



# Summer of PLEY Series

## Evaluation Report

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## Executive Summary

The Summer of PLEY was an innovative, multidisciplinary integrated knowledge sharing strategy aimed at increasing awareness of the benefits of outdoor loose parts play and risk-taking within play, to children's physical literacy and other aspects of development, health and wellness. The strategy involved five separate events over July and August of 2019. It was funded through a Knowledge Sharing Support Award from Nova Scotia Health Research Foundation (now Research Nova Scotia), and through the Dalhousie Medical Research Foundation's Picchione Visiting Scholars Series. The strategy targeted diverse early years stakeholders (mainly local and provincial), which included early childhood educators, parents, families, academics, government, policy-makers, physicians, and health professionals. The work was lead through a partnership of academics and practitioners associated with various Provincial Universities and Colleges (Dalhousie University, Mount Saint Vincent University, Nova Scotia College of Early Childhood Education, Saint Francis Xavier University, Cape Breton University), and supported through collaborations with Provincial Government (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development; Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage; Department of Health and Wellness), Health Authorities (IWK Health Centre, Nova Scotia Health Authority), municipalities (Halifax Regional Municipality), organizations (Recreation Nova Scotia, Doctors Nova Scotia, Atlantic Collaborative on Injury Prevention, Halifax Central Public Library), community and business partners (Cobequid Consulting, Aerobics First) and local play champions (Alex Smith, Luke MacDonald). Many local businesses (RONA, SportChek, Scotia Tire, Walmart, Sobeys, Atlantic Superstore, Aerobics First, MEC, Cobequid Consulting) supported our work through donations of loose parts/gift cards to purchase loose parts for our loose parts pop-up event on the Halifax Commons (see report for more details). Funding from the Dalhousie Medical Research Foundation allowed our team to bring in internationally renowned outdoor play expert, Dr. Mariana Brussoni, to Halifax to support three of our knowledge sharing events. Our team developed several communications strategies to engage targeted stakeholders and the wider public, and had the opportunity to share these events through traditional media (radio and TV interviews). The events were also disseminated in the form of newspaper/online articles, and write-ups appeared on various Dalhousie University websites.

The collective impact of our work was strong and far-reaching, as evidenced in this report. We have achieved our objectives of engaging knowledge users and decision-makers in dialogue around the importance of outdoor play (with its risks) to children's health and community health and well-being. We have presented opportunities for children, families and the wider community to engage in outdoor loose parts play, and in doing so, have created a greater awareness of the value of outdoor play with loose parts and how it contributes to all aspects of children's health and development, including physical literacy. We have increased understanding of what physical literacy is and how it can be supported through unstructured, child-led, active outdoor play (with its risks). Importantly, we have strengthened relationships with multi-disciplinary and multi-sector partners invested

in early years development, and in doing so, are seeing great commitment to consider how to better support children's opportunities for outdoor play and physical literacy development in early years settings across the Province.

In this report, the reader will find a detailed overview of our Summer of PLEY Series of events, and evidence of the impact our work had on achieving our objectives (as outlined above and in our Research Nova Scotia funding proposal). It will also speak to how this funding has significantly increased the capacity of the project lead and Principal Investigator (Dr. Michelle Stone) as a researcher and children's health advocate: through the creation of wider and stronger multidisciplinary partnerships, here in NS and beyond; and through enhanced public awareness of the importance of children's outdoor play (with its risks) to children's health and the overall health and wellness of communities. This funding, and the knowledge mobilization events that sprang from it, reinvigorized efforts in the province and beyond, to focus on finding ways to support children's outdoor play (with its risks) for physical literacy and other health benefits. It has paved the way for future work ("next steps", as outlined in the final summary section of the report) to build upon our program of research, which is aimed at enhancing young children's opportunities for outdoor play (with its risks) in all of the spaces and places in which they live, learn and play, to enhance the health of our communities. We hope that readers will find our report inspiring, and see the value that the funding from Research NS and the DMRF had on enhancing our work. Thank you so much for your investment and support in our team!

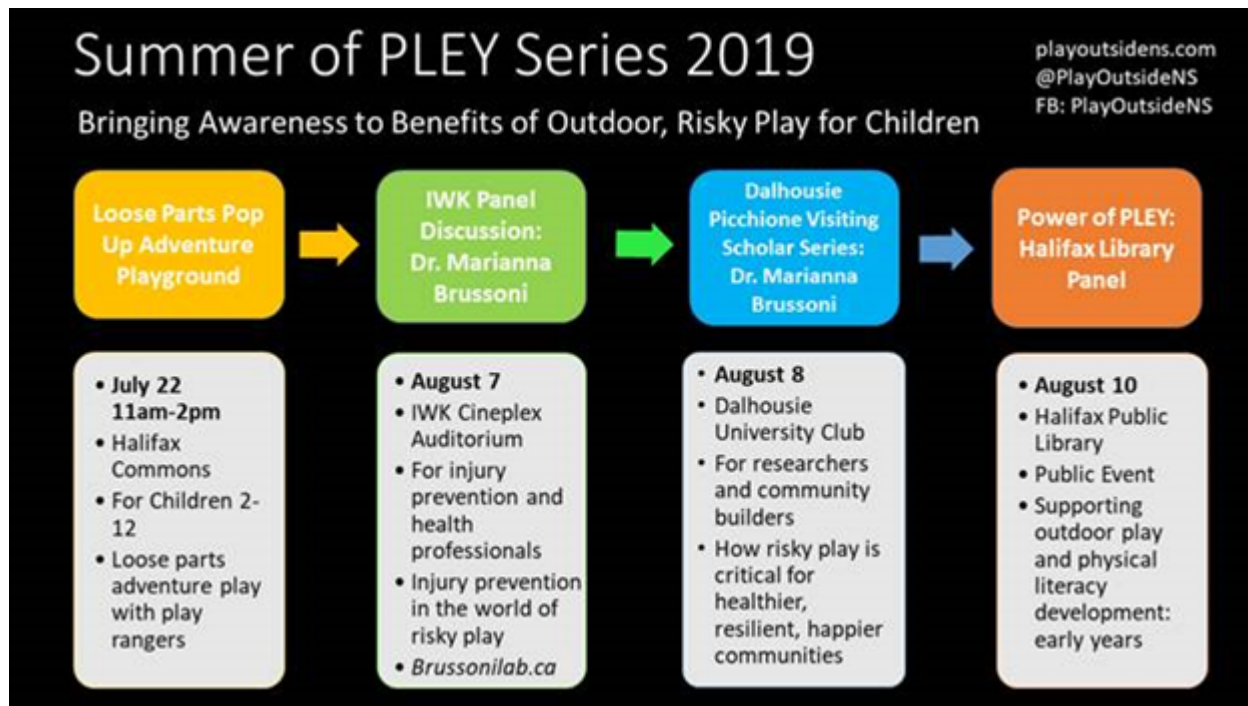


Figure: Schematic of Summer of PLEY Series of Events (2019)

## Background and Introduction

Physical activity (PA) during the early years is critical for the development and maintenance of physical, mental and social wellbeing throughout the lifespan (1). Unstructured, self-directed, and free play dominates early childhood, and affords numerous physical, cognitive and socio-emotional health benefits (2). Outdoor play (with its risks) has particular benefits for children (3-5), and has been endorsed through a position statement geared towards key influencers of children (parents, educators, caregivers, media, government) (6). The position statement highlights that healthy childhood development relies on access to active outdoor play with its associated risks. Unfortunately, children's opportunities for quality outdoor play experiences have declined over time (6), as well as opportunities to be physically active and to develop the fundamental developmental domains that set children up to be active for life: physical literacy. Physical literacy is defined as "the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life" (7). Interest in physical literacy is rapidly rising, and many programs and policies to improve physical literacy are emerging (8). Provincial governments, municipal public health and recreation departments, boards of education and sports and recreation groups across the country are recognizing that investments need to be made to improve low rates of physical literacy in Canadian children and youth (8-10). However, there is still an overwhelming lack of knowledge on how to best support children's physical literacy, particularly in early years environments, through a play-based approach.


In 2018, our team submitted a proposal to the Nova Scotia Health Research Foundation (now Research NS), under their Knowledge Sharing Support Award (KSSA) program, to implement an innovative, multidisciplinary knowledge sharing strategy aimed at early years stakeholders across the Province invested in supporting children's outdoor play and physical literacy, and overall health and wellness. The knowledge sharing strategy was focused on taking lessons learned from our previous research, the Physical Literacy in the Early Years (PLEY) project (11), and engaging stakeholders in dialogue around the value of outdoor play (with its risks) for children's health and wellness.

## Aim

To create greater awareness regarding outdoor loose parts play (with its risks) and physical literacy that would support provincial programs, strategies and policies.

## Objectives

1. To engage knowledge users and increase community awareness of the importance of outdoor loose parts play for children's physical literacy and other health outcomes;
2. To build a greater understanding of what physical literacy is, and how to best support it within various early years environments in communities across Nova Scotia;

- 
3. To present an innovative opportunity for children, families and the wider community to engage in outdoor play with loose parts through a pop-up adventure playground on the Halifax Commons
  4. To present opportunities to have dialogue around the potential for outdoor loose parts play to enrich the play experiences and health of young children in the Province;
  5. To create and strengthen relationships with multidisciplinary and multi-sector partners invested in supporting early years development through outdoor play opportunities that informs best practice in our communities;
  6. To evaluate the impact of this integrated knowledge sharing strategy on knowledge mobilization with key stakeholders and the wider community around outdoor play with loose parts and how it can be used to support children's physical literacy development.


