

# Calgary's Play Charter



Collective Impact Report 2024

# Calgary's Play Charter

Calgary is committed to promoting play, providing play opportunities and educating all Calgarians of the importance of play to our community. As signatories to this charter, organizations concerned with positive childhood development, it is our responsibility to promote, enable and work towards comprehensive play opportunities for all.



## Play Looks Like

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



## Play Sounds Like

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



## Play Feels Like

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

## We Believe

Play develops a core set of skills for healthy well-being.

That play is a vital component of childhood; it is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated.

Play is fun, uncertain, challenging and flexible.

When children have opportunities to play they pursue creativity, innovation, and reflection to learn, experiment, solve problems, create new worlds, test boundaries, assess risk and meet challenges.

Play is a natural state for a child.

## We Will

Support play that encourages physical, emotional and social development.

Understand and communicate that risk is a valuable component to play, and we will encourage, support and enable play that allows children to develop risk-taking skills.

Create environments that children can control – providing flexibility in materials and spaces that promote inquiry and evoke curiosity.

Embrace the geography and climate of Calgary and support children to play outdoors all year-round.

Educate and inform adults, using common language across all organizations, on the importance of play.

Involve children in the decisions that affect their lives.

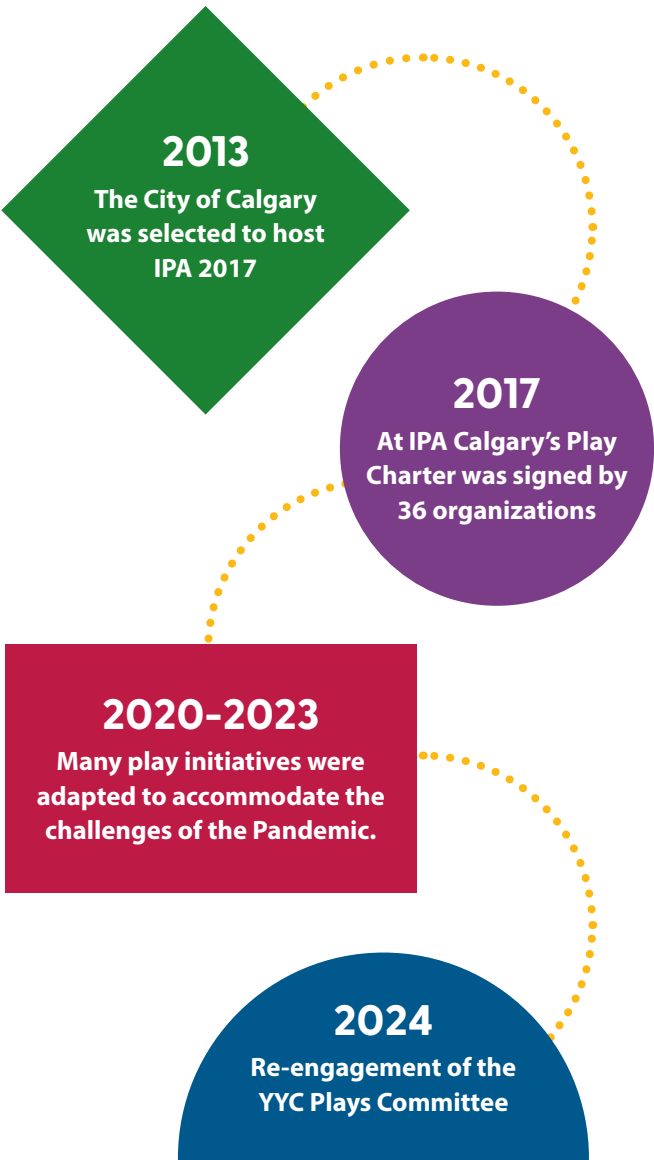
Report on our organization's experience with play.

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Background</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Calgary's Play Charter Signatories 2017/2018</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>High Leverage Activities</b>	<b>6</b>
General Findings	7
Advocacy & Promotion	8
Communication & Marketing	11
Partnerships	12
Play Spaces	14
Policy & Practice	16
Programs	18
Training	21
<b>Future Considerations</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>YYC Plays</b>	<b>23</b>

# Introduction

We all have an important role in promoting and protecting a child’s right to play. Play is fundamental to all aspects of child development and is a key component in preserving community and culture. Children’s play presents rich opportunities for their social, physical, moral, and emotional development and as such, must be preserved and protected. (Based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child, article 31).



# Background

In 2013, The City of Calgary was selected to host the 2017 International Play Association Triennial World Conference (IPA 2017). As part of a legacy component to the Conference, a group of organizations under the banner of YYC Plays started meeting to discover what play means in Calgary and to develop Calgary’s Play Charter. The Lawson Foundation awarded The City of Calgary a grant to develop some innovative play opportunities and support the development of a community play charter.

