

Celebrating 100 years of

play



promoting the value of play

play Australia

Play Australia supports outdoor play by way of inspiration, advice, access to information, provided by qualified people and professional services.

Play Australia is a not-for-profit charity that is membership based and has been supporting play for 100 years.

Play Australia recognises the increasingly critical need of outdoor play for all children given the increasing evidence world wide of the decline in childhood mental health, increased diabetes and obesity, and the under development of children physically and mentally.

Play Australia endorses environmentally sustainable practices in its advice and workplace activity.

Play Australia supports and works with the community and industry sectors involved in the provision of play opportunities and environments.

Play Australia members include educators, professionals, landscape architects, designers, manufacturers, recreation planners, suppliers, consultants, and people with a commitment to the development of play from all states and territories within Australia.

Play Australia provides forums, networks and training across Australia for exchange and action across disciplines and across sectors in support of the development of quality play for all people.

Play Australia is the secretariat for International Play Association (IPA) in Australia. The IPA is recognised by the United Nations Economic and Social Council, UNICEF and UNESCO. The IPA's purpose is to protect, preserve and promote the child's right to play as a fundamental human right.



President's welcome

On this momentous occasion I am honoured to be the President of Play Australia in our 100th year. I would also like to acknowledge Cormac McCarthy who was also the President this year until the 2014 AGM.

It is no mean feat to be still standing after 100 years as an independent, not-for-profit organisation, and in fact going from strength to strength in 2014.

When we take the time to look back over our history the stand out indicator to our longevity and continued momentum would have to be the extraordinary people who have led us to this point. Incredibly passionate and committed women and men from all different walks of life. They had one thing in common, ensuring children's right to play and alleviating the effects of poverty in which many lived through the tough times of the depression at the start of the last century.

In the early 1900's the Guild of Play built the foundations for the organisation that is still thriving today. Politicians, businessmen, and their influential wives created a loud and successful voice for play. These strong minded and determined women were the driving force behind the legacy of influence and advocacy that is now ours to take forward, and continue building for the next century.

The Board of this decade remains in the hands of many wise minds that as individuals and collectively provide better outcomes and solutions to take us into the future. We are indeed fortunate to continue recruiting significantly talented volunteers with broad industry expertise and enthusiasm onto our Board.

Today, Play Australia is a highly valued member organisation and we have commenced our transformation into a truly national body. Our focus remains on training, professional advice and development of support networks for people and organisations involved with children's outdoor play. We remain strongly engaged with government and increasing collaborations with other organisations in the promotion and advocacy of play.

Now in 2014 we set our sights on the next 100 years! A century where we hope to see a genuine implementation of the United Nations Article 31's agenda, to a child's right to play. That our legacy will be one of advocacy that will allow each Australian child the right to grow up with the advantage of a playful childhood.

As our Play Australia Life Member, Felix Hemingway once commented, the people within the community that we actually serve are not even our members, but the children within our communities in which we work and live.

And may we remember, we were all children once and we all played.....



Cathy Kiss
Play Australia President 2014



1914–2014 Where it all began

The Guild of Play was formed in Melbourne in a very challenging time. It was post the gold rush and Melbourne's population boomed, and at the time was the biggest city in Australia. Around Federation the boom went bust and huge job losses ensued and raging poverty emerged.

So in a dramatically changing social environment the Guild of Play became the ambassadors for the children who were pouring into the dangerous and often unhealthy streets of inner city Melbourne.

Such notaries as the Prime Minister Alfred Deakin at the time were important figures in the initiation of this significant organisation. Prime Minister Deakin was intent on a social reform agenda and the women surrounding him, such as the dynamic Madeline Murray were going to "save these poor children". Their aim was to provide moral order, improve their physical health and bring these young children out of poverty.

One of the most significant policies was the introduction of purposely built playgrounds in the crowded suburbs of Melbourne. The children came by their hundreds! A large percentage of Melbourne's population (over 40%) at the time were children and without playgrounds, they played wherever they could. They were viewed as a nuisance in suburban parks, gardens and streets where their play was disturbing to many members of the public.

Many organisations and companies donated play equipment to the playgrounds. The first was in Lincoln Square in Carlton, where today there is still some play equipment under the trees.

Local councils were recruited to join as members of the Guild of Play at the annual cost of 1 guinea. The local councils were pivotal in the development of structured playgrounds and were lobbied heavily to fund them within their own local communities. Then there was the significant introduction of 'Play Leaders' who were funded by local councils and employed and trained by Playgrounds and Recreation Association of Victoria (PRAV).

