

# PLACE AND PLAY

EVERYONE  
CAN PLAY



# Introduction

The Everyone Can Play guideline has transformed the way playspaces are planned, designed and managed. The three core principles of Everyone Can Play encourage thinking that moves from just considering accessibility to planning for true inclusion by asking the questions: Can I get there? Can I play? Can I stay? These principles have been fundamental to challenging our thinking around inclusion. But there is more we can do to ensure our playspaces are designed to bring people together.

Expanding on the Everyone Can Play core principles, this document seeks to encourage playspace designers, planners and managers to think about the deeper experiences play can provide. By planning and designing playspaces that are firmly rooted in place and informed by meaningful engagement, playspaces become powerful hubs for learning, discovery, community connection and celebration.

Expanding on the principles of 'Can I get there? Can I play? Can I stay?' when developing new playspaces and upgrading existing playspaces, this document encourages people to further ask:

- Can I connect?
- Can I discover?
- Can I celebrate?

Playspaces are the heart of our communities. They are places for community gathering and interaction, supporting connections and experiences. Our rich history and stunning landscapes, combined with the unique stories and aspirations of our communities, provide us with powerful tools to help create amazing playspaces.

When we create places that reflect the wants and needs of our communities, there are significant flow-on benefits. Most importantly, we form stronger connections to our land and to each other — fostering a deep sense of belonging. Connecting with a place should always start with a local conversation, so we can fully understand community dynamics and desires.

Australia is home to oldest living culture in the world. In addition to this sacred and special honour, we also have access to a range of beautiful and diverse landscapes — from bushland to beaches, and everything in between. These unique environments should be highlighted and celebrated in the places our people love most.

By engaging with community and drawing on the unique characteristics of place when we plan and design our playspaces, we can create places that foster connection, discovery and celebration.

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# What is Place and Play?

*Place and Play* is about understanding and incorporating our local context in playspace consultation, planning, design and delivery. We know that our most loved playspaces reflect the unique characteristics of Country, and the values and aspirations of local communities.

Understanding and drawing on the characteristics of place helps us shape completely distinct playspaces. When we use local knowledge, materials, artists, plants, perspectives, climates, stories and other elements to inform planning and design, we create playspaces that reflect and celebrate our communities, culture and environment. Engaging meaningfully with communities and stakeholders is also vital to understanding the aspirations and needs of the people who use these spaces.

Whether we are honouring established connections to a place or helping to create new ones, taking a place-based approach to designing playspaces is a great investment in our communities and a way to create places that people love.

**“When we design environments that are relationally rich, be it with people or places, we honour our brain’s most fundamental archaeology — to feel connected.”**

– Patrick Faucher  
Principal, Yudi Gunyi School

# The benefits of connecting with place

Places can be important because of their location, their history or how they make us feel. Some places provide us with a sense of identity through stories, images, experiences and memories. Connecting with place offers our communities social, cultural and environmental benefits.

## **We connect with Country**

Acknowledging, highlighting and celebrating the land we are on strengthens our connection with Country. Our choice of plants, stone, timber and other natural materials can be drawn from appropriate local sources to share local history while playing.

## **We create meaningful design outcomes**

A meaningful design is an honest reflection of people and place. Talking to our communities and walking

Country with knowledge-holders provides a more detailed understanding of what is already unique and loved, and what can be incorporated in design to establish greater connections to place.

## **We form lasting relationships**

Engaging local knowledge-holders and communities in the planning and design process brings people together around a shared goal. This bonds community members, allowing new relationships to endure once the playspace is constructed, and helping inform future local projects.

## **We uplift the local economy**

Localised engagement and collaboration with artists and makers creates a deeper sense of belonging and increases employment opportunities in the area. When we truly know our communities' needs, we prioritise items that deliver the most return — reducing budget costs.

## **We promote sustainability**

Local materials and resources are more environmentally sustainable as they are appropriate to the local climate and context and do not have to be imported across long distances. Sustainability also

comes from working with our existing natural settings and amenities, like shade and cooling winds.

## **We discover history**

Australia has a rich and fascinating past. By incorporating the experiences and stories of local knowledge-holders into playspaces, we highlight and celebrate this history with our communities.

