



University of Dundee

Playful Gardens, Mission, Aims and Values

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Publication date:
2024

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in Discovery Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Armstrong, V., Frediani, K., Hadden, K., Derrick, S., Herd, L., & Greene, S. (2024). *Playful Gardens, Mission, Aims and Values*. University of Dundee.

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PLAYFUL Gardens



The Playful Gardens Mission:

At Playful Gardens our mission is to mobilise nature and play to support all children, enhancing family well-being and relationships through the creation of engaging, free, joyful, and inclusive outdoor opportunities.

Our Aims:

- To ensure there are play opportunities for families who face barriers accessing other spaces and activities.
- To give thoughtful consideration to the diverse needs of all children.
- To utilise nature and the outdoor environment to support children's development and wellbeing.
- To encourage positive and playful family relationships.
- To link families with formal and informal support, providing access to information and connections to CAMHS, community organisations and peers.
- To curate a welcoming and non-judgemental space, reducing the isolation felt by many parents of children with additional support needs.

Our Values:

- **Equity:** We are committed to designing activities and spaces that work for all children and families, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or circumstances.
- **Creativity:** We celebrate imagination and creativity as essential to joy and growth, creating spaces that inspire these qualities in both children and adults.
- **Wellbeing:** We prioritise the holistic physical, emotional, and social wellbeing of children and families.
- **Agency:** We promote children's agency and encourage the adults around them to listen to their unique voice and follow their lead.
- **Accessibility:** We are committed to removing financial, physical, and social barriers to participation, ensuring our events are free and fully accessible.
- **Community:** We recognise that a sense of belonging is important to the families that make up our audiences. We believe in the strength of community, involving local families, organizations, and specialists in our development process.
- **Sustainability:** We are dedicated to sustainable practices that respect and preserve the environment.
- **Education:** We believe in the potential of outdoor spaces as living classrooms where children can learn about nature, sustainability, and their own capacities for growth and creativity.
- **Innovation:** We embrace innovative approaches and research-driven methods to continuously improve the design and impact of our work.

About Playful Gardens:

Playful Gardens was created by friends Vicky Armstrong (Art at the Start, UoD) and Keren Hadden (NHS Tayside CAMHS) in 2022. After a conversation about the difficulties families could face in accessing activities, the two were motivated to create an alternative to other play settings that would better meet the diverse needs of families and children, many of whom might be on waiting lists for support. Kevin Frediani in the University Botanical Garden offered to support their idea, and further partners were brought on board from Scrap Antics, Dundee Contemporary Arts and Barnardo's. Playful Gardens has developed into a collaboration between local organisations, community support groups, health services, socially conscious activity providers and families.

Core elements that make Playful Gardens possible:

From our experiences and our consultation with families ([read our research here](#)) we have identified the core elements which help Playful Gardens meet the diverse needs of families. We think these are essential to the success of the offer:

- A sensory friendly outdoor environment which allows for soft boundaries, gentle light and the dissipation of noise.
- Versatile play spaces with areas for different play experiences, from high-energy activities to calm, reflective spaces, so children have choices.
- Involving a range of organisations which complement each other, including partnerships with local cultural organisations, links with 3rd sector support organisations in the local community, and input from specialist staff such as CAMHS mental health officers and art therapists.
- Staff who set the tone of inclusion; accepting families as they come, displaying genuine respect and care for their wellbeing.
- Staff who model responsiveness, playfulness, and child led principles.
- Sufficient staffing/volunteers to safely facilitate a range of activities.
- Funding so the activity can be free and include an offer of food.
- Accessible toilet facilities and accessible paving round the space.
- A safety-focused venue which is a secure, well-maintained, enclosed environment free from roads and traffic, litter, dogs and their mess, and other hazards, ensuring a safe space for children and families.

