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## ***For Immediate Release: Kiwanis Clubs' Outlast Blocks Donation Enhance Newly Designed Naturalized Playgrounds in Niagara's Early Learning Programs***

The St. Catharines Kiwanis Club, Stamford Kiwanis Club and the Kiwanis Club of Welland have joined forces once again in support of Niagara's early learning programs. Over the course of a two years, the Kiwanis Clubs have made an outstanding donation of \$45,000 enabling twenty-six (26) early learning and child care programs to receive unique Outlast Blocks, a product of Louise Kool and Galt, to support their recently redesigned naturalized playgrounds.

The donation was made through the Early Childhood Community Development Centre (ECCDC), a charity offering resources, training and coaching support to early learning programs and educators within Niagara and across the Province. The ECCDC and the Kiwanis Clubs of Niagara have enjoyed a long-standing partnership which has seen many resources donated to child care programs over the past decade; including science, math and literacy materials. The Ontario Trillium Foundation has supported many of these projects over the years. Additionally, the ECCDC's primary funder, Niagara Region Children's Services has also offered tremendous support to child care programs in transforming traditional playgrounds to naturalized play spaces.

This most recent donation of Outlast Blocks helps ensure young children have access to durable, open-ended materials in their naturalized playgrounds to replace traditional toys. Research has demonstrated that children's emotional, social and physical health is positively impacted when they have daily connections in nature. This donation will support the opportunities for children in Niagara to spend time in the natural environment and reap the important benefits of being outdoors. The Outlast Blocks are wooden playthings that last forever outdoors. They are rugged and extremely durable. The blocks are non-toxic and environmentally-friendly and the wood won't shrink, warp or rot. Outlast Blocks deliver all the benefits associated with open-ended play.

In the Spring of 2018 fifteen (15) child care programs received Outlast Blocks at a special event that featured nature pioneer Rusty Keeler. This spring, eleven (11) other child care programs will receive their Outlast Blocks donation at a ceremony on Thursday May 16<sup>th</sup> at Balls Fall Conservation Area. In addition to receiving the Outlast Blocks, programs will enjoy a complimentary training session facilitated by the ECCDC's Coaching and Mentoring Team in order to continue having conversations about connecting children to nature. Playground presentations will be shared by programs who have transformed their playgrounds. Members of the Kiwanis Clubs of Niagara will also be present.

The ECCDC's Executive Director Lorrey Arial Bonilla is grateful for the long-standing partnership with the Kiwanis Clubs of Niagara: "our local child care programs have really benefited over the years from the many generous donations given through the Kiwanis Clubs of Niagara. The three Clubs continue to support our early learning sector by helping programs access innovative resources to support their work with children and families. We are thrilled this most recent donation has afforded twenty-six (26) programs who are leaders in Niagara in creating naturalized playgrounds to receive Outlast Blocks. These blocks will complement the resources that programs are already making available for children to explore within their natural playgrounds". The ECCDC and Kiwanis Clubs of Niagara are also grateful to long-standing supporter, Louise Kool and Galt, for their price guarantee over the course of this multi-year project, as well as for their various in-kind contributions.

*The ECCDC is an independent charitable organization dedicated to providing Niagara's early learning and care programs and providers with affordable access to the specialized learning resources, training and supports they need to deliver high quality care. The ECCDC's services are available to all educators and others involved in the care and education of children.*

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