## **We celebrate and appreciate place**

Everyone can enjoy the experience of native organic textures, smells and sounds. By engaging with the natural elements around us, we gain deeper appreciation for where we live.

## **We take ownership**

Working with local communities to create playspaces nurtures a sense of stewardship and pride, as we reflect the identities and needs of our communities and foster a sense of belonging.

# How to connect with place

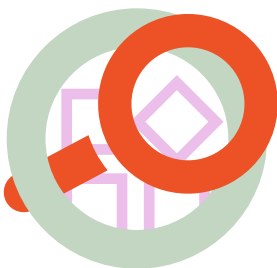
The core principles of Everyone Can Play help us plan for true inclusion by asking the questions: Can I get there? Can I play? Can I stay?

These three questions provide a simple and effective tool to challenge the way we think about building inclusive playspaces.

To expand on this, *Place and Play* encourages people to consider the deeper experiences that play can provide by asking:



## Can I connect?



## Can I discover?



## Can I celebrate?

These questions can help you design playspaces that foster community connection and learning, and promote the unique characteristics of your local area.

**When planning, designing or upgrading your next playspace ask yourself: Can I connect? Can I discover? Can I celebrate?**



# Can I connect?

**In the planning phase, begin by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the place. Then look for opportunities to connect and engage with the local community, culture, history and natural environment.**

Before we can connect with place, we need to connect with local knowledge-holders and communities.

## Connect with the community

Community engagement is an important part of connecting with place. Disability support groups, Aboriginal Land Councils, community members, council staff and children all have a special perspective to share.

Connect with the community early to inform the playspace location and brief development for play experience designs. We can do this through online, face-to-face activities or both to reach the widest range of people. Bringing community members from diverse cultural backgrounds together in discussion is a key step in sharing our cultures and helping everyone connect over mutual values.

*Photo by Bec Ho*







Photo by Bec Ho

## BEST PRACTICE CASE STUDY

# A community-driven project

LIVVI'S PLACE, WARRAGAMBA, NSW

Livvi's Place Warragamba is a true community-driven playspace project. The local community came together to design the space, host fundraisers and raise awareness.

The project was a partnership between the NSW Government, Touched by Olivia, Wollondilly Shire Council and community members. It was led by local resident Sandra Harlor, with support from key stakeholder groups in the Aboriginal community and disability sector.

The team understood they needed to go to the community to rally public support. Consultations were held at local festivals and Warragamba Public School, where students helped design key features of the playspace. A fundraising rodeo was also hosted, where the mayor auctioned off pieces of equipment for community sponsorship.

Today, the playspace is loved by the local community, as it reflects what is special to them. Its unique elements include fence panels designed by a local Gundungurra Elder that illustrate local Aboriginal history, and an entrance wall decorated with over 200 tiles by Warragamba Public School students. Livvi's Place demonstrates the value of taking a project vision to the community and highlights the benefits community ownership brings.



## Connect with Traditional Custodians

Ongoing and early engagement with Traditional Custodians, including local Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal Land Councils, Aboriginal Elders, leaders and recognised knowledge-holders, is key to building meaningful, long-term relationships — not just a one-off engagement process. Strong relationships provide a solid foundation for Aboriginal people to provide leadership and guidance throughout a project's lifecycle.

Engage local Aboriginal communities at all project stages. For example, during the early planning stage to assist in selecting the project location, then during the design stage to help embed principles of connecting with Country and place, then on an ongoing basis once the playspace is open.

By building meaningful relationships with local Aboriginal communities and gaining an understanding of the Country we work on, we can apply knowledge not only across the broader playspace network, but also on a project-by-project basis. In expanding our view and understanding of the wider context, we can make broader connections to place.



Photo by Jess Layt, Campbelltown-Macarthur Advertiser website



## BEST PRACTICE CASE STUDY

# Meaningful engagement with Traditional Custodians, Aboriginal Elders and leaders

KOSHIGAYA PARK, CAMPBELLTOWN, NSW

In 2020, Campbelltown City Council embarked on the design of their first yarning circle as part of Campbelltown's bicentenary. Introductions and relationships with key Traditional Custodian stakeholders were facilitated by Council staff who identify as Aboriginal and had pre-existing relationships with various stakeholder groups.

