

ISSUE 110

JiGSAW

THE MAGAZINE OF FAMILY DAY CARE AUSTRALIA

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in Family Day
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Launch**

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Watching a Park

Came to Life.

Community, Curiosity
and the Magic of
Family Day Care

Written by Elizabeth Stanger

For a long time, the park near our family day care was closed behind temporary fencing. What had once been a familiar play space, was suddenly full of movement, machines and activity. Instead of disappointment, the children were fascinated. Each excursion became an opportunity to stop, observe and wonder about what was happening on the other side of the fence.

Large diggers arrived first, followed by trucks carrying soil, materials and exciting new equipment. The children quickly became experts at spotting the different machines and learning their names. Conversations naturally flowed as we watched the workers and the machines in action.

"That one's a bobcat," one child announced proudly after learning the name.

"That is an excavator, it's digging a really big hole!" another exclaimed, watching the scoop lift and tip soil into a pile.

The children closely observed how the machines moved — how the arms lifted, how the buckets scooped, and how the wheels turned. They compared sizes, noticed patterns in the work and wondered what the finished park might look like. These everyday observations became rich moments of inquiry, with children asking questions, sharing ideas and building new understandings together. With the most incredible

ability to notice each different machine, what it could do, and what it was called.

Curiosity led us to explore the project map for the park redevelopment. Together we studied the plan and talked about the different equipment that would be installed. The children pointed to the

pictures and tried to match what

they could see on the map with what they could observe

behind the fence. This simple act of exploring the map sparked

conversations about space, planning and change, demonstrating how children make meaning when given the time and space to investigate the world around them.

For months the park continued to evolve. The children watched patiently as the space slowly took shape. Continuously captivated to take time to watch what was going on.

Then the day finally came when the fence came down and the new park opened. What had once been a construction site became a vibrant community space at the heart of our town. We visited many times each week, exploring every corner of the park and noticing the fine details. The children moved through the space with excitement and familiarity, discovering new equipment, pathways and quiet places to play.



Then one morning, another exciting chapter began.

When we arrived at the park on one of our regular excursions, a Ute and trailer pulled onto the grass beside the playground. A team stepped out carrying shovels, wheelbarrows and trays of plants. The children watched with curiosity as the group prepared to start planting.

Before long, one of the team members from Nature Play Solutions walked over and warmly invited us to help.

With plenty of shovels to share, the children eagerly joined in. As we began digging into the soil, the children quickly discovered something very exciting hidden beneath the mulch — worms.

Lots and lots of worms.

"They're wriggly and tickly!" laughed one child, holding their hands out carefully as a worm moved across their palm.



Another child peered closely into the soil and asked, "Do worms have eyes?"

A third child compared two worms and thoughtfully suggested, "This one's bigger... maybe it's the mum."

These moments sparked curiosity and early scientific thinking as the children compared worms, counted them and discussed what they might mean for the soil. One child confidently shared, "Worms mean the

soil is healthy."

Over the next two weeks, the Nature Play team continued planting throughout the park — and the children were determined not to miss a moment of it. Each morning, they asked the same eager question:

"Can we go back to the park?"

At their request, we returned again and again. With each visit, the children became more confident in their interactions. They greeted the Nature Play team like old friends, approached them independently to ask questions and proudly demonstrated the skills they had learned.

"I know how to dig the hole now," one child said confidently while showing a younger child where to place the shovel.

The children also began meeting other community members who stopped by the park. New friendships formed easily, and familiar faces were greeted with enthusiasm. The atmosphere created by the Nature Play team was truly special. Every child was welcomed warmly, every question was valued and the team made an effort to learn and use each child's name.

In this environment, the children felt seen, capable and included in a real community project. Their ideas, questions and contributions mattered, and this sense of belonging strengthened their confidence and connection to the world around them.

During this special time, we were also fortunate to have our Educational Support Officer visit and spend a morning with us at the park. It was a joy to share the experience together — meeting our new friends, observing the children's growing confidence and witnessing the depth of learning unfolding in such a natural way.

Moments like this highlight the unique strengths of family day care.

With small group sizes, flexible routines and strong relationships. As an educator it was a magical journey to facilitate following the children's interests and creating meaningful connections between learning, place and community. Learning was responsive, collaborative and deeply grounded in the children's lived experiences.

Now when we visit the park, the children proudly point to different areas and say, "We helped with this." It is a place they have watched grow, cared for and contributed to.

They notice how the plants are growing, revisit the places where they planted and remember the people they met along the way. Recently, one child's grandparent visited the park, and the child excitedly showed them the plants they had helped plant, explaining how they were growing. The children also remind other park visitors to tread carefully around the plants, proudly taking on the role of caretakers for the space.

The park is no longer just somewhere to play. It has become part of their story — a living reminder of what can happen when children are welcomed as active participants in their community.

Experiences like this capture the true magic of family day care: learning that unfolds over time, guided by children's curiosity, strengthened through relationships and deeply connected to place.

It has been a truly magical experience and one we have all been incredibly proud to be part of. I feel confident the children will carry these memories with them for years to come.

