NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION SITE NETWORK

ADVANCING RECREATION THROUGH RESEARCH BASED BEST PRACTICES

PLAYCARE
Building communities through play & recreation™
We believe high-quality recreation environments play a critical role in promoting community health. Research indicates that when stakeholders are engaged in the planning process, evidence-based design principles are implemented with the built environment, and supplemental programming is offered to further enhance user experiences, then positive outcomes occur.

PlayCore’s Center for Outreach, Research, and Education (CORE) leads the National Demonstration Site Network as an important effort for raising national awareness and helping local communities share the positive impact they are making on community health and wellness. The initiative is also important for convening a network of community leaders committed to sharing insights, information, and reporting outcomes. National Demonstration Sites illustrate community vitality across a variety of influences, including social-emotional, environmental, health, community engagement, public services, and educational opportunities.

National Demonstration Sites (NDS) exemplify evidence-based best practices in design and implementation, support health-related initiatives, and provide meaningful ways for community stakeholders to gather data about the sites’ impact on the community. There are five NDS programs that help communities turn research into practice in local park destinations. Choose to utilize one or a combination of NDS designations to thoughtfully support playful pathways, nature play, adult fitness, youth physical activity, and inclusion in outdoor play and recreation settings.
The purpose of Pathways for Play is to intentionally integrate play — critical for children’s health — into walkable, bikeable, shared use community pathway networks. Research shows that playful pathways attract children and families and can dramatically increase frequency and duration of use.

PlayCore has partnered with the Natural Learning Initiative, College of Design, NC State University, to help professionals and community champions create opportunities to “bring people to nature” by creating playful routes for families to explore, discover, learn, and be physically active together surrounded by nature. Pathways for Play National Demonstration Sites infuse play into trails, greenways, and shared parks to motivate children, families, and youth organizations to get outdoors and engage in healthy, stimulating activity in nature.

Best Practice Implementation:

- Assess form, location, access, usability, safety, and regulations when evaluating an existing or planned pathway.
- Connect pathways to meaningful destinations in locations where children live to support their independent mobility.
- Promote environmental literacy and learning by integrating play pockets along the path. Play pockets include themes for learning, educational signage, and playful activities that enhance the overall play value.
- Integrate at least three play pockets at appropriate distances apart to encourage movement and discovery.

“It is clear that there is no other choice but to discover new ways to deliver high-quality outdoor environments for children compelling enough to motivate them to acquire healthy, fearless, outdoors-in-nature, active lifestyle habits."

- Robin Moore, DiplArch, MCP, Hon. ASLA
The purpose of NatureGrounds is to create a dramatic shift in the standard playground development process by deliberately designing nature back into the everyday spaces of childhood, not only to benefit children’s play, but also to engage communities in working together to deliver high-quality play experiences across generations. Research has proven that designing play environments that integrate the living landscape with manufactured equipment results in increased play value, higher levels of physical activity, social interaction, and improved environmental sustainability.

PlayCore has partnered with the Natural Learning Initiative, College of Design, NC State University, to help professional and community champions bring “nature to people” in an effort to reconnect children to nature to support healthy human development. The multiple benefits of a NatureGrounds play and learning environment include: play value, child development, health benefits, and environmental sustainability.

Naturalized playgrounds have become sought out destinations that provide visual interest, shade, and comfort resulting in sustained repeat visits, a relaxed and playful social atmosphere, and growth of community social capital. These well-designed playgrounds offer rich outdoor education and programming opportunities for both schools and parks.

Best Practice Implementation:

- Locate playground in relation to existing site features and surroundings such as mature trees and topography.
- Design entrances, pathways, and boundaries to enhance naturalization and connectivity.
- Integrate planting pockets (trees, shrubs, grasses) into the play environment as part of the play experience.
- Select child-friendly plants to provide additional play value using the Plant Database at playcore.com to offer variety, seasonal change, wildlife enhancement, and/or play props.

“A generation ago playing outdoors in nature was usually taken for granted, but times have changed. Now, nature must be deliberately designed back into children’s lives.”

- Robin Moore, DiplArch, MCP, Hon. ASLA
Best Practice Implementation:

- Identify user groups, location/context, site-specific amenities, and programming opportunities.
- Select a design typology that meets the space requirements, usage goals, and site-specific needs.
- Offer a variety of aerobic, muscle/strength, core, balance, and flexibility equipment to provide a well-rounded fitness routine.
- Adhere to safety and industry standards in regards to surfacing, accessibility, signage, and equipment configuration.

Research demonstrates that Outdoor Adult Fitness Parks provide a variety of meaningful outcomes to communities and can serve as critical health solutions by offering new ways to make physical activity more available, accessible, affordable, and enjoyable.

PlayCore partnered with Dr. Michael Suk, Chairman of Orthopaedic Surgery at Geisinger Health System; Dr. Gary Liguori, Dean of College of Health Sciences, University of Rhode Island; and Dr. Thom McKenzie, Professor Emeritus, San Diego State University to develop evidence-based guidelines for meaningful outdoor adult fitness destinations.

This designation recognizes communities that advocate for and utilize Outdoor Adult Fitness Parks as critical health solutions for improving health and overall wellness through a well-rounded workout and reduce sedentary lifestyles. Adult Fitness National Demonstration Sites align to health benefits and total body fitness that offer users of all levels a well-rounded workout. Together, these elements can help people adhere to routines that develop overall health and wellness, and engage participants in substantially more moderate to vigorous physical activity.

As our country continues to struggle with obesity and chronic disease, outdoor adult fitness parks are a sustainable option with measurable impact across the broad spectrum of adult health and wellness.”

