

To:

Canberra, 11^h July 2018

Policy Lead Better Suburbs
City Presentation
Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate
ACT Government

Subject: Better Suburbs Play Space Forum Submission

Dear Sir/ Madam,

On behalf of Urban Synergies Group and the University of Canberra Health Research Institute, we wish to make a submission as part of the consultation process of the better suburb play space forum.

We understand the objective is to:

- determine community priorities for the management of play spaces in Canberra
- develop community criteria to consider when making decisions about play spaces
- allocate funding towards play spaces for the 2018-19 financial year
- make recommendations for how the ACT Government works with the community in decision making about play spaces into the future.

We present you with a short two-page joint briefing that provides a short summary of our contribution to the wider community on this specific issue. This document might be able to assist and enable an informed discussion on the occasion as it draws on research evidence as well as on the latest international and localised efforts on this pressing issue.

We would like to thank the ACT Government for the opportunity to provide input on this important issue. Should you require further information please contact us.

Yours sincerely



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shaping healthy communities

Today children's opportunities for play are in decline. Urbanisation has influenced the 'how' and 'where' children are allowed to play. Play is fundamental for healthy child development and in accordance to the UN Convention on the Child Rights (United Nations, 1989) Article 31 it is also a human right. Furthermore, children should be empowered using a co-design process as articulated in Article 12 of the UN Convention. There is also the opportunity to align policies for better health and wellbeing outcomes for children with the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals as outlined in our latest World Urban Forum outcome report (Mews, 2018). We have summarised below key information around this issue that may be useful for the forum.

What is play in the context of childhood?

In the General Comment to Article 31, the International Play Association defines play as: *"Children's play is behaviour, activity, or processes initiated, controlled and structured by children themselves and it takes place whenever and wherever opportunities arise. [Adults] may contribute to the creation of environments in which it takes place, but play itself is non-compulsory, driven by intrinsic motivation and is undertaken for its own sake, rather than as a means to an end. It involves the exercise of autonomy, physical, mental or emotional activity [by children, and has the potential to take infinite forms, either [playing] in groups or alone. These forms will change and adapt throughout the course of childhood. The key characteristics of play are fun, uncertainty, challenge, flexibility and non-productivity. Together, these factors contribute to the enjoyment it produces and the consequent incentive to continue to play."*¹

What are some of the benefits of play? (Ginsburg, 2007)

- Unstructured free play is a natural way to increase physical activity levels in children, which is one important strategy in helping to address the obesity epidemic and an effective way to meet the WHO recommended 60 minutes per day of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (World Health Organisation 2010).
- Play is essential for the development of imagination, dexterity, physical, cognition, physical literacy and emotional resilience.
- Undirected, unstructured 'free' play allows children to learn how to work in groups, to share, to negotiate, to resolve conflicts, and to develop a wide range of social skills.
- Much of play often involves adults, but when play is controlled by adults, children acquiesce to adult rules and concerns and lose some of the benefits 'free' play offers them, particularly in developing creativity, spontaneity, leadership and inter personal skills.

What is a play space?

A space to play that is free of distractions, which can manifest in different places, times and in concepts (Foucault, 2008). Play space is more than a defined playground as it also includes more informal safe networks of streets and paths in neighbourhoods.

What is play value?

"The play value of an outdoor play space is a quality. This quality is a result of a play space composition/ modification that considers social inclusion, securely linked to the surrounding environment, and is designed with nature in mind. It should include mobile and temporary material as well as a high degree of imaginative and creative elements that provide opportunities for physical activity and cater for challenges."²

¹ Official IPA Statement: Play in General Comment No. 17 (2013) on UNCRC Article 31

² Outcome of a one-year co-design process across Germany delivered by Gregor Mews as part of a national play space design seminar funded by SIK-Holz® and promoted by the Deutsches Kinderhilfswerk (German Children Aid Foundation) accessible under <https://sik-holz.de/informationen/was-bedeutet-spielen>

A paradigm shift is needed

A better suburb is designed for and with people and children in mind that enables health societal benefits for all. Suburbs represent a large part of the urban system. These urban systems are complex and require concerted and holistic efforts by all stakeholders to enable long term liveability for all people that choose to live, work and play there. The ACT government should offer comprehensive processes for enhanced engagement of its citizens in achieving improved health and well-being.

In order to implement child friendly environments across Canberra, criteria that translate into action for the design must be categorised and adequately addressed. Child friendly play space designs across suburbs are only possible if policy and intervention occurs at the macro, meso and micro level and can be translated into tangible actions and outcomes.

Community criteria must reflect effective engagement and implementation of solutions with children and other user groups

Research has shown that child-friendly infrastructure (built form) and the direct involvement of children and young people in planning can prevent vandalism and violence. Young people seem to quickly accept places and spaces that were designed with them, and by them. Child-friendly infrastructure and participation reduces social costs associated with anti-social behaviour (Stange, 1998).

Case study: Shaping Spaces for Gen Z- Recommendations

In close collaboration with the ACT Government, UN-Habitats World Urban Campaign and the University of Canberra, Health Research Institute, we hosted an Urban Thinkers campus here in Canberra (Mews, 2017). Under the umbrella slogan “The city we need” we gathered leading international experts on children health and well-being and collaboratively explored with more than 120 participants, representing eight countries and 39 organisations, issues of key importance. The main outcomes of this Urban Thinkers campus addressed children and the built environment and design around children’s health and play. Stakeholders at the forum prioritised the below issues for action:

- Safe access, well-designed routes around schools-daily active transport built in. This could be achieved by creating safer speeds (30 km/h or 15 km/h) near areas where children’s play has priority.
- Play infrastructure for all ages, co-designed best practice learning from overseas. This can be accomplished by the introduction of weekend pop-up road closures e.g. Reclaiming the streets initiative-introducing temporary play spaces for all. Co-design opportunities in government processes and community-based initiatives can empower children. On a grassroots level, creative “Kids at Play” signage, designed by the communities can be used on local streets to promote speed reduction, fostering unique community characteristics to emerge.
- Environmental movement/play in all schools, supported with loose material/ equipment e.g. bark, logs, pipes, pots, mugs, spoons. This can be delivered in an integrated way as part of the promotion and awareness raising of importance of play.
- Use co-design and engagement principles in the school curriculum to ensure children’s engagement and ownership of initiatives that are relevant to their overall health and well-being; and
- Safe walking and cycling paths (map and smartphone apps) QR coded checkpoints, social school support element.

The full report can be accessed under the following link:

https://urbansynergiesgroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/SS4GenZ-Report_Web.pdf

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