

BEYOND THE WALLS:

Replicating an Outdoor-Based Approach to Licensed School Age Child Care in Vancouver

May 2024



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Vancouver Tackles Licensed School Age Child Care Shortage

In 2018, facing growing demands for quality licensed school age child care and limited space availability within public schools, the City of Vancouver collaborated with the Vancouver School Board, Vancouver Coastal Health - Community Care Facilities Licensing, the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, the YMCA, and other non-profit partners to explore innovative solutions.

This resulted in the launch of an **Outdoor-Based School Age Pilot Project**, a first-of-its-kind initiative in Vancouver aimed at expanding licensed child care options while providing school age children with the well-documented benefits of outdoor-based learning.

Initially envisioned as a multi-site project, the implementation of the Pilot for Vancouver's first licensed outdoor-based school age child care faced various challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the project focused on a single location and in May of 2021, Vancouver's first licensed outdoor-based school age child care program- the Malkin Park YMCA Outdoor Adventures - was launched at Kerrisdale Elementary Annex.

Now in its third year, the program has successfully transitioned beyond the pilot phase and offers valuable lessons for others interested in replicating this model of licensed school aged child care. By building on the YMCA's experiences, we can pave the way to bring the benefits of outdoor-based learning to school age children across the city, while also creating more diverse child care options for families.

Report Overview

Expanding on the research conducted during the initial phase of the Outdoor-Based School Age Child Care Pilot, this report dives deeper into the YMCA's program, exploring key lessons learned and offering practical recommendations. It serves as a valuable resource for child care providers, policy makers, and public service partners, particularly the Vancouver School Board and Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, who may be seeking to replicate this innovative approach to licensed school age child care.

The Project's Research Team was comprised of leading experts in the field of early learning, child care and outdoor play including Sandra Menzer, Rika Lange, Dr. Marianna Brussoni and the Human Early Learning Partnership. See [Appendix 3](#) for Project Team Details.

Additionally, an Advisory Committee with a broad range of expertise provided valuable guidance. Members included: Marisol Petersen & Annie Burkes (City of Vancouver), Pam Preston & Crystal Janes (Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre) and Cathy Poole (YMCA of B.C.)



This report includes:

- **Research Findings:** Links to data and key insights from the pilot's initial phase.
- **Program Spotlight:** Details the key features of the Malkin Park YMCA Outdoor Adventures program.
- **Lessons Learned:** Offers valuable best practices and practical takeaways.
- **Recommendations for Success:** Provides guidance for exploring licensed outdoor-based school age programs.
- **Planning Tool:** Lays out key considerations for those interested in developing licensed outdoor-based school age care.

2.0 BACKGROUND

Growing Demand, Limited Space: The Catalyst for a Licensed Outdoor-Based School Age Child Care Pilot.

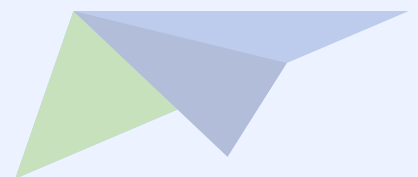
With increasing demand for quality school-age child care spaces, Vancouver has been facing a challenge – a large shortfall of licensed spaces and a lack of suitable indoor spaces within the public schools. This prompted the City to take a pivotal leadership role in exploring alternative models for quality school age child care. This initiative brought together key partners including the Vancouver School Board, Vancouver Coastal Health - Community Care Facilities Licensing, the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, the YMCA, Westcoast Child Care Resources, and other non-profits where the idea of further exploring outdoor-based programs emerged.

The concept of outdoor-based child care programs is well aligned with the City of Vancouver's priorities for expanding programs to serve the needs of school age children, and with the goals of the [Healthy City Strategy](#). Research has also shown the positive impact of outdoor programs on children's overall growth and development. Moreover, a focus on outdoor learning aligns seamlessly with the [BC's Early Learning Framework](#), which promotes the importance of connecting to the land.



The City's commitment extended beyond the initial convening phase, actively supporting the Pilot by:

- **Funding program start-up:** including the capital funding required for the Malkin Park YMCA Outdoor Adventure program to be licensed.
- **Documenting learnings:** commissioned a Process Evaluation to document the Project's original path and funded a Literature Review to gather relevant research on outdoor programs. Additionally, key informant interviews were conducted to gain diverse perspectives on outdoor-based programs.
- **Knowledge sharing:** funded the development of this report: "Beyond the Walls: Replicating an Outdoor-based Approach to Licensed School Age Child Care in Vancouver."



