
- SEN-focused sessions
- Parent wellbeing workshops
- Take home clay kits



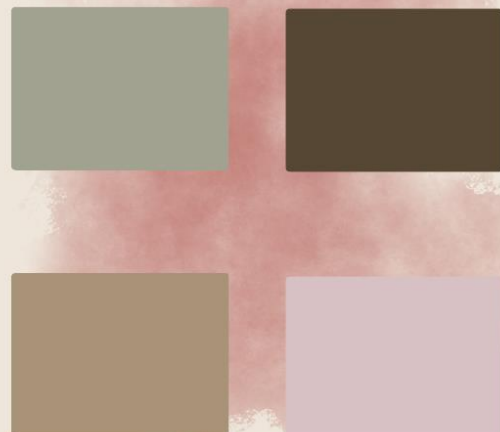
(Image 12: Downs 2026)

MARKET RESEARCH: COMPETITOR AWARENESS

Market research highlights a clear gap within Cardiff's early years sector, particularly in the limited availability of affordable, sensory-based creative provision. Many existing services offer physical play-based activities, such as Mambo Play Centre and Jump Cardiff, which focus on entertainment rather than developmental learning, with entry fees that are not always accessible (Mambo Play, 202; 123 Jump, 2026). Similarly, craft-based provisions for children and caregivers, including the National Museum of Wales and Cardiff Pottery Workshops, tend to provide structured, one-off, chargeable sessions focused on creating a finished product, rather than supporting sustained open-ended exploration, sensory learning or child-caregiver relationships (National Museum Wales, 2025; Cardiff Pottery Workshops, 2026).

BRANDING

A natural, calming brand aesthetic, using recycled materials where possible to support sustainability, which is shown to be a central value of social enterprise projects (Jayawardhana *et al.*, 2022; Pérez-Barea, 2025).



MARKET RESEARCH: AUDIENCE AND PROMOTION

TARGET AUDIENCE:

- Families with children aged 0–5
- Low-income or marginalised groups
- Neurodiverse children and families

PROMOTION:

Marketing will include:

- Social media (Instagram, Facebook)
- Parent groups and forums (Mumsnet, Netmums)
- Partnerships with schools and nurseries
- Community notice boards

Demand for the service is driven by increasing awareness of the developmental benefits of sensory play, alongside a growing need for community-focused wellbeing initiatives. Trust and engagement will be built through pilot sessions, strategic partnerships and word-of-mouth promotion, all shown to be effective in supporting social enterprise development (de Bell and Bakker, 2024; Bialkova and Te Paske, 2021), while user testimonials will further evidence impact and encourage wider participation (Peña-García *et al.*, 2024).

SOCIAL IMPACT STRATEGY AND PARTNERSHIPS

Impact Aims and Measurement

Clay-Play aims to:

- Improve parent-child bonding
- Reduce social isolation
- Increase access to early learning
- Enhance wellbeing

Impact will be measured through attendance, feedback, observations and wellbeing indicators, as research shows these are effective for evaluating early years outcomes (Education Endowment Foundation, 2024; Demissie and Pearse, 2025; Balladares and Kankaraš 2020).



(Image 13: Downs, 2026)

Partnerships

Collaborative working is essential in early years provision and supports early intervention and family wellbeing (Sholikhah *et al.*, 2025; Welsh Government, 2026).

Clay-Play aims to partner with supporting organisations such as:

- Cardiff Flying Start (Flying Start Cardiff, 2026)
- Early Years Wales (Early Years Wales, 2026)
- Cardiff Family Advice and Support (Cardiff Family Advice and Support, 2026)

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

ESTIMATED COSTS

- Venue hire: Community spaces such as Cardiff Hubs and local halls typically range from approximately £12.00 to £26 per hour (Cardiff Hubs, 2026). With 1.5–2 hours required (including set-up and clear-down)
- Materials: Air-dry clay is a cost-effective option that avoids kiln use. Current benchmarks suggest around £5–£10 per session (based on 4–5kg of clay) (Hope Education, 2026) with potential savings through trade/ bulk purchasing
- Tools and consumables: Mainly reusable resources (e.g. sculpting tools), with minor ongoing costs for natural materials, wipes, biodegradable cloths and table coverings. Reclaimed or repurposed tools are used where possible (see bulk purchase image of items sourced second-hand for under £15- *Image 14: Downs, 2026*)
- Public Liability Insurance (target £5–£10 million cover) is essential and often required by venues; cost to be budgeted annually depending on provider (£100-600 p/a) (Go Forma, 2026)
- Safeguarding compliance: Enhanced DBS checks for staff and regular volunteers are required (currently £49.50 per check) (UK Government, 2024)
- Staffing costs- including a lead facilitator and sessional assistant/s complying with UK National Minimum Wage (UK Government, 2026)
- Additional costs: Marketing materials, online booking platform fees, optional refreshments and a contingency budget (TBC)

(Image 14: Downs, 2026)



