



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
THURSDAY, JUNE 2, 2016

On a mission to reconnect the children of Niagara to nature, the Early Childhood Community Development Centre (ECCDC) has partnered with Bienenstock Design and Consulting in an innovative initiative to change the landscape of the Niagara region for decades to come. The ground-breaking program provides funding for twenty childcare centres in the region to receive a natural playground design, a kit of loose materials to use in the space and a series of nature based training sessions. This Thursday at 5:30 p.m. the program officially launches with the grand opening of the pilot playground at A Child's World Child Care Centre - Woodlawn, and will be followed by an information session for the region's licensed childcare centres about the new program and how they can apply.

Adam Bienenstock of Bienenstock Design and Consulting is thrilled to be a part of the project. "It's wonderful to be a part of a large scale projects like this, and to be in partnership with the ECCDC. We're passionate about the need to bring this generation of children back to nature – play in a natural environment improves mental and physical health, and encourages creativity and collaboration." Bienenstock went on to say, "natural playgrounds are the best way to do this – they keep children engaged and active in the places they play three times longer than traditional playgrounds."

One of four trial programs, A Child's World Child Care Centre - Woodlawn is the first to take the natural playground design provided by Bienenstock and commission a build, with the Rosalind Blauer Centre for Child Care soon to follow. Bethlehem Support Services and St. Thomas Childcare also participated in the trial program, and have received a customized natural playground design, a loose parts kit and invaluable nature training for their staff.

Lorrey Arial Bonilla, Executive Director of the ECCDC is delighted to be working with Bienenstock Natural Playgrounds to offer this unique service. "We believe in the high quality workmanship of Bienenstock's designs and playground builds and they share our passion for affording young children the opportunity to have uninterrupted, unstructured play in naturalized settings."

Other licensed child care programs in the region will have the opportunity to apply for the program after Thursday, which includes a natural playground consultation and design (though not a build) as well as four nature education training sessions inspired by the highly respected Reggio Emilia educational philosophy that will support early childhood educators in using natural playgrounds and the natural world, and a kit of loose materials to create dynamic and engaging nature play opportunities for children in their care.

The program is generously funded by Niagara Region Children's Services, and the ECCDC is grateful for their support, says Bonilla. "They have demonstrated forward thinking in funding this initiative and we're certain this project will impact children's development and play in positive ways for decades to come."

Media are invited to attend the ribbon cutting **this Thursday June 2 at 5:30 p.m. at A Child's World Child Care Centre - Woodlawn, 300 Woodlawn Road, Welland.** For more information about how natural playgrounds can benefit our children, or to RSVP to the event, please contact **Samantha Sudds** at samantha@engagers.ca, or call her at **647-968-0180**. For more information about the program to bring natural play to Niagara's children, please contact **Lorrey Arial Bonilla** at larial@eccdc.org.