



GRENADA'S SAVE THE CHILDREN ORGANIZATION

PLAYGROUND BUILD PROJECT



Lisa Pearson
Grenada, West Indies
April 12, 2003
Tosun Aricanli

I. Abstract

Grenada's Save the Children Organization, GRENSAVE, is committed to securing the best interests of children as preserved during the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. GRENSAVE continues to work to improve the education provided at their preschools and daycares with the limited human and financial resources at its disposal.

GRENSAVE's PLAYGROUND BUILD PROJECT is designed to provide the students with a parent/ teacher-built playground system. This project is designed to increase the students' thinking and social, verbal and physical skills as well as encourage their creativity. The parents, teachers, and staff at GRENSAVE have been working to design an appropriate playground system and raise the funds to buy materials and tools in order to complete the projected target build day scheduled for August 2003.

II. Summary

GRENSAVE's PLAYGROUND BUILD PROJECT based in Grenada, West Indies is primarily going to benefit the children of GRENSAVE's preschools and daycares in the villages of Pearls, Dunfermline and Sauteurs. The project will also benefit the parents and teachers of these children. The teachers and staff at GRENSAVE began meeting in November of 2001 to discuss the schools. Throughout the course of these meetings they devised the following problem statement:

If GRENSAVE does not work towards improving the conditions of their schools, then the children will not succeed in Grenada's current educational system.

In order to alleviate the problem they set the following goals for their project:

- To create a more constructive educational environment for the children attending GRENSAVE'S three country schools
- To teach children through play
- To ultimately design and build three individual play schemes for GRENSAVE's Preschools and Daycares
- To promote working together as a community

At this time, the children in GRENSAVE'S preschools and daycares are not able to maximize their time at the schools. The children are idle more than two hours daily and that does not include the forty-five minute rest time after lunch. This project is designed to assist the teachers in maximizing the time that is spent in the school, offering a play structure that would assist in the children's learning experiences.

Currently at two of the schools, play equipment does exist, but it is dangerous and must be removed. This project focuses on giving the opportunity to both the parents and the teachers to come together and create a solution for their children. It relies on the

willingness of both the parents and teachers to work together and develop a system that is not only safe for the children, but will maximize their learning abilities while at school.

If the entire project were complete then the objectives would be:

- To provide the students with a better education
- To design and build 3 playground systems
- Bring the community together to build a playground for their children

Due to various delays, the project is not complete. At this point, the parents and teachers have gotten together to successfully fundraise a large percentage of the funds and materials needed. Further, they have chosen the dates and designed a system for Dunfermline that they believe to be best suited for the location and the ages of the children. This project was chosen to be the pilot project. They will use the successes and mistakes from this project to build the next one.

Over the last two years my project has changed its focus and goals, but the problem remained the same. The teachers and parents have initiated the reasons for these changes. They met and determined what it was their children needed; then the parents and teachers needed assistance in determining if the playground was feasible and if so, how to achieve it. Throughout the process the three most prominent factors for delays and changes have been changes in staff and parents, location and distance.

This project is an excellent way to get a community to work together to benefit the community as a whole. If someone is intending to emulate this project, I recommend doing it in his or her own community or one close by. There are a great many decisions that need to be made. I especially recommend that the project manager sit down with the project leaders and discuss timetables and desired results and keep a detailed list of what each leader has volunteered to take care of, in order that they can be held accountable to

the group. It is important that clear lines of communication be established and open throughout the process. Without clear communication, it is very difficult to complete the project.

III Definition of the Problem

Problem Statement

If GRENSAVE does not work towards improving the conditions of their schools then the children will not succeed in Grenada's current educational system.

THE COMMUNITY

The Country

Grenada is a small nation, which consists of three islands:

Grenada, Carriacou, and Petit Martinique. "Grenada

is by far the largest of the three, with a width of twelve miles

(18 km) and a length of twenty-one miles (34 km). Its 133 sq. miles (440 sq. km.) consist

of mountainous, volcanic terrain, reaching heights of over 2,750 feet atop Mount St.