Calgary’s Play Charter is intended to be a unifying document outlining why we believe play is important and how, in working together, we can create a community that supports and encourages comprehensive play opportunities for all Calgary children. At IPA 2017, Calgary’s Play Charter was signed by 36 organizations. With the re-signing of the charter in 2018, 15 additional organizations came on board to uphold this charter through their innovative work on play initiatives.

Until early 2020, YYC Plays organizations continued to meet on a regular basis to share ideas and resources, collaborating to advance the promotion of play in Calgary. From 2020- 2023, many play initiatives in Calgary were adapted to accommodate the challenges of the Pandemic. While the initial goal was to re-connect after 5 years in 2023, the pandemic prolonged this, resulting in re-engagement of the YYC Plays Committee in mid-2024. The primary purpose for re-engagement included accumulating data to report on the current state of play in Calgary (thus this impact report) and to determine next steps and goals of the committee (if any) for play in the city.

## 2017/2018 Play Charter Signatories

Alberta Association  
of Landscape Architects

Alberta Council for  
Environmental Education

Alberta Health Services

Alberta Parks Inclusion

Between Friends

Bienenstock Natural Playgrounds

Bow Valley College

Boys & Girls Clubs of Calgary

Calgary Age Friendly  
Steering Committee

Calgary Be Fit for Life Centre

Calgary Board of Education

Calgary Catholic School District

Calgary Child's Play

Calgary Police Service

Calgary Public Library

Calgary Zoo

Canadian Wildlife Federation

CCES Nature Kindergarten

Chestermere Recreation Centre

Common Digs

Connected by Nature

Creative Child Care Consulting

Early Childhood Coalitions of Alberta

ELCC & Community Development/  
TOPP Kids



*Calgary's Play Charter signing, 2017*

First 2000 Days Network

GPI Outdoor Designs Inc.

Haysboro Community Association

Huntington Hills Child Services

Mosaic Primary Care Network

Mount Royal University

Nature Play  
(Formerly TimberNook  
of Greater Calgary)

Parks Foundation Calgary

Physicians in Support  
of Play - Collective

PI3yinc

Playful Content

Rockyview Projects

ScrapStore Play Pods Canada

Sherpa Kids Canada

Siksika Nation

Sport Calgary

TELUS Spark Science Centre

The Lead Foundation

The Calgary Fire Department

Town of Banff

University of Calgary

Variety – the Children's  
Charity of Alberta

VIVO for Healthier Generations

Westside Recreation Centre

WinSport

YMCA Calgary



## Calgary's Play Charter High Leverage Activities

In 2017, YYC Plays, using a collective impact approach, identified seven high leverage activities. As a charter signatory, each organization was asked to commit to undertaking "Three Big Things of Play" throughout the year that contributed to one or more of the following high leverage activities. This same approach was used to collect data from signatories, reporting on activities from 2023 – 2024, as is outlined in the remainder of this report.



### Advocacy & Promotion

Work that increases public awareness, skills and knowledge that can lead to action or change in public perceptions or behaviours.



### Policy & Practice

Principles that guide decision-making in an organization.



### Communication & Marketing

Specific tactics to provide information on play opportunities to the public and YYC Plays organizations.



### Programs

Events, activities, presentations, resource development, courses and research that have a specific beginning and end undertaken to support/enhance play.



### Partnerships

Efforts by more than one person or group working together to advance a common interest in supporting/enhancing play.



### Training

Formal and informal training, tools, and resources for staff and volunteers that enable them to support and enhance play.



### Play Spaces

Provision of physical spaces where play happens.

## General Findings

The survey was sent to 27 signatories, asking questions centered around the high leverage activities (January 2023 – Present) as well as other information including **Outcomes of the pandemic** and **Technology implementations**.

Challenges around contacting the remaining signatories (approx. 24) could have resulted from movement of previous staff holding historical play knowledge, possible shifts in organizational priorities or other unknown reasons.

18 organizations responded to the survey, indicating a decrease in quantitative measurements on the impact of play compared to impact reporting from 2018. This estimate of impact to public through awareness, attitudes, play opportunities, spaces, resources, partnerships and community involvement is difficult to quantify, as many organizations have embedded their efforts into regular programming and overall strategies.

### Outcomes of the Pandemic


The pandemic resulted in many organizations adapting their play spaces by moving program opportunities outside. “Play hubs” were also created to accommodate government guidelines for safety. Online resources were also made available from organizations to keep children engaged and learning through play within their homes and safe environments.

The pandemic taught educators and facilitators valuable lessons about flexibility and the importance of outdoor and emotional play. This has been implemented into much of the trainings post pandemic, empowering educators, and facilitators to grow professionally.

Post pandemic, more behavioral issues are also being reported in younger children regarding emotional regulation and increased special needs are being seen (ie. autism and ADHD behaviors).


