

FIELD OF DREAMS:
A GRASS-ROOTS APPROACH TO STARTING
A CHILDREN'S GARDEN

A Project Paper

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate School of Cornell University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Professional Studies

(Agriculture)

By Anna Ford Halverson

June 2005

© 2005 Anna Ford Halverson

ABSTRACT

In the past 15 years children's gardens have been added to many major public gardens across the country. These spaces are not just pint-sized versions of a traditional display garden. They represent an entirely new category of outdoor environment for children. They are the product of the combined influences of emerging trends in playground design, children's museums and gardening programs for children. Understanding the historical and theoretical context in which children's gardens have emerged explains their relevance and popularity in today's world.

Currently many children's gardens are being developed within the context of an existing organizational structure, such as a public garden. There are a few examples of public children's gardens that are started entirely from the ground up through grassroots organizing. As the popularity of these environments for children continues to build, it is reasonably expected that more gardens will be started through this channel.

In order to help grass-roots organizers of new children's gardens navigate some of the organizational aspects of the start up process, case studies of three children's gardens and one botanical garden that were started through grass-roots organizing were conducted. An analysis of the case studies brings to light several common themes:

- *Generating Initial Support*
- *Establishing the Mission*
- *Incorporating and Gaining Tax-Exempt Status*
- *Fundraising*
- *Choosing and Designing the Site*

Recommendations based on these themes will help organizers create strategies that will help them build strong and lasting children's gardens in their communities.

BIGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Originally from New York City, Anna Halverson is well aware of the benefits of public outdoor spaces that engage a child's curiosity and sense of playful exploration and learning. For Anna such a space could be found in the naturalistic landscape of Manhattan's Central Park.

Anna majored in political science and English at Wellesley College before turning her sights to gardens. After college Anna studied Landscape Design at George Washington University, in Washington, D.C. She learned the practical skills of landscape design-drafting, site engineering and construction methods-as well as the creative aspects such as design principles, site design and planting design.

As a fellow in the Cornell Plantations Public Garden Management Program, Anna has focused on aspects of public horticulture related to children's gardens. Over the past three semesters she has studied organizational behavior, cognitive development, horticulture, and the impact of the environment of health. She interned at the Everett Children's Adventure Garden at the New York Botanical Garden in the summer between her first and second years.

Upon graduation she will put her experience researching new children's gardens to work as the Children's Garden Program Developer at the new children's garden opening in September 2005 at the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden in Richmond, Virginia.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply indebted to my committee, Dr. Donald Rakow, Dr. Nancy Wells and Dr. Sonja Skelly for their guidance through the process of writing this paper. I am especially grateful for their patience with my down-to-the-wire work on this paper.

I am grateful to the people at each of the case study institution who gave of their time to help me understand their start-up experiences.

I would also like to thank my mother Barbara Ford and sister Abigail Ford who each took the time to read chapters of this paper and offer their keen editorial services.

Most of all, I am grateful to my husband for his practical help with this paper. I would never have been able to complete this project without help.

I also want to thank Ryan for completely managing our move down to Richmond, Virginia while I typed away on this paper at the Lewis Building

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Biographical Sketch

Acknowledgements

Chapter 1. Introduction

Chapter 2. Historical & Theoretical Context

Chapter 3. Methods & Materials

Chapter 4: Case Studies

Chapter 5: Analysis & Discussion

Chapter 6: Recommendations

Appendix

References

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

A curious thing has happened since the 1993 opening of the Michigan 4-H Children's Garden. The garden, which was designed to:

promote an understanding of plants and the role they play in our everyday lives; to nurture the wonder in a child's imagination and curiosity; and to provide a place of enrichment and delight for children of all ages, (<http://4hgarden.msu.edu/tour/faq.html#mission>)

has created a groundswell. What began in a half-acre site on the campus of Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan has spread across the country. According to the American Horticultural Society (AHS), "[l]andscape architects and designers, teachers and botanic gardens consider the 'children's garden' as one of the strongest trends in gardening... it continues to generate interest and does not appear to be slowing down."(www.ahs.org)

New children's gardens have been added or are in the planning stages at many major public gardens including the Phipps Conservatory in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (1996), New York Botanical Garden (1997), Red Butte Gardens in Salt Lake City (1999), Atlanta Botanical Garden (1999), Cleveland Botanic Garden (1999), The Huntington in San Marino, California (2004), Morton Arboretum in Lisle, Illinois (2005), Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden in Richmond, Virginia (2005), and Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis (2005) to name just a few.

Maureen Heffernan (2004), former Director of Public Programs at the Cleveland Botanical Garden, likens the trend of children's gardens to a "horticultural revolution" that "has gently swept across the country since the early 1990s." In her book about the

creation of the Hershey Children's Garden at the Cleveland Botanical Garden, Heffernan (2004, p.2) explains the appeal of these new gardens:

Most children are not thrilled by regular public gardens. Although adults find them beautiful and interesting, most children become bored and restless just strolling past tastefully maintained beds and borders.

However, if a garden is created with child-sized structures, secret spaces, interactive features, fun theme plantings, big bright flowers, and water, it will attract and hold the interest of children for hours—even have them crying when it is time to go.

Designed to lure children off the beaten garden path, the new children's gardens usher them in to exuberant, playful spaces that capture their imaginations with natural discoveries and secret places...Children's gardens are gardens of joy—gardens that tickle our hearts and mind with childlike, effervescent energy, wonder and delight. They contain simple yet profound experiences and spaces that speak deeply to children and to the “inner child” of grown-ups.

The children's gardens that have been developed at public gardens in the last 15 years are markedly different from traditional school or community gardens which focus primarily on gardening as an activity. They depart from traditional display gardens in their emphasis on play and interactivity. And while they emphasize play, they cannot be understood simply as playgrounds, either. They present a truly new paradigm for children's environments.

Despite their novelty, there isn't a distinct term or label for these new outdoor spaces. Many institutions use the general term “children's garden” (e.g. The Hershey Children's Garden at the Cleveland Botanical Garden, The Helen and Peter Bing Children's Garden at the Huntington). Others use more the descriptive “children's discovery garden” (e.g. Children's Discovery Garden at the Brooklyn Botanical Garden, Discovery Garden at the Phipps) or “children's adventure garden” (e.g. Everett Children's Adventure Garden at

the New York Botanical Garden). Regardless of the term that is used, these places are distinct from other types of gardens and from other environments for children.

Lest this ambiguity of title threaten to cloud the momentum of this trend in public gardens, I propose a comprehensive definition based on an analysis of the missions, descriptions and stated goals of notable children's gardens (See Appendix X for list). A children's garden in this context is:

- ***An interactive outdoor environment, designed specifically for children, which provides opportunities for learning and playful exploration through hands-on experiences with plants and the natural world.***

These gardens resonate with both children and adults because they address a need for meaningful first-hand experiences with nature in a setting that promotes wonder and delight. By providing a setting where children can playfully explore, discover and interact with the natural world, children's gardens fill a niche that is frequently missing from children's environments today (Moore 1996).

The most powerful testimony of the impact these gardens make is that visitors often return home inspired with the vision of creating a children's garden in their communities. In an interview in early 2005, Maureen Heffernan remarked,

I can't tell you the number of people who have gone through the Hershey Children's Garden and gone 'Ah! Let's create this in our community!' There are people that absolutely fall in love with this idea. They said that they just could not believe that a place like this existed. It changes their life, literally! There are always some people who are not just talking the talk, they persevere and have that passion, that fire to do it.

This paper is intended for those very people who have been inspired by the vision of children's gardens and are embarking on the process of starting children's gardens in their own communities.

Project Orientation

The inspiration for this paper came from my volunteer work with the Ithaca Children's Garden in my first semester as a student at Cornell University. I saw how the organizers of this children's garden faced the start-up challenges of raising money, managing programs, and making decisions regarding site development. I realized that their hard-won experience—both their successes and their failures—had produced a wealth of information that could be useful to other groups that were interested in starting children's gardens.

The following chapters present the historical and theoretical context of children's gardens, and offer guidance for building a strong organization based on non-profit management expertise and an exploration of the strategies of several other start-up gardens.

Chapter Two reviews the historical roots of children's gardens. Although children's gardens have existed in different forms for more than 100 years (Greene 1910), the children's gardens that are being created today have a unique historical legacy. These highly interactive outdoor environments have been influenced by developments in three key areas: children's gardening programs, children's museums and playground design. Understanding how these factors have evolved and how they impact children's gardens provides a better understanding of the unique niche that children's gardens occupy.

Chapter Two also brings to light factors in the social and physical environment, such as suburban sprawl and the reduction of school recess, that have influenced the emergence of children's gardens. An awareness of the context in which children's gardens are created provides a key to understanding their resonance with both children and adults. This chapter also presents an overview of the research that establishes the rationale for children's gardens in terms of the benefits of children's contact with nature, the importance of play in the development of the whole child, and the distinctive nature of children's perceptions of the physical environment. Organizers of new children's gardens can draw upon this data to educate potential donors, partners and the community about the underlying principles and important benefits of children's gardens.

An examination of the individual cases of several gardens begun as grass-roots projects provides valuable insight into how such efforts take root and thrive. Chapter Three introduces the case studies of several public gardens that have been (or are being) started through grass-roots organizing, and explains how this research was conducted. The institutions that are highlighted are the Ithaca Children's Garden, Inc. in Ithaca, New York, the Camden Children's Garden in Camden, New Jersey, the Story Garden in Binghamton, New York, and the Coastal Maine Botanical Garden in Boothbay, Maine.

The Ithaca Children's Garden, Inc. (ICG) is a non-profit organization established by volunteers in 1997 to create a children's garden in their community. Still largely run and managed by volunteers, ICG is currently in the first phase of building on the

site of the future children's garden. This case exemplifies what inexperienced but committed volunteers can achieve.

The Camden Children's Garden is an initiative of the non-profit Camden City Garden Club and is a successful element of a major economic development initiative in one of the poorest cities in the country. This case demonstrates what can be achieved by partnering with other institutions and other youth development programs.

The Junior League of Binghamton, Inc. is developing the Story Garden as an "interactive children's garden" that uses themes from children's books as its central design concept. The Junior League is a group of veteran community volunteers; the Story Garden case highlights the organizational effectiveness of structured leadership.

The Coastal Maine Botanical Garden is an emerging botanical garden envisioned by a group of Maine residents in 1991. The garden has grown from an idea hatched in the founder's kitchen to a well-managed institution with an experienced board and skilled staff. This case highlights the transition from grass-roots volunteer-led effort to professional institution.

Each of these gardens has experienced many of the challenges and hurdles that a new non-profit organization may face. The cases are not meant to serve as models of best practices, but as illustrative examples of what is possible with committed leadership, resourcefulness, and dedication.

Chapter Four provides a discussion of the organizational aspects of starting a children's garden. The start-up process is broken down into five sections: Generating Support, Building the Organization, Incorporating and Gaining Tax-Exempt Status,

Fundraising, and Choosing and Designing the Site. This practical guide will give a clear picture of the key elements to consider before getting underway.

Chapter Five provides a set of recommendations based on the synthesis of expert non-profit management strategies and the practical experience of the case study institutions. These recommendations will guide the way towards building a strong and dynamic children's garden in any community.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL & THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Roots of the Children's Garden Movement

As cultural institutions, children's discovery gardens are the product of the confluence of three direct influences: children's gardening programs, children's museums and playgrounds. The developmental history of each of these influences has bearing on children's discovery gardens. Children's gardening programs have not only sought to educate children about gardening techniques but also often to strengthen the understanding of the essential links between people and plants (<http://assoc.garden.org/about>). From children's museums come the influences of interactive exhibits designed for children's active learning styles. Playground design has influenced children's discovery gardens by emphasizing the importance of play in child development and underscoring the value of safe, developmentally appropriate outdoor environments for children.

History of Children's Gardening Programs

The first organized gardening programs in the United States were started at the dawn of the 20th Century as part of a Progressive effort to provide wholesome activities for the children of poor and working class families in cities (Crowder 1997). Advocates of gardening programs believed that they would teach children, "civic virtues; private care of public property, economy, honesty, application, concentration, self government, civic pride, justice, the dignity of labor, and the love of nature by opening up to their little minds the little we know of her mysteries, more wonderful than any fairy tale." (Green,

1911, p.4, quoting Mrs. Henry Parsons in Report of the First Children's School Farm in New York City, for 1902-1904)

The first public children's gardening program was established in 1914 at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden (BBG). The program, established at the BBG by Ellen Eddy Shaw who served as founder and curator from 1914-1945, served as a model for other public gardening programs for children. These programs focused on teaching horticultural skills and related subjects, while often providing garden-related art and craft projects as well (Crowder 1997).

The School Gardens Association of America was formed in 1910 for the purpose of helping individuals and communities establish gardens (Crowder 1997). School gardens flourished, especially during the war-time years when planting a vegetable garden was considered an act of patriotism. School gardening programs aimed to teach, not only gardening, but also values such as hard work, perseverance and cooperation.

Today gardening programs at schools and in community gardens are increasingly focused on integrating gardening and plants into other areas of the formal curriculum such as math, science, language arts, history and social studies. The American Horticultural Society (AHS) is a founding member of the Partnership for Plant-Based Learning, a coalition of organizations devoted to promoting the use of plants in formal educational programs (http://www.ahs.org/youth_gardening/plant_based_education.htm). The philosophy that plants can be used in many areas of the curriculum, not just science or ecology, is one that AHS and the other major champion of youth gardening programs, the National Gardening Association (NGA) strongly emphasize. NGA and AHS are both

actively engaged in promoting children's gardening and advocating for the establishment of children's gardening programs in schools, in community gardens and at home.

NGA has a strong focus on *gardening* as an activity, as opposed to *the garden* as a unique environment for children's development. Therefore, their youth gardening website, (<http://www.kidsgardening.com>) has lots of information about gardening project ideas, activities and educational programs. It also has good resources for teachers, parents and others who are gardening with kids. In addition, it has some valuable information about small grants and awards for youth gardens.

As an advocate for youth gardening generally and *children's gardens* more specifically, AHS developed a demonstration children's garden at their headquarters at River Farm in Alexandria, VA. Since 1993, AHS has organized the annual Children & Youth Garden Symposium. This symposium originally focused on children's gardens, or "reconnecting children with nature through ...landscapes designed specifically for children and the way they play, explore, and interact."

(http://www.ahs.org/youth_gardening/index.htm) In the past few years, the focus of the symposium has expanded to include a strong school gardening component. This change reflects the popularity of school gardening programs among teachers and parents. The symposium continues to serve as the leading forum for the exchange of ideas related to children's gardens.

The AHS youth gardening webpage (http://www.ahs.org/youth_gardening/index.htm) contains many links and references that are useful for organizers of children's gardens. There are several white papers that AHS has commissioned about the importance of gardens and plants in the school curriculum, a link to their "National Registry of

Children's Gardens,” information about the annual “National Children & Youth Garden Symposium,” and a Children and Youth Gardening Resource List which contains information about “Formal Educational Programs & Curriculum Guides,” “Sources of Children’s Gardening Activities,” “Children’s Gardening Programs at Public Gardens & Horticultural Societies,” “Horticultural Therapy Programs for Children,” and “Sources for Financial Assistance & Gardening Supplies” among other features.

