

common digs

To: Doug Marter, Manager Capital Development, Calgary Parks

Re: Letter of support for Clearwater Park Development Plan

*"Every child and young person has the right to grow up and live in a high-quality, wildlife-rich environment with ready access to the physical and mental health benefits, developmental advantages and play opportunities it affords."<sup>1</sup>*

This letter is to urge City of Calgary Council Committee for Community Services to support the proposed Clearwater Park Development Plan. This parkland is a unique environment to Calgary offering diverse and rich opportunity for children based on its historical and proposed intended use. **Support of the Development Plan is critical to the health and well-being of children in Calgary and to the future of conservation in Calgary.**

As in the quote above, it is every child's right to have access to and be able to play in the natural world - to pretend to be a coyote in long grasses, to hunt for bugs, to create forts. **Children in Calgary are increasingly deprived of this experience due to development and families are forced to break by-laws to take their children off the path of parks to give them play experiences in less-groomed nature spaces.**

Research shows a multitude of reasons - intellectual, social, emotional and physical to get kids playing in nature. Additionally, research by Louise Chawla<sup>2</sup> with environmentalists demonstrates that the 2 fundamental factors to environmental sensitivity are great lengths of uninterrupted play in wild spaces and the support of an adult.

Common Digs created its Forest School programs to respond to these needs. The programs model the Forest School approach that has been well established in Europe since the 1950's following a child-inspired emergent curriculum rooted in play in the natural world.

What began as a program with 4 children in 2014 now provides programming for over 100 children at two locations and has helped to start the society that operates Calgary Nature Kindergarten, which opened its doors in September 2015. **Even with the expansion, both of these programs now have waitlists for children to attend - a testament to the demand for children's play in nature from parents.**

**Finding suitable locations in Calgary with a diversity of natural wild spaces has been the single greatest inhibiting factor to developing and growing these programs.** The completion of the Ring Road will make this parkland increasingly accessible. It is our hope to be able offer Forest School programs through a future partnership with the City of Calgary at Clearwater Park, but regardless of whether this comes to fruition, it is critical that the City of Calgary continue hold this parkland as a essential component to the parks available to the children of Calgary.

We look forward to hearing of your positive support and continued care of this important parkland.

Sincerely,  
Lisa Menzies and Wendy Yuen  
Founders, Common Digs

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- 1 Tony King, 2010, Head of Scottish Wildlife Trust as sourced - <http://richardlouv.com/blog/the-forgotten-human-right1/>
2. Louise Chawla, Research on Sources of Environmental Sensitivity, 2006 downloaded March 23, 2016 from <http://www.colorado.edu/cye/sites/default/files/attached-files/Chawla%2C%20L.%20%281998%29.%20Significant%20life%20experiences%20revisited.%20Journal%20of%20Environmental%20Education%2C%2029%283%29%2C%2011-21..pdf>