Catherine. This topography provides Grenada with one of the loveliest and most varied

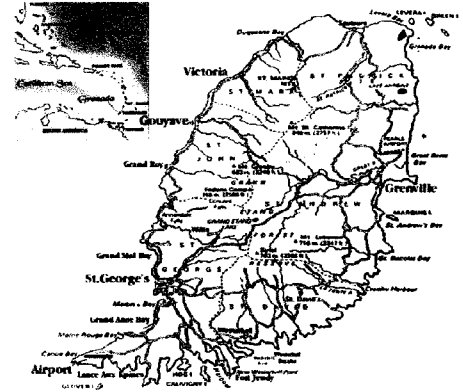
environments in the Caribbean, including crater lakes and a startling variety of plant and

animal life. Dwarf forests high atop Mount St. Catherine descend to the mountain

rainforests of middle altitudes, which give way in turn to the dry forests of the lowlands.

Those forests shift to mangrove at the coast, giving way to stunning white sand beaches, brilliant blue water, and exquisite coral reefs."

In 1974 Grenada adopted a Democratic Parliamentary government after gaining independence from England. Today with a population of 89,018¹ the country is 82% African, 13% mixed African European, and 5% European and East Indian, and only a



¹ www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print (July 2000)

trace of Arawak and Carib Amerindian. It is a religious country that is 53% Catholic, 13.8% Anglican and 33.2% other Protestant.²

GRENSAVE is a non-governmental non-profit organization committed to the best interests of Grenada's children. Its primary focus is direct services to children.

GRENSAVE promotes specifically counseling and intervention services, as well as lobbying and advocacy services, all of which they enthusiastically promote, protect, and seek to preserve the rights of our children. Some of the current programs include:

- Program for Adolescent Mothers (PAM)
- Jean Augustine Scholarships
- After School Program
- Youth Groups
- Daycares and Pre-schools
- Summer Camps
- Adolescent Self Development Program
- Big Brothers Big Sisters Program



Specifically, the target community for this project is the students, parents and teachers of GRENSAVE'S three northern preschools and daycares in Pearls, Dunfermline, and Sauteurs.

Major assumptions that were made in this project were:

- The students will use the equipment
- GRENSAVE will not hire more teachers, staff for the schools
- GRENAVE will not hire better-trained teachers, staff
- Source of the problem is lack of education

Through the use of surveys and interviews, I compiled a list of what each teacher thought would help and presented it with the group. Overwhelmingly, the teachers at all three facilities determined that the best solution was to clean up their play yards by

² www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print

removing the few pieces of dangerous playground equipment and replacing it with safe and educationally designed equipment. The teachers determined that this equipment would allow for one teacher or staff person to monitor the play yard while the other teachers accomplished some of the other responsibilities.

IV PROJECT GOALS

- **To create a more constructive educational environment for the children attending GRENSAVES three country schools**
- **To teach children through play**
- **To ultimately design and build three individual play schemes for GRENSAVE's Preschools and Daycares**
- **To promote working together as a community**

Grenada's Educational System

Grenada's educational system, which is based on the English model, provides primary school education up to sixteen years of age. At the age of eleven, the students begin taking common entrance testing; passing allows the children to continue to secondary school. Of Grenada's population, 35.9% is under fourteen years of age, yet the educational system only has enough room for approximately ¼ of the students to attend secondary school. The average class size for a form one student (approximately age 5) is 50 students per teacher. Class sizes in primary school are not conducive to providing individual attention to students who are having a difficult time; because of this many private preschools have developed throughout the country to begin to work with younger students, giving them a better chance to succeed in the formal system.

GRENSAVE's Schools

The needs for preschool and daycares services are growing in Grenada. GRENSAVE has three schools in the North and Northeast of the Island. The organization is not able to keep up with maintenance and repairs to the schools, repairs that are necessary to provide a safe and effective education. The teachers and staff are required to raise funds independently in order to replace or purchase any necessary supplies and equipment for their school.

In December of 2001 the teachers met with the Executive Director and created a list of what they believed was important and essential to providing their students with a proper education. Teachers complained of lack of space and inadequate bathroom facilities, but beyond the school building itself, there was the inadequate staff and the great amount of idle time that the students had throughout the day.

