

Child Friendly Cities

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Introduction

Children and young people, from birth to 18 years of age, represent a vulnerable and marginalized segment of the urban population, susceptible to having their needs and considerations overlooked by the agendas and priorities of adults. Although the proportion of children—that is, people under 18 years of age—in the total Australian population is decreasing, the number of children living with their families in Australian cities is increasing. The way cities are planned and developed should, therefore, consider the needs of this group and, where possible, involve children and young people in urban development planning and design processes.

Landscape architects can make a positive difference to the lives of children and young people through the projects they design. Many of the everyday environments in which children live, play and travel are designed by landscape architects, and these places influence their physical, social, mental and emotional development. As well, children develop a sense of connection to these places as they are linked to significant relationships with friends, family and community.

The Child Friendly Cities (CFC) initiative of UNICEF is aimed at realizing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child at the local level. This initiative describes a Child Friendly City as a local system of good governance committed to fulfilling children's rights. More specifically, a Child Friendly City is actively engaged in fulfilling the right of every young citizen to:

- Influence decisions about their city
- Express their opinion on the city they want
- Participate in family, community and social life
- Receive basic services such as health care and education
- Drink safe water and have access to proper sanitation
- Be protected from exploitation, violence and abuse
- Walk safely in the streets on their own



- Meet friends and play
- Have green spaces for plants and animals
- Live in an unpolluted environment
- Participate in cultural and social events
- Be an equal citizen of their city with access to every service, regardless of ethnic origin, religion, income, gender or disability. (<http://childfriendlycities.org>)

A fundamental aspect of achieving 'child friendliness' is including children and young people as participants in planning and design processes, particular at local government level. This kind of engagement lies at the heart of the CFC's first two principles: enabling children to influence decisions about their city and expressing their opinions on the city they want.

The CFC initiative is gaining support in Australia. A number of local councils have sought recognition for the processes and programs they have implemented to achieve CFC goals. For example, the City of Bendigo was recognised by UNICEF as Australia's first Child Friendly City. Other cities and local government authorities have developed strategic plans specifically addressing children and young people and implemented best-practice participation methods for ensuring that the voices of this constituency are represented.

Landscape architects create places in our cities that can support children and young people's development, health and wellbeing, provide enjoyment and learning within safe, comfortable environments to foster a love and care of built and natural environments. While parks, playgrounds, skate parks and sporting facilities are generally the first things that come to mind when we plan for children and young people, there are other types of urban facilities and settings which can and should be more child friendly, such as:

- the public domain, including plazas, transit stops, footpaths, roadways and bicycle corridors
- neighbourhood design in residential projects, from greenfield suburbs to high-density urban infill projects
- commercial developments: shopping centres and entertainment facilities or precincts
- institutions: schools and school grounds, early childhood centres, community centres and libraries, hospitals and museums
- public transport systems
- destination recreation facilities, eg, walking trails, beaches and campgrounds
- environmental education facilities.



Key issues

There are numerous challenges that make it difficult to always meet the needs of children and young people in landscape architectural projects. Broadly, there may be a lack of awareness and understanding of how children and families living in cities are disadvantaged by a lack of consideration. Aiming for 'child-friendliness' is rarely identified in design briefs as an important project objective, apart from those developments that include play environments. Rarely is consultation with this age group included in consultants' fees. This is largely due to long-held views, for example:

- There is a view that children's needs are met by providing playgrounds, schoolgrounds and skate parks
- The environmental needs of children and young people living in cities are often overlooked as important to their personal development
- The process of engaging with children and young people is thought to be too time consuming and rarely is included in project fees.
- There is uncertainty about the most effective ways of engaging with children and young people
- There is a concern that what children want doesn't match up with budget realities.
- The lag time between consultation and project implementation can mean those children who've been involved in the project process have grown up or moved on to other interests.

Landscape architects working in local and state government can provide critical pathways towards meaningful engagement with children and young people by acting as a conduit and advocating for collaboration between all necessary parties including:

- Internal: councillors, executive management, place-makers, family services, youth services, project delivery
- External: schools, kindergartens, carers / parents, wider community, and
- Design and funding sources: advocacy and enabling of consultant landscape architects to include participation with children and young people throughout the planning and design processes.