The knowledge sharing strategy was titled “The Summer of PLEY” and consisted of five integrated events in July and August of 2019. A stakeholder engagement event was held in March 2019 to raise awareness on the importance of active outdoor play, and to provide an opportunity for input into event planning. This meeting created an opportunity to discuss ways to promote active outdoor play and gain insight on how to move our work forward. The discussions and feedback from this meeting were then used to inform our knowledge sharing strategy. This strategy was supported by funding from the Dalhousie Medical Research Foundation’s Picchione Visiting Scholars Series. The Picchione Lecture Series is designed to engage public interest and understanding on the relationship between health research and health outcomes, led by a prominent keynote speaker dedicated to health advocacy/health research. One of the leading contributors to the outdoor play movement in Canada is Dr. Mariana Brussoni, an internationally renowned developmental child psychologist who has investigated child injury prevention and children’s outdoor play for almost 20 years.

Through our Summer of PLEY series of events we were able to shine a brighter spotlight in Nova Scotia on the importance of supporting outdoor risky play in spaces and places where children live, learn and play. This report is designed to provide an overview of these events and illustrate their collective impact on achieving our objectives. It includes photos, reflections from our team and the community; communications strategies that we employed to increase awareness of The Summer of PLEY events, the reach of these communications strategies, and the attendance at events; and evaluation survey results. It also outlines how our objectives were met, and speaks to the impact of this work on connecting with end users and decision-makers and programs and policies in the province. Finally, the report provides a summary and a discussion of next steps for our team in encouraging children’s outdoor play and physical literacy in early years settings in communities on a local, provincial and national-level.

Overall, this report demonstrates the collective impact of our Summer of PLEY events on raising awareness amongst key early years stakeholders and the general public on our team's program of research, at a local, provincial, national and international level. Importantly, this work has led to the strengthening of relationships with key stakeholders here in Nova Scotia and elsewhere to support our work, and has opened up opportunities for new relationships, which are having significant impacts on children's opportunities for outdoor risky play in our own province and beyond. We strongly feel that the support from Research NS and the DMRF has contributed to our team's goal of creating greater awareness regarding outdoor loose parts play (with its risks) and physical literacy in our province and beyond. This increased awareness, and the strengthening of relationships in our province and beyond, will continue to support provincial programs, strategies and policies around children's outdoor play (with its risks) that leads to healthier, happier, and more resilient communities.

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## Summary of Summer of PLEY events

This report provides an overview of the five Summer of PLEY events associated with the Research NS and Dalhousie Medical Research Foundation Picchione Visiting Scholar Program funding. The events are highlighted on our website (<https://playoutsidens.com/events/>) and on the DMRF website (<https://dmrf.ca/about/events/picchione-2019/>). The report also provides an overview of a stakeholder meeting held in February 2019. This meeting presented an opportunity for dialogue amongst diverse early years outdoor play stakeholders in the province into our knowledge mobilization strategy, and a way for those invested in children's outdoor play and health to provide input into the conceptualization of these events.

Our first Summer of PLEY event was held at the Halifax Commons on July 22, 2019, and was titled “Pop Up Loose Parts Playground”. The event was aimed at families, early childhood educators, and the general public. The pop up event was focused on providing an opportunity for children to engage in unstructured, child-directed play with loose parts, materials with no fixed purpose (e.g. tires, wooden planks, buckets, balls) that could be used and rearranged in endless ways, directed by the children themselves. The pop-up was designed to bring together the community for a day of free play, wonder and joy – and as the report will show – was incredibly successful in achieving this. The second Summer of PLEY event was held at the IWK Health Centre on August 7, 2019, and was titled “Building Resilient Children: Injury Prevention in the World of Risky Play”. The event was aimed at physicians and other health stakeholders to explore the value of risk for children's health while also avoiding injury. The goal was to have dialogue around the supporting children's opportunities to play freely and take risks in play, while also avoiding injury, and examine the role that health care and the medical community could take in supporting this. The second event was the dedicated Picchione Visiting Scholars Lecture, delivered by Dr. Brussoni, and was held at Dalhousie University in the University Club on August 8, 2019. Her lecture was titled “Risk, Resilience and the Renaissance of Play”. The third event offered an opportunity for community indoor loose parts play, and was held at the Halifax Central Library on August 10, 2019. The fourth event was a lecture titled “The Power of PLEY” and was held at the Halifax Central Public Library on August 10, 2019, immediately after the community indoor loose parts play event. The lecture featured talks by Dr. Brussoni, our Physical Literacy in the Early Years (PLEY) research team, and two early childhood educators who participated in our PLEY research. The lecture was moderated by Laura Beth MacPherson, an outdoor play consultant affiliated with the Government of Nova Scotia's Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage.



## Communications Strategies

Our team developed an extensive communications strategy to raise awareness of these events with the wider public, and created various social media channels, which are outlined below.

### 1. [Play Outside NS website](https://playoutsidens.com/)

<https://playoutsidens.com/>

The Play Outside NS website was created to showcase blogs from outdoor play programs within Canada, provide resources for individuals to learn more about loose parts play, and introduce the public to the various members of the PLEY research team. The website was designed from the ground up, and provided an index directing visitors to specific pages (as seen in Figure 2).



**Figure:** The index of pages found within the Play Outside NS website (Retrieved on: September 24, 2019)

This index allows for the segregation of information. The **Home Page** consists of blogs and other postings that highlight the benefits of outdoor play. The **In the News** tab provides links to media coverage of the Summer of PLEY knowledge mobilization events. The **Events** tab links to the events hosted by the Summer of PLEY. The **Resources** tab is an outdoor play resource centre, providing relevant documents, online portals, blogs, twitter feeds and documentaries. The **How to Get Involved** tab provides opportunities for others to support this work. The **Outdoor Play Stakeholders** tab provides an outline on all the stakeholders within Nova Scotia who are committed to improving outdoor play and early childhood education. The **About Us** tab provides information on the PLEY research team. Finally, the **Contact Us** tab provides a mechanism for visitors to get in touch with our PLEY research team. The site received 3,284 visits between its creation in June 2019 and September 20, 2019 from individuals from a variety of countries (Figure 3).





## 2. Facebook and Twitter

**@playoutsidens**

Both Facebook and Twitter were used to engage a wider audience quickly, share information about events, and for promotion. These platforms also allowed the opportunity to disseminate images from photo opportunities with the Mayor of Halifax (Mike Savage) and the Chief Medical Officer of Health (Dr. Robert Strang) and our PLEY research team, which took place on August 7, 2019 in Fort Needham Park on National Play Day (Figure 4). These photos appeared in several tweets and accrued attention from various News media outlets.



**Figure:** Members of the PLEY Team (Jane Cawley, Nila Joshi, Dr. Michelle Stone and Dr. Daniel Stevens) with Chief Officer of Health Dr. Robert Strang, and Dr. Marianna Brussoni in Fort Needham Park.

**Video recordings** of the IWK panel discussion, the Picchione lecture at the University Club, and the lecture at the Halifax Central Public Library, can be found on our Facebook page under “videos”. **Our twitter account** provides evidence of public awareness and reach of our events to diverse stakeholders here in Nova Scotia and around the world.

### **3. News Media Outlets**

A press release about The Summer of PLEY and associated knowledge mobilization events was written and sent out with the assistance of the Dalhousie Faculty of Health’s Communications Team (Lead: Dawn Morrison). Following this, a series of interviews were held at a variety of news media outlets namely, CBC Maritime Connection, Star Metro, The Chronicle Herald, Halifax Today, News 95.7, Global News, CTV news, Dal News. The knowledge mobilization events were also in the Dalhousie Events listings. The Faculty of Health also did an interview on PLEY research team (and PhD in Health candidate) Nila Joshi, which appeared on the Faculty of Health website, and the Summer of PLEY press release was featured on the Dalhousie University main website for several weeks following the knowledge mobilization events (August 2019). Notably, the Summer of PLEY was featured on Outdoor Play Canada, a national and leading hub for research, policy and practice efforts supporting children’s outdoor play

#### **4. Eventbrite**

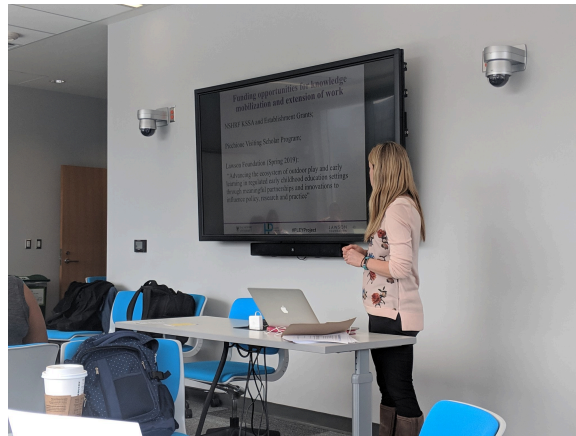
Eventbrite was used to manage events and acted as a unifying place for collecting ticket information from people. Links to Eventbrite were provided on infographics, which were produced through Canva and shared in emails, Facebook, Twitter and within our Play Outside NS website. Based on the number of free tickets “sold” on Eventbrite we could gauge how many attendees there would be at each event, however attendees were not required to have a ticket to attend the event. The Pop-up Adventure Playground “sold” 422/422 tickets, the IWK Panel Discussion sold 82/82 tickets, the Picchione Lecture sold 42/80 tickets, the Loose Parts Play Session sold 69/100 tickets, and the Power of PLEY Panel Discussion sold 26/100 tickets.

