

MY CITY TOO

**Advancing outdoor free play
and independent mobility
as cornerstones of a more
child friendly Toronto**



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880 Cities is a non-profit organization based in Toronto. Our mission is to improve the quality of life for people living in cities no matter their age, ability, or socioeconomic status. We have worked in over 300 cities around the world bringing people together to transform mobility and public space to create more vibrant, healthy, and equitable communities. The organization is based on the simple but powerful idea that if everything we did in our cities was great for an 8 year old and an 80 year old, then it would be great for everyone.

Learn more at <http://880cities.org>.



Started in 1994, EcoKids offers programs and resources for children, parents, educators, and communities in Canada to engage in environmental education. EcoKids is designed to inspire children to become lifelong environmental stewards through outdoor play and experiences.

Learn more at <http://ecokids.ca>.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Toronto is one of the world's metropolitan gems, and has the potential to be one of its most inclusive and welcoming cities.

But our approach to city building has lagged behind our ambition, which means we aren't always working to create a public realm that people of all ages and abilities are able to enjoy. The goal of this report is to illustrate how adopting a child-centered lens can make an already great city even greater, more inclusive, and joyful.

Like many North American cities, Toronto has spent decades designing and building its streets prioritizing the movement of vehicular traffic. This has come at a cost to children's health and wellbeing. Our streets are not safe and welcoming for walking, bicycling, or taking public transit, which are the only means of independent mobility for children and youth. Today, fewer children walk or bike to school than in the 1980s, with fear of car traffic the number one reason parents and caregivers say they do not let their kids walk or bike on their own.

Children in Canada are also spending less time outside playing than previous generations, in part because of their lack of independent mobility, and in part because of risk-averse policies that have focused more on limiting liability than on creating exciting places to play. Childhood has retreated indoors and become more sedentary, more technologically immersed, more structured, and more adult-supervised. As a result of our lack of child-led mobility and outdoor play, Canada was ranked 25th out of 41 peer countries in UNICEF's 2017 Index of Child and Youth Wellbeing and Sustainability.

My City Too is led by 8 80 Cities and EcoKids, coming together for the first time in order to advance two overlapping cornerstones of a more child friendly city: outdoor free play and independent mobility. We wanted to highlight the important role that access to the public realm plays in the health, development, and wellbeing of Toronto's youngest residents. This is in fact, their city too.

Why focus on child-led play and mobility for young children? First of all, if you design a great city for a child, there's a good chance you are designing a great city for all. There is also abundant research that shows that independent childhood mobility and outdoor free play are interconnected. When kids are able to walk, bike, or take

transit on their own, they are more likely to play outdoors on their own as well, learning important skills by creatively exploring boundaries, following instincts, and getting to know themselves. These early experiences correlate with better adolescent mental health, physical health, and sense of connection to community.

With these benefits in mind, and with Toronto as our focus, we reviewed academic studies and policy documents from around the world, interviewed international experts and leaders in the field, and spoke with parents, caregivers, children, and advocates to learn about existing barriers in Toronto and best practices to address them. We also convened with municipal initiatives, non-profit organizations, and private enterprises working in this space, and identified the resources and assets we can build on to make Toronto a more child friendly city. We look forward to continuing to convene, connect, and collaborate with this network of experts, advocates, community members, decision-makers, and children we met as we build towards our shared goals of creating a more child friendly Toronto.

Based on our findings, we have ten major recommendations to address barriers and expand upon Toronto's assets:

Child-led inclusive play

1. Think beyond the playground, and design all public spaces to encourage children to play creatively and take risks.
2. Design for accessibility for all.
3. Program and manage public spaces to increase outdoor play.
4. Create or rewrite outdoor play policies to be risk-aware, rather than risk-averse.

Safe, healthy, playful streets

5. Ensure that our streets are child friendly and deliver on the city's commitment to Vision Zero.
6. Streamline and accelerate road safety improvement projects.
7. Expand education programs that promote children's active travel.
8. Expand play streets, school streets, and open streets programs.

Child-centered decision-making

9. Center children in municipal planning and decision-making processes.
10. Give parents and caregivers tools to enable children's participation in the public realm.



CHAPTER 1

OUR APPROACH

DEFINING OUTDOOR FREE PLAY

Play is difficult to define¹ but there is a growing body of academic literature that considers the meaning and importance of play in various facets of daily life². We focused on children's outdoor free play, which can be broadly understood as a process in which "children follow their own instincts, ideas, and interests without a defined purpose or outcome"³. This kind of play is often contrasted with what some term "structured play," or play that is facilitated and planned by adults, like organized sports.

There are three characteristics that differentiate outdoor free play from structured play: outdoor free play is **child-led**; it typically involves the use of **loose parts**; and it involves children's independent mobility.

By child-led or child-directed play, we mean the kind of play in which, instead of being instructed on what to do, the child decides what kind of play they want to engage in, for how long, and under what conditions. Child-led play can sometimes include "thrilling and exciting forms

of play,"⁴ sometimes referred to as "risky play," through which children learn to set their own limits. Adults can offer support, and even join in, so long as the children themselves are leading the direction of play.

Loose parts are any materials that "can be moved around, carried, rolled, lifted, piled on top of one another, or combined to create interesting and novel structures and experiences"⁵. They can include both natural and synthetic materials such as objects found in nature, wood, fabrics, containers, tires, crates, water, and mud. Because loose parts do not have a defined purpose, children have the freedom to choose how they want to engage with the materials, creating more "opportunities for play, social interaction, language use, risk taking, and inclusivity of gender and age"⁶ than may have been possible with structured, pre-built playgrounds, for example.

For the purposes of this project, we focused on outdoor free play for children aged 4 to 12.

1 CPHA, 2019a.

2 Johnson, 2015.

3 CPHA, 2019b.

4 Ibid.

5 Wilson, 2010.

6 Flannigan & Dietze, 2004.



DEFINING CHILDREN'S INDEPENDENT MOBILITY

The term “children’s independent mobility” was introduced in a seminal 1990 study called “One False Move...” and was characterized at the time as “the freedom of children to travel around in their neighbourhood or city without adult supervision”. Some experts in the field, including the University of Toronto’s Ron Buliung, favour a softer interpretation that allows adults to be present, so long as they are non-directive. An example Buliung gave us was of a parent following half a block behind a child running ahead, with the child choosing the route and pace.

Both these definitions of children’s independent mobility can be understood as being child-led, like outdoor free play. In child-led mobility, children choose the type, speed, direction, and even destination of their travel, with adults either absent or following rather than leading them. Allowing for adult presence is more inclusive of children with disabilities who may need adult support to travel. Child-led mobility options include walking or using a wheelchair, riding a bike, and using public transit. At different points in a child’s development, adults may place restrictions on types of travel and distances travelled, as well as destinations and times of day permitted, so independent mobility may mean different things to different children.

For the purposes of this project, we focused on independent mobility for children aged 6 to 12.

“Walking home with my sister at age 7, finding special rocks and sticks along the way.”

“Rolling around between trees and piles of leaves.”

“Riding my bike with my childhood best friend and pretending we were running away from our kingdom.”

“Taking the bus to piano lessons. I felt so grown up and free!”

—Torontonians telling us their earliest independent mobility and outdoor play memories

WHY FOCUS ON PLAY AND MOBILITY?

Outdoor free play and children's independent mobility are interconnected. Both occur largely in the public realm, and children who travel outdoors on their own have more opportunity to play with their peers than those who are less independent⁸. Their play is also more likely to be child-led, in natural settings, with available loose parts⁹. In focus groups, children themselves told us that they see independent mobility as a form of imaginative play: "Adults forget how fun it is to just roam around."