The Play Leaders were to take on more than just a supervisory role of the children in playgrounds and provide activities that were seen as educational as well. They were an important part of the developing programs to encourage children to play outside right up until the 1960s. Miss May Smith (now May Hughes) was 17yrs old in the early 1950's and trained

for two years to be a Play Leader. May remembers fondly her days as a student studying in the morning (exercises, learning games) then going out to the schools or playgrounds for lunchtime, set up the activities and often stayed up to 7pm.

In 1974 the Cubbies in Fitzroy was developed by Joan Healey, and funded, as one of the last decisions of the Whitlam federal government.

For some time during the 1980's PRAV was part of the Play for All Unit, a part of the Victorian Government.

A significant change in Victorian government funding in the 1980s which monies from PRAV to Local Government with the introduction of the Municipal Recreation Officers Scheme lead to most playgrounds previously being managed by PRAV being the responsibility of Local Government.

Playgrounds flourished and with more children playing in them there also became a greater awareness of injuries that occurred. Then in the early 1980s came the adaptation of the British Standards, to assist in developing safer play spaces and alleviate some of the injuries that were being sustained by children while playing.

PRAV took on a leading role in the dissemination of the Standards as they were introduced and amended to become part of the Australian Standards that we now have in operation. Many children's limbs and lives have been saved as a result.

PRAV became the Australian secretariat for the International Play Association when it was founded in 1961 and Joan Matheson played a key role in the IPA and attended many conferences held overseas. In 1992 Sally Jeavons, as the President of PRAV became a member of the IPA Executive, and thus the first Australian to undertake this role. PRAV and the Toy Libraries Assoc. hosted the IPA World Conference in Melbourne in 1993. Play Australia continues a strong relationship with IPA and is committed to its purpose "to protect, preserve and promote the child's right to play as a fundamental human right".

The home of PRAV at Albert Street, Brunswick was destroyed by fire in 1989 and many records sadly were lost. Jeff Rawson played the lead role in rebuilding the building, and an extension to the building was created which was then occupied by Playgrouping Victoria and whilst Play Australia has long since moved, Playgroups Victoria as it is called now, remains there today.

The role of the organisation and its development reflected changes in politics, funding and general social issues since it began.

Key developments included:

- supervised play in public playgrounds
- developments in childcare and preschool education
- design of playgrounds to provide participation in play for all children
- introduction of Playground Standards in response to the injury prevention lobby
- most recently, a focus on reconnecting children with the natural environment, and thus these developments became the central focus of PRAV

It is interesting to note that Mary Jeavons gave presentations in the 1980s promoting the need for children to spend time playing in the natural environment.

There were many people who served the organisation as members of the Committee, members of staff and supporters of play throughout Australia.

The people involved with the organisation have always been the backbone of our success. The Board has remained steadfast and able to recruit talented and professional members with relevant expertise and knowledge that has maintained this extraordinary community serving organisation for a century.

Joan Matheson was a memorable figure in the history of the organisation and the Manager for approximately 40 years. Joan was instrumental in the continued role of trained Play Leaders. Remembered fondly “for her style, independent spirit, positive outlook and sense of humour”.

The then Governor of Victoria, Dallas Brooks commended the work of PRAV under Joan’s management at the time with an official letter citing, *“The aim and object of this Association is to provide places where children will be able to make good use of their spare time by being provided with games to play, material with which to perfect themselves in handicraft, books to read, and, above all, with leaders who are capable and sympathetic towards the young people concerned. Nothing could be more important in the small population which exists in this vast country than to improve and adjust the minds of those young people who require help and guidance so that they may become responsible members of the community.”*

Key dates:

Guild of Play 1913–1923

Playgrounds Association of Victoria 1923–1933

Playgrounds and Recreation Association of Victoria 1933–2011

Play Australia 2011

Gerard Leeds then lead the organisation through the Standards era. As the Manager for 15 years these were significant times in developing PRAV as a peak body providing support to the expanding industry on safer standards to protect children from injury.

Barbara Champion has been the Executive Director for 16 years and still counting! Barbara is now leading the organisation into the next challenge for Play Australia, becoming a national organisation and expanding our role as a peak body advocating for children’s play. Barbara’s passion to improve and encourage children’s play is boundless. Barbara’s management in partnership with the Board is building the capacity of Play Australia nationally, significantly increasing membership, creating international networks, government funding recognition and the development of professional policies and innovative practices for the play industry. A highlight was the development of The Good Play Space Guide, published in March 2007 with funding from the Victorian Government. This is now widely distributed and has been translated into Japanese and Italian.