#### **5. Conferences and Presentations**

Summer of PLEY team members Karina Branje and Nila Joshi will give an oral presentation on “The Summer of PLEY” events and associated impact at the 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Crossroads Interdisciplinary Health Research Conference on March 20, 2020. Karina will also give an oral presentation of her Masters thesis work, titled “The Impact of an Outdoor Loose Parts Intervention on Nova Scotian Preschooler’s Fundamental Movement Skills” at the 18th Annual Crossroads Interdisciplinary Health Research Conference on March 20th, 2020, which is based upon associated research (The PLEY Project). Nila will also be presenting our PLEY School project (upcoming research funded by Research NS), as part of a symposium, at the International Society for Behavioural Nutrition and Physical Activity (ISBNPA) Conference in Auckland, New Zealand, in June 2020. Finally, Karina and Nila are headed to the Horwood Outdoor Education Conference (Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario) this January 2020, to give a workshop on outdoor play and physical literacy, and present their thesis research. Dr. Michelle Stone and Dr. Daniel Stevens are also considering presenting The Summer of PLEY and associated research (PLEY School) at the North American Society for Pediatric Medicine (NASPEM) conference in July 2020 (Kelowna, BC). Dr. Stone will continue to share the Summer of PLEY and associated research to University students and the University community via classes, guest lectures, etc.

## Stakeholder meeting – March 2019

On March 11, 2019, our PLEY Project team held an early childhood and outdoor play stakeholder meeting at Dalhousie University.



14 stakeholders from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Education, the City of Kentville, Department of Communities, Culture, and Heritage, IWK Health Centre, and Researchers from Mount Saint Vincent University, Dalhousie University, St. Francis Xavier University and Cape Breton University attended.



The meeting took on a World Cafe format where stakeholders rotated around three tables, each with unique topics which included outdoor play initiatives, pop-up playground KT event, and future Lawson funding opportunities. This meeting with stakeholders reinforced the value in taking what our team has learned from childcare settings and moving outdoor loose parts play into the early elementary school environment. Following the meeting, attendees were asked to complete an evaluation survey describing their experience. Responses to the questions on the evaluation survey were on a 4 point Likert scale, with responses ranging from “1” (Strongly Disagree) to “4” (Strongly Agree). The results from the evaluation survey are in the table below.

Evaluation Questions for Stakeholder Meeting	Mean Response (n=6)
This meeting allowed me to strengthen collaboration and form new connections	3.50
This meeting provided me with opportunities to learn with others	3.83
I had the chance to think about ways to move forward in supporting opportunities for children to gain access to quality outdoor play experiences and develop physical literacy in early years setting	3.66
How likely will you do the following as a result of your participation at the meeting: Explore new connections made at this meeting	3.83
How likely will you do the following as a result of your participation at the meeting: Share what you have learned	3.80
How likely will you do the following as a result of your participation at the meeting: Think about your work in a new way	3.60
How likely will you do the following as a result of your participation at the meeting: Use information to enhance or change existing policy or practice related to the promotion of children's outdoor play and physical literacy development in early years	3.75
Overall, how satisfied were you with this meeting?	3.83

On the evaluation survey, attendees were asked to use one word to describe their experience at the lecture. Below is a word cloud, which illustrates the variety of words that attendees presented.

Motivating  
Refreshing  
Energizing  
Networking  
Engaging  
Opportunities  
Dynamic



## Loose Parts Pop-Up Playground

The loose parts pop-up playground was held on July 22, 2019. It was by far our most well-attended and impactful Summer of PLEY event. It was also the most work! The pop-up event was inspired by a previous event held on the Halifax Commons in the Summer of 2017, by our colleague Alex Smith, a significant local outdoor play champion and prolific blogger (<https://playgroundology.wordpress.com/>). Planning for our loose parts pop-up event began in January 2019, and involved months of loose parts sourcing and logistics planning. Countless hours were spent on communications strategies and outreach with targeted stakeholders and the general public, and significant time went into the recruitment and training of event volunteers. It was an enormous effort, but one that payed off immensely, and brought great joy to the community and to our team, as you will find in this report. Below is an infographic of this event, which was circulated to early years stakeholders in the province, and to the general community via various communications strategies (e.g. social media channels, Dalhousie University's Faculty of health, Healthy Populations Institute, School of Health and Human Performance). Printed copies were also posted around the community. We have also included a reflection, written by one of our team members (Jane Cawley), that gets at the work that went into planning this event, and the day itself.



## Loose Parts Pop-Up Playground: A Reflection

The amazing thing about a pop-up playground event is that it looks to an outside observer like a magical happening, that arrives with a “POP”, and 5 hours later it disappears as quickly as it came. In reality, it takes months of planning; sourcing loose parts, creating an ongoing presence on social media, forming community partnerships, amassing an army of volunteers, creating and implementing a task plan for the team, and all the while keeping fingers crossed that the weather will be good.

We arrived at the Commons on the day with a U-Haul and our cars packed to the rafters. We unloaded the loose parts and reassembled hundreds of cardboard boxes (the bigger the better) that had been flattened for easy storage. Our team member Alex Smith, who hosted a pop-up playground in 2017, advised us to gather as many cardboard boxes as we could and thank goodness, we took that advice. As you can see from the photos the boxes were a big hit. Next, we staged the loose parts into separate areas, creating visual invitations to come and play.



**...and then the magic happened!**





The children started to arrive wide-eyed and curious. There were toddlers, preschool and school age children and even a few infants. Some children came in groups from child care centres or day camps, and some came with caregivers or parents. Some came because they had seen the event notice, and some were driving by and stopped to see what it was all about. Some children dove right in, but some children were a bit hesitant. Message to the children, “play and have fun.” Message to the adults, “The beauty lies in allowing the children the freedom to explore the materials, use them as they wish, and take them to any area of the play area they feel the need to.”

We observed the children playing with the loose parts in many different ways. Physical play was happening as children immediately began reorganizing, picking up, or dragging the loose parts to other locations. Often when the loose part was heavy or bulky the children had to adopt a collaborative plan to make this happen.

Even though there were lots of materials and lots of children, the Commons provided spaces for children to practice balancing skills, to throw and catch balls, and to move their bodies. We observed balancing structures created with wood planks and tires as well as throwing games with balls and buckets. The children demonstrated confidence, motivation and competence; all of the elements of physical literacy.





Construction play was a theme throughout the day, with the older children having a specific goal “we’re gonna build a fort”, and the younger children simply working organically with the materials and somehow some of those turned into forts too. The children also engaged in dramatic play as they assumed roles to match their structures. One group mixed water and crushed chalk to make a secret potion.

Loose parts play can support collaborative group play or be used by one child engaged in solitary play, or two children playing side by side in parallel play. We observed younger children playing with older children; friends playing together; children playing with other children they had just met. They were recognizing and appreciating the talents, skills, abilities and capacities to contribute to the play community. They were learning from each other and functioning in a cohesive, respectful, and responsible way.





The use of open-ended materials like loose parts can also lead to risky play. Good risks are those that engage and challenge children and support their growth, learning, and development (Play England, 2007). We observed children carefully assess their own capabilities and without adult input make thoughtful decisions. We also observed older children offering support to younger children.

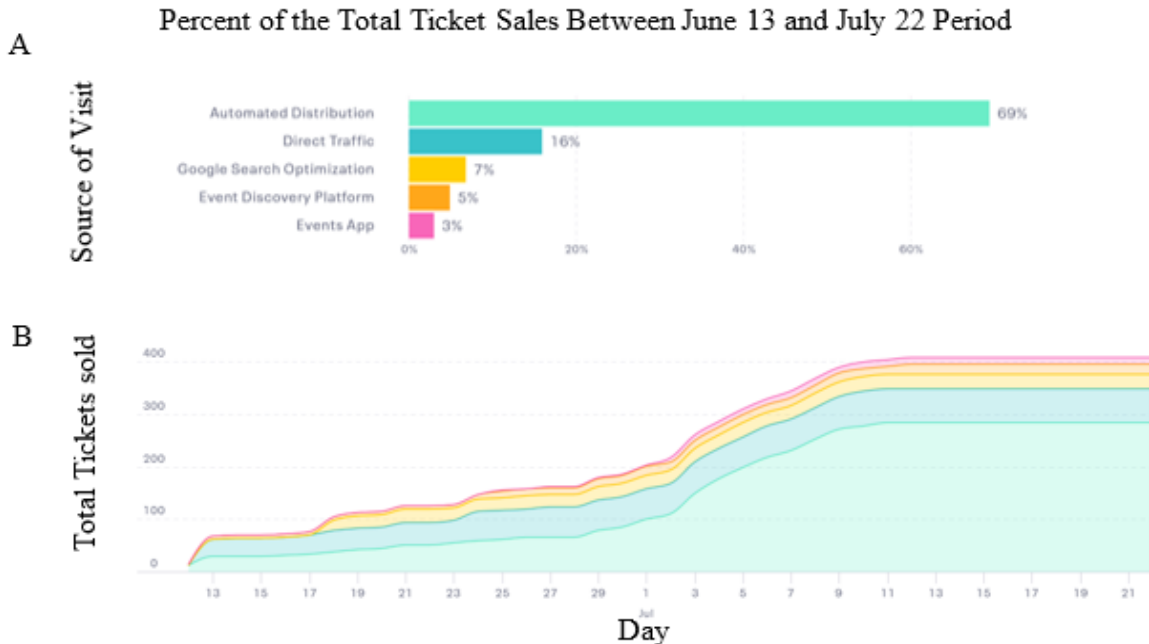
An interesting statistic...PLEY team members had bandages in their pockets. Final tally – zero bandages handed out. Thank you for the generosity of the community in supporting our Summer of PLEY Pop-Up Playground.