3.0 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

This report expands upon the initial research phase of the project, which documented the process and lessons learned from establishing a outdoor-based licensed school-age child care program. It provides a deeper exploration of the YMCA's program, aiming to identify key findings, offer practical recommendations, and provide planning suggestions for the development of outdoor-based school-age child care programs. To accomplish this objective, a comprehensive strategy for data collection and analysis was implemented.

This included:

- **Stakeholder Interviews:** In-depth discussions to provide insights into the YMCA's program development and daily operations: (Kerrisdale Annex School Principal and School Engineer; Outdoor School Age Child Care Program Staff Team including the Supervisor + two staff members; YMCA BC: Vice President – Children and Youth Services; YMCA Program Manager; Two Past Program Supervisors; Three current parents, who have been using the program for more than 1 year)
- **Document Review:** Background documents, provided by the YMCA such as curriculum plans, specific operating policies and procedures (e.g.: risk assessment tool, promotional material, equipment lists) offered a deeper understanding of the program's implementation and delivery. Additionally, two key reports from the **Outdoor Pilot Project's** research phase were reviewed:
 - Process Evaluation Report
 - [Literature Review & Key Informant Interview Findings](#)
- **Site Visit:** A visit to the program site allowed for firsthand observations of the outdoor and indoor space use, equipment, and supplies used by the children.

By using this combination of data collection methods, a comprehensive understanding of the YMCA's program was gained, and consequently, key elements were identified that can inform the development of similar programs by others.



4.0 LESSONS LEARNED

The Malkin Park YMCA Outdoor Adventures licensed school-age child care program was a pioneering initiative in Vancouver. Designed to address the growing demand for school age child care while offering the benefits of outdoor learning, the program has flourished into a successful, ongoing initiative serving children from Kerrisdale Elementary and Kerrisdale Annex schools. Over the past three years, many children have benefited from this unique program, and valuable lessons have been gleaned to inform best practices and lay the groundwork for the creation of more quality licensed outdoor-based school age child care programs.

Key Learnings

- 1. Replicability:** The success of the YMCA's program demonstrates the potential for outdoor-based approaches to licensed child care for school aged children and provides a solid foundation for replication. However, it's crucial that outdoor programs are not simply viewed as a quick fix to the child care space shortages in Vancouver. Rather, with careful planning and intentionality, these programs can become high-quality licensed child care options that enrich children's lives through outdoor learning experiences.
- 2. The Kerrisdale Annex & Malkin Park Forest location,** with its school playground, covered area, open field, natural forest in the adjacent park, and access to indoor spaces. This site is an ideal setting for this type of program. An overview of the program's key characteristics is provided in [Appendix 1](#), while [Appendix 2](#) showcases the program through a site plan and photos.
- 3. The Power of Outdoor-based Learning:** Research has increasingly demonstrated that high-quality outdoor-based programs create some of the best conditions for children's learning and development. In nature, children move freely, follow their interests, take risks, and test limits. Studies highlight the positive impacts, including:
 - Fostering creativity and problem-solving skills
 - Improved health
 - Enhanced social skills
 - Better concentration
 - Increased physical activity

[Click here for the Pilot Project's Literature Review and Key Informant Interview Summary.](#)



4. **Essential Considerations for Quality Outdoor-based Programs:** The information gathered through the project has yielded valuable insights, summarized below, and elaborated upon in [Section 5](#) of the report.
- **Suitable Outdoor Environment:** Easy access to a diverse natural landscape, ample and secure outdoor storage, a covered area, access to washrooms, a food preparation space, and an indoor space for inclement weather or safety concerns is needed.
 - **Program Design:** Based almost entirely outdoors, (with very limited use of indoor spaces) these programs require a curriculum specifically designed to utilize the natural environment as the primary learning space. This approach differs significantly from traditional indoor-oriented school age programs that simply incorporate more outdoor time.
 - **Licensing Requirements:** Programs must meet a set of specific standards, including dedicated indoor space during the program's specific operating hours.
 - **Site Selection:** Not all locations with outdoor environments are suitable. Careful consideration is required.
 - **Family Communication:** As a relatively new concept, clear communication with families regarding an outdoor-based program's philosophy, curriculum, approach, and expectations is essential.
 - **Educator Qualifications:** An outdoor-based program's success hinges on the experience, passion, and qualifications of the Educators who work with the children.



