

For Immediate Release

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Nature-filled Play Areas Coming to Child Care Sites Across San Francisco

Benefits include better mental health and creativity.

SAN FRANCISCO, CA – Ten San Francisco child care centers and family child care homes have been transformed into nature-filled oases that inspire learning, movement, and imaginative play. The “green” makeovers, which will benefit over 350 children, were revealed today at a ribbon-cutting ceremony at Friends of St. Francis Childcare Center.

The transformations were made possible by the Connecting Children with Nature program, founded by the Department of Early Childhood (DEC) and the Low Income Investment Fund (LIIF) in collaboration with the San Francisco Recreation & Park Department (Rec & Park) and SF Children & Nature.

The program's success is a testament to the power of community. It has brought together unique public and private partnerships and the dedication of hundreds of volunteers through [Rebuilding Together SF](#). Their efforts, combined with in-kind donations of natural materials, including logs and stumps from the Presidio and Golden Gate Park, have transformed these outdoor spaces into vibrant learning environments.

The transformed play areas include new plantings and gardens for experiencing nature and inviting pollinators, 40 new trees in addition to logs and tree stumps for climbing, bug hotels, sand and gravel pits, two creeks, mud kitchens, and natural loose parts for creative and imaginative play. The designs were developed with educators and administrators to support educational goals and sustain outdoor learning opportunities over time. In addition to the physical transformations, LIIF provides one year of professional development and technical assistance for all the teachers on best practices in nature-based early childhood education to prepare them for meaningful outdoor learning.

Since its launch in 2021, the program has revitalized 21 outdoor play spaces across the city into natural oases for our youngest residents.

The initiative is poised for further growth, with plans to expand into 14 more childcare centers and family child care homes in the coming year. This expansion will continue our mission of nurturing children's connection with nature and providing safe, enriching, and stimulating settings to develop their skills and curiosity while fostering a love for the outdoors.

"San Francisco continues to invest in families and deliver support for the health and well-being of our children. We know that access to outdoor space is essential to the development and growth of all of children, and that nature promotes creativity and responsibility, and provides an opportunity for kids to play, imagine and just be themselves. I want to thank all of the organizations and volunteers who partnered with the City to connect all of our children to the outdoors," said Mayor London Breed.

"We're proud of our financial commitment to transformative outdoor enhancements that provide a unique natural haven for young children in child care centers and family child care homes," said Department of Early Childhood Director Ingrid Mezquita. "We're thrilled to have partnered with the Children & Nature Collaborative to improve outdoor play spaces and encourage nature-based learning in early education. It's an amazing opportunity to help our children grow and learn with help from the natural world."

"This project is a testament to the power of collaboration and community engagement," said Elizabeth Winograd, ECE Deputy Director at LIIF. "We are proud to have played a role in creating a more natural and healthy environment for young children in San Francisco."

"We are thrilled that Golden Gate Park trees and other materials from our parks have found new life instilling a love of nature in San Francisco's youngest residents," said Rec and Park General Manager Phil Ginsburg. "Children are natural explorers and nature makes them happier and more resilient. We are proud to be part of SF Children and Nature, a collaborative that works to ensure all City kids have the same opportunity to experience nature every day."

The Connecting Children to Nature partners celebrated with a special ribbon-cutting ceremony at Friends of St. Francis Childcare Center on Tuesday, May 7, 2024. The event featured remarks from San Francisco Board Supervisors Myrna Melgar, Rafael Mandelman, Hillary Ronen, Ahsha Safaí, and Connie Chan; it also included General Manager Phil Ginsburg, Department of Early Childhood Director Ingrid Mezquita, and additional notable guests.

Renovated Sites

Child Care Centers:

- Family Connections - Portola
- Friends of St. Francis Childcare Center
- Kai Ming - Geary
- Mission Kids
- Wu Yee Children's Services - Bayview

Family Child Care Homes:

- Brilliant Kids FCC
- FCC Qixia Deng
- Happy Angels FCC
- Pasitos FCC
- Superkids Preschool FCC

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Photos of the outdoor transformations [here](#).

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About the San Francisco Department of Early Childhood: The Department of Early Childhood (DEC) is a City and County of San Francisco Department deeply committed to our young children's safe and healthy development. As the city's largest funder of early childhood, DEC is dedicated to creating a system that ensures every child can thrive and learn. We provide public investment, expertise, and leadership to put resources into the hands of those who care for our city's youngest children. www.sfdec.org. DEC is also a lead partner and funder in San Francisco's Children & Nature Collaborative, which works to ensure all children & youth growing up in the city can play, learn and grow in nature daily. Since 2021, DEC has invested Over \$5 million to over 20 Early Care and Education (ECE) programs that bring nature and play to over a thousand children and train over 200 early educators and staff.

About the Low Income Investment Fund

Low Income Investment Fund (LIIF) is a national community development financial institution (CDFI), headquartered in San Francisco with offices in New York City, Atlanta, Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., that invests in communities of opportunity, equity and well-being. As a CDFI, LIIF supports projects that have high social value but lack access to traditional financial institutions. Since 1984, LIIF has deployed more than \$3.5 billion to serve 2.5 million people in communities across the country from its five offices. In early care and education, LIIF has deployed almost **\$455 million** to support ECE, helping **379,000 children** by creating or preserving an equivalent number of spaces to date. An S&P-rated organization, LIIF funds healthy communities by providing innovative capital solutions. liifund.org

About SF Rec & Park

The San Francisco Recreation and Park Department currently manages more than 230 parks, playgrounds and open spaces throughout San Francisco, including two outside city limits—Sharp Park in Pacifica and Camp Mather in the High Sierras. The system includes full-complex recreation centers, swimming pools, golf courses, sports fields, and numerous small-to-medium-sized clubhouses that offer a variety of sports- and arts-related recreation programs for people of all ages. Included in the Department's responsibilities are Golden Gate Park, Coit Tower, the Marina Yacht Harbor, the San Francisco Zoo, and Lake Merced. In 2017, San Francisco became the first city in the nation where all residents have access to a park within a 10-minute walk, a direct result of the Department's commitment to increasing and improving parkland in the city.

About SF Children & Nature

San Francisco Children & Nature is a cross-sector collaborative that works to ensure all children & youth growing up in the city have the same opportunities to play, learn and grow in nature. sfchildrennature.org

Note to media: Video and photos will be available by request immediately following the event.