There are a number of notable gardening programs that serve as advocates and models for other school or community gardening efforts. Many of these programs have information available on their websites that can be relevant to organizers of new children’s gardens, whether it be for educational programming ideas, design concepts or links to funding sources.


The Life Lab is a non-profit organization devoted to “environmental stewardship by promoting science and garden-based education for all learners” (<http://www.lifelab.org/index.html>). The Life Lab has developed curriculum manuals, educational programs, and training for teachers who want to incorporate garden-based learning. The Life Lab organization has also created a two-acre Garden Classroom at the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems (CASFS) at UC Santa Cruz to serve as a model school garden (<http://www.lifelab.org/classroom/index.html>).

The Edible Schoolyard at the Martin Luther King Middle School in Berkley, California is an organic gardening program developed by chef and author Alice Waters (<http://www.edibleschoolyard.org>). At the Edible Schoolyard middle school children actively participate in all aspects of food production from planting to harvesting to preparing recipes using the produce grown in the garden. The program emphasizes

relating the food kids eat to the land where it is grown as a means of teaching ecology and environmental stewardship, providing nutrition education, and developing healthier eating habits. (<http://www.edibleschoolyard.org/homepage.html>) The Edible Schoolyard's website also has resources about starting a school garden (including a section titled "Things we Learned the Hard Way"), and lesson plans for incorporating nutrition and environmental education into the curriculum.

The breadth of children's gardening programs inspires and influences the educational programs of children's gardens. The resources that have been developed for school and community gardens can be used by organizers of children's gardens to design educational programs in the garden. More children's gardening program resources can be found in the Appendix to this paper.

History of Children's Museums

The first children's museum in the United States, like the first public gardening program for children, was started in Brooklyn, NY. The Brooklyn Children's Museum  opened its doors in 1899, followed a few years later by museums for children at the Smithsonian, in Boston, Detroit and Indianapolis (Gibans 1999). These first children's museums focused on natural history and displayed collections which were considered of particular interest to children including fossils and rocks, insects, American Indian artifacts, and stuffed birds and turtles (Lewin-Benham 1997).

The founders of these institutions were influenced by late 19th Century educators such as John Dewey and Maria Montessori, who emphasized the value of learning by exploration and direct access to material (Gurian 1997). They sought to educate children

about the natural world by allowing them, under the guidance of a museum docent, to gently examine the artifacts in their collections. The educational objective of early children's museums was to "delight and instruct the children who visit," and "stimulate their powers of observation and reflection" (Alexander 1999, p.192).

After World War I, children's museums' primary focus on the natural world expanded to include the study of other cultures, including their history, geography and art. But until the 1960s their collections largely remained under glass in a traditional "museum case" exhibit format. During this time children's museums experienced only modest growth. There were about 30 "junior" museums created in the 60 years after the founding of the Brooklyn Children's Museum (Gibans 1999).

Until the 1960s, children's museums tended to serve a much older youth audience than is typical of a children's museum today. Most of the visitors were upper elementary school students who participated in clubs and workshops that were offered by the museums (Gurian 1997). In the 1960s, Jerome Bruner, whose research led to the development of the Head Start program, showed that very young children benefit from stimulating experiences and environments. A result of these findings was that parents began to seek out enriching opportunities for their youngsters, which included bringing them to children's museums in increasing numbers. The ensuing drop in the average age of visitors prompted children's museums to design exhibits that were geared to the developmental needs of younger audiences (Maher 2001).

In 1964 Michael Spock, the son of famous pediatrician Dr. Benjamin Spock, revolutionized the children's museum experience by creating an interactive exhibit called "What's Inside" at the Boston Children's Museum (Lewin-Benham 1997). Children were

given the opportunity to take apart a variety of different familiar objects and find out for themselves what was inside. This interactive exhibit marked a paradigm shift in the way exhibits were designed at children's museums and started a movement that led to the explosion of children's museums across the country (Lewin-Benham 1997). Another important influence on the evolution of children's museums was the approach to science exhibits developed at the Exploratorium in San Francisco in the early 1970s. Visitors were given hands-on access and guided in open-ended exploration of scientific topics (Maher 2001). The exhibits were designed to encourage children to touch, try out, experience and investigate the materials, components, or principles illustrated in the exhibit. Today, children's museum exhibits, no matter what their subject, are designed to allow children to engage in self-directed learning by exploring materials, engaging in pretend play, and investigating concepts (Frost 2005).

The excitement that was generated by the interactive exhibits at the Boston Children's Museum and the Exploratorium resulted in the creation of more than 80 new children's museums in the 1970s and 1980s (Maher 2001). Children's museums are now the fastest growing type of cultural institution, with more than 100 new museums opening between 1990 and 2003. There are now well over 200 children's museums in the United States and approximately 85 are in the start-up phase. In 2003 over 25.7 million children and families visited children's museums. (Association of Children's Museums Website). For most of their 100-year history, these children's museums have been started through grass-roots organizing (Gurian 1997). The Association of Children's Museums (ACM) has published a comprehensive guide to establishing children's museums called Collective Vision: Starting and Sustaining a Children's Museum. This manual covers many of the

same start-up issues that are involved in starting a children's garden and would be a valuable resource for organizers of new children's gardens. ACM also maintains an email list-serv for children's museum professionals that serves as a forum for the exchange of ideas related to operating children's museums. Many of the messages that are exchanged relate to start-up issues that are relevant in the sphere of children's gardens as well. The list is open to anyone interested in children's museums. Instructions for joining the list can be found on the Web at: <https://mailman.rice.edu/mailman/listinfo/childmus>.

History of Playground Design

The first organized playgrounds for children in the United States were the German-inspired "sand gardens" created in Boston in the late 1880s (Frost 1992). These playgrounds were funded by Progressive civic organizations that were concerned about the lack of safe play space in the tenements of the increasingly over-crowded cities (Eriksen 1985). Like the earliest gardening programs, these playgrounds were expected to instill moral values in the children who used the space. Games and social play were thought to inspire, "cleanliness, politeness, formation of friendships, obedience to law, loyalty, justice, honesty, truthfulness, and determination" (The Playground Association of America 1909 Report as quoted in Frost 1992 p. 121).

Hundreds of playgrounds were created in the early part of the 20th Century at schools, churches and in city parks. These traditional playgrounds consisted of manufactured steel play equipment such as swings, see-saws, jungle gym and slides situated in paved and fenced lots (Frost 1992). The design of the traditional playground fostered gross motor skill development but there was little or no thought given to other forms of play such as

imaginative or creative play (Crowder 1997). These playgrounds were often unsafe, presenting real hazards such as the combinations of hard surfaces and great heights (Crowder 1997).

In the 1950s playgrounds began to undergo a redesign as artists and architects entered into the playground design arena (Crowder 1997). The playgrounds that were designed in this time period that came to be known as the Novelty Era were filled with concrete “play sculptures” that had futuristic abstract shapes and were brightly colored (Frost 1992, 125). These aesthetic considerations were thought to inspire imaginative play in children but more often appealed to adults than to children. According to Frost (1992, p.125), these playgrounds failed because they were “abstract, fixed, lifeless and resistant to change, movement, or action by children.” Most troubling, however, was the fact that the novelty play sculptures were all too often as dangerous and developmentally inappropriate as the traditional manufactured play ground equipment (Crowder 1997).

Beginning in the early 1970s, the U.S Consumer Product Safety Commission, manufacturers, and consumers began to confront the hazards traditional playgrounds presented. Safety emerged as an important design criterion for play ground designers. Playground designers took care to eliminate obvious hazards like hard surfaces, dangerous heights, and heavy wooden swings (Frost 1992 p.129).

During this era, designers also became responsive to contemporary child development theories. Accordingly, designers created more complex play environments that fostered a variety of different play experiences (Frost 1992). Playgrounds were designed using modular playground equipment linked together in massive structures that contained slides, climbing apparatuses and bridges. Moving from one apparatus or activity to the

next was integral to the play experience. One of the influential designers of this period, Paul Friedberg, wrote that, “The moving from one experience to the next is an experience in itself. The choice of what to do next becomes an experience. The more complex the playground, the greater the choice and the more enriched the learning experience” (Friedberg 1970, p.44). This type of modular play structure is still found on most playgrounds today (Frost 1992).

A phase in playground design that failed to take root in the United States but has nonetheless influenced children’s gardens is the Adventure Playground. The Adventure Playground concept was first developed in 1943 in Denmark during the German occupation and spread throughout Europe in the ensuing decades (Allen 1968). Playground designers had noticed that children seemed to gravitate toward junk yards and building sites. In those untidy sites, children invented games and developed their own forms of play incorporating unused or abandoned materials (Allen 1968). Adventure Playgrounds were designed to replicate this type of environment by providing loose parts such as discarded lumber, tires, pipes, bricks, and basic tools (Eriksen 1985). Children were supervised by a play leader who showed how to use the tools and ensured safety but who served as more of “an older friend and counselor than as a leader” (Allen 1968, p.56). The children who played at these Adventure Playgrounds were free to alter the environment in any way they wished, building, digging, demolishing, and painting (Eriksen 1985). The National Playing Fields Association of England (as quoted in Eriksen 1985 p.24) describes an Adventure Playground as:

A place where children of all ages, under friendly supervision, are free to do many things that they can no longer do easily in our crowded urban society; things like building—huts, walls, forts, dens, tree houses; lighting fires and cooking; tree climbing, digging, camping; perhaps gardening and

keeping animals; as well as playing team and group games, painting, dressing up, modeling, reading—or doing nothing. For it must also be a place where children just meet and talk in a free, relaxed atmosphere. They do not have to pay to enter, nor do they have to join as members; they just come to the playground whenever they feel like it.

Although Adventure Playgrounds were replicated across Scandinavia and Western Europe they never gained wide acceptance in the United States (Eriksen 1985). The failure of Adventure Playgrounds to gain a foothold in the United States is likely the result of the requirement for the presence of a trained play leader, an occupation that is foreign to Americans, and the fact that many adults perceived these playgrounds as too messy and “junky” (Eriksen 1985, p.26). The fundamental premise of the Adventure Playground, that children direct their own playful learning by interacting with rich, stimulating environments, is alive in children’s gardens.

Currently, there is an active movement among progressive playground designers, early childhood educators and children’s environments experts to create playgrounds that use vegetation and the natural environment as the foundation of playground design. Notable examples of these initiatives include *The Natural Learning Initiative* (www.naturalearning.org), *Planet Earth Playscapes* (www.planetearthplayscapes.com), *The White Hutchison Leisure & Learning Group* (www.whitehutchinson.com/children), and *The Natural Playgrounds Company* (www.naturalplaygrounds.com). According to Randy White (2004) of White Hutchison:

These new naturalized play environments do not depend on manufactured play equipment. Rather than being built, they are planted—they use the landscape and its vegetation and materials as both the play setting and the play materials. Rather than designed like a well manicured adult environment, naturalized playgrounds are designed from a child’s perspective as informal, even as wild, and as a place that responds to children’s development tasks and their sense of place, time and need to interact with nature. They are designed to stimulate children’s natural

curiosity, imagination, wonder and discovery learning as well as nurture children's connectiveness [sic] with nature.

As physical spaces, naturalized playgrounds have much in common with children's gardens. Robin Moore, director of the Natural Learning Initiative, describes naturalized playgrounds as "stimulating places for play, learning, and environmental education - environments that recognize human dependence on the natural world" (<http://www.naturalearning.org/aboutUs.html>). According to Moore's description, a naturalized playground might also fit my definition of a children's garden: *an interactive outdoor environment, designed specifically for children, which provides opportunities for learning and playful exploration through hands-on experiences with plants and the natural world*. The distinction is that naturalized playgrounds seem to be more narrowly defined as play spaces connected to a school or early childhood center (www.naturalearning.org, www.planetearthplayscapes.com, www.whitehutchinson.com/children). This distinction may disappear as "naturalized playgrounds" are created outside the context of school or early childhood center grounds.

Children's gardens are indeed at the vanguard of a new movement in children's environments. As outdoor environments for play, children's gardens are at the very cutting edge of the movement to naturalize playgrounds. The interactive design of informal learning environments in children's gardens is influenced by children's museums. The influence of children's museums is also manifest in some children's gardens' custom of calling their garden spaces *exhibits* or *galleries*. (Everett Children's Adventure Garden, Camden Children's Garden) Children's gardens' didactic emphasis on using plants to teach about culture, science, art, history, everyday life and nutrition is a

product of the influence of current trends in children's gardening programs. Children's gardens are the happy result of the confluence of these three elements.

Social Factors Influencing the Emergence of Children's Discovery Gardens

Children's gardens are emerging in the context of a social and physical environment that affords children fewer and fewer everyday opportunities to explore, play and learn outdoors. Contact with nature through outdoor play has become severely restricted for children for a number of reasons. Robin C. Moore (p. 82, 1996), children's environments expert and Director of the Natural Learning Initiative at North Carolina State university, suggests that among the forces that are constraining what he calls the "environment of childhood" are traffic dangers, parental fears of the perceived danger of children being abducted, kidnapped or physically harmed while playing outdoors, lack of appropriate play space, reduction or elimination of school recess, prevalence of single parent or dual-income families, children's tightly structured schedules, television and electronic media, and the commercialization of play as seen in the rise of for-profit indoor play centers. Additionally, as the population increases and development sprawls out into what had formerly been undeveloped land there are fewer places for children to explore nature near their homes. Heffernan (2005) writes:

That children need to have contact and meaningful experiences with nature is not a new concept. However, because more and more of today's children have little daily contact with nature, the sense of urgency to provide places where children can discover plants, gardens, and nature in playful and educational ways has provided further fuel to this movement.

Children learn to appreciate nature through rich, positive experiences during early childhood. These formative experiences with nature help instill concern for the environment (Chalwa 1988). Claire Freeman (p.381, 1995) asserts, "[i]f children are to

develop into environmentally aware adults, capable of safe-guarding our fragile ecosystem, they need to experience the environment as an integral part of their lives in their formative years. Children learn through play, thus it is essential that natural environments form a significant component of their play experience.”

Catherine Eberbach (pg.1, 54 1988), who helped design the Everett Children’s Adventure Garden at the New York Botanical Garden, states that “exposure to environments profoundly shapes future environmental predispositions” in children. She writes that children’s discovery gardens can provide children with positive first-hand experiences with the wonder of the natural world that can extend into their adult lives. Children’s discovery gardens provide opportunities for children to connect with nature in a dynamic way, thereby laying the foundation for an appreciation of the natural world as adults.

In Nabham and Trimble’s book, The Geography of Childhood: Why Children Need Wild Places (1994, pg. 9), the authors suggest that in order to “counter the historic trend toward the loss of wildness where children play, it is clear that we need to find ways to let children roam beyond the pavement, to gain access to vegetation and earth that allow them to tunnel, climb or even fall”. Children’s gardens have the potential to reconnect children with the wonders of nature and forge strong connections with the natural world.