### Technology Implementations

Technology has played a significant role in the activation of play spaces, with some organizations adding elements to enhance the play experience. Other organizations reported removing some technology (ie. lights/sound), indicating that it was important to not overwhelm some learning styles. This intentional disconnect was in response to guest and staff feedback when designing those spaces.



*“Generally, I think there is a broader understanding of the importance of play. We saw that coming out of the pandemic and organizations have reinforced that.”*

**TELUS Spark Science Centre**



*“Play has reminded parents of their own childhood nostalgia.”*

**The City of Calgary  
Recreation & Social  
Programs**



## Advocacy & Promotion

Over one-third of organizations participating in the survey reported offering workshops on play, while over 50% of respondents have presented at public events and/or conferences sharing the benefits of play.

Over 90% of members surveyed from **Between Friends**, reported feeling play programs within this organization were valuable. The Calgary community has been positively impacted by the integration of these play programs.

**VIVO for Healthier Generations** presented at the ARPA Conference (Lake Louise) on the equity audit tool and being an inclusive facility that has been purposeful in how spaces are designed. Vivo for Healthier Generations continues to promote their indoor play park and promote risky play research learnings to facility, community members and public.

**Bow Valley College** initiated a program called Materials Day, in which online students come to one of the regional campuses (Airdrie, Cochrane, or Okotoks) one day each term

to play with common – and uncommon - early childhood materials. Each of these days has an overarching theme, and instructors are present to facilitate play using loose parts, books, art opportunities and sensory adventures. The instructors support student reflection on how they can embed meaningful play and development into their work as early childhood educators. Students make plans for how they might initiate and support play with these materials in early childhood contexts.

**Get Outside and Play** regularly presents to early childhood educators about outdoor play and co-hosts the annual Outdoor Play in the Early Years Conference in Calgary. 2025 will be the 3rd year this event has taken place. 160 educators who work with children from birth to 7 years old attend sessions and meet others interested in outdoor play in the early years.

**Nature Play** also presented at the National Outdoor Learning Conference (Banff) and have also provided multiple development sessions to schools throughout Calgary. Nature Play has had a big impact on the community with many individuals attending programs and residencies to be taught the value of play and the connection to development and creation of happy, healthy children through nature-based learnings. Following the work of Megan Zeni and Marianna Brussoni, this organization helps teachers and parents understand the value of play.

*“Public has a sense of appreciation for the efforts and parents have had a revelation of something they always knew but seemed to have forgotten in our changing culture.”*

**The City of Calgary**

**TELUS Spark Science Centre** presented at the Association of Science and Technology Centres in 2024 about having a dedicated play space in a large urban science centre.



*Water play, Nature Play*





## Advocacy & Promotion

**The City of Calgary** contributed content for the 2023 IPA conference in Glasgow regarding a workshop titled “Planning for Play in Local Governments and Municipalities”. Staff continue to advocate for play by educating parents through the Mobile Adventure Playground offerings. Parents see non-typical supplies used by children in non-typical ways. These parents are seeing creativity in their child that may not be sparked elsewhere in their lives. National Child Day was celebrated in 2023 by utilizing displays at the Arts Centres and Leisure Centres. In 2024, Mobile Adventure Playground was hosted at Haultain Park and Calgary Afterschool programs celebrated the uniqueness of each child on National Child Day through various activities.

*“We are learning that baby steps are the way to go for changing attitudes and making change.”*

### Nature Play

**Playful Content** delivered play and playful learning workshops with adult learners as part of InceptionU curriculum, exploring the value of play for ideation, design and learnings. They were also on a panel at the Western Museum Association annual meeting on outdoor play and observation skills for museums, as well as presenting at the Association of Science and Technology Centres on Adventure Playgrounds. With the vast majority of work being non-local, Playful Content has been doing play related development and installations across the US for Children’s museums and Science Centres.

**Westside Recreation Centre** focuses their actions from a child/child & caregiver perspective, allowing that demographic to have access to those specific programs/ services through continual communication to caregivers and children to why play is important.

**Calgary Public Library** staff presented at the American Libraries Association Conference in San Diego (2024) to an audience of close to 500 participants. The session titled: “A Call to Play: Encouraging Staff to Play in Public Libraries”, sharing learnings, introduced play-based techniques and reflective activities for future design at other libraries.

**Bow Valley College** continues to build and enhance capacity for play-based learning in online spaces for adults, as students work towards their post-secondary credential in ECED.



*Mobile Adventure Playground, The City of Calgary*

*“From a department perspective (the ECED department within the School of Community Studies at Bow Valley College), we are making a significant impact in Early Childhood Educator’s understanding of and ability to plan and participate in play activities with children and families. Students and instructors are having conversations about play of all types within early learning and child care programs across the province, and supporting the ECE’s to offer diverse play opportunities in indoor and outdoor contexts.”*

### Bow Valley College



## Advocacy & Promotion



Outdoor play, The City of Calgary

**WinSport** is committed to advocating for playful physical activity and promoting its world-class facilities for all Calgarians to discover, develop, and excel in both recreational and competitive sport by following the work of Dr. Beverlie Dietze on play. WinSport also follows the early childhood development programming philosophies from F2000 days network and the play spaces play cycle.