5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

This section dives into the essential program components and considerations for launching a successful outdoor-based, licensed school age child care program. With a specific focus on replicability across Vancouver, it outlines the key elements necessary to bring this innovative approach to new locations throughout the city.

5.1 Essential (Physical) Elements for Quality Outdoor-based Programs

A quality licensed outdoor-based school age care program must have easy access to a **diverse landscape that offers a variety of play and exploration opportunities**, such as a playground, park, natural elements (e.g.: trees, boulders, hills), and a large, permanent covered area for shelter, quiet space, and creative play.

Additional Considerations:

- **Easily accessible washrooms:** Conveniently located washrooms are required for hygiene and comfort.
- **Food preparation space:** A kitchen or dedicated food preparation space, even if located off-site, is essential for preparing healthy snacks and ensuring proper food handling. This space must be operationally viable, suitable for maintaining food safety standards and if located off-site, time considerations for food preparation and delivery to the program site must be factored in.
- **Access to an indoor space:** While used very rarely, a flexible indoor space allows for activities, rest time, or refuge during extreme weather. (e.g.: extreme heat, cold, wildfire smoke). This space should ideally be near the outdoor program area for easy access.
- **Good exterior lighting:** Provides a sense of safety, especially in darker months (permanent lighting in covered areas, near climbing structures, building perimeter, outdoor storage; mobile lighting for activity areas).
- **Safe arrival space and minimal overlap with other users:** Each program needs a designated gathering area separate from other users for program start/ welcome procedures; and a space that isn't heavily used by the school community or neighbourhood to minimize disruptions and ensure a safe predictable environment for the children.
 - Each site should be fully assessed to ensure that a high standard of care for the children can be always met. (e.g.: safe, calm, diverse play spaces, access to nature)
- **Ample, secure external storage:** Locked, easily accessible storage (e.g.: shipping container) with interior lighting, sized appropriately for the program to secure belongings, program equipment and supplies, emergency kits, and children's information.
- **Prioritizing children's comfort and minimizing reliance on indoor space:** a warming station with an (electric) outside heat source (portable and placed in the covered area) is recommended for use on colder days.

5.2 Start Up Costs

Establishing high-quality child care spaces, either indoors or outdoors, requires an initial investment to secure appropriate facilities and equipment. And while outdoor-based programs may have slightly higher upfront costs (compared with using an existing multipurpose space for example) they remain a significantly more cost-effective option than constructing a new building.

Factors that influence outdoor program costs include:

- **Unique Storage Needs:** Large, lockable, and well-lit storage units (e.g., shipping containers) are necessary to accommodate children's belongings, bulky program equipment and supplies, administrative materials, a portable heater/lighting system, and emergency supplies.
- **Enhanced Security:** Depending on the host facility (e.g: school or community centre), security upgrades for access to washrooms, intruder alarms, and improved exterior lighting may be required.
- **Covered Space:** The program needs a covered area for shelter, shade, warmth, and for quieter, creative activities.
- **Technology and Attire:** Investing in additional electronic devices (e.g., tablets for sign-in/out, walkie-talkies for easy communication, multiple cell phones) and appropriate weatherproof clothing for staff is important.
- **Human Resources:** Additional staff recruitment time and professional development focused on outdoor safety, curriculum adaptation, and risk management may be necessary.



5.3 Quality Programming and Child Safety

High quality outdoor programs don't simply replicate indoor school age child care program routines in outdoor settings. Rather, they leverage the natural environment and the addition of appropriate materials and supplies as a unique learning space that demands its own set of operational practices and strategies. Outdoor-based approaches to child care requires a mind shift from traditional indoor-based licensed programs.

Here are key considerations:

Philosophical Alignment

The Operator should demonstrate a strong commitment to outdoor-based learning and a willingness to adapt existing policies and procedures to best serve children in an outdoor environment.