There are tremendous shared public health and societal benefits associated with granting children more opportunities for outdoor free play and independent mobility. For individual children, there is a high correlation between wellbeing, based on UNICEF scores, and freedom to travel and play without adult supervision¹⁰. Access to outdoor play and independent mobility also has impacts on municipal traffic management and is increasingly seen as an indicator of a city's performance and ability to support health and wellbeing, sustainability, resilience, and safety¹¹.

Benefits of outdoor free play and children's independent mobility include:

Better physical health because access to independent mobility and free play helps to integrate physical activity into children's daily routines¹².

Better mental health, with reduced stress, depression, and anxiety, and increased happiness^{13,14,15}. Children who walk or bike to school report more positive emotions during the school trip than those who travel by car and have higher levels of energy at school¹⁶.

Better social and emotional development thanks to social connections forged through shared exploration and play¹⁷, building bonds and relationships^{18,19} that could reduce feelings of loneliness in adolescence²⁰.

Better cognitive development, including spatial awareness, cultivated through experiences of navigating surrounding neighbourhoods, creatively exploring boundaries, following instincts, and getting to know themselves. Understanding neighbourhood context also helps reduce fear of crime in adolescence²¹.

Reduced congestion thanks to fewer children being driven in cars. This benefit aligns with Metrolinx's regional transportation plan, The Big Move, which aims to see 60% of children walking and/or biking to school by the year 2041 as part of a strategy to address congestion in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area.

Reduced climate impact for decades to come. Car travel currently accounts for 29% of Toronto's greenhouse gas emissions²². A key strategy to reduce our collective carbon footprint is to increase the proportion of trips taken by walking, biking and public transit, and research shows that children who grow up comfortable using these sustainable modes of transportation are more likely to use them as adults²³.

- 8 Prezza et al., 2007.
- 9 CPHA, 2019a.
- 10 Shaw et al., 2015.
- 11 ARUP, 2017.
- 12 Stone et al., 2014.
- 13 Lambiase et al., 2010.
- 14 Ramanathan et al., 2014.
- 15 Iancovich, 2015.
- 16 Barnes et al., 2016.
- 17 Prezza et al., 2001.
- 18 Garbarino et al., 1992.
- 19 Groves et al., 1997.
- 20 Marzi & Reimers, 2018.
- 21 Prezza et al., 2007.
- 22 City of Toronto, 2019b.
- 23 Buliung, 2012a.



OUR METHODOLOGY

Literature review of academic studies and policy documents from around the world, with a focus on Canada and similar (peer) countries. This review helped us define our terms and understand the benefits and barriers to outdoor free play and independent mobility, as well as global best practices.

Meetings with researchers, leaders, and policymakers. Researchers we met included Raktim Mitra of Ryerson University, Ron Buliung of the University of Toronto, Linda Rothman of the Hospital for Sick Children, and Natalia Krysiak, a Churchill Fellow in child friendly neighbourhood design. Leaders and policymakers we spoke with included Ian Smith, Child Friendly City Coordinator at the City of Edmonton, transportation planners at the London Borough of Hackney, United Kingdom, and City of Toronto staff working in Transportation and Parks, Forestry and Recreation, as well as the interdivisional Child Friendly TO initiative established by Children's Services and Toronto Public Health.

Community engagement with over 200 people through focus groups, pop-up interactive hubs at parks and events, and an online survey asking parents and caregivers about their childhood experiences versus their children's experiences with outdoor free play and independent mobility. We learned about perceptions, concerns, and needs in Toronto for residents with different lived

experiences, including newcomer parents, caregivers, and children at The Neighbourhood Office in Thorncliffe Park, and adults and children with disabilities and parents and caregivers of children with disabilities at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital.

Roundtable convening of 34 representatives from 23 Toronto organizations that work with children, play, mobility, and health in frontline, policy, planning, and funding capacities. Participants shared challenges, resources, and opportunities they saw to help increase rates of outdoor free play and children's independent mobility in our city. Most had not previously met, and the convening facilitated new relationships for future collaborations, especially across their sometimes siloed fields of work. The group included representatives from the municipal government, the public school board, charitable foundations, grassroots advocacy groups, non-profit and charitable organizations and service providers, and private enterprises; many of them are listed in Chapter 3.

One of the goals of My City Too is for this network of experts, advocates, community members, and decision-makers to continue to grow, meet, connect, and collaborate. The City of Toronto's Child Friendly TO initiative, which we worked with for this project, would be a natural ongoing convenor for this group.





CHAPTER 2

INITIAL FINDINGS

HOW ARE CHILDREN FARING WHEN IT COMES TO OUTDOOR FREE PLAY?

In 2015, a global survey of almost 30,000 parents and children in 12 countries found that 89% of parents of children aged 7 to 12 agree that “play is an essential and important part of the way a child develops” and that “play is essential for [children’s] wellbeing and happiness”²⁴. Across Canada, there is increasing recognition that outdoor free play is an important and beneficial contributor to children’s mental, physical, and social development^{25,26}. In 2015, ParticipACTION released a Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play (PSAOP), calling for more opportunities for all children in Canada, regardless of race, ethnicity, or socio-economic status, to engage in self-directed, active play in nature and outdoors—“with all its risks”²⁷. The PSAOP has been signed by over 350 supporters and received the endorsement of Canada’s Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health in 2018.

Despite this support, outdoor free play is waning in Canada. Childhood has retreated indoors, become more sedentary, more technologically immersed, more structured, more adult-supervised, and more risk-averse²⁸. UNICEF Canada found that only 21% of children ages 5 to 11 engage in at least 1.5 hours a day of active play and unstructured activities²⁹, and Statistics Canada found that less time spent outdoors correlated with lower rates of physical activity³⁰. Current social norms also associate good parenting with “constant supervision”³¹, such that a Winnipeg neighbour

called child protection services upon seeing children playing unaccompanied in their backyard in 2016³². Our online survey found that only 10% of our respondents remember an adult supervising their outdoor play all the time, but 63% of them now supervise their own children’s outdoor play all the time.

These trends and norms are symptoms of the multiple barriers that exist to outdoor free play in Toronto:

Inequitable access to safe outdoor play spaces and programming for communities that have been historically and structurally marginalized. In these neighbourhoods, children are often exposed to more dangerous situations and are therefore “overrepresented in injury statistics”³³ due to a “lack of availability of safe play areas”³⁴ where they can follow their instincts, ideas, and interests. In our online survey, many respondents said that their outdoor free play took place in backyards, which are not available to growing numbers of Torontonians. Thorncliffe Park is an example of a dense Toronto community with very limited outdoor play space. When public funding is limited, fundraising or advocacy for outdoor play spaces often takes the shape of parent-led initiatives, which are not equally feasible for all parents and caregivers³⁵, resulting in a lack of “equal access to adequate parks”³⁶ for children in lower-income families. Service providers also told us that newcomer and lower-income families are less likely to be aware of or seek out the free play opportunities offered through community programs, and may also lack access to warm clothing in

24 IKEA, 2015.

25 Giles et al., 2019

26 CPHA, 2019a.

27 ParticipACTION, 2015

28 Young, 2019.

29 UNICEF Canada, 2019.

30 Colley et al., 2019.

31 CPHA, 2019c.

32 Globe & Mail, 2016.

33 Giles et al., 2019.

34 CPHA, 2019a.

35 Ibid.

36 Giles et al., 2019.



the wintertime. We need to create more opportunities for lower income, newcomer, and Indigenous families to share their social, cultural, and geographic lived experiences and not only inform but lead policy development and decision-making around outdoor free play spaces and programming³⁷.

