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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-year project, the Kiwanis Clubs have made an outstanding donation of \$45,000 enabling twenty-six (26) early learning and child care programs to receive a set of unique Outlast Blocks, a product of Louise Kool and Galt's Community Playthings line, to support their recently redesigned naturalized playgrounds.

The donation was made through the Early Childhood Community Development Centre (ECCDC), a local charitable organization which provides resources, training and coaching support to early learning and child care programs and educators within Niagara and across the Province. The ECCDC and the Kiwanis Clubs of Niagara have had a long-standing partnership which has seen many resources donated to licensed child care programs over the past decade, including science, math and literacy materials.

This most recent donation 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 contact with nature. This donation will support the opportunities for children in Niagara to spend time in the natural environment and reap the important benefits of developing a connection with nature. The Outlast Blocks are wooden playthings that last forever outdoors. They are rugged and extremely durable. Made of acetylated wood, the products 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 block play.

In the Spring of 2018 sixteen (16) licensed child care programs received the Outlast Blocks donation at a special event that featured a keynote presentation by nature pioneer Rusty Keeler. This spring, the remaining ten (10) licensed child care programs will receive their Outlast Blocks donation at an exciting ceremony taking place on Thursday May 16th at Balls Fall Conservation Area. In addition to receiving the Outlast Blocks, programs will also receive a complimentary training session facilitated by the ECCDC's Coaching and Mentoring Coordinator, Patricia Couroux, and Early Learning and Child Care Trainer, Ginette Wilson who will share innovative strategies for connecting children to nature. Playground documentations and presentations will be shared by programs who have begun the transformation of naturalizing their playgrounds. Members of the Kiwanis Clubs of Niagara will also be present at the celebration.

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 from 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 helped twenty-six (26) programs who are leaders in Niagara in creating naturalized playgrounds, receive the generous donation of durable Outlast Blocks. These blocks will complement the resources that programs are making available for children to explore within their natural playgrounds". Additionally, both 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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