

ENGAGING CHILDREN IN PUBLIC SPACE DESIGN: TIPS FOR DESIGNERS

To meaningfully engage children in public space design takes planning, time, and budget, as well as a commitment to report design outcomes back to the participating children.

A simple 'how to' co-design toolkit is illusive. Public spaces vary greatly, and so do community aspirations and the experiences of children in different places. These 'tips for designers' highlight general principles and effective strategies identified through co-design case studies with children*.

*In each case study, on and off-site workshops enabled children to experience and explore the physical landscapes, learn about their history and current use, and the Council/Panuku brief for their transformation. A range of age-appropriate elicitation methods assisted the children in contributing their ideas in ways they felt comfortable. Their ideas were collated in reports for Auckland Council, Panuku and the contracted design teams/landscape architects involved in the public space transformations. Designers reported back to the children on the value of their input and how (or not) their ideas were being incorporated into the designs of the three public space projects.

For further information and to view a video resource on the Eastern Viaduct and Puhinui Stream co-design processes, please go to Co-design with Children on the Kids in the City website: <https://kidsinthecity.ac.nz/codesign>. Full research reports are also available on the website.



Why it is important to engage children in co-designing public space?

- Children are citizens who belong to, identify with, and participate in communities.
- City and neighbourhood design impacts on children's wellbeing; and children's wellbeing an indicator of the social sustainability of cities – a 'child-friendly' city is good for all.
- Developing 'civic-mindedness' through meaningful contribution at a young age gives children a sense of agency and ownership over the future of the places in which they live.
- Children have the right to be consulted on matters which concern them (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child ratified by Aotearoa/New Zealand in 1993).
- Children use public space and are key stakeholders.

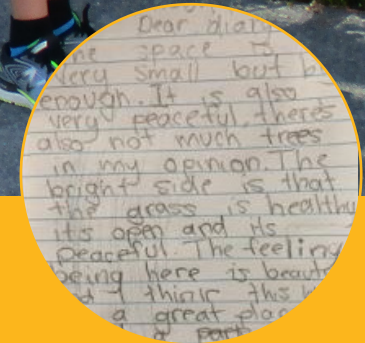


What can be gained from engaging children in urban design?

- Children often have novel perceptions and ideas to contribute to urban design, thereby expanding notions of what is possible; they are our leaders of the future
- Children can help designers re-see the world through children's eyes.
- Children learn through their participation and become more informed citizens.

When can children be engaged in the public space design process?

- Opportunities to engage children occur at various stages of the design process – from formulating the brief, through preliminary and developed design phases, to construction.
- In practice, most co-design with children happens within concept design phases.
- Extending children's involvement across the design/ construction continuum enriches the experience and the learning potential.



What do you imagine this place could be like?

What do you think Horotiu would like to see in the Eastern viaduct area?

What would make you want to come here with your friends or family or by yourself?



Forts
Field (Soccer, basketball)
Lagoon
Aquarium
Underwater train
mini golf
go cart track Rental
Trampoline
drive in
Ice rink
Wave machine
Forest
Maze
mini skate Park
market
Glass boats
Pop Containers
disabled work Short Centre
underneath water walk
Swimming Pool



Getting started:

Be clear about:

- The objectives in engaging with children on the design of a specific public space transformation.
- Who to engage with: a specific age cohort, a wide range of ages, mana whenua and/or specific ethnic groups?
- How to recruit children: a small reference group, via relevant school or community organisations.
- Your timeline and budget – is it adequate to meaningfully engage children?
- Identify effective and 'child-friendly' ways to engage within timeline and budget constraints.
- The willingness of the design team to interpret and integrate children's views into actual design outcomes

Effective engagement:

Children need:

- To know what is being asked of them in a co-design process (eg parameters).
- Time to explore and experience the site and adjacent areas.
- An opportunity to learn about the site's history, ecology and mana whenua narratives.
- An understanding of what is possible in terms of transforming spaces into places (through site visits, stories and images).
- A workshop venue they feel comfortable in.
- Skilled, friendly adult facilitators who are genuinely interested in their views.
- Adequate time frames and processes to accumulate the experiences and knowledge of a site; to formulate and express their ideas; and for their input to have an influence on the design. Meaningful engagement can be time-consuming!
- Workshops should be enjoyable and meaningful for the children; ice-breaker games, refreshments, and a variety of activities will keep interest and energy levels high

For further information please go to: <https://kidsinthecity.ac.nz/codesign>



Methods to elicit children's ideas

- A range of age-appropriate workshop methods are desirable to ensure all children have opportunities to contribute their ideas in ways that feel comfortable to them.
- Site visits and aerial maps help orient children to the site.
- Taking photographs and captioning them can prompt children to consider aspects of the site they like/don't like and changes they would like to see happen.
- Different children respond to different methods. Some are more comfortable talking about their ideas, others prefer to write them down, and others like to draw or create models.
- Use of other creative and multi-disciplinary approaches.
- Recording site visits through photographs, video, walk-along interviews and conversation transcripts helps capture their spontaneous responses.
- Children are digital natives - incorporating elements of gamification could work well.



The importance of relationships and feedback:

- Relationship building is of primary importance – with the participating children (and their parents), schools (if involved), project partners, and mana whenua.
- Feedback from designers/council indicates to children and young people that their views have been listened to and taken seriously.
- Feedback on how children's ideas have/have not been incorporated into the design solution for the project helps them understand that a project is developed from a wide range of views and see how everyone's contribution is important.
- Public space design and development is complex, and delays are common. Children understand if told that they are contributing their ideas to benefit their wider community and future generations.
- Successful engagement processes with children encourages their increased civic participation as young people and adults in the future

These 'tips for designers' are lessons learned through undertaking three case studies of co-designing public space with children over the past five years, in collaboration with Auckland Council and Panuku Development Auckland: the Freyberg Square Refurbishment, Eastern Viaduct Renewal (both Auckland CBD) and the Puhinui Stream Regeneration (South Auckland). We drew on Built for Kids (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2005, 2009) to ensure we worked within established child-friendly principles.

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