Fear of litigation in municipal, school, and childcare settings. In Canada, those who are injured can sue a property owner “regardless of the degree to which that [property owner] is found to be negligent”³⁸. Many organizations told us that they practice risk aversion in their programming to eliminate the possibility of liability, and Toronto municipal by-laws prohibit activities that may cause injury in public parks, including climbing trees and throwing snow³⁹. Provincial Education Acts also expect educators to “protect their students from all reasonable and foreseeable risks of injury or harm”⁴⁰, essentially requiring playground supervisors to restrict students from engaging in child-led play that could be deemed risky.

Concerns about safety. Globally, 51% of parents say that they “want [their] children to play more outdoors, but are worried for their child’s safety,” with 46% adding that they feel they “have to be over-protective of them in this world”⁴¹. About 54% of Australian parents reported being concerned about “stranger danger”⁴², in line with the 59% of Canadian respondents in our online survey who said the same, despite RCMP figures showing that the odds of total stranger abduction are 1 in 14 million⁴³. At our public engagement hubs, racialized parents expressed additional fears about their unsupervised children being perceived as a nuisance or threat to others around them in ways that would endanger the children’s own safety.

Lack of inclusivity for children with disabilities and their caregivers. Part of the problem at typical Toronto playgrounds and natural spaces is a lack of accessible structures that would enable different kinds of free play, like table-height planter boxes to allow children to engage with mud and dirt while sitting in their wheelchairs, for example. The lack of municipal staff at public parks means that children with intellectual or physical abilities rely on overburdened parents and caregivers to give them the support needed to play safely on their own terms. Torontonians with disabilities also emphasized to us that, even with accessible structures and staff support, there is a broad need for integrative education programs that could help normalize differences in abilities, so that able-bodied children are more likely to actively include others, rather than exclude.

Lack of awareness about the benefits of outdoor free play and especially “risky play.” Children told us that they struggle to convince adults to let them run loose or get dirty instead of sticking to “boring, little kid playgrounds.” Many parents, children, educators, and funders also prefer indoor activities, overtly educational programming, or organized sports, which may be seen to have more intrinsic value than child-led outdoor play, especially in colder weather. While phones and screens are increasingly a distraction, parents and children are still able to put them away for sports or tutoring—but not always for outdoor play. Multiple organizations told us that they spend additional time educating parents, caregivers, and children, both informally and in workshops, about the reasoning behind year-round outdoor play time. These education efforts are piecemeal; organizations told us that what we need instead is a city-wide conversation to change adult mindsets, as well as curriculum changes to early childhood educator training⁴⁴. More structures providing shade and warmth, and more access to warm clothing, would also help justify outdoor free play in the hottest and coldest months of the year for those who are skeptical.

37 CPHA, 2019c.

38 CPHA, 2019a.

39 City of Toronto, 2018.

40 CPHA, 2019d.

41 IKEA, 2015.

42 Veitch, 2006.

43 ParticipACTION, 2015.

44 Lawson Foundation, 2019.

HOW ARE CHILDREN FARING WHEN IT COMES TO INDEPENDENT MOBILITY?

Both the adults and the children we spoke with expressed an intuitive understanding of the value of children being able to travel on their own, but studies show that 35% of Toronto parents never let their child go out without adult supervision (on their own or with friends)⁴⁵. Only 16% say that their child often or always goes out on their own, with higher rates for children in lower-income communities⁴⁶ where parents and caregivers have fewer options for supervision. In our peer country Australia, even among children who are given some freedoms, 64% of 8 to 12 year olds are “not allowed to travel more than 1 km” and 37% of 10 to 11 year olds are “not allowed to walk further than their own street”⁴⁷.

The decline in children’s independent mobility is closely related to declines in active school travel: in 1986, 53% of 11 to 13 year olds walked to school in Toronto, compared to 43% in 2006⁴⁸. Despite the correlation, initiatives aimed at increasing rates of active school travel do not necessarily measure whether the travel is child-led. As noted in ParticipACTION’s 2016 and 2018 Report Cards, this is an important angle of analysis as part of the overall strategy to promote active transportation and physical activity. Moreover, children’s independent mobility is key to children’s overall wellbeing in Toronto and yet it is rarely discussed as such.

In order to create a city where children can safely and independently navigate their streets and neighbourhoods, we must address the following barriers:

Fear of vehicular traffic is the biggest concern for parents and caregivers when it comes to children’s travel, outweighing their fear of strangers both nationally⁴⁹ and in our online survey. We know that speed management is a key element of improving safety for pedestrians and that children are especially vulnerable to road danger due to their size, as well as their ability to judge speed of moving vehicles. A pedestrian hit at 30 km/h has a 90% chance of survival, at 40 km/h that drops to 70% and at 50 km/h it

drops to only 15%⁵⁰. It is understandable that adults are typically less likely to grant children independent mobility on busy, fast-moving roads than on quieter, slower streets⁵¹. In fact, road safety is intrinsically linked to children’s independent mobility. The top performing countries when it comes to children’s independent mobility also have national policies to promote active transportation and improve road safety⁵². In Toronto, speeding and collisions are increasingly common even on residential streets, and dangerous driving behaviours during school drop-off and pick-up were associated with higher rates of collisions affecting pedestrian children⁵³. From 2008 to 2019, eight children died and 93 were seriously injured while walking or cycling on Toronto’s roads⁵⁴. The 2014 death of Georgia Walsh, who was 7 years old when she was hit by a driver near her home, led to a grassroots initiative in which Toronto residents posted signage asking drivers to slow down⁵⁵ while they waited for more concrete changes. The process for getting traffic calming improvements in a neighbourhood in Toronto can take years, and often has to be initiated by residents, which means wealthier and more established neighbourhoods with residents who have experience navigating City Hall tend to have greater power to advocate for safer streets.

Unwelcoming public realms that exclude or discourage children from travelling on their own. Unsafe walking conditions are widely tolerated in Toronto, especially in our inner suburbs, where streets are more likely to have higher speed limits and wider lanes (which encourage speeding), no crosswalks, no protected bike lanes, and narrow or missing sidewalks. About 6% of Toronto’s arterial roads and 25% of our local roads do not have sidewalks⁵⁶, and where sidewalks do exist, they become unsafe and inaccessible to young children and children with mobility impairments if they are not cleared of snow and ice in the wintertime, severely limiting mobility for some of our most vulnerable residents. In 2018, Duncan Xu was 11 years old when he was hit and killed by a driver while crossing midblock near a

45 Mitra et al., 2014.

46 Ibid.

47 CPHA, 2019c.

48 Buliung et al., 2009.

49 Buck, 2019.

50 City of Toronto, 2017b.

51 Carver et al., 2008.

52 Shaw et al., 2015.

53 Rothman et al., 2016.

54 City of Toronto, 2019d.

55 Karstens-Smith, 2014.

56 City of Toronto, 2019c.

school walkway that was “a convenient route for students [and also] connected residents to a nearby park”⁵⁷. The local city councillor’s response was to close the walkway, eliminating one of the most direct routes to the school for children walking, rather than redesigning the street to force drivers to slow down. A more human or child-centered public realm includes more beauty and opportunity to connect with nature—denser tree coverage is correlated with higher levels of independent mobility⁵⁸—as well as more complete streets with lower speeds, clear physical separation from moving traffic, and protection from the elements like shade in the summer and snow clearance in the winter.

