



# *Wild Zones*

**How to Create and Enjoy Them  
A Toolkit**



Wild Zones

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# Wild Zones

## How to create and enjoy them

### WHAT IS A WILD ZONE?

#### A new form of public space

Wild Zones are places where adults, children and adolescents can co-create a new form of public space that is dedicated to unstructured free play in a natural setting. Wild Zones differ from parks and nature reserves because they offer opportunities to interact with nature rather than leaving it untouched:

- Build dens, forts and treehouses
- Make new pathways
- Play around with water and mud
- Create sculptures from natural materials
- Invent games
- Other kinds of free play.

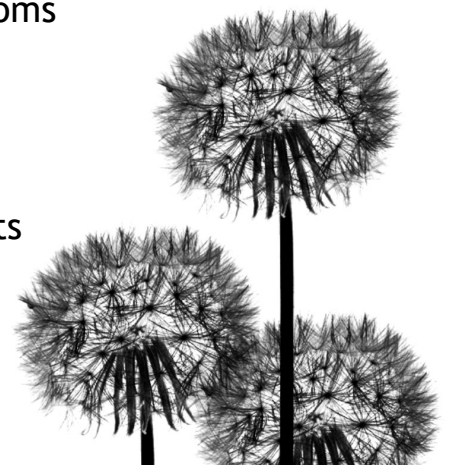
Wild Zones allow for all types of play to be discovered by children, teenagers and adults. Each Wild Zone is an outdoor laboratory of creativity with open-ended possibilities for self-designed play, learning, and socializing. They are places where adults, children and adolescents can play freely in ways that enhance people's connection with each other and with nature.

### WHO ARE WILD ZONES FOR?

Wild Zones are places for **intergenerational** play and creativity:

Children	Teenagers
Adults	Seniors
Families	Artists and would-be artists
Friends	Business people
Disabled people	Single people
Single parents	Weekend dads or moms
Neighbors	Volunteers
Mentors	Aunts and uncles
Churches	Synagogues
Mosques	Temples
Birthday Parties	Team-building events

**All are welcome!**



## HOW ARE WILD ZONES STRUCTURED?

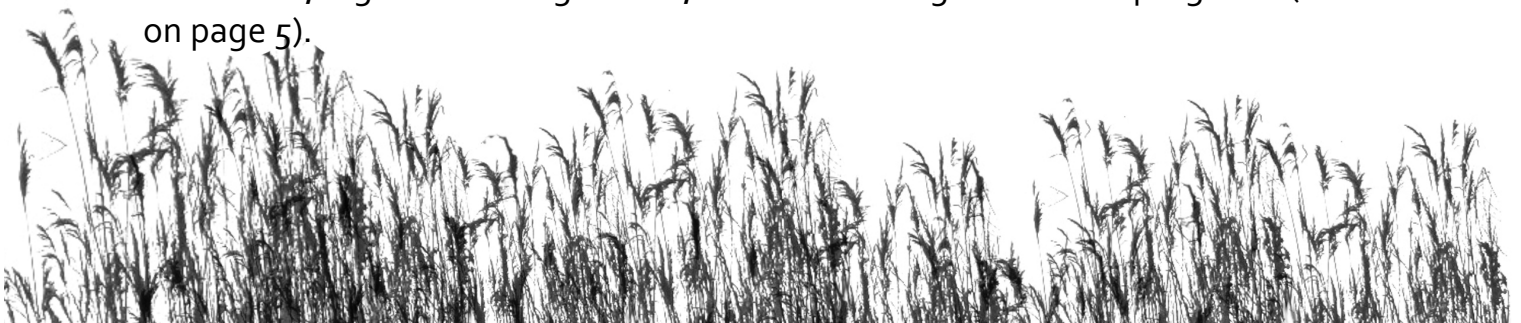
Wild Zones are a new concept for land use. Currently, on most public land people are not allowed to dig holes, build forts or use natural materials to make sculpture, just as most public land didn't allow people to grow food, use skateboards or let dogs run off leash before there were community gardens, skate parks and dog parks.

Wild Zones can be structured as an officially designated site (at a Park or Nature Area or school) that is permanently dedicated to unstructured play in and with nature. A Wild Zone could also exist for two hours a week or one afternoon a month as a community event within a Park, camp or other open space that does not have a permanently designated Wild Zone. For example:

### **A. Family Play Days or other special Wild Zone events**

Wild Zone activities can be scheduled in parks or other open space on a regular or occasional basis. A Family Play Day can be open to the whole community or could be offered by a particular agency, community organization, religious group, school or business for their constituents.

- A typical Family Play Day or other Wild Zone event might last 2-3 hours. The number of participants can vary greatly, depending on the site and the activities. For example, the Family Play Day in Santa Clara has about 150 participants and takes place on less than two acres within the 40 acre Ulistac Natural Area. An 'Art in Nature' event might involve 20 young people and 5 adults in a designated area in a city park (it could be as small as 50' X 50').
- On a larger scale, "Michigan Mud Day" has over 1,000 children, teens and adults rolling, playing and laughing in the mud for several hours; the Wayne County Parks Department creates the shallow mud pit each July by mixing 200 tons of topsoil with 20,000 gallons of water. (The Fire Department hoses everyone off afterwards!)
- Wild Zone events with themes such as fort building, nature sculpture, mud play, fairy houses, etc. also be scheduled activities for after school programs, YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, Big Brothers Big Sisters, and other intergenerational programs (see "Menu" on page 5).



## B. Environmental education

Research shows that **self-directed play in nature** is the most effective way for children to develop a deep bond of affection for the natural world. From this love of nature comes the passionate commitment to environmental stewardship that has guided such pioneers as John Muir and Rachel Carson. Free play can be included in environmental education alongside information-based programs so that children can develop the passion and skills needed to protect the earth. Wild Zones and the Environmental Studies Institute at Santa Clara University are developing a pilot curriculum that integrates free play and environmental studies. Please feel free to contact us for more information.

