

Growing Up Boulder 15-Minute Neighborhood Project with YSI Manhattan

For three weeks in October 2015, Growing Up Boulder (GUB) volunteers worked with children involved in the Youth Services Initiative (YSI) Manhattan site after-school program to explore design options for a more walkable, friendly, fun, and inviting neighborhood.

The GUB volunteers engaged four 9- to 11-year-old YSI participants in a three-session exercise called the “15-Minute Neighborhood.” We asked the children to draw, explore and reflect on the neighborhood environment within a 15-minute walk from their homes and asked them to identify features they like and do not like.

Process:

Session #1

GUB volunteers and the YSI Manhattan group first met at the East Boulder Recreation Center, where we played some ice-breaker games to get to know each other. To introduce the “15-Minute Neighborhood” project, GUB volunteers asked each child to draw a picture of his or her neighborhood, however the child perceives it. GUB volunteers were there to both ask and answer questions: Where do you go when you leave home? What do you do? The children’s answers provided the starting point for session two.



Session #2

We met for the second time at the YSI Manhattan participants' apartment complex. The two girls who had participated in session one did not participate in session two.

Prepared with a camera, pencils and paper, and green and red painted cardboard frames, we left the apartment complex as a group (five adults and three boys) and walked south on the sidewalk for 15 minutes. Along the way, the children used the painted cardboard frames to show the GUB volunteers what they like (green) and do not like (red) about the area. The children enjoyed the opportunity to “red frame” things they don't like, such as stinky garbage, beehives, and spider webs. The children used the green frames to show the basketball court, the nearby school's athletic fields, and trees. We stopped at Keewaydin Meadows Park, just south of Manhattan Middle School, to play before turning around and walking back.

After the walk, GUB volunteer Lori Carlucci gave the boys maps of their neighborhood and recapped what we had observed. She introduced the idea of creating a collaborative map highlighting the children's suggested changes at session three, and encouraged them to share their ideas the following week.



Session #3

Using information from notes gathered during the previous session's 15-minute neighborhood walk and the photos made along the way, we met at the East Boulder Recreation Center to create a "better neighborhood" map. GUB volunteers asked the children (the three boys who had led the walk and one of the girls who attended session one) to mark a large map of the area explored with their likes and dislikes. They glued generic icons of different kinds of natural elements, water features, built elements, and surfacing types on the map; drew pictures and wrote their own suggestions; and cut up the photographs and pasted them on the map to illustrate what currently exists.



Results:

The children's suggestions for improvements to their neighborhood are concentrated primarily around their apartment complex – the area most familiar and accessible to them. As a group in session two, we actually ventured farther than the children are allowed to go on their own, as dictated by their families. Their observations were most salient and suggestions most constructive within about one block of their residences. As a result, most of the recommended improvements are focused on the housing development.

Recommendations:

The children want improvements on site or close by. The current renovation process of the Manhattan site provides the perfect opportunity to implement these minor exterior improvements.

On Site

1. Replace stone/pebble ground cover with crushed rubber, similar to the ground cover in Keewaydin Meadows Park.
2. Install one or two of the swiveling “spinner” playground elements, as found in the playground at Keewaydin Meadows Park.
3. Increase the height of the fence to allow for the play of wall ball. *Note:* increased wall height must be sufficient for wall ball and adjacent to a hard surface to allow proper play.
4. Relocate trash bins away from the front doors of the apartments, or distribute them differently to contain the smell of garbage.
5. Replace or relocate the trees in the playground area that drop pea pods. Although the children appreciate the shade the trees provide, they do not like the fact that the pods get in the way of wheels and other play.

RTD Bus Stop Area

1. Currently, a field and abandoned tennis court exist behind the RTD bus stop. Reuse and repurpose that site to provide both hard and soft play areas. Ideas generated include a skate park, a parkour course, and a batting cage.
2. Increase maintenance to ensure beehives and wasp’s nests inside of the RTD bus stop shelter are properly disposed of.

Public Playground: Keewaydin Meadows Park

1. Maintain soccer goals; the netting currently has holes in it that let the ball through.

The three boys who walked with us to Keewaydin Meadows Park love to play there, however, they are not generally allowed to go there because it is too far for them to walk on their own. The children have, however, identified elements of the park that could easily be incorporated closer to home, as noted above.

~ Respectfully submitted by Lori Carlucci and Darcy Kitching, 10/30/15