**Between Friends**, often excluded from conversations around play, provides a supportive space for members, families and extended networks, through opportunities for people with disabilities to engage in play in ways similar to their non-disabled peers. The broader Calgary community has also been positively impacted by the integration of play programs, building a more inclusive and supportive community for everyone.

*"We are on a path to raise healthier generations. The community understands risky play better and the outcome of children building better confidence and competence."*

**VIVO for Healthier Generations**

**Sport Calgary** offers workshops on importance of play and safe sport/play. They continue to have discussions around how to promote sport/play as a safe and inclusive environment for all.

### Insightful Findings & Considerations

Many organizations are doing work communicating with the public (and within their organization) about the impact of play, however, generally agree that they can still improve in this area.

Survey respondents also reported on participant hesitancy as a barrier to successful planning and delivery of play programs. Participants can be uncertain, sometimes lacking understanding, which leads to reluctance in engagement of play opportunities.

The social aspect of play has also been greatly impacted by the pandemic with many participants not understanding how to "play together."



## Newsletter, websites, social media and on-site promotion (word of mouth) were the biggest marketing tools used to promote play.

Radio, television and flyers/pamphlets were the least used marketing tools among survey respondents, while also indicating that with all the strategies used to advertise play opportunities, efforts were a generalized marketing approach, meaning advertising means were inclusive of all opportunities (not necessarily play specific, especially when play was embedded in programming).

Due to marketing and communication efforts, most organizations believed the following statements to be true:

- Parent and participants are more aware of the importance of play.
- Parents and participants are more comfortable playing/letting their children play.
- Parents and participants are more aware of the play opportunities available in Calgary.

*"Through newsletter, resources, events and workshops, early childhood educators in Calgary have a better appreciation of the value and benefits of outdoor play for young children."*

**Get Outside and Play**

**The City of Calgary** used bold signs and sandwich boards in the community where programs took place, while also promoting play opportunities on a dedicated Calgary.ca webpage and free brochures. Community partners also helped advertise for special events, through community newsletters and posters.

**VIVO for Healthier Generations** has Activity Facilitators that help with "Play in the Park" promoting the play concept and keeping members safe and engaged. The facility's programs utilize boulevard signs, overpass banners and Calgary's Child Magazine to advertise, along with digital means in the facility and with online platforms.

**Between Friends** is expanding marketing and communications capabilities in 2025 to better reach both members and potential members. Currently a quarterly member newsletter is used to highlight programs along with focused community connections

**Calgary Fire Department** Engine 23 is primarily promoted through the Calgary Public Library website, while the Virtual Reality Program is advertised directly through school and community association relationships/partnerships. Community Safety Officers also directly connect with community members in more-vulnerable areas to encourage participation in the Virtual Reality Education Programming.

**University of Calgary** plans to reach new user groups in Spring 2025 by utilizing social media, on-site signage, and potentially e-brochures.

**WinSport** capitalizes on social media to reach its target market and communicates play with purposeful, informative content through its many additional marketing assets.

## Insightful Findings & Considerations

Based on survey responses, play advocates can expand/improve communications to public and communities to:

- Know where to go for information about play opportunities in Calgary.
- Be more comfortable with providing/supporting/funding play opportunities.
- Be willing to share play information with others.





## Partnerships

75% of survey respondents reported working with partners to promote play and all respondents agreed that partnerships were a good use of their organization's time. They would not have been able to offer play without these partnerships and will continue to use partnerships in the future.

**Sport Calgary** has 50+ new and existing partnerships including **The City of Calgary** and various non-city facilities while **Vivo for Healthier Generations** has concentrated their partnerships with the surrounding communities, sport groups and schools.

**Between Friends** partnered with **The City of Calgary, the Parks Foundation** and the **Flames Foundation** to construct an outdoor pickleball court and unstructured play space at Sandy Beach Park. Sport based programs were also launched through partnering with local sports organizations, such as **Lacrossing Barriers**. Learnings and findings through the **Calgary Adapted Hub** also highlighted new insights around social isolation and chronic loneliness, increasing awareness for the need for community based solutions to foster connections and well-being.

**Between Friends** also provided customized inclusion training to MusicBox volunteers at the **University of Calgary**, helping to ensure their programs are accessible and welcoming to participants of all abilities. **Trico Centre for Family Wellness** has been a longstanding and valued partnership with Between Friends, which play a pivotal role in supporting the well-being of youth with disabilities, providing accessible spaces, programming and storage.