Benefits of Children’s Contact with Nature

There is a growing body of research that points to the psychological and cognitive benefits of children’s contact with nature. Researchers have determined that exposure to nature serves as a buffer against life-stress (Wells & Evans 2003). Elementary school-age

children who experienced stressful changes in life like a move or experienced bullying or fights with parents were better able to cope with those stresses if they had access to nature near their homes. The presence of a naturalistic play environment in the community may serve to foster resilience and positive coping behaviors among children. Likewise, Ulrich's (1983) "psychoevolutionary" perspective on the psychophysiological effects of nature suggest that human beings may be hard-wired to feel reduced stress in response to a natural scene.

Researchers have found that interaction with nature improves cognitive functioning as well (Wells 2000). Wells found a correlation between the increase in nearby nature when children relocate and their ability to concentrate. Researchers found similar correlations in children's exposure to nature and their ability to exercise self-discipline (Faber Taylor, Kuo et al. 2002). Faber Taylor and colleagues (2001) also found that natural play settings lessen the severity of children's symptoms of Attention Deficit Disorder. These studies build on Rachel and Stephen Kaplan's (1989) theory of attention restoration. According to this theory, there are two types of attention, directed (voluntary) attention and involuntary attention. Directed attention is the kind of attention required to focus, learn new material and problem solve. And as anyone who has ever tried to focus on challenging new material will attest, directed attention is prone to fatigue. Rachel Kaplan and Stephen Kaplan (1983) propose that natural environments have the capacity to restore directed attention because they engage involuntary attention and allow directed attention to recover. Nature provides four critical elements: (1) fascination, or ability to draw attention effortlessly; (2) extent, or potential to become immersed in the experience; (3) being away, or a feeling of being free from the cares of the everyday world; and (4)

compatibility or the extent to which the environment complements one's purposes or inclinations. As natural environments, children's discovery gardens engage involuntary attention and give directed attention a needed break.

Importance of Play in Children's Gardens

Children's gardens are predicated on the theory that play is an important component of child development and that children learn through play. A large body of research supports the primacy of play in children's development. A full examination of the many theories of play is outside the scope of this project, but Joe Frost (2005, p.54), one of the leading authorities on play, provides a summary of the various dominant theories of play.

Any number of contemporary theories provide lenses for our understanding of play. These theories may emphasize the nature or the nurture of play (i.e., the biological, cultural, or interactive influences of play on development). Psychoanalytic theory emphasizes the emotional, motivational aspects of play and how play allows children to express their feelings. Scholars such as Freud, Erikson, and Peller have refined psychoanalytic theoretical lenses, Bateson and Garvey have given us ways to view play in terms of communications. Children signal one another when they play, and those verbal and nonverbal signals provide the theoretical lenses for understanding children's play talk and the pretend frames they create. Cognitive theorists, such as Piaget, Bruner, and Vygotsky, tell us that play links theoretically with our minds. Play may be a way of assimilating knowledge (as Piaget tells us), problem solving (in Bruner's sense), or creating knowledge within a zone of proximal development (in Vygotsky's terms). Depending on the cognitive lens we select, we can see different aspects of thinking in the developing child's play.

Play is often understood to be social. Theorists have provided a number of rational frameworks for understanding the social features of play. Play may be a setting for increasing social participation, as Parten tells us. Or it may be the setting for creation of social structures, where social status is established. Corsaro and social status researchers provide a number of lenses for seeing (and hearing) how play relationships benefit players differently, making some popular and others less so. Others show us how play is a foundation for children's own culture. Other scholars see play as a creative activity, in which children find original solutions to their

problems and explore novelty and the arts. Different theories are needed for all these views of play, and each view provides us with unique lenses for observing and understanding children's play.

Frost suggests that these theoretical perspectives can be appreciated as lenses through which the developing child's play behavior can be understood. And while none of these theories is comprehensive, each adds to our understanding of the many roles and meanings of play. In the absence of an integrated theory of play, a precise definition of play is problematic. The Strong Museum in Rochester, NY, a children's museum that calls itself the "National Museum of Play" offers a definition of play that incorporates many of the dominant contemporary theories (www.strongmuseum.org). According to the Strong Museum, play is:

- Learning
- Imagining
- Pretending
- Competing
- Discovering
- Socializing
- Collecting
- Shifting Perspectives
- And More...

Play is basic to all of us. We play to develop our muscles and our brains. We play to be creative. We play to escape, in unplanned moments or in structured games. We play to test our limits. Play can be cheery or furious, frivolous or sincere, simple or complex. When we play we affirm our values and connect with others. When we are absorbed in play we lose ourselves. When we look closely at play over time, we find ourselves.

Although children can engage in play just about anywhere, a stimulating, rich, and varied physical environment fosters the varied play behaviors essential to optimal growth and development (Eriksen, 1985). Children's discovery gardens are specifically designed to promote exploration and playful learning.

Several studies have shown that natural environments promote developmentally significant play behaviors. MaryAnn Kirkby (1989, p.7), landscape designer and

children's environments researcher, writes, "A natural setting has the degree of complexity, plasticity, and manipulability which allows a child to experience many developmentally significant play behaviors such as role-playing, cause-effect actions, constructive play, etc." These types of play behaviors are significant because they have been found to promote cognitive development and greater scholastic achievement (Smilansky & Shefatya, 1990). A play environment that offers manipulable natural materials such as sand or dirt, leaves, flowers, branches, and water gives children more abundant choices when it comes to materials for dramatic play (Frost 1992). Moore (1989) also found that the vegetative loose parts (flowers, leaves, sticks, etc.) found in natural environments foster imaginative play and creative social interaction. Moore (1989 p.4) writes of his experience with children in a naturalistic schoolyard in California: "Plant parts provided irresistible sensory gems, pinpoints of color, smell, and geometric form that focused children's attention and set the wheels of their imaginations in motion."

As horticulturally-rich outdoor environments, children's gardens provide the necessary complexity, plasticity, and manipulability to accommodate a variety of play behaviors. In providing opportunities for different types of play and playful learning, children's gardens foster the development of the whole child by stimulating social, cognitive, physical (motor skill) and emotional growth (Eriksen, 1985).

Children's Perceptions of their Physical Environment

Another fundamental principle of the children's garden is that children experience the physical environment in a way that is different from adults. Children actively engage their physical environments—running, jumping, splashing, swinging, touching, and lifting. Adults generally have a much more cerebral engagement with their surroundings.

Gibson's (1979) concept of "affordances", meaning the functional significance of environmental features in relation to an individual, helps shed light on this difference.

The theory of affordances posits that our perceptual experience includes not only awareness of the structural properties of objects in the environment, but also, and perhaps more fundamentally, an awareness of their functional potential in relation to our bodies (Heft 1988). According to this theory, the perception of the environment is inseparable from the unconscious perception of one's own body—the environment is perceived in relation to the scale of an individual's physical proportions. For instance, something that is stable, flat and horizontal about knee-level affords "sitting-on." Something that can fit in the palm of a hand is "grasp-able," although clearly, what is "grasp-able" for an adult may not be for a child. Likewise, something that affords "hiding in" for a child may not offer the same affordance for an adult.

The adult capacity to intellectualize the environmental experience diminishes the dominance of perception of the functional significance of environmental features (Heft 1988). While adults take pleasure in the aesthetics of a garden, noticing the elements such as flowers, shrubs, stream and woods, the functional significance of those features may be more directly salient for children (Heft 1988). For children, trees are notable as features that afford swinging from or climbing, shrubs afford hiding, flowers afford sniffing or touching, streams afford splashing or wading. The allure of a garden for children is not only what they can *see*, but what they can touch, smell, climb, hide under, skip over, sit on, lift, dig, splash, run around, and DO! Children's gardens are designed to maximize the functional possibilities of the environment in relation to the scale of a small child.

Design of Children's Environments

Part of the magic of a successfully designed children's garden is that it reflects unique aspects of the physical and cultural setting in which it is located. There is not a standard formula for designing a children's garden but research in the area of children's environments provides insight that can be incorporated in the design process.

According to Moore (1997), children prefer naturalistic, somewhat "wild" environments over manicured and highly ordered environments. Many researchers (Eberbach, 1988; Whiren, 1995; Francis, 1995; Harvey, 1989; Hefferman, 1994; Heft, 1988; Raymund, 1995) have looked into the specific elements of a naturalistic environment that are salient to children. Among the most frequently cited elements are water, tall grasses, bushes that afford refuge, flowering plants of various size, shape, color and bloom time, plants of extreme size (large or small), and habitats for other creatures such as birds, butterflies, bats or beneficial insects.

Kirkby (1989) suggests that an important characteristic of naturalistic environments is that they often afford the element of refuge, meaning semi-enclosed spaces where one can see out but not be seen, a hiding place of sorts. Kirkby found that children overwhelmingly prefer to play in these semi-enclosed refuges and that their play behavior in these refuges was of a very high-order. According to Appleton's evolutionary-based habitat theory (1975), human beings are biologically predisposed to seek out refuges because they provide cover from predators. Kirkby suggests that because the refuges in children's naturalistic play environments afford a feeling of safety, children are more likely to engage in the dramatic, creative or imaginative forms of play that are fundamental to cognitive development. Moore (1997) notes that an outdoor environment

made up of a number of different spaces of varying size encourages socialization in various size groups. This in turn promotes friendships and positive social interaction.

Randy White (2004), advocate and builder of naturalized playgrounds, integrate much of this research in his recommendations for the basic components of a naturalized play environment:

- Water
- Plentiful indigenous vegetation, including trees, bushes, flowers and long grasses that children can explore and interact with
- Animals, creatures in ponds, butterflies, bugs
- Sand, and best if it can be mixed with water
- Diversity of color, textures and materials
- Ways to experience the changing seasons, wind, light, sounds and weather
- Natural places to sit in, on, under, lean against, climb and provide shelter and shade
- Different levels and nooks and crannies, places that offer socialization, privacy and views
- Structures, equipment and materials that can be changed, actually or in their imaginations, including plentiful loose parts.

These recommendations and the research of children's environments experts can serve as a starting point for designing a garden that is engages children's imaginations, stimulates playful learning, and fosters an appreciation for the natural world.

Summary

As cultural institutions and built environments for children, children's gardens occupy new territory in the landscape of childhood. Children's gardens are the product of the combined influences of trends in playground design, children's museums and children's gardening programs. They fill a niche by affording interactive experiences with plants and nature at a time in our cultural history when children's access to the natural environment is that is becoming increasingly rare. Children's gardens are

designed to nourish children's active and playful learning styles, creating spaces that encourage exploration and discovery and engage children's unique perception of the environment. Understanding what children's gardens are, the cultural factors surrounding their emergence, and the benefits they provide for children helps define their place in the geographic and cultural landscape of childhood.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS & MATERIALS

In order to accomplish the goals of this project I first needed to select other gardens to serve as contrasting and comparable examples to the Ithaca Children's Garden model. At first I concentrated on finding other children's gardens that had been started through volunteer efforts outside the framework of an existing botanical garden or school-yard garden. Although many new children's gardens have been built across the country in the last 15 years, most of these have been built as part of existing botanical gardens. Those gardens had the benefit of developing within an established organizational context. I was wanted to find examples of other children's gardens that had been built from the ground up. This model would allow me to compare start-up experiences and initial organizational development.

I contacted a number of experts in the field of children's gardens including Cynthia Klemmer, Director of Education and Development at the National Gardening Association (NGA), Tom Underwood, Director of Horticultural Programs at the American Horticultural Society (AHS), Nancy Busick, Youth Programs Coordinator at AHS, Cindy Tyler, principal of the landscape architecture firm Marshall*Tyler*Rausch which specializes in children's gardens, and Sharon Lee, Deputy Director of the American Association of Botanical Gardens and Arboreta (AABGA). I also posted a query to the Botanical Gardens Education email list regarding children's gardens.

From all these sources, the only children's garden that was suggested as a possible case study was the Camden Children's Garden. Sharon Lee of the AABGA suggested a number of public gardens (botanical gardens and arboreta, but not children's gardens) that had been started through grassroots volunteer organizing, at least in their initial

stages. I decided that since there was so little data available on independent children's gardens I would have to use examples of other types of public gardens in my study.

Through internet research of the half dozen public gardens Sharon Lee suggested, I decided to narrow my focus to the Coastal Maine Botanical Garden (CMBG) and the North Carolina Arboretum (NCA). Both CMBG and NCA had been started by volunteer organizers and neither had the benefit of a major benefactor or patron in their earliest stages.). CMBG had been started in 1991 through a grass-root effort by community volunteers. CMBG is now in the early stages of Phase I of a 20 year Master Plan for development. The garden was established without the benefit of an endowment or the support of a major patron. I felt that was important because a garden that had a secure and ample funding support from the very beginning would not have experienced the same start-up challenges as one that had a more modest start.

NCA is an example of a public garden that had started out through volunteer organizing twenty years ago and is now well established as a major public garden.

Kevin Moss, Volunteer Coordinator at Cornell Plantations suggested the Story Garden in Binghamton, New York. The Story Garden is still in the earliest stages of development, but because the project is being led by an organization with a long track record of successful volunteer projects I felt that it would provide a good case study.

The diverse experiences of the Camden Children's Garden, the Story Garden, and the Coastal Maine Botanical Garden each provide interesting counterpoints to the Ithaca Children's Garden model and help shed light on how other groups faced some common start-up issues.

Interviews

After selecting the case study institutions I conducted interviews with key staff and founders at each of the institutions. I conducted nine individual interviews with the founders, volunteers, staff and board of the Ithaca Children's Garden. I interviewed Meg Wahlig-Cole, Director from 1999-2005; Monika Roth, Cornell Cooperative Extension Program Director; Leigh MacDonald, Education Coordinator; Harriet Becker, founding member; Mary Alyce Kobler, founding member; Marcia Eames-Sheavly, past president of the Board; John Semmler, Board member; Penny Chick, Fundraising Committee member; and Bart Auble, Youth Horticulture Apprentice Program Coordinator. I recorded and transcribed each of these interviews.

I also conducted telephone interviews with George Briggs, Director of the North Carolina Arboretum; Marianne Taylor, head of the steering committee for the Story Garden; Mike Devlin, Director of the Camden City Garden Club and founder of the Camden Children's Garden; and Maureen Heffernan, Director of the Coastal Maine Botanical Garden.

I created a series of interview questions to guide conversation but my goal was to allow each interviewee to explain in his or her own words some of the biggest challenges and obstacles they faced in starting a new organization. In each interview I asked questions to guide conversation. These questions were grouped into categories relating to:

- Initial Organizational Development
- Site selection
- Fundraising
- Board Structure

This method had some drawbacks because contrary to what I had expected, there was little consensus on what the biggest hurdles were in this process. Each institution developed within the context of a particular environment which afforded unique constraints and opportunities.

As my research progressed I became aware that my choice of the North Carolina Arboretum as a case study did quite fit the parameters of the study I was trying to conduct. The North Carolina Arboretum was established as a non-profit organization in 1984 (then called the Western North Carolina Arboretum, Inc.) but two years later they were made part of the 16-campus University of North Carolina system (NCA website). They received \$250,000 in appropriated funds from the North Carolina General Assembly for the first operating budget in 1986. The state of North Carolina appropriated an additional \$2.5 million of capital funds to build the 25,000 square-foot Visitor Education Center.