Engagement with Traditional Custodians, Aboriginal Elders and leaders occurred early in the process to seek endorsement for the project. This followed with a series of workshops and meetings to define the meaning and purpose of the yarning circle, identify a suitable site, shape the design and material selection, and seek endorsement of the final plan.

It was important that Council received strong endorsement from Traditional Custodians, Aboriginal Elders and leaders, while managing tight timeframes for delivery. By setting clear expectations and parameters for the project, building in flexibility to the program, and taking the time to genuinely listen to and consider requests, Council was able to engage meaningfully with stakeholders while delivering to the required deadlines.

This process has allowed Council to continue building strong, genuine ties with the local Aboriginal community, creating places that respond to both their needs and vision, and where the whole community feels welcome.

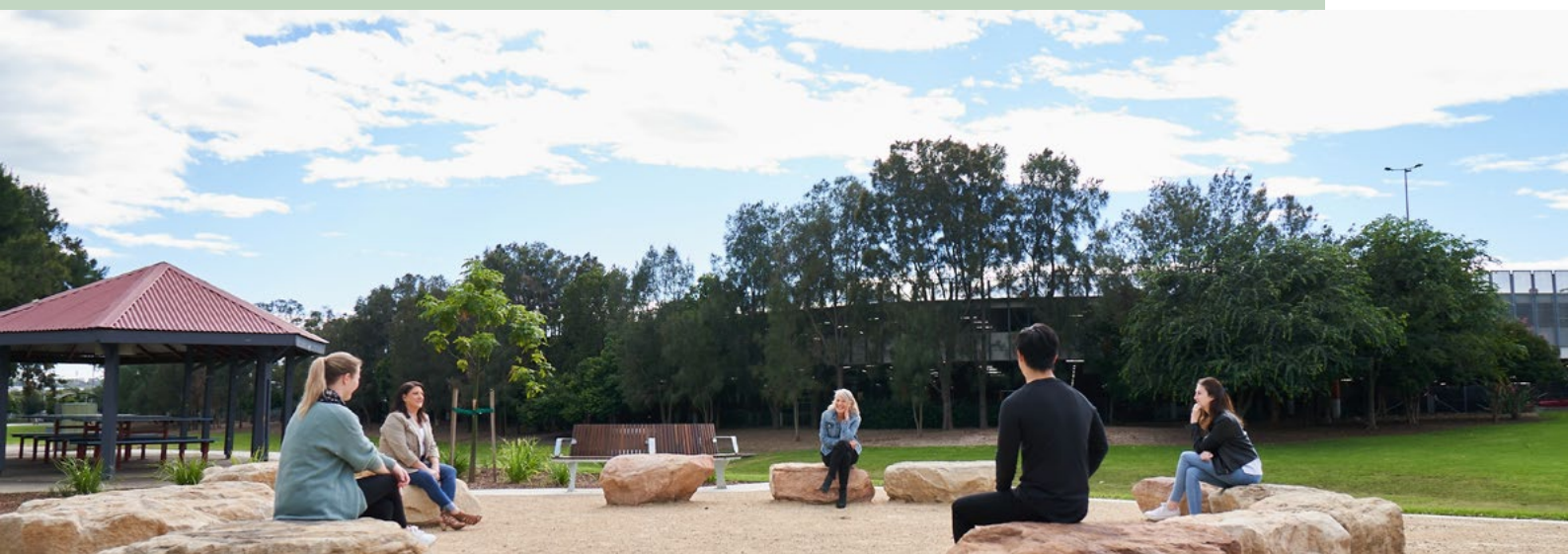


Photo by Campbelltown City Council



## HOW TO CONNECT WITH PLACE



### **Connect with the site**

Siting a playspace is central to connecting with place. To develop a place-specific design, we must understand the intricacies of the place. We can do this by spending time walking around potential locations — ideally with a recognised knowledge-holder — gaining an understanding of site significance, and discussing features with the community.

When connecting with a site, engage all senses — not only sight, but also touch, smell and sound. What textures do we feel?