## C. Nature Play Areas at Schools, Pre-schools and Day Care Centers

These can be small or large areas that include natural materials that lend themselves to imaginative play (see **Materials** page 7)

## D. Permanent land use

**A portion of an existing park** or other open space can be officially designated as a Wild Zone with its own particular rules and regulations (just as Rose Gardens or lakes or picnic areas have their designated uses and rules).

**An unused or derelict space could also be 're-wilded'** by people by planting diverse species, building imaginative structures, creating art with natural materials and encouraging intergenerational free play in an evolving nature area.

Any change in land use requires a group of people who are committed to working with government agencies, non-profits and community members that represent a wide range of perspectives and needs. (See "Getting People Involved" on page 11).

This is rarely (or, realistically, never) a quick or simple process. But there are many resources (see Appendix) to support your efforts. And every Wild Zone that is designated will make it easier for the next ones to succeed!

## MENU OF POSSIBLE ACTIVITIES

### A. Nature Art and Free Play in the Wild Zone

This includes using natural materials such as rocks, dirt, branches, seeds, pinecones, leaves and mud for making art or other hands-on free play. These activities could be open-ended or themed. The possibilities are endless. A few examples:

- Dens, Forts and Secret Spaces
- Wild and Wacky Mud Art
- Where the Wild Things Are: Fairies, Ogres and other Creatures of the Wild Zone
- Building New Paths, Secret Passageways and Art Trails
- Water and Mud Play
- Digging, mining and earth works
- Family Play Day

### B. Build Infrastructure

Examples of projects include:

- Write, design and build signs to explain the Wild Zone and invite people to come and play
- Design and build signs that say 'Get off the Path. Come in and play'
- Design and build a Gate (a non-permanent 'entry way') into the Wild Zone – even if there isn't a fence
- Design and build 'Secret Entrances' and 'Obstacles' around perimeter
- Plant the Art Garden" (with materials that are good for making art: curly willow, bamboo, manzanita, reeds, plants with interesting seedpods)
- Create sites for Water Play" (stream; mud hole; gully that cries out for stepping stones, a boardwalk or a bridge)
- Create boulder pile for climbing
- Prune fallen trees to maximize climbing (make soft landing spot under tree – with woodchips, leaf piles, etc.)
- Pathmaking: Build new and interesting paths through impenetrable areas
- Build toolshed and benches" using natural materials such as cob, strawbales, driftwood, logs...



- Construct 'Alone Zone' with opportunities for reflection, solo activities, etc.
- Create Landmark Mud Art: work with a professional artist to make large permanent sculptures from mud, rocks, branches, etc.

## Suggested Guidelines for Wild Zones

Here are some sample guidelines. Each community will decide what works best their particular situation:

- Please use this space and these materials to create playfully, enjoy the creativity of others, and honor nature.
- The art and structures you find here are for you to appreciate, alter, reuse, and recycle.
- When you create new things in the Wild Zone, you should expect them to be appreciated, altered, and reused.
- The natural materials inside the designated Wild Zone area have been collected by Wild Zone volunteers for your use. Please don't collect materials from other parts of \_\_\_\_\_ [name of park] on your own. If you want to suggest materials for the Wild Zone, please talk to the staff or volunteers.
- The Wild Zone is the only area of \_\_\_\_\_ Park that has been designated as an area for hands-on interaction with natural materials. We hope that you will enjoy playing and expressing your creativity in this Zone, but please remember that these activities are not allowed in other areas of \_\_\_\_\_ Park.

**The community involved at each Wild Zone will have to make its own policies regarding:**

- Hours of operation
- Fences, gates
- Tools and toolshed
- Permitted or non-permitted activities, for example:
  - Climbing trees
  - Water play and mud play
  - Types of constructions allowed (for example, tree houses? Making new pathways? Improvised play equipment such as see-saw or swing?)
  - Harvesting branches or other parts of living plants for constructions (can these be harvested during unsupervised activities or only during supervised programmed activities?)
- Maintenance
- Volunteer orientation and trainings for building infrastructure, maintenance, soliciting donations, adult supervision ('Play Rangers'), etc.
- Animals – is dog walking allowed in the Wild Zone? On or off leash?



## MATERIALS

A wide range of natural objects that lend themselves to creativity and play can be included in a Wild Zone at a park or in a natural play area in a school ground. They can also be brought in especially for a Wild Zone event. After the event they can be removed or left for others to use, depending on the agreement with the particular site. Examples of materials: **rocks, sand, dirt, straw, mud, branches, driftwood, sticks, seed pods, seeds, bark, leaves, wood, roots, shells, pine needles, flowers, stems, stalks, seaweed, pine cones, fronds, feathers, bones, beans, grains, nuts...**

These materials can be collected in advance from various sites (with permission) or onsite by participants during the event. You can also request donations from local businesses (landscaping suppliers, tree pruning companies, nurseries, etc.) **Sample letters** requesting donations of materials are in Appendix B.

## WHAT IS THE ROLE OF ADULTS IN ‘FREE PLAY’?

As much as people may wish that children could be let loose for unstructured play the way we were as kids, it’s not going to go back to how it used to be. There will be adults in Wild Zones. A Wild Zone is essentially an intergenerational space – not just a place to drop off kids to play. Often adults will come with their families or neighbors to a Family Play Day. All ages will come as part of school field trips, after-school programs, day camps, youth programs, religious fellowship programs, or community projects.

## ‘PLAY RANGERS’ AND ‘PLAY FORAGERS’

Sometimes there will be teenagers or adults trained to work as paid or volunteer ‘Play Rangers’. The Play Ranger training offered by Wild Zones focuses on acting as a ‘hands-off’ facilitator, and offers suggestions for how to facilitate rather than regulate play (see Guidelines below).

‘Play Foragers’ collect materials that will enhance the play potential of the site (see Materials, above).

## WHAT IS PLAY?

Play is a set of behaviors that are **freely chosen, personally directed** and **intrinsically motivated**.

(See ‘Appendix F’ for Types of Play)



## **GUIDELINES: Role of adults**

The guidelines below can be the basis for trainings that encourage adults to explore ways of being with children that allow them to discover and engage in free play. They are designed to help adults re-learn the joy of unstructured play and feel comfortable with a child-led agenda, with a focus on how to foster rather than regulate play – and how to let kids find their own way, in their own time.