## Pop-up Playground Social Media Engagement

The Pop-up adventure playground was the most popular event within the Summer of PLEY series. This event was actively promoted through various avenues of social media. According to Facebook, a total of 18,000 people were reached after an extensive public relations campaign advertising the event, including a radio interview on News 95.7, Halifax Today, The Star Halifax, CBC Mainstreet, and CBC Maritime Connection. From the insights page, women between 25 and 44 years of age represented 74.9% of the 248 of clicks to book the event on the Eventbrite page. This was reflected at the actual event where the majority of the parents in attendance were women.

A break down of the daily ticket sales within Eventbrite show that the 422 tickets made available to the public were sold out two weeks before the event. (Figure 4). Of the tickets which were released in advance of the event, 294 tickets were sold via integrated systems between Eventbrite and Facebook, while 66 were sign ups associated with links provided via email. When examining ticket sales, tickets were often sold in blocks of two or more with an average number of tickets sold, which is expected as this was a family-focused event. In the future, establishing a child vs. adult option on the ticket sales would allow for further understanding of a breakdown of parent/guardian to child ratios.



**Figure:** A) The percent distribution of ticket sales by the source of the visit ticket sales on Eventbrite, where ‘Automated Distribution’ relates to an integrated Eventbrite link within Facebook, and direct traffic refers to links which are shared on websites or emails shared by the PLEY team. The remainder of the sales pertain to links which are related to advertising algorithms which suggest events to the population based on their attendance. B) The cumulative ticket sales from the release of sales on June 12 and to the closure of sales prior to the event on July 22<sup>nd</sup> by source.

## Pop Up Event Reflections – PLEY Team Members

“It was a fantastic event! Huge congratulations to all of the team that worked so hard to make this happen. That the day went by without so much as a bandaid being needed is testament to the meticulous preparation, as well as to the creativity, resiliency and resourcefulness of the kids that participated. We had lots of twitter action also – 14,804 impressions from the 8 tweets I sent in the morning. It was great to see media attention and here’s the clip from Global News featuring Nila and Karina, who did a brilliant job articulating the benefits of loose parts play. Well done to each and every one of you – a phenomenal team!”

“Fabulous event! So much positive energy all around is amazing to see.”



“It was truly an incredible day. It surpassed all of my expectations, and the entire experience was just phenomenal. I really am so proud of the team that we created. I was just full of joy watching our team put all they had into setting up and taking down the event, and interacting with children, educators, families and others during the event. It was honestly one of the best experiences I have ever had, and probably the most rewarding event I have had the privilege of organizing with you all.”

“I would like to say congratulations to the entire team as well. What a fantastic day that truly demonstrated the power and spirit of children’s/ intergenerational/ intercultural/ community (and the list goes on) play. It was all made possible by your hard work, preparation, and dedication to this project. On a personal note, it was such a great event to participate in during my first month in the School of HAHP. I’m looking forward to the future events as well.”



“ I feel so proud and lucky to be a part of the PLEY team – it is a wonderful project made up of so many good people.”



“ I am sending some of my thoughts:

- Widened eyes filled with wonder! CHILDREN AND ADULTS
- We created an environment that promoted a sense of wonder, curiosity, and creativity.
- I observed adults and children joined together in laughter and delight to celebrate the joy of being a child and the joy of being someone who loves a child. I also observed parents engaging in conversation with educators as they watched the children play together.
- I loved seeing children faced with situations where they did not have an answer, where there was not an obvious path. This kind of play makes the learning visible.
- Even though there were many examples of language I am always astonished how efficiently young children develop a form of non-verbal communication that far surpasses anything adults could accomplish.
- I also felt we created a space for inclusion and equity. Younger children playing with older children; friends playing together; children playing with other children they had just met. They were recognizing and appreciating the talents, skills, abilities and capacities to contribute to the play community. They were learning from each other and functioning in a cohesive, respectful, and responsible way. Collaboration instead of competition.



...I observed so many examples of authentic kindness.

Child A is on a wobbly board, arms extended to keep his balance.

Child B :”that’s a little shaky for you, I’m gonna put on a stronger board.”

Child B drags over another board and puts on top of the first one. “Oh, that’s better”

Child A who had said nothing during this “fix” turned to Child B and said “thanks”.

An area of concentration for me continues to be understanding and supporting children who experience stress and anxiety and subsequently have difficulty with self-regulation. A quote from one of the ECE students who attended the Pop-up Playground “I observed “0” worried faces for the whole time I was there. Where did the anxiety go?”

One of the interesting things that I noted was 3 very distinct “feelings” throughout the event. The start up was a slow build in excitement and engagement with children checking in with adults from time to time to see if they were doing it right. The middle section was like a fabulous new years eve party. The last section settled into a calmer period where the play became even deeper and more meaningful. Remember the Mum and 2 children who stayed playing as we tidied up around them. When they finally packed it in I went over and thanked them for coming and playing with us. The little boy, unprompted, looked me in the eye and said “thanks for letting us play the longest!”.”





## Pop Up Event Reflections - Volunteers

“Best day of the summer!! YeeeeeeFreakingHawwww!”

“I was one of the many photographers buzzing around to capture some shots of the day so while I wasn’t interacting with anyone, I was a keen observer for a couple of hours. First and foremost, the event was INCREDIBLE so kudos to the team! We hear about the project all the time and, more generally, the need for kids to just play and explore (in a more unorganized fashion than tends to be the norm) but to see a wide open space, tons of what we might consider to just be “stuff” spread all over the place and so many kids using their imaginations and trying new things honestly just made me really feel happy!”



“It was so good to see everyone have such a good time with not an electronic device in sight! Kids working together, using their creativity and imaginations and being a bit daring at the same time - couldn’t ask for more than that. I loved seeing not only kids working with the items but parents/grandparents, older siblings, and caretakers/sitters getting in on the action as well, something not observed as much when looking at organized play, sports, etc. It was also really interesting to observe that, even in the heat, there were very few meltdowns as the kids were so into what they were doing, they didn’t seem to notice the heat or they didn’t mind if they fell off a created ramp or got hit with an object. There was so much to do and see that they didn’t sweat the small stuff.”

“I was pleased to see diverse groups, lots of participants of different ages, and clearly lots of different personalities (some very shy, preferring to work alone and some very boisterous and happy to work with anyone that was near). It would have been great to see some participants with physical challenges as well. I heard a few great quotes from participants and I now wish I had written them down!”



“I think the biggest takeaway for me was just witnessing the power of unstructured play and how happy all the participants were – being active (body and mind), outside, around other people, and seeing the different thought processes of each participant come out through how and what they played/worked with...it all seems so simple but in today’s world of organized play and electronics, it was just so darn refreshing to see the way play should be!”



“Thank you all for creating such an amazing event! It was inspiring to see everyone working so well together, volunteers, children, families, educators and more! Creativity, imagination and inclusion filled the Commons, it was great fun to be a part of the day!”

“Thanks for including me in the day - I thoroughly enjoyed seeing the children enjoying themselves so much and being able to capture some of that through pictures. “



## Pop Up Evaluation Survey Results

During the loose parts pop-up event, members of the PLEY team/event volunteers distributed evaluation surveys to various event attendees. A total of 61 surveys were completed. In this survey, attendees were asked questions on awareness of outdoor loose parts play, their comfort in supporting risky play, and their knowledge on the benefits of active outdoor play. They were also asked whether their perspective of outdoor play and physical activity had changed following the loose parts play event, and whether they would like to see loose parts at their local playground/park. The survey employed a likert scale, with responses ranging from “1” (Not Aware) to “5” (Extremely Aware) for Questions 1-2; “1” (Not Comfortable) to “5” (Extremely Comfortable) for Question 4; “1” (Strongly Disagree) to “5” (Strongly Agree) for Questions 3 and 5; and “0” (No) versus “1” (Yes) for Question 6. The results from the evaluation survey are in the table below:

Evaluation Questions for Pop Up	Mean Response (n=61)
On a scale from 1-5, how aware of outdoor loose parts play were you, prior to our event?	3.36
On a scale from 1-5, how aware of outdoor loose parts play are you now?	4.36
You would like to see loose parts materials at your local playground or park (scale from 1-5)	4.49
On a scale from 1-5, how comfortable were you at supporting risky play, prior to our event?	3.98
On a scale from 1-5, how comfortable are you at supporting risky play now?	4.15
Your perspective on outdoor play and physical activity has changed following this event (scale from 1-5)	3.57
Has your knowledge of the benefits of active outdoor play expanded following this event? Y/N	41/61 responded yes 14/61 responded no 6/61 gave no response

From the responses, it is evident that awareness of outdoor loose parts play increased post-event, as did comfort in supporting risky play. Many attendees seemed to see the value of having loose parts at their local playground/park, and 67% of respondents felt that the loose parts event increased their understanding of the benefits of active outdoor play.

