

## **“Playing together!” – Collaboration, the key to inclusive and natural play outcomes**

Presenter - Walter Van Der Loo

Just as playing together as kids has many benefits, so too does “playing together” (collaborating) as professionals in the planning, design and implementation of play projects.

This presentation is intended for those responsible for the provision of playgrounds – particularly larger multi-dimensional public playgrounds. These types of playgrounds are becoming increasingly popular as public authorities strive to meet the perceived needs of an increasingly diverse community for exciting play within a controlled environment.

Large multi-dimensional playgrounds cost a lot of money to establish and maintain. They also generally attract significant use and have the potential to have greater impact on large number of users. Therefore asset managers, capital works programmers, project managers, designers, specialists, suppliers, constructors and operations staff all have a responsibility to ensure the greatest potential for appropriate play opportunities is realised for each and every playground project.

The first key message of this presentation is that provision of playgrounds is not an end in itself. Playgrounds are merely a means for enabling play and all the benefits that come with play.

Planners of playground provision may generally have good intentions for play provision. However there are often many other drivers that affect how briefs are prepared for playground projects. This presentation will explore how different paradigms and motivations may affect decision makers in preparing briefs. What are we in control of? Do we really understand the challenge or opportunity? What are the important issues? What red herrings will try and distract us? It will also explore how decision makers can find collaboration in planning to ensure a playground project can have the best inception possible.

Designers of large multi-dimensional playgrounds are most often the lightning rod for the development of the physical manifestation of public authorities’ and communities’ vision (explicit or implicit) for playground projects. Designers are usually relied upon to provide leadership in ensuring the “process” takes into account all foreseen (and sometimes unforeseen) factors and resolve all issues. However they are often confronted by complex range of conflicting or difficult to apply standards, serious risk management challenges, funding limitations and operational constraints. To further complicate matters evolving trends in play provision such as providing for greater nature based and free play, and improving inclusive play opportunities demand an increase in designers’ breadth of knowledge and experience.

The second key message of this presentation is that the opportunity exists now more than ever for innovative and exciting collaborations between generalists and specialists that could result in significant improvements in play opportunity provision.

The presentation will use project examples to explore the planning design and implementation process and share lessons learnt and benefits gained from sharing knowledge and experiences between a diverse range of individuals involved in play planning, design and provision. A particular example that will be used is the Yokine Regional Open Space inclusive playground designed through collaboration between AECOM, Fiona Robbe Landscape Architect and City of Stirling. A design has been developed for a \$3M play space and support facilities, with the tender package currently being finalised by the City of Stirling for the first stage. The presenter has been involved in the Yokine project since inception while employed at the City through to design development and documentation as a consultant to the City. Useful insight will be provided resulting from addressing the same project from both the client and consultant perspective.

The presentation will also explore methods for improving collaboration, in particular utilising the aspects of Stephen Covey’s *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. It will also provide helpful hints regarding key considerations that attendees can take away immediately and assist them in their own planning and design for highly successful inclusive and natural play outcomes.

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