Some of these suggestions will not come easily to adults because we are usually expected to instruct young people in the right way to do things and to regulate all aspects of children's lives. People will find different aspects of these guidelines come naturally or feel challenging – the diversity of adults in the Wild Zone can support each other in exploring new ways of being with children.

*These guidelines are intended for discussion and reflection. They are not 'rules'. Always use your own good judgment.*

### ***Don't unwrap the children's presents for them.***

- Give children time and space to explore what's there without trying to engage them in something that you think they would enjoy.
- Kids are so used to being told what to do and the right way to do it, that it may take some time (and perhaps frustration) for some kids to find their intrinsic motivation and figure out how they want to direct their own activities.
- Tolerate children's uncertainty or boredom – don't try to solve it for them.

### ***Don't show them how to play with their presents***

- Let kids discover for themselves how to do things, even if it takes them longer or they don't do it in the most efficient manner.







### ***No gold stars are needed***

- \* Interact with kids in a way that expresses interest in what they want to tell you about what they are doing, but avoid praising or judging. Even positive judgment takes it out of the realm of play and into the realm of pleasing others, rather than doing something for the intrinsic pleasure of it.
- \* Find alternatives to standard phrases for praising such as 'Good Job!' or 'Well done!' For example: 'That looks like fun' or 'What did you enjoy about making that?' Or anything that authentically expresses your interest in the child's project rather than your judgement of it.

### ***Be playful yourself***

- Enter into the joy of unstructured play. Engage in your own play or activity, but be aware of what is happening with kids and be ready to leave what you are doing to respond to what is happening with the children.
- This concept is called 'parallel play' – it is a proven method of encouraging children to play in creative ways. You can dig a hole or skip stones or daub mud on your arm or stack stones or build something... anything – as long as it is truly interesting or fun for YOU (not just something you think would be fun for a kid).

### ***Be interested, but respect the inner life of the child at play.***

- It is not always possible or useful to put important experiences into words. Falling in love, grief from losing a loved one, relating to nature – these are private experiences and it may not be appropriate to explain them to someone else. Avoid questioning children in order to satisfy your curiosity about what this experience means to them.

### ***Refrain from the 'teachable moment'***

- Allow the child's own meanings or interpretations to take priority over the 'teachable moment' – whether it is about science, math, ecology or other forms of knowledge.
- Be curious, share memories, be excited or amused or touched, but hold back from suggestions, instructions, advice or commentary.

### ***Explore ways to feel comfortable with a child-led agenda***

- Think about times when you have solved a problem or met a challenge without someone else giving advice or instructions. Use these memories as motivation for allowing children to be self-directed in their play and projects in the Wild Zone.

### ***Allow children to find a way through their own conflicts and challenges***

- Play is an excellent context for learning about how to manage conflicts without adult arbitration
- Other children may step forward to improve a situation
- As in all other parts of life, please do interrupt bullying, racism, cruelty or violence.

### ***Trust (This, above all)***

- Children's brains and emotions are designed to learn much of what they need to know by playing. Most studies on the value of free play emphasize its crucial value in developing social skills and all forms of cognitive and emotional development.
- Unless someone is hurting themselves or hurting others, or taking a risk that may truly result in injury, try not to interfere. Self-directed play is a key to lifelong learning and evaluating risk is an important survival strategy.

Wild Zones' co-founders Karen Payne and David Hawkins are available for trainings of 'Play Rangers' and any other adults who are spending time with children in the Wild Zone.

*That was the main thing about kids then: we spent an awful lot of time doing nothing... All of us, for a long time, spent a long time picking wild flowers. Catching tadpoles. Looking for arrowheads. Getting our feet wet. Playing with mud. And sand. And water... What there was to do with sand was let it run through your fingers. What there was to do with mud was pat it, and thrust in it, lift it up and throw it down... My world, as a kid, was full of things that grownups didn't care about.*

- Robert Paul Smith

## Getting People Involved

### Building Social Capital: Community organizing and community development

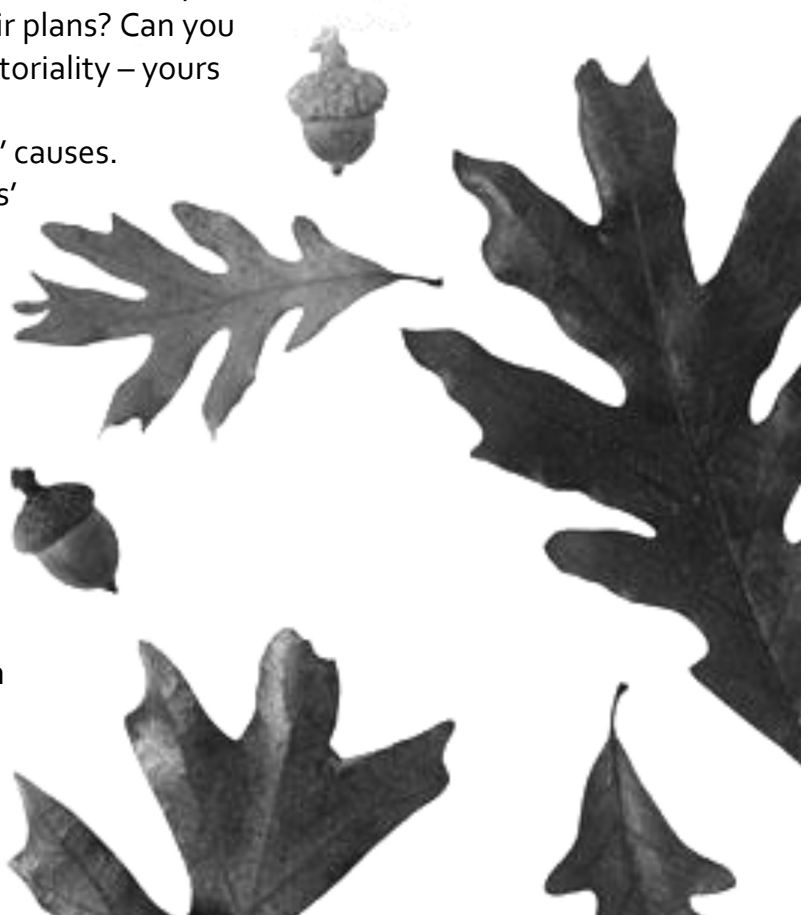
A Family Play Day or other pilot Wild Zone event can be launched by an organization or small group of community members in a few weeks. However, establishing a Wild Zone as a permanent new land use (such as a dog park or community garden) takes more time, effort and people. Here are some basic principles of community development that will help you get started in establishing a new Wild Zone. There's more information in Appendix G: Resources.

