



### **Flour Mill Engagement – Children and Families Submitted by Early Childhood Creative Collaborations (ECCCo)**

**Goal:** To contribute children’s thinking to the JCSC process to learn about community member’s wishes for arboretum enhancement.

**Process:** To garner a sense of how children perceive and connect to the Flour Mill arboretum, we designed a land art engagement for children and their families. We presented them with two questions: 1) How can (and do) you connect to the creek and the arboretum? 2) What does the land want?

#### **Our instructions/invitations:**

- Create 3D works that communicate what they notice, what they feel, what they want, and what the lands wants
- Harvest materials from the area – we asked them how we can do that, what tells us if something is living. We provided tips on safe and gentle harvesting.
- Notice what the materials want (how they bend or don’t bend, how they move, if they want to be harvested/cut or not)
- Work solo or collaboratively

**Results:** There was an enthusiastic response to the invitation (25 children, 17 adults and 17 families). Children used snow, dried grasses, sticks and dead branches found along the creek to create land art in response to the green space along Junction Creek.

## Themes that emerged:

### **A. Connections**

- Two or three groups of children were exploring connections. Two boys in particular were creating a structure with snow.

### Conversation

- Adult: "Tell me about what you're making."
- Boy: "We're wondering how this spot is connected to the creek over there."
- Adult points to the wetland: "Interesting, yes. You can also think about how the wetland over there is connected to this area, and to the creek."



### Conversation

Child: "It's when the spring starts and the trees turn into flowers."

Adult: "And they are purple and pink?"

Child: "Yes. There's one type of tree that 's full of flowers at the start of spring!"

Adult: "Here in Canada?"

Child: "Yeah!"

Adult: "Is it a Lilac tree?"

Child: "Yes, That's it!"

Adult: "How did you know about them (the lilac trees)?"

Child: "I learned about them in Toronto at a summer camp."

## Conversation

- Child: I made the forest, and I put myself in it with my friends



### *Possible enhancements:*

- Guided walks designed for children that share these connections and changes over time
- Information panels that are designed for children – maps, drawings that demonstrate these connections between canopy and creek, wetland, field and creek. These can be drawings or maps that show water moves over time and seasonally, or how the creek area has changed over time;
- Walking pathways that demonstrate these ecological connections between wetlands, open areas (prior wetlands), and the creek itself: meandering pathway from one area to another that invite thinking about connections – perhaps panels that pose questions for visitors to consider
- Summer and march break programming – eco learning, art experiences
- Creating an area to view different types of flora and fauna and their relationship to the land. Adding information to the panels that highlight these.

## B. Creek habitat and characteristics



- Several teams were thinking about fish, and other creatures. One child dug a hole in the snow, and carved a fish shape out of a chunk of ice snow; he then lay in the hole with the fish on his belly:
- Boy: 'I am in the creek with the fish'
- Girl: "The big hole is the river and the sprinkles are the seaweed and that one is the fish"
- It was clear from many of the children's work that they did not see themselves separate – they were in their sculptures physically.
- Another team designed a full creek system noting how the water bubbles and froths in the pools (see photo 2).

### **Water movement**

- A father and daughter were interested in water movement and created a waterfall using grasses cascading down the snow.



Child: "This is the water [it] flows into a pool at the bottom and the river that it came from."

### Flowers and trees and wildlife



Several children created flowers and trees using sticks and grasses. One made a flower pot with the snow with flowers (grasses) arranged in it. They were thinking about beautiful pinks and purples, and the plant matter that might be food for the creatures that pass through this area. The sunflower and lilacs were specifically mentioned as possibilities.

### Conversation

Girl: So I made a flowerpot. I used the snow-ice that he talked about over there, to make the pot. I like how when you crack the vine it makes it hairy so I used that for the base. I also like how the twirly on the vine look like barb-wire.

Adult: “So I am wondering about flowers, is that something that they should be considering planting?”

Girl: “The first flower that comes to mind is the sunflower. Not here because this is a path but more like in the middle or outwards you could grow plants that the animals will eat. Plants that will regrow back every season so you don’t have to plant them again.”

#### *Possible enhancements*

- A bridge over the creek with a viewing floor or platform where children can observe creek habitat, fish spawning and other seasonal activities.
- Finding ways to invite children to be ‘in’ the ecosystem, beyond walking the pathway would enhance their connection, and as a result their sense of stewardship – could play areas be created with natural materials? Stumps, wood, an open ‘tree house’
- Information panel with drawings and invitations to think about how water moves and why these movements are important to water quality and habitat (ie: the bubbling and aeration for instance)
- Planting Indigenous perennials that flower, that provide food for creatures that live near the creek or pass through

#### **C. Family and friends – in community**

Two groups of children created ‘fires’ with sticks and vines. While they didn’t explicitly say this, these kinds of creations point to gatherings, being with family and community around a fire, sharing stories, and being outside.



### Conversation

Child: "This is my firepit, and so these are supposed to be like flames flying up and I used some sticks and tried to bend them in a kind of a circle to be around these."

Adult: Why did you make the firepit?

Child: "When I come into the woods, it reminds me of my camp and we always have family fires at my camp."

### *Possible enhancements*

- Ways for families to eat, gather and share time outdoors: benches in circular formation? Cob pizza ovens? Fire pits?

### **D. Imaginary worlds - Creating new worlds - What would happen if?**

Many of the children created imaginary worlds, inspired by the snow, the blocks of ice they dug out from under the snow and the found natural materials. Two separate groups working close together created two worlds which they eventually joined together with a bridge that linked the two worlds.



### Conversation

Child - "Snow is very delicate but we can cut shapes out of it. We found moon-shaped snow so we made a moon out of it. If we find a round piece we can turn it into the sun. The sticks bend so we made a rainbow out of one and stuck it in the middle. Now we have a sun, a moon and a rainbow."

Conversation

Child: I want to see horses come down the paths.

*Possible enhancements*

- Open trail/invite different kinds of trail users (dog walkers, horse riders)

**E. Habitats and Shelter - as part of the ecosystem, shelters for animals**

Two children created shelters in their art.

One was a shelter for a horse that she wished would walk through the forest

The second was a face within a heart with a shelter around it. Many of the children expressed an interest in sticks that bend to form new shapes.



Girl: "It's a house for horses. This is the horse that lives in the house"





*Possible enhancements*

- A lean-to with a bench that people could use as shelter in inclement weather
  - Shelters for wildlife in the area - nests for ducks, birdhouses, bug hotel
  - Shelters made of bent sticks
- Viewing platforms to watch birds in the wetland, to peer over the creek, to look into the trees
- Play equipment, viewing platforms that are made of sticks and natural materials (ecologically relevant)

Possible resources for play structures:

Sean Procyk: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CTiEr48Jrgn/>  
<https://www.instagram.com/p/CZPu2ZUPVAX/>  
<https://www.instagram.com/p/CGGrrUIgy6u/>

Sophie Edwards has worked with this artist who created these structures – he uses a community engaged process with children and families to create the design, then builds, based on those designs.