

Growing Up Boulder's Roots: Professor Louise Chawla's Reflections on Growing Up in Cities and GUB Fall 2023

The roots of Growing Up Boulder and the Child Friendly Cities Initiative are historically fused. Growing Up Boulder's current leadership towards Boulder's recognition as a UNICEF Child Friendly City is an outcome of relationships that began more than twenty years ago, during preparations for Habitat II, the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, held in Istanbul, Turkey in 1996. The Convention on the Rights of the Child had been ratified by the United Nations in 1989, and both UNICEF and UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) wanted to embed respect for children's rights into the Habitat Agenda, the document emerging from Habitat II discussions, and to integrate it into urban programs internationally.

Recognizing that the majority of the world's children would soon live in cities, UNICEF commissioned the book *Cities for Children: Children's Rights, Poverty and Urban Management* (1999) by Sheridan Bartlett, Roger Hart, David Satterthwaite, Ximena de la Barra and Alfredo Missair on strategies for local authorities and urban policies to create supportive conditions for children, including the most disadvantaged. As representatives of UNICEF, the authors advocated for the recognition of all children's rights during the drafting of the Habitat Agenda, including rights to positive involvement in their communities. At the conclusion of Habitat II, UNICEF continued its research and advocacy on behalf of urban children, resulting in the establishment of the Child Friendly Cities Initiative in 2000, headquartered at that time in UNICEF's Innocenti Research Center in Florence, Italy.

On its side, UNESCO supported the revival of Growing Up in Cities as its contribution to Habitat II. Growing Up in Cities was originally conceived by Kevin Lynch, a professor of urban planning and design at MIT. He proposed it to UNESCO in 1970 on the reasoning that children and youth need to be involved in creating sustainable cities. Beginning in four countries, the program pioneered participatory methods to engage young people in evaluating their local urban areas and creating good communities in which to grow up.

From the beginning, the emergence of the Child Friendly Cities Initiative and revival of Growing Up in Cities were allied. Four of the authors of *Cities for Children* (Bartlett, Hart, Satterthwaite and de la Barra) served as advisors for Growing Up in Cities as it gained new life, and this author, who coordinated new Growing Up in Cities sites, joined UNICEF meetings during the drafting of the Habitat Agenda. The Preamble to the Habitat Agenda prominently includes children's rights to participation:

The needs of children and youth, particularly with regards to their living environment, have to be taken fully into account. Special attention needs to be paid to the participatory processes dealing with the shaping of cities, towns and neighbourhoods: this is in order to secure the living conditions of children and youth and to make use of their insight, creativity and thoughts on the environment.

From the beginning, Growing Up Boulder was designed as a fusion of the Child Friendly Cities Initiative and Growing Up in Cities. In 2006, Professor Willem van Vliet created a Children, Youth and Environments Center in the Program in Environmental Design at the University of Colorado. This author joined the design program to help develop the new center. In 2009, David Driskell, who co-coordinated the Growing Up in Cities' revival, became the City of Boulder's new Executive Director of Community Planning and Sustainability. Over beers at The Hungry Toad, a Boulder bistro, Driskell and van Vliet planned a partnership between the city, the Children, Youth and Environments Center, Boulder Valley School District, and other community organizations to engage young people in participatory planning to make Boulder a child friendly city. Whereas the

**Growing Up Boulder's Roots: Professor Louise Chawla's Reflections on Growing Up in Cities and GUB
Fall 2023**

participatory practices of Growing Up in Cities were at its core, it included a broad vision of what child friendliness means.

This author joined the plan, bringing her experience leading UNESCO's revival of Growing Up in Cities, and Mara Mintzer brought her background in organizing school-based community development for families. As young people became engaged, they held a naming contest for the new initiative, and Growing Up Boulder was born. With Growing Up Boulder now spearheading Boulder's formal recognition with the City of Boulder and UNICEF USA as a UNICEF Child Friendly City, the spirit of collaboration between UNESCO's Growing Up in Cities program and UNICEF's Child Friendly Cities Initiative, formed more than twenty years ago, comes together again full circle.

Louise Chawla
Professor Emerita
Program in Environmental Design
University of Colorado Boulder