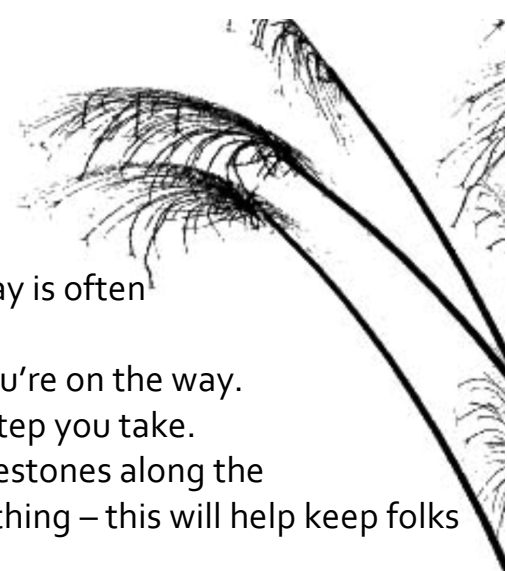
**Cast your net widely in seeking help. Ask around the neighborhood and your community including your friends. You never know where help will come from, and you'll need a diversity of talent to launch Wild Zones.**

- Identify stakeholders
  - Who cares about the park or other space where the Wild Zone might be located?
  - Who cares about children's health and well-being?
  - Who cares about the needs and potentials of teenagers?
  - Who cares about building more vibrant communities?
- Form a broad-based community coalition by inviting different stakeholders to discuss the proposed Wild Zone
  - Reach out to the neighboring community and keep people informed about your plans from the beginning. People have less tendency to get polarized if they have information and feel that you are taking their concerns, hopes, and fears seriously.
  - Who is already working in the area? What can you learn from them? Is part or all of your project in their plans? Can you help or partner? Think about territoriality – yours and theirs.
  - Most conflicts are between 'good' causes. Be prepared to incorporate others' goals, broaden your ideas, and compromise.


### Strategize based on communities strengths and assets

- Identify local assets
  - Who has time, interest, skills and resources to contribute to this project?
  - How could people of diverse backgrounds make a contribution based on the traditions and skills in their communities?



- 
- How can the energy and creativity of children and teenagers contribute to creating and sustaining the Wild Zone?
  - Prioritize the steps you take, based on what is most broadly supported, most needed, and doable.
    - Perfection is the enemy of 'Done'. A good plan today is often better than a perfect plan tomorrow.
    - Just get started. Do something small that shows you're on the way. It will be much easier to attract support with each step you take.
    - When a project takes years to realize, have real milestones along the way – host an event, plant something, install something – this will help keep folks from losing heart or interest.

### **Develop and Nurture Relationships**

- 
- Make time for building respectful and caring relationships
    - Welcome everyone, every time.
    - Listen.
    - Thank everyone for everything. People remember how you make them feel.
    - Always be nice to government officials and staff. They'll be grateful, because people are often not polite to them.
    - Allow time in meetings for people to socialize and network – as well as getting through the agenda.
    - Things will get easier as you develop a broad network of contacts, partners, and a track record. A good way to do this is by helping others with related efforts.
      - Nurture diverse leaders
        - Encourage people to take on roles that interest them even if they don't have much experience. Let them work with someone who has experience so that they can gain skills and confidence.
        - Invite a wide range of people to attend meetings and make presentations – don't always have the same 'leaders' and representatives speak on behalf of the Wild Zone.
        - Don't be bashful about ASKING others to assist. Enlisting is often the best way to 'find' volunteers.

## Include Families

- Schedule meetings and events at times that are convenient for the work, school and family schedules of parents.
- Schedule meetings so that children and teenagers can participate.

## Expect things to take much more time and effort than you anticipate.

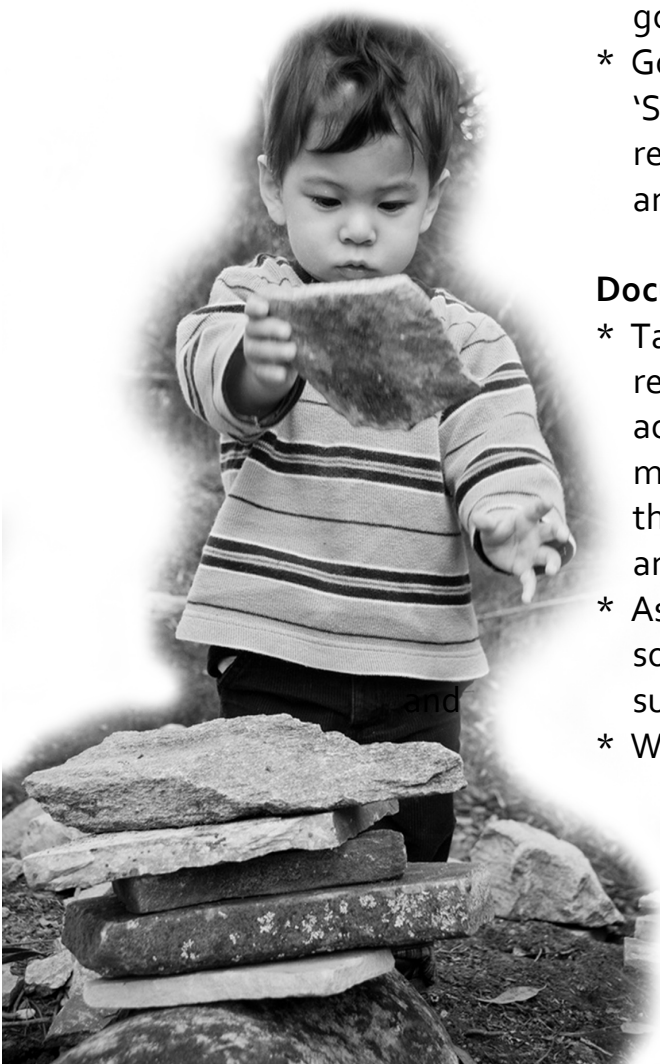
- Be prepared for a long process. Sometimes nine-tenths of success is just showing up at meetings. Sometimes, the one who attends the most meetings wins.
- You (or someone) will have to pick your way through more regulations and requirements than you dreamed.
- You might be able to do things better or faster than many people in the community – but you can't do everything and if you could, it would be *your* project, not the community's. Building community takes even longer than implementing a project!