I felt that the significant support that they had received, not only in funding but also in organizational structure, by being part of the University of North Carolina system would make it difficult to serve as a relevant model for a small start-up garden. The Coastal Maine Botanical Garden case seemed better suited in terms of illustrating the example of a garden that has made the transition from grass-roots start-up to professionally managed institution. While the Coastal Maine Botanical Garden is not as mature in their development as the North Carolina Arboretum is now, they have definitely crossed the threshold from start-up to major public garden. Based on this rationale I did not include the data from my interview with NCA director George Briggs in the following analysis.

CHAPTER 4: CASE STUDIES

Ithaca Children's Garden—Ithaca, New York

The first seeds of inspiration for the Ithaca Children's Garden were planted far from the Finger Lakes region of upstate New York. In 1996 Jane Taylor, creator of the Michigan 4-H Children's Garden, gave a lecture about the benefits of children's gardens to the volunteers of the Quail Botanical Garden in La Jolla, California. Among the volunteers was a woman named Harriet Becker who was spending a year in California. Becker was captivated by the idea of a garden for children because it integrated her interests in gardening, art and working with children. Becker returned to Ithaca in the fall of 1997 eager to share her enthusiasm about children's gardens with others in the Ithaca community. Coincidentally, Jane Taylor had also been out to Ithaca that summer, and had given a similar talk at the Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE). The ideas and images she conveyed resonated particularly with another avid gardener, Mary Alyce Kobler. That fall Becker and Kobler, who had worked together previously as Master Gardener volunteers, decided to dedicate themselves to creating a children's garden in Ithaca.

As a first step, Becker and Kobler approached Monika Roth, the Program Leader for the Agriculture and Environment Program at the CCE. Part of Roth's job involves helping volunteers implement new ideas that are within the scope of the mission of the CCE's Agriculture and Environment Program. Roth heard their proposal and agreed to help them get this idea off the ground. In this case, CCE would serve as an "incubator" of the new organization, by setting it up as a new program under the auspices of CCE. This had the benefit of immediately conferring tax-exempt status on the group's efforts and of providing an organizational framework in which to work.

Roth helped organize their efforts by holding an open community meeting at the Cooperative Extension center in downtown Ithaca. They invited all members of the community to this initial networking meeting. At the meeting they were able to bring together a larger group of people who were curious about children's gardens and have a dialogue about their ideas for a children's garden in Ithaca. This meeting also connected them with people who would be willing to support this effort through volunteer time or resources.

Their next step was to create an Advisory Board. The Advisory Board consisted of "a cross-section of community expertise in the garden development process" (Ithaca Children's Garden 1998). This group included educators, gardeners, parents, landscape design professionals, and city officials. The founding group was very enthusiastic about their new organization. That enthusiasm paid great dividends—before the group even formally incorporated, Kobler secured \$50,000 in seed money from a community benefactor. This money allowed the new organization to start putting their ideas into action.

Becker and Kobler discussed their ideas with the founders of the Ithaca ScienCenter, a children's museum of science, which had been established in the early 1980s through grassroots efforts and community organizing. They decided to follow a similar model of development by creating educational programming in the form of in-school and after-school programs as a way to build community support. They felt that piloting programs that would one day be used in the garden would not only raise awareness of the new garden but also would be a way of refining their ideas for educational programs. This had the additional benefit of making their educational

programming a driving force in developing their site design, rather than designing a site and then wondering how they would use it for educational programming.

The next step was to locate an appropriate site. The founders wanted the site to be 2-3 acres, centrally-located and accessible by public transportation, walking or by kids on their bikes. The site that was initially selected was a two-acre parcel adjacent to the Ithaca Farmer's Market, a seasonal market near the base of Lake Cayuga, within walking distance of downtown Ithaca. This site seemed to have all that they were looking for—it was in a beautiful waterfront location near the Ithaca Sciencenter and the Youth Bureau. However, after months of meetings with officials from the city and county government, they were unable to secure the site. The difficulty lay in the fact that the site was already occupied by the state Department of Transportation (DOT). ICG organizers hoped that they would be able to secure it because the Tompkins County Waterfront Development Plan recommended that the county relocate the DOT and use the site for “a better public purpose” (Progress Report 1998). Ultimately, the cost of relocating the DOT facilities to another location proved to be too high for the county.

In 2000 the ICG organizers began their search for a site a second time. With help from the city forester they visited a number of potential sites. In September 2000 they narrowed their focus to one site, a 3-acre parcel at the southern end of Cass Park, not far from the original site on the Cayuga Inlet. Cass Park is used for recreational purposes; its facilities include public playing fields, an ice rink and a seasonal outdoor swimming pool. Cass Park is also part of the Cayuga Waterfront Trail, a recreational walking trail that is being developed along the shore of Lake Cayuga. The site was under-developed (it had a few swings and other play equipment that were in need of repair or replacement) and was

proximate to the waterfront and downtown. The land was owned by the city so ICG negotiated a lease to develop the land as a public garden. ICG had developed a good relationship with the city and proven its credentials through ongoing education and outreach programs so when they approached the city about the site they found support.

Organizers of the Ithaca Children's Garden reached out to the community for input in developing ideas for the design of the garden. They contacted the Landscape Architecture Department at Cornell University about getting help with design concepts for the new garden. In response, students from a Community Design class developed an initial conceptual design. In May of 1998, Becker and Kobler held an open meeting for the presentation of the students' conceptual design. The design that the student landscape architects came up with offered a jumping off point to discuss what elements would be most important to include in the new garden. The group chose not to implement the students' design because they didn't think that they would be able to raise approximately \$5 million dollars and the group was ultimately unsuccessful in securing the site near the Farmer's Market.

The founders got input from kids in the community by dropping off drawing kits to seven elementary schools in the area and asking the kids to draw what they'd like to see in a children's garden. The group also held a design charette, a visual brainstorming meeting, in which kids and adults in the community drew and gave input about ideas for the design of the garden. These designs were synthesized into a conceptual Master Plan by one of the board members, landscape architect Rick Manning.

During this time the group started to slowly build the organization. They hired a part-time director and then a part-time education coordinator. They incorporated in 1999,

but continued to operate under the CCE umbrella. They applied for their own tax-exempt status as a 501(c)(3) charitable organization in 2003, when applying for a large grant from the Environmental Protection Fund and negotiating a lease on the Cass Park site with the City of Ithaca. The group concentrated on educational outreach and other programs such as their Youth Horticulture Apprentice Program, a summer job training program for teenagers, while slowly raising money for construction of the garden.

Construction finally began on the site in late fall of 2004, with the highlight feature, the “Turtle Mound” currently under construction. The Turtle Mound is a giant snapping turtle sculpture that will be situated in a wetland habitat. Children will be able to climb up on the turtle’s back and investigate the plants and animals that live in the wetland habitat. The snapping turtle was chosen as an icon of the Ithaca Children’s Garden because it is native to the site and the Iroquois who lived along the shores of Lake Cayuga believed that the world was carried on the back of a snapping turtle. ICG has already developed educational programs that use the Turtle Mound to teach about wetland ecology, social studies, history, science and math (the Iroquois also used the snapping turtle as a calendar—the 13 plates on the turtle’s back representing the 13 moons or months in the year).The organization seems to have regained some momentum with the construction going on at the Cass Park site.

Camden Children’s Garden—Camden, New Jersey

The Camden Children’s Garden (CCG) was created through the volunteer efforts of members of the Camden City Garden Club. CCG is an important component of the Camden City Garden Club, Inc.’s mission “to provide horticultural related, recreational

and educational opportunities for residents of all ages of the City of Camden and the Delaware Valley.” (<http://www.camdenchildrensgarden.org>) Mike Devlin and Val Frick, founding members of the Camden City Garden Club and organizers of the Camden Children’s Garden were inspired to create a children’s garden by a visit to Jane Taylor’s Michigan 4-H Children’s Garden. In the video that depicts the creation of CCG they credit “seeing the energy visitors draw from the Michigan garden” as the motivation to bring a children’s garden to Camden (Cooper's Ferry Development Association 1999).

CCG is located across the Delaware River from Philadelphia on a site next to the New Jersey State Aquarium. The children’s garden was an important part of an overall redevelopment plan for the Delaware River waterfront. To help fund the construction of the garden, planners sought financial support from the State of New Jersey, the Delaware River Port Authority, and Camden County among other sources. They were able to raise approximately \$8 million in 5 years primarily through government, foundation and corporate grants. Devlin believes that the fact that they were part of a redevelopment plan in one of the poorest cities in the country made it considerably easier to raise the necessary capital (Devlin 2005).

In addition to creating a destination for families, the children’s garden was expected to boost tourism to the area and provide employment for Camden residents and job training for youth. These programs have been very successful. Significantly, in an area where less than half of the city’s teenagers graduate from high school, only one student of the hundreds who have gone through the Camden Children’s Garden job training program has dropped out of high school.

The Camden City Garden Club built support and recognition in the community for the proposed Camden Children's Garden through their participation in the annual Philadelphia Flower Show. Their exhibits, which won first place twice at the Show, not only provided a vehicle for gaining support and recognition but also allowed them to test out their ideas for exhibits. They were able to see what children liked and didn't like in their exhibits at the Flower Show and then recreate or revise those exhibits back at the Children's Garden. They were also able to attract partners whose support helped build the garden. Notably, the Eagles Youth Partnership, the philanthropic organization associated with the Philadelphia Eagles professional football team endowed the Eagles Butterfly House and Education Center at the CCG in 2001. The Eagles Youth Partnership also provides funding for an educator at the garden and bus transportation for Camden children visiting the garden with their school classes.

http://www.philadelphiaeagles.com/partnership_data/other_playground_info.jsp

In terms of raising funds to build the garden, CCG clearly benefited from being part of a large-scale economic redevelopment plan for the Delaware River waterfront. One of the drawbacks of this approach to funding the garden's construction is that the emphasis on bringing tourists to the waterfront may have distorted the original purpose of the garden, which was to "provide horticultural experiences for creative and imaginative play" (<http://www.camdenchildrensgarden.org>). The need to find ways to increase attendance may have contributed to the development of features such as a carousel and a train ride that are very popular but are unrelated to their horticultural mission. CCG is also distinct among the children's gardens profiled here in that they charge admission (\$5.00 for adults and \$3.00 for children). Revenue generated from admission fees,

children's birthday party packages, and other program fees account for 75% of the operating budget for the children's garden (Devlin 2005).

The Story Garden—Binghamton, New York

The Junior League of Binghamton, Inc. (JLB) is in the early stages of developing a children's garden adjacent to an existing children's museum in Binghamton, New York. Binghamton is a small city (city pop. ~46,000; metro area pop. ~252,000) in upstate New York, in a region of the state along the border of Pennsylvania known as the "Southern Tier" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Binghamton,_New_York). JLB is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization "committed to promoting voluntarism, developing the potential of women, and improving communities through the effective action and leadership of trained volunteers". (www.story-garden.org) JLB is one of 294 local affiliates of the Association of Junior Leagues International, Inc. There are Junior League chapters in communities across the United States, Canada, Mexico, and the United Kingdom (<http://www.ajli.org>).

The impetus for a children's garden came from the directors of the children's museum, The Discovery Center of the Southern Tier. The Discovery Center (DC) had just completed a major expansion to their existing building and approached JLB about creating a garden near the entrance to the building. The DC itself was founded by community volunteers from the Junior League in 1984, before being spun off as its own non-profit corporation (www.story-garden.org). The DC directors created a proposal for JLB to create a garden outside their building in Binghamton's Ross Park. Ross Park is one of the major recreational areas in the Binghamton area. Marianne Taylor (2005), a

JLB member and head of the steering committee for the Story Garden describes how the Ross Park site is well suited for a children's garden.

In Ross Park we have the Discovery Center, the Story Garden and the Zoo (all in the same park). About 2 years ago the city of Binghamton built a big playground area on the other side of the park near that zoo. So it's nice that all these places for kids are all in the same place. I know that if you create public spaces that are inviting, people come. It's just amazing! They paved the old railroad tracks in a rails-to-trails effort and now there are a million people on that trail everyday. I think our community really needs gathering spaces. Because we are not urban, and we are not really rural, in a lot of ways we lose the benefits of one or the other. Even at the schools, the kids ride the bus to the schools so it's not like a neighborhood where people are necessarily walking and spending time with their kids at the schools on the school playgrounds.

The board of JLB voted to take on the project but quickly realized that a children's garden that would complement the mission of the Discovery Center would involve more than just a few bulbs and low-maintenance shrubs. Marianne Taylor (2005), describes the process as one that originated as a small project but quickly developed into a true children's garden:

The Discovery Center gave us a proposal and asked us to do some basic landscaping maybe some natural play structures (nothing like what we have planned for the Story Garden). They wanted a \$10,000 garden, basically. We accepted. The Junior League voted and chose that project to do. Our committee went and did some more research and, to make a long story short, we decided to spend the \$10,000 on a master plan as opposed to putting a bunch of perennials in and a piece of plastic [play equipment].

In working with the Discovery Center as a steering committee, a landscape architect, some JL members, some people from the Library system, we focused on what would really make a garden interactive and bring a new level of appreciation for plants and what would create an interactive space. We decided to make literacy and stories the concept for our garden. That's how it jelled and it became a huge project that outgrew the tiny space they had earmarked for it. We moved to another spot of almost an acre on the same campus [Ross Park, near the Discovery Center].

The steering committee recommended to the JLB board that they use the \$10,000 of JLB funds that had been dedicated to the project to hire a professional landscape architect. The master plan that they came up with creates 13 garden “vignettes,” or interactive areas that relate to a theme from children’s books such as Charlotte’s Web, The Wind in the Willows, Alice in Wonderland, and The Adventures of Peter Rabbit. The proposed budget for the entire project is \$260,000. The scale of this project is the smallest of the cases presented in this paper but may be in line with other start-up children’s gardens.

Coastal Maine Botanical Garden—Boothbay, Maine

The movement to establish a botanical garden on the Maine coast originated as the vision of a single individual. Rollins Hale, a Boothbay, Maine resident conceived the idea of a botanical garden to showcase and preserve the natural beauty of the coast of Maine. During the winter of 1991 he approached several greenhouse owners and other horticulture professionals in the Boothbay area with his vision. The idea took root and seven people came together to form the original group. In their first two years they built the organization by writing a mission, by-laws and incorporating. They completed the paperwork necessary to apply for 501(c)(3) status, which enabled them to operate as a non-profit organization and begin to raise money for the project.

Bob Boyd (2005), current Vice-president of the board and one of the original founding members recalls that they were very deliberate and focused in their efforts to build credibility for their project. The founding group spent about 6 years researching the operations of other botanical gardens. They joined the American Association of Botanical

Gardens and Arboreta (AABGA), the professional organization of public gardens, which gave them access to research and expertise in the area of public garden management. They also worked with landscape designers from the Radcliffe Seminars Landscape Design Program to work out a rough conceptual plan for the garden.

They set about looking for a site, knowing that they wanted a location on the coast of Maine, between the towns of Camden and Portland, which is where most of Maine's population is concentrated. It took the founding group five years to locate the site they ultimately chose. In 1996 they found what they were searching for: a 128-acre parcel of undeveloped land on the Boothbay Harbor with shoreline frontage and beautiful topography. The parcel was about to be turned into a housing subdivision but the developer had gone bankrupt before he was able to sell the lots. The group was able to buy the land for approximately \$500,000, which was a good price but still more than the founding group had in donations. The members of the founding group pooled their own money and several of them actually took out second mortgages on their homes to come up with the \$40,000 down payment! Having made such a dramatic commitment to their vision for a botanical garden, the founders immediately realized that they would need to raise more money. They initiated a membership program which initially attracted the support of several hundred new members. By the time the group hired someone to manage the membership program (the second staff position) they already had about 700-800 members.

