

# Growing story of Child-Led Play Sanctuaries for Children

So much more than a local spaces for play

Hyahno Moser CEO



## Freedom Fortress

### RULES FOR PLAY

<p><b>Enjoy your childhood</b> Live your best childhood by having fun and being kind!</p>	<p><b>One at a time</b> Only one person in the Silly Smashing Zone at a time, and don't forget your goggles!</p>	<p><b>Plan and Test</b> Think things through before you do and try them out before you start!</p>	<p><b>Respect everyone</b> Treat play workers and each other with kindness and respect!</p>	<p><b>Respect others creations</b> Don't damage or disrupt other people's bases!</p>
<p><b>No swearing</b> Use kind words and avoid swearing!</p>	<p><b>Warnings first</b> You'll get a warning for unsafe or poor behavior before we call your parents.</p>	<p><b>No violence</b></p>	<p><b>Wash your hands</b></p>	<p><b>Be kind to mother nature</b></p>

These rules were created by 'US' the children of this community to ensure we all can play, feel heard and safe. Please respect our wishes and have fun!



# **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY**

**I acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we live, work and play. We pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging.**

**Always was, is and will be Aboriginal Land**



# Our Strategic Approach

## 1 Child Voice on Play

Nothing about them, without them. Ensuring children are empowered to help us cater for their play needs. We will support children to share their thoughts and opinions on matters important to them, we will then commit to actioning changes which will allow children to have control over what, when and how they play.

## 2 Play-based Strategies

Related to the aforementioned actions, play-based strategies is one method of how we are delivering for children on their expressed play needs. Not only creating playful opportunities for children, but also leading by example and creating opportunities for community members to collaborate and role model high quality child-led free play provision for the community.



## 3 Capacity Building for play

Working together with individuals, groups and organisations to build competence, capability and sustainability for child-led free play within the community. This will ensure long-term positive outcomes for Logan's children and the entire city of Logan.

## 4 Playful Research

Building an evidence base to demonstrate the need for more child-led free play. Highlighting the impacts for all, as well as growing awareness of the essentialness, value and power of play to transform communities. Play can build community pride and create positive narratives for all involved.



# LOGAN'S PLAY ACTION PLANS 2022-2025

Play is a necessity for childhood development, and it is essential that we embed play in society for children. There are National Play Policies in countries such as Ireland, Wales and Scotland. These Play Policies exist to protect play and provide more play opportunities.

In Australia there is no National Play Policy - but we have to start somewhere! The Australian Institute of Play team has been working in the play space for over 20 years. In that time, they have collected the voices of many children and community members. These voices have been used to create the first step towards a National Play Policy, starting with a Local Level Plan.

These plans are available to anyone in Logan, and they can be used as plans to increase play by any individual, organisation or group!

To develop a cohesive plan for increasing play for Logan Children, AIP coordinated and led a 6 month process.

The steps taken included multiple rounds of co-design, with community involved every step of the way. These plans were founded on 199 Logan Children's voices from 31 Logan suburbs and shaped over three days of workshops in October 2021 (89 grown-ups who support Logan Children participated). Draft plans tested and approved by Logan's Children in Action group and the finalised plans were given back to the community to begin the work.

Shortly after, AIP have founded a 3 year strategy on the 2022-2025 Logan's Play Action Plans

To make Logan the most playful city in the world, The Logan community is dedicated to...

## KEY PRIORITY AREAS

1. Increase Intergenerational Play
2. Increase Loose Parts Play
3. Increase social media on play
4. Increase community connections
5. Increase access to playgrounds and play spaces
6. Increase play education
7. Create more Neighbourhood Play Networks
8. Create Community Playboxes
9. Co-design with children/child's voice
10. Create free play events
11. Follow current research

THE PROTECTION AND AFFORDANCE OF PLAY REQUIRES CONSISTENT AND DEDICATED EFFORT



This map of Logan displays all the playful efforts made by the Australian Institute of Play between 2022 and 2025. Our biggest efforts have included Key Priority Areas 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10 and 11. We are working with community to build the necessary connections and supports to ensure the same level of effort is given to the other Key Priority Areas.

1,215 x children consulted on their play, to understand local considerations, barriers and solutions

1,563 x Playworkers trained to provide high quality child led play for the children they support daily

13 x high quality Loose Parts Play areas created for local children to access and play more often

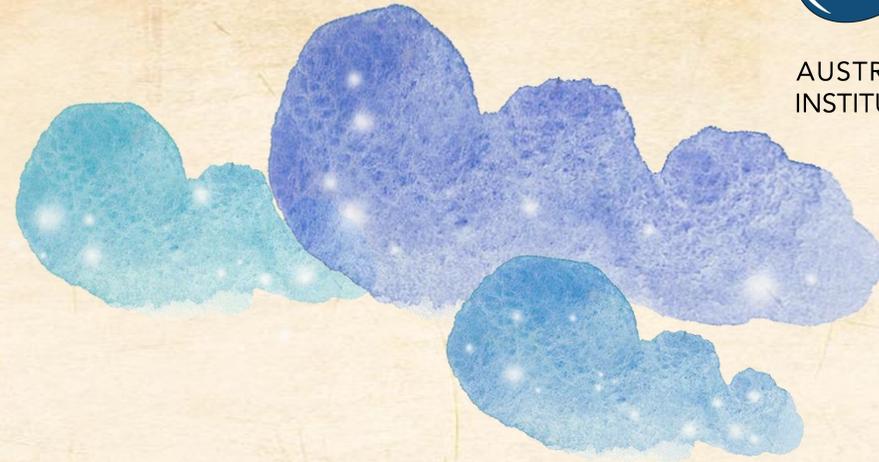
2,575 Pop-up Play sessions for Logan children, role modelling high quality child-led play provision

5 Neighbourhood play networks established for local children to be able to play every day, where they live



# Play Defined: **WHAT IS PLAY?**

**Self-Directed  
Freely Chosen  
Intrinsically Motivating  
Autonomous**



**The means is more important  
than the ends**



## Key Questions:

- Where & when are children afforded access to these conditions?
- What systems, policies & processes in current governance or society protect these conditions?

What does this mean for children's relationship with play, neighbourhoods, community and the broader world?

# Conditions for Play

1. Time?
2. Space?
3. **Permission?** or **Acceptance?**

(Dr Naomi Lott, (2025) The interdependence of the convention on the rights of the child: understanding the relationship of the right to play with other convention rights. Dr Wendy Russell, 2006: Reframing Playwork, Reframing Challenging Behaviour )

(<https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2025-04/wales-a-play-friendly-country.pdf>)

What children need to be able to access high-quality child-led play, where they live.



# What is Loose Parts Play?

## High-Quality Child-Led Play

Loose Parts are **PLAY OBJECTS**:

- **Moveable** – can be transported from location to location by the child
- **Connectable** – joined with other items to support the child making whatever they like
- **Transferable** – meaning of the item is open-ended and the child can decide what and how it is used

(Simon Nicolson, 1972)



# What is Loose Parts Play?

## High-Quality Child-Led Play

Loose Parts Play is a type of play that is:

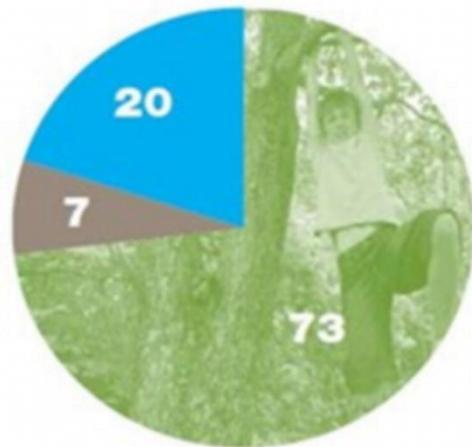
- Child-directed
- Freely chosen
- Intrinsically Motivating
- Autonomous
- **Collaborative**
- **Active**
- **Challenging**
- **Social**
- **Imaginative**
- **Creative**
- **Problem solving.**