INCOME AND FUNDING

- Grants (Wales):
- National Lottery Awards for All Wales (£300–£20,000) to support community provision (The National Lottery, 2026)
- Arts Council of Wales, Creative Communities Funding (£500–£1,500) for participatory arts projects (Arts Council of Wales, 2026)
- Community Foundation Wales, Fund for Wales (Community Foundation Wales, 2026) (£500–£2,500) for local initiatives
- Trading income: Revenue generated through afterschool clubs, holiday workshops and private Clay-Play events, which are charged at full rate to cross-subsidise community sessions
- Donations and sponsorship: Opportunities for local business support, including “sponsor a family” schemes to fund free or subsidised places

RISKS AND MITIGATION

Clay-Play recognises several potential challenges in delivering community-based provision and has identified clear, practical strategies to mitigate these risks. Potential risks include:

- **Logistical challenges** (mess, storage, transport): For example, clay activities may create mess or require transport of materials between venues; this will be managed through careful venue selection (e.g. spaces with sinks), use of protective coverings, and portable storage systems.
- **Safety and compliance**: For example, risks relating to safeguarding, allergies, or accidents during sessions; these will be addressed through DBS-checked staff, clear safeguarding policies, risk assessments, first aid provision, and appropriate Public Liability Insurance.
- **Financial risk**: For example, low attendance or delays in grant funding during early stages; this will be mitigated through pilot sessions, pre-booked attendance, flexible pricing, and diversified income streams such as paid workshops and events.
- **Policy and contextual changes**: For example, changes to funding priorities or curriculum expectations; this will be managed by maintaining alignment with the Curriculum for Wales and ensuring flexible delivery across different venues and community settings.
- **Inclusion and Additional Learning Needs (ALN)**: For example, ensuring sessions are accessible for neurodiverse children or those with additional needs; this will be supported through small group sizes, sensory-friendly environments, adaptable resources, and inclusive, child-centred practice.

IMPLEMENTATION AND FUTURE PLANNING

TIMELINE

- Months 1–2: Pilot sessions
- Months 3–4: Funding and launch
- Months 5–6: Expansion and partnerships

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT AIMS:

- Year 1: Pilot in a nearby additional council area e.g. Newport
- Year 2: Expand to 4 community hubs + regular sessions and events
- Year 3: Train facilitators, build partnerships, launch mobile “Clay Cart” for outdoor events



(Image 15: Downs, 2026)

CONCLUSION

Clay-Play offers a sustainable, socially impactful model that integrates early years education, creativity and community wellbeing, addressing a clear gap in provision in Cardiff.



(Image 16: Downs, 2026)



Academic Research

Clay-Play: A Social Enterprise Supporting Early Years Development in Wales

Clay-Play is a proposed social enterprise providing accessible clay-based sensory play sessions for young children and caregivers in Cardiff. Grounded in Froebelian pedagogy, it aims to address gaps in affordable early years provision while promoting family wellbeing and reducing social isolation. This essay critically examines the theoretical, practical and policy foundations of the model, its contribution to children's development, barriers to implementation, alignment with early years frameworks in Wales, and opportunities for future growth.

Clay Play and Early Years Development

As an open-ended material central to Froebelian pedagogy, clay provides opportunities for sensory exploration, creativity and active learning, supporting multiple areas of children's development (Bruce, 2021; Parker, 2020; Gilchrist, 2023). These include;

Cognitive Development

Exploration of clay promotes cognitive development through problem-solving, experimentation and creative thinking. As children manipulate clay, they make decisions, test ideas and demonstrate higher-order thinking skills such as reasoning, evaluation and creation (Parker, 2020; Gilchrist, 2023). Research suggests that open-ended materials, including clay, blocks and loose parts, encourage exploration and problem solving while creating opportunities for sustained shared thinking between children and adults, supporting deeper learning (Cankaya *et al.*, 2023; Siraj *et al.*, 2023).

Clay also enables symbolic representation, allowing children to explore early mathematical concepts and spatial awareness through shaping, measuring and comparing objects (Gilchrist, 2023; Gifford *et al.*, 2022; McCluskey *et al.*, 2023). This reflects Piaget's constructivist theory, which proposes that children learn through actively exploring their environment and engaging with materials (Aubrey and Riley, 2016).

Language, Social and Emotional Development

Clay-Play sessions encourage collaboration, turn-taking and shared experiences, supporting communication, language and social development. Through conversation, storytelling and

exploration, children build vocabulary and communication skills, while interactions with peers strengthen social communication (Welsh Government, 2023; Finders *et al.*, 2023). This aligns with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which emphasises learning through interactions with adults and peers who extend children's thinking (MacBlain, 2018; Zöggeler-Burkhardt *et al.*, 2023).

Emotionally, clay provides a therapeutic medium for non-verbal expression and emotional regulation (Caruso, 2025). Ogutu (2023) argues that clay modelling allows children to express emotions symbolically, supporting psychological wellbeing and helping them communicate experiences that may be difficult to verbalise. The sensory and tactile qualities of clay may be particularly beneficial for neurodivergent children by providing accessible opportunities for communication, engagement and self-expression (Van Lith and Beale, 2025; Piller *et al.*, 2025). Involving caregivers can also strengthen attachment and parent-child relationships, supporting children's emotional security, resilience and wellbeing through shared creative experiences (Bowlby, 1988; Hutchings *et al.*, 2023).