The founders also realized that successful fundraising efforts would have to start with leadership from a strong board of directors. The founding group was passionate about the vision of creating a botanical garden but lacked the wealth and financial

sophistication needed to steer a significant development effort. Once they had obtained the site the founding group recruited board members with a mix of experience and financial resources to help the garden achieve its mission. The CMBG has been very successful in attracting a strong and professional board to lead the organization. Bob Boyd (2005) credits their success to their strategy of building credibility and establishing a solid organizational foundation in their early years before approaching individuals of means to serve on their board. Boyd suggests that this strategy worked well because fledgling non-profits can appear to be risky investments until they have established their credentials.

Establishing their credentials in the community involved gaining the support of area Garden Clubs, and establishing a Board of Advisors. The Board of Advisors was made up of 18 individuals, many of whom were professionally active in the horticultural community. The Board of Advisors did not have the fiduciary responsibility of a Board of Directors and met once or twice a year as a group but the Advisors served the critical role of ambassadors of the CMBG. The network that was established by the founding group and the Board of Advisors was fundamental in establishing a positive reputation for the new organization.

The garden continues to grow with the help of membership support, foundation grants and a capital campaign. Educational and outreach programs keep the public and the garden's supporters involved with the garden as the site is being planted and developed. Major construction of the master plan and buildings will begin in the summer of 2005 and most likely continue through 2008. Director Maureen Heffernan (2005) describes the experience of building a garden from the ground-up:

It's a long, hard process. It's going on 15 years and there is still no "botanic garden," or at least what you think of as a botanic garden. We have done a lot of work, and it's amazing all the organizational work that has to go into this behind the scenes, before we can even get anything done. There is so much planning to do and master planning, and building up the organization's development capacity. In our case we started with nothing! No building, no graphic image, everything had to be created. It can be overwhelming, but its also great fun!

As a major public garden, the Coastal Maine Botanical Garden has a much larger scope and scale than a children's garden but the organizers of CMBG faced many of the same challenges of organizational development, fundraising, and planning that a smaller children's garden may encounter. Their experiences, notably their success in attracting a strong board of directors, can be instructive to organizers of a new children's garden.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

In analyzing the case studies and in researching strategic non-profit management, several common elements emerged. I have organized these elements of the start-up process into five themes. These themes are not “steps,” (in that they are not strictly sequential) but reflect broad actions that each of the case study gardens undertook as part of their start-up process. In most cases these themes are not action items that can be checked off, but rather ongoing processes that will be refined as the organization matures.


The sections that follow are:

- *Generating Initial Support*
- *Establishing the Mission*
- *Incorporating and Gaining Tax-Exempt Status*
- *Fundraising*
- *Choosing and Designing the Site*

My research focuses on only a small part of the start-up picture. The themes I have identified are elemental aspects of building an organization but do not comprise the whole. There is much research about building organizations and developing the capacity of nonprofits. Organizers of children’s gardens who are interested in further reading on organizational development and capacity building can find more information on these topics in references that are listed in the Appendix.

GENERATING INITIAL SUPPORT

Finding support in the community

Getting the word out about the idea for a new children’s garden is critical in creating the network of supporters, volunteers, advocates, donors and partners you’ll need to help turn vision into reality.  Since many people may be unfamiliar with the concept of a children’s garden, you may wish to use information from the preceding literature

review to explain what it is you are trying to create and to underscore the benefits that such a place can have for children and the community.

Even if your plans for a new children's garden are still in development, you can begin to engage members of the broader community. This helps you begin to build a network of people who have a stake in the children's garden. Their early involvement can help you develop an institution that is relevant to the community. Bringing together a group of people from the community at the outset of the planning process can help get your organization off to a strong start.

The Garden Conservancy, a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of historic gardens, has created a two volume handbook called "Taking a Garden Public" (Garden Conservancy 2001) to help groups develop the organizational capacity to preserve and manage a public historic garden. These handbooks, while geared toward preservation of existing historic gardens, provide relevant advice to organizers of new children's gardens. The Garden Conservancy advocates assembling a group of supporters in a Friends Group or an Advisory Board who will help the new organization realize its goals. The Garden Conservancy handbook "Taking A Garden Public: Feasibility and Startup" (2001 p.19) offers this advice for the formation of a group of supporters:

As individuals organize themselves into a Friends group, they look for others who share their concern about the project or issue at hand. The more diverse the group, the better able they are to realize their goals. As with non-profit boards, the three "W"s are most helpful: individuals who contribute Work, Wisdom and Wealth.

Workers are the lifeblood of the Friends group. Anyone is welcome who will be willing to roll up their sleeves and make phone calls, write letters, invite others to join the group, attend lots of meetings, and contribute their expertise and creativity to the project.

The group needs leaders with a long-term commitment to the project. The process of saving a garden and developing an organization capable of maintaining it can take years. You will need leaders who can identify

opportunities and constraints and help devise a strategy that takes advantage of the group's resources and finds creative ways to add to them.

Raising money is always a challenge, and those who are willing to contribute funds, or have good connections to funding, are invaluable members of any Friends group.

Individuals who start a Friends group sometimes feel inadequate, never having attempted something like this before. The passion of working to preserve a garden can teach the kind of discipline and skills needed to make the project succeed. No one person has all the necessary skills and part of your job is to identify what skills will be needed and recruit people with those skills. You may want to consider recruiting people who have experience or expertise in certain areas including

- Organizational management
- Community leadership
- Public relations
- Fundraising
- Legal and financial matters
- Volunteer recruitment and management
- Events planning
- Negotiating skills
- Computer skills

Organizers of children's gardens may also want to consider other specific areas of expertise that would be helpful to incorporate, such as early childhood education, horticulture, landscape design, and informal education.

Both the Ithaca Children's Garden and the Coastal Maine Botanical Garden successfully organized Advisory Boards (Boyd 2005, Becker 2004). These groups played especially active roles in the early stages of the organization.

The Ithaca Children's Garden has been very active in engaging the broader Ithaca community. Early in their planning stages the founders organized and publicized a networking meeting, inviting anyone who was interested or involved children's gardens to participate. The goal was to gather ideas and identify potential collaborators. This meeting put them in touch with people who would subsequently become board members, volunteers and even one who, five years later, became a paid employee. ICG also had a number of community design charettes, which are participatory visual brainstorming sessions. At these design charettes members of the community sketched their ideas and

made suggestions about the design of the children's garden. Design charettes got the community involved and gave them a sense of ownership in the garden. Board member John Semmler (2004) believes this is important because:

Involvement leads to commitment. If you are involved with an organization and you help make it grow and work, you have some ownership in the organization. Then when it comes time to provide financial support you are more inclined to do that. Getting people involved in all levels and aspects [of developing the garden] will help make those people supporters of the organization.

The Ithaca Children's Garden formalized the network they had begun to create in their early meetings by creating a Board of Advisors, a group of about 50 people from the community who serve as advocates of the Ithaca Children's Garden and on-call experts and allies of the directors. Members of the Board of Advisors—which includes a member of Ithaca City Council, a member of the City of Ithaca Department of Planning and Development, landscape professionals, Cornell University Department of Horticulture faculty, professional engineers, landscape architects, fundraisers, and educators—contribute their expertise to the organizers of the children's garden. The Board of Advisors does not have the formal responsibilities of a Board of Directors. They only meet as a group once a year and there is also no explicit expectation of financial support from members of ICG's Board of Advisors.

The Ithaca Children's Garden continues to generate support from the community by hosting and participating in a number of community events. These events like ICG's annual Scarecrow Jubilee and the Family Reading Partnership's Book Fest sustain interest and support from the community while the site is under construction.

The Coastal Maine Botanical Garden had a more targeted approach to generating initial support. The founder whose vision for a botanical garden on the coast of Maine

sparked the creation of CMBG initially approached owners of garden centers and other horticultural professionals in the Boothbay region for support of his idea (Boyd 2005). Rather than appealing to the general public at first, his strategy was to make a targeted approach to the people he thought would be most likely to support his vision—namely leaders in the horticulture and landscape community (Boyd 2005). The founding group and the 18-member Board of Advisors were composed of leaders in the “green industry.” The approach of generating support first among individuals who were already active in the gardening community helped the organization establish their credentials as a serious horticultural endeavor before introducing the vision to the greater public.

The Camden Children’s Garden generated public support for their initiative by creating award-winning displays at the annual Philadelphia Flower Show. Since the founding group, the Camden City Garden Club, was already established and funding for the garden came in large part from government and foundation grants, the goals of their efforts were to pilot exhibit designs and create excitement and recognition within the community. Mike Devlin (2005), Director of the Camden City Garden Club and the Camden Children’s Garden, suggests that the exhibits helped build their audience by introducing many people to the garden.

The clearest benefit of “going public” with your vision for creating a children’s garden is that you’ll begin to bring together a group of individuals with a diverse set of talents and resources who can help you build the new organization.

Creating a strong board

Some of the individuals who actively support the organization as donors, advocates or volunteers will likely become prime candidates for board members when

you organize a formal Board of Directors. A Board of Directors provides strategic management and oversight of a nonprofit organization. Nonprofit consultant Peri Pakroo (2005) suggests that members of a nonprofit Board of Directors typically are responsible for duties such as:

- Defining the organization's mission and ensuring that the nonprofit stays on course
- Outlining the nonprofit's main programs designed to accomplish its mission, usually on an annual basis
- Establishing and managing financial systems by developing budgets, monitoring finances, and implementing accounting controls
- Leading and helping with fundraising efforts
- Dealing with internal board management, such as electing new officers and finding new board members to replace outgoing ones
- Establishing and overseeing committees to handle special issues, such as membership, special events, or fundraising
- Hiring and managing an executive director
- Helping promote the nonprofit and its activities to the public

Often these expectations are defined in an organization's *Statement of Board Member's Responsibilities*. An example of the Ithaca Children's Garden Statement of Board Member's Responsibilities can be found in the appendix.

The number of members of a board is widely variable among organizations but nonprofit organizations' boards tend to be larger than their for-profit counterparts (Oster 1995). The case study gardens had varying board configurations: the Coastal Maine Botanical Garden has a 22-member board; the Ithaca Children's Garden has 8 board members; the Camden Children's Garden doesn't have a board per se but the Camden City Garden Club has 23 board members; the Story Garden doesn't have a board but the 5-member steering committee reports to the 7-member Executive Committee of the Junior League of Binghamton.

Developing a professional board can involve a transition of leadership from the original founders to those with management experience. One interviewee commented that,

Building an organization is a challenge. There is a difference between volunteers who are committed to a vision and professional board management. You can't necessarily expect that the people with the vision have the management ability needed to run a board. The founders have so much vested in the program pieces that the management pieces are struggling as they try to fill all those roles.

The Coastal Maine Botanical Garden exemplifies the case of an organization that has successfully navigated the transition from leadership by a group of committed volunteers to a professionally managed board. Bob Boyd (2005), member of the original founding group and current Vice-president of the Board, credits their success in attracting people with the financial resources and business acumen to their strategy of solidly establishing their organizational credentials within the community before approaching new board members. With the exception of Bob Boyd, members of the original founding group have stepped aside and now serve as Directors Emeriti. Bob Boyd (2005) is adamant that although they have wealthy members on the board, they have been careful to develop a board that is neither elitist nor homogenous. Boyd reported that the nominating committee of the board of CMBG maintains a matrix of the composition of the board, including attributes such as wealth, professional experience and geographic distribution (they want to have board members from within and outside the local community). This matrix gives a clear picture of the strengths and weaknesses of the mix of board members. Combined with a clear strategy for building capacity on the board, it is a useful tool for the nominating committee to have when recruiting new members.

What constitutes the ideal mix of board members' specific traits and qualities is a matter of each organization's strategy. Nonprofit consultant Peri Pakroo suggests that an effective board is often composed of members who:

- Share a passion for and commitment to the mission
- Are willing to roll up their sleeves when necessary
- Have strong ties to their communities
- Are heterogenous
- Are willing to support efforts to raise money.

Finding and recruiting board members who embody those characteristics will put your organization on the right track. In order to lead effectively, however, it seems that the most critical characteristic of the board as a whole is a well defined and commonly held understanding of the mission of the organization (Oster 1995). According to Sharon Oster (1995), professor of nonprofit strategy at Yale University's School of Management, numerous studies of nonprofit boards have found that the single, most important factor determining board effectiveness is a common understanding of the organization's mission.

DEFINING THE MISSION

Defining a mission is an important step in building a children's garden. A mission is generally defined as "purpose of the organization, the fundamental task that it sets out to accomplish" (Hay 1990 p. 89). Management expert Peter Drucker (1990 p.45) asserts that:

Non-profit institutions exist for the sake of their mission. They exist to make a difference in society and in the life of the individual. They exist for the sake of their mission, and this must never be forgotten.

Sharon Oster (1995) suggests that a mission typically serves three main functions for an organization: it defines the scope and niche of the organization by setting defining parameters that specify why and for whom the organization exists (Oster calls this the “boundary function” (p.22)); it inspires and motivates staff, board, volunteers and donors by articulating the purpose and ideology of the organization; and it provides a point of reference in the process of evaluation. Making full use of each of these functions of a mission can help organizers of a children’s garden stay focused, energized, and consistently on the right track.

Sharon Oster explains the importance of the boundary function of the mission in decision making and evaluation:

The boundary function is important as a way to provide focus for all organizations, but for nonprofits it is particularly so given the ambiguity of control and criteria for success in this sector. A for-profit enterprise interested in a new project will typically make its decision by looking at the effect of that decision on profits, however difficult they are to measure. For nonprofits, which are often producing either collective or hard-to-evaluate goods, the profitability of a venture is often not the right criteria for success. Consistency with the mission is a partial substitute for profitability in the management of the nonprofit... (Oster 1995 p.22-23).

A well-defined mission provides the starting point from which all other planning and development should flow (Pakroo 2005), so taking the time to define a clear mission statement is well worth the effort involved.

The American Association of Museums (AAM) has guidelines for creating a mission statement that are used by their member museums to comply with the AAM’s accreditation program. The advice given for a museum’s mission statement can be applied to a children’s garden.

A mission statement describes the purpose of an organization and its reason for existence. It is the heart and essence of an organization, and it should clearly define the organization's niche. It should be crafted to provide a distinct focus that strengthens the organization's unique position in the marketplace.

An effective mission statement reflects the strategic thinking of the organization's leaders to define an appropriate role for the institution. The mission statement reveals the organization's understanding of the environment in which it exists, the relevance and appropriateness of the role it has selected for itself, and its relationship to its constituencies and communities. A well-used mission statement is a key governance and management tool.

A good mission statement conveys:

- How the organization relates to its public and its communities
- How it enhances the well-being of others and improves the quality of life
- Who benefits as a result of its work
- What services it provides

A mission statement should always contain two critical elements: why the museum exists and for whom. In addition, it should convey how the museum makes a difference in society, how it transforms others, and how the future will be different as a result of its work.

