

**McGILL UNIVERSITY**  
**SUSTAINABILITY PROJECTS FUND**



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**FACULTY OF EDUCATION OUTDOOR LEARNING SPACE**  
**FINAL REPORT, 2015**

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Date Opened: June 4, 2015  
Time: 12 noon  
Address: 3715 Peel Street (between the Coach House and Purvis Hall)

**PARTICIPANTS**

Supervisor: Mindy Carter  
Research Assistant: Christopher Nixon  
Horticultural Supervisor: Hugo Laperle  
Volunteers: Faculty of Education Professors and Students

**SUMMARY OF PROJECT**

**1. OVERVIEW**

The Outdoor Learning and Sustainability Group spearheaded the McGill Outdoor Learning Space to create a unique environment to facilitate education in eco-literacy. Unlike other outdoor spaces and gardens on McGill's downtown campus, the mission of this site is to provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to experience experiential lessons outdoors on a site that is easily accessible from the Faculty of Education.

**2. SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES**

The installation of two raised garden beds that continue to remain structurally intact, and have allowed for the growth of edible plants is an enormous success. However, this result was not without challenges. For example, a groundhog managed to disassemble one of the raised garden beds by disturbing the foundation of the bed from underneath the ground. After re-enforcing the raised garden beds with screws on all sides, and re-positioning the posts

supporting the garden beds under the ground, the groundhog has not managed to create any further damage to the structural integrity of the site.

### 3. STAKEHOLDERS IMPACTED

#### ***A. OUTDOOR LEARNING AND SUSTAINABILITY GROUP***

The Outdoor Learning and Sustainability Group led by Mindy Carter was instrumental in beginning this project, by designing and submitting a proposal for its formation. This group will benefit from a space that is now accessible for the promotion of outdoor learning.

#### ***B. EDUCATION STUDENTS***

Students in Education will have the opportunity to experience teaching outdoors as well as learning from nature on a site that is located nearby.

#### ***C. VOLUNTEERS***

The impact on volunteers has been the reward of participating in a collaborative project that they can feel proud of. The Outdoor Learning Space has also become a special place volunteers feel connected to, because they were a part of its creation.

### 4. REPORTING ON RESULTS

The project's impacts on the culture of sustainability at McGill are that this outdoor learning space will promote eco-literacy at the Faculty of Education. This progressive change to view education not only from the perspective of the classroom, but also from the outdoor physical environment has also begun to create awareness and connection to nature within the urban landscape. A connection to nature should also further increase attention towards sustainability and practices on McGill campus as more people become aware of this space.

### 5. CHANGES IN BUDGET

The project's expenses came in below projected costs on some materials, but above projected costs on others. However, most materials were purchased below market value, by taking advantage of store sales, volunteers and borrowing items from McGill Grounds personnel.

### 6. WHAT IS NEXT WITH THIS PROJECT?

The next phase of this project is to:

- Utilize the site for the teaching of experiential outdoor lessons
- Promote eco-literacy among Faculty of Education students and staff
- Appreciate what the space can offer members of the McGill community
- Engineer new ideas for how to use the space more effectively

Promotion of the outdoor learning space may be done by directly contacting professors by e-mail, and informing them that this space is available for teaching purposes. Posters encouraging people to visit the site may also be displayed in the faculty of education building. Events such as pot lucks to mark seasonal changes (fall, winter, etc.) may also be used to encourage people to learn about this outdoor environment and the changes that occur throughout the seasons. Mindy Carter may also contact people involved in outdoor elementary

education such as Christopher Nixon who is operational manager of Forest School Canada to assist her with new ideas about how to use the space effectively.

## 7. OWNERSHIP PLAN

### ***A. FACULTY OF EDUCATION PROFESSORS, STUDENTS AND OTHER VOLUNTEERS***

Volunteers that are willing and able to participate in the maintenance of this site will be responsible to keep it clean and functional. Garden beds will need to be weeded regularly at different intervals depending on conditions, and the battery operated sprinkler system will need to be monitored regularly to ensure the gardens are receiving water, and the batteries are functioning. All green waste (weeds, organic residue) will be composted on the site and reused to enrich the soil for future plants. Any non-organic waste should be brought to the nearest garbage or recycling container surrounding the site. They will be collected by the Grounds personnel.

### ***B. GROUNDS DEPARTMENT***

The Grounds Department has agreed to continue regular maintenance of the surrounding area to ensure the lawn is mowed and the site is accessible.

### ***C. MINDY CARTER***

Mindy Carter will be responsible for organizing a list of volunteers to maintain the garden and be a source of contact for site maintenance.

## 8. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF THE OUTDOOR LEARNING SPACE

This site has the potential for several recommendations:

- Collecting tree stumps that can be used in a circle as chairs to re-create the feeling of a campfire setting for telling stories
- Designing a movable outdoor stage for performances and lectures that can take place outdoors

Planning for the implementation of these recommendations is ongoing.

## 9. MANAGING THE PROJECT: SUCCESSES, CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED (MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE)

### ***A. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT***

The development of the project was successful in recognizing an undervalued area on McGill campus to design and create an outdoor learning space. However, communication between the original proposal and carrying out the project faced challenges. The proposal for the project stated that a source of water had been identified. However, when the construction of the garden beds was about to take place, it was unclear where the water source was located. Without water, the project faced a possibility of not progressing. Due to construction barriers around Purvis Hall, it became difficult for the research assistant in charge of the construction to identify that there was a water tap behind the fences. Thanks to the Grounds supervisor who knew

how to avoid the barriers and access Purvis Hall, the water source was found and construction was able to be completed with only a minor delay of a week and a half. The lesson learned was to be more specific when communicating between team members with regards to important elements that could jeopardize a project.

