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- Playground Maintenance and Inspection Training— West Ryde, 22nd September 2008
- Proposed Coffs Harbour and District Visit— 15th September 2008
- Proposed Wagga Wagga and District Visit—October 2008



Community Consultation A Design Tool

Canada Bay Council has developed a strategy to improve and broaden play opportunities in the playgrounds within its city. The council's landscape architect Ben Richards describes the consultation process undertaken with the community and the benefits gained during the design and planning stages of a playground.

Design can only be considered successful if it provides for the wants and needs of the end-user. The only way to ensure you are providing for the end user, is by asking them what they need and want. This is community consultation.

Community consultation is a "needs" brief on a broad scale. An architect would never design a house without consulting with the client and a playground designer should not design a play space without doing the same.

This involves determining who and what the space is being designed for. The user-base of a playground, whether in a park or a child care facility, is wide-ranging and as such, requires input from the whole community.

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Community Consultation— A Design Tool

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Community consultation should be undertaken throughout the planning and design stages. The feedback received should be used in conjunction with professional knowledge, to inform the design. The correct level of research into how the community would like to see their asset developed will result in a playground that is well received, used and cared for.

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The Process

The level of consultation considered appropriate will depend on the magnitude of the asset being provided and the size of the catchment it will service. The level of consultation undertaken for a regional playground will be much more than that for a local playground.

For the best result, all relevant stakeholders need to be engaged and encouraged to actively participate in the decision making process. Relevant stakeholders may include any professionals who specialise in the environment you are trying to create. This is important as you are not just creating a playground, but a learning environment and an experience as well.

Initial contact should be made prior to the design beginning to seek ideas on how people would like to see the space developed. This initial contact is best done via a mail out and must contain, and seek, some basic but important information. Prior to the mail out, the catchment area needs to be determined so that the sections of the community who will directly benefit are engaged and invited to participate.

The mail out should inform the community of the following:

- area of the park to be developed;
- approximate budget;
- age and ability to be designed for (based on most recent census information); and
- any relevant information on local/cultural identity.

In return you should seek from the parents/guardians the following:

- their vision for the area;
- data on their usage of the space i.e. frequency and activity;
- amenities they would like to see in place; and
- items they would not like included.

From the children you should seek information on:

- the activities they most like to do rated in order of most important;

- the frequency of their visits;
- the person they most regularly go to the play ground with; and
- what they dislike about other playgrounds they have visited.

If the mail out is more than one page long or too wordy the response will be limited and your data flawed. Use graphics as much as possible for the children's section and be direct with the questions. While the last two questions may seem negative, it gives the participant an opportunity to get anything off their chest prior to any face to face meetings in the future. It is also a clear direction on what not to do with the design, unless it can be justified. The feedback you receive provides the theory for your design brief.

The second contact is best done face to face to present a preliminary concept plan. This stage of the process allows the designer to engage interested people and present their design and field questions. This ensures that the design intent is accurately interpreted and gives a further opportunity for comment, both verbally and in writing. The beauty of this is that time is not wasted detailing up an idea that is not going to be accepted.

Finally, once the concept is complete, a mail out is sent to the original catchment and to any other interested parties who have participated. This gives a final opportunity to have a say prior to detailed design commencing.

The Result

The advantages of conducting community consultation during the design process are two fold.

Firstly, you ensure that the product you are delivering is one that the community will embrace. The long-term benefits are that the facility will be well used and the users will feel some ownership of the development. These extra eyes help reduce vandalism and concerned users report maintenance issues early. Secondly, comprehensive consultation reduces complaints when the construction commences, which reduces time and cost overruns.

Community consultation will not eliminate all problems associated with project delivery to a large stakeholder group. If planned and undertaken correctly this public forum will inform the design and minimise the risk of the project being held up due to miscommunication and/or disgruntled residents.

You ensure the product you are delivering is one the community will embrace. The users will feel some ownership of the development.

Community consultation is a positive contribution to the development of any public asset and should be managed as such.

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This course provides the prerequisite knowledge for enrolment in the UTS Level 2 Operational Playground Inspectors Course

Who would benefit from attending a *Playground Inspection and Maintenance Workshop*?

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 - ◊ Parks supervisors
 - ◊ Maintenance staff
 - ◊ Landscape design staff
 - ◊ Risk managers
- Children's services staff
- Department of Community Services children's services staff
- Early childhood studies professionals
- Early childhood centre staff
- Coordinators of children's services
- Primary school principals and:
 - ◊ General assistants
 - ◊ Grounds maintenance staff
 - ◊ Parents groups
- Landscape architects and designers
- Playspace construction workers
- Agencies providing playgrounds
- Health promotions officers and health professionals
- Equipment manufacturers, designers and representatives

Training can be arranged for established groups or organisations or can be run for individuals who submit an expression of interest.

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The course includes notes and a workbook. An onsite inspection is held where delegates are taken through the inspection routine using the relevant inspection tools.

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- *Promote an understanding of the current Playground Safety Standards*
- *Encourage the assessment of playground equipment to comply with current Standards*
- *Improve the inspection and maintenance of playground equipment in accordance with Australian Playground Standards*
- *Deliver consumer advice in relation to playground equipment purchases*
- *Describe archiving practices, maintenance systems and regimes*
- *Explore achievable design practices and the promotion of the use of the natural environment*

For further information contact:

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