

Playground created for kids, by kids

Ideas for pre-school's play area came from over 400 people, including children

Priscilla Goy

Some children went down the playground slide, while others climbed up structures made of large tyres and barrels, making sounds as they hit pots and pans.

They were clearly enjoying themselves, and likely more so, as the playground was designed with the help of some of their peers.

This revamped play space – located at the Gilstead Road campus of St James' Church Kindergarten (SJCK) – is the result of an eight-month collaborative design process involving more than 400 people, including children, parents, educators and designers.

The play area, which is part of the Hack Our Play initiative by philanthropic organisation Lien Foundation, the kindergarten and non-profit design group Participate in Design, was launched yesterday.

Hack Our Play seeks to get children, educators, parents and members of the community to co-create playgrounds amid growing research on the benefits of child-directed play.

Organisers say it is the first community-built playground, unlike regular playgrounds that are "mostly bought off a catalogue, resulting in cookie-cutter and standardised play experiences".

The play area can be modified easily as people can take apart and re-configure some structures, such as those made of tyres and drink crates. The heavy barrels can be moved by a large group of adults.

And all the materials used to develop it cost just \$18,000, while playgrounds typically cost more than \$100,000.

SJCK senior principal Jacqueline



Alistair Teo, five, and his mother Iori Chua, 39, at the playground, which comprises structures made of tyres, drink crates and barrels. ST PHOTO: ONG WEE JIN

Chung told The Straits Times: "Children today are very accustomed to having finished products presented to them. They have little idea of how these things come about, so their appreciation of these things will not be as rich."

"But when you have a part to play in the design process, you'll look at the finished product through a different lens. Being involved in developing the play space also grooms children to be active citizens."

Participate in Design director Mizah Rahman said: "I realised children may also play with the structures differently. For instance, some kids climbed up the barrels, while others liked the sounds created from hitting the barrels."

Play advocate groups such as Chapter Zero Singapore and Playvocates In Action extol the benefits of child-directed play.

Chapter Zero co-founder Shumei Winstanley said: "It raises kids to be

more creative and imaginative."

Playvocates In Action co-founder Eugenia Koh said: "It helps to build up their confidence and problem-solving skills."

She said public playgrounds have more safety restrictions, but added: "I don't blame the playground suppliers for that, but I think if more people in the community can understand the benefits of healthy risk-taking, playgrounds would be able to have fewer safety restrictions."

Ms Sharlene Poh, sales and marketing manager of playground equipment supplier Hoopla Parks and Recreation, which was involved in the Hack Our Play discussions, said its playgrounds have modular parts that allow for more customisation to cater to children of different age groups.

She added: "Playground safety is our utmost priority. With the use of recyclables, we have to ensure that the play space is safe to use, and the

parts are durable and not easily removed."

Hack Our Play organisers hope other pre-schools will develop their own community-built play spaces too. An online guide will be launched in January. SJCK has also hosted a visit by other pre-school educators and children to use and learn about the development of the playground.

goyshiyi@sph.com.sg