**The City of Calgary Partnerships (Community Services)** utilized Social Programs staff for leading events and programs at NW Community Associations, as well as working with **Vivo for Healthier Generations** for activations of play spaces.



*Central Family Day, Calgary Public Library*



## Partnerships



*Outdoor play, Nature Play*

**Nature Play** has hosted elementary school residencies, bringing loose parts and unstructured play to Calgary schools.

Bringing loose parts equipment to monthly events and Stampede Breakfasts, **Get Outside and Play** has worked with **Shawnee-Evergreen Community Association**, engaging people in outdoor play concepts.

With support from a grant through the **Lawson Foundation**, the Early Childhood Education and Development Program at **Bow Valley College** developed a plan and enacted partnerships to support outdoor play and pedagogy. This ongoing work involved working with **The City of Calgary** and **East Village** partners to plan for the availability of outdoor loose parts on St. Patrick Island, available to both Bow Valley College students and instructors engaging in outdoor learning, as well as to community members.

**WinSport** is proud to have built impactful partnerships with organizations such as **Servus**, **Adrenalin Source for Sports**, and **Explore Kananaskis** to provide a plethora of opportunities for play.

### Other partnerships reported from our play partners included:

**TELUS Spark Science Centre** – Palix Foundation (in kind sponsorship, providing knowledge and content sharing), Government of Alberta (funding for BLUprint Program)

**The City of Calgary** – Public/Separate School Boards, Private Schools and Community Associations

**Rocky View Play** – Calgary Parks, Parks Foundation

**Nature Play** – Calgary Public Library, Lead Foundation, Calgary Board of Education

**Calgary Fire Department** – Calgary Public Library, ConocoPhillips Canada, Calgary School Boards

**The City of Calgary Partnerships (Community Services)** – CFD Fire Truck (Erlton Neighbour Days)

**Calgary Public Library** partnered with **CanLearn Society** to offer WordPlay camps at the Central and Judith Umbach Libraries. Other partnerships at various libraries included **Nature Play, Calgary Opera, Music with Mandy, The Crickettes, Calgary Fire Department, Calgary Police Service, Calgary Pride, TELUS Spark Science Centre, and Calgary School Boards. Calgary Public Library** is also grateful for the support of various community donors, supporting programming at the libraries.

### Insightful Findings & Considerations

*Leveraging resources* was reported as a challenge for most organizations, stating they were either just starting to leverage resources or nothing is happening currently.





## Play Spaces

22 new public play spaces were reported to be created, while 18 public play spaces were enhanced. 11 signatories reported creating or enhancing play spaces in the last year.

Planning for these play spaces involved engaging community, reviewing program and guest feedback, as well as user facilitation.

**Variety – the Children’s Charity of Alberta** built and installed 6 inclusive playgrounds in 2023 – 2024 in schools and communities in the province. Some have implemented sound technology to enhance the experience.

**Rocky View Play** has also implemented musical instruments and surface games into their designs allowing more children and users to have fun and get outside (eg. The City of Calgary Parkour Play area- Coventry Hills).

**VIVO for Healthier Generations** launched their indoor play park, allowing for safe, fun spaces for supporting exploration.

**Calgary Fire Department** found a new home for Engine 23 at Fish Creek Library with an accessible cab with universal design, providing all children and parents the ability to access and engage in the Engine 23 experience.

The **University of Calgary** moved 20,000 lbs of twigs, logs and stumps into the old beach volleyball court for a new natural challenge and adventure playground.



Children's area, Calgary Public Library



Winter play, Nature Play



# Play Spaces

*"Playgrounds are being reimagined to include gathering spaces for different age groups and upgraded amenities to appeal to a broader population."*

**The City of Calgary Partnerships  
(Community Services)**

**Westside Recreation Centre** has plans to enhance outdoor spaces including the skatepark and preschool specific areas.

**Calgary Public Library's** Early Learning Centres, Questionariums and Teen Spaces provide places for children and families to come together, to feel part of their community, to learn alongside others and make new connections. These spaces are vibrant, freely accessible, and of no cost to families, designed to be flexible, open-ended, and interactive. Other features in the library spaces include moveable activity centres, props, game support play and active learning through talking, singing, reading, and writing.

**WinSport** operates both indoor and outdoor facilities such as the ski and snowboard hill, Markin MacPhail Centre, and Mountain Bike Park for guests of all ages to experience play throughout the year.

**TELUS Spark Science Centre** made enhancements to the Brainasium (outdoor play space), through the last 5 years, as well as enhancements to the Creative Kids Museum (inside play for younger children) in 2022.