After the completion of our Pop-up Playground, we have had a number of individuals and organizations reaching out regarding another event. Individuals from John MacNeil Elementary in Highfield Park, Dartmouth, Friends of Armdale Society in Halifax, and Switch Dartmouth were all curious how they could incorporate loose parts play into their schools and public events, and have sought out of advice. These were people who attended our Pop-up Playground and recognized the physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional benefits children were receiving from playing with these open-ended materials. It was important for the individuals on the ground, working with children every day, to experience this event. This event *showed* individuals who care for children everyday, the end users, the benefits of loose parts play, without them having to attend an academic lecture. This event showed our team that there is an incredible desire for offering outdoor loose parts play in various early years settings, with many stakeholders reaching out to our team for training and assistance. Our challenge now is to try to find

On the evaluation survey, attendees were asked to use one word to describe their experience at the loose parts pop-up event. Below is a word cloud which illustrates the variety of words attendees presented.

## Sourcing of Loose Parts

While the sourcing of loose parts can appear to be a relatively facile process, the acquisition of loose parts for the July 22nd event took well over two months to complete. A focus should be spent on securing a location that is large enough to house all of the materials, and on acquiring cardboard boxes as all of the 76 boxes acquired for the July 22nd event were used at the event. To help others with sourcing loose parts across Nova Scotia, the following loose parts source guide was created. An infographic using this information should be created, which tiers the donors based on their support for the 2019 Summer of PLEY and released on the website. Some of the key supporters this year were:

**Cyclesmith**, who provided the majority of our boxes, bike tubes, and tires for this event.

**Garnet MacLaughlin from Cobequid Consulting** who supplied us with tree cookies, logs, planks, and stumps

**RONA** who supplied us with a truckload of warped wood, and offcuts

**Sport Chek** who supplied us with gift cards and product from throughout the store.

## List of Loose Parts Suppliers

**Bike Tubes and Tires** - Donated by Cyclesmith

Website: <https://www.cyclesmith.ca/>

2553 Agricola St, Halifax, NS B3K 4C4

**Car Tires** - Walmart (Dartmouth Crossing) and Scotia Tire (2903 Robie St Halifax and 267 Bedford Hwy).

**Fabric Cut Outs & Flowerpots** - Walmart

**Frisbees** – Purchased from Sport Chek (Dartmouth Crossing) utilising Gift Cards donated by the company.

**Hoola Hoops** –Dollar Store and Walmart

**Hose** - Donated by Garnet MacLaughlin at Cobequid Consulting

Website: <https://www.cobequidconsulting.ca>

Phone Number: 902-647-2271

RR1 Economy NS



### **Hub Caps, Interlocking Rubber Mats, & Large Cardboard Boxes**

Large cardboard boxes are often easily obtained, key places to target include big chain retailers such as Walmart, and Sporting retailers such as Sport Chek, and Bicycle shops (Cyclesmith and M.E.C.), and from National Paddling Regattas on Lake Banook.

**Milk Crates** - Donated to us by community members.

**Mini Logs & Mini Planks** - Donated by Garnet MacLaughlin at Cobequid Consulting

Website: <https://www.cobequidconsulting.ca>

Phone Number: 902-647-2271

RR1 Economy NS NS

### **Misc. Kitchen Items**

Some of the kitchen items were obtained through old loose parts source kits from previous days hosted by the group, which were originally obtained from the dollar store, the remainder of the parts were obtained from donations.

**Misc. Rope** - Donated by community members

**Pool Noodles** - Purchased from Dollarama and Walmart.

### **Pallets**

Pallets can be easily sourced from a variety of areas. In this particular research project, pallets were obtained from the copy center in the Life Sciences Center on Studley campus. In general, pallets can be obtained from many stores or businesses in industrial parks, however caution should be taken as some pallets -especially ones that are painted blue go back to the original manufacturer, and those with HCP stamped on them are pressure treated – so masks should be worn whilst sanding them.

**Plastic Buckets** - Donated by Rona.

**Plastic Cups** - Purchased.

**Plastic Flower Pots** - Obtained from the garden center at the Walmart Dartmouth Crossing location.

**Plastic Mesh Roll, Pots, & PVC Pipes** - purchased from Kent.

**Pylons & Saw Horses** – on loan from team member.

### **Scrap Wood**

Rona was exceptionally generous, donating a truckload of warped wooden boards, fence posts and other building materials to the July 22nd event.

### **Spools**

Spools were sourced from Dalhousie facilities management, who had a large supply of spools as a result of a retrofit of the Dentistry building on Carleton campus. Other possible locations to obtain spools include The Binnacle, The Yacht Shop, Nova Braid, and hardware stores.

### **Stumps, Wooden Crates, & Wooden Planks**

Garnet MacLaughlin at Cobequid Consulting

Website: <https://www.cobequidconsulting.ca>

Phone Number: 902-647-2271

RR1 Economy NS





## IWK Grand Round Panel Discussion

The IWK panel, titled “Building Resilient Children: Injury Prevention in the World of Risky Play”, was held on August 7th during the IWK’s grand rounds. The IWK panel discussion featured members of the PLEY team (Dr. Michelle Stone and Jane Cawley), Dr. Brussoni, the Manager of the IWK Child Safety Link (Sandra Newton), the Executive Director of the Atlantic Collaborative on Injury Prevention (Jennifer Russell), and the Chief Medical Officer of Health (Dr. Robert Strang). Below is an infographic of this event, which was sent to physicians and other medical staff at the IWK, and to various stakeholders around the Province. It was also released via our social media channels, and promoted by Dalhousie University’s Faculty of Health, the Healthy Populations Institute, and our own School of Health and Human Performance. Printed copies were also posted around the community.

**AUGUST 7, 2019**

**9AM - 10AM**  
**PEM ED ROUNDS**

**IWK HEALTH CENTRE**  
**CINEPLEX THEATRE**



**BUILDING RESILIENT CHILDREN:**

**INJURY PREVENTION IN THE WORLD OF**

**RISKY PLAY**

**SUMMER OF**

**PLEY!**

**Dalhousie University's Physical Literacy in the Early Years (PLEY) project research team is hosting a free panel discussion featuring internationally renowned outdoor play researcher Dr. Mariana Brussoni.**

\*Please note we will be photographing & video graphing this event for use in future presentations. knowledge translation and research\*

**Agenda**

9:00 am - Dr. Robert Strang (Chief Medical Officer of Health)

9:10 am - Dr. Mariana Brussoni (BC Children's Hospital)

9:30 am - Dr. Michelle Stone (Dalhousie University, PLEY Project)

- Jane Cawley (Dalhousie University)

9:35 am - Sandra Newton (IWK Child Safety Link)

- Jennifer Russell (ACIP)

9:40 am - Question and Answer

**This event is supported by the following agencies**

  
Healthy Populations Institute

  
ADVANCING INNOVATION

  
Dalhousie MEDICAL RESEARCH Foundation

  
IWK Health Centre



  
CHILD SAFETY LINK Here for you.

  
acipcapb

  
BC INJURY research and prevention unit

  
BC Children's Hospital

The Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Robert Strang, opened the panel discussion. He began by discussing the rationale for the event, and the importance of holding it at the IWK Health Centre. He spoke about why it is important, from a public health perspective, to support outdoor risky play, and the value of bringing in Dr. Brussoni here to Nova Scotia to continue the dialogue around supporting children's opportunities to play freely and take risks (while also avoiding injury). He mentioned how supporting children's outdoor play with its risks is directly connected to population health, and is crucial for chronic disease prevention and the promotion of mental health and resilience. He mentioned how he worked with Dr. Brussoni, and advocated to Chief Medical Officers of Health throughout Canada to put forth their own position statement that endorsed the Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play (<http://www.phn-rsp.ca/aop.php>). Importantly, he spoke about the role of the medical and health community in supporting children's opportunities to play outside and take risks in outdoor play while also avoiding risk. He also highlighted the collaborative, interdisciplinary nature of our panel, and how it has offered a wonderful opportunity for us to extend the work we are doing to support children's outdoor play with its risks while avoiding injury for child health and wellness.



Dr. Mariana Brussoni was the first panelist to speak, opening her presentation by asking attendees what their favourite childhood memory was. She wanted attendees to reflect on certain elements of their memory including: what they were doing, who they were with, and the smells that surrounded them. For each question we saw

hands fly up as almost everyone in attendance grew up playing outside and unsupervised. She then finished by asking how many people thought their parents were bad parents for allowing them to do what they did - no one. The purpose of this reflection was to demonstrate how, for most individuals, our favorite childhood memory occurs within the outdoors, where we are unsupervised, and are taking risks.



She used this activity to highlight how different our own childhood experiences are to children's experiences today. There have been significant historical declines in outdoor play around the world; children's time spent outdoors is disappearing. Children's access to technology, safety concerns, limited independent mobility, environmental design, less street play, and so on, are all playing into these societal shifts. Children's lives are becoming more structured, more adult-led, and less carefree, far removed from the unstructured, child-led play experiences that we had.





