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The Inanda Children's Wilderness Park

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Company: Durban Green Corridor

Project: Inanda Children's Wilderness Park



"In the end we conserve only what we love. We will only love what we understand. We will understand only what we are taught." - Anonymous

Introduction

Within a natural open land of the Inanda Seminary and headwaters of the Gobhogobho River lies the Inanda Children's Wilderness Park. Based on the Kinderwildnis in Bremen Germany, the Inanda Children's Wilderness Park is a project in collaboration with the eThekweni Municipality Economic Development, Durban Green Corridor and the University of KwaZulu-Natal Occupational Therapy Department. This new initiative focuses on utilising a wilderness park to meet developmental needs for the community across the lifespan.

There are approximately 6,5 million South African children under the age of seven. Of these, some 3,8 million children (59,2%) live in circumstances of dire poverty (DoSD, DoE & DoH, 2004). These children, along with their families, teachers, communities, and the South African government face a range of challenges and obstacles. The most significant of these are poverty, education, health and HIV/Aids (Atmore, Niekerk, & Ashley-cooper, 2012). These factors have undermined the development of our children and inevitably has a negative impact on the growth and wellness of communities, including

townships such as Inanda. Although initially developed as a wilderness park, the developmental needs of children within a South African context will be met at the Inanda Children's Wilderness Park across multiple levels whilst incorporating wilderness elements.

This article aims to shed light into the essence of the Inanda Children's Wilderness Park and further explains the uniqueness, beneficial properties, multidisciplinary sectors and progress into this innovative developing project.

Unpacking the Inanda Children's Wilderness Park

The design of green open spaces is a recurring and central task for the climate partnership between Bremen and Durban in the context of sustainable urban and settlement development. Based on the Kinderwildnis in Bremen, Germany, the Inanda Children's Wilderness Park draws upon the concept and design elements whilst ensuring that it meets the needs of the South African Context. This park would meet the needs of the South African context in terms of youth and community development and skills development through environmental education programmes, which is embedded within the ethos of Durban Green Corridor.

Prior to the development of this project, the open land of the Inanda Seminary was a target for land invasions, illegal dumping and criminal activity. The members of this community had also fallen victim of the deprivation cycle whereby aspects such as poverty, powerlessness, disability, isolation and vulnerability interact to form a trap. This deprivation leads to an imbalance between the individuals' sense of self, environment and therefore reduces engagement in meaningful occupation, which results in criminal activity. Through the activation and management of this open space, the Inanda Children's Wilderness Park would attempt to create a community whereby the next generation are not afraid to dream and explore, which would lead weight in attempting to break this cycle of deprivation.

This project is one of a kind in South Africa as although other wilderness parks may exist, this wilderness park is unique as it is in collaboration with the Occupational Therapy Department in UKZN. Occupational Therapy practitioners utilize human occupation as the intervention media to promote health and well-being. The primary goal of Occupational Therapy is to enable people to participate independently in their Activities of Daily Living. Occupational Therapists achieve this outcome by enabling people to engage in scientifically selected activities that will enhance their ability to participate or by modifying their living environment to better support independent function. During occupational therapy interventions, clients are actively involved in the therapeutic process; outcomes for intervention are client-driven and measured in terms of client participation and satisfaction (Adapted from WFOT Definition, 2004).

Occupational Therapy plays an integral role in early childhood development, recreational engagement and overall community wellness. The Inanda Children's Wilderness Park would be offering therapeutic age-specific environmental education programmes for creches, primary schools and high schools. The heart of these programmes would be to encourage and develop a love and appreciation for the natural

environment which could result in a more sustainable and eco-friendly community. There would be a variety of different environmental education programmes that would focus on cognitive skills, skills development, physical development and youth/adolescent programmes. The Inanda Children's Wilderness Park would also be utilized as an educational aid to teachers and other relevant stakeholders. Various opportunities for recreation exists within this project such as physical exercise groups for the community including the elderly, skills development and active mobility. Other benefits of this exciting project include;

Youth Benefits:

- Promotion of early childhood development which caters for a child's basic need to explore, discover, and play
- Opportunity to play in nature, connect to nature and lead own play
- Social and emotional development
- Speech, language and literacy development
- Problem Solving, Decision Making, Reasoning and Numeracy skills
- Knowledge and understanding of the world
- Gross and fine motor skill development
- Facilitation of Sensory Processing needs
- Development of Visual Perceptual Skills
- Creative development
- Development of positive self-esteem and thinking
- Postural stability and physical development

Community benefits:

- Educational Aid for pre- schools, primary schools and Inanda Seminary School
- Active space results in attempting to decrease criminal activity
- Community and Youth Development
- Community Wellness
- Skills development
- Physical health opportunities for adults and pensioners

'Sifunda Ngokudladla' which translates as 'Learn through play', the Inanda Children's Wilderness Park captures the essence of this.

