A New Playground Coming to CDL!

The Child Development Lab (CDL) is soon to have a new playground! The current CDL playground is 25 years old and has “far outlived its life span,” Dr. Brent McBride explains. The current playground lacks the equipment to influence important developmental skills. Specifically, the outdated playground negatively impacts motor development and upper body strength, lacks appropriate space, and does not have enough variation for a child’s locomotive skills. The new, modular playground will consist of three different main structures with other smaller ones surrounding it, McBride shares. The design is based on available space and the age range of the children who will use it. Planning for the playground started last September with the hopes that it can be finished for next school year. The demolition of the old playground will begin over the summer.

Sometimes it just takes the right people to get a project started and that certainly is what happened for the CDL playground. Kim Kidwell, Dean of the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences, recognized the need to provide the CDL children, teachers, faculty, and students with an updated playground to meet their needs. She granted the initial funding to plan for the new playground. A gift from ACES Alumna Nannette Armstrong (BS, ’64) significantly expanded on the original plan. Because Nannette studied home economics, she spent a great deal of time working in the CDL. During a recent visit to campus, she saw the current playground and wanted it to improve for the children. A thoughtful donor and commitment from the College of ACES are making this project possible and the excitement for the updated playground is growing.

Appreciation: Dr. Susan Silverberg Koerner

In August of 2013, Dr. Susan Koerner began her role as Department Head of HDFS. During her 6-year term, she was dedicated to enhancing the department by welcoming new faculty members, establishing helpful resources and procedures, and building lasting connections with students. Dr. Koerner truly enjoyed adding new faculty members to the HDFS department including Dr. Sharde’ Smith, Dr. Kelly Tu, Emily Hurth, and Barbara Anderson, because of their rich scholarly expertise and unwavering commitment to students. During her time as department head, many faculty, staff, and graduate students were nominated for awards for their outstanding work in and out of the department. Acknowledging the contributions of all members of the HDFS department has been an important objective for Dr. Koerner over the years. “The level of advocacy she displayed for faculty, staff, graduate students, and undergraduate students at the college, university, and national level is particularly notable,” says TeKisha Rice, a graduate student in HDFS. Dr. Koerner appreciates the passion and commitment that HDFS students have for leaving a lasting positive impact on the lives of children and families. Dr. Jennifer Hardesty, an HDFS faculty member, says that Dr. Sue Koerner’s favorite part about being HDFS department head was “creating opportunities, mentoring, and building a positive culture for students.” Although she is no longer the department head, Dr. Susan Koerner continues to be an essential part of HDFS as an instructor (she recently developed a new graduate seminar on Aging, Families, and Health) a researcher, and a mentor to students and faculty. “One-on-one mentoring is an extremely rewarding part of my job,” says Dr. Koerner as she describes her time working closely with HDFS students and faculty. She is confident that the HDFS department will continue to thrive as it brings on new and bright students, faculty, and staff. “I am excited to see the direction Dr. Koerner’s work will take in the coming years because she has a lot to offer our shifting and growing department,” says Dr. Jennifer Hardesty. We are all thankful for all that Dr. Koerner has done for this department over the years, and we look forward to seeing what she does next.
Girls on the Run

With her experience and passion for running and working with kids, Dayle Mueller, senior in HDFS, knew that Girls on the Run was “the perfect fit” for her. Girls on the Run is an organization that helps inspire and motivate young girls. Dayle was a head coach for the Stephens Family YMCA team and was able to build strong relationships with the other coaches, her supervisor, and the girls on her team. As part of her internship she ran social media for the group. “I really wanted to display positivity and help the community get a better sense as to all that this program does for the lives of young girls,” says Dayle. It took time for Dayle to trust herself and become confident in her abilities; she learned that her efforts really did matter. One of Dayle’s most memorable experiences as an intern was the Fall 5K run, which she talks about in her article, Joy Changes the Atmosphere. She describes how incredible it was to see everyone having such a good time, despite the bad weather. Dayle writes, “It didn’t matter what the weather looked like on the outside, the hearts of all our participants and volunteers outshined the gloomy day.”

From her time at Girls on the Run, Dayle grew in self-confidence, communicating, and planning with others. Dayle continues to promote this wonderful organization and plans to help with the next 5K run! Dr. Aaron Ebata, the instructor supervising the internship experience said “Dayle did what we hope all of our interns can experience – she took what she already knew about children and her own strengths, took on new challenges, and came out with a new sense of confidence and competence.” We are proud of Dayle and all that she has achieved during her internship, and we wish her all the best with her future!

HDFS and Engineering Team Up

Dr. Nancy McElwain, professor in HDFS, is leading a new and innovative research project. Her research has focused on children’s development, physiological reactions, and family relationships. For this new project, Dr. McElwain is collaborating with electrical and computer engineers as well as several faculty members from other departments. The team hopes to develop what they call “smart shirts.” These wearable devices can be used to collect physiological data in younger children, beginning as early as their first year of life. The shirts will include ECG monitors to collect heart rate data, as well motion sensors and an audio recording device. Previous studies like the Infant Development Project have also used recording devices such as the Language Environment Analysis (LENA). This is a small and easily wearable tool used by researchers to collect audio recordings in the home, which is typically used for studies related to a child’s language and speech development, and interactions in the home. Data are typically collected through observations conducted in a laboratory setting, which is useful because the variables can be controlled. However, with devices like LENA, researchers are unable to capture data from a child’s everyday life and their experiences outside of the lab. This device is meant to make it easier to conduct studies in a child’s natural environment without the presence of researchers. Going beyond collecting physiological and biological data, the smart shirts will also help researchers study patterns of behavior and development in children. We are excited to see this project develop and wish all of its collaborators and participants the best of luck.

Private support of the Department of Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS) ensures that we can continue to address contemporary social issues that affect children, youth, adults, and families through high quality research, teaching, and outreach programs. To learn more about the department’s activities, attributes, and accomplishments, and how to support them, visit www.hdfs.illinois.edu.