## Be realistic about the future.

- \* Ask yourself: What is success?
- \* When you move on, what will be needed to keep it going? How will the project be maintained?
- \* Go back to step one and 'Cast your net widely', 'Strategize based on assets', 'Develop and nurture relationships', and 'Expect things to take more time and effort'!

## Documentation and Evaluation

- \* Take photos at all stages of development. But remember that the true purpose is play rather than achieving something, so participants should not feel motivated or pressured to produce something for the camera. Please be non-intrusive with cameras and video.
- \* Ask for feedback after every meeting or event. Ask someone in the group to record people's comments suggestions.
- \* When appropriate, get written evaluations of events.



## Marketing and Sustainability

- **Media coverage:** Wild Zones and Family Play Days are newsworthy and offer good photo opportunities. Invite the local media to events.
- **Teambuilding/Volunteer Days:** Develop program for corporate partners and community volunteers of all ages to create the infrastructure for the Wild Zone (see 'Menu' on page 3).
- **'Adopt a Wild Zone' or 'Adopt a Nature Play Area':** Based on the model of 'Adopt a Mile' highway clean-up program, individuals, families, businesses, youth groups or religious groups can publicly claim responsibility for ongoing maintenance of a Wild Zone in their community (See 'Sample Letter' in Appendix C)
- **Marketing Strategy:** Work with volunteer marketing professionals to design and implement best ways to promote the Wild Zone
- **Communication Tools:** Develop posters, press releases, brochures, postcards, newsletter, web site, etc. as determined by the marketing strategy

## Cost of Program

The cost of each Wild Zone will vary depending on many factors. The goal is to use volunteers and community donations as much as possible. This is not just to save money. It is so that many people have a stake in the project and will care about its success.

## You can contact Wild Zones for:

- Consultation on establishing new Wild Zones
- Two-hour 'pilot' Wild Zone events
- Family Play Days
- Art and Nature events
- Intercultural Play Festivals
- 'Play Ranger' training for adults and teenagers
- Planning and facilitation of community meetings

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## Appendices

- A. Why are Wild Zones needed?
- B. Sample letter requesting donations of materials
- C. Sample letter requesting groups to “Adopt a Wild Zone” or “Adopt a playground” for maintenance
- D. Checklist for Wild Zone Pilot Program
- E. Types of Play
- F. Resources and Research
- G. Acknowledgements



### A. Why are Wild Zones needed?

There is currently almost nowhere for urban children to build a den, mess around with water, mud and sticks, or even dig a hole just for the heck of it. Extensive research shows that the lack of opportunity for unstructured play in a natural environment has a negative impact on many aspects of young people’s lives.

#### **Wild Zones are a holistic approach to crucial needs of young people:**

**Health:** Children and adolescents need vigorous and freely chosen activity to counter the rising levels of obesity, stress, heart disease, diabetes, eating disorders, depression and anxiety.

**Learning and Cognitive Development:** Young people need active involvement in creative and absorbing play to develop a love of inquiry that leads to self-motivation and lifelong learning. Outdoor exercise and absorbed attention are also powerful antidotes to attention deficit disorder and hyperactivity.

**Emotional and Social Development:** We need projects that bring the generations together and build relationships across lines of difference through collaboration, play and creativity. Free play allows children to learn how to work in groups, to share, to negotiate, to resolve conflicts, and to learn self-advocacy and decision-making skills

**Ecological Stewardship:** Children and young people need to have the experience of being nurtured and healed by time spent playing or relaxing in natural environments. Childhood play in nature is one of the most significant factors in individuals choosing to take action to benefit the environment when they are adults.

## Why are Wild Zones needed?

### American Academy of Pediatrics:

“Encouraging unstructured play may be an exceptional way to increase physical activity levels in children, which is one important strategy in the resolution of the obesity epidemic. In contrast to passive entertainment, play builds active, healthy bodies...

“Play is essential to development because it contributes to the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being of children and youth. It is through play that children at a very early age engage and interact in the world around them. Play allows children to create and explore a world they can master, conquering their fears while practicing adult roles, sometimes in conjunction with other children or adult caregivers.

Play also offers an ideal opportunity for parents to engage fully with their children through understanding how they see their world. As they master their world, play helps children develop new competencies that lead to enhanced confidence and the resiliency they will need to face future challenges.

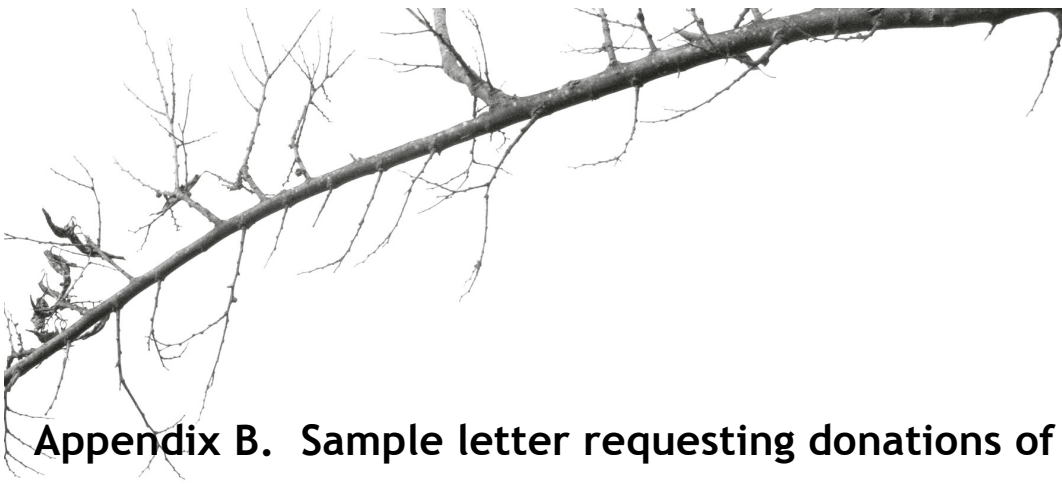
Undirected play allows children to learn how to work in groups, to share, to negotiate, to resolve conflicts, and to learn self-advocacy skills. When play is allowed to be child-driven, children practice decision-making skills, move at their own pace, discover their own areas of interest, and ultimately engage fully in the passions they wish to pursue. Ideally, much of play involves adults, but when play is controlled by adults, children acquiesce to adult rules and concerns and lose some of the benefits play offers them, particularly in developing creativity, leadership, and group skills”.