(<http://www.aam-us.org/dos/museummission.cfm>).

The *components* of a mission that AAM recommends support the *functions* of a statement that Sharon Oster defines. By including such elements why the museum [or children's garden] exists or for whom, and how it makes a difference in society, the mission will define the boundaries of the organization's purpose, inspire and motivate stakeholders, and serve as a mechanism for evaluation.

An example of a well-defined mission statement can be found in the mission of the Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens:

The Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens is committed to the protection, preservation and enhancement of the botanical heritage of coastal Maine for people of all ages through horticulture, education and research. (www.maine gardens.org).

This mission clearly defines the organization’s niche. It articulates why the garden exists (for the “protection, preservation and enhancement of the botanical heritage of coastal Maine”), for whom (“for people of all ages”), and how it makes a difference in society (“through horticulture, education and research”) Bob Boyd (2005), the current Vice-President of the Board and one of the original founding members recalls, “It’s painful to write a one paragraph mission statement! It’s easy to write a 2-page mission, but to get it succinct and to make every word count is tough.”

Maureen Heffernan, current director of CMBG, suggests that their mission inspires their stakeholders because it places emphasis on the protection and preservation of coastal Maine’s botanical heritage. According to Heffernan (2005), preserving land from development is such an important issue in Maine right now that this aspect of the mission is especially resonant.

The Camden Children’s Garden does not have a mission that is distinct from that of their parent organization, the Camden City Garden Club. Their mission is:

to provide horticultural related, recreational and educational opportunities for residents of all ages of the City of Camden and the Delaware Valley. Through the Club's various hands-on experiences, children and adults will realize that gardening is fun, easy and can be enjoyed by everyone.

The mission is well-defined according to the AAM guidelines. The mission specifies what the Camden City Garden Club does, for whom and why. The Camden Children’s Garden is an example of a mission-driven program. CCG supports the mission of the Camden City Garden Club to the extent that it provides “horticultural related, recreational and educational opportunities” and “hands-on experiences [for] children and adults.” Co-founder Val Frick believes that the Camden Children’s Garden, “is an

expansion and an enhancement of what we already do in the community gardens”
(Coopers Ferry 1999).

The Story Garden is also a mission driven program of the Junior League, but the steering committee decided to create a separate mission for this project. This mission builds on the mission of the Discovery Center, the children’s museum adjacent to the garden. The mission of the Story Garden is:

...to make available to the community an interactive children’s garden based on a literary theme. The mission of The Story Garden is to reflect the mission of the Discovery Center in a garden setting, spark the imagination through interactive experiences with images from favorite stories, encourage the reading of children’s literature by children and adults, and foster a love and appreciation of gardens. The Story Garden initiative fits into this mission by providing new opportunities and a community focus for the children of the community through a garden design that takes into consideration the needs and desires of The Discovery Center, the safety of the users, the visual image of the community, and the maintenance resources of the City.

Having a specific mission for this project helps the steering committee lead the organizational efforts of building the children’s garden.

The Ithaca Children’s Garden struggled to define its mission. For ICG it was a problem larger than simply being unable to draft a suitable *mission statement*. According to members of the founding group, they had a difficult time narrowing down the scope of their vision and defining the purpose and role of the organization. Harriet Becker recalls the dilemma of defining the mission:

If you look at our earliest mission statement—which is very long because we were trying to include *everything*—you get a good idea of what we were trying to do in our early days. We have always tried to be a community center, meaning that we were trying to involve kids but also making it a place for everyone in the community. It would be a spot like the Farmer’s Market where people go, not just to buy groceries, but because it a place to meet your friends. That’s what we wanted the

children's garden to be—a social center and a place where kids could learn about “everything in the world through plants.” That's a pretty big vision! That's why it has been really hard to write a short mission statement because I think that we've always wanted it to be hands on, interactive, every catch word that is out there. I think we still do. That's what makes it so hard.

Indeed, by their second year the group was doing so many things that retrofitting a mission that could incorporate all the diverse programs and activities already underway became increasingly difficult. Becker (2004) recalls that they even had a board retreat to try to hammer out a mission statement but they failed to reach an agreement that was suitable to everyone involved. Board members had so many ideas about what ICG *could* do, in terms of programming, outreach, and what the Garden *could* become in terms of design and found it difficult to pare down or prioritize those ideas in order to focus their vision.

The crux of the problem was that because the organizers hadn't defined the scope of ICG in the early stages (in essence because they didn't have the *boundary function* of the mission), they did not have a systematic basis for deciding which program ideas to develop and which ones to forgo. Marcia Eames-Sheavly (2004), former president of the Board and active member of the Education Committee, reflects on using the mission to guide decision making in developing their programs:

Sometimes I think that the way ICG has determined what programs to do is on the basis of “who's asking.” The role I'm trying to serve on the Ed committee is to be more reflective. “Who are we? Who is our audience? How do we best serve that audience? What is our mission? What is our vision? What does that allow us to say ‘no’ to?” I worry about burning out someone like [Education Coordinator] Leigh [MacDonald] because she's just terrific and working so hard but saying yes to so many programs. How do we determine what our priorities are, who our audiences are, so we can serve them in an absolutely top-notch way?

The lack of a mission became a problem for ICG in other ways. Several staff acknowledged that stakeholders often seemed confused about the core purpose of the Ithaca Children's Garden and how all their programs fit together. A mission that clearly defines the purpose and role of an organization can be an effective communications tool (Oster 1995).

The board and staff of ICG finally arrived at a solution to the dilemma they faced in trying to write a mission statement that encompassed all the ideas and principles they wanted to incorporate by going a step further to define not only the mission but also a set of key objectives and a guiding vision. The current mission statement is short and definitive, describing why the organization exists and for whom. The ideas about what the garden could become make up the vision statement.

Mission & Objectives

The mission of the Ithaca Children's Garden is to create a sustainable public garden with successful educational and outreach programs where children of all ages can discover, explore, create and enjoy the plant world.

The Ithaca Children's Garden:

- ***Promotes an understanding of plants and the role they play in our daily lives.***
- ***Nurtures the wonder of a child's imagination.***
- ***Creates a community attraction that enriches the lives of residents with intergenerational teaching programs and activities.***
- ***Provides a place of enrichment and delight for children of all ages***
- ***Teaches horticulture skills and encourages artistic expression.***

Vision

The Ithaca Children's Garden is an innovative grassroots effort to create exciting, interactive garden-based experiences with children of all ages. Garden programs are intergenerational and open to all. The garden itself will be a beautiful place where local residents and visitors will explore the many ways in which plants enhance our lives. This

unique garden will create a living venue for experiential learning, blending disciplines such as horticulture, art, literature, music, life skills, and science. Its diverse uses will include tours, workshops and special events, and it will foster an appreciation of the natural world, relaxation, reflection, and the wonder of discovery. Children, volunteers, mentors and youth apprentices will participate in garden development, maintenance, and on-going educational programs.

The current mission statement defines why the organization exists, for whom, and how ICG makes a difference in society. This mission serves each of the three functions of a mission that Oster describes: it defines the scope of the organization's purposes and role, it inspires and motivates stakeholders, and it can serve as a mechanism for effective program evaluation. Education Coordinator, Leigh MacDonald (2004), reports that they actively use this mission to drive programming decisions:

As we develop new programs we check them against the mission... Whenever we have a new program idea we think about whether it really fits in with what we want to do. We have thrown some programs out because they really don't fit. We do have programs that fit and are wonderful but we just haven't found a way to use them yet and they sit in the "good idea" file just waiting for the right opportunity.

The mission is the foundation of building the organization. It is from the mission that all strategic planning should flow (Pakroo 2005). With a well-defined mission established, organizers of a new children's garden can begin the strategic planning and budgeting processes. Guidance for these aspects of the start-up process is outside the scope of this paper. Organizers of children' gardens can learn more about this process from resources such as "Starting & Building a Nonprofit: A Practical Guide", by Peri H. Pakiroo. More resources are listed in the appendix.

INCORPORATING AND GAINING TAX-EXEMPT STATUS



Formally incorporating and applying for 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status as a charitable organization is a step that all children's gardens will likely take at some point in their development. Incorporating as a non-profit organization involves filing *Articles of Incorporation* with the state corporations division, usually the Secretary of State's office (Mancuso 2002). *Articles of Incorporation* generally contain:

- the name of your corporation
- the corporation's address
- the name and address of a "registered agent" (a person who agrees to receive legal papers on behalf of the corporation), and sometimes the names of the corporation's directors.

Incorporating as a non-profit protects the directors of the organization from personal liability for the corporation's debts and liabilities but does not in itself convey tax-exempt status. It is, however, a necessary step in applying for tax-exempt status from the federal government. Only those nonprofit corporations formed for religious, charitable, scientific, educational or literary purposes of benefit to the public may claim 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status (Mancuso 2002). Gaining tax-exempt status excuses qualified organizations from paying state and federal income tax on activities directly related to their charitable purposes and allows donors to make tax-deductible donations to the organization. It is also beneficial in grant-seeking because many public and private foundations are restricted by their own by-laws to give grants only to 501(c)(3) organizations (Mancuso 2002).

To apply for tax-exempt status under Internal Revenue Code 501(c)(3), you must write corporate bylaws, (the rules governing the internal operations of the organization),

elect a board of directors and hold an initial meeting of the board, and fill out a series of Internal Revenue Service forms.

You can prepare the forms yourself but most experts recommend consulting with a lawyer or tax advisor to make sure that your application is in order (Mancuso 2002). The organizers of the Coastal Maine Botanical Garden and the Ithaca Children's Garden were able to do much of the paperwork required for their applications for 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status which saved them the expense of hiring a lawyer (Boyd 2005, Wahlig-Cole 2004). ICG Director Meg Wahlig-Cole recalls:

I did most of the groundwork for incorporating as a non-profit; filling out forms, and, forms. We put together a giant package and then met with an attorney. We had heard that it would be quite expensive to pay for the legal work involved in incorporating. When we had all the forms ready to go it became much less expensive, in fact she didn't charge us at all. We did all the groundwork and it saved us a lot of money. What pushed us to incorporate was that we had an Environmental Protection Fund grant pending. We couldn't receive that until we were formally a non-profit, so the funding pushed us into moving fast on that. The other thing is that we could expedite the non-profit status because we had a state grant pending. So we were able to use each of the sides to move forward quickly.

There are a number of resources available to help you incorporate and apply for tax-exempt status. Your state's corporation division can send you information about forming a non-profit in your state. Books like Nolo's "How to Form a Non-Profit Organization" provide guidance through the process, including step-by-step instructions for preparing the required legal paperwork.

Given the complexity of the application process, you may decide to wait to apply for 501(c)(3) status if you can organize under the umbrella of another 501(c)(3) organization until you are at a stage where the increased organizational demands (time, bookkeeping, paperwork) can be managed (Mancuso 2002). Ithaca Children's Garden,

the Camden Children's Garden and the Story-Garden were each able to start out under the auspices of an existing non-profit organization. It may make sense for you to seek out a non-profit incubator or umbrella organization that will allow your new project to develop under its wing until your organization has grown. To find a nonprofit incubator in your community you can contact the local office of the [National Council of Nonprofit Associations](http://www.ncna.org) (www.ncna.org).

One of the benefits of this arrangement is that you can immediately take advantage of that organization's 501(c)(3) tax exempt status. Marianne Taylor (2005) of the Story Garden reports that this arrangement has made it easier for them to raise money.

Because the Junior League already has its own 501(c)(3) status, it makes it easier to raise money from grant-making foundations. If we didn't have our own existing non-profit status we could have gone through the Discovery Center but the downside to that is that they also want to go after grants for their own internal purposes for their own programming. This arrangement makes it a better division. It is also a great training opportunity for our members; this is what it's all about, so that they can learn how to do this for any other project.

Although the fundraising advantages are one of the most obvious benefits of organizing a fledgling group under the auspices of an existing 501(c)(3) organization, there are other benefits to consider. Leigh MacDonald of the Ithaca Children's Garden relates her perception of the pros and cons of ICG's relationship with Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE):

We always seem to be weighing the pros and cons of being part of Extension, and the pros seem to always outweigh the cons. In the beginning one of the big cons was the question of "are people going to recognize us as an organization? Are we just a program of Extension's? Extension does all these things and they tend to just get blended into one. Are we going to be taken seriously as a project that really wants to do something. I think that there was a drive for independence. We wanted to move forward to create a public children's garden and there was a lot of

push there. For a while we even kept a PO Box so we had a separate address from the CCE.

But the pros are just incredible, aside from being able to lease space in this building where we can work along side other people who are working with the community. There is amazing networking that can happen every day. I don't feel as much that we are living in a vacuum. For a while it was just me and Meg [Executive Director of ICG] on staff. The stimulus of being in an office with lots of people and lots of ideas is really great. We get support because we can contract with administrative assistants, with book-keeping, with computer help and marketing help. We don't have to hire even a half-time person to do a lot of the administrative functions because we have the resources here.

Another big plus is benefits. By being part of Extension we are part of the Cornell benefit system. That is a big challenge for other non-profits, especially with healthcare and health insurance costs going up so much. We are also employees of cooperative extension. Our paychecks come from Cornell, we get the same benefit package as any other Cornell employee. We get no core funds from CCE. We have to raise all the money ourselves for staff salaries, site development, programs. Extension doesn't give us any money but lets us rent office space and contract administrative help. There are other organizations that are under the Extension umbrella so they are used to setting up start-up programs. The bookkeepers do some sort of magic to track our grant funds. Especially with Meg being part-time...imagine having to write grants, manage site development, and keep track of financial management and bookkeeping. It would be insane!

Monika Roth, who as a Program Director for Cornell Cooperative

Extension, is the formal liaison between ICG and CCE. Roth (2004) explains that by organizing as a "program in partnership with Cornell Cooperative Extension," ICG has been able to provide employee benefits such as health insurance and workman's compensation and employment taxes that are a considerable expense for a small non-profit start up. Other benefits of their working relationship include renting office space in the CCE headquarters and having access to professional bookkeeping and auditing services. The arrangement with CCE is not meant to be permanent. CCE incubates a group or a program while they get established and

then spins them out on their own. Roth suggests that organizers of children's gardens in other communities may be well served by approaching the local Cooperative Extension agents about partnering.

Extension as an affiliated organization, is a great place to start or incubate an idea, as long as it fits within the current programmatic areas of the Cooperative Extension. All Extensions have 4-H Plant Science, perhaps children's gardens around the country could be started through this channel. Community gardening groups have sometimes been an outgrowth of Extensions. Depending on the resources available to the Cooperative Extension and the needs of the community and how the Children's Garden would address those needs, a group that approached Cooperative Extension would find varying degrees of support.

In any case, getting in touch with the local Cooperative extension is a good idea to get a sense of what is going on in the community and what has already been done/is being done with children and gardening. How to partner on programs, there is just a logical educational partnership there with Cooperative Extension, if nothing else. Providing organizational context may or may not work in each case.

Roth explains that one of the reasons the working relationship between ICG and CCE works as smoothly as it does is because ICG's directors have been successful at bringing in grant money to make them self-sufficient. Roth cautions that if a new idea was not well defined or if the new group had to depend on a lot of Extension resources it would be less attractive as a group to incubate.