What plants do we smell? What wildlife do we hear? By using all senses, we can achieve a richer understanding of place.

Site analysis reveals the microclimate conditions of the site, so that appropriate shelters from the sun and wind can be included in design. We should consider the core principles of Everyone Can Play — Can I get there? Can I play? Can I stay? — when reviewing pre-existing features, such as parking, toilets and public transport.





## BEST PRACTICE CASE STUDY

# Working with the landscape

### TOWN BEACH PLAYGROUND, PORT MACQUARIE, NSW

In 2021, a new playspace opened in Town Beach, Port Macquarie following extensive consultation with the community. Locals were eager to create an inclusive playspace inspired by the landscape and marine life.

Capitalising on the breath-taking location, the seaside playspace includes a climbing structure that provides sweeping views of the ocean. It also includes visual elements that reflect the coastal location, such as a stingray sculpture, a totem animal of the local Birpai nation, and yellow and blue rubber soft fall designed in the shape of a creek, embedded with sea creatures to create a flowing, water-like effect. Bells on the bridge, which are the same as those on river boats, provide an auditory feature linked to the waterfront site.

Council also designed the playspace to work with the local landscape. Nestled between the beach and the Hastings River, it weaves along the adjacent reserve towards a café and incorporates existing vegetation — embracing the natural landform as an anchor.

By offering a beautiful design unique to the location's landscape, flora and fauna, and a range of play opportunities for everyone to enjoy, Town Beach Playground is a popular spot for the community to come together and connect.



## Connect with local suppliers

An important focus of connecting with place is empowering communities to really “own” local spaces by taking part in the planning, design and development process.

Working with local suppliers and makers is a cost-effective way to add unique and meaningful elements to our playspaces — whether it’s a bespoke entrance gate made by local steel fabricators, a piece by a local artist, or a collection of plants grown by community nurseries.

Ask participants what skills and abilities they can contribute to the play area. Local landscape contractors can have an impact on the project through existing relationships with material suppliers or nurseries. Community members can donate time, knowledge and ideas. By collaborating with local creators, we can enhance community connections and pride, and encourage people to play a key role in shaping their own spaces.