AILA position

AILA supports the objectives of the United Nations' Child Friendly Cities Initiative and advocates for governments throughout Australia, at all levels, to adopt this framework to underpin their strategic planning for urban development and implementation of site-specific project planning and design. Further, we encourage all Australian states to follow the NSW's Government's lead and hold inquiries focusing on children, young people and the built environment as a starting point for identifying the existing barriers and obstacles to involving children and young people in the planning and design of their environments

- AILA advocates for planning and design processes that invite and take account of children's and young people's authentic participation. Further actions include:
- liaise with AILA Registered Landscape Architects working in the public sector to determine the best approach to raise awareness in their sector of the issues of planning and designing with children and young people
- support school and community groups seeking assistance in developing child friendly initiatives to encourage children's and young people's participation
- document case studies that showcase projects and policies that assist cities in their CFC efforts, and disseminate research on issues relevant to CFC
- assist members to build skills in participating with children and young people in their project work and including these age groups in tendering for public projects through continuing professional development programs
- recognise planning and design excellence in state and national awards programs for projects that demonstrate leadership in working toward CFC goals.

Case Studies

Darling Precinct

The Darling Precinct, designed by ASPECT Studios for Lend Lease as part of their Darling Quarter redevelopment, is an example of a city space that accommodates a full range of users, from babies and toddlers to teenagers. It is also an example of a major developer committing to expend a considerable budget and allocate a significant area of public space to a unique play facility specifically for children and families.

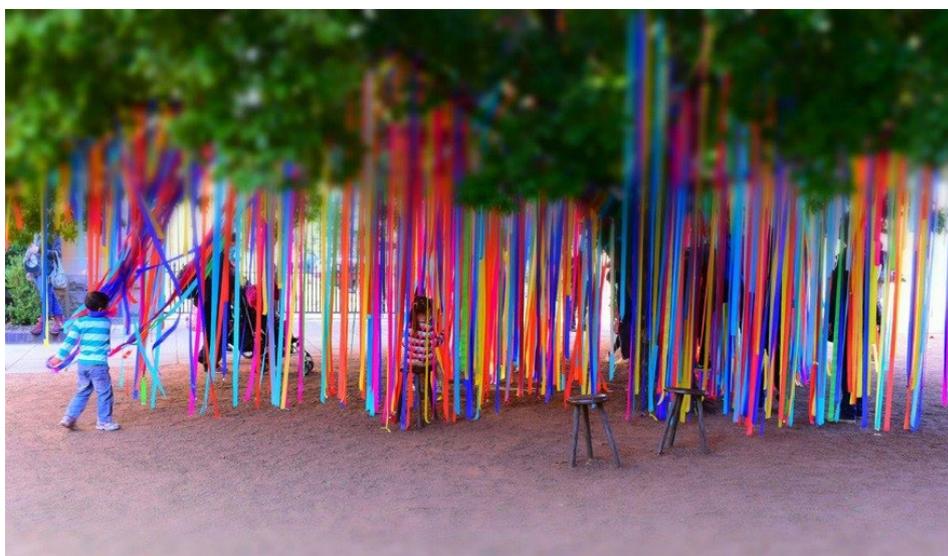
This innovative children's playground is at the heart of Darling Quarter centerpiece. Over 4000m² in size, the playground is the largest in the Sydney CBD. Incorporating a range of play settings and including interactive water play facilities, it has become a popular, heavily used regional attraction for Sydney.



Figure 1: Darling Precinct - designed by Aspect Studios



[ArchiKidz event/project at VIVID Sydney in June 2015](#)



ArchiKidz PLAY[ground] was a collaboration with Hassell Young Designers and a team of creatives, including Vanessa Trowell, ArchiKidz Director that transformed a plaza at the Hyde Park Barracks in Sydney's CBD into a colourful and engaging playspace. Besides creating an event as part of the VIVID program of offerings, the project offered kids an opportunity to be seen and heard. The creators wanted to offer an experience that would inspire "tomorrow's thinkers and city makers...to play, experiment and toy with ideas about the future of our cities." In turn, the Young Designers were testing ideas for public engagement with children that could inform how they undertake future projects in the public domain. There was also a program of workshops about city making and the built environment for kids and adults, and the team captured kids' ideas about play, the importance of greenspace, apartment living in the city, and dreams for environmentally-friendly public transport.



Brooks Reach, Dapto, Stockland residential development

This was the first project recognised by PIA in the category “outstanding project that addressed Planning for Children and Young People”. It was awarded in 2012 to Stockland, for their new Illawarra residential community, Brooks Reach.

An independent research project was developed with Dr Karen Malone, University of Western Sydney’s School of Education, where over 150 local primary school children, aged 5-10 years of age, investigated their local environment using cameras and drawings. A group of Year 5 children analysed the submissions and helped inform the brief for a new play environment. Stockland used that brief in commissioning JMD Landscape Architects. This project demonstrates how children’s views can be taken into account and how they can be genuinely involved in decision making processes. Stockland was committed to a consultation process in which the children were co-creators with imagining the qualities of a future residential environment.

