CASE STUDIES OF
CHILD PLAY AREAS AND
CHILD SUPPORT FACILITIES.

TRAVEL AND FIELD RESEARCH REPORT

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This report is a joint product of the Community Design Center, Inc. and the Center for Architecture and Urban Planning Research, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. It was prepared by the Co-Principal Investigators at UWM, Professors Uriel Cohen and Gary T. Moore, and the Project Manager at CDC, Mr. Tim McGinty.

The work was conducted from late June through August, 1978 in completion of Task II, Travel and Research, of Contract No. DACA73-78-C-0005 between the U.S. Department of the Army, Office of the Chief of Engineers and CDC, Inc. with its subcontractor, UWM.

The site visits were conducted by Messrs. McGinty, Cohen, Moore, and Mr. Frederick Jules of UWM, who were joined for portions of the trip by Messrs. William E. Johnson and Murray Geyer of the Office of the Chief of Engineers, and at two military facilities by Ms. Marla Bush of the Community Services Branch, Office of the Adjutant General.

Various other people have contributed to the completion of this report. All site and building plans were drawn by Mr. Jules, in many cases from rough field sketches. Photo processing was done by Mary Keeler of the UWM School of Architecture and Urban Planning Photo Laboratory and by Educational Communication Services. Typing was done by Mss. Susan Meier, Kathy Goff, and Carol Lane. Final graphic production was done by Mr. Donald Gatzke, with assistance from Ms. Ann Hill, all of the UWM Project Team.

Many people shared their time and offered insights about children's environments: the child care, family housing, and master planning staffs, parents and children of the 7 military bases visited; the child care and playground staffs, designers and children at the 35 civilian facilities visited; and additional experts and interested people around the country.
PURPOSE

This report describes and evaluates 50 facilities and settings for play, child care, and early childhood development. The evaluation is part of a long-range project for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to specify new guidelines for the design of child care facilities and play areas at military establishments around the country.

Problem

This research-travel report was done in response to two problems affecting the hundreds of thousands of children at military bases. First, the U.S. Army maintains the largest number of employer-sponsored child care centers in the country (close to 200). Nevertheless, as a microcosm of the rest of the country, demand for developmentally-oriented quality care, both full-day and drop-in, including infant care, far exceeds current supply. Second, outdoor playgrounds and natural play areas for the children of young enlisted and officer families are seriously lacking in most family housing areas.

These problems must be seen against the dual backdrop that the early preschool years are the time of most rapid development, and that childhood development happens everywhere—certainly not just in school—but also in early childhood centers and through spontaneous outdoor play.

To help rectify these problems, the Dept. of the Army has plans to build a number of new child care facilities, to renovate others, and to introduce new play areas for children in family housing, recreation, and town center locations.

Objectives

The objectives of the research were:

- to sensitize the client organization to the role of the physical environment in child play, care, and early development
• to comparatively document and assess a sample of both military and civilian care facilities and play areas
• to identify key design features and physical patterns which facilitate child development

RESEARCH PROCEDURE

Research site visits were made at 35 civilian and 7 military locations. A total of 50 were studied. The settings were selected to sample regional and climatic variations, new and renovated facilities, specially designed and self-help projects, different facility sizes and budgets, and some award-winning facilities.

Specific methods included:

• architectural inventories of the surrounding context, immediate site, the building or play area, building subsystems, and furnishings
• behavioral observations of the spatial behavior of children and staff in the facility and its major behavior settings
• focused interviews with the facility director, typical staff, and in some cases children, parents, the base master planner or the chief designer of the facility
• interviews with selected national experts

All interviews were tape recorded and notes were taken. Observations were recorded through behavioral mapping, sketches, and photographs. (For details of the research methods, see the Appendix—Research Forms.) A total of 55 person-days were spent on observations and interviews. The data was then analyzed and distilled into mini-reports.

ORGANIZATION OF THE DOCUMENT

The case studies are in two parts: children's play areas, and child care facilities. Each major case study includes:

• basic architectural and user data
• program philosophy
• facility description, conceptual organization, and building subsystems
• results of user observations and interviews
• assessment, including, as appropriate, special strengths and weaknesses of the facility in the light of child development goals, and lessons for other facilities of the same type.

The shorter case studies include only basic data, facility description, and brief assessment.

Important issues and conclusions arising from the case studies are summarized at the end of the two major parts of this document.

DISSEMINATION

The findings of this research will be disseminated to Corps of Engineers' personnel, military master planners, facility engineers, family housing officers, and child care directors and staff across the country.

SIGNIFICANCE

This report is an example of applied architectural research done for an institutional client under professional time constraints. Designed to inform the client about design issues, design decisions to be made, and successful design features for child development it is also a prototype document which brings together and makes accessible large amounts of architectural and behavioral information. It is the product of a joint government/professional/university effort to conduct evaluative case studies of a range of existing facilities in order to influence better design.

The main points of significance are:

• in-depth behavioral evaluation and criticism of a range of children's facilities relative to child development goals
• adaptation of environment-behavior research methods for use in a professional context
• identification of patterns of physical features to be avoided and others to be repeated in subsequent designs
• production of a prototype document for on-site research which can be done for other building types.
• bringing together information from architectural and behavioral points of view, and making it readily available to national decision makers, clients, architects, and program directors.
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