Fear of judgement and authority among parents and caregivers. This fear takes several forms, all founded on the aforementioned cultural norm that good parenting requires “constant supervision”⁵⁹. Some Toronto parents told us that they only accompany their children because they are wary of well-meaning neighbours calling authorities if their children are seen outdoors alone, like in the 2015 case of American siblings who were picked up by police on their walk home from a nearby park⁶⁰. In a focus group, newcomers to Canada said that they had been told that children here are automatically removed from parental care if they are seen alone outdoors. While there are real historic and systemic reasons for lower-income, racialized, Indigenous, and newcomer families to distrust police and child protection services, it is untrue that a child found alone is automatically taken into care; official Children’s Aid Society of Toronto policy, if they are called, is to ascertain whether the child seems prepared and ready for such responsibility. Even long-time Torontonians, including educators we spoke with, hold the mistaken belief that the law requires children to be 10 or 12 before they can travel alone. In fact, “in Ontario, there is no law that sets out a minimum age at which a child can be left unattended for short periods. It’s a judgment call, based on the maturity and confidence of the children.”⁶¹ What Ontario law does require is that caregivers make “reasonable” arrangements for the care of children under 16 left unattended, which may include equipping their child with the skills needed to be alone⁶².

57 Marshall, S. 2018.

58 Buliung, 2012a.

59 CPHA, 2019c.

60 Schulte & St. George, 2015.

61 Rankin, 2019.

62 Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017.



GLOBAL IDEAS AND BEST PRACTICES

Other cities around the world have taken steps to create more opportunities for children's independent mobility and outdoor free play. The following case studies offer inspiration for improving Toronto's public realm for kids.

PLAYING OUT (UNITED KINGDOM)

The non-profit organization Playing Out is the leader of a resident-led movement in the United Kingdom for play streets, in which roads are closed to car traffic and opened for play. Playing Out began in a grassroots fashion with a single street in Bristol 10 years ago, inspired by similar programs in the Netherlands and across Europe that had the dual benefit of protecting children from vehicular traffic while expanding access to safe outdoor play space. Play streets then spread to nearly 200 streets when Bristol's local council created a policy allowing residents to apply to open their street for play for up to three hours per week. Now, 63 local councils have a play streets policy, overseeing almost 1000 play streets, and Playing Out successfully lobbied the national Ministry for Transport to formally

encourage all UK councils to follow suit. The Ministry issued official guidance and legal clarification in 2019, stating that "Play streets offer wonderful opportunities not merely for children, but for families and communities"⁶³. Website: <http://playingout.net>

SCHOOL STREETS (UNITED KINGDOM)

Similar to play streets, the school streets movement closes roads to cars on a regular basis. In this case, roads are closed for 15 to 45 minutes during drop-off and pick-up times in front of schools, to make it safer for students to walk, wheel, or cycle to school. The movement began in Bolzano, Italy, in the 1990s, where it halved pedestrian collisions, and spread to other European countries. In the UK, as with play streets, local councils had a role to play in creating policies to allow for them, using street closure powers established in the 1984 Road Traffic Regulation Act. In Hackney, after a successful pilot project at a small number of schools located on very different types of

⁶³ Ferguson, 2019.



streets, school streets are now being implemented for every primary school in the borough. For some school streets, barriers are laid out by volunteers to physically block cars from entering at the designated times, while for others, automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) cameras are used to send automated fines to violators. On some school streets, no vehicles are allowed, while others allow buses and resident vehicles displaying a permit. Decisions about timing, implementation, and exceptions are arrived at through broad community consultation, and each school street is piloted and evaluated for several months before being made permanent⁶⁴. Website: <http://hackney.gov.uk/school-streets>

CHILD FRIENDLY EDMONTON (CANADA)

Child Friendly Edmonton is a municipal initiative with a mandate to work with individuals, community groups, and government departments to create a better city for children and their families, based on the UNICEF Child

Friendly Cities Initiative. The initiative's coordinator, Ian Smith, was a citizen advocate for a more child friendly city for years prior to receiving funding to establish an office through Edmonton's Council Initiative program, by which individual city councillors can sponsor special projects. With the benefit of municipal funding, the initiative has established working groups; led research and training related to child friendly practices, programs and resources; influenced the adoption of a child friendly lens in city departments; held child-directed play events throughout the city; and more. Among its offerings are a guide called "Involving Young People in Civic Matters," and a Pop Up Play program, which supplies loose parts and paid staff animators at free neighbourhood events supporting child-led risky play in communities across the city that may not have access to traditional play spaces. The Pop Up Play program recently merged with Edmonton's Green Shack program, which has offered year-round paid staff programming in 220 municipal parks and playgrounds for over 50 years, using loose parts and other supplies kept onsite in their titular green shacks Website: <http://edmonton.ca/childfriendly>

64 Sanderson, 2019.





Documentary still. Image credit: Nature Play Queensland.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAY PROJECT (AUSTRALIA)

The Neighbourhood Play Project is a state-funded research project and documentary film built around the concept that resident-led activation can turn neighbourhoods back into places where children can experience child-led play⁶⁵. It was created in response to research showing that the average Australian childhood has shifted in just one generation from being outdoors, active, independent, social, community orientated to being indoors, sedentary, technologically immersed, highly structured, fearful, and risk adverse. Two families were selected for the project from very different neighbourhoods, and researchers and documentary filmmakers followed them as they worked to champion changes in their communities. Their strategies included workshops and adventurous play dates⁶⁶ supported by the project's parent organization, Nature Play Queensland, a collaborative organization that offers family resources on child-led play, large-scale nature play events, and workshops on nature play space design. The project's challenges and successes informed Nature Play Queensland's 10 Point Neighbourhood Play Plan, a resource offering local residents the opportunity to achieve local agency through practical steps with immediate and measurable results. Websites: <http://natureplayqld.org.au/neighbourhoodplayproject> and <http://vimeo.com/ondemand/neighbourhoodplayproject>



Traffic calming mural. Image credit: Mercedes Benz Korea.

REDUCE TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS CAMPAIGN (SOUTH KOREA)

In South Korea, where children as young as 5 walk to school on their own, collisions skyrocketed in the 1980s after an economic boom meant that more people suddenly had the means to drive, and there were 1,766 child traffic fatalities across the country in 1988. Responding to an urgent need for action, the national School Zone Improvement Project implemented measures like reduced speed limits, more demarcated sidewalks, traffic calming murals, and a ban on curbside parking on roads leading to school entrances⁶⁷. An amendment to the Child Welfare Act mandated road safety education in schools to help children understand how to navigate streets on their own; kindergarteners are taught how to safely cross the road, elementary school students map out routes to take, and middle schoolers learn how to use and maintain bicycles. Elementary school classes also go on field trips to experiential "traffic parks" where young children can learn how to use crosswalks and interpret traffic signs on mock roadways⁶⁸. These integrated infrastructure and education initiatives, which take for granted that children have the right to independent mobility, reduced children's traffic fatalities across the country by an incredible 97% from 1988 to 2014⁶⁹.

⁶⁵ Moser, 2019.

⁶⁶ Agius, 2019.

⁶⁷ ARUP, 2017.

