Healthy, Complete Outdoor Playspaces: A Journey from Problem to Policy

- A little about Peterborough Public Health
- From playground injury data to healthy, complete outdoor playspaces for children
  - Identifying the issue
  - Understanding the issue
  - Engaging others in addressing the issue
  - Leading the way in taking a position

Purpose of Presentation

About Peterborough

Public Health is defined as “the art and science of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health through the organized efforts of society” (WHO).

What is Public Health?

What is Health Promotion?

Advancing Healthy Public Policy Roadmap*

* Source: Ottawa Public Health
Identify and Define Issue

1. Policy Agenda Setting & Influencing

- Identify Problem
- Define scope of policy options
- Conduct brief stakeholder scan
- Assess readiness for policy development

Identify the problem

High injury rates from playground equipment falls

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Ontario Injury Data Report, 2012

Situational Assessment

- Literature review on playground equipment and injuries (Fall 2013)
- Best practice:
  - equipment properly maintained
  - appropriate fall surface
  - adequate supervision
  - age-appropriate use
- Development of a playground checklist based on research evidence

Review & Synthesize Evidence

Assess Applicability & Transferability of Findings

Playground checklist used in six locations:
→ 2 outside the City:
  ~ Rural municipality
  ~ First Nations community
→ 4 inside the City

Mapping playgrounds in the City

High income
Low income
What the Checklist Told Us

Public School, Peterborough (October 17, 2013)

City Park (October 17, 2013)

First Nation Park (October 18, 2013)

Township Park (October 18, 2013)

Scan of Stakeholders and Influencers & Communicate Findings

• Presented findings to Municipal Access to Recreation Group (MATRG) – May 2014  
  → Playground inspection training (Oct. 2014)

• Met with MATRG (Nov. 2014)  
  → checklist development  
  → accessible playgrounds training

Scan of Stakeholders and Influencers & Communicate Findings

• Hired consultant (Dec. 2014)  
  → telephone survey with municipal and school board representatives

• Met with MATRG to share results (Mar. 2015)

• Met with school board representatives to share results (Apr. 2015)  
  = playground vs play “experience”

Circling back…Situational Assessment

• Expanded literature search (Summer and Fall of 2014)

• Search topics included: play, natural playspaces, risky play, risk management, built environment, school playgrounds and more

• Reviewed over 100 articles (from peer-reviewed journals to grey literature)

• Synthesized key findings into technical report.

Review & Synthesize Evidence
Synthesize Evidence

Evidence Review
• Play, types of play and child development
• Traditional and natural playspaces
• Risk and play
• Injuries and playground safety
• Risk-benefit assessment
• Built environment and playspaces

Evidence Highlights
• Play is a human right
• Many, diverse features meeting universal design principles to encourage different types of play for all abilities and interests
• Natural playspaces = more inclusive, gender neutral and accessible
• Simple adaptations – enhance play experience

Evidence Highlights
• Risky play is essential to healthy child development
• Injuries happen; “as safe as necessary”
• Restricting access to playspaces for fear of injuries invites other risks (physical and mental)
• Risk-benefit assessments are essential
• Design of spaces needs to be a collaborative exercise

Synthesize Evidence
• Internal document – guiding planning and future work
• Vetted document – internally and externally

Scan of Stakeholders and Influencers
Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)
• Municipal sector (recreation*, parks*, public works*, planning)
• Education sector (school boards, principal, early learning experts)
• Community sector (accessibility advocates, nature stewards, landscape architect)

* MATRG members

Scan of Stakeholders and Influencers
1. What are your initial thoughts of this report?
2. What do you like about this report?
3. Are there any areas that need to be strengthened?
1. What are the opportunities given the evidence?
2. Does this research present any barriers to you in your sector?
3. How can you use this report in your sector?
4. What would you need to move this forward?

Assessing the level of readiness...

Internally
- Briefing Note for Executive Committee – go-ahead to create a position statement

Externally
- Consultations (municipalities, environmental group)
- Riding a wave

Alignment with Other Initiatives

NATIONAL
- National Position Statement on Active, Outdoor Play (2015)
- A Framework for Recreation in Canada 2015: Pathways to Wellbeing
- Lawson Foundation’s Outdoor Play Strategy

Policy Formulation

Active Outdoor Play Position Statement from the Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health (Draft 2017)

Healthy, Complete Outdoor Playspaces for Children

Conclusion

My secret wish...

Play policies all around!