



Providing Optimal
Environments for
Children's
Unstructured
Play in Parks

Goals of the workshop

- Presentations

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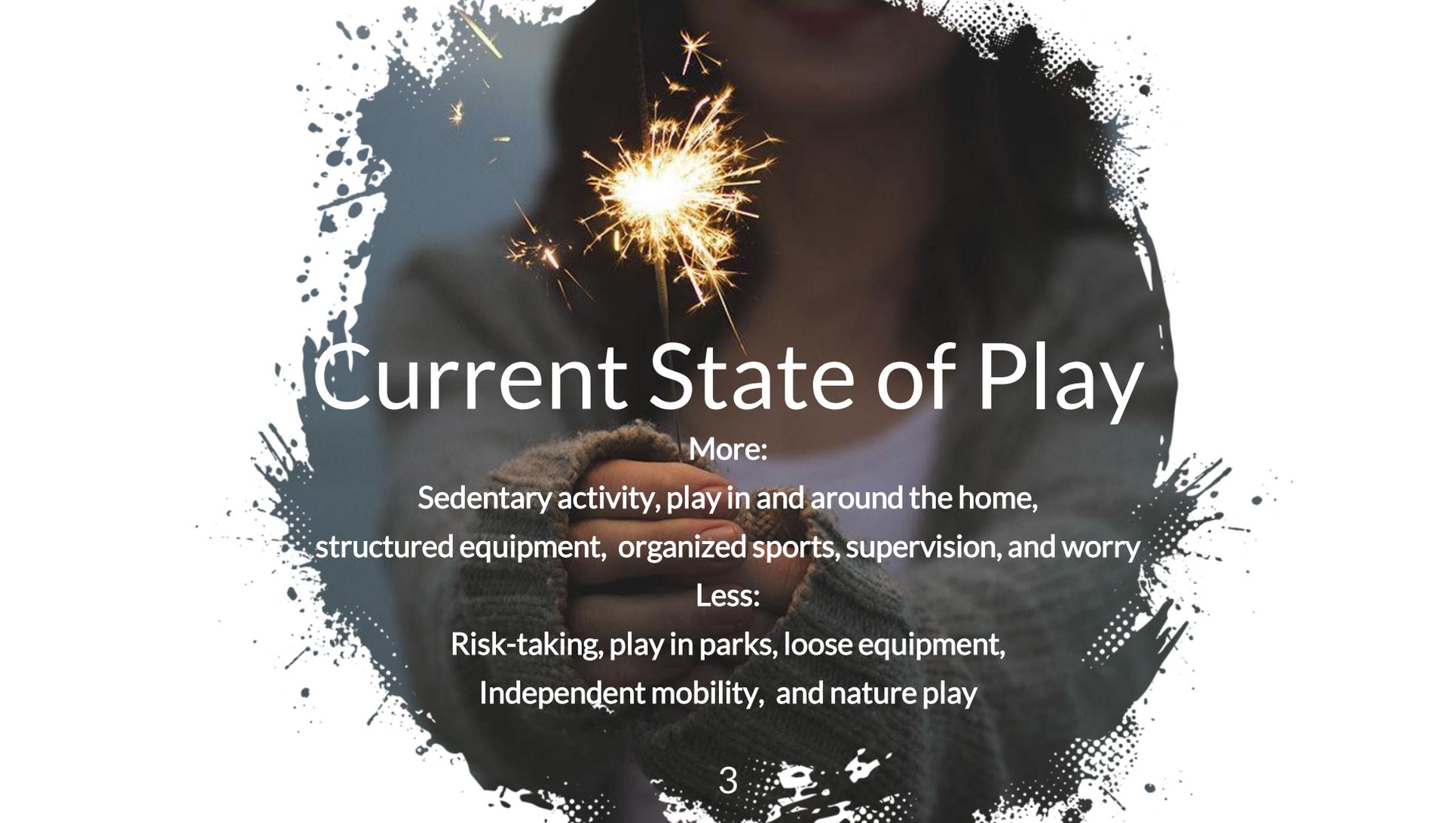
- World Café

Table discussions relating to
urban, sub-urban, and rural
initiatives for unstructured
play in parks

3 questions each

Change every 15 fifteen
minutes

Opportunities to switch tables

A hand holding a lit sparkler against a dark, splattered background. The sparkler is bright and glowing, with many small sparks flying out. The background is dark with white splatters and a circular pattern of dots.