*Outdoor play, Nature Play*

*"Confidence and creativity and an appreciation of nature including the joy of every season outside. Returning to the same space and seeing how it changes week by week (especially the creek and the leaves on the trees) is really special. We love seeing the ducks and the owls and we still talk about the time the moose walked through the stump circle!"*

**Nature Play**

## Insightful Findings & Considerations

Some organizations found *moving outside* was too much to fully embrace for educators (and parents) amid all the other pandemic challenges that were faced during this period. Alternately, other organizations do believe parents are *more open to outdoor play* due to the challenges of the pandemic, and in fact, may even crave it more than before.

Weather/environmental issues also pose a significant challenge to play programming and accessibility. Cancellations due to weather, air quality and heat are becoming increasingly common. Although, programming staff adapt well to these situations, certain demographics may not embrace this, affecting engagement and exposure to play. Disabled and vulnerable populations are also greatly affected, as finding accessible accommodations are not always possible.



37 play policies were developed or reviewed in the past year, with the majority of respondents doing some work around shared understanding and language in their organization around play, but feel they can do better.

### Play Policies Developed or Reviewed (Categorized)



- 6 Provisions of play
- 9 Supporting risk and differentiating risk and hazard in play
- 7 Outdoor play
- 7 Roles and responsibilities of staff in play
- 6 Supporting play as a non-revenue generating activity
- 2 Play policies that don't fit into one of these categories
- 6 No policies were new or reviewed

**WinSport** believes in prioritizing the active participation of those from all backgrounds and ability levels, with intentional efforts to encourage play and bring them back for more by taking a fundamental view of “building from the ground up”. This included evaluating programs based on a new mindset of tools and principles. Redesign of the Outdoor Summer Camps focused on the goal of promoting outdoor accessibility and understanding. WinSport focused on creating more outdoor unstructured free time as a guiding principle in their programming philosophy. Once WinSport was grounded in the philosophy, decisions were able to be made from there.

**Get Outside and Play** recently completed a report for ARCQE (early learning and childcare organization) looking at outdoor play in early learning settings in Alberta. Learnings included barriers to outdoor play as well as what educators loved most about being outside with children. This work will give ARCQE and other organizations in Alberta areas to focus their efforts to overcome barriers to outdoor play in early learning and child care settings. Get Outside and Play is also following the work being done by the Lawson Foundation focused on outdoor play in the early years across Canada.



*Natural adventure park, University of Calgary*





*Winter play, Nature Play*

**VIVO for Healthier Generations** has wrapped up various projects around policy and practice and are embedding key learnings into their offerings.

**TOPP Kids'** core principles are INSPIRE, DEVELOP, LEAD. Learnings around play have guided current practices and set a foundation for continued innovation in play-based education, ensuring TOPP kids remain at the forefront of childhood development and care.

Due to encountering increased injuries when play turned into horseplay, the **University of Calgary** developed a horseplay policy, distinguishing between play and horseplay. This policy helped to promote safe and enjoyable play experiences outlining clear parameters around supervision & guidelines, rules & expectations, communication & consequences, safe play areas, respectful & inclusive play, problem solving and positive reinforcement.

### Insightful Findings & Considerations

Some organizations have struggled with the definition of play and how it relates to their organization (ie. sport based work)

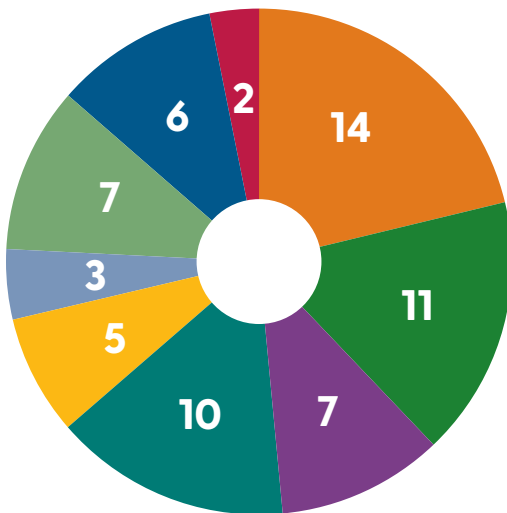
When asked if each organization was developing, sharing, and incorporating new play knowledge, most organizations agreed that they could also do better in this area. Action is being done developing ongoing play priorities within most organizations, while other organizations report there is room for improvement.



# Programs

In the past year, 17 organizations created or improved programs to enhance play. Organizations reported designing play programs for more than one user group (see chart below) with most organizations tailoring programs for children aged Preschool – 12 years.

## Program User Groups



- 14 Children (preschool - 12 years)
- 11 Adolescents (13 years - 17 years)
- 7 Young Adults (17 years - 24 years)
- 10 Adults
- 5 Indigenous communities
- 3 Cultural groups
- 7 Low income participants
- 6 People with disabilities
- 2 Other: Newcomers to Canada

Most signatories report activities/programs within their organization are aligned to increase and enhance play (report doing excellently).

An initiative to have families come together and play, **Westside Recreation Centre** offers Family Play time and Family Gym time, an unstructured environment allowing children and their caregivers to explore and play together.

