

Title: Nature playground at Reed Park, Kaikohe

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Proposal: Establish a new nature playground in Reed Park to service families in a deprived area.

Reed Park is a beautiful reserve in central Kaikohe, filled with mature trees – including large Puriri and Oak trees. It is under-utilised, often used as a thoroughfare. It has a perception of not being safe, and as a result is often empty. With investment from Council it could be a space for families to reclaim, and for children to interact and engage with nature. A nature playground would be an ideal project to achieve this.

Kaikohe has a very young population, with 1/3 of residents 14 years and under (Statistics New Zealand). The playground, skatepark and Basketball court at Memorial Park are well used in Kaikohe – although only the playground is designed for younger children. These facilities are located on the south side of the main highway, in a commercial and light industrial area. For children to access this park from the North side, multiple roads need to be crossed. Further, with McDonalds and the Warehouse directly across the road and in sight of the playground there are implications for health and wellbeing. Research shows ease of access to fast food, increases uptake and in poor communities often fast food outlets face little to no competition from healthier options. This is true in Kaikohe. (See for example, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2661452/>)

There is a need for further investment in children in Kaikohe. This is especially true, given the high level of deprivation and the more limited resources many children in Kaikohe have compared to children from more affluent areas in the Far North.

Further, some visionary design and planning could have good outcomes for local community wellbeing, as well as encouraging visitors to the areas. These playgrounds are known as “destination playgrounds”. There are opportunities to link up a destination playground with the cycleway, stimulating our local economy.

A nature playground would be in keeping with the natural beauty of Reed Park, and enhance the features (trees for climbing, autumn leaves etc) that are already present.

Nature playgrounds can include elements such as mounds of earth, boulders, trees and plants, logs and log structures, tree stumps, dirt/mud/sand, natural water features, tree houses, large musical instruments, ropes and bridges.

Dr David Suzuki has stated that “Natural playgrounds should be the standard for all our playgrounds” They truly connect children with nature through play and are a sort of classroom for the next generation of environmental stewards” Research has found that children who play on playgrounds that incorporate natural elements are more active than those who play on traditional playgrounds. See for example <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2012/10/121011135036.htm>

Nature playgrounds offer many different ways for children to engage with them, whereas traditional playgrounds are designed to be used in specific ways. Research shows that children participate in more creative and imaginative play when playing on nature

playgrounds. The international move towards natural elements in playgrounds recognises both the importance of interaction with nature for children and adults alike, as well as the move towards heuristic materials in childcare and school settings.

Below are some examples of nature playgrounds around the world.



<https://www.natureplaywa.org.au/programs/nature-playgrounds/getting-started>



Kingsway College Playground





Morialta Playground, Australia



Tumbling Bay Playground, London



Waldhochseilgarten in Volkspark Jungfernheide, Germany