

## South Shore Active Communities (SSAC)

South Shore , Nova Scotia

### AIM:

- The aim of SSAC is to increase physical activity in the population of the South Shore by supporting outdoor play through their work with child service and program providers.

### PLACE:

- This initiative serves the South Shore of Nova Scotia (Hubbards to Yarmouth)

### PROJECT COMPONENTS:

- Partnership made up of MPALs (Municipal Physical Activity Leaders) and CCH (Communities Culture and Heritage) staff in the region
  - Regional Physical Activity Consultant provides coordination and support to SSAC
- Two key documents were developed to conceptualize the focus of the partnership's work
  - Theory of Change – provides a pathway of change
  - Evaluation Framework – used to measure SSAC's contribution to change
- SSAC's work focuses on the engagement of service and program providers who deliver programs to children in the region
- Key activities:
  - Outdoor Play Symposium – 88 people from multiple sectors in the region gathered and discussed local case studies, research and areas for action
  - Policy review of the early years and multiple sectors related to outdoor play
  - Scan of literature of play among children 10-13 years old
  - Outline of Key Messages and audiences
  - Development and delivery of 6 adult education modules for the early years sector related to understanding and integrating Outdoor Play
    - : [Module 1: Outdoor Play and its Benefits \(120 minutes\)](#)
    - : [Module 2: Outdoor Play Philosophy \(120 minutes\)](#)
    - : [Module 3: Adult Role in Child-led Play \(120 minutes\)](#)
    - : [Module 4: Using your outdoor space for learning through play \(120 minutes\)](#)
    - : [Module 5: Planning for Action and Integration \(120 minutes\)](#)
    - : [Module 6 \(pending\): Communicating with Caregivers & Parents \(120 minutes\)](#)
    - : [An abridged module has been developed for virtual delivery \(90 minutes\)](#)
  - A comprehensive set of Guiding Principles have been developed for delivery of modules
- Capacity Building
  - Delivery of all modules to all Pre-primary staff in SSRCE in 2017 & 2018; delivery to Pre-primary staff in TCRCE in 2018
  - Delivery to Bridgewater YMCA in 2018
  - Delivery to Through the Years Childcare Centre in Chester leading to an RFP and planning support for the development of a shared naturalized playspace on adjacent land
    - Contribution and facilitation support for content and delivery of the outdoor play content of the Nova Scotia Before and After Program required training
    - Delivery to provincial Schools Plus staff in 2019
- Provincial Strategy – rational linked to outdoor play goal in Let's Get Moving initiative
  - SSAC's work also contributed to the inclusion of Outdoor Play in Goal 2 of the 2018 Let's Get Moving Strategy for Nova Scotia and the actions under "Reach Nova Scotians in Early Childhood".

### FINANCES:

- Primarily in-kind donations
- Community Health Board (Symposium)
- Community Culture and Heritage (NS Government) project and staff funds
- Leveraging Active Community Fund grant (CCH-NS Government) to support community level activities and implementation in municipalities

## **RATIONALE FOR INITIATIVE:**

- Aims to increase the physical activity in the population on the South Shore through incremental change by supporting outdoor play
- Values outdoor play as an effective approach to encourage physical activity in children which can contribute to a broad range of positive health and well-being outcomes
- Theory of Change aims to support a change in both practice and culture through capacity building towards sustained behaviour change
  - Aims to influence behaviours related to understanding, valuing and integrating outdoor play into program delivery and policy
  - Aims to increase the amount and quality of outdoor play through enhancement of social and physical environments
- Adult Education approach is crucial to the delivery of modules
  - Opportunities for participants to be co-creators of the learning process by sharing their own experiences and knowledge encourage deeper understanding of topics, conversation, and self-reflection

## **COMMUNITY AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT:**

- Work is guided by physical activity practitioners, the Outdoor Play Position statement, research, local data, best practices and provincial trends
- Partners observed need for increase in physical activity in the region and the sphere of influence that they had within the region
- The Outdoor Play Symposium was a pivotal time to see observe community and partner states of readiness were

## **POPULATION SERVED:**

- SSAC engages service and program providers who deliver programs to children 0-13 in the South Shore region and consults with schools, school boards, the department of education and early childhood development, public health, etc.