Throughout all the name and staff changes it is truly remarkable that the core philosophy of the organisation has remained steadfast, and that is to truly uphold our aim of promoting the value of play.

We recognise there is a huge amount of significant decisions, activities and people which have not been included in this brief summary. It is the Board’s intention to fully document our history in the near future. We take this opportunity to say a huge thank you to all of those who have contributed to Play Australia over the past 100 years!



The ‘Play Leaders’ L–R: May Smith, Gwen Cooper, Isobel Priestly, Joan Matheson, Miss Best, Miss Lois Logan, Miss Williams, Deidre Theggie.

100 years of play

“The more things change,
the more they stay the same” – Proverb

The above quote is also true about play! Over the century our society and environments have changed dramatically, through world wars, depressions and recessions, industrialisation, globalisation and our social saturation with information technologies. Yet what remains constant is that children still play wherever they are regardless of the era in which they are born.

How children play is not so much defined by the decade in which they live/d, but by their social class and gender. Children will play differently in the city as opposed to a country lifestyle. The socio-economic environment in which they are born will certainly affect access to particular play resources. Yet no matter how rich or poor the family background, children have still created their own play activities to suit their interest and amusement.

So many of the games played by children over time originated as the games of adults. Back in ancient Greece and Roman times it was the men who played the everlasting game of marbles. Now games have become a key part of a child's playtime domain.

Back in the early 1900s a large percentage of Melbourne's population were children and without playgrounds, they played wherever they could, with whatever they could. They were viewed as a nuisance in suburban parks, gardens and streets where their play was disturbing to many members of the public. Children were put before the Children's Court for breaking tree branches!

The Australian playscape was changed with the introduction of purpose built playgrounds. In Melbourne, through the initiation of the Guild of Play, came the supervision of children's outside play by Play Leaders.

With school becoming compulsory early in the century, children's playtime was segregated into girls and boys sport and play areas. Teacher's were on duty but not interfering. In contemporary school life we now see a significant loss of freedom in play activities, with children advised of 'no running', 'no marbles as it causes arguments', and asphalt has replaced grass. Adults have taken control.

Dr June Factor's PhD thesis of 1989 (Captain Cook chased a chook¹) analyses the Australian context of children's play and the lack of interest in the study of children's folklore by academics and educators, as this group is often seen within the community as without much status and authority.

“The traditions of play provide a secure arena for diverse and versatile linguistic, cognitive, kinetic and social improvisation and experiment. Much is possible in play, and children's folklore allows the relatively dependent and powerless 'middle childhood' young a freedom not otherwise generally available.”

“Despite constantly recurring claims to the contrary, these folkloric play traditions have not disappeared in our highly organised and mechanised world. Children continue to clap, skip, hop, rhyme, chant, tongue-twist and all the rest. It seems that childhood and children's folklore are inseparable”, describes Dr Factor.

American scholar, Dorothy Howard was the first person to ever document how Australian children play. It is noted in *Child's Play*² that what Dorothy Howard found in the unique cultural landscape of Australia during the mid-1950s was remarkable. Hundreds of games, rhymes, sayings, chants, taunts, riddles and secret languages all happening “three feet below adult eye level and invisible to myopic adults.”

With contraception comes a population with less children and more time to be anxious and concentrated on the few we have. This could be seen in some ways as a misplaced virtue.

In more recent years it has become apparent that adults have assumed the role of organising and monitoring children's sport and supervised physical activity. A child's free time out of school is converted into swimming lessons, ballet classes, little athletics, cricket games, basketball matches, and the list goes on and on.

Stranger danger and streets crowded with traffic have sent our children indoors, on sofas watching TV or at a computer online.



There are children playing in the street who could solve some of my top problems in physics, because they have modes of sensory perception that I lost long ago.

J. Robert Oppenheimer

When you spend anytime with adult peers and friends we spend many fond moments recalling our childhood of being outside with our mates, in the street, in the park, in the paddocks, from dawn to dusk. Our mothers on the porch calling us inside for dinner. The cycle is now turning again as research and educators are ringing the alarm bells to a generation of children that could be the first to have a shorter lifespan than their parents.