Physical Development

Clay play supports fine motor development as children roll, pinch and mould the material, strengthening the dexterity and coordination required for mark-making and early writing (Kriegler, 2025; Flexen, 2015). It can also promote gross motor development through large-scale outdoor or tuff-tray activities that encourage movement and exploration. Its sensory properties support sensory development by allowing children to explore texture, pressure and movement through hands-on play, which may be particularly beneficial for children with additional learning needs or sensory processing differences (Patimah and Nurhayati, 2023).

Critical Reflection and Analysis

Although the literature highlights the value of clay-based play, several assumptions underpinning the Clay-Play model require critical consideration. Not all children engage equally with sensory materials. Children with sensory sensitivities may find clay uncomfortable or overwhelming, requiring practitioners to adapt the environment and activities to promote inclusion (Wong, 2023; Fan *et al.*, 2024).

The perceived "messiness" of clay also presents a practical challenge. Practitioners may avoid clay activities because of the time, space and resources required to manage them (Casey and Prendiville, 2020). Cultural expectations regarding cleanliness and attitudes towards play-based

learning may further contribute to negative perceptions, particularly when such activities are viewed as less academically focused (Zosh *et al.*, 2022; Ang *et al.*, 2025). This reflects ongoing tensions between developmentally appropriate practice and increasing pressures around school readiness and measurable outcomes (Pramling Samuelsson and Björklund, 2023; Kay, 2024).

Adult facilitation presents another consideration. Although guided interaction supports learning, overly directive involvement can limit creativity, agency and self-expression (Baker *et al.*, 2023; Chen *et al.*, 2024). Effective practice therefore requires a balance between adult support and child-led exploration.

Finally, research on clay play remains less extensive than the wider literature on play-based learning. The limited availability of large-scale empirical studies reduce the strength of the evidence base and highlights the need for further research to evaluate programmes such as Clay-Play.

Barriers and Risks

Implementing Clay-Play presents several practical and structural challenges. Financial sustainability is a key concern given the commitment to inclusive, low-cost provision. Many social enterprises operate through hybrid resource models in which commercial income supports social objectives, requiring a balance between mission and financial viability (Defourny and Nyssens, 2017). While cross-subsidisation is common, it depends on a reliable income stream from paying customers, which may create long-term sustainability challenges (Ciambotti *et al.*, 2023).

Staffing is another important issue. Delivering high-quality sessions require practitioners with expertise in early years pedagogy and safeguarding. However, workforce shortages and retention difficulties continue to affect the Welsh early years sector (Welsh Government, 2024; Social Care Wales, 2026). Reliance on volunteers may also be unpredictable. Consequently, Clay-Play would need adequate funding for salaries and professional development to maintain a skilled workforce.

Logistical factors, including storage, transportation and venue suitability, must also be addressed. Access to safe, appropriate spaces is essential for effective delivery, highlighting the need for careful planning and adaptable implementation strategies.

Links to Policy and Practice

Clay-Play aligns closely with Welsh, UK and international priorities for early childhood education. Estyn (2024) highlights the importance of high-quality provision that supports children's social, emotional and developmental needs through play, while Public Health Wales emphasises the impact of social isolation on family wellbeing, reinforcing the value of community-based initiatives (Estyn, 2024; Wood *et al.*, 2026). Similarly, the UNESCO and UNICEF Global Report on Early Childhood Care and Education (2024) advocates inclusive, play-based approaches that promote wellbeing, holistic development and lifelong learning (UNESCO and UNICEF, 2024).

By supporting holistic development through child-centred sensory play, Clay-Play reflects these priorities. It also aligns with the Curriculum for Wales and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), both of which emphasise experiential learning, creativity, communication and holistic development, supporting implementation across a range of early years settings (Welsh Government, 2022; DfE, 2021).

Future Opportunities and Development

Clay-Play has strong potential for expansion due to its low-cost materials and adaptability within nurseries, schools and community settings. Successful scaling would require practitioner training in Froebelian pedagogy and sensory play, alongside partnerships with local authorities, early years organisations and health services. Further longitudinal and mixed-methods research is needed to evaluate long-term impacts on child development and family wellbeing. Future developments could include digital engagement, outreach programmes, specialist support for children with additional learning needs, a mobile "Clay Cart," and practitioner training packages to extend reach and impact.

Conclusion

Clay-Play offers a creative, inclusive and play-based approach to supporting children's cognitive, social, emotional, physical and language development. Grounded in Froebelian principles and supported by contemporary research, it aligns with Welsh early years policy and has potential to enhance child development and family wellbeing. Although challenges relating to sustainability, staffing and implementation exist, these can be mitigated through careful planning and partnerships. As demand for accessible, community-based early years provision grows, initiatives

such as Clay-Play should be further developed, evaluated and supported to provide inclusive opportunities for children and families across Wales.

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