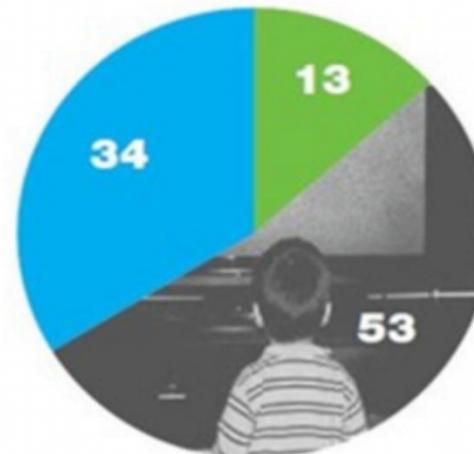
# Childhood has changed

## Modern Day Childhood- Changes to Physical Activity

One generation ago



Now



- Played / plays outdoors more often than indoors
- Played / plays indoors more often than outdoors
- Played / plays outdoors and indoors equally

Base is those who have any child currently aged between 3-12 years, n=246

(Planet Ark, Climbing Trees, 2013)



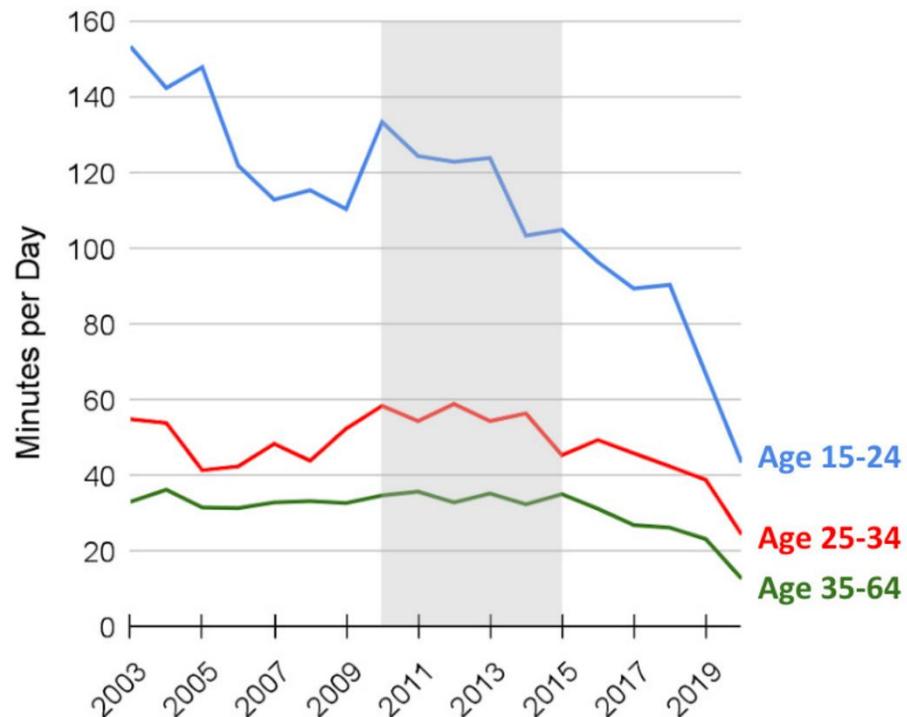
# Childhood has changed

PLAY SUFFICIENCY

VS

PLAY DEFICIENCY

### Daily Avg Time with Friends (minutes)



SOURCE: Kannan & Veazie (2023) analyzing the American Time Use Study.



