

Submission for The Better Suburbs Play Spaces Forum



Thank you for the opportunity to share with your forum members why Bluearth Foundation values play spaces. Bluearth Foundation is a national health promotion charity on a mission to improve the health and wellbeing of Australian children by making movement part of everyday life. We do this because this generation of children may be the first to have a shorter lifespan than their parents due to the burden of disease associated with our increasingly sedentary lifestyles.

The importance of play spaces

In an era of higher density living, increasingly sedentary lifestyles and a disconnection from being outdoors, community play spaces are becoming more important as an extension of the ever shrinking backyard. Play spaces are integral to childhood physical development as children play more actively outdoors especially when encouraged by a participating adult. Evidence shows that physical and mental wellbeing is increased by playing actively outdoors and connecting with nature.

Bluearth in the ACT

In the ACT, we engage with families with young children (birth - 5 years) to increase their physical activity through information, programs (which demonstrate active play) and advocacy. Both of our current ACT programs have play as the foundation element.

The Meet & Move program is supported under the ACT Health Promotion Grants Program. Based on parent feedback and the evaluation of our 2015-2018 Playgroup program, Meet & Move is a local activation program connecting families with opportunities to play together in their local area; playgrounds, local parks and bushland. The aim is to build an active, healthy community where families feel connected and support each other to get outdoors and play.

In My Backyard, Neighbourhood Nature Play is a pilot program supported by Active Canberra. The program is designed to help families experience and identify nature play options in their local area and increase parent/carer confidence in engaging in nature play with their children.

Additional items we would like the forum to consider

- defining 'playgrounds' as a type of 'play space', sometimes these terms are interchanged
- the importance of connecting the the community with existing play spaces
- creating play spaces that are multigenerational - servicing families as they grow and change and to be inclusive of the whole community
- making school playground facilities accessible to the community - these areas are already maintained and audited and could be a significant play space asset in many areas, and where schools share facilities invest in further development of those schools' play spaces
- creating play spaces that support children to explore risk acknowledging the importance of risky play in childhood development and applying a Benefit-Risk Assessment to play spaces
- creating playgrounds with more opportunities for open ended non prescriptive play - natural play grounds cater to this
- fencing - we regularly hear that parent's with two young children are reluctant to visit an unfenced play space. However this has not been explored in detail. Further research is needed to understand how widely this barrier is felt in the community and also to explore a range of solutions

Yours in play,
Nicole Sadlier, Coordinator - Early Years