

Executive Summary

At the Community Services Committee meeting of July 9, 2018, Council received the report entitled "Children and Youth Recreation Programming Review". The review of current recreation programs offered by the City of Greater Sudbury (City) was conducted by Leading Minds Inc. The report included information regarding industry norms, best practices and leisure trends. The report included a series of key findings and options for consideration relating to children and youth programming offered by the City.

One of the strategic directions for consideration was that the City develop a Play Charter. The Play Charter would guide planning and policy decisions related to programs and facilities and be a lens by which all local leisure providers are invited to think about play programs, facilities, and partnerships.

A play charter sets out a vision for play. It aims to be a catalyst for individuals and organizations to examine and improve how they provide for children and young people's play and informal recreation.

This report will outline the existing City initiatives and programs that support a Play Charter and provide information about other municipalities that have introduced charters or similar play policies. A draft Play Charter for the City of Greater Sudbury is included as well as a plan for implementation.

Current Status

The City has positioned itself well in order to take this step to formalize the importance of Play in our community. The following programs and initiatives demonstrate the City's commitments made to prioritizing play:

Population Health

In 2017-2018 the City engaged the community in an extensive consultation process that led to the development of a Population Health report entitled 'Moving Forward with an Upstream Approach - A Call to Action on Community Priorities'. Play Opportunities has been identified as one of the ten priority areas for Population Health. The report describes Play Opportunities as:

Play is a key factor in positive human development. Play practices risk management, socialization and physical skills development. Emphasis on affordable options for recreation, volunteer opportunities, and grassroots initiatives inspire people to get out and play across all generations. Reducing or eliminating financial barriers, an equal starting point for all.

The report includes the following Calls to Action in the area of Play Opportunities:

- Inclusion
- Access
- Intergenerational
- Affordable access
- Reduced screen time
- Natural play (physical and social interaction)
- Risk tolerant play

Play Equity Research

In 2017, the International Play Association (IPA) hosted an international conference in Calgary, Alberta focusing on Unleashing the Power of Play. Municipal staff attended this conference and gained valuable insights into the value of unstructured play and how it relates to a healthy community and healthier more resilient children. The inherent risk in the aspect of free play was also a common theme throughout the conference and focused on the idea that risk is a valuable component to play in order for children to develop risk-taking skills which help them to become healthier adults.

In recent years, the City has collaborated a number of times with founder/educator, Pierre Harrison from PlayLearnThink. PlayLearnThink is a social enterprise dedicated to fostering creativity, nurturing imagination, promoting science literacy and encouraging life-long learning through play-based and inquiry-based exploration. PlayLearnThink believes that play is the essential element necessary to create a sound foundation on which to build a healthy, fulfilling life of learning.

Healthy Kids Community Challenge

The Healthy Kids Community Challenge was an extremely successful and enlightening three year funded project, focusing on healthy and active initiatives for children in our community. Legacies from this program have continued to benefit children throughout our community through new unstructured play opportunities.

HIGH FIVE Accreditation Program

HIGH FIVE is Canada's quality standard for children's programs. Before HIGH FIVE, no standard existed and there was a clear need for an innovative approach to help organizations enhance program quality and provide positive experiences for children, which would remain with them for a lifetime. The HIGH FIVE Principles of Healthy Child Development are:

- a caring adult
- the opportunity to make friends
- the opportunity to play
- the opportunity to master skills and
- the opportunity to participate

These principles directly align with the spirit of the Play Charter and allow the City to go beyond its own programs to endorse and advocate to other organizations in the community to do the same. The City has been training summer staff through HIGH FIVE for approximately 15 years with the goal to continue providing this HIGH FIVE training to all areas of front line program service providers.

Playground Revitalization Strategy

Currently, the Playground Revitalization Strategy will provide a strong foundation for which the Play Charter can be launched. This strategy is in its first year of full operation where the community will see the completion of 12 new playgrounds as part of phase one with another 15 new playgrounds initiated before the end of 2019. These playgrounds were evaluated based on age and condition and prioritized based on community demographics and socioeconomic factors. These facilities will provide play equity throughout our community and dramatically increase the level of unstructured play at the neighborhood level immediately for this generation in Greater Sudbury.

Northeastern Ontario Recreation Association (NeORA) Forum and Tradeshow 2019

City Council approved the bid to host the 2019 Northeastern Ontario Recreation Association Forum and Tradeshow, here in Greater Sudbury from September 23 – 26, 2019. The theme of this year's conference is The Power of Play, whereby the goal of conference organizers is to showcase our city's efforts to support and provide free play opportunities through our community.

Other Alignments with Play Charters

In recent years, the City has continued to build on its free play offerings to the community. The City has realized new splash pads such as Capreol, Onaping, Garson and Coniston, new pickleball courts at O'Connor Park, partnered on projects such as Kivi Park, Morel Family Foundation Park, Loughheed Park, and the Adélie Splash Pad in Coniston. Ongoing and historic programs and facilities such as the neighborhood outdoor rinks, the Ramsey Lake Skate path, and Snow Day are winter activities that the community has come to make part of their winter schedule. All of these offerings build the foundation for the creation of Play Charter in order to formally advocate to other partners in our community to join the City of Greater Sudbury in our efforts to create healthier, happier citizens.