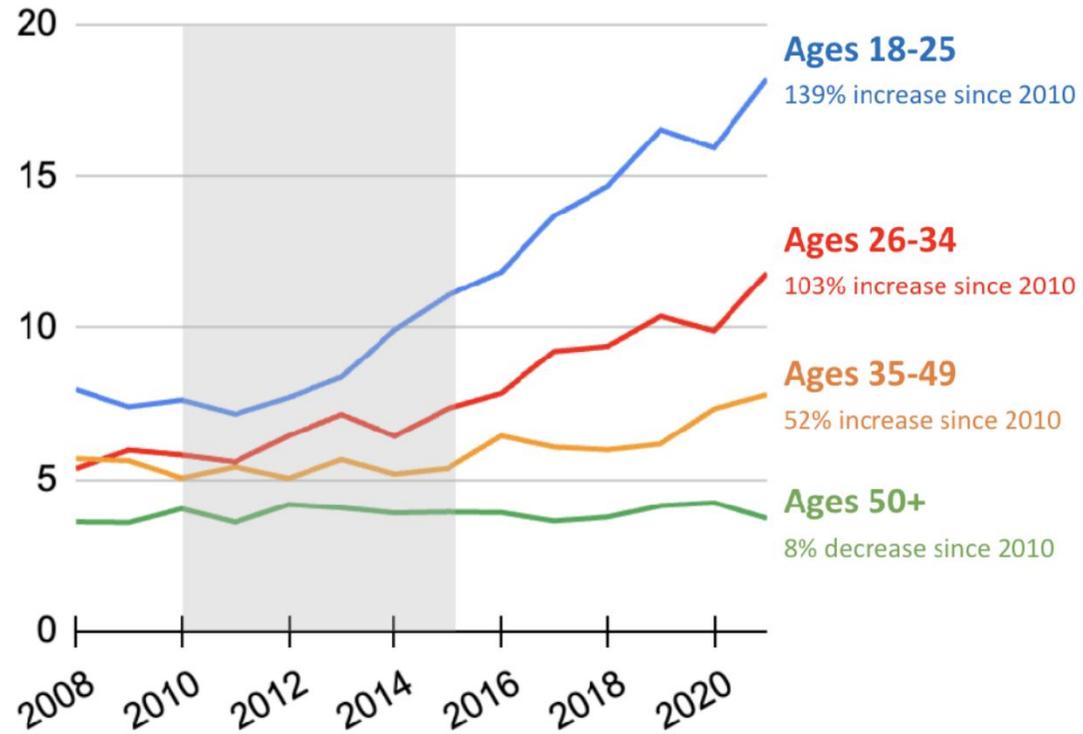
# Childhood has changed

PLAY SUFFICIENCY

VS

PLAY DEFICIENCY

### Percent U.S. Anxiety Prevalence

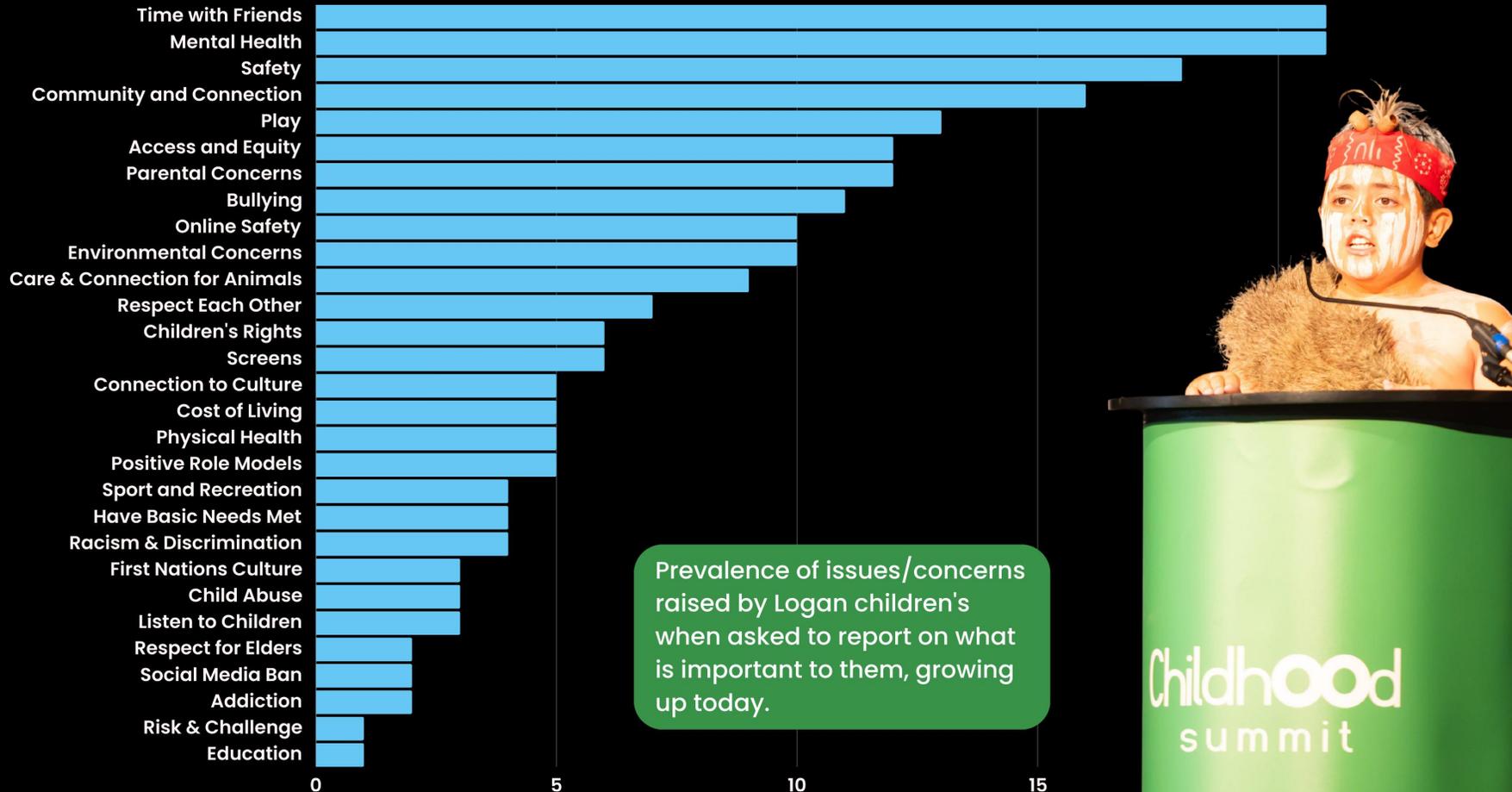


SOURCE: U.S. National Survey on Drug Use and Health



# What are the local children are saying?

## 2025 CHILDHOOD SUMMIT - CHILD VOICE THEMES



# Childhood as a **PLACE**

## Enter Neighborhood Backyards

**A modern day solution that caters for not only for children's need for play, it also caters for modern day challenges of being a parent and supporting children to play and connect, where they live.**



# Growing story of Neighbourhood Play Sanctuaries

So much more than a local space for play

## WHAT IS JOOMUNJIE LAND?



Independent Analysis  
of Joomunjie Land  
evaluation  
after 18months



# JOOMUNJIE LAND

## NEIGHBOURHOOD BACKYARD



YEARS OF PLAY

**4 YEARS IS A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF TIME IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN. THAT EQUALS 4 YEARS OF:**

- LOCAL PLAY FOR THESE NEIGHBOURHOOD CHILDREN.
- OCCUPYING THE HEARTS & MINDS OF LOCAL CHILDREN & FAMILIES
- THE COMMUNITY DRIVING THE SOLUTION
- COLLECTING DATA, EVIDENCE & STORIES
- POWERFUL IMPACTS & OUTCOMES
- PROOF THAT FOCUSING ON INCREASING LOCALISED PLAY RESULTS IN INCREASING POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR EVERYONE

**Joomunjie Lander 8 Years Old, Boy**  
 "Joomunjie Land helps me at home because I feel hungry so I eat, have my bath, tired and I sleep early"

**3 Words To Describe Joomunjie Land, from the Children...**  
 Safe Fun and Epic  
 Playful, Freetime, Colourful  
 Peaceful, Explore, Try New Things  
 Fun, Amazing, Incredible  
 Nature, Fun, Learning

**Joomunjie Lander 9 Years Old, Boy**  
 "Joomunjie land is my happy place."

**Joomunjie Lander 11 Years Old, Boy**  
 "Freedom of doing and bringing to life ideas"

**Joomunjie Lander 8 Years Old, Boy**  
 "Joomunjie Land is helping me at school because I learn new things and also I speak good English now since English is not my native language"

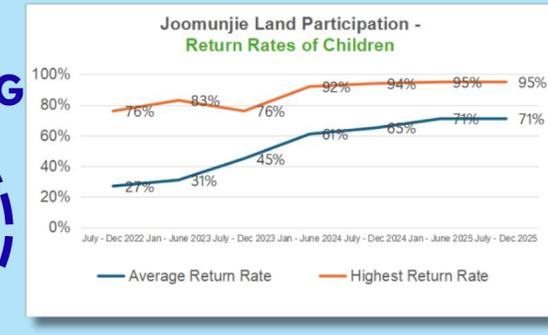
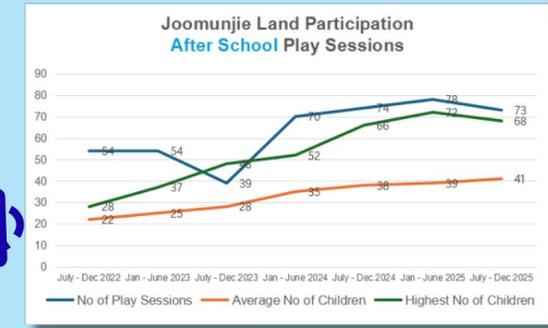
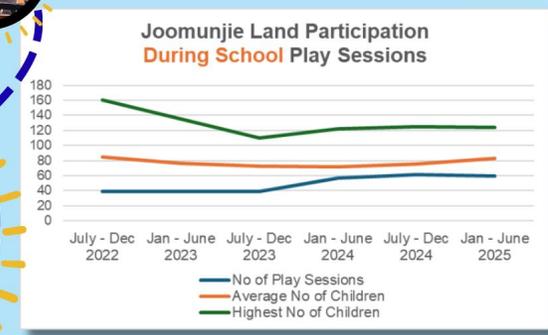
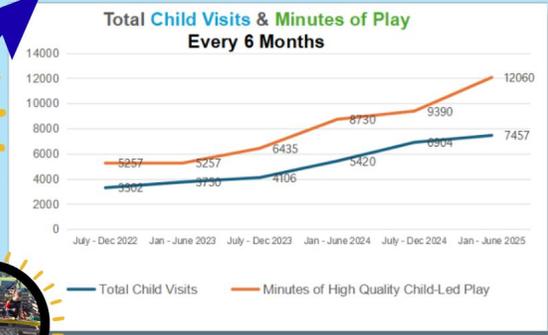


### PROOF IS IN THE PLAY

**Joomunjie Lander 11 Years Old, Girl**  
 "I am happier and feel more free"

**Joomunjie Lander 11 Years Old, Girl**  
 "I get to run around and play. Make friends. It helps me be more confident and the supervisors are great."

**Natasha, Parent of 2 Joomunjie Land Children (6 & 8 Years)**  
 "As a result of Joomunjie Land, I have noticed positive changes at home. My children are happier, more confident, and more cooperative. They share what they have learned, get along better with each other, and are more engaged in activities instead of being bored or on screens. Normally my children don't like to eat or are not big eaters, but after Joomunjie Land they are always hungry and can really finish their dinner, which makes me very happy. Overall, the routine and support from Joomunjie Land make our home life calmer and more positive".  
 "In Joomunjie Land, my children experience a unique cultural and community connection that they don't get anywhere else. They are able to learn their identity through stories, language, and traditions, while also building friendships in a safe environment. It's a special space where they can grow their confidence, express themselves freely, and feel a strong sense of belonging."  
 "If my children are not at Joomunjie Land, they just stay on their screens or phones, get grumpy at each other, and end up bored. They don't have the same excitement, learning, or social time they get from being there."



**INCREASING RATES OF ATTENDANCE RATES OF RETURN VALUE TO THE COMMUNITY IMPACT OF OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN**

**WHY?** Listening to Children & Community & Concerns Barriers

## Evolution of Joomunjie Land

1. Child Voice workshops
2. Neighbourhood Play Networks
3. Community is Socially broken with extreme levels of distrust = Wont let kids outside - Play is on Parents Terms -  
Need adults for supervision.

=

## Neighbourhood Play Backyards

Heard about a 40 year tried and tested model - YAY!



# EVOLUTION OF JOOMUNJIE LAND



2020 - COVID-19

Returning from lockdowns, Eagleby South State School has a high number of behavioural issues and Playground incidents. School moral is low, and children are dysregulated. **Introduces a small loose parts play spaces**



2021 - APRIL

AIP helps ESSS **introduces Loose Parts Play in a 300m<sup>2</sup> space**, with only 30 students allowed in each play break.



2022 - MARCH

AIP and ESSS undertake **child consultation, planning and creation of a large play space process** with student leaders.