FUNDRAISING

Significant funds are required in order to construct and maintain a children's garden. Because each of these gardens was established through grass-roots organizing, without the benefit of a major patron, none had an endowment. Each garden had to raise the money to develop and sustain the garden from a combination of:

- Public and private grants

- Individual donations (including memberships)
- Earned income revenue (admission fees, program fees, facility rentals)

Each garden had a different strategy for generating funds. According to Penny Chick (2004), Chair of the Fundraising Committee for the Ithaca Children's Garden, they have been very successful in generating support from grant-making foundations and from government agencies, but have lagged in their efforts to solicit individual contributions. Recently they received two major grants totaling \$525,000 to build the first phase of the garden. They are now in the process of raising an additional \$300,000 from other sources, including individual contributions, to maintain the garden and sustain their programs. The fundraising committee is initiating a special fundraising effort to raise these funds. This will involve board members personally making appeals to individuals who have given to ICG in the past. Historically, ICG has generated individual support through annual giving and a few special events such as a fund raising dinner and an art-action. ICG does not have a membership program.

John Semmler (2004), another member of the Fundraising Committee explains why they decided against instituting a membership program:

Membership programs are really tricky because oftentimes it limits people's giving to a certain level. They feel that they have "supported" the organization by buying a \$30 membership, when they really have the means to make a much larger gift. We want them to do more than \$30. You are not going to make your fundraising goal with \$30 gifts. Servicing memberships at \$30 (and people in Ithaca aren't going to pay much more than \$30 for anything) probably costs \$29.95.

This assertion is not supported by the experience of other gardens, including the Coastal Maine Botanical Garden, which has been successful in generating funds for the garden through a membership program (Heffernan 2004). Semmler was skeptical that

individuals would pay to join a garden organization that doesn't yet have a garden built, and has little beyond a newsletter to offer members as a benefit. However, the Coastal Maine Botanical Garden built a solid membership program before they had any garden spaces designed on their site. Maureen Heffernan (2004) explains that the organizers were able to generate memberships primarily by marketing the vision of the garden:

How do you get people to become a member of a garden that does not yet exist? Well you kind of market the dream of it, the prospect, the vision. We also have some more tangible things. The grounds are beautiful. We don't have true gardens in there yet, or they are very young, but they are beautiful to walk in. We are basically selling the vision. Members get some benefits. They get the newsletter, which goes out 4 times a year, we offer programs, but basically members join to help get this thing off the ground and started.

I would recommend having a community event that supports the garden, or a publication that keeps members informed of things. Something unique that keeps them learning something new, some kind of mailing like that is really important. We'd like to start sending out email blasts publicizing upcoming events or programs, maybe combine it with "what's blooming" on the grounds, so that we keep in touch with our membership and people who take our programs beyond the newsletter, to make it more timely.

Membership benefits like the ones Heffernan suggests do require an outlay of resources from the organization. The ICG has chosen not to develop memberships but it unclear whether that was a successful strategy. ICG already has a newsletter which is sent to everyone on their mailing list, regardless of whether they have made a contribution to the organization. Historically they have sought individual contributions in an annual campaign which typically brings in around \$6000 each year (Chick 2004). According to Chick, however, most of those contributions come from people who are very close to the organization, such as board members and volunteers. This raises the question of whether

broad (but possibly shallow) support in the form of a membership program might be beneficial to the fundraising efforts of ICG.

The Camden Children's Garden was able to attract initial funding in the form of grants from government, foundation and corporate sources. Now they generate approximately 75% of their operating income from admission fees, program fees and birthday party revenue.

The Story Garden relies on the efforts of Junior League members to raise funds within the community. According to Marianne Taylor, this is a key strength of the Junior League. The broad network of women who are involved in the Junior League allows the Story Garden steering committee to tap into the resources of the community. Taylor (2005) explains:

The Junior League structure has people called sustainers who are not active anymore but still financially support the Junior League and are the experts in community organizing. You can bring them in for advice and they know a lot of people in the community. They are the movers and shakers in the community. The Junior League has a great network. Sometimes there are Junior League members on the boards of granting foundations. You see the Junior League influence in a lot of ways that you wouldn't expect.

The Junior League traditionally funds initiatives through individual donations and in-kind donations. This is the first time in Taylor's 12-year involvement with the Junior League that they have applied for grants as a source of funding. The Story Garden is larger-scale than other projects they have undertaken in the recent past. The steering committee has already raised \$10,000 from small foundations and are waiting to hear back about the status of other grants.

The Board of Directors at the Coastal Maine Botanical Garden drives their individual donor fundraising efforts. This is a board leadership role that many non-profit strategy experts recommend. Peter Drucker (1990, p.56-57) maintains:

Your first constituency in fund development is your own board. One of the things we have learned about managing non-profit institutions is that the old-type board, the board that simply was in sympathy with the institution, is no longer enough. You need a board that takes an active lead in raising money, whose members give both of themselves and by being fund-raisers, fund *developers*.

The fundraising leadership of the board often involves board members giving large donations to the organization. Depending on the organization board members may be expected to give at a certain level or just to make a donation at a level that is meaningful to them. This may seem like an unfair expectation of those who are already giving so much of their time and energy to the organization. The fact is, financial support of the organization by members of the board sends a positive signal to other would-be donors. Sharon Oster (1995, p. 79) explains:

The nonprofit board often has large donors serve directly on the board. The presence of large donors on the board of an organization provides a direct way for them to monitor how well their funds are being spent. Thus, a donor is put on a board not as a benefit of giving, but as insurance for giving. It is no surprise, therefore, that trustees are active in the fundraising function. By their presence, such donor-trustees implicitly promise other potential donors that their funds will not be wasted.

Setting an example in giving and determining fundraising strategies are key responsibilities of members of a children's garden board of directors.

CHOOSING AND DESIGNING A SITE

Each of the three children's gardens in this study chose sites that are proximate to other places that were already family destinations. The Camden Children's Garden built next to the New Jersey State Aquarium; the Story Garden is being built next to the Discovery Center children's museum in Binghamton's Ross Park which also houses the Zoo; the Ithaca Children's Garden is being built in Cass Park, home to a public pool, ice rink and playing fields. Choosing locations near other kid-friendly attractions made sense for each of these gardens. In the case of the Ithaca Children's Garden, founder Harriet Becker (2004) recalls that they were also looking for a site that was close enough to the downtown area that kids there could walk or ride their bikes to the garden.

Choosing a site that is already undeveloped or underdeveloped also is an important consideration. The Ithaca Children's Garden originally selected a site that was occupied by the state Department of Transportation (DOT). Although they had assurances that the DOT was going to relocate (Becker 2004) that process did not move as quickly as the ICG organizers had hoped. In fact, in 2005 the DOT still occupies the site. Once they found a site that was unused they were able to proceed more quickly to securing a lease.

Involving children in the design process

Many naturalistic playgrounds are designed in a participatory process that allows the community, and especially the children in the community, to give input into the design of the play space (White & Stoecklin 1998). Soliciting children's ideas makes sense for a number of reasons: it ensures that the garden will be relevant to the children who will use it and it gives kids a sense of ownership in the project. This is a strategy that

children's garden organizers can utilize. This process can take the form of informal interviews with children or by holding a design charette. A design charette is a collective creative process akin to visual brainstorming that is used to develop solutions to a design problem.

The Ithaca Children's Garden held a number of community design charettes, including a youth design day in 2000. In 1998, ICG organizers solicited design ideas from all the 2nd graders in the Ithaca school system. The drawings the 2nd graders created were made into quilt blocks that were used in the development of the conceptual design. The children were prompted to create the drawing by listening to a story about a grandmother and grandfather who want to create a special garden for their grandchildren. After hearing the story, the children were asked what they'd like to see and do in this garden and drew pictures based on their ideas. (ICG website)

Alice Phipps Whiren (1995) studied the process of engaging children in the design of the Michigan 4-H Children's Garden. Children were asked what plants they would want to have in a garden, what characteristics of the plants were important to them (flowers, color, size, etc.) and what they would like to be able to do in the garden. Adult planners synthesized the information from the children and used it to guide the design of the Michigan 4-H Children's Garden. Whiren maintains that soliciting the ideas of young children in the design process helps planners design environments that are more engaging to the children who will use them.

Planning for programs

A strategy employed by each of the case study gardens is to pilot educational programs while the garden site is still in development. This allows the organizers to test

out and fine tune educational programs. It also ensures that the garden will be designed in a way that supports the educational programming, rather than building a garden first and trying to come up with educational programs that can be conducted in the space. Leigh MacDonald (2004), Education Coordinator for the Ithaca Children's Garden, believes that piloting educational programs is important because "We are designing a garden based on our education goals. We aren't building a garden first and then asking, 'What are we going to do here?'"

Although the garden itself is just now entering its first phase of construction, the Ithaca Children's Garden already operates a number of summer programs, after-school, and in-school programs that have reached thousands of children in the Ithaca area. Organizers of the Ithaca Children's Garden have found that piloting educational programs also provides them with much needed motivation and inspiration to keep up momentum through the long process of creating a new children's garden.

Piloting educational programs before the garden is built is also a way of generating excitement and support for the project within the community. The ICG education programs help spread the word about the new children's garden within the youth community. Harriet Becker (2004) explains that educational programming can also help build an audience while funds are being raised to construct the garden:

Development of educational programming goes hand and hand with the development of the garden...If we had just built this thing seven years ago, we wouldn't have had any community support because people would have said, "What is this?" But now so many people have been involved and touched by all the outreach stuff we do. I feel like so many people know about us as a result of our outreach and we are a part of the community now. That is going to help build the garden, really, all that community support. You can't rush because you can't get the money that quickly so this model works for us. Start small. Get kids involved.

The Story Garden and the Coastal Maine Botanical Garden also are conducting educational programs while their garden sites are under construction. Before the Camden Children's Garden was built, they tested out ideas for exhibit designs at the Philadelphia Flower Show.

Securing a site

Once a site has been selected and before the design process gets underway, organizers will have to negotiate for the purchase or lease of the garden site. In each of the case study examples, relationships with public officials and other key decision makers was at the heart of their success in securing a site. In the case of the Ithaca Children's Garden, the organizers were able to leverage the support of members of city council and city staff to secure a lease on the city-owned land. Meg Wahlig Cole (2004) suggests that in order to successfully obtain a lease on public land it helps to have support from within city government. Wahlig Cole (2004) recommends being forthright about how your organization plans to develop the site and being responsive to any concerns members of city council may have. She suggests:

Move as quickly as you can, give them everything they need. Be available to them. Always have as much information as you are able to have and if you don't have the answer or the information that they are looking for, tell them that but figure out how to get it. Listen to what their concerns are.

The Ithaca Children's Garden benefited from the credibility and positive relationships they had built with public officials. In July, 2001, the governor of New York signed a bill that allowed the City of Ithaca to lease land to the Ithaca Children's

Garden for 25 years. Once they had approval from the State the work of ironing out the terms of the lease began. Wahlig Cole (2004) recalls this process:

Every single thing was talked about at the lease negotiation. Those were very intense meetings...At these negotiating meetings we had the city attorneys and our attorneys, city staff, council people and the President of the Board and me. We went from “will flowers go to seed, yes or no? Yes, flowers are going to be left to go to seed so that we can teach about the lifecycle of plants. That has to be in the lease. Insurance policies, signage requirements, snow removal, mulch, everything! We wanted to put in the lease that if the city has mulch available they would give it to us for free. Some things like that don’t really go with the lease but we wanted to get a commitment from the city. They are not going to plow the parking lot in the winter all the time. If they get to it they will but they aren’t contractually obligated to. Mowing if they have time, too, but at least it’s in the lease. So at least we have that in writing. So there are some good things for us. Pieces of every single little component that you could possibly think of were negotiated. It was tough.

The Camden Children’s Garden is also built on public land, in their case the site is owned by the State of New Jersey. They were able to secure the site along the waterfront because there was already a major effort underway as part of an economic development plan to build up the area as a tourist destination. Coopers Ferry, the group developing the Camden waterfront, helped them secure the site (Coopers Ferry 1999). CCG Director, Mike Devlin, himself a long-time member of Camden city council, was able to leverage his experience and relationships within the community to generate support for the development of the Children’s Garden on the waterfront site.

Bob Boyd (2005) of the Coastal Maine Botanical Garden, recalled that they would not have been able to purchase the land had the community bank not been very supportive of their initiative and accepted their homes as collateral in order to come up with a loan for a down-payment on the site.

The Story Garden in Binghamton is being built in city-owned Ross Park, adjacent to the Discovery Center. Although the Discovery Center solicited the project to create a children's garden on the site, the land is not owned by the Discovery Center. The Discovery Center has a perpetual lease on its building from the city, but a new lease had to be negotiated to include the children's garden site. This became a tricky issue for the steering committee to work out because potential donors are wary of supporting a garden on a site that conceivably could be requisitioned for another purpose. Marianne Taylor (2005) recalls that:

There were some issues of ownership because the land was given to the City of Binghamton Parks Department to be public space...this is a big question when you are talking to people who give you money. OK, it's a garden, how do we know it's going to stay alive? How do we know someone isn't going to come in here and reclaim the land because its not owned by the entity that is building it? That was something that we needed to work through because you don't want to do anything on this space before we got this issue resolved.

The organizers were able to get the issue resolved quickly in part because they had the strong endorsement of the mayor of Binghamton. According to Taylor (2005), Mayor and most of City Council is strongly supportive of the Discovery Center and the plans for the Story Garden. Details of the perpetual lease that will include the site of the future Story Garden are currently being worked out by the city Council.

In each of these cases the relationships the organizing group had developed with members of the community helped them work out the details of securing the site.

CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS

The experiences of the Ithaca Children’s Garden, the Camden Children’s Garden, the Story Garden and the Coastal Maine Botanical Garden illustrate aspects of the challenging and exciting process of starting a garden from the ground up. In studying these cases and in researching nonprofit management strategy I have synthesized some recommendations for organizers of other fledgling children’s garden organizations.

The following recommendations are based on the themes explored in Chapter 5.

These themes are:

- *Generating Initial Support*
- *Establishing the Mission*
- *Incorporating and Gaining Tax-Exempt Status*
- *Fundraising*
- *Choosing and Designing the Site*

Recommendation 1. Generating Initial Support: Cast a wide net for supporters among all stakeholders, but think strategically about developing key relationships.

Generating support for the organization in its early days is fundamental to the future success of the garden. All the other elements—building the organization, incorporating and gaining tax-exempt status, fundraising and choosing a site—would be irrelevant if there were not support from stakeholders for the vision of organization. Stakeholders include community members, children and families who may visit the garden, volunteers, donors, and partners. The farther you can cast your net among stakeholders the broader your base of support in the community will be. The Ithaca Children’s Garden has been especially successful in creating a broad foundation of support within their community. They have involved the community in designing the garden by holding community design days. They host free events for the community like

their annual Scarecrow Jubilee harvest party, and participate in community events geared toward families like the Family Reading Partnership's Book Fest. Through their afterschool, in-school and summer educational programs they have already reached literally thousands of youth in the community. These children who know of the Ithaca Children's Garden through their educational programs will become the visitors and perhaps volunteers once the garden opens. John Semmler (2004), ICG board member articulated their strategy by saying, "Involvement leads to commitment." They have involved so many members of the community in the process of developing the garden that although the first phase of construction has just begun, the Ithaca Children's Garden is already part of the fabric of the Ithaca community.