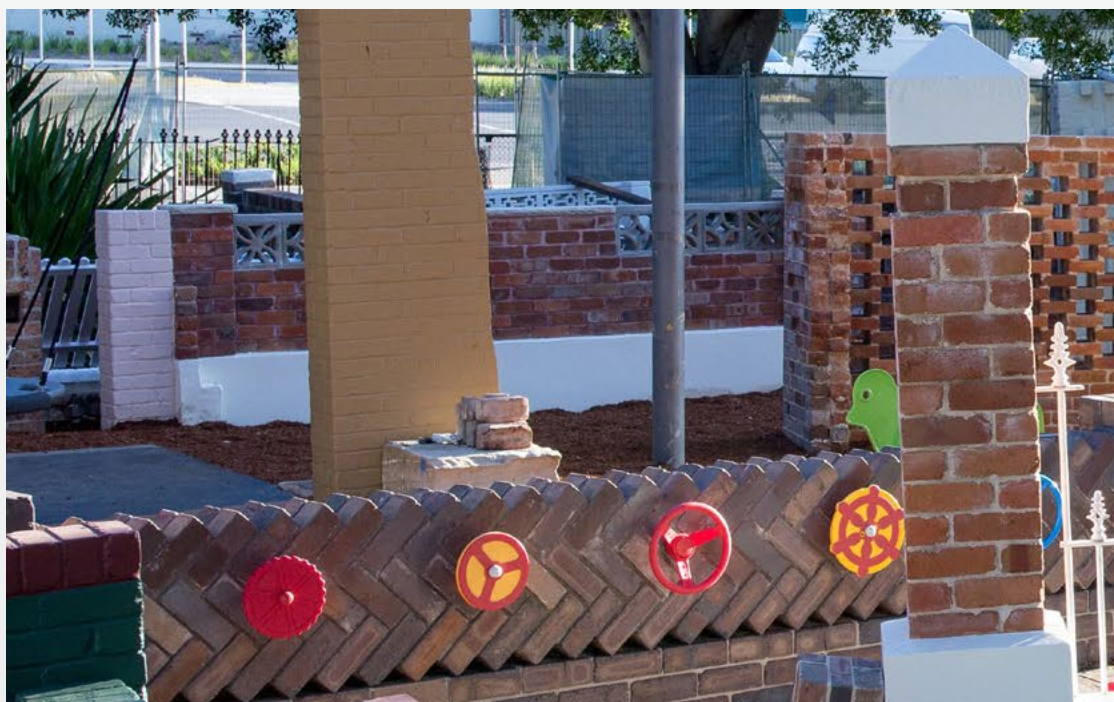


Photo by Mike Hewson



## BEST PRACTICE CASE STUDY

# Revealing history

## ST PETERS FENCES PLAYGROUND, ST PETERS, NSW

In 2020, Inner West Council and Transurban commissioned artist Mike Hewson to create St Peters Fences. The playspace and permanent public artwork tells the stories of houses and structures cleared for the WestConnex motorway construction.

To inform the unique design, the artist worked with a local historian and community members, who helped coordinate the donation of plants and

structural items from the surrounding area — including bricks and cast iron fences.

The playspace predominantly uses these local salvaged materials. It includes innovative features, such as a rubber soft fall designed to look like concrete, swings that hang from a terrace house frame, and climbing walls that reference residential fences, to create a unique playspace that visually communicates local history.



**Remember: meaningful engagement takes time. The more we put into it, the more we get out of it.**

Engagement processes don't need to be complex to gain useful insights. Councils can tailor engagement processes to suit their needs and timeframes. Supply and construction tenders can be updated to include a requirement to work with local suppliers and makers. Refer to the Everyone Can Play guideline for consultation tools to assist in this process.



# Can I discover?

**The play experience should allow for discovery of stories and adventures that are unique to the place. A big part of play is curiosity, and discovery invites everyone to be inquisitive.**

Playspaces should provide inclusive opportunities for exploration so everyone can discover history and place.

## Discover the area

Work with existing grading and site features as much as possible in design to encourage discovery of place. This can mean placing seats in locations that allow distant views, working carefully around existing trees, or developing a dry creek bed along an existing natural drainage line through the playspace.

While some attributes of place are intangible, they can still be brought into design. For example, we can reference site history through custom elements, themes or naming, or connect and design with Country.

## Discover perspectives

Playspaces are important community gathering places where we can encounter diverse people and perspectives. They are great places to share and celebrate these differences as they bring people together and foster community cohesion.

Think creatively about the diverse and unique perspectives of communities and groups. Artists and makers can create play elements that reflect local stories, like sculptures in fencing, or carved stone elements that embody local culture. Local children can do drawings that feature in signage, paving and other play elements.

Ongoing collaborative design processes, for the entire playspace or parts, can continue to be developed long after the initial community engagement and brief development.





Photos by Tash Mohring

## Discover paths and adventures

People of all ages, abilities and cultures should be able to experience a sense of adventure and discovery – and playspaces are a great place to start.

In addition to choosing materials that reflect place, play elements, ground surfacing colours and finishes encourage a sense of discovery and adventure. This deepens our attachment to place and each other.

Colour selection can play a key role in wayfinding, with contrasting surface colour treatments to distinguish activity and circulation zones. Use one colour underneath activity areas and another colour for paths to help users discover and choose different experiences. Incorporate natural elements such as water, logs, planting, stepping stones and boulders to inspire adventures and a sense of discovery.





**BEST PRACTICE CASE STUDY**

# Nature as play

**PARA WIRRA NATURE PLAYSPACE, YATTALUNGA, SA**

Playspaces should encourage a sense of discovery. By incorporating local natural elements, playspaces can invite people to discover play opportunities in unexpected ways. The nature playspace at Para Wirra Conservation Park, nestled under mature Eucalyptus trees, uses nature to take the user on an adventure.

A network of tracks weaves between the trees, offering a series of play elements and nature experiences along the way. A maze of vertical logs guides the user towards an arrangement of elevated balance beams, which lead to a web of climbing ropes strung between the trees.