2022 - APRIL

**Student leaders build Joomunjie Land** with support from AIP. They also promote the launch event to local community!



2022 - JUNE

**"Joomunjie Land" officially opens for school use 2 days per week.**



2022 - AUGUST

**"Joomunjie Land" begins after school sessions**, run by AIP, 2 days per week.



2023 - DEC

AIP Evaluation with Griffith University identifies impacts and growing need (**MORE DAYS OF PLAY REQUESTED**)



FEB-2024

"AIP secures more funding to open for a **3rd day.**"  
"AIP **hires local Playworkers (First Nations local community members)**". Number of children attending **increases by 20%**



JULY-2024

"AIP conducts cultural audit to find **44% of children attending are First Nations.**" "Joomunjie Land wins **National Award for Best Playground**"  
"Participation and return rate grows"



APRIL - 2025

**"Joomunjie Land 100% run by local community"**  
"High participation & return rate continues"

Children tell us they want more pPLAY



# Evaluation of Joomunjie Land



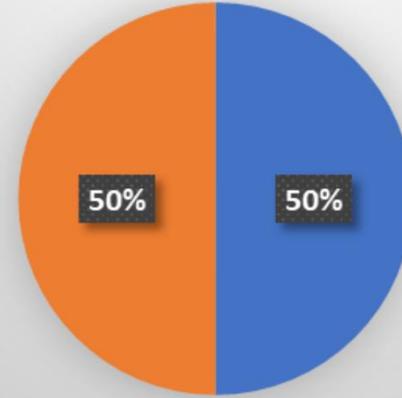
## Key Facts

- Method - Respondents **25 Children, 20 Parents, 13 School Personnel**
- **Interviews & Surveys**
- Open **3 days per week** - during school play-break and afterschool
- 2.45pm to 5pm and school holidays = **401 play sessions** per year
- (**165 mins high-quality child-led play per day**).
- Total number of **child visits in 2024-25 - 14,361.**
- **44% First Nations Children**
- **Approximately 20% of the school population** (not including Prep aged children (4-6 year old))
- visits Joomunjie Land with an **average return rate of 71%** and the
- **highest return rate is 94%.**
- **Been open for almost 4 years**
- The 'Playworkers' or grown-ups who work in Joomunjie Land are from the local community, invested in being part of the solution
- Local Playworkers support child leaders who supervise and uphold the rules & consequences developed by the student population.
- Seen as a community asset / institution, source of local pride
- Shaping a positive story for the local community



Count of Gender

## Gender of Children who attended Joomunjie Land



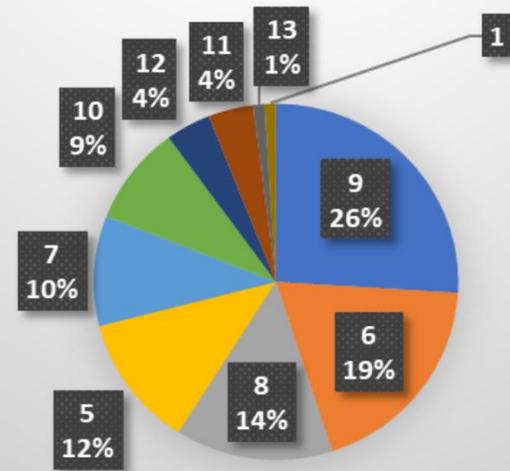
Gender ▾

- Female
- Male



Count of Age

## Age of Children who attended Joomunjie Land



# Children / Parents

interactive  
playground builderistic funny  
cool **great** annoying  
safe best **amazing** backyard  
awesome  
earth **good fun** exciting  
playful happy nice place  
creative **heartful** building  
swings fantastic freedom  
undescrivable

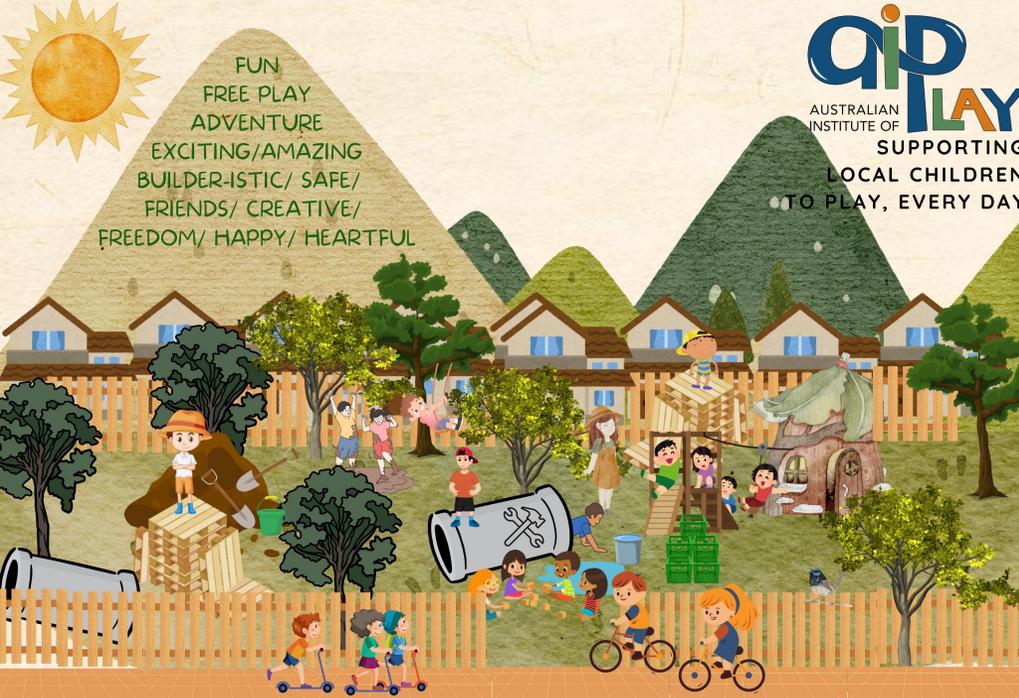
imaginative unpredictable  
outdoors educational simple  
wonderful fantastic **important** expression  
community creativeness  
interactive activity **adventure** place unusual  
funny **heartful** creative **good** earth playground  
exercise **free** **freedom** backyard full  
active friendly  
play messy happy **fun amazing** cool  
creativity friends **exciting** safe nice explore  
real swings imagination playful great annoying open  
wild builderistic **adventurous** building learning  
volunteers eventful awesome engaging surprise  
happiness exploration interacting  
therapy respectful undescrivable

# Growing Story of

## Mental & Physical Health, Overall Life Satisfaction & Wellbeing or 'AMAZING CHILDHOOD'



### AIP COMMUNITY BACKYARD & PLAY SANCTUARY



## Growing Strong Foundations of Physical Literacy

*“Physical literacy is as important as learning to read. **Physical inactivity, poor fitness and being overweight/obese are key risk factors for heart disease. Just as children need to be taught the alphabet to read, they also need ‘physical literacy’ – the physical, psychological, social and cognitive skills to achieve lifelong physical activity.**”*

(Deakin University - Institute of Physical Activity and Nutrition, 2021)