After several different meetings GRENSAVE's Board of Directors decided to make structural improvements on its four schools, but determined that the teachers and staff needed to work amongst themselves, with the assistance of myself, to solve the problem of idle time.

**To create a more constructive educational environment for the children attending
GRENSAVES three country schools**

Currently the students at GRENSAVE's schools can arrive between 8:15 and 9:00 am when school begins. The children who arrive early are required to stay seated until 9:00am. This is the time that teachers and staff prepare for the day and are unable to entertain or properly supervise the children. Lunchtime is from 12:00 to 12:30 and after that the students have a brief fifteen-minute playtime; then they rest. The teachers use this time to clean the school and the babies. The students rest until 2:00 pm and then between 2:30 and 4:00 the students are picked up by their parents. Again the students are generally required to stay seated until someone comes for them.

This is the problem; the teachers are too busy for the students. There are many dangers in the schoolyards that make supervision necessary. It is difficult for any teacher to play a structured game with the students or allow the children to play unstructured games with the dangers in the play yard and easier for them to make them stay seated.

The students need to be preparing for primary school. Soon they will be sent into a system where the teachers have no extra time to help students who are not prepared. If a student cannot keep up with the class, there is very little opportunity to make up the class work without the help of a private tutor. Many of the children that GRENSAVE helps cannot afford the expense of a private tutor.

The parents and teachers desire to create a more constructive day. They have decided to come up with creative ways to provide the necessary supervision to the students. One of these schools has a playground for the children to use. In the other three facilities, although they have adequate yards for building some type of play area, currently nothing safe exists.

Teach children through play

Play is one of the most important things that a young child can do. Currently the students are spending a great deal of time idle. The teachers are looking for ways to provide the students with a better experience but are limited by their educations and their responsibilities. It has their desire to create a more suitable environment for the students, but they know that they are not going to be able to receive more training or additional personnel to help out. When children invent playground games, complete with specific rules of play and sequences of how playground equipment should be navigated, they are demonstrating an ability to create, to problem solve and to challenge themselves” (*From Dimensions of Early Childhood, article by Kathryn Castle and Elaine Wilson, Summer 1992*) Children begin to formulate plans and objectives through games. They begin to teach themselves ways to meet these objectives without even knowing what they are doing. They are exercising their thinking, social, verbal and physical skills, as well as

their creativity within the meaningful context of inventing a game, all without being taught by an adult.

The parents and teachers believe that this form of play and game creation will be enhanced by playground equipment. The solution they have come up with is based on the premise that 'Play is the work of childhood.' "For a child, creativity and intellect are the same thing," Berger was quoted as saying. "The world presents its perplexities to a child, and it's through play that a child masters those perplexities." Garnick added that an essential aspect of playing is the independence it offers kids. "When we give children the ability to interact with other kids on an even level and explore the environment on their own, versus 'here's the environment, you will explore it,' it supports their development. Kids need to play," Garnick said. Play also lets children release emotions in a safe way. It gives them the chance to express feelings or emotions, such as pent-up energy or anxiety, while giving them pleasure. When children play, they're in control. Playtime is free of rules and gives an unlimited number of choices." (www.healthscoutnews.com)

NAEYC, a national child-care accreditation group, reports that play is an active form of learning that unites the mind, body and spirit for children who, at least until age 9, learn best when they involve their whole self. Also, play reduces tension that often comes with having to achieve or needing to learn: in play, adults do not interfere and children relax. The development of children's perceptual abilities may suffer when so much of their experience is through TV, computers, books and other media that require only two senses; involving all five senses through space is a powerful mode of learning. (From "Early Years are Learning Years: The Value of School Recess and Outdoor Play," NAEYC 1997)

Clearly, children learn many things through play. However, skill development is neither the reason nor the justification for play. Children play - and need to play - simply because of the sheer joy it brings them. Therefore, play should always be thought of as an end in itself, not as a means to an end. The skills children learn are simply the result of enriching, engaging play experience.³

**To ultimately design and build three individual playschemes for GRENSAVE's
Preschools and Daycares**

Of GRENSAVE's four preschools and daycares, the three northern schools do not have adequate or safe play schemes. The goal for the community is to design and build three of these age appropriate systems, one for each school. When designing an age appropriate play scheme, it is important to recognize the four areas of development: physical, emotional, social, and intellectual. In order to recognize these areas of development, proper equipment and area planning are required.