Unique Curriculum Development

Outdoor settings call for curriculum specifically designed to engage children with natural elements along with appropriate material and supplies. This might involve incorporating elements like nature exploration, hands-on science activities, and creative play inspired by the natural surroundings.

Focus on the Educators

While a quality outdoor environment provides a foundation for exploration and learning, research shows that the role and qualifications of Educators have the greatest impact on program quality. Educators with experience in outdoor education, child development, and risk benefit management are particularly well-positioned to create safe and engaging learning experiences for children in an outdoor setting.

Staff Recruitment and Retention

A targeted recruitment and retention strategy is necessary to find staff who possess a love for the outdoors, an interest in nature and the outdoor urban environment, and who are comfortable facilitating risky play while ensuring child safety, in all weather conditions. (Risky play can be defined as allowing children to explore challenges and manage potential hazards.)

Staff Training and Development

The Operator should be prepared to assess staff's existing knowledge and skills, and proactively address any gaps through comprehensive orientation and ongoing professional development focused on outdoor play, nature pedagogy, and risk management strategies.



Equipment and Supplies

Outdoor-based programs require a unique and distinct set of equipment and supplies compared to traditional indoor programs.

Clothing and Comfort

Ensuring children's (and staff) comfort is paramount. This requires a focus on weather-appropriate clothing (layers for changing temperatures), proper footwear for different terrains, and a designated space for drying wet gear.

Safety and Supervision

Safety is always the top priority. Outdoor programs require heightened vigilance and clear procedures for supervision, risk assessment, and emergency response in natural wide-open settings.

Quiet Play and Relaxation

While active exploration is a cornerstone of outdoor programs, children also need designated areas and times for quieter play and relaxation. This could include cozy nooks for reading, storytelling, or simply enjoying the natural world in a more peaceful way.

Inclement Weather Considerations

Not every day will be perfect sunshine. Having access to a covered area, with a warming station (e.g.: hot beverages, an electric heat source) is essential for providing refuge from adverse weather conditions, allowing for a smooth continuation of program activities.

Additional Considerations:

- **Washroom Access and Maximum Group Size:** Given the larger, open spaces along with likely less direct access to washrooms, it's recommended to limit the program group size to a maximum of 24 children and exceed licensing's minimum staff- to - child ratios requirements by adding one additional staff member per group which provides a 1:8 staff child ratio.
- **Effective Communication with Families:** For a relatively new concept like licensed outdoor-based programs, clear communication with families is crucial. Parents enrolling their children should be fully informed about all program elements, particularly the emphasis on outdoor activities with minimal to no indoor time, in all weather.



5.4 Operational Hours

After School Care

While outdoor programs offer fantastic benefits, carefully considering the balance between service hours, working families' child care needs, and children's well-being is crucial. To ensure child safety and adapt to seasonal changes, especially shorter winter days, these programs may need slightly adjusted operating schedules compared to traditional indoor programs.

Before-School Care Considerations

There is a continuing need in Vancouver for before-school child care to support working families. However, incorporating before-school care into an outdoor program presents a few unique challenges that require thoughtful consideration. For example:

- **Changing Clothes and Drying Space:** Children may need to change into dry clothes before entering their classrooms. Having a dedicated space for wet clothes to hang and dry would be necessary.
- **Indoor Space Availability:** Utilizing available indoor space during the shorter before-school hours, rather than the outdoors, especially during inclement weather, could be a possible solution. Collaboration regarding access to designated indoor areas will be beneficial.

5.5 Securing the Right Space: Siting Considerations for a Licensed Outdoor-Based Program

A note about Licensing Requirements: In BC under the British Columbia Community Care and Assisted Living Act [BC Child Care Licensing Regulations](#):

- a licensed care facility requires a premise, which is defined as a 'building or a structure' that meets certain requirements, including dedicated indoor spaces for the programs operating hours. The legislation **limits the ability to licence outdoor or outdoor-based programs without access to a physical building.**
- There are three types of licensed group school age programs (in the regulations) that could potentially be used for an outdoor-based program: Group School Age; School Age on School Grounds; and Recreational Care. The proposed location of the program will determine which type of license is most applicable.