# Healing Power of Joomunjie Land

## Helps Children Develop



*Social skills*



*Communication skills – negotiation*



*Problem-solving skills*



*General Wellbeing*



*Physical and Mental health*



*Friendships*



*Ideas to reduce boredom and the use of technology*

**“It upgrades your activity and creativity”** Child7

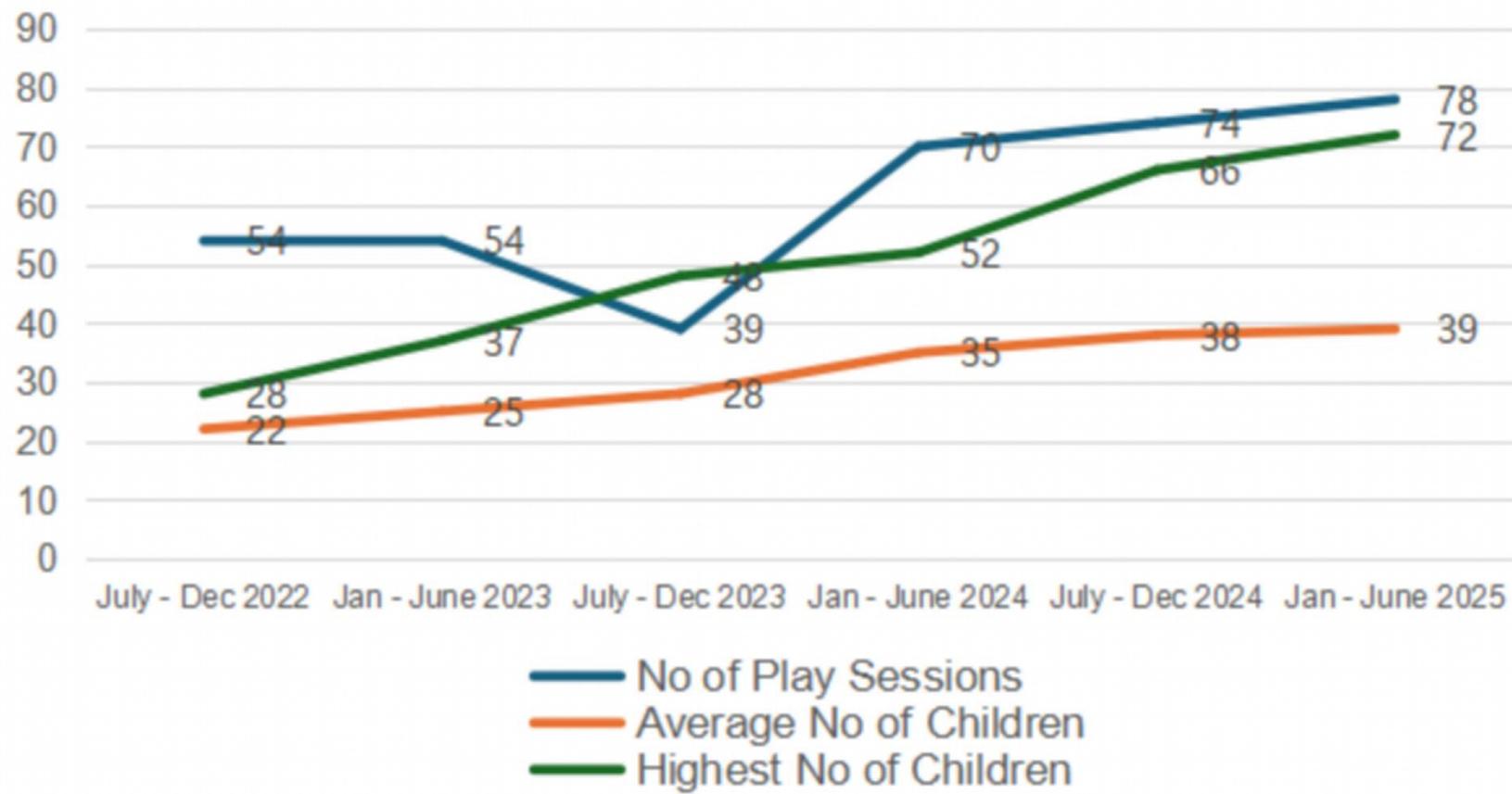
“I don't just want to lay down. I want to go out and do things instead of just going (does a laying down action) all day ... yeah I feel like I'm just trying to do new things instead of just being too scared to do them.” Child1

“Yes, because at Joomunjie Land you learn to be nice to everyone and it gives me ideas of things to do at home so I'm not bored.” Child – Survey

“It supports a whole range of development I believe – Problem solving skills – Physical development – Mental development – Creative thinking – Personal awareness – Autonomous play – Social play.” **Parent/Carer – Survey**

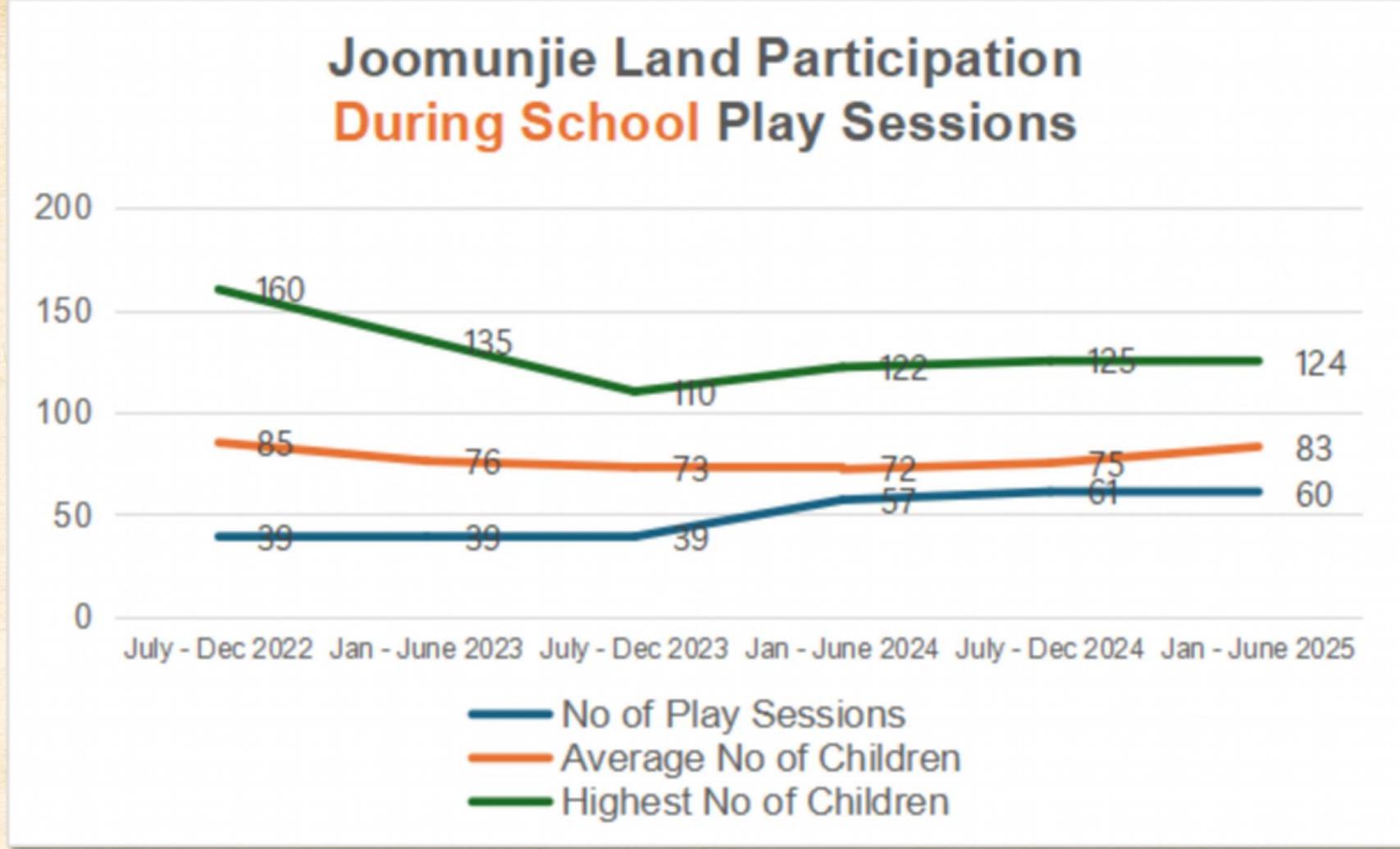
**Joomunje Land  
3 Year  
Participation  
Data Trends  
July 2022 to  
June 2025**