Project Progress

Throughout the duration of this year, this project has made a lot of progress. What had begun as a open, unmaintained piece of land where criminal activities had taken place, cattle had grazed and traditional healers had adopted, has now been transformed into a lush and inviting serene space. The area has been fenced to ensure a secure and safe experience for all it's service users. The fencing reflects a natural element as well. All elements of the Inanda Children's Wilderness Park have a rustic

feel to it. Sensory gardens have been planted at the entrance of the park to elevate the sensory experience as you enter the park. Children are encouraged to interact with the sensory gardens by touching tactile style plants, fragrant smelling plants and viewing visually appealing plants whilst being embraced by the crackling of leaves and songs from nearby birds. You are then green by a beautiful wooden structure that will house our information maps and details in the future. A pathway leads you around the sensory gardens and leads you into the wilderness where you are able to indulge, appreciate and explore your natural environment. All pathways are wheelchair friendly as the Inanda Children's Wilderness Park is a universal one that caters for able bodied and disabled people. This is depicted in the below image.



Landscaping and wetland rehabilitation had occurred throughout the first half of the year. The landscaping had focused on revitalising and revegetating the environment to enhance the lush environment whilst ensuring a wilderness theme throughout the park. Wetland rehabilitation had occurred whereby specialists had cleared up the wetland and sandbagged the area to ensure better flow throughout the river. The Inanda Children's Wilderness Park is home to the headwaters of the



Gobhogobho River which supplies water to other areas such as Kwa-Mashu thus wetland rehabilitation had played a significant role in the conservation and sustainability of this river.

A recreational pond was also created which would be utilized as an attractive view spot whereby families would be able to have picnics surrounding this pond area. This pond would also be utilized as an educational aid whereby children can learn about the importance and value of water, it's eco-systems and engage in sensory water play. The below image depicts the recreational pond.



The wetland and recreational pond also play an important role as it attracts different crab, frog and bird species which contributes to facilitating and encouraging the learning experience.

Active mobility trails have been created within the distance of 2.5 kms. The trails would be utilized during educational nature walks, fitness and recreational groups and for bike and cycling use. These trails have potential to create economic development and wellness for local community businesses as they would be incorporated into different fitness and recreational events in the future.



Future Developments

This project exists within an evolving and developing realm. Future developments include the installation of offices, classroom and kitchen containers which would contribute to the overall administrative and educational process of the park. Therapeutic play infrastructure would be designed and installed at a later stage to enhance the wilderness and adventurous spirit of the wilderness park.



The Inanda Children's Wilderness Park holds potential to be incorporated into different tourism opportunities as there are many heritage sites within the Inanda area including Bertha Mkhize homestead, the first doctors surgery and post office and Umzinyathi Water falls.

Research Opportunities

As a result of being such a novel concept, this project is rife with research opportunities. Currently there are two research projects underway. A group of final year Occupational Therapy students from the University of KwaZulu-Natal are in process of conducting a Honours study exploring the different caregiver perceptions around the Inanda Children's Wilderness Park. The site manager of the Inanda Children's Wilderness Park is also an Occupational Therapist and is conducting Masters Research exploring how Occupational Therapy wilderness based programmes being implemented at the Inanda Children's Wilderness Park is able to influence teacher proficiency and thus early childhood development within a local creche. This project is a gold mine for research opportunities and data collected from these research studies will lend weight in the field of knowledge required to transfer this concept to other disadvantaged and marginalized communities. Another upcoming research study is one of an action research nature that will involve creating a training manual for the youth mentors to build capacity.

Capacity Building

All environmental staff have been trained in alien invasive clearing and maintenance within the wilderness park. Youth mentors have been trained by an Occupational Therapist to ensure effective planning and running of therapeutic programmes.

Conclusion

The Inanda Children's Wilderness Park will be a protected fenced natural area that would provide children and youth with the opportunity to explore and learn about their natural environment whilst stimulating and developing their developmental needs. This project holds deep potential in terms of eco-tourism and early childhood and community development within the Inanda community with hopes of this concept transferred and replicated to other marginalized communities alike.

References

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Acknowledgement of sources and persons

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To the City of Bremen and the Kinderwildnis, thank you so much for developing this exciting project.

To our architects, landscapers and other stakeholders, thank you.

The Official Brochure for The Inanda Children's Wilderness Park

Inanda children's wilderness park

INANDA
CHILDREN'S WILDERNESS
SIFUNDA NGOKUDLALA

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THE INANDA CHILDREN'S WILDERNESS PARK WILL BE A PROTECTED FENCED NATURAL AREA THAT WOULD PROVIDE CHILDREN AND YOUTH, BETWEEN THE AGES OF 2-18 YEARS, WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPLORE AND LEARN ABOUT THEIR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT WHILST NURTURING THEIR DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS. EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTION, YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORTING AND APPRECIATING LOCAL ECO-TOURISM WILL BE THE FOCUS OF THE PROJECT.

Where is the site?

The site is situated in ward 44 at the headwaters of the Gohogobho River on open land of the Inanda Seminary School currently leased under EtheKwini Municipality & managed by Durban Green Corridor. This space will be conserved as a natural habitat to provide a safe recreation space for children and visitors to the area, as well as animals and birds.

Benefits to children:

- ★ Opportunity for early child development which caters for a child's basic need to explore, discover, and play
- ★ Opportunity to play in nature, connect to nature and lead own play.
- ★ Social and emotional development
- ★ Speech, language and literacy development
- ★ Problem Solving, Decision Making, Reasoning and Numeracy skills
- ★ Knowledge and understanding of the world
- ★ Gross and fine motor skill development
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Community Benefits:

- ★ Educational Aid for pre- schools, primary schools and Inanda Seminary School
- ★ Active space results in attempting to decrease criminal activity
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Site development is underway and looking forward to site opening in late 2018...