Dr. Brussoni also spoke about historical declines in children's independent mobility. An interesting example she presented was a great granddad, in 1919, was able to travel 6 miles from home to go fishing, a grandfather, in 1950, was able to travel 1 mile into the woods, a mother, in 1979, was able to travel ½ a mile to the swimming pool and today, a son is able to travel 300 yards to the end of the street. This is a drastic change. Dr. Brussoni then went on to show how over the same time that we have seen these shifts in outdoor play, we have also seen alarming increases in mental health issues in children and youth, declines in fitness, and an increase in chronic disease risk factors. She spoke about how 1 in 4 children are developmentally vulnerable in terms of their physical, cognitive, social and emotional skills, and how children are becoming less resilient and feel less in control of their own lives.

Dr. Brussoni then shifted into a discussion of risky play. She presented the characteristics of risky play, and spoke about how risk is very different for every child.

## What is risky play?



*... thrilling & exciting forms of play involving uncertainty and the chance of physical injury*

She presented several statistics demonstrating how risky play is in fact safe and affords children numerous benefits. Below are a few facts she presented during her presentation:

- 1). Risk of abduction by a stranger in Canada is ~1:14,000,000, the equivalent to leaving a child unattended for 200,000 years;
- 2). Death rate for falls from play equipment (ages 1-14 in 2007-2013) is 1;
- 3). Death rate for falls from tree (ages 1-14 in 2000-2013) is 0; and
- 4). Top 5 causes of injury hospitalization in Atlantic Canada (from most common to least) are non-sport related falls (34%), sport-related injuries (12%), playgrounds (8%), poisoning (7%), and cycling (7%).

Dr. Brussoni spoke about how children are rarely getting injured while playing, which is why **our goal shouldn't be to prevent injuries, it should be to promote health, wellbeing and development**. She pointed out how we, as a society, should be thinking about “as safe as necessary” not “as safe as possible” in terms of children’s play, and understanding how to differentiate between “hazard” and “risk”.



The presentation then shifted to a discussion by Dr. Michelle Stone about the Physical Literacy in the Early Years (PLEY) project, and Summer of PLEY events. This was followed by a discussion from Sandra Newton, Manager of the IWK Child Safety Link, and Jennifer Russell, the Executive Director of the Atlantic Collaborative on Injury Prevention. The IWK Child Safety Link is an injury prevention program at the IWK Health Centre dedicated to reducing the incidence and severity of unintentional injury to children and youth in the Maritimes. They are committed to working with community organizations, governments and other partners to ensure children are as safe as necessary at home, on the road and at play. The Atlantic Collaborative on Injury Prevention, also known as ACIP, is a partnership of injury prevention practitioners from both government and non-government organizations. The goal of ACIP is to reduce the burden of injury in Atlantic Canada. Sandra and Jennifer spoke about the work that their organizations are doing to support dialogue with families, organizations, government, and other stakeholders around the health benefits of risky play. They also spoke about their work to develop positive injury prevention messages that support healthy living, talking about the importance of focusing on “As safe as necessary” rather than “As safe as possible”.



The panel presentation ended with a question and answer period intended to spark dialogue with attendees.





The “Building Resilient Children: Injury Prevention in the World of Risky Play” panel drew in a number of health professionals filling the Cineplex Auditorium at the IWK Health Centre. We were in the company of individuals from: The Child Safety Link, Atlantic Collaborative on Injury Prevention, EXCEL Halifax Regional Centre for Education, Dalhousie Emergency Medicine, IWK Adolescent Intensive Services, United Way Halifax, Christopher Allan’s Preschool, Nova Scotia Health Authority, Regional Centre for Education Pre-primary, Research Nova Scotia, Department of Education, Nova Scotia Government, Nova Scotia International Student Program, IWK Emergency Department, Dalhousie Medical Students, Mount Saint Vincent University, Chignecto Central Regional Centre for Education, Body Speech Mind Therapy, IWK Poison Centre, Halifax Early Childhood School, IWK Children’s Recovery, Recreation Nova Scotia, IWK Research. Many of these individuals work within policy and curriculum development, at early year’s centres, or have an influential presence in the health field. It is key that not only current early childhood educators embrace outdoor loose parts play, with its associated risks, but also future educators. Current educators are able to influence their centres current programs, where a curriculum change will be able to ensure future educators are aware of the benefits *before* they begin to work with children. Additionally, the presence of physicians and individuals who work in the health field are a key influencer of parents. If we are able to change parental perceptions of risky play by emphasizing the benefits their children will receive, children will be happier and healthier while under the care of their parents. As noted previously, this event was recorded and shared live on our Facebook page. This recording had an estimated reach of 3,386 individuals, with 1048 unique viewers. Interestingly, the audience of the live video was prominently women between the ages of 35 and 44 residing within Nova Scotia.



## Picchione Keynote Lecture

The Picchione Keynote Lecture was held on August 8th in the University Club at Dalhousie University. The purpose of the lecture, “Risk, Resilience, and the Renaissance of Play”, was for Dr. Brussoni to present on how outdoor, risky play is critical for establishing healthier, happier, and resilient communities. As a keynote lecture, this presentation served as the main feature of Dr. Brussoni’s visit to Nova Scotia. Below is an infographic that our team created for the event. Our communications strategy was similar to that for our previous event, with additional support provided by the Dalhousie Medical Research Foundation.

**AUGUST 8,  
2019**

**5PM - 7PM**

**DALHOUSIE'S  
UNIVERSITY  
CLUB**

**Great Hall, 2nd Floor**



# RISK, RESILIENCE AND THE RENAISSANCE OF PLAY

## SUMMER OF PLEY!

RSVP @  
<https://bit.ly/2RUDyc1>



Dalhousie University's Physical Literacy in the Early Years (PLEY) project research team is hosting a keynote lecture with Dr. Mariana Brussoni on how risky outdoor play is critical for establishing healthier, happier, and resilient communities.

**5:00-6:00 p.m.** Dr. Brussoni will share what's happening nationally and internationally to support children's outdoor play, with its risks, and how we can work within the outdoor play ecosystem, to give young children the freedom to play outdoors (while avoiding injury) in early years environments.

**6:00-7:00 p.m.** An informal social event with Dr. Brussoni, graciously supported by Recreation NS

**\*Please note we will be photographing & videotaping this event for use in future presentations, knowledge translation and research\***



The Picchione Visiting Scholars Series lecture was opened by Joanne Bath, Director of Development and interim Co-CEO of the Dalhousie Medical Research Foundation. Joanne gave an overview of the intent of the Picchione Visiting Scholar Program, and spoke of the importance of this topic in terms of promoting community health and wellness. She shared some of her own outdoor play memories, and expressed the real value of our work in meeting the DMRF's mission of addressing some of the most pressing health concerns in the Maritimes. It was a fantastic opening to this lecture.



Similar to the panel discussion, Dr. Brussoni started her presentation by asking the audience to reflect on their favorite childhood memory. Following this activity, she presented facts on active outdoor play, specifically on how a societal shift has occurred resulting in children being constricted in how they choose to play outdoors. She then presented several statistics contrasting the myths with the facts of outdoor risky play. Throughout her presentation, Dr. Brussoni highlighted how children's health and development are often compromised when they are not outside taking risks.





Dr. Brussoni's presentation was very interactive as she engaged with the audience, asking them questions which made them think, reflect, and understand the value of outdoor risky play. A variety of early childhood stakeholders attended the lecture. Attendees from Dalhousie University, the Nova Scotia Government, Non-Profit, Education, and general public attended the lecture.

Attendees commented on how Dr. Brussoni's presentation was thought-provoking and critical to the understanding of active outdoor risky play. They were particularly impressed by the statistics presented throughout the presentation, commenting on how the numbers really communicated the value of outdoor risky play. Attendees described how this event reinforced their knowledge on the positive benefits of risky play and the negative impact of being too protective. Several attendees commented on how this event has left them feeling inspired and motivated to do more to support active outdoor play for children.



