



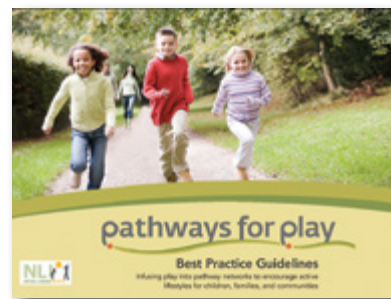
pathways for play

Best Practice Guidelines

Infusing play into pathway networks to encourage active lifestyles for children, families, and communities.

The purpose of *Pathways for Play* is to intentionally integrate play - critical for children's health - into walkable, bikeable, shared use community pathway networks to provide opportunities for playing along the way and encourage use by children and families. PlayCore has partnered with the Natural Learning Initiative, College of Design, NC State University, to offer an educational resource designed to help professional and community activists promote playful pathways across our nation.

Partnership:



Comprehensive program includes:

- ▶ 61 page educational resource:
 - Best practice design principles for new and existing systems
 - Supporting research and benefits
 - Play pocket considerations for linear play value
 - Case studies and examples of implementation
 - Tips for master planning, funding, and sustainability
- ▶ PathwaysforPlay.org, a comprehensive website with case studies, pathway activities, and more
- ▶ Professional development training module
- ▶ The Pathways for Play National Demonstration Site program, national recognition and press exposure for sites that follow the best practice guidelines and establish playful pathways in their community.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"If we are going to solve the problem of sedentary childhood, we have no choice but to refocus intense professional attention on design for outdoor free play in everyday naturalized settings."
- Robin Moore
DiplArch, MCP, Hon. ASLA

An Innovative Way to "Bring People to Nature"

Children need access to opportunities to activate, stimulate, and exercise their potential in the rich natural diversity of the outdoors. Today, many children have lost easy access to natural play spaces due to urban sprawl, parental apprehension, perceptions of crime, overscheduled lifestyles, and heavy street traffic. Intentional design strategies to infuse nature back into the everyday play spaces of children can play a critical role in providing children the many developmental benefits of engaging with nature.

Pathways for Play advocates for children, youth, and families as primary user groups and demonstrates technically how this can be done to help increase use by infusing pathways with play value.

Pathways for Play is designed to help professionals and community activists involved in planning and design of trails, greenways, and shared parks to intentionally make these community assets more playful, usable, and attractive to children and families. Playful pathway design will extend play-in-nature by creating attractive, playful routes for children to explore, discover, and be physically active outdoors.

Multiple benefits include:



Extending play value

Extending the types of play (especially in the physical and socio-dramatic domain) afforded by a continuous, complex, linear space where nature is omnipresent.



Enabling health promotion

Enabling kids and families to get outdoors, enjoy the fresh air, and experience meaningful physical activity on foot, bicycle, or wheeled toys.



Expanding inclusion

Expanding possibilities for people of all abilities, ages, and backgrounds to engage in playful interactions with each other and their surroundings, which continuously afford play opportunities as children and other users move along.



Engaging with nature

Providing a multitude of opportunities for interacting playfully with a wide diversity of plants and animals through the seasons.



Reinforcing environmental literacy

Benefiting from the learning opportunities afforded by pathways integrated with a "green infrastructure" of stream and river corridors and vegetation patches, transecting local habitats, exposing natural and sociocultural history of former land uses.



Walkable, bikeable community connectivity

Encouraging nonmotorized travel from home to local recreational and cultural destinations, thereby reducing both traffic and the carbon footprint.



Growing community social capital

Bringing residents together through shared lifestyle experiences focused on children and a sense of building healthy communities together.

RESEARCH

Research shows that playful pathways attract children and families and can dramatically increase frequency and duration of use of trails, greenways, and shared-use pathways.

Background

Although trails exist throughout our nation, it appears that a small minority of children and families are actually using them. The Natural Learning Initiative, College of Design, NC State University, conducted independent research which provides new insight into how infusing play into pathway networks positively impacts usage, duration, independent mobility, and play behaviors of children.