## **EVALUATION:**

- Theory of Change guides towards results
- There is opportunity for feedback for participants at modules
- There is a formal Evaluation Plan

## **SUCCESS FACTORS:**

- Working with energy, priorities and skills within partnership
- Leveraging existing positions whose scope of work aligns with Outdoor Play and its benefits
- Clearly identifying Outdoor Play as a regional priority in 2015
- Investing time in planning related to the progressive types of change they wanted to contribute to over time and then identifying the parcel of activities and services they would create and offer
- Identifying and distinguishing between the ultimate beneficiary of the work (kids 0-13) versus who they would engage in their work and like to see progressive change in capacity, practice and policy among (Service and Program Providers of kids 0-13)
- Having a 'doer' group and a roster of 'consult as needed' group
- Balancing planning and research with practice and tangible outputs
- Offering all professional development and resources for free
- Having a website to host our resources and share other compiled resources
- Bringing in Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) whenever needed or when it would serve the audience best
- Working at the pace of the partnership while having someone play the 'backbone' role to hold the vision, do some grunt work and facilitate forward momentum.
- Having strong project documentation and evaluative thinking built into the initiative
- Utilizing and relying on the hard work of the Outdoor Play Position statement, PlayWales and Outdoor Play Canada plus the Lawson Foundation to validate and provide an umbrella for the rationale for our work
- Using an adult education approach to engage Service and Program Providers in learning and discussion about Outdoor Play; focus on their own creation of an Outdoor Play philosophy as an anchor to their learning
- Bringing people together at an OP Symposium to assess interest and the starting point for future work; assess who was at a state of readiness for change and energized about the topic and to start there

## CHALLENGES:

- Slow pace of population level change
- Attrition in partnership positions and maintaining skills and contribution across the partnership

## WHATS NEXT:

- Working with childcare centres in planning and developing their own philosophies around outdoor play
- Continuing education with adults on the importance of outdoor play
- Planning a first edition of a booklet that is practical and tips oriented for why outdoor play matters – this is planned to be distributed to parents as early as in the maternity ward
- Trying to figure out if modules could be delivered in different areas of the province
- Incorporation of modules into teacher training for pre-service learning

## ADVICE FOR OTHERS:

- Find the right group of people
- Understand your sphere of influence vs. sphere of control
- Take a results-oriented planning approach
- Be expansive, responsive, and adaptable as program rolls out
- Keep end goal in mind

## RESOURCES:

- <http://barringtonrecreation.ca/programs/south-shore-connect/>

# ADULTS IN OUTDOOR PLAY

## THE ROLE OF THE ADULT IS TO OFFER

### PERMISSION

Let kids play and allow for child-directed play.  
Value play as essential to learning.  
Model play by being playful yourself.

### TIME

Children need time and opportunity for play.  
Allow for play to feel endless and be uninterrupted.

### MATERIALS

Offer a variety of materials including loose parts with no set purpose that can be moved, combined and manipulated.  
Materials can be synthetic, natural or diverted waste.

### SPACE

Quality playspaces invite play! They include wonder, excitement, the unknown and the unexpected.  
Importantly, the best playspaces are those not controlled or entered by adults.

### WHAT TO DO IN THE MOMENT

**BE A LEARNING ALLY**  
Let your child follow their play needs. Redirect only when needed.

**WAIT AND OBSERVE**  
Don't interrupt. Only join in when invited.

**CHECK-IN**  
Ask questions or offer tips: "How do you plan to get across that?" "If you fall, go floppy and roll!"

**THE 17 SECOND STRATEGY**  
Give children time to problem solve on their own.

**DON'T LET YOUR FEARS BECOME THEIR FEARS**  
The benefits of play far outweigh the risks.

**OFFER A SAFE SPACE FOR PLAY**  
Ensure the playarea is free of hazards. Offer a secure base (ie. your lap) to get started.

### HAZARDS VS. RISKS

**HAZARD:** a danger that could seriously injure or endanger a child and is beyond the child's capacity to recognize.  
Adults are responsible for hazards.

**RISK:** a challenge that a child can recognize and learn to manage by choosing to encounter and determining their own limits.  
Risks help your child develop.  
Appropriate level of risk will be different for each child.

### TAKE A LIFEGUARD APPROACH

**OBSERVE** (OPEN ATTENTION)  
Express interest as you watch but avoid interfering in their play. Trust that the child can manage the risks and challenges at hand.

**CHECK-IN** (FOCUSSED ATTENTION)  
If/when danger presents itself that may push the edge of acceptable risk, check-in with the child to see if they are aware of the risk. If yes, go back to observing.