**Joomunje Land Participation  
After School Play Sessions**

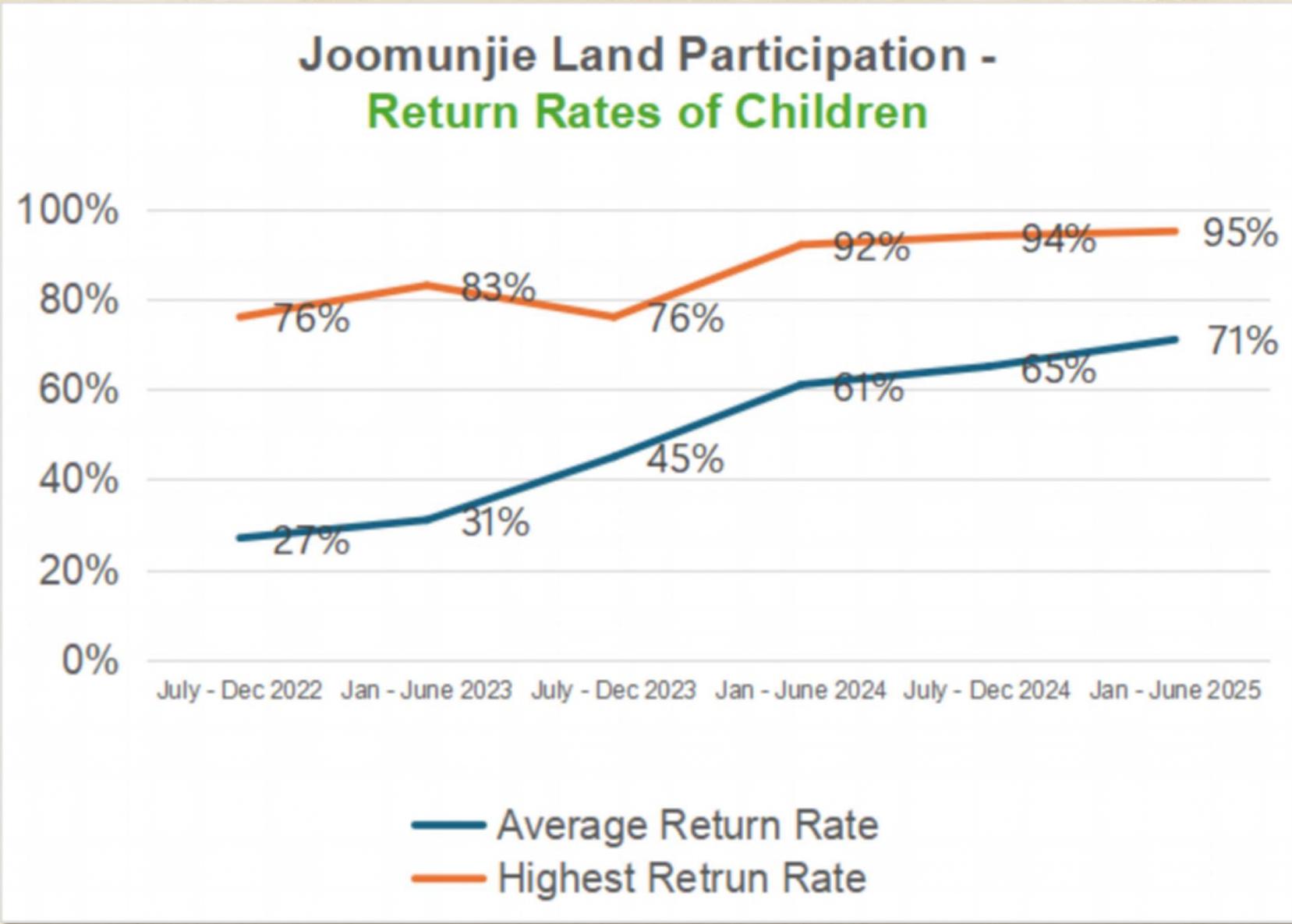




# Joomunje Land 3 Year Participation Data Trends July 2022 to June 2025

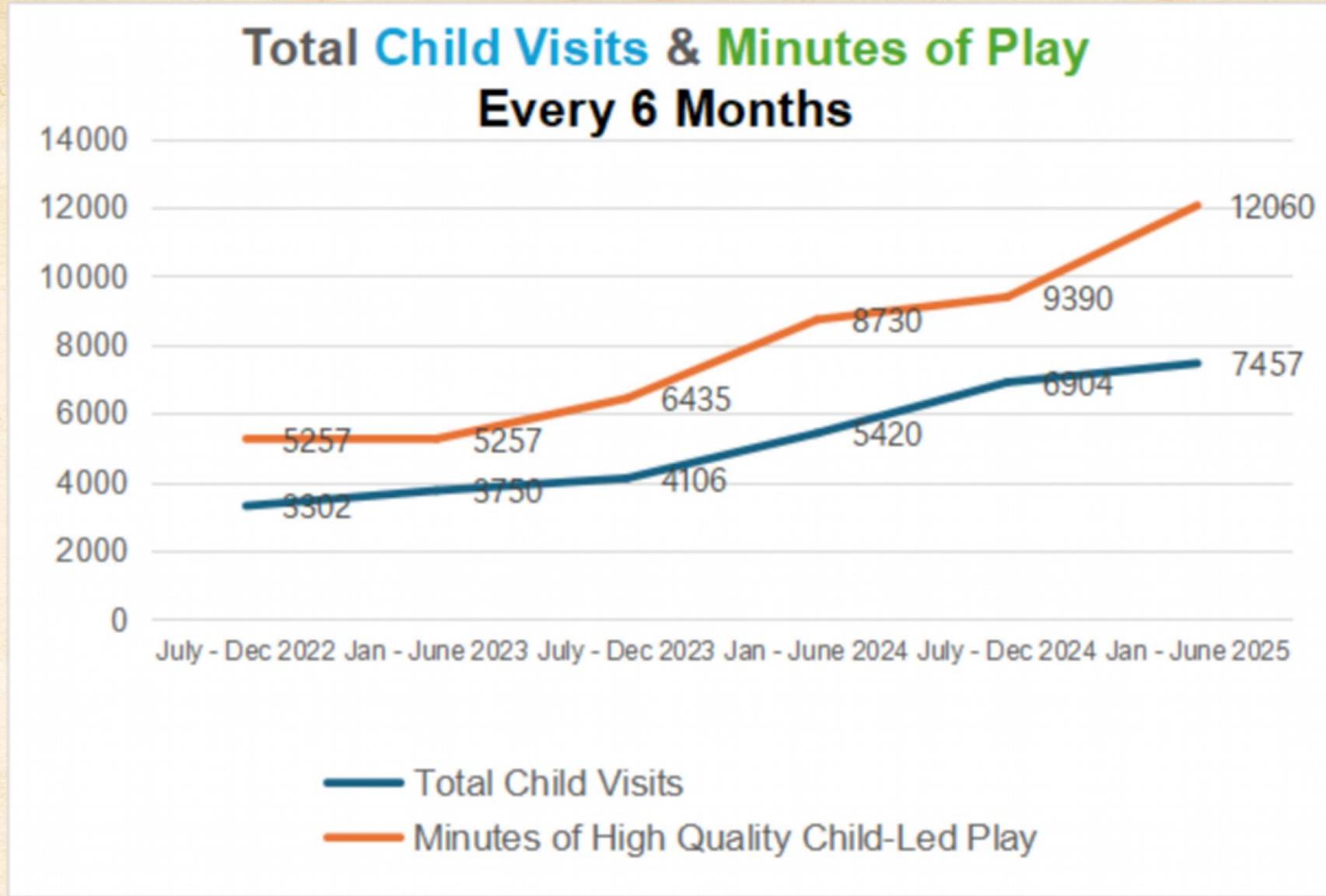


# Joomunjie Land Participation Data Trends July 2022 to June 2025





**Joomunje Land  
3 Year  
Participation  
Data Trends  
July 2022 to  
June 2025**



After school





**HIGH-5  
Welldone**



165 mins of  
high-quality  
child-led  
play per day

Required Daily Physical Activity  
Requirements for Children 5-14  
YOA, to be Healthy:

**60min of Moderate to  
Vigorous Physical Activity:**

- A moderate-intensity activity makes your heart beat faster and breathe noticeably harder than when you're at rest or sitting.
- A vigorous-intensity activity is more intense on your body because your breathing is much faster and harder, heart beat increases, cheeks start to turn red, body starts to feel warm, and sweat starts to form.



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A group of children in blue school uniforms are playing on a trampoline in a schoolyard. One boy is leaning over the side, interacting with a girl who is sitting on the trampoline. Other children are standing around, some watching. The background shows a stone wall, trees, and a green slide. A blue circular graphic is overlaid on the top left, and a green rectangular graphic is overlaid on the bottom left.

165 mins of  
high-quality  
child-led  
play per day

Neighbourhood  
Backyard Children  
are doing almost  
3x the required  
Daily Physical  
Activity  
to be Healthy



**HIGH-5  
Welldone**



**What are the  
secret ingredients  
to creating  
Neighbourhood  
Backyards?**



# Designed & redesigned by Children Skills & Knowledge Building - MASTERY



FREE AND SUPERVISED AFTER SCHOOL PLAY SESSIONS



‘So much more than a space for play’



# Opportunities for Risky Play

## Risky Play is How We Played



“I want to thank you for bringing my childhood memory back. This is exactly how I used to play when I was a child. Now see my children and their friends play like how I used to play is just amazing. I can share my experience and my memories with them”

Parent/Carer – Survey

“Outside play, creative play and imaginative play, like children experienced years ago - I did!”