⁶⁸ GADRRRES, 2017.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

BARNETRÅKK, OR KIDS' TRACKS (NORWAY)

Norway's Barnetråkk program has worked for decades to prioritize children in the long-term planning process by asking them to map out where they live, where they go, streets and trails they use, and areas they perceive as dangerous. Globally, there are few programs that identify children's independent mobility as an explicit goal rather than the by-product of other efforts, but Barnetråkk is an exception⁷⁰. The impetus came from Norway's 1989 Building and Planning Act, which required every county to appoint a representative for children's interests, and gave children the right to participate in the land use planning process. Vestfold County responded by creating Barnetråkk, which established multiple partnerships at the local, regional, and national levels and across departments of culture, parks, and education in order to implement infrastructure and program changes based on the children's input. In Vestfold County, children's hand-drawn maps informed the Municipal Master Plan and were shared with developers so that they could incorporate informal children's paths and play areas into their planning. The county saw dramatic traffic safety improvements as a result.⁷¹ Now, municipalities across Norway use Barnetråkk, also known as The Vestfold Method, to receive children's input into planning decisions, using laptops and tablets in classroom workshops. Website: <http://barnetrakk.no/en>

SPEELWEEFSELPLAN, OR PLAY WEB (BELGIUM)

The Speelweefselplan model bears similarities to Barnetråkk. In Antwerp, researchers use the city's open data platform to create masterplans for individual neighbourhoods, highlighting "parks, playgrounds, public spaces, sports facilities, schools, cafés, shopping, and other key features," and then work with children aged 6 to 14 through school programs, youth clubs, and on playgrounds to understand where they played and spent time with friends, and their travel routes to each destination⁷². The resulting Play Web "provides the city with a framework for infrastructure improvements along children's common travel routes and further investments in creating more accessible journeys"⁷³. These improvements have included traffic calming, additional crossings, and more greenery and "play stimuli" along popular routes⁷⁴. Some play stimuli are items like logs and willow tunnels, but as project lead Wim Seghers explains, "it can be something like a concrete stepping stone, not even a play device, but when children find it on their route they know that it's fun, that they can sit on it, lie on it, jump on and off of it — it makes the route more attractive and more child friendly"⁷⁵; in other words, play stimuli create new opportunities to play in unexpected places, improving access to play spaces. This planning approach encourages cities to consider play and mobility in tandem rather than focusing on either one in isolation. Website (in Dutch): <http://antwerpen.be/info/antwerpse-speelweefselplannen>

⁷⁰ Shaw et al, 2015.

⁷¹ Lees et al., 2009.

⁷² Gill, 2018.

⁷³ Krysiak, 2019.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

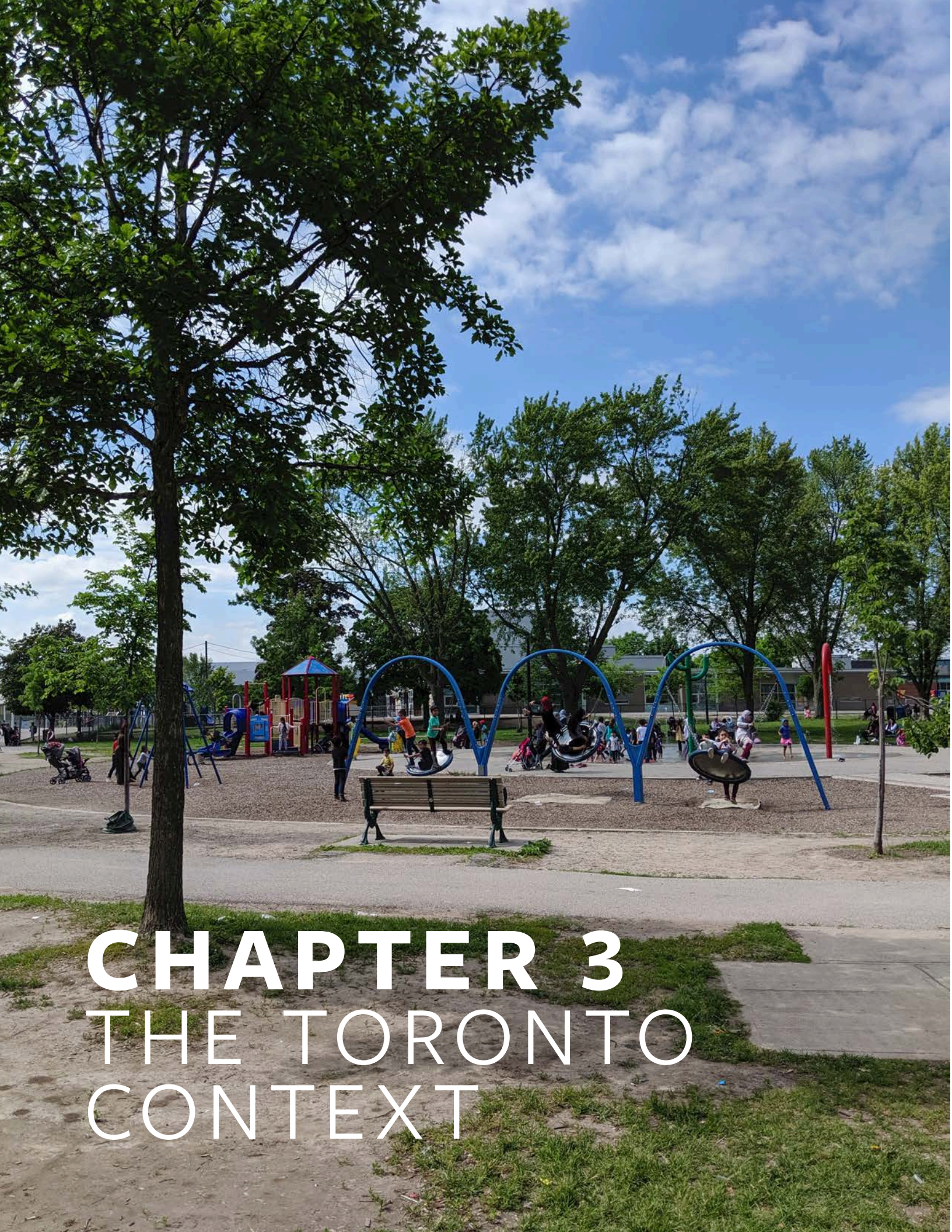
⁷⁵ Darabi, 2018.



Bergen Barnetråkk program. Image credit: Bergen Council



Play stimulus in Rotterdam. Image credit: Tim Gill



CHAPTER 3

THE TORONTO

CONTEXT

ASSETS TO BUILD UPON

Toronto is fortunate to have numerous city resources and initiatives, community organizations, and private enterprises already working to promote outdoor free play and children's independent mobility. We highlight just a selection of these incredible assets in the list below. This list demonstrates that we have many of the tools and structures necessary to become a leading child friendly city; we just need to come together to build upon them.

CITY RESOURCES AND INITIATIVES

Toronto's streets are one of the largest public spaces in our city. We have about 5,600 km of street network, accounting for about 25% of Toronto's total land area⁷⁶. Our streets present an amazing underused asset for creating more opportunities for children's physical activity, social interaction and connection to their city.

Toronto's civic commons include our 58 outdoor pools, 138 splash pads, 54 outdoor artificial ice rinks and 30-40 sanctioned natural rinks, 100 libraries, 152 community and recreation centres, and 1,500 individual parks, beaches, and ravines, which cover 8,000 hectares or 13% of the total land area of the city. The Bentway, located under the Gardiner Expressway, showcases best practices for taking advantage of underused public space, and Dufferin Grove Park offers a model of volunteer-led programming to create accessible community spaces. All of these public amenities are proudly offered free of charge to ensure equitable access for all residents. The City's 2019 Parkland Strategy includes plans to expand and improve the parks system with a focus on improving pedestrian and accessible access to parks⁷⁷, and the Accessible Recreation office works to support people with disabilities who want to be involved in recreational activities. Website: <http://toronto.ca/parklandstrategy>.

Free public transit for children 12 and under has dramatically expanded distances that children can travel through independent mobility without concern for cost. This policy was enacted in 2015 as part of a city-wide poverty reduction strategy. In the first full year of its implementation, child ridership doubled, and was expected to increase every year afterwards⁷⁸. Website: <http://toronto.ca/toprosperity>.