- A. Ideal Locations with dedicated indoor space:** The following locations are likely to meet basic licensing facility requirements:
- **Elementary School Annexes:** These facilities are designed for primary school aged children, which typically is the age group most in need of licensed child care. And usually, there are no after-school rentals; therefore, these sites can more easily offer access to dedicated indoor space.
 - **Community Centres:** Look for facilities with existing preschool spaces or multi-purpose rooms within a safe walking distance from a school.
 - **Elementary Schools (Main):** While Strong Start classrooms or Multipurpose Rooms are ideal, other available spaces may be considered depending on program needs and space suitability. These include:
 - Primary/modular classrooms
 - Libraries
 - Gyms
 - Lunchrooms
 - **Neighbourhood Park with Caretaker Building:** provided it has sufficient space and features that can be adapted to meet program needs (e.g., washrooms, storage).
- B. Potential Locations with Shared Indoor Space:** Given the limited use of indoor spaces for an outdoor-based program, exploring locations with shared indoor space could be an option. However, this would require **applying for a Licensing exemption to the dedicated indoor space and equipment requirements.**

Suitable shared indoor spaces might include:

- **Multipurpose rooms or gyms** in community centres.
- **Large lobbies/foyers** of elementary or high schools.
- **Multipurpose rooms, gyms, libraries, classrooms, or other spaces** in elementary schools
- Regardless of the chosen indoor space, it is crucial to ensure its availability for the program when needed (i.e. unsafe weather conditions) which may be on very short notice.



6.0 TAKING ACTION PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

This section **translates** the valuable learnings and experiences from all phases of the Outdoor-based Licensed School Age Child Care Pilot Project **into actionable steps**. With a particular focus on Vancouver's public partners, **it serves as a roadmap** for planning, developing, and implementing licensed outdoor-based school age care programs in Vancouver.

Step 1: Assess the Need and Interest

- **Review City of Vancouver Child Care Needs Assessments** to identify areas with gaps in service provision for school aged child care. Contact Social Policy and Projects division (childcare@vancouver.ca)
- **Conduct a community/family survey** to gauge interest in an outdoor-based program at a specific school or neighbourhood.
- **Undertake an environmental scan in the neighbourhood:** Are there already licensed school age child care programs operating at or near the potential site? Are there waitlists indicating a demand for more spaces? What other community resources exist?

Step 2: Preliminary Site Assessment

- **Gather information** on after-school usage of the potential space. This includes:
 - Intensity of use by the school community and neighbourhood
 - Number of children typically using the space
 - Presence of other school age or outdoor programs
 - Duration of typical use
- **Assess space suitability:** Does the space offer the **Essential (Physical) Elements for Quality Outdoor-based Programs** outlined in [Section 5.1](#) of this guide? Is there sufficient space for an outdoor program to effectively operate?
- **Contact Licensing:** If the space seems suitable and interest persists, contact [VCH Community Care Facilities Licensing](#) for an initial site assessment and to discuss the operational plan for an outdoor-based school age program.



Step 3: Confirming the Operator

- **Identify the child care program operator:** Determine who will operate the new outdoor-based school age child care program.
- **Establish an initial project start up budget and financial responsibility:** Include start-up costs, potential building upgrades, exterior storage, equipment, and supplies.
 - **If the Public Partner or Host Site** Intends to operate the program, then:
 - Assign a Project Lead and develop a *detailed work plan outlining the project timelines and responsibilities.
 - Familiarize yourself with the [VCH Child Care Application Guide](#) and [BC Child Care Licensing Regulations](#); and
 - Contact the Licensing Officer (from Step 2) and discuss your plans.
 - **If a Partner Non-Profit Organization** will be operating the program, then:
 - Establish a process and criteria for selecting an operator with experience and interest in running outdoor-based school age programs (not simply adapting indoor programs for an outdoor setting)
 - Collaborate with the chosen partner to confirm a Project Lead for developing a joint detailed work plan with timelines, budget, and clear allocation of responsibilities for implementation.
 - **Examples of Work Plan Items:** Project Management (timeline, stakeholders, risk), Finances (start up and operating budget, sustainability), Permits and Licenses (requirements, timelines), Location and Facility (evaluation, adaptations), Child care Licensing (standards, staff), Equipment & Supplies (purchases, plan), Human Resources (job descriptions, recruitment, training), Enrollment (waitlist, communication), Setting up the Space (layout, safety, play).