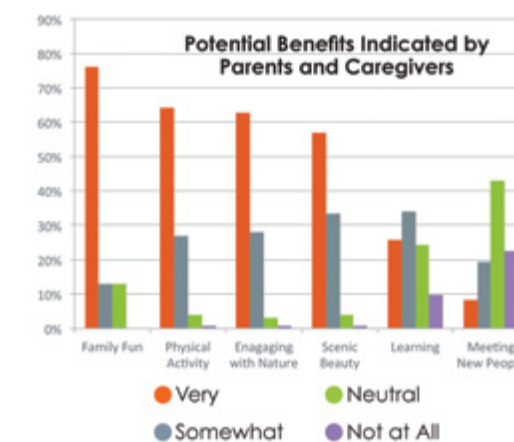
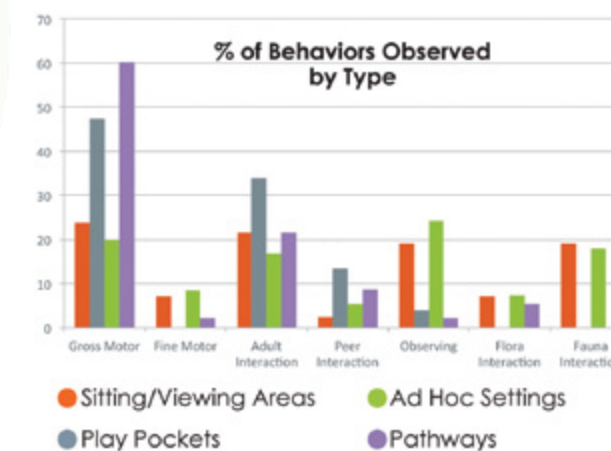
Methodology

Through an objective analysis of 169 observation points on four playful pathway sites, children were observed participating in gross motor activities, using natural loose parts, interacting with adults and other children, observing, and engaging with nature. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected through a variety of research methods.

Findings

Play pockets installed along trails that contained nature themed play equipment, were not only popular, but showed the highest levels of child-adult interactions. The following findings were concluded from the playful pathways in Springfield, MO and Chattanooga, TN.

- **Play Value:** Playful Pathways present opportunities for diverse play behaviors.
- **Benefits:** "Family Fun" was the most important benefit of pathways perceived by parents, closely followed by physical activity, engagement with nature, and scenic beauty.
- **Frequency:** In Springfield, 88% of park users report visiting the park more frequently after the addition of Play Pockets. For Springfield and Chattanooga combined, 75% reported visiting the park more often.
- **Duration:** In Springfield, 100% of families who visited the park before play pockets were added believe that play pockets increased the duration of family visits. For Springfield and Chattanooga combined, 91% reported increased visit duration.



At all four research sites, family fun was perceived as the most important benefit of the pathway experience by parents and caregivers.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Best Practice Considerations

Playing Along the Way

Consider these key factors and design principles when planning playful pathways in your community.

- Connect to meaningful destinations such as playgrounds and parks.
- Stimulate interest through curves, loops, and sinuosity so children “work” to discover the play value along the way.

- Foster an appreciation of community culture and heritage through built features that increase visual interest and encourage a sense of adventure and discovery.
- Utilize natural features such as rock formations, landscape views, or other unique habitats.
- Infuse built features such as manufactured play elements, tunnels, bridges, art, etc., to add visual interest and encourage continuous movement.

FAMILY FUN
and adequate visibility can be achieved through careful site layout, equipment selection, and naturalization strategies.

PLAY POCKETS
are the primary means for infusing linear **PLAY VALUE** into pathways by intentionally designing them to stimulate play through a sense of adventure, exploration, and discovery for the whole family in nature.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY
can be achieved through innovative play pockets that engage the whole family while encouraging them to continue moving to explore the next discovery.