Child Friendly TO is an interdivisional initiative to build a culture that applies a child friendly lens to inform planning and decision-making at City Hall and beyond, based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. In fall 2019, the initiative launched with 22 champions representing 22 divisions at the City. They committed to elevating the role and voice of children in municipal affairs and promoting the rights of children across Toronto. Child Friendly TO also worked with Maximum City (see below) on KidScore. Website: <http://toronto.ca/childfriendlyto>.

The Vision Zero Road Safety Plan is based on the understanding that all road deaths are preventable and that zero road deaths is an achievable vision. The plan includes traffic calming measures (speed humps, pinch points, and chicanes), speed limit reductions, more sidewalks, more red light cameras, more traffic signals and pedestrian crossovers, more school crossing guards, and an active school travel pilot program, among other initiatives. Website: <http://toronto.ca/visionzero>.

Growing Up: Planning for Children in New Vertical Communities, a 2015 study by the Planning division, produced draft guidelines on how new development can better function for larger households at three scales—the unit, the building and the neighbourhood—to be more responsive to the needs of Toronto's youngest residents and therefore all segments of the population. Website: <http://toronto.ca/growingupto>.

⁷⁶ City of Toronto, 2017.

⁷⁷ City of Toronto, 2019a.

⁷⁸ Spurr, 2017.



COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND PRIVATE INITIATIVES

8 80 Cities is sparking conversation about vibrant, age-friendly streets and the Vision Zero concept through a series of pop-up demonstrations called 8 80 Streets. The first two pop-ups, on Danforth Ave and Pineway Blvd, looked at how road design can make streets safer and more welcoming for people of all ages. The third pop-up, in October 2019, was a four-day school streets demonstration on Mountview Avenue in front of Keele Street Public School, inspired by the UK school streets program. The pop-up received overwhelmingly positive community response from students, parents, caregivers, and school staff and 8 80 Cities is looking into next steps to expand school streets across the city. Websites: <http://880cities.org> and <http://880streets.ca>

The Boys and Girls Club of West Scarborough runs numerous programs year-round, including a summer camp that makes use of the Warden Woods Nature Trail, Woodbine Beach, and Ashbridges Bay Park to offer outdoor

play opportunities for children aged 6 to 12. Website: <http://wsncc.org/bgc>

City Scouts is a weekly summer day camp for children aged 10 to 13 that fosters independent mobility through urban adventure. Children receive challenges that require them to navigate city streets and public transit to reach destinations they may not be familiar with, and camp counsellors accompany but do not lead them. Sometimes, the children make mistakes and get lost, and when they work together to reroute, they build both navigation skills and resilience. Website: <http://www.cityscouts.ca>

Charlie's FreeWheels, located between Moss Park and Regent Park, offers programming and events to promote access to cycling for local youth aged 12 to 25. Their free Build-a-bike programs allow participants as young as 12 to learn bicycle repair, maintenance, and safe riding skills as they use donated parts to create a bike that they can take home to keep and use. While Charlie's FreeWheels does not cater to children under 12, their work with older youth helps to normalize and spread the concept of independent mobility through bicycling. Website: <http://www.charliesfreewheels.ca>

CultureLink's Bike to School Project works with students, teachers, parents, and caregivers to nurture a bike culture in Toronto schools. They lead cycling education programs and events in elementary and secondary schools across the city, often as part of gym classes, and offer family cycling workshops for school councils. TDSB EcoSchools funds cycling education programming for select schools, while other schools can purchase programs individually. The Bike to School Project also runs Bike to School Week across the province. Website: <http://www.culturelink.ca/bike-to-school>

Downsview Park, a large urban park in North York, offers Nature Play through both public events and school programs, allowing children to explore naturalized areas and engage in free play with both natural and human-made loose parts. The school Nature Play program is open to visiting kindergarten to grade 4 classes, while the free public events are for children of all ages. Adults are encouraged to remain hands-off. Website: <http://downsviewpark.ca>

EcoKids promotes outdoor free play through Street Play, a play streets program inspired by the United Kingdom's Playing Out. Working with the City of Toronto, EcoKids piloted a simplified permit process in which residents can apply to close their streets for a few hours on a regular basis for play. Findings from the pilot in 2017 showed that children who participated Street Play engaged in a variety of diverse and imaginative play activities, creating new

games and building items⁷⁹. The program is currently only available in certain municipal wards in which the local city councillor has agreed to provide the liability insurance required by the City for street closures; a change in policy could expand access to Street Play for the whole city. Website: <http://ecokids.ca>

EcoSchools supports students and staff in learning about, caring for, and protecting the environment starting in their own school. They work with numerous external programs, including Ontario Active School Travel and the Bike to School Project. For the Toronto District School Board, TDSB EcoSchools is a department within the TDSB Sustainability Office and is supported by the TDSB Charter for Active, Safe and Sustainable Transportation. Other school boards and independent schools are served by the national non-profit organization EcoSchools Canada. Schools that demonstrate a commitment to sustainability through programs, events, and campaigns can be certified as Bronze, Silver, Gold, or Platinum EcoSchools. Websites: <http://ecoschools.ca> and <http://www.tdsb.on.ca/ecoschools>

Evergreen offers nature-based outdoor free play opportunities at its Evergreen Brick Works location in the heart of the Don Valley ravine system, with paid day camps and Nature School on weekdays, and free Nature Play every weekend. Evergreen is also working with the Toronto District School Board on a child-led placemaking project in which 10 students in grades 5 and 6 received facilitation training, created their own participatory design questions and activities, and led a visioning process with their whole school in order to co-create a master plan to transform their school grounds. Website: <http://evergreen.ca>

Green Communities Canada's Ontario Active School Travel program works with schools and communities to make walking, cycling, and other forms of active, safe, and sustainable transportation the norm for trips to and from school. They do this through research, advocacy, training, educational resources, events, partnerships, and on-the-ground programming. Green Communities Canada worked with an insurance provider on a resource for schools or school boards with fears about liability, noting that active travel interventions actually reduce liability exposure by reducing vehicle congestion in parking lots and roadways, thereby reducing potential for collisions⁸⁰. Websites: <http://greencommunitiescanada.org> and <http://ontarioactiveschooltravel.ca>

Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, located in North York, is Canada's largest children's rehabilitation hospital focused on improving the lives

of kids with disabilities. Their groundbreaking Children's Advisory Council invites kids as young as 3 years old to share ideas about meaningful improvements to the hospital and its services, which have led to design changes that allow children to access more independence when they visit. Holland Bloorview's Spiral Garden invites 6 to 18 year olds with and without disabilities to play together in a beautifully landscaped play space with winding pathways leading to accessible activity centres staffed by artists. Their unstructured summer camp allows children to choose how they spend their time, and the large trees and multiple shade structures make it comfortable for kids to spend long hours playing with clay, working with wood, or telling dramatic stories, with support as necessary from care workers and volunteers. The space and the programming, which promote integration and friendship between children with and without disabilities, are a model for what Toronto's public play spaces could be. Website: <http://hollandbloorview.ca>

Kids In the Woods Initiative (KIWI) aims to reconnect children with nature through year-round adventure play programs in Rouge Park, an urban national park located in



79 Abbasi & Mitra, 2018.

80 Wyseman, 2010.



Scarborough. KIWI follows the adage that “there is no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate clothing,” and its programs for children aged 4 to 12 take place completely outdoors, regardless of cold, rain, or snow. Website: <http://kidsinthewoodsinitiative.org>

The Laneway Project is a non-profit organization offering resources, research, events, and advocacy focused on the potential of Toronto’s over 2,400 public laneways to function as true public spaces, including as unconventional play spaces. In summer 2019, the Laneway Project released a toolkit called “Turning Laneways into Public Spaces” with both inspiration and guidance for community-led laneway improvement projects. Website: <http://thelanewayproject.ca>