Current State of Play

More:

Sedentary activity, play in and around the home,
structured equipment, organized sports, supervision, and worry

Less:

Risk-taking, play in parks, loose equipment,
Independent mobility, and nature play

Current State of Parks

Concerns

- × Too boring
- × Not enough unstructured activity
- × Need opportunities for engagement with nature
- × Balance health and safety

Areas of Improvement

- × Local capacity-building
- × Include parents
- × Loose parts and nature play
- × Multi-purpose
- × Pop-up parks

Engage

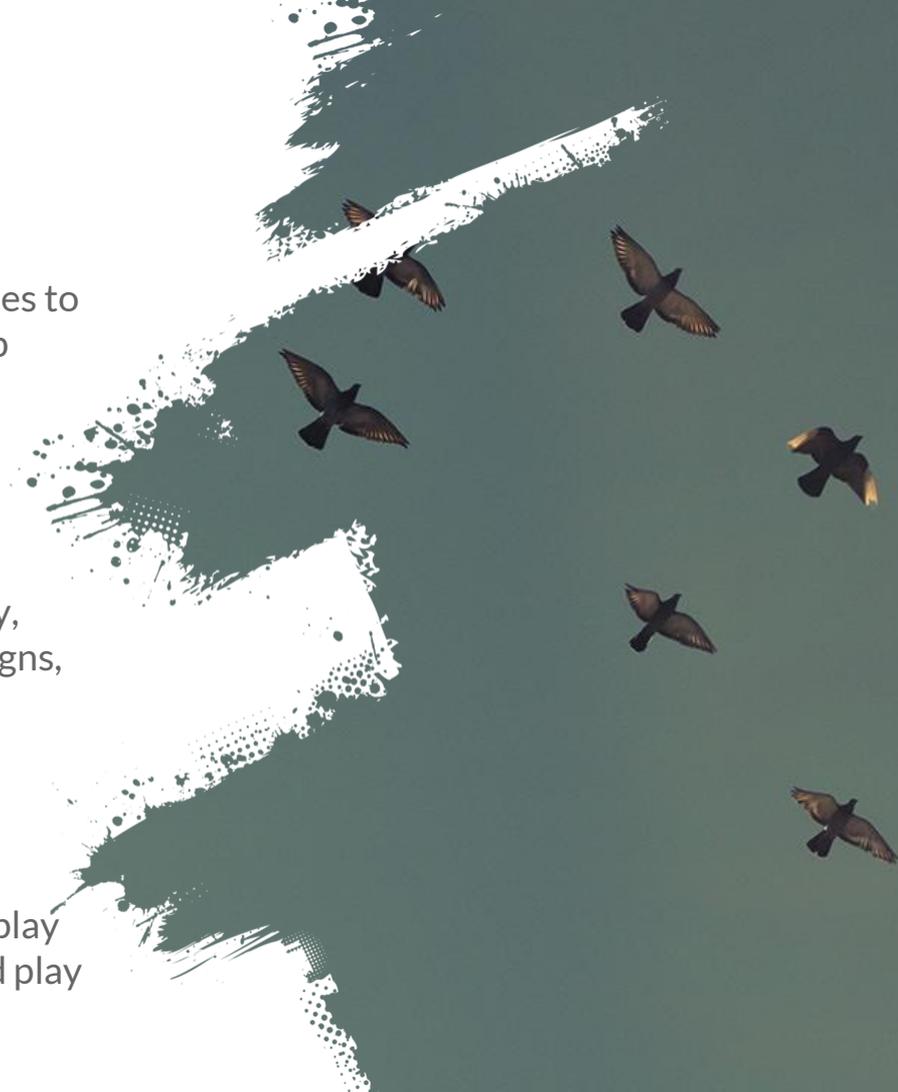
with communities, people, and spaces to ensure that parks are built that help children discover the art of play