Parent/Carer – Survey

“In Joomunjie Land, kids design and rule their play place, [it reminds] me so much of my childhood, a land of free play. **Here I see creativity, risks, fun, leadership, teamwork, kindness, friendship, fearlessness... kids need these in their play.**” Parent2





# Growing Story of Skills & Knowledge Building - MASTERY

==  
*“You can pretty build what ever you want” Vince, 8*





# Growing Story of Friendships & Social Competence - BELONGING



“So much more  
than a space  
for play”





# Growing Story of Friendships & Social Competence - BELONGING



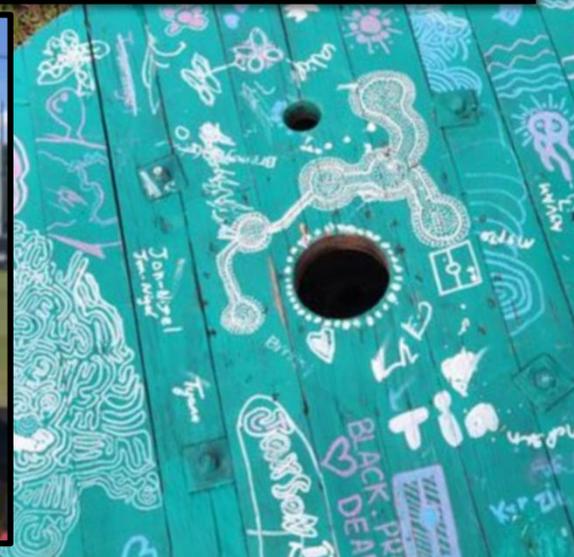
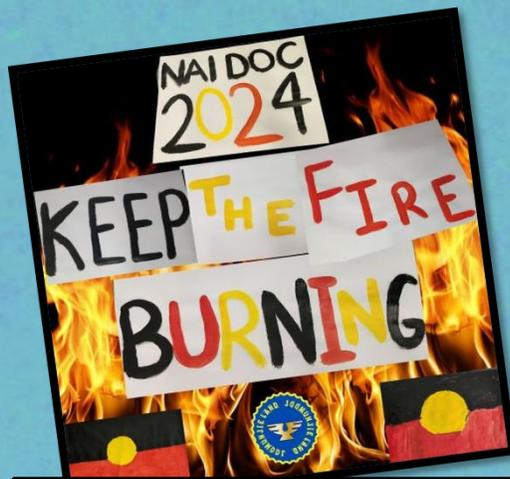
*“ I used to have 6  
friends now I have 19”*

**Jaxson 9 YOA**





# Growing Story of Cultural Competence & Community Intelligence



“So much more than a space for play”



# Growing Story of Community Renewal & De-stigmatizing - Belonging



“So much more  
than a space  
for play”

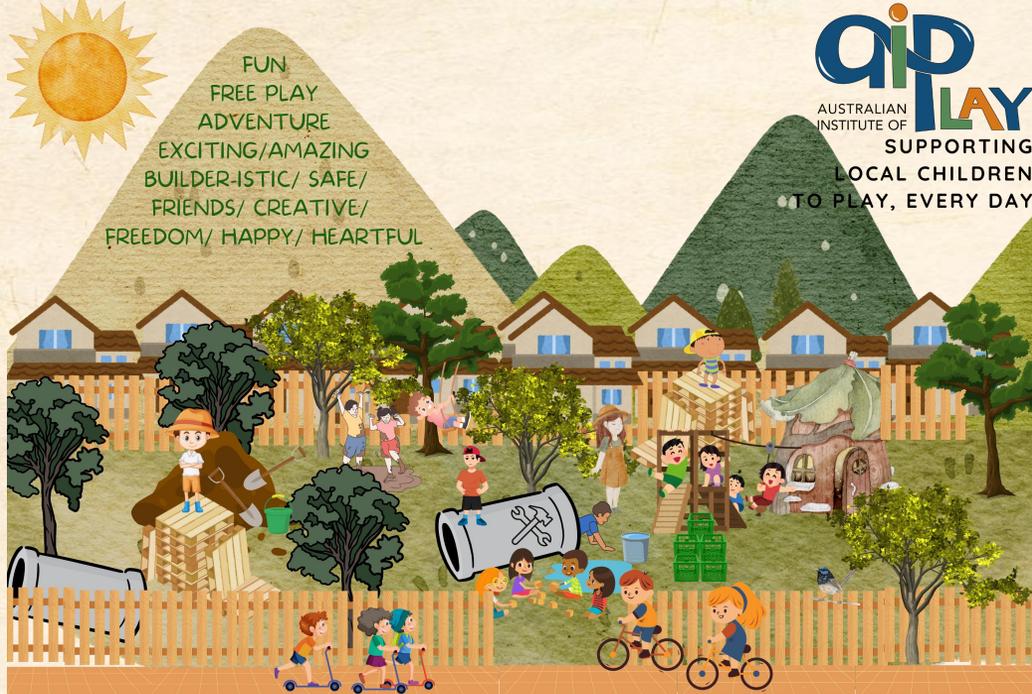


# Growing Story of

## Mental & Physical Health, Overall Life Satisfaction & Wellbeing or 'AMAZING CHILDHOOD'



AIP COMMUNITY BACKYARD & PLAY SANCTUARY



=

- ANTI-FRAGILE
- ANTI-PHOBIC
- DISCOVERY MODE

(not defense mode)

Professor Jonathan Haidt, 2024, Anxious Generation

# Growing Story of

# Mental & Physical Health, Overall Life Satisfaction & Wellbeing or 'AMAZING CHILDHOOD'

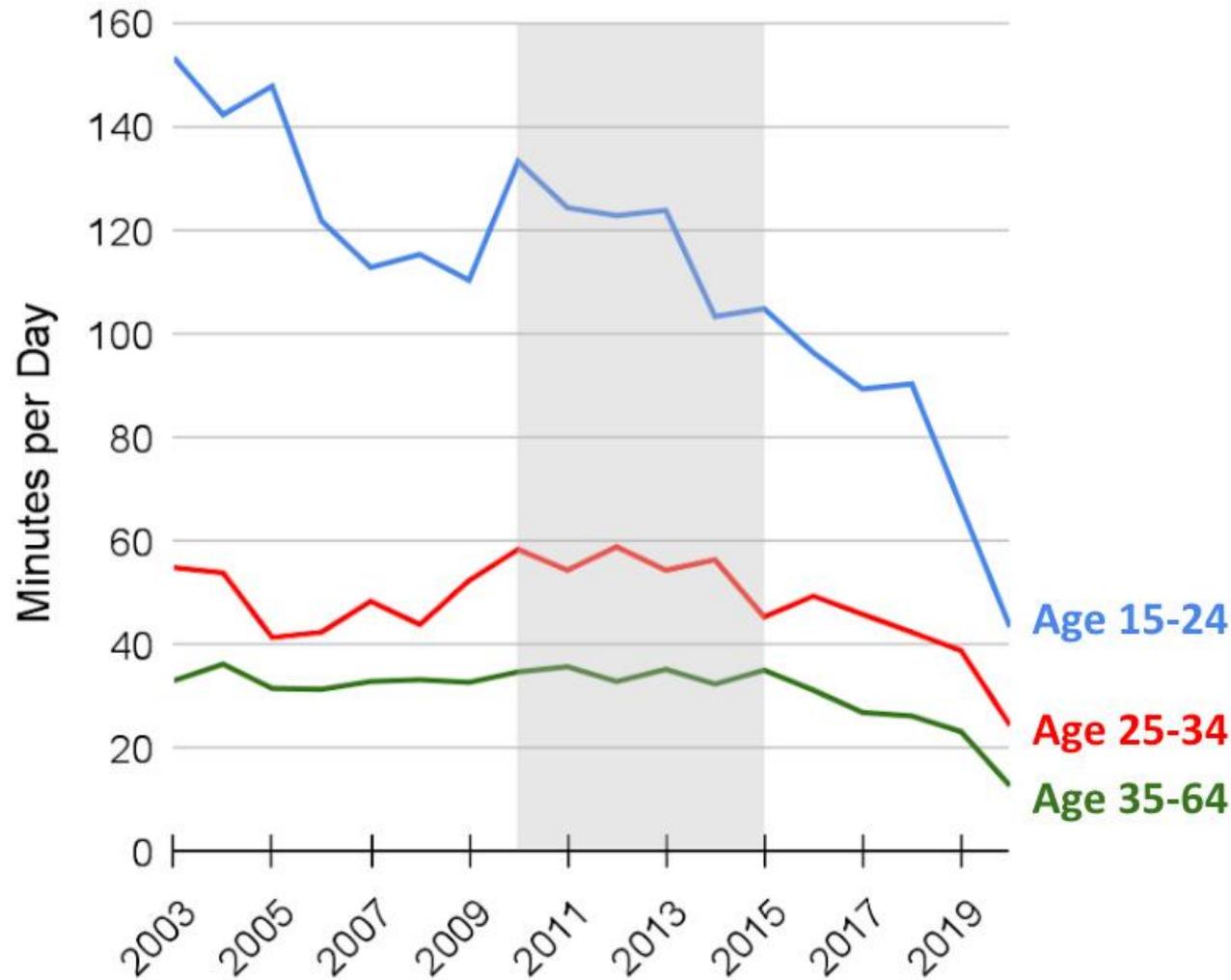


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“So much more than a space for play”