This is not an exhaustive list, and specific work plan items may need to be adjusted based on the local context and program specifics.



Step 4: Regulatory and Operating Requirements (Project Lead Role)

- **City Requirements:** contact the City of Vancouver's Development, Buildings and Licensing Services to confirm and secure necessary permits to meet specific City requirements (e.g.: zoning, building code, permits, licenses etc.)
- Depending on the location, **confirm any additional Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, Vancouver School Board, or other Host Site** requirements that may need to be met (e.g.: lease agreements, insurance).
- **Finalize VCH Community Care Licensing Requirements:** Collaborate with the Licensing Officer to finalize licensing requirements, including any unique operating policies and procedures related to supervision for washrooms, parent/guardian pick-ups, etc.
 - Update the original Project Budget as needed.
 - Apply for child care capital funding from the [Province of BC](#) or the [City of Vancouver](#).



Step 5: Implementation and Startup (Project Lead Role)

- Ensure the project work plan is fully implemented.
- Facilitate regular check-in meetings to monitor progress and address any concerns.
- Plan an opening celebration

Following these steps, earlier recommendations, and collaborating with partners will empower you to successfully plan, develop, and implement high-quality licensed outdoor-based school age child care programs in your communities.

7.0 CONCLUSION

Vancouver's Outdoor-Based School Age Pilot and the YMCA's first of a kind licensed outdoor-based school-age child care program in the City offer a wealth of knowledge for child care providers, policy makers, and public service partners considering this innovative approach to expanding licensed care in ways that support healthy child development. And now more than ever, we know that outdoor programs foster healthy child development outcomes and connections with the environment promote increased physical activity and contributes to more well-rounded childhood experiences.

The YMCA's experiences during start-up and operation of their program confirm that, with the right foundation – a strong philosophy, commitment, and suitable environments – this model of licensed outdoor-based school age care can be replicated in other locations throughout the city.

However, these programs should not be viewed as quick fix solution to the child care space shortage. The outcomes from the Pilot highlight the importance of thoughtful implementation that prioritizes children's needs, while also offering a valuable outdoor alternative within the broader child care landscape.

Key factors include:

- **Diverse and Engaging Natural Environments:** Providing access to a variety of stimulating natural spaces optimizes the outdoor experience.
- **Indoor Space (as a complement to the outdoor environment):** Access to flexible indoor facilities ensures essential amenities and provides shelter during harsh weather.
- **Operating budgets sufficient to meet the unique needs of this type of program** (e.g. additional staffing, clothing, storage)
- **Comprehensive Staff Training:** Equipping staff with the necessary skills and knowledge is crucial for program success.
- **Clear Communication with Families:** Open and informative communication regarding program logistics and benefits ensures family understanding and support.
- **Collaboration with and between public service partners is vital.** They can play a significant role in developing funding models, securing appropriate facilities, and raising awareness of outdoor-based child care options.

By addressing these considerations and leveraging the valuable lessons learned from the YMCA's program, we can unlock the immense potential of outdoor play to provide school-aged children with enriching and developmentally appropriate licensed school age care experiences across Vancouver.

Appendix 1

KEY CHARACTERISTICS: Malkin Park YMCA Outdoor Adventures Program



A. PROGRAM SITE, FACILITIES, and EQUIPMENT

The **Malkin Park YMCA Outdoor Adventures** program meets the requirements for a licensed 24 space school age child care program in BC, with an exemption granted by Licensing for the indoor equipment and supplies requirement.

- **Home Base:** The program utilizes the designated outdoor area of the school, encompassing:
 - A large, covered paved area
 - A playground with diverse play structures
 - A spacious field
 - A grassy hill with mature trees
 - Malkin Park Forest (directly adjacent to the schoolyard)
- **Essential Facilities:** The program has access to specific indoor spaces for essential needs:
 - Kitchen for preparing and storing snacks
 - Washrooms for children's hygiene
 - Gym (used only during inclement or unsafe weather conditions)
- **Outdoor Storage:** A secure shipping container serves as the primary storage facility, housing:
 - Program gear, supplies, and equipment
 - Emergency supplies
 - Children's personal belongings (backpacks, extra clothing)
- **Indoor Storage:**
 - Daily snack supplies (food and dishes) are kept in the school kitchen.
 - The program does not store any toys, equipment, or other supplies indoors
- **Gym Equipment:** On rare occasions when the program moves indoors due to weather, they utilize the school's gym equipment for activities.

