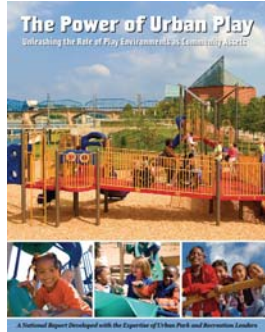


The Power of Urban Play

Unleashing the Role of Play Environments as Community Assets

Executive Summary

Play enriches life. The benefits of play are well documented for fighting obesity and promoting physical activity, reducing stress and violence, promoting academic achievement,



fostering social and emotional development, engaging in nature, and supporting community development. Tragically, many children in urban areas face barriers and disparities for play. Urban areas offer unique trends and challenges to play as they manage growing urban densities,

“A worldwide demographic shift to urbanization is making urban parks the sole connection to the natural world for an increasing majority of children and adults.” —The Power of Urban Play

diversity, and capacity for human coexistence and social cohesion.

The Power of Urban Play: Unleashing the Role of Play Environments as Community Assets is a national initiative, sponsored by PlayCore, to identify the importance of play for urban communities, define the trends and unique characteristics of urban communities, and discuss best practice strategies for developing and maintaining healthy play environments that are critical for the wellbeing of children, families, and communities. Data was collected and summarized through a series of interviews, surveys, and roundtable discussions with over 40 urban parks and recreation leaders.

To request a copy of the report, visit www.playcore.com.

Report Development Process

Urban park and recreation leaders from across the nation were involved in the development of this report, including directors and staff from the park and recreation departments of major American cities and non-profit groups that have demonstrated expertise in urban play. Knowledge, opinions, experiences, and case studies were gathered in three primary ways as well as through secondary research and communications with various experts.

1. The first step included an in-depth interview process with six targeted cities to begin exploring the unique needs and trends of their cities and to shape what later became the five best practice themes of this report.
2. Additionally, an online survey was distributed to park and recreation leaders from across the country. Survey respondents validated the themes identified through the



initial interview process and provided quantitative and qualitative data about the current initiatives, trends, and design considerations for urban play. Detailed survey results can be found in the full length report.

3. A group of urban play leaders, who served as critical advisors due to their experience of developing park and recreation programs in urban communities, participated in an Urban Play Roundtable to analyze survey results, share

information about play in their cities, and discuss the facets and implications of each best practice theme for urban cities, which informed the final recommendations of this report. Members of the Roundtable Advisory Council included:



- **Joseph Wynns, Project Leader and Former Director**
Indianapolis Parks and Recreation Dept.
- **Marilyn Boyd Drew, Former Director**
DeKalb County, GA, Parks and Recreation
- **Norm Merrifield, Director**
Cincinnati Recreation Commission
- **Joe Turner, Director**
Houston Parks and Recreation Dept.
- **Jon Kirk Mukri, General Manager**
City of Los Angeles Dept. of Recreation and Parks
- **Sue Black, Director**
Milwaukee Cty. Dept. of Parks, Recreation & Culture
- **Nancy Barthold, Asst. Commissioner**
New York City Dept. of Parks & Recreation
- **Catherine Nagel, Executive Director**
City Parks Alliance
- **Peter Harnik, Director**
Ctr. for City Park Excellence, The Trust for Public Land
- **Ashley Futrell, Senior Manager, Public Policy**
National Recreation and Park Association
- **Rose Harvey, Senior Vice President**
The Trust for Public Land

The Problem

Urban park and recreation leaders across the country identified the following current challenges and obstacles for healthy play in their communities:

A Vast Disparity in Play Environments Preventing Children's Healthy Development

Concerns about Crime on Playgrounds that Prevent Families from Playing There

Under Utilization of Urban Playgrounds

Many Urban Communities Do Not Have Access to Sufficient Resources

Limited Planning Prevents Strategic Provision of Play Resources



Best Practice Recommendations

The following recommendations demonstrate that there are multiple opportunities to bring about lasting change. Together, we must boldly promote our collective and collaborative voices by advocating for and implementing urban play best practices at the local, regional, national, and international levels. Play is critical for the future of our youth, and we must act accordingly to reverse current trends. *To request a copy of the report, visit www.playcore.com.*

1 : DESIGN for Compelling Play Environments.



Agencies should design play environments that are compelling and meet the unique needs of diverse urban users. Engaging a variety of stakeholders, through participatory design, is critical for ensuring best practices for multigenerational inclusion, integration of natural elements, increased physical activity, safety, and equitable access to the space.

2: Create Playgrounds as CRIME PREVENTION Programs.



Communities should view playgrounds as crime prevention assets by considering visibility in the design, establishing proactive partnerships with local law enforcement and neighborhood groups, and by keeping the playspace active and well maintained.

3: Offer PROGRAMS on the Urban Playground.



Public play environments should market free play and supervised play programs that promote high levels of physical activity and learning while maximizing joint use opportunities, providing playleaders for supervision and play facilitation, and utilizing mobile play programs for additional reach and interest.

4: Execute PARTNERSHIPS for Play.



Partnerships should be established to strengthen the variety and reach of play opportunities for a broader reach of play resources, facilities, and programs while also increasing usership and ensuring sustainability over time. Public/public, public/private, and public/non-profit partnerships should be considered for play funding, programming, and community development.

5: Develop an Urban Playground MASTER PLAN.



A comprehensive and collaborative master plan should be developed for play and playgrounds that includes a current asset management plan; provides guidance for the overall goals, objectives and strategies for strengthening play; specifies funding cycles; monitors implementation; and ensures continuous improvement.