[“My School Rules” project—Tract Consultants’ winning entry with Marrickville Public School](#)

My Park Rules, was a national competition run by AILA in collaboration with 2020 Vision, with the aim of encouraging school groups, parents and communities to submit their proposals for transforming an under-loved park and creating a greener future. The Sydney office of Tract Consultants worked with the students at Marrickville Public School to design new schoolground and community spaces. Their entry was selected to be constructed. The video of their project demonstrates the engagement how the children engaged with this process and were facilitated in doing so by the landscape architects.

[Tweed Shire Council’s Youth Strategy and Action Plan](#)

Tweed Shire Council’s Youth Strategy “Speak Out” Strategic Plan, 2013-2017 won the 2013 NSW PIA Award for Planning for Children and Young People. The youth strategy sits within Council’s suite of strategic and operational plans, ensuring its list of actions will not be overlooked.

The process of developing the Youth Strategy was exemplary, largely due to the wide-range of best practice participatory activities employed by Cred Consultants; including: youth workshops and online surveys; ‘vox pops’; a ‘Speak Out’ website and Facebook page; postcards distributed throughout the LGA to all high school students; and two local government forums where young people and Council officers interacted. Council regarded this as an excellent investment of time. ‘By participating in the planning and delivery of decisions that affect them, young people will have the opportunity to feel more connected to where they live’ (Cred 2012, p7).



Supporting research, publications and agencies

[UNICEF \(2004\) Building Child Friendly Cities](#)

UNICEF's Child Friendly Cities website provides practical guidance on building a Child Friendly City or Community. It includes international case studies, best practices and interventions, links to publications, and updates on current research and initiatives.

[Child in the City](#)

This is the website of the Child in the City Foundation, which has the following objectives: "...to strengthen the position of children in cities, promote and protect their rights and give them space and opportunities to play and enjoy their own social and cultural lives. We do this by providing communications platforms for academics, practitioners and campaigners for children's rights to disseminate research and good practice." It's an excellent up-to-date source of information with research and postings from international experts on issues of health, participation, mobility, urban planning, children's geographies, play, intergenerational approaches, poverty, and education.

Bishop K. and Corkery L. (eds) (2017) Designing Cities with Children and Young People: Beyond Playgrounds and Skateparks, Routledge, New York.

This book, edited by Kate Bishop and Linda Corkery, "...focuses on promoting better outcomes in the built environment for children and young people in cities across the world...present(ing) the experience of practitioners and researchers who actively advocate for and participate with children and youth in planning and designing urban environments."

Robbé, F. (2017) "Designing with Children: A practitioner's perspective", in Bishop and Corkery (eds.) Designing Cities with Children and Young People: Beyond Playgrounds and Skateparks, Routledge, New York. pp 177-193.

Fiona Robbé has long advocated for children's active participation with designers in creating their play environments. Her chapter in Bishop and Corkery's book outlines her approach and provides a detailed example of one of her schoolground design projects undertaken with the students.

[Arup \(2017\) "Cities Alive: Designing for Urban Childhoods"](#)

This report was produced by Arup's Foresight, Research and Innovation and Integrated City Planning teams and effectively makes the argument that all citizens benefit when we use a child-friendly approach to innovative urban development. Drawing on current international research and project exemplars, this accessible document speaks to a wide audience including city decisionmakers, developers, planners and designers.



Freeman C. & Tranter P. (2011) Children and Their Urban Environment: Changing worlds. Earthscan, London.

In this book, the authors focus on specific 'activity spaces' of childhood: home, school, neighbourhood, and city centre; service, cultural and natural spaces—first understanding them as they exist and their significance in children's lives, then suggesting how they could be improved.

[Planning Institute of Australia CFC framework and position statement](#)

PIA was the first professional organization to adopt a policy on CFC in 2007. This statement spells out their commitment to making the needs of children a planning priority, and acknowledge that this, in turn, benefits the general community.

[ACT's Children and Young People Commitment](#)

From the website: "The focus of The ACT Children and Young People's Commitment 2015-2025 (the Commitment) is children and young people aged 0 to 25 years residing in the ACT. The purpose of the Commitment is to set a vision for a whole-of-government and whole-of-community approach to promote the rights of children and young people...It has been developed in consultation with children, young people, community agencies and the ACT Government."

[National Children's Commissioner, Australian Human Rights Commission](#)

[NSW Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People](#)

[Commissioner for Children and Young People Western Australia](#)

[Victorian Commission for Children and Young People](#)

[South Australian Commission for Children and Young People](#)

[Youth Action](#)

Youth Action is the peak body for young people and youth services in NSW, representing over 1.25million constituents.



Australian Institute of
Landscape Architects

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[Other AILA position statements](#)

Further information

AILA National Office

www.aila.org.au

Telephone 02 6248 9970

Email admin@aila.org.au

Post GPO Box 1646,

Canberra ACT 2601