The Lawson Foundation has funded tools, resources, and training to build adult capacity to support outdoor play, based on the understanding that “all children from all social, ethnic and economic backgrounds require play-rich opportunities in the outdoors.” In October 2018, the foundation held a multi-sector symposium on child-led outdoor play and early childhood education, synthesized in a May 2019 discussion paper that includes proposed

actions to address existing barriers and gaps. Website: <http://lawson.ca/op-discussion-paper>

Maximum City developed KidScore in 2019 for children 5 to 12, with support from Child Friendly TO. KidScore is both an engagement tool and a metric. Participating children walk outdoors and evaluate how child friendly their streets and neighbourhoods are, using a process and criteria co-created with children. The resulting information and ideas from children’s perspectives, which will be published in an interactive map layered with planning, transportation, and demographic data, will inform neighbourhood-level planning as well as city-wide policies. Website: <http://maximumcity.ca>

MLSE Foundation supports charities across Toronto that provide active or play-based programming for children and youth aged 6 to 29, with a focus on programming that celebrates diversity, addresses barriers, and builds more inclusive communities. MLSE Foundation funds Charlie’s FreeWheels, Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, and more. Website: <http://mlsefoundation.org>



Raising the Village, developed by the Toronto Child & Family Network, uses a number of indicators to monitor 10 wellbeing outcomes for Toronto children under 12 and their families. The resulting Child & Family Inequities Score Map can be used to understand variations in socioeconomic barriers across different Toronto neighbourhoods. Website: <http://raisingthevillage.ca>

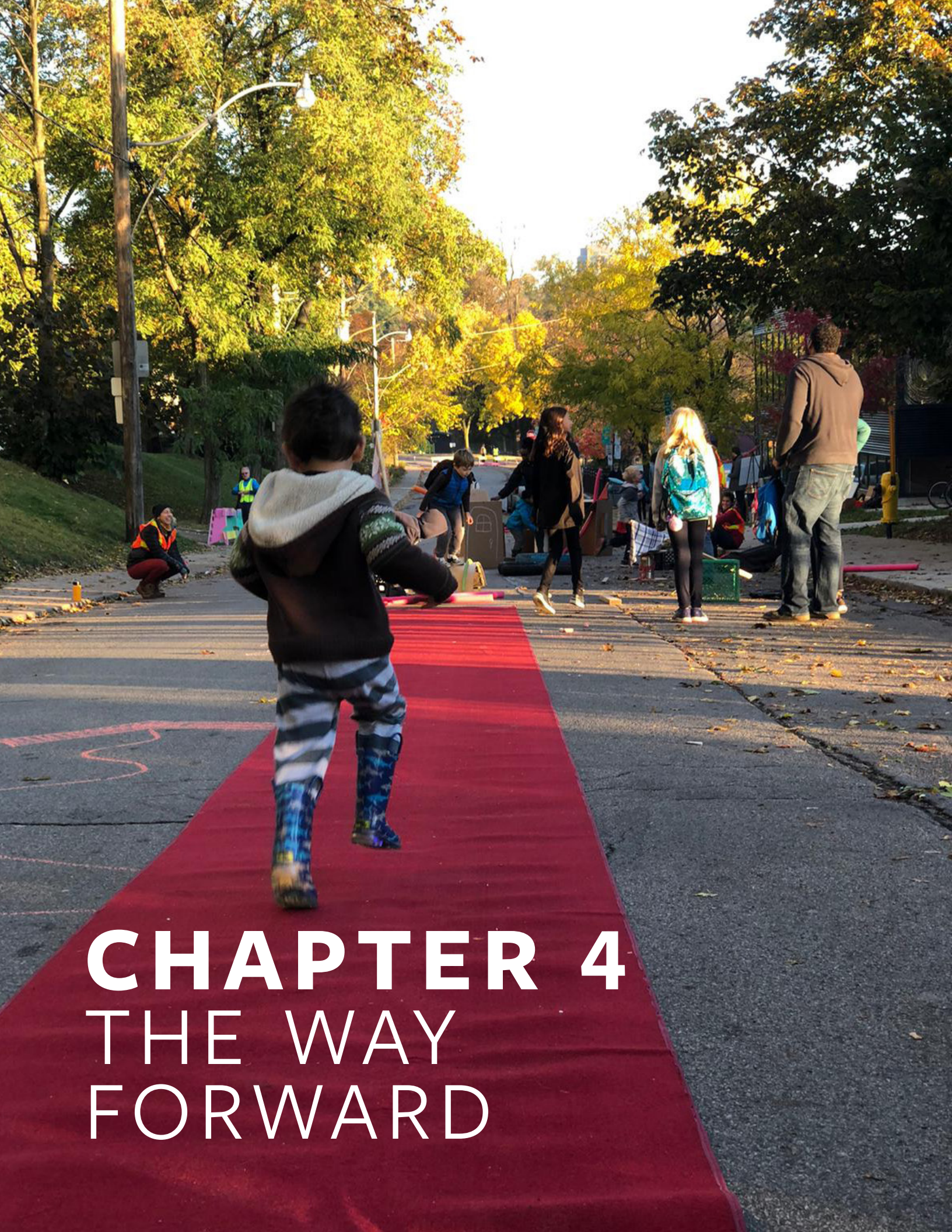
Small Print Toronto's Mouse City program asks children aged 2 to 8 to design a miniature cardboard city for mice that addresses a real-life urban issue, such as the need for accessible public transit. Small Print Toronto also educates city planners about how to transform fun, creative, accessible loose play materials into feedback that can be used to inform the policy and design that shapes cities. Website: <http://smallprinttoronto.org>

TNO - The Neighbourhood Organization provides a wide range of free community services in Thorncliffe Park, Flemingdon Park, St. James Town, and Crescent Town, as well as other satellite locations. Among their offerings are drop-in play groups, after school children's programming, and parent workshops on the importance of year-round outdoor play and guidelines for children's independent

mobility. Staff take children to nearby parks and green spaces for outdoor free play, and provide used bicycles for families that need them. Website: <http://tno-toronto.org>

Open Streets TO is inspired by the open streets movement begun in Bogota, Colombia. For two Sundays each year, Yonge and Bloor Streets are closed to cars and opened to people of all ages. Open Streets TO curates activity hubs to animate the street with activities and performances. While the events are not specifically geared towards children, hundreds of children play and travel in the safety of a car-free street. Open Streets could expand to more days and streets if the City's permitting process didn't require them to hire police to manage every intersection, which constitutes the bulk of their event expenses. Website: <http://openstreetsto.org>

The YMCA is the largest child care and after school care provider in Toronto, with 82 locations across the city. Their child care staff use YMCA's Playing to Learn curriculum, which emphasizes unstructured, child-led exploration and problem-solving using natural materials, and their after school program is built on fun, active, outdoor play. Website: <https://ymca.ca/What-We-Offer/Child-Care>



CHAPTER 4

THE WAY FORWARD

The way we plan, design, and manage Toronto's parks, streets, and public spaces plays a vital role in children's wellbeing.

For decades, we have designed our streets thinking more about the movement of cars than about the health and happiness of children, and we have designed and managed our parks and schoolyards thinking more about limiting liability than about exploration and independence.

Modern childhood suffers from limited independent mobility, play, and social engagement. We need a vision and strategy for a public realm that affirms children's right to move freely and be active participants in their city. This is the essence of My City Too.

The actions we need to take are doable. The following ten recommendations expand upon Toronto's tremendous social and physical infrastructure to address existing inequities. They are intended for City of Toronto decision-makers and policymakers, community organizations, educators, parents, caregivers, and anyone interested in improving quality of life for children in Toronto.

