

NAME OF THE PROJECT/ACTIVITY:

Redesign of Outdoor Play spaces in WELS

NAME OF ORGANISATION AND CONTACT PERSON:

Whitehorse City Council

DATE: 2016 consultation and project implemented across services in different financial years.

Description/background (100 words max):

2005 and 2006 3 services underwent major renovations to increase capacity and update the buildings. Some landscaping was completed in the outdoor areas to re work the play spaces with the new building and address challenges at the time. 10 years on from the redevelopment with recent research and feedback from staff including how the children use the spaces, we identified the opportunity we had for creating something more in line with our thinking on natural and sensory driven engagement with an outdoor environment. We also recognised we could better embed with the children and families the benefits of nature play and risk taking for children within our learning environment.

Key Stakeholders:

WELS client's both children and families, WELS Director and staff at the services, Early Childhood Services Team: Co-ordinator, Team Leader and Manager, OHS representative, Capital works officers.

How did you include children in the project?

Consultation included discussions with the children, seeking their ideas on what they liked to do outside, what they wished they could do outside, and what they liked in outdoor play spaces they had visited. This came back as transcribed discussions and pictures drawn by the children.

The outdoor architect put together photo images of different types of outdoor play spaces mostly all natural surfaces and elements like rocks, logs, green spaces, dry creek beds etc. Some images had provocations of how areas could be used with fixed items i.e. creative areas with chalk boards and musical instruments, small water tanks, climbing frames, tree house, decks for a stage or conversation spaces etc.

These were displayed as posters, the children and educators then added stickers to indicate they liked the image and the feeling it gave them. This helped us get a sense of what they felt connected to and what inspired them. Posters were also displayed in the foyers for all families to contribute and feel part of the consultation process.

What were the outcomes for children and your organisation?

- An outdoor play space designed to represent the individual identity of the families and children in the centre
- Children and families engaged and consulted during the entire process
- Inviting outdoor play spaces that encourage children to use their imaginations to engage with nature
- Physically challenging environments that promote children's agency, health and well-being.

What did your evaluations tell you?

- Children have clear ideas on how they would like the outdoor space designed
- Children are capable and confident contributors to the process regardless of age
- The consultation process was key to the success of the finished play spaces.

What key messages or learnings would you like to share?

The children are more empowered by contributing to the design, and it becomes a space that they can identify with.

The families are more confident and informed of the benefits of children participating in outdoor spaces that encourage natural play and risk taking.

The children explore an open play space which invites them to connect with natural surfaces, indigenous and seasonal plants, logs, rocks and green tunnels to manoeuvre on, around and through developing imagination, physical competence and an appreciation of a space they helped design.