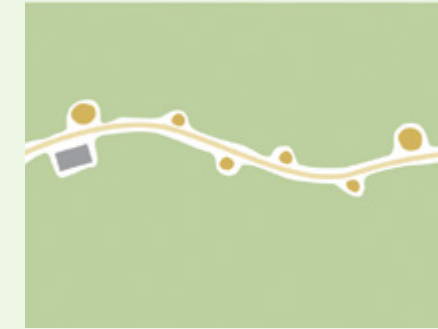
LEARNING
can be promoted through visible adventure and exploration in nature. Developmental considerations should be addressed through play pocket designs, educational signage, and playful activities.

5 best practice design principles:

To motivate children, families, and youth organizations to get outdoors and engage in healthy, stimulating activity in natural surroundings, the *Pathways for Play* strategy is driven by five best practice design principles:

- 1 Infuse play and learning value into pathways
- 2 Create shared-use, inclusive pathways
- 3 Connect pathways to meaningful destinations
- 4 Locate pathways where children live
- 5 Apply appropriate themes for learning

Playful Pathway Typologies



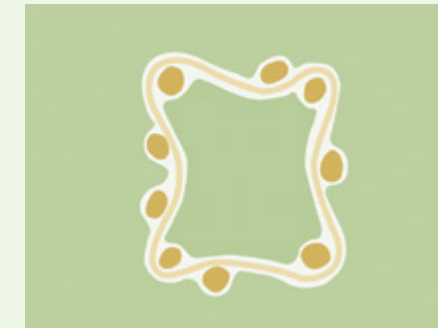
Sinuous playful pathway



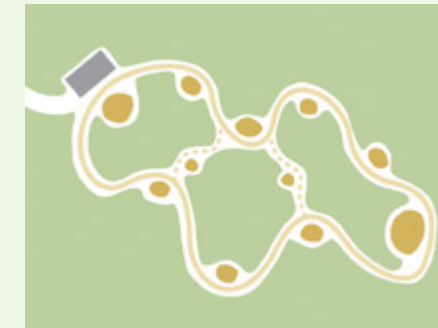
Crisscross loop with rail-to-trail playful pathway



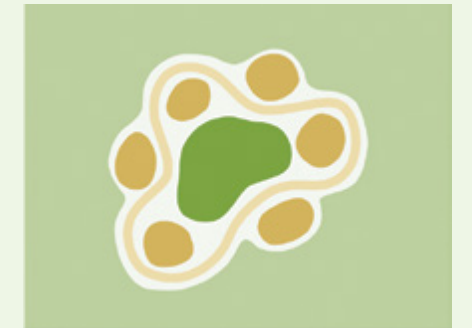
Cul-de-sac playful pathway



Single looped playful pathway



Multi-looped playful pathway



Compact looped playful pathway



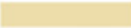








Flower playful pathway



Creekside playful pathway



Water body playful pathway

	Primary trail		Low plantings
	Secondary trail		Play pocket
	Textural change in pathway surface		Water
	Corridor vegetation		Parking and bathroom
	Seating		



Join the Movement!

ADVOCACY

Become a National Demonstration Site

- **Promote your leadership** through best practice principles that integrate nature into the everyday spaces of childhood (new or retrofit)
- **Collaborate with program partners** and document the process for others to replicate
- Create **positive attention** and attract partners/funds that support healthy lifestyle initiatives
- Gain **national awareness** through various media outlets, press releases, collateral materials, and nationwide presentations
- Receive **letter of recognition and signage** for serving as a model demonstration site

To learn more about infusing play into pathway networks to encourage active lifestyles for children, families, and communities, request a full copy of the *Pathways for Play* guidebook, or become a National Demonstration Site, please visit:

www.playcore.com/pathwaysforplay.html

"Pathways for Play gives us new tools to ensure that children grow healthier in body and spirit. American Trails is honored to be a part of this project and to help introduce it to the trails world."

- Pam Gluck
Executive Director, American Trails