Comparator Communities

In developing this report, comparator communities played an important role in guiding the focus of the Play Charter. In Canada, the cities of Calgary AB, Lethbridge AB, and Burlington ON, had charters or initiatives that were specifically related to play opportunities/policies. Common themes were the child's right to play, outdoor focus, using nature as a playground, using measured risk to develop resilience and risk-taking skills, educating and informing the community on the importance of play, and the social and health benefits of play.

The organization Play England also established a Charter for Children's Play. Their charter sets out a vision for play with the aim of being a catalyst for individuals and organizations to examine and improve how they provide for children and youth in the areas of play and recreation.

Draft Play Charter for the City of Greater Sudbury

Greater Sudbury is committed to promoting play, providing play opportunities, and educating all residents on the importance of play to our community.

Play LOOKS LIKE:

- Children of all abilities, alone or in groups, engaged, focused, solving problems, having fun.
- It can look physical, imaginary, creative, dramatic, social or energetic.

Play SOUNDS LIKE:

- Laughter, conflict, imaginative stories.
- It can be boisterous or silent.

Play FEELS LIKE:

- Excitement and challenge.
- It can be scary, wondrous, doubtful, hesitant and thrilling.

WE BELIEVE THAT:

- Play develops a core set of skills for healthy well-being.
- Play is a vital component of childhood; it is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated.
- Play is fun, uncertain, challenging and flexible.
- When children have opportunities to play they use creativity, innovation, reflection to learn, experiment, solve problems, create new worlds, test boundaries, assess risk and meet challenges.
- Play is a natural state for a child.

WE WILL:

- Support play that encourages physical, emotional and social development.
- Understand and communicate that risk is a valuable component to play, and we will encourage, support, and enable play that allows children to develop risk-taking skills.
- Create environments that children can control by providing flexibility in spaces and materials that promote inquiry and evoke curiosity.
- Embrace the natural environment and climate of Greater Sudbury and support children to play outdoors all year round.
- Educate and inform adults on the importance of play.
- Involve children in the decisions that affect their lives as it relates to play.

Next Steps

The Play Charter will act as a catalyst for organizations and individuals across the City of Greater Sudbury to mobilize toward making play a priority in our community. This initiative will have positive outcomes in the areas of child obesity, children's mental health, social inclusion, community engagement, a reduction in marginalization, and create play equity. The City of Greater Sudbury will lead this initiative throughout the community and encourage children and families to do something that they may not be doing as much as they would like to – enjoying the great outdoors and playing together.

Upon the approval of Council, a marketing campaign will be undertaken to brand Play in Greater Sudbury through the Play Charter. The Play Charter will be ingrained in all relevant advertising opportunities within Leisure Services and any other related departments such as Social Services and Children's Services. A communications strategy will be developed to reach into the community to our partners to encourage Play in their programs, facilities and curriculums.

Within the City's programs, free play will continue to be recognized as a fundamental part of our offerings along with fundamental movement skills that offer a more structured approach to activity. In our continued efforts in the area of Affordable Recreation, free play has an extremely close connection as many children in our community do not have the financial resources to participate in organized activities due to financial barriers. Unstructured play opportunities allow the City to provide many other options for children to choose from in order to remain active and engaged in fun activities of their choosing.

A review and understanding of the Play Charter will also be integrated into training for staff delivering programs as well as facility staff where play occurs.

Summary

Over the past number of years, the City of Greater Sudbury has built a foundation for active healthy living through its Strategic Plan, the Healthy Community Strategy and the most recent priority of Population Health, of which Play is one of the ten strategic priorities. Creating a Play Charter will establish the City of Greater Sudbury as the community leader in the advocacy for a child's right to play. It will formalize and recognize the work that has previously taken place in order to invite community organizations and families to prioritize play and build healthier children in our community.

References:

Child and Youth Program Review, Community Services Committee (July 9, 2018)
<http://agendasonline.greatersudbury.ca/index.cfm?pg=agenda&action=navigator&id=1264&itemid=12766&lang=en>

PlayLearnThink
<https://www.playlearnthink.com/plthome.html>

HIGH FIVE
<https://www.highfive.org/what-high-five>

Population Health: A Call to Action 2018-2028
<https://www.greatersudbury.ca/city-hall/reports-studies-policies-and-plans/report-pdfs/population-health-call-to-action/>

Play England – Charter for Children's Play
<http://www.playengland.org.uk/resource/charter-for-childrens-play/>

City of Calgary Play Charter
https://calgary.ca/CSPS/Recreation/Documents/Research-and-development/PlayCharter_eng.pdf

City of Lethbridge Play Charter
<https://www.lethbridge.ca/NewsCentre/Pages/Lethbridge-Play-Charter-adopted.aspx>

City of Burlington
<https://www.burlington.ca/en/live-and-play/play-street.asp>
<https://www.burlington.ca/en/live-and-play/get-outside-and-play.asp>