CHILD-LED INCLUSIVE PLAY

Our play spaces need to do more to address a growing Toronto population, be more inclusive of different abilities, and entice children back outside. We also need to shift our liability-focused mindset and recognize that risk-taking is fundamental to children's healthy development. Expanding our understanding of what play can and should be will have physical, mental, social, emotional, and cognitive benefits for children's wellbeing.

Recommendation 1: Think beyond the playground, and design all public spaces to encourage children to play creatively and take risks.

- Provide loose parts like wood, water, sand, and mud in more public parks and play spaces.
- Create play opportunities in unconventional and underused spaces, including public areas around libraries and civic centres, surface parking lots, bus stops, and laneways.
- Enable streets and sidewalks to become places for play (see Recommendation 7).

Recommendation 2: Design for accessibility for all.

- Accelerate the Parkland Strategy's creation of accessible pathways and wayfinding to and through green spaces, including Toronto's ravines.
- Remove barriers and design public spaces to provide more opportunities for children with disabilities to enjoy play. For example, build table-height planters or sandboxes to allow children to play with mud and sand from their wheelchairs.
- Install and maintain child friendly, accessible public washrooms that are open year-round.
- Build more structures to provide shade and warmth, allowing more hours of play on hotter or colder days.
- Provide soft, welcoming lighting for evening play.
- Create more comfortable seating options.
- Clear park pathways of snow and ice in the wintertime.

Recommendation 3: Program and manage public spaces to increase outdoor play.

- Hire year-round professional play staff trained in supporting child-led play, recognizing that reliable staff presence would help alleviate parental concerns and facilitate play for children.
- Support community-led initiatives designed to create opportunities for child-led play, like volunteer park management groups.
- Make it easier for small vendors to open food and refreshment stalls in parks and public spaces.

Recommendation 4: Create or rewrite outdoor play policies to be risk-aware, rather than risk-averse.

- Build capacity for municipal staff that are involved in the design, planning, and management of parks and play spaces to enable risky, child-led play.
- Rewrite internal policies at community organizations, service providers, and institutions to allow for riskier play programming with appropriate preparation and supportive education and resources for staff and children.
- Provide more training to educators and childcare workers about the benefits of child-led play and ways to support risk.

SAFE, HEALTHY, PLAYFUL STREETS

Toronto's Vision Zero Road Safety plan was a good start, but it is being implemented too slowly to address the urgent need for change. Making our streets safer will have the immediate benefit of saving children's lives, and the extended benefit of relieving fears of vehicular traffic for parents, caregivers, educators, and children themselves, facilitating more child-led travel and reducing congestion. While safety from traffic is paramount, we also need to re-imagine our streets in Toronto as assets that can have an enormous positive impact on children's healthy development and well being.

Recommendation 5: Ensure that our streets are child friendly and deliver on the city's commitment to Vision Zero.

- Take a safe systems approach to traffic safety and focus on safe, human-centered road design as the most important tool for reducing fatalities and serious injuries on our streets.
- Complete the sidewalk network. Every street in Toronto needs a sidewalk, yet 25% of local streets don't have one and many more only have a sidewalk on one side of the street.
- Build wider and more welcoming sidewalks, with play stimuli where appropriate.
- Implement a city-wide default speed limit of 30 km/h on all residential and school streets and 40 km/h on arterial and collector roads.
- Retrofit intersections and crossings to prioritize young pedestrians (add curb extensions, reduce turning radii, increase crossing times to accommodate slower walking speeds, build midblock pedestrian islands, and add speed tables and elevated crossings to make children more visible to drivers).
- Eliminate right turns on red lights.
- Make it safer for children to walk and bike in their neighbourhoods by slowing car traffic on residential streets through traffic calming improvements (narrow traffic lanes, add bumpouts and pinch points, plant greenery and trees).
- Make bicycling safe and comfortable on arterials by installing wide protected bike lanes on every major street.
- Require crosswalks (pedestrian crossovers) or traffic lights at all midblock transit stops.
- Institute municipal snow clearance on all sidewalks, bike lanes and park paths across the city.
- Endorse and apply NACTO's (National Association for City Transportation Officials) upcoming "Streets for Kids" Design Guidelines.

Recommendation 6: Streamline and accelerate road safety improvement projects.

- Create a fast-tracked pilot project implementation and evaluation process that allows for quick retrofits of dangerous streets and intersections.
- Reduce onerous traffic engineering approval requirements and remove city councillor veto powers for safe street measures like crosswalks, speed humps, and sidewalks.
- Ensure that all new road infrastructure investments pass the "80/80 test" and prioritize children's independent mobility and safety.

Recommendation 7: Expand education programs that promote children's active travel.

- Integrate active travel and safe bicycling education into elementary school curricula across the city, working with existing programs like Green Communities Canada, EcoSchools, and CultureLink's Bike to School Project (see pages 18 to 21).
- Educate decision-makers about how active travel programs limit liability exposure by reducing congestion and therefore collisions.

Recommendation 8: Expand play streets, school streets and open streets programs.

- Expand the EcoKids' existing Street Play program across the city by providing City insurance rather than requiring residents or city councillors to provide their own (see page 18).
- Implement a school streets pilot through either a Street Play-like permitting process or a change in municipal bylaws (see pages 12 and 18).
- Expand programs like Open Streets TO by providing more sustainable funding for longer routes and more frequent implementation (see page 21).

CHILD-CENTERED DECISION-MAKING

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to give their opinion, and for adults to listen and take their opinions seriously. Listening to children is not only our duty as adults, but also the best way for us to ensure that we are creating a city that addresses children's needs and abilities, and not one that is based on old assumptions about what is appropriate for them. Children's engagement activities also build leadership skills and give children a sense of ownership over their city. We are thrilled that the City of Toronto's Child Friendly TO initiative is already beginning this work.

Recommendation 9: Center children in municipal planning and decision-making processes.

- Educate city staff on engaging children. Resources could include Child Friendly Edmonton's "Involving Young People in Civic Matters" guide or 880 Cities' "Building Better Cities with Young Children and Families" guide for engaging children under age 5.
- Create Children's Advisory Councils for public-facing city divisions and ensure that participating children represent a diversity of lived experiences, including children living with a disability.
- Facilitate neighbourhood-level planning that integrates play and mobility by creating Torontonians versions of Norway's Barnetråkk or Belgium's Speelweefselplan (see page 15).
- Require Planning, Transportation, and Parks, Forestry and Recreation divisions to consult children from the beginning of any public project, using models offered by Evergreen's participatory design process, Maximum City's KidScore, or Small Print Toronto's Mouse City (see pages 18 to 21).
- As part of city procurement processes, require external consultants and subcontractors to engage children as stakeholders on Planning, Transportation, and Parks, Forestry and Recreation projects.

Recommendation 10: Give parents and caregivers tools to enable children's participation in the public realm.

- Work with community partners to share resources with parents, caregivers, decision-makers, and authority figures regarding Children's Aid Society policies and provincial laws that allow children to experience independent outdoor play or travel if they are ready for it.
- Raise awareness of best practices for assessing a child's readiness to be unaccompanied in public space, and for helping them achieve readiness. For example, Holland Bloorview's "strengths-based" approach focuses on a child's level of capability rather than their limitations.

These recommendations are not exhaustive. As we continue to learn with and from Toronto children, we will better understand how we can support their outdoor free play and independent mobility in the city. We look forward to continuing to convene, connect, and collaborate with the network of experts, advocates, community members, decision-makers, and children we met through this process as we build towards our shared goal of creating a more child friendly Toronto.



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