Play is vital not only to children's physical, social, emotional health and wellbeing, but to the community at large, to our social fabric. We are bringing the focus back to encourage families and children outdoors, playing and enjoying nature.

Let's continue to promote the integral value and fundamental importance of spontaneous, imaginative and unstructured play for children in the next 100 years. Play Australia will be there for the next 100 years.



From the PRAV brochure 'Citizens of Tomorrow at Play'



Play remains essential to the nature of being a child.

¹ Factor,D (1989). *Captain Cook chased a chook: children's folklore in Australia: its origins, development, characteristics and functions within a changing historical and cultural context.* Melbourne University.

² Darian-Smith,K and Factor,J (2005) *Child's Play – Dorothy Howard and the Folklore of Australian Children.* Museum Victoria

What is the future of play?

“That every child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life. That member governments shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.”

Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child¹

Without intervention and a significant change in our technology and media saturated social lifestyle our children are heading into an unhealthy future. We have the research, we have the knowledge, we know the problem and we have an answer. Now we need the will to change.

There is a significant body of research internationally and here in Australia that now discusses at length how this century has seen children engaging infrequently in physical play.

A number of reasons and analyses are cited². Parents feel uncomfortable allowing their children to play outside without adult supervision. Traffic safety and stranger danger. Schools frequently opt for an academic focus and do not encourage play activities and physical education.

The technology immersion of children in today's high-tech, commercialised digital world, has resulted in a loss of outside adventures and games once common in neighbourhood streets and parks. Replaced by digital video games, computers, iPods, and smart phones. Social contact is believed not to be necessary in person but through online social media and texting.

Unfortunately, this fascination with technology has made children more sedentary and less physically active, which—according to the Centre for Disease Control (CDC)—has increased the number of children facing health problems related to obesity (CDC2008a, 2008b).³

Play is perhaps the only human behaviour that integrates and balances all aspects of human functioning—a necessary component for all of us to develop our full potential.

Rogers and Sawyers 1988

Nature deficit disorder

Today's children, particularly in highly populated cities, often have limited opportunities to connect with the natural environment. Richard Louv called this phenomenon, 'nature-deficit disorder' in his book, *The Last Child in the Woods*, and tells us the developmental effects that nature has on our children.

Louv documented how modern family life has changed dramatically and become so busy in the last two decades. Children spend more time viewing television and are online more than they do being physically active outside.

Our western society is eating more processed, high-calorie foods due to their busy schedules.

This added to the reduction in physical play has dramatically increased childhood obesity, and obesity even in adolescence predicts a broad range of adverse health effects in adulthood (Dallal et al. 1992)—most notably, heart disease, Type II diabetes, osteoporosis, high blood pressure, and some types of cancer. Type 2 diabetes, which used to be rare among children, has now become common (Sutterby and Frost 2002).⁴

There are increasing concerns about the disconnection between children and nature.⁵

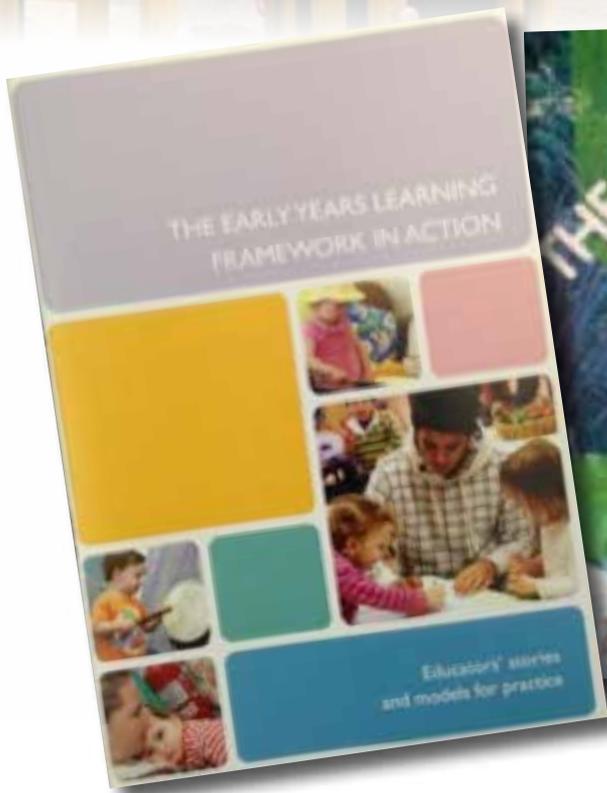
We can no longer ignore the changing global environmental issues. There is a challenge to bring children and families back in touch with nature. Who will be the conservationists of the future unless we can create meaningful connections with the environment, our ecosystems and education about sustainable practices?