**Source:** American Academy of Pediatrics Clinical Report: “The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bonds”, by Kenneth R. Ginsburg, MD, MS Ed., and the Committee on Communications and the Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health Guidance for the Clinician in Rendering Pediatric Care Pediatrics. 2007 Jan;119(1):182-91, *Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics*

***For more quotes and citations from research papers, see “Research/Resources” below.***







## Appendix B. Sample letter requesting donations of materials

Dear Mr/Ms \_\_\_\_\_,

I/we represent \_\_\_\_\_ (group/organization). Our group's mission is to \_\_\_\_\_. (You do what? For whom? Where?)

In our project, Wild Zones, we create places and events where children, teens and adults can play and work together in natural areas. They can build dens, treehouses, forts, dig holes and play with water, mud and rocks - all things that previous generations were able to do on vacant lots and in the woods, but which today's kids seldom get to experience. One of the things we've found older kids love to do is making sculpture with natural materials, including rock balancing. You can find out more on our website [www.wild-zone.net](http://www.wild-zone.net).

We have a pilot Wild Zone program on \_\_\_\_ (date) at \_\_\_\_\_ (place). We wonder whether you would be willing to make a donation of a selection of rocks that would be suitable for rock balancing? You'll find some examples of sculptures that the youth have made in Wild Zones on our website [www.\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_](http://www.wild-zone.net) and on the Wild Zones website [www.wild-zone.net](http://www.wild-zone.net)

Thank you for your consideration.

With best wishes,

Name

Title

Organization

Phone, fax, email

OR, YOU CAN SUBSTITUTE a request for other types of materials or support. For example:

Would you be willing to make a donation of

- Tree branches for building forts and dens
- Flowers, seed pods, pebbles, feathers, bones, twigs with lichen, shells, pine cones, etc. for sculptures, fairy houses, pathmaking or other creative project
- Healthy snacks and drinks
- Funds to support a bus to transport families to the Wild Zone
- Graphic design for publicity materials
- On-site help at the event: set-up, clean up, Play Ranger, etc.

## Appendix C: Adopt-A-Wild Zone

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

We \_\_\_\_\_ [name of city, agency, non-profit or citizens' group] encourage residents, community organizations and businesses to become directly involved in improving access to free play in nature through our Adopt-A-Wild Zone Program.

Wild Zones are places where adults, children and adolescents can co-create a new form of public space that is dedicated to unstructured free play in a natural setting. The goal of Adopt-A-Wild Zone is to have all Wild Zones adopted by a wide range of community organizations, neighborhood groups and businesses in order to make them places where it is fun and safe for all ages to play.

We recognize the contributions of the adopting groups and individuals by making and erecting signs bearing their names and logos, if feasible, in the adopted Wild Zone.

Adopting a Wild Zone can take many forms, including setting up and clearing up before and after Family Play Days; supplementing the 'play' materials with additional rocks, flowers, seedpods, bamboo, willow, etc.; establishing a presence in the Wild Zone to be on the look-out for vandalism or maintenance problems and reporting these to us; providing maintenance assistance in the form of general clean-up, such as picking up litter; and providing input to us on how Wild Zones can be improved.

Our staff and volunteers will assist within available resources to provide training and to supervise the progress of the work of each individual or group who adopt a Wild Zone.

The purpose of this program is to build community spirit and a sense of civic responsibility. By supplementing existing resources, this program will enhance the benefits of Wild Zones and will improve the quality of life in \_\_\_\_\_ [name of city] for the entire community.

To Adopt-A-Wild Zone, please complete and sign this form.

Sincerely yours

[Name, title, sponsoring organization]

**We would like to Adopt a Wild Zone:** \* Name of group, organization, family, or business

\* Contact Person/Title

\* Contact information: [address, phone, email]

\* Contribution we would like to make: (check all that apply):

- Setting up and clearing up before and after Family Play Days supplementing
- Look-out for and report vandalism or maintenance problems
- providing maintenance assistance and general clean-up,
- providing input to us on how Wild Zones can be improved
- other [please describe]

## Appendix D. Checklist for Family Play Day or Wild Zone Pilot Program

- Permission to use site for Wild Zone activity
- Length of program
- Audience for program (number of participants, age and abilities, etc.)
- Accessibility of site
- Menu of activities that will be allowed
- Decide the rules appropriate to the site, type of activities and participants
- Advance preparation needed
  - Invitations (email, mail, visits to schools or local businesses, etc.)
  - Publicity
  - Posters
  - Press release + follow-up phone calls
  - Materials
  - Foraging for additional rocks, flowers, branches, seeds, etc. to enhance nature play
  - Tools (shovels, buckets, hammers, clippers, saws)
  - Insurance (site may already have it, but check!)
  - Permission and liability forms (if necessary)
  - Recruitment and training of 'Play Rangers'
- Preparation on the day
  - Greet and welcome
  - Thank everyone for coming and playing
  - Make signs to describe logistics (bathrooms, parking, etc.)
  - Introduce activities, tools
  - Introduce the guidelines and rules for safety and enjoyment
  - Review 'Role of Adults' with the adult and teens
  - Remind everyone to have fun!
- Clean-up on the day
  - Will all of the things produced be removed entirely, or can sculptures, forts, trails, fairy houses, rocks, branches etc. remain after the event?
  - Remove all tools, trash, etc
- Thank volunteers, donors, etc (cards, phone calls, emails)



## Appendix E. Types of Play

In the U.K. Bob Hughes has rooted through all the literature he could find and has identified through research and observation of children 15 different play types. These are what we use in the U.K. to inform our practice.