# Daily Avg Time with Friends (minutes)



Community Backyard  
Children  
get 165 minutes of  
high quality  
play per day,  
with friends



*SOURCE: Kannan & Veazie (2023) analyzing the American Time Use Study.*

# Concerns about Risky Play Overcome = Opportunity to Grow in Joomunjie Land



The presence of Joomunjie Land (and loose parts within the school) has provided the children/students the opportunity to:

1. 'look after themselves and look after others'
2. 'improve their judgement of danger'
3. 'become more confident'
4. 'show other kids and staff what they can do'

This helps adults to view children differently or more positively in terms of their capacity and resilience

Researcher



**HIGH-5  
Welldone**

# Evolution of Joomunjie Land

## COMPOUND FLEXIBILITY - FLEXIBILITY TO GROW



The flexibility inherent in Joomunjie Land offers children a space that is constantly changing that they manage, which in turn **provides them with what they need, when they need it** (Brown, 2003)

It is a space where they 'can just be kids', have something to look forward to as 'there might be something new', and a space with rules that aren't too restrictive just 'the basics'

"Something really good about it is ... they have some rules but they don't have many and that's pretty much just the basics like don't trash the place don't hit don't swear don't hurt people don't steal things that people are using technically it is not stealing but don't try and use things that people are using." Child1

"If I am having a bad day it helps me to come to a place where there isn't that many rules." Child 9

# Healing Power of Joomunjie Land

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*Communication skills – negotiation*



*Problem-solving skills*



*General Wellbeing*



*Physical and Mental health*



*Friendships*



*Ideas to reduce boredom and the use of technology*

**“It upgrades your activity and creativity”** Child7

“I don't just want to lay down. I want to go out and do things instead of just going (does a laying down action) all day ... yeah I feel like I'm just trying to do new things instead of just being too scared to do them.” Child1

“Yes, because at Joomunjie Land you learn to be nice to everyone and it gives me ideas of things to do at home so I'm not bored.” Child – Survey

“It supports a whole range of development I believe – Problem solving skills – Physical development – Mental development – Creative thinking – Personal awareness – Autonomous play – Social play.” **Parent/Carer – Survey**

# SUMMARY - BENEFITS FOR ALL

## Children/Students

- Grow friendships
- Helping mental health
- Learn and master new skills
- Get physically active
- Getting off devices and dealing with boredom
- Meet individual needs

## Parent/Carers

- Knowing their child is happy, having fun
- Child is playing safely
- Offers parent/carers an opportunity to work, study, or spend time with other children
- Connects them with the community

## School

- School morale is up
- The number of behavioural issues (the original reason for beginning Joomunje Land) have reduced
- Sense of job satisfaction has improved





**HIGH-5  
Welldone**



It took 2 years to achieve  
sustained cultural change.



**OUR CHILDREN  
DON'T KNOW  
HOW TO PLAY!**

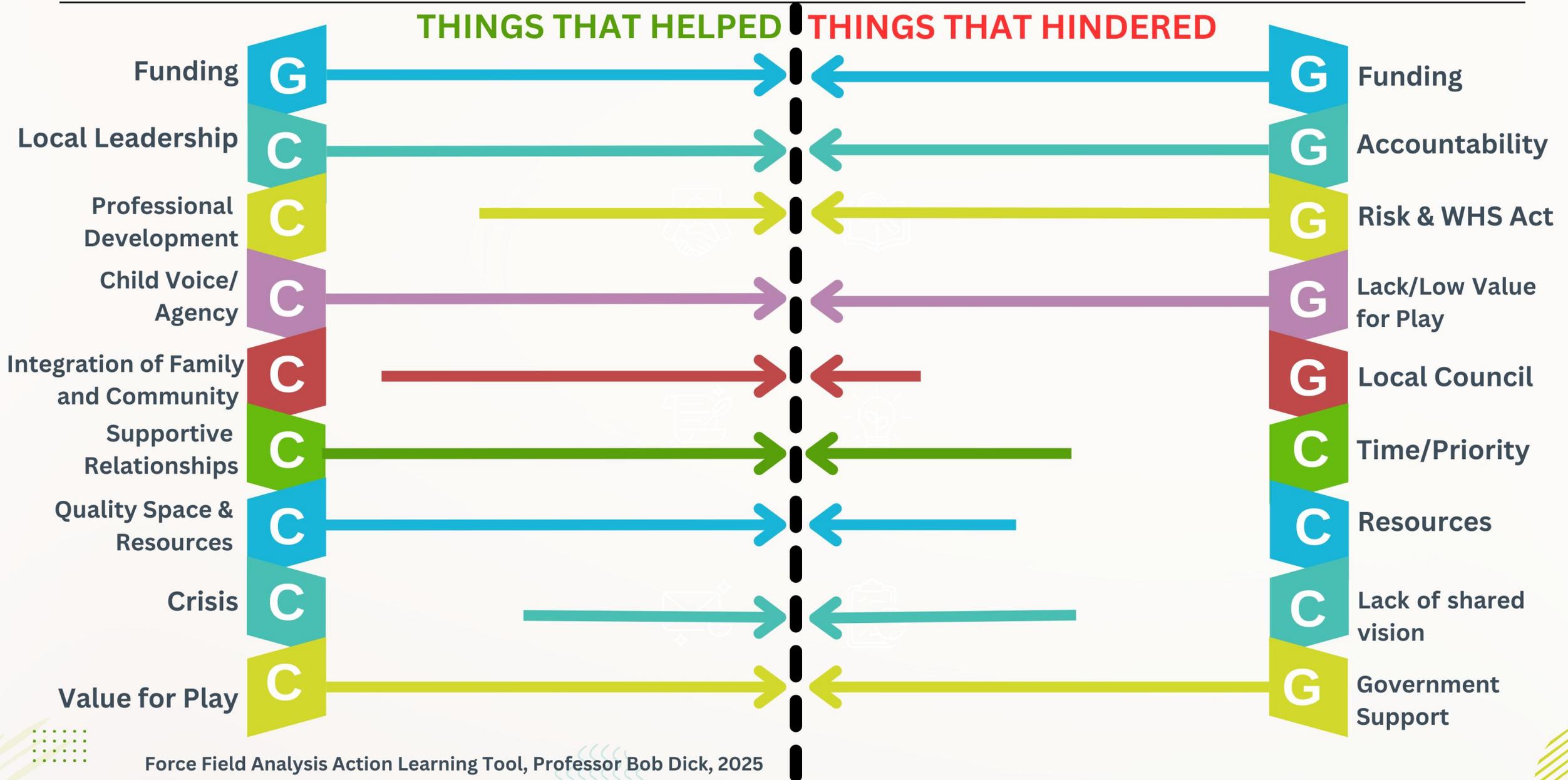




**What are the  
secret ingredients  
to creating  
Neighbourhood  
Backyards?**

# CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS OF JOOMUNJIE - PLAY SANCTUARY

## CURRENT LINE OF EFFECTIVENESS



# Scalability of Neighbourhood Play Backyards

Empowering and spreading cultural change for children where they live

Children at  
the heart

Community led

Beneficial for many

Connected & cohesive

Celebrates uniqueness

Strong neighbourhoods solving their own problems





# Google-able Resources

- Australian Institute of Play - Youtube Channel
- Neighbourhood Play Networks
- Neighbourhood Play Project Documentary
- Joomunjie Land
- Freedom Fortress
- Nature Play Queensland
- Cities for Play
- 1000 Play Streets
- Playbourhoods
- The Land Documentary
- Playing Out Network
- Play Australia
- Playborhoods