[See Appendix 2 for the Site Plan and photos.](#)

- **Licensed Indoor Spaces:** The licensed indoor areas include the kitchen, gym, and washrooms). These are separated from the rest of the school with security gates and intruder alarms activated when the school engineer is not present.



B. THE FINANCES: START UP AND OPERATING COSTS (2019/2020)

The YMCA, Vancouver School Board (VSB), and City of Vancouver collaborated to launch this pilot program, with significant financial and time investments from all parties.

City: Capital Costs (Approximately \$20,000):

- **The Challenges:** Vancouver Elementary Annexes typically lack after-school custodial staff and permanent outdoor storage.
- **The Solutions:** The City funded security and building modifications at Kerrisdale Annex to enable access to washrooms, the kitchen, and the gym for the program. This included:
 - Purchasing an external locking storage unit (shipping container)
 - Installing security gates to restrict access within the school
 - Installing intruder alarm keypads, tamper-proof receptacles, and additional kitchen outlets

YMCA Start-Up Expenses (Approximately \$26,000):

- **Equipment And Supplies Investment (\$12,000)**
 - About the same as the YMCA spends for a typical indoor program, but different items specific to the outdoor program, including:
 - iPads for child sign-in/out
 - High-quality outdoor clothing for staff
 - Commercial quality walkie-talkies
 - Cell phones (replacing landlines)
 - Specialized emergency equipment and first-aid kits
- **Staff Time Investment (\$14,000)**
 - The YMCA dedicated significantly more staff time than usual for a new program due to:
 - Pilot program nature, requiring more Licensing process involvement and to respond to key personnel changes
 - Management of facility upgrades.
 - Earlier staff onboarding for training and program setup.
 - Delays related to COVID-19 and staffing changes with partners.

Other YMCA Operating Expenses include:

- **Higher Staffing Costs:** The program employs one additional staff member beyond the mandated ratio to provide enhanced supervision.
- **Gradual Start-Up:** as the first fully outdoor-based school age program, the YMCA chose a slower program launch, enrolling only half the capacity initially, leading to higher first-year operational costs.



C. USE OF INDOOR SPACES

Although the YMCA's program takes place outdoors, there is daily access to the school's indoor space:

- kitchen for preparing snack (usually 30 minutes before program start)
- using the washrooms

Use of the available indoor gym space (the dedicated space as required by licensing) is minimal, averaging 1-2 times per month. And when used it is primarily for short periods to provide some shelter to the children during extreme weather conditions. However there have been a few instances, where wild fire smoke and heavy fog meant the children were inside for the full program time.



D. SAFETY AND SUPERVISION OF CHILDREN

Given the size/diversity of the outdoor space, the YMCA and Licencing worked together to prioritize children's safety and well-being through several different strategies.

Enhanced Staffing: the program employs one additional staff (beyond the mandated staff: child ratios.)

This allows for adequate supervision for children who need to go to the washroom, enhanced supervision for the larger, open spaces, and as well as the safe transition for releasing children to their parents.

Communication and Collaboration: strong communication and transition plans (between the YMCA and School staff) are developed for safely moving children from their classrooms to the outdoor-based programs.

Managing High Traffic Periods: After school use of the playgrounds/field/covered area by the school community can be high, especially in good weather, so the program has established a safe meeting spot for sign in and snack, away from the busy areas.

Security Measures: The additional program staff helps oversee access to the indoors spaces as well as program supplies and equipment, minimizing the risk of items going missing, especially during busy periods when extra vigilance is required.

Malkin Park Forest Access: While the Malkin Park Forest provides a unique learning environment, temporary closures are sometime implemented due to safety concerns like coyote sightings or hazardous ground conditions.



E. HUMAN RESOURCES

The YMCA has encountered challenges in recruiting and retaining staff for the outdoor program. This includes a temporary program closure due to difficulties filling the Team Leader position and a near 100 % annual turnover of program staff.