Discuss

spatial equity, independent mobility, challenges and barriers in park designs, and the need for unstructured play

Mobilize

and collaborate with unstructured play advocates to promote unstructured play opportunities in local areas





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The Voice of Public Health
La voix de la santé publique

Children's Right to Play

FRANK WELSH, PH.D.
DIRECTOR OF POLICY
CANADIAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION



Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the land on which we gather, the original, unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabeg people. They have been guardians of this land for millennia and CPHA is grateful for the example their stewardship provides.



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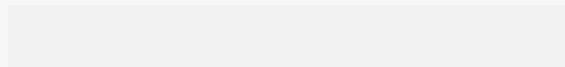
The Voice of Public Health

LAWSON
FOUNDATION



This project was generously supported through the
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Learn more at lawson.ca





UNSTRUCTURED CHILD-LED PLAY

Play where children follow their own instincts, ideas, and interests without a defined purpose or outcome





PLAY AND PUBLIC HEALTH

An upstream approach to healthy development

- Physical and gross motor skills development
- Mental and emotional health
- Social health and teamwork
- Learning and attention at school
- Resiliency and risk management skills

Embedded in Article 31 of the UN Convention
on the Rights of a Child



PROJECT OBJECTIVE

A policy toolkit that provides evidence-informed tools and resources to increase access to unstructured play

- Increase knowledge on the importance of play for healthy development
- Increase decision-makers capability to respond to parent/guardian perceptions that limit play
- Support development of policies and strategies that improve access to unstructured play at school and in the community

Target audiences:

- 1) Municipal, public health and school decision-makers
- 2) Parents and caregiver



