“But that’s just for little kids...”

Meeting the needs of older children and adolescents in parks and playgrounds

Dr. Lisa Wood, Dr. Karen Martin, Dr. May Carter.

This paper presents preliminary findings from ‘Child’s Play’; a Western Australian study exploring child, adolescent, parent and stake-holder’s perspectives about parks, playgrounds and outdoor play spaces.

BACKGROUND

Older children and adolescents...

• Are rarely consulted

Older children and adolescents (teens and tweens) are often overlooked in typical park and playground design and infrastructure, and much of the literature and community consultation relating to park features and planning is ‘through adult eyes’.

• Are often designed out

Older children often feel unwelcome or under adult scrutiny in public places and parks - this includes measures such as the ‘designing out youth from public spaces’, removal of seating in areas in which young people may congregate or fencing/locking of playgrounds and parks.

• Need spaces

While the nature and terminology of ‘play’ may change as adolescence approaches, interactional and recreational spaces remain important for the mental and physical wellbeing of youth of all ages.

Barriers to using parks/playgrounds?

Perception that the parks and playgrounds are not ‘for them’

Negative perception of them by parents/adults

Their own parents don’t allow it (fearful of strangers)

Fearful other kids being aggressive / starting fights

Told to leave by adults

Cost of some activities (eg water slides)

No suitable places or spaces for them to go

Too busy (homework/study/work)

Their own parents not trusting them to ‘do the right thing’

Leisure time activities and locations

Teens and tweens reported that generally there wasn’t a lot for them to do or places for them to go in their local area. They reported their regular activities included:

• Screen activities *
• Hanging out with friends*
• Sports and leisure (e.g. horse riding, motorskate)
• Going to friends houses in neighbourhood
• Homework
• Shopping centres, city centre
• Movies
• Skating (rollerblading)
• Beach

* Most commonly mentioned

METHODS

• 7 focus groups
• 47 older children/adolescents aged from 9 to 17 years

Older children/adolescents were asked...

1. what they did in their leisure time
2. where they went in their local neighbourhood
3. if and how often they used local parks/playgrounds
4. barriers and facilitators to using local parks/playgrounds
5. What they want from local parks/playgrounds, and what would encourage their use?

RESULTS

Leisure time activities and locations

Teens and tweens want that generally there wasn’t a lot for them to do or places for them to go in their local area. They reported their regular activities included:

• Screen activities *
• Hanging out with friends*
• Sports and leisure (e.g. horse riding, motorskate)
• Going to friends houses in neighbourhood
• Homework
• Shopping centres, city centre
• Movies
• Skating (rollerblading)
• Beach

* Most commonly mentioned

Teens and tweens want socially appropriate spaces

Want to be able to go outdoors

Identifiable spaces for teens/tweens

Spaces to ‘get away’, where they can’t be seen

Spaces for hanging out

Some natural risk

Creative strategies to reduce perceived youth problems

Implications: what can be done?

Consider needs of older children /adolescents in planning and redesigning local parks/playgrounds

Plan parks and playgrounds in full consultation with older children/adolescents

Promote unstructured outside leisure to older children/adolescents

Provide higher quality and well maintained courts/spaces and equipment/facilities

Develop and promote organised activities in parks in consultation with local older children/adolescents

Centre for the Built Environment and Health
Stirling Highway Crawley, Western Australia 6010
lisa.wood@uwa.edu.au, karen.martin@uwa.edu.au
http://www.sph.uwa.edu.au/research/cbeh