**TOPP Kids** offers leadership programs for grades 3–6, involving engaging activities, mentorship, supportive environment, learning integrity, courage, creative thinking, self-belief, responsibility and planning. The participants help plan activities and contribute to community initiatives.

**VIVO for Healthier Generations** has launched Fridays in the Park (loose parts play) and have also provided sensory times in the facility and provide sensory backpacks with play parts to help parents.



Mobile Adventure Playground participants,  
The City of Calgary





## Programs

Along with the continued success of Engine 23, **Calgary Fire Department** launched the Virtual Reality Fire Safety Education Program (Pilot). Offered in 7 different languages and offered at various schools and community events, this program educates Calgarians on how to identify hazards found in their home and handle real-life situations in a safe and controlled manner.

*"Play is at the heart of what Between Friends does."*

**Between Friends**

The **City of Calgary** offers play opportunities through various program (both revenue generating and non-revenue generating) streams and facilities. Daycamp, Skateparks, Afterschool and Stay n' Play programs offer self-directed program utilizing components such as arts & crafts, sports and loose parts play. Participants are challenged with teamwork, problems solving and social skills.

The Mobile Adventure Playground through The City of Calgary continues to be offered at various community greenspaces in the Spring, Summer and Fall. Since January 2023, over 5500 participants have taken part in these loose parts play and creative exploration, facilitated by trained program leaders. This program is made accessible and inclusive for all, considering spaces that allow for participants with disabilities and cultural groups. National Play Day was also hosted at Haultain Park in 2024 with a bouncy house, painting station and CFD and CPS on site to provide vehicle tours. The City of Calgary Preschool, art, dance and nature-based programs also offer large components of play through creative dance programs, cartoons & comics classes, active exploration rooms, fairy & rock garden play structures and wetland species classes.

This year, **Between Friends** emphasized unstructured and risky play at Camp Bonaventure. They developed a new outdoor risky play area and gardening space at Sandy Beach Site, featuring natural wood stepping "stones", sensory walls, and a sensory circle that allows children to engage in experimental, risky play. Overnight adventure trips were enhanced by incorporating unscheduled time, giving members the freedom to explore unstructured play in new environments. Between Friends also introduced several new play focused programs to the WESOAR offerings this year.



*Engine 23, Calgary Fire Department*

One such program, Table Top, allowed members to explore various tabletop games. Another program, "Fluffy, Furry, Creepy, Crawly", gave members the chance to interact with different animals over a ten-week period. Members were also able to participate in the building and utilization of adapted gaming through Makers Making Change.

The BLUprint program at **TELUS Spark Science Centre** evolved from a successful junkyard playground program from 2018 – 2023. BLUprint activities is based on exploring building and trades with new tools, promoting the trades industry. Play is also integrated into many other programs at TELUS Spark Science Centre, provided by the continual insight and feedback from guests.

**Sport Calgary** introduced All Sport One Community, targeting the introduction of sport to underrepresented communities, with the goal to help introduce sport and play to all Calgarians.

*"I want my kids to socialize because we are new to the city. I want them to be able to make new friends and learn English."*

**New Canadian, The City of Calgary**



# Programs

Intended to build confidence through exposure to outdoor skills and increase the number of girls 8- 12 years playing, **Nature Play** developed the Nature Girls Program.

**The City of Calgary Partnerships (Community Services)** has numerous events that have play incorporated, including Neighbor Day at Erlton Community Association, having free play activities facilitated by The City of Calgary staff, drawing 50 – 100 people per event. Ranchlands Community Association have plans to bring new equipment into their large playground to spark imagination and creativity.

**WinSport** delivers high-quality programs for skate and hockey, skiing and snowboarding, mountain biking, and wilderness adventures with play as a foundational element of each offering. WinSport utilizes discovery zones that bring in many factors such as wildlife, nature elements, loose parts, etc. that is very popular among their users. The Wilderness Summer Program focuses on themes to spark creativity among participants (ie. magnifying glasses, holes, etc.), facilitated by program staff. In addition to other user groups, WinSport also programs for girls and newcomers to Canada.

**Calgary Public Library** offers gaming and 3-D Printing programs through their teen focused programming, reading camps for ages 6 – 8 and interactive outdoor program involving winter magic and loose parts to engage imagination. Creative music programs are also a big offering at most libraries including Musical Tales for Tots (Opera discovery journey), Tell Me a Musical Story (musical story telling) and Writing Silly Words for Silly Songs (Ukuleles & Kazoos).

STEM based camps at the **University of Calgary** designates body break times incorporating play (usually outdoor play), loose parts play in most camps such as balls, bean bags and random toys during lunch times and/or pick up & drop off times. Spontaneous play also occurs in camps such as Wilderness Survivor and their Natural Adventure Park, having participants engage and explore (building forts, etc.)