A dry creek bed sits at the centre of the playspace. It follows the natural contours of the land, with 'billabong' sand pits stemming from the creek line. A sculptural tunnel of weathered steel rods and a rock platform amphitheatre for performance play provide other exciting discoveries along the way.

Users are encouraged to climb over large rocks and interact with nature. Branches, logs, leaves and stones provide the materials for unstructured and creative play across the playspace. Para Wirra's natural landscape provides fun play opportunities everywhere.

Photo by Tash Mohring





# Can I celebrate?

**Find ways to highlight the distinct and special attributes of the place, so that people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds can come together to celebrate and enjoy the uniqueness of their local environment.**

Finding unique and distinguishing ways to honour place is key to community celebration.

## **Celebrate stories**

Stories unite and inspire us, teach us lessons, spark imagination and honour our past. Connecting with place gives us the opportunity to share and celebrate local cultural stories.

Feature stories in artwork and design, through colour, patterns or motifs, or through play experiences.

Understanding cultural stories can also lead to the creation of flexible spaces for performances, gatherings and celebrations — such as a flat, accessible surface that doubles as a ball game area and a stage.





Plan by Fiona Robbe, Shellharbour City Council

## BEST PRACTICE CASE STUDY

# Shining a light on local Aboriginal heritage

## ABORIGINAL INTERPRETIVE PLAYSPACE, SHELLHARBOUR, NSW

Shellharbour City Council has been working closely with the Shellharbour Aboriginal Advisory Committee, as well as hundreds of local Aboriginal Elders, Aboriginal students from different primary and secondary schools, and members from the broader community, to design a unique experience in Shellharbour City Centre. Community needs identified through this engagement process directly informed the playspace design and overarching theme: *the movement and journey of the local Aboriginal people*.

In line with this theme, the playspace design reflects an early contact map of the local region, including traditional travelling routes replicated through stepping stones and bush tucker, and the shoreline and bodies of water replicated through blue painted concrete. The playspace will also incorporate a climbable whale sculpture — a creature frequently seen off the Shellharbour coastline and linked to local Aboriginal stories.

The design incorporates local Aboriginal people's traditional language to correctly identify characters and important features in the playspace.





### **Celebrate place**

Native materials thrive in their original habitat. By choosing native rocks, timbers and plant materials for landscaping, wayfinding and play elements, we can create playspaces that prosper in our native environments, reducing ongoing maintenance costs and providing deeper connections with place.

Celebrate place by calling attention to important local elements and history through design — such as modelling play pieces after a signature local animal or weaving a narrative into the play experience.

### **Celebrate collaboration**

Playspaces are places for community gathering and interaction, supporting connections and experiences. Celebrate community and the joy of coming together through respectful collaboration during the design process.

Collaborative design means the playspace will better reflect the identities and needs of the community that helped design it, and nurture a sense of community ownership, pride and belonging.

In addition to collaborating on the design, we can collaborate on playspace naming, interpretative signage and wayfinding, or ongoing activities for the community.

## BEST PRACTICE CASE STUDY

# School of thought

## SPENCE PARK, PENRITH, NSW

In 2020, Penrith City Council collaborated with Penrith Public School to co-design an inclusive playspace through the *Penrith Mayoral Challenge* — an annual program where Council works with young people to design and build new playgrounds.

Penrith City Council's team worked with students using the Everyone Can Play guideline to evaluate different options and help with the siting and design of the playspace. Through this process, students also helped with community engagement and worked with Council to incorporate feedback into design.

The co-design process ensured that the design reflected place — for example, the colour scheme inspired by a resident kookaburra — and was tailored to the needs of the local community.

The experience helped the students understand more about open space care and maintenance. Importantly, it helped them become more community-minded by considering their community's needs, and fostered a sense of pride, ownership and celebration in the playspace they helped design.



Photo by Penrith City Council



# LET'S CONNECT

Everyone Can Play is about doing the best we can with the resources we have.

It is possible to take a place-based approach to playspace design in any community, regardless of our location or budget size.

**By considering the three simple questions —  
Can I connect? Can I discover? Can I celebrate? —  
we can create more meaningful connections  
between our communities and the places they  
love.**