- Gary Liguori, PhD, University of Rhode Island

Research & Programming in partnership with:

[Images of people exercising in a park setting with PlayCore logo and Outdoor Adult Fitness Parks logo]
The purpose of Play On! is to promote physical activity and fun through the use of thoughtfully designed outdoor play environments and creative playground learning activities. The Play On! program provides educators and recreation professionals evidence-based best practices to promote fitness and health — maximizing the value and potential of school and community playgrounds.

PlayCore is proud to partner with physical activity experts, SHAPE America, to provide a valid solution for intentionally increasing physical activity on playgrounds through six key elements of play to promote fitness. Play On! can be used to enhance recess, physical education, before/after school programs, special events, camps, and other programming efforts that focus on combating sedentary lifestyles and childhood obesity.

The Play On! Program contains 125 activities for grades PreK-5 that align with national physical education standards. The program includes assessment tools, equipment lists, playground funding opportunities, send-home family resources, and design best practices.

Play On! can become a vital component in efforts to strengthen, educate, and build healthier communities through play and recreation.

Best Practice Implementation:

- Incorporate six key elements of play that promote your physical activity — balancing, brachiating, climbing, spinning, sliding, and swinging.
- Provide a developmentally appropriate progression of skill opportunities through beginning, intermediate, and advanced elements.
- Design the layout of the space to encourage movement through running, chasing, and exploring.
- Program the environment utilizing Play On! learning activities and additional loose parts to encourage active play and social interaction.

It is critical to advocate for play initiatives, effectively communicate the developmental benefits of playgrounds, and demonstrate how investing in play can result in healthy outcomes."

- Russ Carson, PhD, Co-author of Play On!
The purpose of PlayCore’s comprehensive inclusive play programs and unique design philosophy is to provide high-quality outdoor play experiences for people of all ages and abilities that develop the whole child, address the whole environment, and ultimately, benefit the whole community.

PlayCore is proud of our national partnership with leading experts at Utah State University’s Center for Persons with Disabilities and Lekotek, which has led to championing thousands of inclusive play initiatives across the world. Our evidence-based design and programming considerations innovate outdoor environments where both physical and social inclusion can occur. The design guidebook, Me2: 7 Principles of Inclusive Playground Design®, is a one-of-a-kind resource to help communities move beyond minimum accessibility guidelines to intentionally increase usability-creating destinations that are more usable, by more people, to the greatest extent possible. These principles are the only evidence-based guidelines that are tailored specifically to address childhood experiences in outdoor play environments.

2 Play Together®: Fostering Friendships Through Inclusive Play provides programmers with strategies, tips, and playground activities to create awareness, break down barriers, and foster friendships through inclusive play experiences.

Inclusive play is our passion and purpose. Together we can put research into action and advocate for inclusive, multigenerational play destinations across our nation.

Best Practice Implementation:

• Address local priorities, create awareness, and enlist community partners that share your mission and goals.

• Provide a developmentally robust and balanced assortment of playground activities that meet the diverse physical, social-emotional, sensory, cognitive, and communicative needs of all children, including those with disabilities.

• Apply the 7 Principles of Inclusive Playground Design® to the overall environmental design.

• Offer programming, activities, special events, or other initiatives to further promote meaningful inclusion and impact community outcomes.

“Providing intergenerational, inclusive play ensures that all people experience the satisfaction of contributing to meaningful play and reap the lifelong developmental, physical, and social benefits of inclusion.”

- Keith Christensen, PhD, Utah State University’s Center for Persons with Disabilities
### National Demonstration Site Benefits

High-quality play and recreation destinations are lasting evidence of a community’s dedication to supporting health and wellness and providing meaningful outdoor environments that turn research into practice. Intentionally aligning to National Demonstration Site design criteria ensures that your community can maximize the value of your investment by implementing scholarly best practice research to activate meaningful play and recreation spaces.

#### Recognition & Advocacy
- Complimentary signage installed at your site to commend your leadership, create awareness, and fuel advocacy efforts
- A Marketing Tool Kit to promote your site to the public and maximize data collection engagement with visitors
- Recognition on the National Demonstration Site Map, an online resource to help others find meaningful play and recreation spaces in their community
- A PlayCore National Demonstration Site project of excellence award for display

#### Data Collection & Outcomes Sharing
- Participation in ongoing data collection and reporting to demonstrate community outcomes
- On-site signage with research QR Code directing visitors to share their experiences and report usage patterns

#### Network Engagement
- Opportunity to network, learn, and share outcomes across a growing number of National Demonstration Site communities and champions

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### Turn Research Into Practice — Become a National Demonstration Site

1. **Design**
   - Work with a local, National Demonstration Site trained representative to design your site to implement evidence-based design criteria.

2. **Collaborate**
   - Identify a Key Informant (the individual with the most knowledge of the project) to participate in outcomes sharing and network engagement.

3. **Engage**
   - Create positive attention through collaborative marketing and/or programming, and encourage community members to share their experiences using onsite data collection methods.

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### NDS Spotlight

The 15,000 square-foot Explore! playground in Hoover, AL was designed for people of all ages and abilities. Located at the popular Hoover Met Complex, the inclusive play destination features multisensory experiences, planting pockets, and custom themed play structures designed to meet the 7 Principles of Inclusive Playground Design. This destination is a stellar example of a project of excellence, meeting the National Demonstration Site design criteria for inclusion, nature integration, and youth physical activity.
For more information on building healthy communities through play & recreation:

playcore.com  |  (877) 765-7563