In casting a wide net for broad community support it is important not to disregard planning strategically and cultivating the support of specific individuals who can help your garden achieve its mission. The Coastal Maine Botanical Garden has done this particularly effectively. From the very beginning, the visionary who organized the founding group targeted individuals who he thought would be most likely to share his vision—professional horticulturalists who were already active in the local gardening community. That founding group shared his vision and worked hard to establish the credentials of the organization. Members of that group knew that it would take more than horticultural expertise to build a high-caliber public garden. They waited until they had established credibility as an organization that was on the right track before approaching individuals with the wealth and professional experience to lead the garden's transition from a grass-roots initiative.

CMBG's board now has a deliberate strategy for recruiting new members to their board. They use "peer-to peer" networking to invite new members to join the board but are careful to maintain the diversity of the board (Heffernan 2005, Boyd 2005). The nominating committee maintains a matrix of the composition of the board in order to inform their selection of new members.

Developing key relationships is not limited to cultivating donors or board prospects. Several interviewees mentioned the importance of cultivating good relationships (Taylor 2005, Roth 2004) with members of the local government who can serve as advocates for the garden in the political arena. The support of public officials was instrumental in securing the garden site for the Ithaca Children's Garden, the Camden Children's Garden and the Story Garden.

Recommendation 2. Establishing the Mission: Clearly define your mission and use it!

A mission is fundamental to a nonprofit organization. Any book on nonprofit management will tell you that. Anyone involved with a nonprofit knows that the organization is supposed to have one. And yet organizations fail to *use* it.

A well-defined mission statement can be a powerful management tool. The mission can help set strategy by defining the scope of what the organization is trying to do. It can inspire and motivate people involved with the organization. It can help the organization improve and stay focused on "the fundamental task that it sets out to accomplish" (Hay 1990 p. 89) by providing a fixed point of reference against which to measure and define success (Oster 1995).

The American Association of Museums' guidelines for writing a mission emphasize that a mission statement is more than just flowery words:

A mission statement is a living document that reflects the health, relevance, and position of a museum. It should be referred to often, reviewed frequently, and revised when necessary.

Numerous studies of nonprofit boards have uncovered the single, most important factor correlated with a board's effectiveness is its common understanding of why the organization exists and where it is going (Oster 1995). That common understanding is articulated in the mission.

The ramifications of not clearly establishing a mission are clear: energy is lost, time is wasted, resources are misapplied, and people become frustrated, burnt-out and disenchanted because of the lack of focus. You may have many earnest, talented and hardworking people involved with an organization, who all want it to succeed, but without clearly defining the scope of what the organization is trying to do, how can they know how to help bring the organization any closer to realizing its purpose? How do they measure success?

The Ithaca Children's Garden suffered some of these ramifications when their board was unable to come to consensus on a mission statement. For a long time ICG didn't have a working mission. Even at the time of my interviews (November 2004), many of the people closest to the organization didn't know whether they even had a mission statement. Without a clearly defined mission, the organization drifted. The volunteers, board and staff of the Ithaca Children's Garden are dedicated, creative and full of good ideas (they actually have a "Good Idea File" to capture all of the random

good ideas that are generated) but without a mission it was hard to productively channel that energy and creativity.

An organization that clearly defines its mission and actively refers back to it will be better poised to navigate the challenges of building a new children's garden.

Recommendation 3. Incorporating and Gaining Tax Exempt Status: Incorporate under the umbrella of an existing 501(c)(3) organization while your group builds internal capacity

The process of applying for tax-exempt status as a 501(c)(3) charitable organization is lengthy and complicated. For a fledgling organization trying to build capacity, dealing with the paperwork and bookkeeping required by the Internal Revenue Service to apply for and maintain tax-exemption may be a bit daunting. An alternative is to incorporate immediately as a nonprofit organization but partner with an existing 501(c)(3) organization to benefit from their tax-exempt status while you focus on developing the organization's capacity to carry out its mission.

Incorporating as a nonprofit involves a fee of about \$30 and a much less Byzantine filing process with your state's corporations division. The benefit of incorporating is that it protects the directors of the organization from being personally liable for debts and other liabilities incurred by the organization. Incorporating as a nonprofit does not, however, give your corporation relief from paying income tax. Only those nonprofit corporations formed for religious, charitable, scientific, educational or literary purposes of benefit to the public may claim 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status (Mancuso 2002). Gaining tax-exempt status excuses qualified organizations from paying

state and federal income tax on activities directly related to their charitable purposes and allows donors to make tax-deductible donations to the organization. It is also beneficial in grant-seeking because many public and private foundations are restricted by their own by-laws to give grants only to 501(c)(3) organizations (Mancuso 2002).

To apply for tax-exempt status under Internal Revenue Code 501(c)(3), you must write corporate bylaws, (the rules governing the internal operations of the organization), elect a board of directors and hold an initial meeting of the board, and fill out a series of Internal Revenue Service forms. Mancuso (2002) cautions that applying for 501(c)(3) status shouldn't be put off for too long, however, because the process itself imposes discipline and structure. Preparing corporate articles, bylaws and tax exemption applications requires organizers to define the non-profit purposes of the group, describe the fundraising program, project expected sources of support, determine the membership structure, and specify the qualifications and procedures for selecting a board of directors (IRS Publication 557).

The Ithaca Children's Garden is organized as a "program in partnership" with the Cornell Cooperative Extension (Roth 2004). They developed under the umbrella of Cooperative Extension until they were ready and able to apply for 501(c)(3) status. They were able to take advantage of CCE's tax-exempt status as well as many other benefits such as office space, professional bookkeeping and administrative services and telephones and computers which they technically rent from CCE (Roth 2004). In addition to the tangible benefits of organizing under the wing of an umbrella organization, there are the intangible benefits such as the guidance and mentoring that an incubator or umbrella organization can provide to founders of a new grassroots initiative.

It is not impossible for a new organization to incorporate and apply for 501(c)(3) status from the start (the organizers of the Coastal Maine Botanical Garden did it) but partnering with another organization is an alternative that may be attractive to founders of new children's gardens.

Recommendation 4. Fundraising: Fundraising is one of the most critical responsibilities of each member of the board

In all nonprofit organizations the board should lead fundraising efforts, even if there is a development person on staff. Management expert Peter Drucker (1990, p.56-57) maintains:

Your first constituency in fund development is your own board. One of the things we have learned about managing non-profit institutions is that the old-type board, the board that simply was in sympathy with the institution, is no longer enough. You need a board that takes an active lead in raising money, whose members give both of themselves and by being fund-raisers, fund *developers*.

What this means is both that the board should set the strategy for fundraising, and that board members set personal examples in giving. This does not mean, however, that each board members should be required give a large gift. Many valuable board members don't have the financial means to give large gifts. Regardless of the size of the donation, every member of the board should be expected to give at some level to the organization. Financial support of the organization by members of the board sends a positive signal to other would-be donors. Sharon Oster (1995, p. 79) explains:

The nonprofit board often has large donors serve directly on the board. The presence of large donors on the board of an organization provides a

direct way for them to monitor how well their funds are being spent. Thus, a donor is put on a board not as a benefit of giving, but as insurance for giving. It is no surprise, therefore, that trustees are active in the fundraising function. By their presence, such donor-trustees implicitly promise other potential donors that their funds will not be wasted.

Each board member should be actively involved with generating financial support for the organization. This often involves serving as advocates of the garden to individuals who have the capacity to give a large gift. Maureen Heffernan and Bob Boyd of the Coastal Maine Botanical Garden both indicated that “peer-to-peer” solicitation was the most effective in generating large gifts for their organization. This makes sense because people are more inclined to give to an organization with which they have a personal connection (Boyd 2005). The board of the Coastal Maine Botanical Garden has been very active in their roles as fundraisers.

Making a personal appeal can be a daunting task for inexperienced board members. The potential awkwardness of sitting in front of someone and asking them for money is understandable. Many members of the board of the Ithaca Children’s Garden didn’t have any experience doing this type of fundraising before this spring. Experienced development professionals on their fundraising committee organized a training meeting and provided a packet of materials about the garden that the board members could use to illustrate the garden’s vision. This training was designed to help members of the board feel more comfortable in their roles as fundraisers. It is unclear yet how successful members of the board have been in their individual solicitation efforts but it is highly commendable that they are embracing this very important aspect of board membership.

Recommendation 5. Choosing and Designing a Site: Before the garden is built, pilot educational programs and let your educational goals inform site design

A children's garden should be designed to support specific educational goals. Since it is the nature of grass-roots organizing to start small, it is unlikely that a grass-roots effort to create a new children's garden will be able to generate all the funds to build the garden immediately. What could be seen as a constraint is, in this case, a great opportunity. While funds are being raised to construct and maintain the garden, organizers can pilot programs in the community. By developing education programs before the garden is built, organizers have an opportunity to fine tune their educational objectives and design a site that is compatible with those objectives. An additional benefit of this strategy is that the educational programs will raise awareness in the community about the vision of the garden which may lead to increased financial support.

Each of the case study gardens developed educational programs before their site was designed. The Camden Children's Garden even tests out their exhibit ideas by modeling them at the Philadelphia Flower Show.

One word of caution, however, about piloting educational programs-- be sure that the programs you are developing are actually serving to refine ideas about educational programming in the future garden. If these educational programs start to "take on a life of their own" they can divert staff resources from the main task at hand: building a children's garden.

Recommendations for future study

My research focuses on only a small part of the start-up picture. The themes I have identified in this paper are elemental aspects of building an organization but do not comprise the whole. The recommendations above will help organizers navigate some of the challenges of starting a children's garden through grass-roots organizing but there are many other aspects that were outside the scope of this paper.

There is a lot of academic research about building organizations and developing the capacity of nonprofits but the practical utility of that research may be limited since much of it is theoretical. There are, however, good sources of practical guidance for organizers of new children's gardens. The best of these resources come from Nolo, an organization devoted to "putting the law into plain English." The Garden Conservancy's handbooks on "Taking A Garden Public" also has lots of relevant practical guidance. These and other references can be found in the appendix.

The process of starting a children's garden may be long and fraught with challenges but the rewards of creating a space where generations of children can connect with nature in a way that engages their curiosity, stimulates playful learning and fosters a sense of wonder and awe surely makes it worth it!

References

4-H Children's Garden Website 4-H Children's Garden: Frequently Asked Questions.

Alexander, E. P. (1999). Anna Billings Gallup Popularizes the First Children's Museum. Bridges to Understanding Children's Museums. N. F. Gibans. Cleveland, Ohio, Mandel Center for Nonprofit Organizations, Case Western Reserve University: 191-200.

Association of Children's Museums Website Facts: All About ACM: Association of Children's Museums.

Camden Children's Garden Website Camden Children's Garden: Our Mission.

Chawla, L. (1988) Children's Concern for the Natural Environment, *Children's Environments*, (5)3

Cooper's Ferry Development Association (1999). Growing the Camden Children's Garden, VidComm.

Crowder, L. E. (1997). Islands of Enchantment and Enlightenment: Designing Children's Gardens as Developmentally Appropriate Playspaces and Outdoor Learning Environments. Landscape Architecture. Athens, Georgia State University.

Drucker, P. F. (1990) Managing the Non-Profit Organization. New York, HarperCollins.

Eriksen, A. (1985). Playground Design: Outdoor Environments for Learning and Development. New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold Company.

Faber Taylor, Kuo, et al. (2001). "Coping with ADD: The surprising Connection to Green Play Settings." Environment and Behavior **33**(1): 54-77.

Faber Taylor, Kuo, et al. (2002). "Views of Nature and Self-Discipline: Evidence from Inner City Children." Journal of Environmental Psychology **22**: 49-63.

Freeman, C. "Planning and Play: Creating Greener Environments." Children's Environments **12**(3): 381-388.

Friedberg, M. P. (1970). Play and interplay. New York, The Macmillan Company.

Frost, J., Wortham, S & Reifel, S. (2005). Neuroscience, Play Deprivation, and Pay-for-Play. Play and Child Development. New Jersey, Pearson: 57-84.

Frost, J., Wortham, S & Reifel, S. (2005). Theory as Lenses on Children's Play. Play and Child Development. New Jersey, Pearson: 27-55.

- Frost, J. L. (1992). Play and Playscapes. Albany, Delmar Publishers.
- Gibans, N. F. (1999). Bridges to Understanding Children's Museums. Cleveland, Ohio, Mandel Center for Nonprofit Organizations, Case Western Reserve University.
- Gibson, J. J. (1979). The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception. Boston, Houghton-Mifflin.
- Gurian, E. H. (1997). The Changing Paradigm. Collective Vision: Starting and Sustaining a Children's Museum. M. Maher. Washington, DC, Association of Children's Museums: 20-21.
- Hay, R. D. (1990). Strategic Management in Non-Profit Organizations: An Administrator's Handbook. New York, Quorum Books.
- Heft, H. (1988). "Affordances of Children's Environments: A Functional Approach to Environmental Description." Children's Environments Quarterly 5(3): 29-37.
- Ithaca Children's Garden (1998). Progress Report for the Period of October 1, 1997-September 30, 1998.
- Ithaca Children's Garden Website Ithaca Children's Garden-About Us, Mission, Board, Staff.
- Kaplan, R. and S. Kaplan (1983). Cognition and environment: Functioning in an uncertain world. Ann Arbor, MI, Ulrich's.
- Kaplan, R. and S. Kaplan (1989). The experience of nature: A psychological perspective. New York, Cambridge University Press.
- Kirkby, M. (1989). "Nature As Refuge in Children's Environments." Children's Environments Quarterly 6(1): 7-12.
- Lewin-Benham, A. (1997). Children's Museums: A Structure for Family Learning. Collective Vision: Starting and Sustaining a Children's Museum. M. Maher. Washington, DC, Association of Children's Museums: 8-13.
- Maher, M. (2001). Capturing the Vision: A Companion Volume to Collective Vision: Starting & Sustaining A Children's Museum. Washington, DC, Association of Children's Museums.
- Mancuso, A. (2002). How to Form a Nonprofit Corporation. Berkeley, CA, Nolo Fifth Edition. Editor, Lisa Guerin
- Moore, R. C. (1996). Urban Vegetation and Child Development: What Can Be Done to Restore The Natural Habitat of Urban Childhood? People-Plant Interactions

in Urban Areas: A Research and Education Symposium, College Station, Texas A&M Press.

Oster, S. (1995) The Mission of the Nonprofit Organization. Strategic Management for Nonprofit Organizations. New York, Oxford University Press.

Website AHS-Youth Gardening Home.

Wells, N. M. (2000). "At Home with Nature: Effects of "Greenness" on Children's Cognitive Functioning." Environment and Behavior **32**(6): 775-795.

Whiren, A.P. (1995). "Planning a Garden from a Child's Perspective" Children's Environments **12**(2): 250-255.

White, R. & V. Stoecklin (1998). "Children's Outdoor Play & Learning Environments: Returning to Nature." Accessed April 14, 2005 from www.whitehutchinson.com/children/articles/outdoor.shtml

Ithaca Children's Garden. Progress Report for the Period of October 1, 1997- September 30, 1998