North Mount Pleasant Arts Centre, The City of Calgary

## Insightful Findings & Considerations

*Staffing challenges* (both front line and supervisory staff) and other resources (ie. funding) during recovery from the pandemic have also been significant, causing difficulty in play planning and delivery, causing some programs to be “forgotten” or cancelled. Expanding programs and/or taking on other projects by the same staff is also challenging when staffing is limited. Finding qualified staff to support people with disabilities has also been an ongoing barrier to program success.

Financial barriers also pose a significant challenge for organizations with lack of funding and inherent costs of outdoor program delivery.

Although most organizations reported they offer opportunities for users to engage in play that involves an element of risk, other organizations feel they can do better in this area.

Requirements for permits/certifications for outdoor activities is making finding staff and keeping costs manageable increasingly difficult.



## Training

12 organizations indicated they have formal or informal training, and resources for staff/volunteers that enable them to support and enhance play. 7 organizations reported developing new or reviewed policies on the roles and responsibilities of staff involved in play development.

Both **Westside Recreation Centre** has implemented, and **The City of Calgary** has continued with High Five training for program and supervisory staff to encourage communication on play. Physical Literacy training with The City of Calgary play staff has also helped create enhanced “teaching moments” at play programs to help facilitate/ support the LTAD model.

**Calgary Public Library** provides workshops for CPL staff on “Supporting Families in Outdoor Play Programming” with a focus on facilitating child and family play in outdoor spaces, literacy building and narrative storytelling. More training programs also help library staff become comfortable and enhance their skills in supporting play at the library, including ‘Calls to Play’ and ‘Playing to Learn’, an integrated approach aiming to empower staff members and focusing on fostering play with children 0 – 12 years, caregivers, and families.

**The City of Calgary Social Programs** also presented a risky play workshop for summer staff to prepare staff for their Stay n’ Play & Park n’ Play programs, while **The City of Calgary Recreation Programs** implement play concepts into training of summer day camp staff as well.

**VIVO for Healthier Generations** has specific VIVO play training and are currently revamping this model and projected to be launched mid-2025.

**The University of Calgary** trains staff for up to 2 weeks (depending on role), explaining play concepts, discussing risk management/risky play and practicing those learnings. These trainings include online policy reviews for all program staff regardless of the camp role.

*“Our focus on play cultivates a thriving, well rounded community, one where children develop critical life skills, families strengthen their bonds, and educators grow as leaders.”*

**TOPP Kids**

*“When the children were doing free play, it was inspiring to see them practicing, using new materials in a creative way. It inspired me to take that into my own life.” This was from observing kids using tires and planting pots to make snowmen at a park.”*

**Mobile Adventure Playground Leader,  
The City of Calgary**

**WinSport** consistently provides training and development opportunities to educate all team members and volunteers on prioritizing an abundance of fun and safe care. Training is built around sparking energy and creativity among participants, constantly reassessing, and planning next steps to spark the theme of exploration and creativity. As part of the interview and hiring process, WinSport asks questions around passion for outdoors, natural conservation and community to hire appropriate staff for play specific roles.

Frontline staff are onboarded annually at **TELUS Spark Science Centre** with concepts centered around inquiry-based learning, risky play, etc. that is foundational to the organization’s philosophy.



Recreation Leader Staff, The City of Calgary

## Insightful Findings & Considerations

Summarized from the insightful findings and considerations on previous pages, there is an opportunity to explore and share at the organizational level to improve on the following:





## Moving into the future with YYC PLAYS

**YYC Plays** has been a collective of organizations working collaboratively on play to make an impact. It's vision since 2015 has been: Calgary – leading the ways in play. Its mission is to increase understanding, value, importance and participation in, for and about play.

There is opportunity to move **YYC Plays** into a new phase by being a part of discussions, sharing research and new learnings. Collectively, we can make a difference!

In 2024, organizations agreed that some work is being done around shared understanding and knowledge around what the committee is trying to achieve, but more work can be done.

*"Through connection and engagement with other organizations in Calgary, the Library has learned of the wonderful opportunities for play in Calgary for families and has a better understanding of the landscape around play in our community and the work being done more broadly outside of the city. We hope to continue to partner and collaborate in the future and look forward to where things progress in the future YYC Plays Community."*

**Calgary Public Library**



Mobile Adventure Playground, The City of Calgary



# Thank you to our play partners

Thank you to all our play charter signatories for your dedication to supporting play in Calgary, and your contributions to the Calgary's Play Charter Collective Impact Report.

Your support of this charter has provided children opportunities to pursue creativity, innovation, and reflection to learn, experiment, solve problems, create new worlds, test boundaries, assess risk and meet challenges.

Through the collective efforts of promoting play and reporting on each organization's experience, we provide valuable education and information to Calgarians on the importance of play. Most importantly, we involve children in decisions that affect their lives, while encouraging physical, emotional and social development.