



FORM BEST PRACTICES CONTEST

Municipality Alexandrina Council Country Australia
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Name project

Amelia Park Playground – Nature Play playground.

Category Certification Criteria

- Energy and environmental policies (politiche energetiche e ambientali);
- Infrastructure policies (politiche infrastrutturali);
- Quality of urban life policies (politiche per la qualita' urbana);
- Agricultural, touristic and artisan policies (politiche agricole, turistiche, artigianali);
- Policies for hospitality, awareness and training (politiche per l'ospitalita, la consapevolezza e la formazione);
- Social cohesion (coesione sociale).

Summary project

Situated at a popular picnic and recreational area at the north eastern end of the Historic Goolwa Wharf Precinct, the Amelia Park Playground redevelopment has involved a wide range of community members and culminated in the construction of a nature play space from only recycled and reused materials. The play space includes an elevated tree house complete with climbing wall, firemen's pole, slide, hand crafted seating carved from old tree trunks and a restored 20ft timber boat that has been converted into a play area complete with seats and ramp.

The project encapsulates the Cittaslow philosophy and principals of:

1. maintain the identity and the spirit of the communities
2. making the best out of the positive aspects of globalization without losing their own identity.
3. Developing sustainable solutions for future generations.

Goal project

The aim of the project was to replace a conventional aging climbing frame and slides playground with a playground that captured children's imagination as well as encompassing the Cittaslow philosophy and principals. The project also needed to embrace the Councils Community Strategic Plan aspirations of "Activate our Spaces", "Participate in Wellbeing", "Innovate throughout our Region" and "Thrive in Clean Green Futures".

A Recreation and Open Space survey of the community and visitors in 2011 revealed that the public found that playgrounds had become boring and unimaginative. This information along with recent world wide change in playground design thinking inspired Councils Recreation Services Team to design and construct a nature play space using recycled materials. The key strategy in the



playground design was to bring nature play and imagination back into play spaces.

With the assistance of the OPAL (Obesity Prevention and Lifestyle program) consultation was undertaken with students from Investigator College reception / year 1 class and going through some exercises with them to gain some ideas of the types of play activities that could be implemented in the design. Amelia Park's playground design and construction centres around providing children with an experience that connects them with the community and its history as well as providing play structures, in a unique setting.

Result project

The redeveloped playground culminated in the construction of a nature play space from only recycled and reused materials. The play space includes an elevated tree house complete with climbing wall, firemans pole, slide, hand crafted seating carved from old tree trunks and a restored 20ft timber boat that has been converted into a play area complete with seats and ramp.

The playground also demonstrates excellence in workmanship and aims to inspire children to work with timber and wood in the creation of structures and boats when they can see how they have been made. The popularity of this play-space will have further community benefits in health and well being in the areas of obesity and lifestyle improvement. One of the main features of the tree house was the pine tree that it is constructed around. The pine tree is a multi trunk mature tree that is roughly 80 years old. The tree in its original role provided climbing opportunities, shade and interest, because of its character of shape and multiple trunks. It was a unique undiscovered feature that provided the inspiration for the design and construction of the tree house. In consideration of the importance of shade the playground is designed and placed so that it is fully shaded in the afternoon sun, the tree house is shaded all day and the surrounding facilities of picnic tables, a barbeque and drinking fountain are also shaded by existing trees.

The material was sourced from Council depots and waste transfer stations that are a great source for surplus building materials that have been stored because they are too good to dispose of and will "come in handy one day". The tree house was mostly built out of old jetty and bridge materials. It provides a stair to the landing, a climbing net and wall, a fireman's pole and slippery slide. Under the tree house provides opportunity for exploration and imagination. The wooden boat was salvaged from Goolwa Waste and Recycling Depot, dropped off by a local resident, who had no further use for it. The history of the boat has been researched and inscribed on the side of boat. The chairs were carved from cypress pine stumps, surplus after being removed in the district. The chairs provide a place of rest and interest, showing what can be achieved using the stump of a tree as a playground asset.

This change in playground design and philosophy has already seen many positive comments and an increase in visitor numbers to the area and playground. The project further compliments the Historic Goolwa Wharf Precinct through the use of the wooden boat and has set the theme for playgrounds within Goolwa. It has further strengthened the links between the community and its heritage as well as developing community spirit. Given the success of this playground Council plan to construct a larger and more complex nature recreation playground at the Bristow Smith Reserve, 1.5km south of this site on the Murray River.



Finance (costs and benefits)

An important facet of the project is its economic viability now and into the future. This playground was constructed for approximately \$60,000. A new modern playground that provided the same features as this could cost as much as \$120,000. Using local recycled material significantly reduced the cost of the playground. In addition to this similar to what would have been spent on a new modern type playground but used local materials and employed local people to construct the playground. This ensures better ownership and community connection to the project. The whole of life costing is an important indicator for playground managers given the increasing focus on Asset Management and financial sustainability. A modern steel and plastic modular playground of similar size has a life span of 15 years, a capital cost of \$150,000 and an annual depreciation cost of \$10,000. The new nature play, play space has a useful life of 50 years given that it is constructed of solid timber an annual cost of \$1,400. This is a saving of over \$400,000 in operating costs over the life of the nature play playground. Maintenance costs have also been reduced through less moving parts and the fact that only sections of timber will need to be replaced not specially manufactured parts that need to be freighted into the area from overseas or interstate. Timber does not rust or deteriorate like plastics and steel

Staff (time use and saving)

The construction and design of this project was undertaken by Council staff. The initial design and consultation process was significant it has been worthwhile in the outcome that has been delivered with over 500 hours going into the design and construction process.

The design and construction of the play space will significantly reduce the maintenance effort required by Council staff while still maintaining a interesting and fascinating play space for the youth of Alexandrina Council.

Nature play spaces have also been found to improve the social capital and well being of communities through increased activity and varying physical activities. This play space has also increased the connection the community has with the history of Goolwa being boats and the River Murray through the use of the wooden boat, historic materials that have a relationship with their community and improved sense of place and community.

Additional information (if necessarily)

Nature playgrounds are becoming the latest trend in cities across North America. Driven by statistics and research showing benefits ranging from lower vandalism and bullying, to higher IQs, better balance and agility, a reduction in obesity, this trend is continuing to grow.

The importance of playgrounds is not just about children using up energy and/or active play. It is a vital part of childhood that helps children develop physical strength, co-ordination and balance. It can also provide opportunities for children to learn and develop:



- Social skills – when they play with other children they learn to communicate, share, collaborate and empathise with others.
- Imagination and creativity – outside play is often open-ended and children need to be creative about what and how games are played.
- Thinking and problem solving skills – as children assess risks and tackle new challenges they learn about having a go, persistence and perseverance and the success those attributes can bring.
- Sense of self – as they master new skills and play with children, they improve their competence and confidence in their own physical and social abilities.
- Sense of connection – to place, to peers, and to their local community and environment.
- Self care skills – managing physical and social challenges helps children to learn about keeping themselves safe.

The development of communities and ensuring residents have a strong connection with their township and history is an important part of the culture of Alexandrina Council and it's commitment to the Cittaslow philosophy and principals. This project further strengthens this culture and builds on other cultural activities and infrastructure within the Goolwa Wharf Precinct such as the Signal Point Art Gallery which held the South Australian Year of Culture in 2012, the Oscar W Paddle Steamer, The SteamRanger Cockle Train and the South Australian Wooden Boat Festival.

Link website
(if available)

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