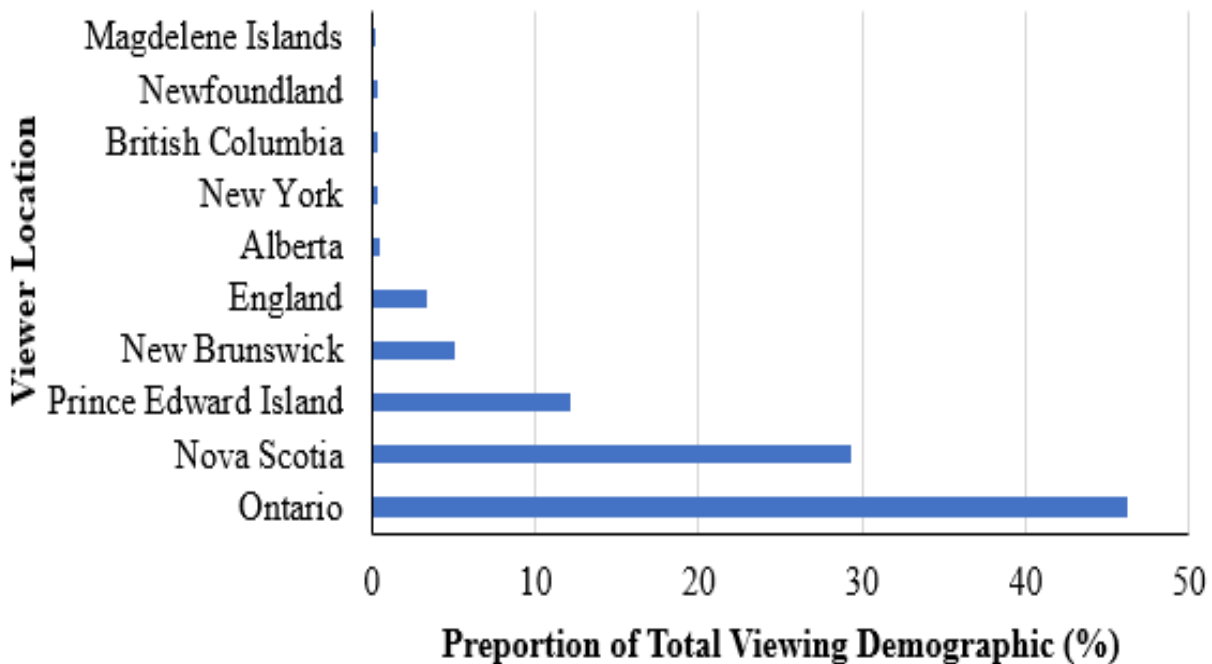


The Picchone Visiting Scholars Series Lecture ended with a social afterwards at the University Club, which was generously sponsored by Recreation Nova Scotia. Our team had an opportunity to continue dialogue with stakeholders and celebrate the success of this event.



## Picchione Lecture Social Media Engagement

This lecture was well attended online and in person, with 42 RSVP's on our Eventbrite page and an estimated reach of 5,788 people, 1531 unique viewers on Facebook. The main demographic of viewers was women between the ages of 45 and 54, and individuals residing in Ontario, at least 6 of which were live views. Thirty-one responses were provided through an in-person evaluation survey regarding attendees' knowledge on risky play before and after the event. The graph below illustrates the top ten online viewing locations represented as a proportion of the total viewer demographic on Facebook for Dr. Mariana Brussoni's Picchioni Visiting Scholars lecture hosted at the Dalhousie University Club.



## Picchione Lecture Evaluation Survey Results

Following the presentation, attendees were asked to complete an evaluation survey. In this survey they were asked questions on active outdoor play, their value of risky play on children's learning and development, and their knowledge on ways to support and engage children in active outdoor play with its risk. This was a likert scale, with responses ranging from "1" (Not Aware) to "5" (Extremely Aware) for the first four questions, and "1" (Strongly Disagree) to "5" (Strongly Agree) for the last question. The results from the evaluation survey are in the table below:

<b>Evaluation Questions for Picchione Lecture</b>	<b>Mean Response (n=31)</b>
<b>On a scale from 1-5, how aware were you of the significance of active outdoor play to children's health, prior to our event?</b>	<b>4.5</b>
<b>On a scale from 1-5, how aware are you of the significance of active outdoor play to children's health now?</b>	<b>4.7</b>
<b>On a scale from 1-5, how aware were you of the value of risky play to children's learning and development, prior to our event?</b>	<b>4.2</b>
<b>On a scale from 1-5, how aware are you of the value of risky play to children's learning and development now?</b>	<b>4.5</b>
<b>Your knowledge on ways to support and engage children in active outdoor play with its risks has changed following this event (Scale from 1-5)</b>	<b>4.0</b>

From the responses, it is evident that most attendees were quite aware of the significance of active outdoor play to children's health, and the value of risky play to children's learning and development, prior to the event. While there seems to be a slight increase in mean values pre- to post-event, the change may or may not be significant. It is important to note the results from the last question, which indicates that most attendees agreed that our event increased their knowledge on ways to support and engage children in active outdoor play with its risks.



On the evaluation survey, attendees were asked to use one word to describe their experience at the lecture. Below is a word cloud which illustrates the variety of words attendees presented.



## The Power of PLEY Library Event: Indoor Loose Parts Play Session

The fourth and fifth events were held at the Halifax Central Public Library on August 10, 2019, and were titled ‘The Power of PLEY: Why Kids Need to Play Every Day’. Our team first offered a loose parts pop-up event in the BMO Room on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, which was targeted to families and the general public. Below is an infographic of the event:

**AUGUST 10,  
2019**

**12PM - 1:30PM**

**HALIFAX  
CENTRAL  
LIBRARY**

**BMO COMMUNITY ROOM**



**THE POWER OF PLEY:**

---

**WHY KIDS NEED TO PLAY EVERY DAY**

**PART 1: LOOSE PARTS PLAY SESSION**

**SUMMER OF  
PLEY!**

RSVP @ <https://blt.ly/2KXkbP1>



Dalhousie University's Physical Literacy in the Early Years (PLEY) project research team is hosting a free loose parts play event at the Halifax Central Library. Families may "drop in" to the BMO community room to play with loose parts between noon and 1:30 pm. This will be followed by presentations from the PLEY research team, Dr. Mariana Brussoni (outdoor play researcher), and educators who participated in the PLEY project, on how to support outdoor play and physical literacy. There will also be a presentation featuring the "voices" and images of children as they engage in loose parts and nature play.

\*Please note we will be photographing & videotaping this event for use in future presentations, knowledge translation and research\*

This event is supported by the following agencies:



Even though we were inside, we did not only bring “inside” loose parts. We brought planks of wood, boxes, milk crates, balls, tubes, buckets, yarn, and many, many other loose parts. This allowed children to explore what used to be a normal room in the library, filled with tables and chairs, in a way they never had before.



The event was the perfect way to see it is not just the outdoor environment that is critical for optimal development, but it is also the variety of materials that children are provided with. Even though we were inside a *library*, a space typically thought of for sitting quietly and reading, we saw children become engineers, artists, and musicians.





Children seemed to be drawn to the planks of wood, balancing them on tires and crates creating balance beams and bridges. Another favourite item, old moving boxes, with the addition of large pieces of fabric, allowed the children to build houses, tunnels, and ice cream parlours.



Differing from our first Summer of PLEY pop-up playground event, held on Monday, July 22<sup>nd</sup>, which drew in several early childhood education centres and camps, this event, held on a Saturday, drew in mostly parents/guardians with their children. This gave us the opportunity to not only share the importance of loose parts play, but also *show* them. Although we had a number of seats along the wall for parents to sit and watch their children play, the majority of them played with their children. When playing with their children they were not telling them what to do, possibly because they didn't know how to best play with the loose parts, but instead, they played along with what the child had created. Whether they were another member of the band, a sous chef, or just playing house with their child, we didn't see any of the parents giving their child directions, instead listening to what their child wanted.



This event ended up including roughly 50 children and parents and provided them with the opportunity to play with a variety of loose parts, objects one would typically find both outside and inside, but ones that have no set purpose. Parents saw children break out of their shell; building, drawing, running, balancing, problem solving, and creating, all because we gave their children the opportunity to play with objects that don't have one set purpose. Parents were given the opportunity to learn about the benefits of loose parts play and how, just because you think an object is meant for one thing, does not mean it does not have many other possible purposes.

The indoor pop-up event reached over 2,400 people on Facebook. Through Eventbrite, more than 69 tickets were reserved, 53 of which were from channels related to Eventbrite, such as the Facebook app. The remaining tickets were sold directly from links on websites and through email. Like in the case of the other loose parts pop-up event, tickets were sold in multiple blocks, which is consistent with tickets being reserved for either multiple children or sign-ups, which include the guardian of the child in the total number.





## Loose parts Play Session Evaluation Survey Results

Parents, caregivers and other attendees were asked to complete an evaluation survey of our indoor loose parts pop-up event. This included questions regarding awareness of outdoor loose parts play; comfort in supporting risk; perspectives on outdoor play and physical activity; and desire to see loose parts at local playgrounds/parks. This was a likert scale, with responses ranging from “1” (Not Aware) to “5” (Extremely Aware) for the first two questions; from “1” (Not comfortable) to “5” (Comfortable) for the third and fourth questions; and “1” (Strongly Disagree) to “5” (Strongly Agree) for the last two questions. The results from the evaluation survey are in the table below:

<b>Evaluation Questions for Loose parts play session</b>	<b>Mean Response (n=14)</b>
<b>On a scale from 1-5, how aware of outdoor loose parts play were you, prior to our event?</b>	<b>3.00</b>
<b>On a scale from 1-5, how aware of outdoor loose parts play are you now?</b>	<b>3.79</b>
<b>On a scale from 1-5, how comfortable were you at supporting risky play, prior to our event?</b>	<b>3.79</b>
<b>On a scale from 1-5, how comfortable are you at supporting risky play now?</b>	<b>4.00</b>
<b>Your perspective on outdoor play and physical activity has changed following this event.</b>	<b>3.14</b>
<b>You would like to see loose parts materials at your local playground or park</b>	<b>4.5</b>

The evaluation survey results indicate that there was a general level of awareness of outdoor loose parts play prior to the event, which seemed to increase pre- to post-event. Similarly, there was a general sense of comfort with supporting risky play prior to the event, which also seemed to increase slightly pre- to post-event. From mean responses, it seems that attendees agreed that their perspective on outdoor play and physical activity changed following the event. Notably, attendees seemed to agree/strongly agree that they'd like to see loose parts at their local playground or park.

