

27 July 2018

Email To: TCCS.BetterSuburbs@act.gov.au

To whom it May concern

RE: Better Suburbs Play Spaces submission July 2018

Marymead welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Better Suburbs Play Spaces submission. Marymead Child and Family Centre is a not-for-profit organisation servicing the ACT and regional NSW, and has been delivering a range of high quality, family support services to children, young people and their families since 1967. Marymead supports service delivery to more than 2,000 families through programs and services including the Autism Centre, disability support programs, child and family counselling, early intervention programs, Permanency Program (out of home care), post separation support, parent education groups and family mental health support programs.

Marymead supports and promotes the inclusion of all children and their families in public spaces. Many of our services regularly deliver support (such as supervised contact) or playgroups based in public playgrounds. Inclusion and access to public playgrounds enables all children to engage with peers, play with family, and access age-appropriate activities within a safe environment. Fenced playgrounds also benefit parents with mobility issues, grandparents, family groups with multiple young children and pregnant mothers. Fenced playgrounds provide a safe and contained space that children can be free to explore where parents are not required to supervise in such close physical proximity.

While some playgrounds in Canberra are now accessible for wheelchair users, additional work is required to make playgrounds accessible and inclusive for children who have 'less visible' disabilities. Marymead works with many children whose disability (eg autism or intellectual disability) may cause them to be 'runners', to have no sense of personal safety, or to actually be attracted to dangers such as roads. Families of these children tell us of the social isolation they experience when even a simple activity like taking the kids to the playground is not possible because of safety concerns if the playground is not fully fenced. This isolation also affects siblings in the family who are equally excluded when a safe play environment is not available for the whole family.

marymead.org.au

CANBERRA

RHEINBERGER CENTRE, CNR WESTON
& LOCH STREET, YARRALUMLA ACT
PO BOX 4260 KINGSTON ACT 2604
PHONE 02 6162 5800

GOULBURN

32 VERNER STREET
GOULBURN NSW
PO BOX 286 GOULBURN NSW 2580
PHONE 02 4827 1600

WAGGA WAGGA

49 BEST STREET WAGGA WAGGA
WAGGA WAGGA NSW
PO BOX 699 WAGGA WAGGA NSW 2650
PHONE 0429 510 034

MORUYA

CORNER CAMPBELL AND PAGE STREETS
MORUYA NSW
PO BOX 994 MORUYA NSW 2537
PHONE 0406 375 247

As the ACT population continues to grow and urban in-fill expands, it is increasingly important to ensure that playgrounds are accessible and safe and that parking and transport considerations are included in their design. It must be noted that for many families of children with disability, public transport is not possible, therefore parking in close proximity to playgrounds is pivotal. More fenced playgrounds throughout Canberra and its town centres will enable inclusion for more families, rather than concentrating accessible playgrounds in tourist areas.

Currently the ACT has a per capita ratio of 1:80,000 residents per fenced playground. To achieve a ratio comparable to Adelaide and Brisbane and to meet these ratios, Canberra would need 30 fully fenced playgrounds.

Marymead recommends that the ACT Government allocate funding to provide 30 fully fenced playgrounds throughout Canberra, and to ensure that all current playgrounds are assessed and reviewed to ensure suitable fencing.

Yours sincerely



Camilla Rowland
Chief Executive Officer
Marymead Child & Family Centre



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