*Engaging with sustainability is more than simply providing rocks and logs in the outdoor environment or a compost bin in the corner. Offering direct experiences with natural elements can contribute to positive sustainability values.*⁶

The doom and gloom is easily read and distributed, but now is our time to take this information and create action. Our children deserve it.

So onward and upward Play Australia, to advocate and promote the extraordinary value of play. Help us to spread the word to families, educators, governments, manufacturers, designers, health and welfare services.... in fact anyone concerned about the health of the next generation!

Our approach needs to be **innovative** to **encourage** children to choose to be **physically** active on a **daily** basis.



¹ February 1, 2013 the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted General Comment #17, article 31

² Witherspoon, L. American Journal of Play, volume 4, number 4

³ Witherspoon, L. American Journal of Play, volume 4, number 4

⁴ Witherspoon, L. American Journal of Play, volume 4, number 4

⁵ Young, T. Elliott, S. ECA e-Newsletter No.59 2013

⁶ Young, T. Elliott, S. ECA e-Newsletter No.59 2013

Our thanks to the Board of 2014

Why **play** is important to me:

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Play is a fundamental aspect of life for children and adults to enjoy and brings so many positive benefits to the individual and the broader community, it needs to be a part of our everyday life.

Cormac McCarthy – Board President

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In a time when we are so focused on the haves and have nots, play is a social leveller. Play is important because it makes everyone's lives better. Every minute of play brings an irreplaceable minute of joy. Play is important because it is fun.

Rebecca Ho

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Outdoor active play is an essentially human activity, it creates wonder in the world around us and provides the foundations of our relationships with others (animal, plant and human). Connecting with others to forward the play agenda provides an antidote to the rising concern that play is getting lost amongst the competing agendas of more sedentary and structured childhood activity.

Rachel Carlisle – Board Secretary

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Play is important to me because it captures the essence and richness of childhood. I am passionately interested in healthy childhood development, that enables children to fulfill their potential. Play is one of the essential ingredients to this.

Cathy Kiss

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Play is important for everyone, we need it in order to be creative, innovative, engaged and most of all, happy.

Dr. Barbara Chancellor

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Play is important to me because it frees my mind and spirit from the daily chores and expected behavioural patterns. Play returns me to my childhood state and allows me to be silly and care-free.

Harri Makela

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Play to me has evolved in many different ways from a boy enjoying the thrill of swinging, to hanging out with mates, to work and now in what seems the most important – getting out and spending quality time with my kids before they decide it's not cool to be hanging out with dad! Then I suppose it's lawn bowls and golf.

Paul Grover – Vice President

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Play is important for me as it provides fun, laughter and allows me to unwind with others. Play also enables me to get to know others in a way that is unique.

Patti Morgan

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Play provides me with a sense of belonging, of community, and of people with a shared view of the world.

Barbara Champion – Executive Director

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Play embodies, friendship, imagination, creativity and movement. Experiences learned in the playground last a lifetime.

Andrew Hoddle

”

Play Australia:

delivers national resources, training and advocacy to:

- increase understanding of the value of play
- advance skills to further promote the value of play
- provide specialised knowledge across relevant industry sectors
- bring 'play' back into the room and make adult learning fun and develop role models for children
- cater for the professional needs of members

Play Australia membership provides:

- specialist consultancy to schools, government and organisations
- informative e-news
- advice on Australian Standards
- information on playground safety
- telephone advisory service
- play industry networks and contacts
- reduced rates for seminars/workshops/training
- online access to resources
- advocacy to promote the value of play

“

We have heaps of theories of play, why it is important, how to encourage it, how to get the best engagement, etc. I figure that sometimes someone else has already said something worth repeating – don't reinvent the wheel. George Bernard Shaw put it most eloquently "We don't stop playing because we grow old, we grow old because we stop playing."

Jeff Speake

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Play is inherent in every person at every stage of their life. Play is free, fun and provides an important way for people to connect to one another and the environment around them.

Sharon Sykes

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“

Play is very important to my family (that it includes our dog too!). To me it's bike riding on road and trails and active team sports with plenty of open space.

Danny Wain – Treasurer

”

Happy 100th birthday

Play Australia



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North Melbourne 3051

Telephone (03) 8846 4111

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