Perhaps the most intriguing of these is what he terms “recapitulative play.” This is based on the knowledge that the human brain is born incompletely formed. (It has to be, for logistical reasons.) So the brain grows very quickly in the first ten or so years of life. Its architecture changes. It develops more filing cabinets and the capacity to fill those filing cabinets with stuff. The theory goes like this—that children learn, through their early playing, the skills that are responsive to the environment and vital to the survival of the species. This has happened throughout the development of humankind. So we learn to make shelters and run and hide and climb and dam streams and irrigate fields and absorb the individual customs and identities of our tribe, child care practices, communication, relationships, and much more through the practice of play.

Bob Hughes has gathered this information in what he calls a “taxonomy of play.” It is a useful diagnostic tool for playworkers [Play Rangers]. They use it to check the provision of a play setting against the offers that it affords to the children.

An excellent example of this comes from observations on a play site where the staff noticed that there was no obvious invitation to children to experience the dramatic play types. They built a stage out of tables and made a Heath Robinson [Rube Goldberg] curtain and before this work was done the children had started to put on a show of “Little Orphan Annie.” This dramatic play continued long after the impromptu production was ended, with dressing up and performance and domestic dramas being acted out all over the site. It was as if a deep thirst had been quenched and the children now felt liberated to indulge in these types of playing. Some three years on, these same children speak excitedly about this memory.



## Here are Hughes's play types:

- Symbolic play—e.g., when a stick becomes a horse
- Rough and tumble play—e.g., play fighting
- Socio-dramatic play—social drama
- Social play—playing with rules and societal structures
- Creative play—construction and creation
- Communications play—e.g., words, jokes, acting, sign languages
- Dramatic play—performing or playing with situations that are not personal or domestic, e.g., playing “Harry Potter” or doing a “Harry Potter play”
- Deep play—risky experiences that confront fear
- Exploratory play—manipulating, experimenting
- Fantasy play—rearranges the world in the child's fantastical way
- Imaginative play—pretending
- Locomotor play—e.g., chase, swinging, climbing, playing with the movements of your body
- Mastery play—e.g., lighting fires, digging holes, games of elemental control
- Object play—playing with objects and exploring their uses and potential
- Role play—exploring other ways of being, pretending to drive a bus or be a policeman or use a telephone.



## Appendix F. Resources and Research

Links to organizations in the children and nature movement:

### Children and Nature Network

This is the national network that was started by Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods, Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*. [www.childrenandnature.org](http://www.childrenandnature.org)  
“The Children & Nature Network (C&NN) was created to encourage and support the people and organizations working to reconnect children with nature. C&NN provides access to the latest news and research in the field and a peer-to-peer network of researchers and individuals, educators and organizations dedicated to children's health and well-being.”

### Alliance for Childhood

<http://www.allianceforchildhood.net/>

### Children in Nature Collaborative (San Francisco Bay Area)

<http://www.cincbayarea.org>

### Children, Nature and You

[www.childrenatureandyou.org](http://www.childrenatureandyou.org)

### Children, Youth and Environments

<http://www.colorado.edu/journals/cye/>

### Every Child has the Right

<http://www.persil.com/scrapbook/Default.aspx>

Hooked on Nature [www.hookedonnature.org](http://www.hookedonnature.org)

National Institute for Play <http://www.nifplay.org/>

Youth Enrichment Strategies [www.yesfamilies.org](http://www.yesfamilies.org)

### Zach Pine Nature Sculpture

<http://homepage.mac.com/zpine/index.html>

### Video and audio links:

<http://www.childrenatureandyou.org/videolinks.html>





## **Additional links for ideas, research and resources:**

### ***Creative Collaboration Between Children and Adults***

by David Hawkins

In this interview David Hawkins, co-founder of Wild Zones, talks about allowing children to make a contribution through play and work as they built the garden at the Edible Schoolyard at Martin Luther King Middle School in Berkeley. The children collaborated with their teachers and community volunteers to transform a derelict asphalt lot into a playful and beautiful garden. *This project was one of the inspirations for developing Wild Zones.* You can link to this interview from the Wild Zones website:

[www.wild-zone.net](http://www.wild-zone.net), 'About the Co-founders' or at the following URL:

[http://www.artheals.org/news\\_2007/aprmay07.php#interview](http://www.artheals.org/news_2007/aprmay07.php#interview)

### ***Cultivating Community: Principles and Practices for Community Gardening as a Community-Building Tool***

by Karen Payne and Deborah Fryman

*Cultivating Community* explores basic principles and values of successful community empowerment programs of any kind, and illustrates how these principles have been applied to community gardens across the country. The document showcases how community gardening programs can advance community development, empower local leadership and nurture families, strengthen economic development and improve overall quality of life.

*Many of the same principles can be applied to developing Wild Zones.*

Order for \$5 from

<http://communitygarden.org/acga-store.php>

Or you can download *Cultivating Community* as PDF from:

<http://www.aecf.org/upload/publicationfiles/cultivating%20community.pdf>

## Research Studies

There are hundreds of research studies that show the value of play and unstructured time in nature. Below are just a few examples.

There are also numerous references on the Children and Nature Network website at: <http://www.childrenandnature.org/research>. Richard Louv's book, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder*, also has a wealth of relevant research.

## Literacy

Finland heads the OECD league table in literacy and is in the top five countries in the world for math and science. The importance of play and the importance of nature are deemed of great importance. In all classes they offer 15 minutes free play after every 45 minute teaching session. Their minister of Social Affairs and Health stated, "The core of learning is not in the information being predigested from the outside, but in the interaction between a child and the environment".