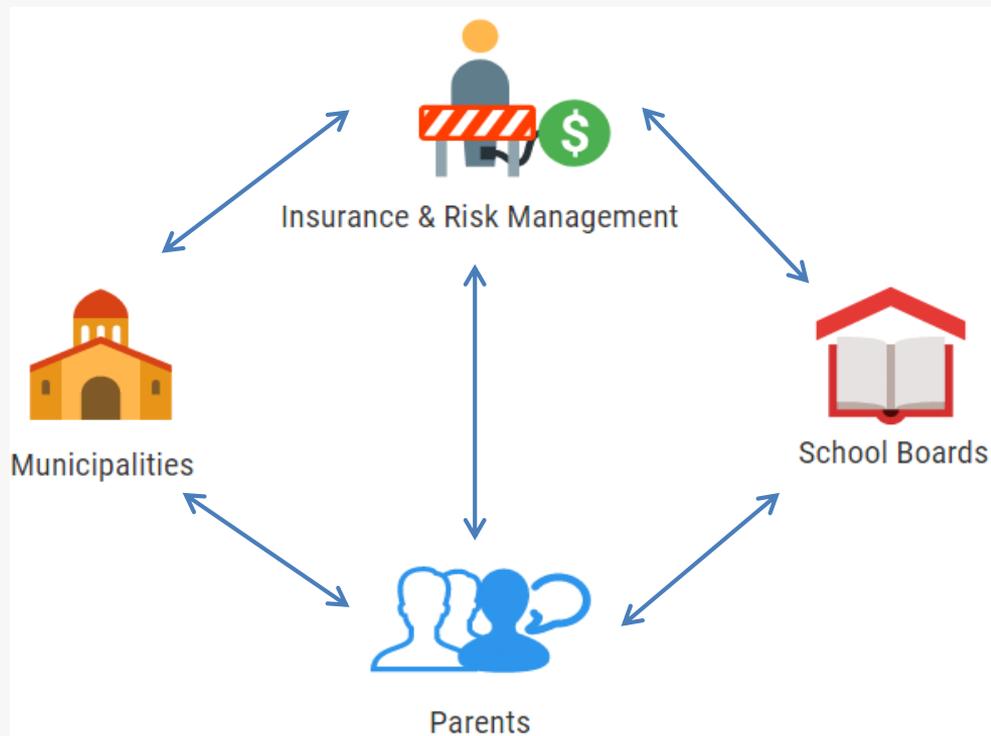
Barriers

- Social and political drivers
- Policies, laws, guidelines and standards
- Risk adverse society
- Financial considerations (schools and municipalities)

**Social and Political Relationships
Influence Unstructured Play**



SOCIAL AND POLITICAL RELATIONSHIPS INFLUENCING UNSTRUCTURED PLAY





KEY MESSAGES

- Different sectors identify the same issues and solutions
- Decision-making should include risk managers and insurance from the **onset**
- Need a better understanding of duty of care
- Need training/education on risk management approaches
- Need greater flexibility of **application** of the Standards; consider loose parts and nature play
- Training/education for playground inspectors/risk managers on importance of risks in play
- Need knowledge mobilization to inform best practices



A POLICY TOOLKIT

Briefings

- Accessibility
- Parent perception
- Educator perception
- Recess
- Injuries
- Risk v. hazard
- What is play?

Infographics

- Why play?
- Recess
- Mental health
- 10 benefits of play
- Perception versus fact

Tools

- Duty of care checklist
- FAQ for parents
- How to foster collaborative decision-making
- Loose parts play framework
- Outdoor play policies
- Play friendly cities

Promising Practices



WICKED PROBLEMS

- Changing faces of children in Canada
- Parental, caregiver and educator perceptions
- Risk communication
- Legislation and Liability
- Education and childcare
- Liability and negligence

Healthy Outdoor Playspaces for Children



What will be covered...

- **Why we started down this path**
- **What we found out**
- **How we engaged community partners**
- **Next Steps**



Falls - playground equipment

	Children (0 – 4)	Children (5 – 9)	Children (10 – 14)
ED Visits Peterborough	424	839	356
ED Visits Ontario	251	587	207
Hospitalizations Peterborough	<5	55	<5
Hospitalizations Ontario	14	43	9



Preliminary Research Findings

- Literature review on playground equipment and injuries (Fall 2013)
- Best practice:
 - equipment properly maintained
 - appropriate fall surface
 - adequate supervision
 - age-appropriate use
- Development of a playground checklist based on research evidence



Shared What We Learned



**Municipal Access to
Recreation Group**

**School Board
Representatives**

**Shift from “playgrounds” to
“play experiences”**



The Technical Report

Outdoor Playspaces for Children: An Evidence Review August 2017



Expanded literature review included such topics as:

- play and child development,
- play spaces,
- natural play spaces,
- risky play,
- risk management
- and more...

Major Takeaways from the Research

- Play is a **human right**
- Unsupervised, **child-led play** is essential to child development
- “**Risky play**” is not a scary word
- **Natural playspaces** are more inclusive, gender neutral and equitable
- Injury prevention can't be the only **driver**
- **Risk benefit assessments** are key



Engaging Key Stakeholders

- **Municipal:** parks and recreation, planning, public works
- **Education:** school board, principal, teacher, early childhood educator
- **Community:** environmental advocates, landscape architect, accessibility experts



**We interrupt your regularly
scheduled programming...**

Blue and Green Spaces

**More residents of Curve Lake and
Hiawatha First Nations, the County and
City of Peterborough have equitable
access to health-promoting built and
natural blue and green spaces by 2022.**



A word about Spatial Equity

A space is equitable when its **use, size, configuration, amenities, upkeep, and spatial accessibility** is **fairly distributed across various sociodemographic characteristics** (i.e. income, race, education, gender, age, etc.).