It's important to acknowledge that high turnover and recruitment difficulties are common issues in many after-school childcare programs, particularly due to the part-time nature of the work.

However, the unique aspects of this type of program presents additional challenges:

- Many educators may not have prior experience with outdoor-based child care programs.
- Understanding the program philosophy and approach requires hands-on experience.

To address the recruitment and retention challenges the YMCA has implemented several strategies:

- Offered a base wage lift
- Invested in training and professional development
- Provided staff with high quality outdoor clothing



F. PROGRAM PARTICIPATION AND FAMILY PERSPECTIVES

The YMCA's outdoor program caters to families with diverse needs:

- **Mixed User Base:** The program serves families seeking both regular child care (to support working families) and recreational type of program for their children.
- **Part-Time Availability:** One of the few YMCA programs offering part-time enrollment options. About 50% of the children are registered part-time.

Additional Observations

- **High Turnover:** The program has experienced a 50% child turnover rate over two years.
- **Limited Awareness:** Not all families are aware of this program's unique outdoor focus and clothing requirements and while the YMCA offers an open house at the start of each year, not all families attend.
- **Parental Choice:** the families interviewed indicated that they did not actively choose an outdoor program, rather, they needed child care, and this was the only option.
 - These families also generally expressed satisfaction with the program and its suitability for their children.
- **Weather Impact:** Harsh weather conditions (cold, wet, or dark) often lead to earlier pick-up times by families.

Appendix 2

YMCA Outdoor Adventures Program: SITE PLAN AND PHOTOS



Appendix 3

Project RESEARCH TEAM



SANDRA MENZER: Lead Consultant and Subject Matter Expert

brings over 35 years of experience in leadership roles in the non-profit community and public services sector in BC. She is a recognized leader in the areas of child care policy, planning and development, operations, and community engagement. For the past eight years, as an independent consultant, she has provided services to a range of non-profits, local and senior governments supporting regional and local planning initiatives, child care policy development, child care facility development, business plan development, and strategic and operational planning work. Prior to offering consulting services, Sandra was the Executive Director of the non-profit Vancouver Society of Children's Centres (VSOCC) for nearly twenty years, where she spearheaded the development of over 1000 new licensed child care spaces. Before that, she was at Collingwood Neighbourhood House, as Program Director and then as co-Executive Director playing a key role in the development and growth of this East Vancouver multi-service agency. She is the past chair of the BC Provincial Child Care Council, former member of the Vancouver Joint Child Care Council, the former chair of the School Age Child Care Association of BC, and the Vancouver Supported Child Care Agency.



RIKA LANGE: Project Consultant and Subject Matter Expert

has been involved with child care in Greater Vancouver for the last 35 years. Rika worked as a Senior Child Care Licensing Officer for Vancouver Coastal Health. She has taught numerous workshops, developed policy and guidelines, and written extensive reports of child care. Currently she is an Early Childhood Care and Education Instructor at Vancouver Community College and Burnaby Community and Continuing Studies. Well respected in the child care community, Rika brings an extensive and detailed knowledge of both licensing and operating child care in BC.



HUMAN EARLY LEARNING PARTNERSHIP (HELP). Project Research Partner

The Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) is a collaborative research and knowledge mobilization centre at the University of BC that brings together expertise, from across disciplines and sectors, to contribute to improving conditions that promote an equitable start in life for all children and their families. Joanne Schroeder, Director, Strategy, and Innovation was the lead HELP Staff. Joanne began her work at HELP in 2000 and previously served as Deputy Director. In her initial role at HELP, she developed and led their knowledge translation activities. She was also the Provincial Advisor to "Children First", a community development project that worked in 45 BC communities and was the National Lead Fellow for the Canadian Council for Early Child Development.



DR. MARIANA BRUSSONI: Project Advisor and Subject Matter Expert

is the Director of the Human Early Learning Partnership, a Professor in the Department of Pediatrics and the School of Population and Public Health at the University of British Columbia (UBC), and investigator with the British Columbia Children's Hospital Research Institute. Mariana's research investigates child injury prevention and children's unstructured, outdoor play, including risks that come with it. Her research has investigated parent and caregiver perceptions of risk, teachers' and educators' experiences with outdoor play and learning, and the design of outdoor play-friendly environments. Mariana's work has been local, national, and international in scope.