"Educators Flocking to Finland, Land of Literate Children" by Lizette Alvarez, N.Y. Times April 9, 2004.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/09/international/europe/09finl.html?ex=1396843200&en=156c7f882b033588&ei=5007&partner=USERLAND>

## Attention Deficit Disorder

This is one of the earliest studies to explore the potential for contact with nature to have a positive effect in reducing the impact of attention deficit disorder in children. The study was designed to test two hypotheses:

- 1) Attention deficit symptoms will be more manageable after activities in green settings than after activities in other settings; and
- 2) The greener a child's everyday environment, the more manageable their attention deficit symptoms will be in general. The results were positive.







"Coping with ADD: The Surprising Connection to Green Play Settings," by Andrea Faber Taylor; Frances E. Kuo; and William C. Sullivan (2001)

### **Closing the Achievement Gap**

Closing the Achievement Gap". a report by the State Education and Environmental Roundtable (SEER), is a ten year study of 150 schools in 16 states. The research found that environment based education produced gains in social studies, science, language arts, and math; improves standardized test scores and grade-point averages; and develops skills in problem-solving, critical thinking, and decision making.

Report available at [www.seer.org](http://www.seer.org)

### **Creativity, problem-solving, and emotional and intellectual development**

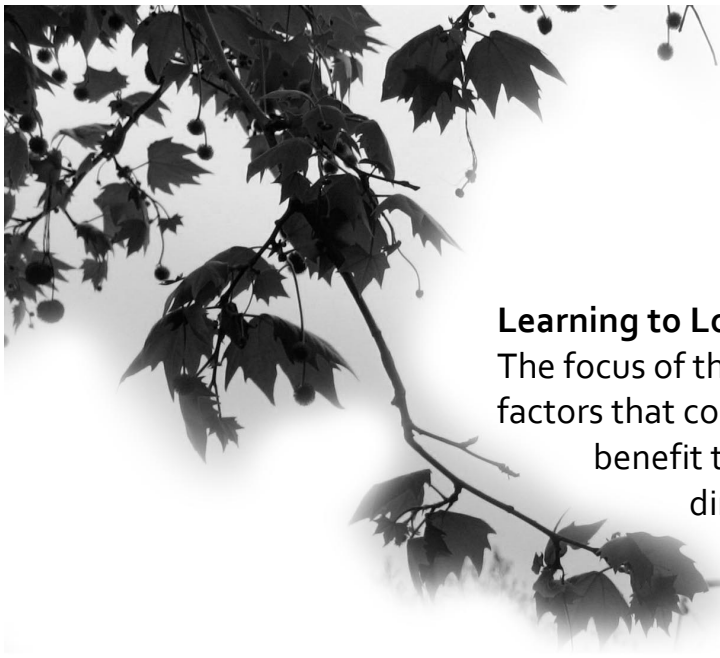
Dr. Stephen R. Kellert of Yale University states, "Play in nature, particularly during the critical period of middle childhood, appears to be an especially important time for developing the capacities for creativity, problem-solving, and emotional and intellectual development." He includes research to indicate optimal learning opportunities at age-appropriate times and differentiates between indirect, vicarious, and direct experiences with nature – with the latter less and less available to children. He urges designers, developers, educators, political leaders and citizens throughout society to make changes in our modern built environments to provide children with positive contact with nature – where children live, play, and learn.

*Building for Life: Designing and Understanding the Human-Nature Connection.* Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2005.

### **Health benefits**

This well-documented article by two physicians builds a strong case for the importance of unstructured free play in the out-of-doors for all age groups, and especially young children. While concerned about the "obesity epidemic" in young children, the authors say that the health benefits from outdoor play are only one aspect of the overall benefits.





"Resurrecting Free Play in Young Children: Looking Beyond Fitness and Fatness to Attention, Affiliation and Affect," by Burdette, Hillary L., M.D., M.S.; and Robert C. Whitaker, M.D, M.P.H. © 2005

### **Learning to Love the Natural World Enough to Protect It**

The focus of this recent research by Dr. Louise Chawla is on factors that contribute to individuals choosing to take action to benefit the environment when they are adults. Positive, direct experience in the out-of-doors and being taken outdoors by someone close to the child—a parent, grandparent, or other trusted guardian – are the two most significant contributing factors.

"Learning to Love the Natural World Enough to Protect It", in *Barn* 2. 2006:57-58. © 2006 Norsk senter for barneforskning. *Barn* is a quarterly published by the Norwegian Centre for Child Research at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway.

### **Overview of Research on Children's Contact with Nature**

This article is a recent review of the literature and establishes what is known, and what is still missing, about the effects of contact with nature on children's lives. While the evidence is growing, this article is an important call to action for further research.

"Is Contact with Nature Important for Healthy Child Development? State of the Evidence." by Andrea Faber Taylor & Frances E. Kuo, in Spencer, C. & Blades, M. (Eds.), *Children and Their Environments: Learning, Using and Designing Spaces*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006.



## Appendix G: Acknowledgements

### We'd like to express our thanks to:

- Brianne Teevan for graphic design
- Roy Gordon, Lilia Schwartz and Ed Worrell for photography
- Penny Wilson and Joan Almon for 'Types of Play' and insights into the role of adults in play
- Berkeley Partners for Parks for 'Getting Positive Projects Done – Tips from Community Activists'
- Zach Pine for sample guidelines and inspirational teaching skills
- Deborah Fryman, Jack Hale and Andy Stone for their knowledge and collaboration in translating community organizing tenets into community development principles that can be applied to community gardens and Wild Zones
- Kerry Payne for suggesting 'Adopt-a-Wild Zone'
- Rob Bradshaw for technical support
- Diane Gordon, Roy Gordon, Mary Roscoe, Amy Pertschuk, and Patrick Archie for feedback and support
- Foundation for Global Community, University of Phoenix Foundation and Kaiser Permanente of Santa Clara for funding to support the development of this Toolkit



This Toolkit is a work-in-progress. We would appreciate any feedback and suggestions on how it can be improved. We'd also like to hear about your own experiences with Wild Zones and Family Play Days. Please send your feedback, stories or photos to us.  
(This is Version 1.01 of the Toolkit, 07June2009)

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