**B. BUDGET**

The budget was revised following project acceptance by SPF. The original budget was not verified based on actual online prices of items. Therefore, the revision was necessary, but resulted in delays. The budget should be realistically planned and verified before it is sent to possible funders.

Concerning actual budget management during the project, expenses were managed exceptionally well. The costs of materials were covered below market value by taking advantage of special sales, and through the support of the McGill Grounds department.

**C. HUMAN RESOURCES**

The work distribution between supervisor, student, and volunteers should be established during the protocol-writing phase. During this project, many work hours were not accounted for in the original proposal, which resulted in a higher student workload than initially expected. However, in this case, the savings from the materials purchasing allowed for funding to pay for the extra hours worked, and was further supplemented by volunteer contributions.

**D. MONITORING**

Success was monitored by the creation of the garden boxes, the survival of the plants, the number of volunteers that showed up to help with activities, and the number of people who attended the opening event. In the future, success will be measured by how many professors use the garden to carry out lessons regarding outdoor teaching practice at McGill.

Regarding quantitative data thus far, throughout the project, four volunteers contributed to building the outdoor space. There were approximately twenty-five individuals who attended the outdoor space opening event. Finally, many students and professors have expressed their interest in using the space in the future. We will have a better idea regarding the numbers of people who actually use the space when the fall session of university classes begins.

**E. TIMELINE**

Similar to point B with the budget, the timeline was revised to be more realistic. Therefore, the timeline should be verified to ensure the best accuracy possible before the project proposal is sent to SPF. The revision of the timeline resulted in delays, and there were further unexpected delays regarding getting certain approvals and resources necessary to complete the raised garden beds. However, everything was completed just in time for planting season and before most staff involved began their summer break.

**10. RECOMMENDATIONS TO ONGOING OR FUTURE SPF PROJECT TEAMS ON MANAGING A PROJECT**

In the future, teams working on an SPF projects should be aware that it may take time to arrange payments for material resources; unless they purchase items they require with their

own money and apply for re-imbursement (which can take many weeks). Teams should also realize that administrative payments such as a P-card payment from Sustainable Project Funds may also not be accepted everywhere (such as small stores or personal sellers) since this type of payment can only be made by staff over the phone or internet directly to the seller. Therefore, make your lists of supplies early with where you plan to purchase them and how you plan to purchase them to avoid delays.

Be careful about your expectations and assumptions. There was belief that a water source was located near the coach house, but in fact it was at Purvis Hall. Had there not been a water source, the project would have not been possible. Verify also the exact equipment you may have available for free through McGill before beginning the project.

Finally, come to a consensus with the project about what is negotiable, what is flexible or not with your supervisor to avoid miscommunication and always insure to keep stakeholders informed of your progress.

#### **11. FEEDBACK ON SPF EXPERIENCE: PROVIDED SPF SUPPORT/PROCESSES/TOOLS**

The SPF experience was excellent. SPF staff support allowed the project to be completed within the recommended time frame and responded to requests as required.

#### **12. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE SPF TEAM**

It is recommended that the SPF Team could work on finding easier solutions to help pay for project materials with funds directly awarded to recipients. If recipients were allotted the ability to pay directly for products and services that they need for their projects, they could possibly reduce costs and finish projects sooner.

#### **13. LINKS OF INTEREST**

Please find below links related to the concept of outdoor learning spaces.

##### **Outdoor learning organizations in Canada:**

- Forest School Canada: <http://www.forestschoolcanada.ca/>
- Child and Nature Alliance of Canada: <http://childnature.ca/>

##### **University-hosted outdoor learning garden projects:**

- Concordia Greenhouse City Farm School – Schoolyard Gardener Program: <https://concordialoyolacityfarm.wordpress.com/schoolyard-gardener-program-2013/>
- University of Toronto OISE Learning Garden: [http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/ese/OISE\\_Learning\\_Garden/](http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/ese/OISE_Learning_Garden/)
- University of British Columbia Learning Garden: <http://learninggarden.blogspot.ca/>

##### **Related Literature:**

- Maynard & Waters. 2014. Exploring outdoor play in the early years. <https://books.google.ca/books?isbn=0335263399>
- O'Brien, Burls et al. 2011. Outdoor Education, Life Long Learning and Skills Development in Woodlands and Green Spaces: The Potential Links to Health and Well-Being. <https://books.google.ca/books?isbn=9048198062>
- O'Brien & Murray. 2007. Forest School and its impacts on young children: Case studies in Britain. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1618866707000301>

- Ormond, McClaren et al. 2015. Pre-Service Teacher Experiences in a Teacher Education Program Reoriented to Address Sustainability.  
[http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-3-319-16411-3\\_10](http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-3-319-16411-3_10)
- Smith & Sobel. 2014. Place and community based education in schools.  
<https://books.google.ca/books?isbn=1134999925>
- Tippins, Neuharth-Pritchett & Mitchell. 2015. Connecting Young Children with the Natural World: Past, Present and Future Landscapes.  
[http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-94-017-9505-0\\_13](http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-94-017-9505-0_13)
- Wattchow & Brown. 2011. A Pedagogy of Place: Outdoor Education for a Changing World. <https://books.google.ca/books?isbn=0980651247>