**Back to your regularly
scheduled programming...**



Riding a Wave...



**Active Outdoor Play Position
Statement from the Council of
Chief Medical Officers of
Health (April 2018)**

**CPHA Position Statement
on Unstructured Play
(March 2019)**



Our Next Steps

- **Endorse** the CPHA position statement
- **Create** a tool kit
- **Consult** with municipal, school and community partners
- **Support** the National Play Charter

...to be

continued



Peterborough
Public Health



THANK YOU!

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Evidence Review and presentation slides:
www.peterboroughpublichealth.ca/play



PLAY and OUTDOOR PLAY: Findings

- Play is a human right.
- Outdoor play – unique contribution to healthy child development.
- Play spaces need a variety of features for different types of play
- Available and accessible to all children to ensure equity.



PLAY SPACES: Findings

- **Traditional play structures** have their place but provide limited opportunities
- Play equipment = have **value** only if children use it
- **Natural playspaces** = more **inclusive, gender-neutral and accessible**
- Simple **adaptations** enhance the play experience (e.g., **loose parts**)



RISKY PLAY: Findings

- **Essential** component of healthy child development
- **Elements of risky play:** heights, speed, getting “lost”, rough and tumble, dangerous tools, dangerous elements
- Difference between **risk** and **hazard**



INJURIES AND SAFETY: Findings

- **Injuries will happen**; majority of them will be minor.
- Proper installation and on-going maintenance of the equipment is essential.
- Better safety practices in **backyard play areas** will reduce the most serious injuries.
- Preventing children from playing in play spaces because of potential risk of harm may **replace one risk with another**—poorer physical and mental health.



RISK-BENEFIT ANALYSIS: Findings

- Play providers need support to recognize importance of **reasonable risk**.
- Use **CSA Standard** as a technical guide rather than a design guide.
- Incorporate **risk-benefit assessments** in our planning and designs.
- Advocate for more **reasonable liability rules** for our play providers.
- Benefits of **risky play** need to be **promoted**.



BUILT ENVIRONMENT: Findings



- Collaborative planning and design with users
- Value playspaces by locating on prime land
- Multiple play zones
- Diversity of play elements
- Universal design principles
- Meet safety requirements



Proposed Design Features

Geography	Rolling topography ~ Shade ~ Natural elements ~ Ground- vs elevated-level elements
Landscape	Looped pathways ~ Sand areas ~ Water features ~ Pathways ~ Large trees and shrubs ~ Ramped pathways
Introduced items	Boulders ~ Logs ~ Gardens and edible landscape ~ Hiding places, tunnels, digging pits ~ Messy zones ~ Seating for adults ~ Storage for loose parts ~ Manipulable materials/ loose parts ~ Ramps ~ Handrails and transfer systems
Philosophy	Freedom to choose different play activities ~ Universal design