On the evaluation survey, attendees of the indoor loose parts pop-up session in the Halifax Central Public Library were asked to describe in one word their experience of the event. Below is a word cloud of their responses:

Exploratory  
Imaginative  
Fun Inventive  
Creative  
Pushing-past-limits  
Interesting  
Informative

## The Power of PLEY Library Event: Panel Discussion

The indoor loose parts session at the Halifax Central Library was followed by a lecture titled “The Power of PLEY”, a collaborative presentation given by Dr. Brussoni, our PLEY team, and two early childhood educators who participated in our PLEY project. Our colleague from the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage, Ms. Laura Beth MacPherson, moderated the presentation. The presentation took place in the Paul O'Regan Auditorium.

**AUGUST 10,  
2019**

**2PM - 4PM**

**HALIFAX  
CENTRAL  
LIBRARY**

**PAUL O'REGAN HALL**



## THE POWER OF PLEY:

### WHY KIDS NEED TO PLAY EVERY DAY PART 2

RSVP @ <https://bit.ly/2YFKRqA>

**SUMMER OF  
PLEY!**



Dalhousie University's Physical Literacy in the Early Years (PLEY) project research team is hosting a free panel at the Halifax Central Library. There will be presentations by our PLEY project research team and Dr. Mariana Brussoni on how to support outdoor play and physical literacy development in early years environments.

### Agenda

- 2:00-2:15 Meet and Greet
- 2:15-2:30 Dr. Michelle Stone (Dalhousie University, PLEY Project)
- 2:30-2:45 Dr. Marianna Brussoni (BC Children's Hospital)
- 2:45-3:00 Laura Beth MachPherson (Nova Scotia Government)
- 3:00-4:00 Parents, Educators, and Children's Testimonials

\*Please note we will be photographing & video graphing this event for use in future presentations, knowledge translation and research\*

This event is supported by the following agencies:



This event targeted the general public. The intent was to highlight evidence around the benefits of active outdoor play (with its risks) and showcase emerging results from of our Physical Literacy in the Early Years (PLEY) project. Educators from PLEY sites spoke about their experience with our PLEY project, and how they are continuing to foster outdoor play, particularly in nature, in their centres. The event also served to disseminate work happening around the Province, and in Canada, to support children's unstructured, outdoor play.





Dr. Mariana Brussoni was the first panelist. Dr. Brussoni began by asking the audience to reflect on their childhood, which the audience members responded to by indicating that they generally engaged in risky, active, unstructured play outdoors, because of the fun and independence this type of play provides. However, she followed that question by indicating the ways children play presently, which is often indoors, and supervised, and using screens. This change means that children today are not experiencing the same unstructured, outdoor play benefits as generations prior.

Dr. Brussoni discussed the strengths of outdoor, risky play, which include benefits for development, for physical activity, and for mental health. She shared knowledge indicating that access to outdoor risky play is essential for healthy child development. However, some caregivers may be reluctant to allow their children to engage in risky outdoor play because of the perceived risks. Dr. Brussoni—who is an injury epidemiologist—stated that there are far more injuries from children being involved in car accidents, than from any sort of play, showing that the benefits of risky play far outweigh any challenges.

Dr. Brussoni also shared evidence of local, national and international initiatives focused on supporting children's opportunities for outdoor play with its risks, highlighting the work of our own team here in Nova Scotia. This provided a good segway to our team's discussion of our PLEY research and emerging findings.





The next part of the presentation focused on discussing the purpose of our PLEY project and sharing emerging findings. Our team presented educators' perceptions of the benefits of outdoor loose parts play, which included the following: loose parts help develop healthy risk; loose parts spark creativity and imagination; loose parts contribute to problem solving abilities; loose parts build relationships and leadership; loose parts cultivate independence and confidence. These findings have since been published and are available at: <https://www.aimspress.com/article/10.3934/publichealth.2019.4.461>





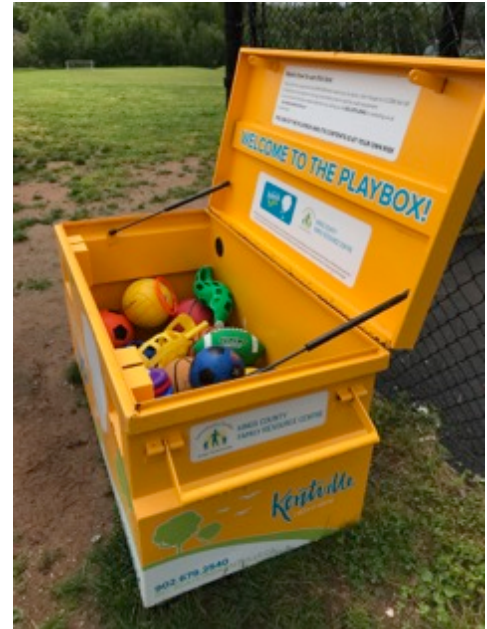
Early childhood educators, Nicole Ongo and Brittany Zwicker, then spoke about their involvement in the PLEY project and how it has contributed to a shift in practice and mindset around supporting outdoor loose parts play and nature play in their own centre. They showed beautiful photos of their children engaging in outdoor play, in natural, wild, left-over spaces, and shared stories of the children's experiences with loose parts play. Importantly, they made strong connections between these experiences and children's learning and overall development. Their talk was engaging, insightful, and incredibly meaningful, and demonstrated the importance of providing children with regular access to child-led outdoor play opportunities, especially in natural spaces.



Throughout the entire lecture, Laura Beth connected the work of Dr. Brussoni and the PLEY project to different initiatives that are currently taking place in Nova Scotia.



For example, Laura Beth spoke about the “Kentville Plays” initiative (<https://kentville.ca/parks-and-recreation/programs/kentville-plays>), where the town of Kentville has invested in Playboxes (boxes filled with toys/equipment). These boxes are placed in playgrounds, courts, and open terrain, providing children and youth the opportunity to participate in unstructured play and outdoor loose parts play. These boxes have been well received by those who live in Kentville, and are sustained through community support and the municipality.



Another initiative Laura Beth spoke to is the “Let’s Get Moving” action plan. This new framework was introduced by the Government of Nova Scotia to help increase physical activity and make it more accessible for Nova Scotians. Laura Beth spoke to how outdoor loose parts play is in fact a recommendation made by the Government as a strategy to increase unstructured play and physical activity in children.





‘The Power of PLEY: Why Kids Need to Play Every Day’ event was a well-attended event, and an effective way to showcase research and practice as it relates to outdoor risky play. By communicating the evidence-based benefits of outdoor, risky play to community members, we hope to see greater uptake of the practice for healthier children and communities.



## Summary and Next Steps

We are inspired by the enthusiasm and momentum that has been generated from our Summer of PLEY series. We are eager to sustain this work and move it into new early years settings across Nova Scotia and continue the work on educating early years stakeholders on the value of active outdoor play, with its risks, to children's health and development, and overall community health and wellbeing. Our team recently received a Research Nova Scotia Establishment Grant (2019-2022); \$149,760.16. This grant will allow our team to scale up outdoor loose parts play in school communities, taking an even larger systems-level approach to advancing children's outdoor play and physical literacy development in Nova Scotia communities. Our team has submitted an application to the Lawson Foundation as part of a call for projects that aim to advance the ecosystem of outdoor play and early learning through partnerships and innovations to influence research, policy, and practice. We are also pursuing collaborative work with Dr. Brussoni and other early years stakeholders in British Columbia, Ontario, and Norway. The goal of this interdisciplinary work is to advance outdoor play programming in regulated childcare centres by providing support for educators, and shift post-secondary training of early childhood educators so that there is more focus on how to support children's outdoor play. By allowing our team to bring Dr. Brussoni to Nova Scotia this summer, the Picchione Visiting Scholars Series funding enabled us to build strong connections with Dr. Brussoni, and really has led to this upcoming partnership. For that, our team is more than grateful.

Our team will continue to seek funding from alternative sources to scale up and sustain our work. We have partnered with MSVU on an evaluation of the Before-After Pre-Primary Program (BAPPP), which is expanding to more Pre-Primary sites in the Province; and our work is influencing the training of BAPPP providers. We will be providing expertise into the NS Early Years Curriculum as it gets revised to focus more on the benefits of outdoor play and importance of physical literacy development in the early years. As mentioned earlier in the report, our Summer of PLEY has sparked great interest from stakeholders in receiving training and support to integrate outdoor loose parts play into childcare, school, and community spaces; and the challenge is how to extend our capacity to support this. Collaborations with outdoor play community champions like Alex Smith and Luke MacDonald has lead to requests from the city of Dartmouth to support outdoor loose parts play events (Dartmouth Switch, Dartmouth Winter Carnival); and outdoor loose parts play has been integrated into community-run youth events (e.g. Youth Running Series). Our involvement with Outdoor Play Canada and Plato-NET, a national initiative focused on bringing together stakeholders from Canada and around the world into dialogue around how to support children's outdoor play, will be a large part of moving our work forward (see: <https://www.outdoorplaycanada.ca/>). Over time, it is our hope that our work leads to advanced efforts in supporting Nova Scotia children's opportunities for quality outdoor play in all of the spaces in which they live, learn and play, so that we can improve the health and wellness of communities across Nova Scotia.