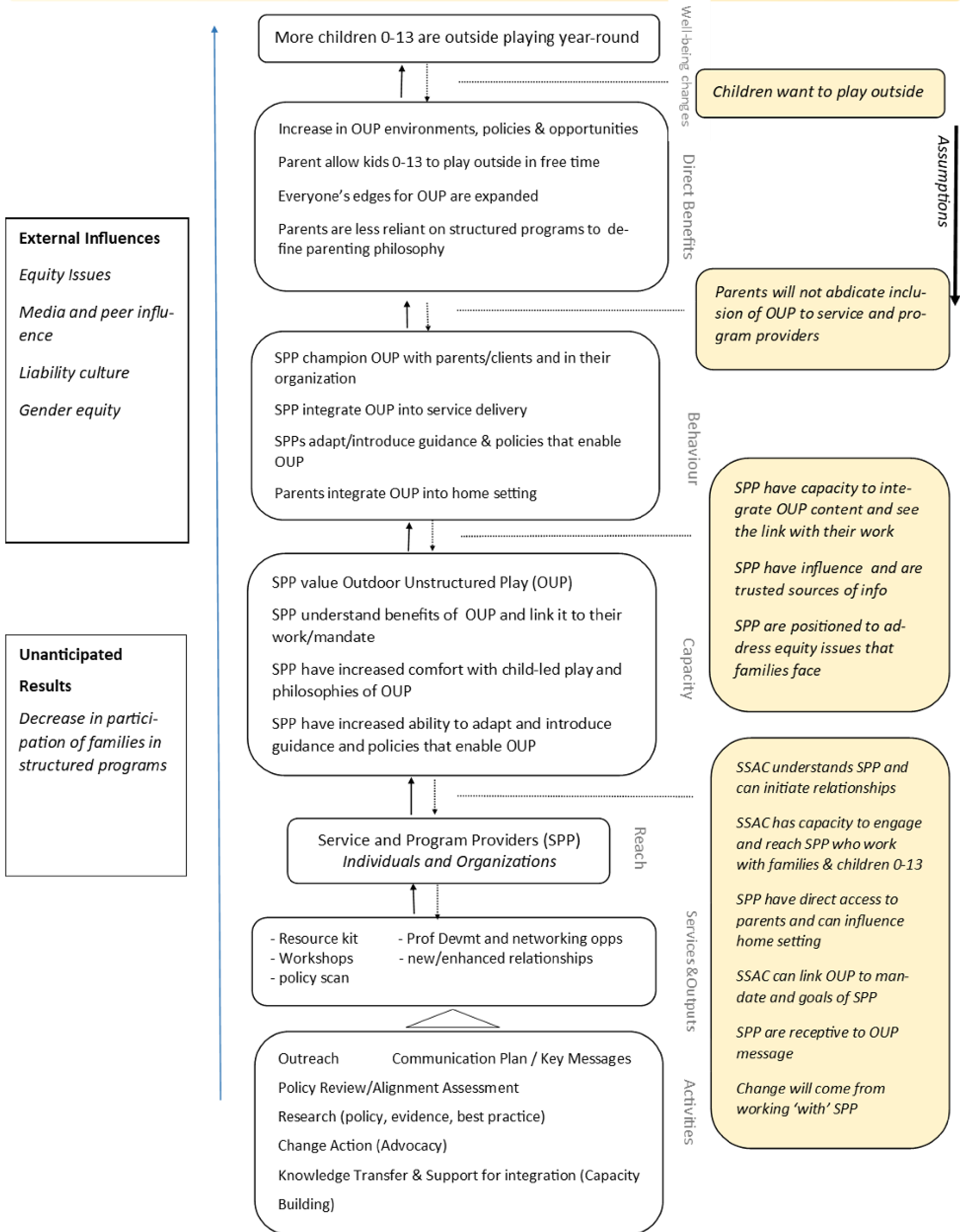
**INTERVENE** (ACTIVE PROTECTION)  
If the level of risk has become unacceptable it's time for the adult to intervene. Take steps to reduce the risks. Help the child better understand risk and give them the confidence to manage it.

**SOUTH SHORE ACTIVE COMMUNITIES**  
More info @ southshoreconnect.ca

“Access to active play and outdoors—and its risks—is essential for healthy child development.”  
—Outdoor Play Canada

LOOK AT YOU GO!

# Outdoor Unstructured Play – Theory of Change



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This case study was prepared in April 2021 by Eryn Burn for the UpLift Partnership