World Café

Urban

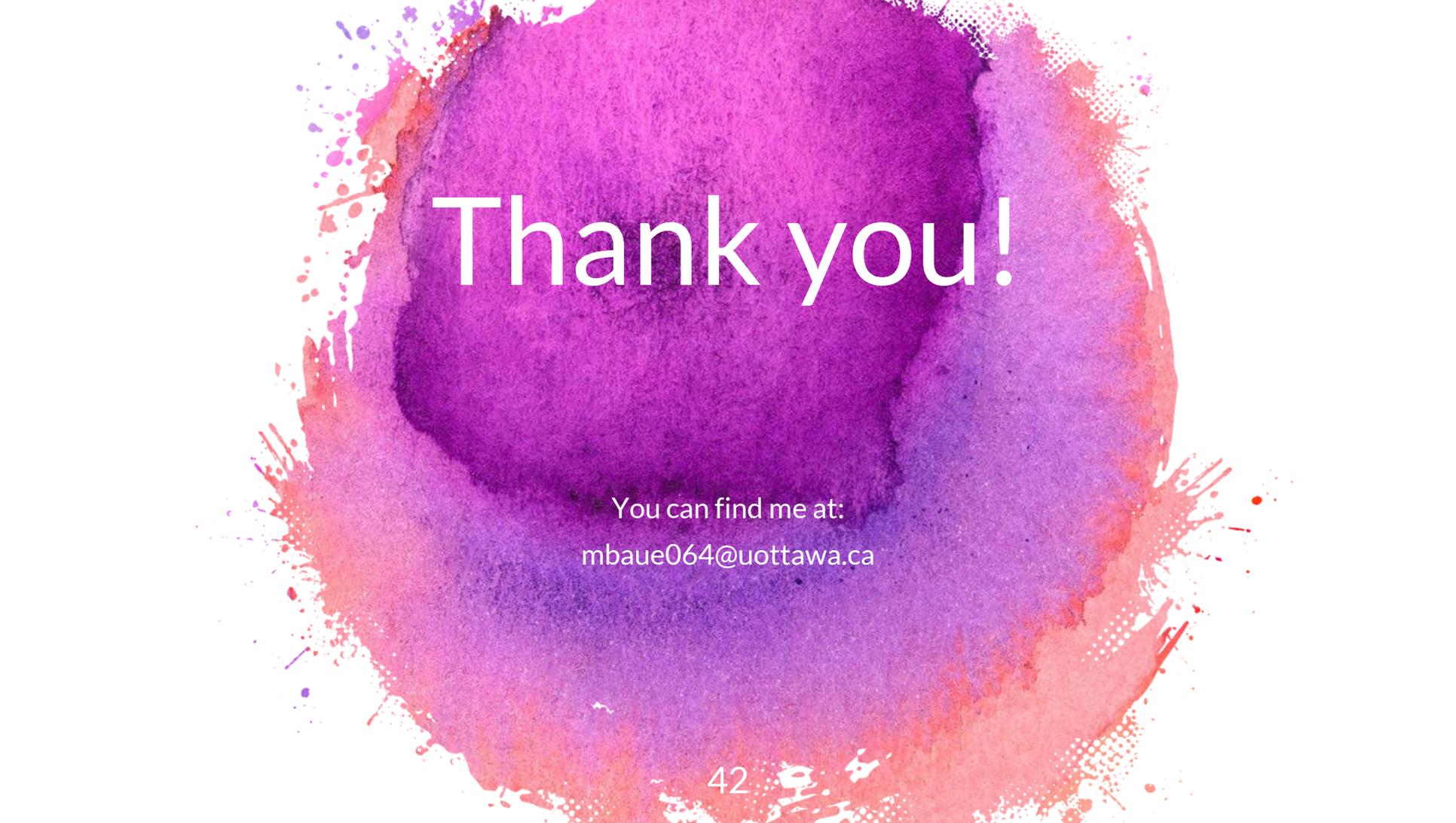
1. What are potential barriers of implementing unstructured play programs/policies/practices for children in urban environments? How might we overcome these challenges?
2. How can we incorporate unstructured play with loose parts outdoors in major metropolitan areas?
3. How can we create urban park environments where children and their parents experience comfort and sociability, and have access to healthy unstructured play?

Sub-urban

1. Can we create mixed-use park spaces that foster unstructured play in sub-urban environments?
2. How can we preserve the environment in sub-urban parks that promote children's unstructured play?
3. How can we better understand neighborhood different views and perspectives on unstructured play for children?

Rural

1. How can we account for children's machine, animal, and land-related injuries in the construction of rural parks that encourage children's unstructured play?
2. How can communities be mobilized to engage in local capacity-building to promote unstructured play in rural parks?
3. How can forests and natural areas be used to promote unstructured play in rural parks?



Thank you!

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