To foster physical development, the teachers considered equipment that would allow a child to practice basic tasks like running hopping, climbing and manipulating small objects. Specifically, they chose to mix crawl tunnels, ramps, activity panels and a sand box.

To foster emotional development, the teachers considered activities that would promote fantasy play and becoming adventuresome such as the use of spring riders, talk tubes and play panels.

To foster social development for the children specifically between the ages of 4 and 5, the teachers considered that they would need to have adequate spacing between

<http://www.ippa.ie/play.htm> ³

some equipment, i.e. the sand box that would allow for movement from parallel play to cooperative play.

Finally, to foster intellectual development, they considered specific areas that would allow the students to express their imaginative and dramatic sides. Activity panes, periscopes, or play areas with caves or boats, or simply different shapes which allow the children to decide what they are, are types of equipment that are helpful for accomplishing this.

This was not an easy task. In addressing all four areas, the group needed to look at the layout of the equipment as well as the particular equipment. It was important to recognize that age appropriate play areas do not need to become complicated. Instead, by strategically places specific pieces of equipment, children can generate ideas within their own imaginations.

To promote working together as a community

One of the original goals of the Executive Director of GRENSAVE was to get the teachers, parents and students to work together as a community to strengthen the educational experience that GRENSAVE was providing to the children of Grenada. The Executive Director and the Board of Directors have been very supportive of this project. Their backing gives the teachers the security to focus on making it a success.

The Executive Director believed that, when the community realized how powerful it was as a unit, it would be able to continue to grow, providing a better education to the students.

V Project Objectives

- **To provide the students with a better education**
- **To design and build a playground system**
- **Bring the community together to build a playground for their children**

To provide the students with a better education

This project will provide the students with a better-structured learning environment. In the late 1960s, researcher Sara Smilansky performed many studies that educators today continue to rely on as a benchmark for understanding and analyzing the benefits of play. These studies specifically focused on the cognitive activity of children during play and established four stages of play: Functional (using large motor skills to explore cause and effect); Constructive (using small motor skills to manipulate objects with the goal of building or creating something); Dramatic/Socio-dramatic (role play, individually at first, and then with two or more children, as comprehension of language and symbols develops); and Games with Rules (emphasis on skills, competition and interaction, as empathy develops). Following Smilansky's theory, this project would provide the children of GRENSAVE's schools the physical structure and activities to foster all of these stages of play.

The following are just some of the things children learn while they're playing:

- Large muscle skills develop as children reach, grasp, crawl, run, climb, skip, and balance
- Hand-eye coordination improves as the child handles objects in play
- Language expands as a child communicates on increasingly mature levels, beginning with coo and babble games and progressing to such levels as making up stories, telling jokes and communicating thoughts and feelings
- Social skills grow through play experiences as the child moves from enjoying simple contact with another person to learning to cooperate, take turns, and even to play by the rules

- Cognitive skills advance as a result of problem solving with play materials, ideas, events and people. This begins in infancy when the baby makes the startling discovery that his action causes a reaction, such as when a shaken rattle produces a sound. Stimulating play environments facilitate progress to higher levels of thought throughout childhood
- Emotional development is fostered through positive play experiences that allow children to feel successful and capable. Sharing positive play experiences forges strong bonds between adult and child from the earliest stages of infancy through childhood⁴

To design and build a playground system

Each play yard is different. Some are large, some are small, and none of them are without obstacles. There are many natural and manmade barriers that must be taken into account. Our pilot school is no different. Dunfermline, which has a good size front yard, has many natural and man-made obstacles for us to work around. Parents and teachers have reviewed many different types of playground equipment. They have received a donation from the Minister of Agriculture for the wood to construct the playground and have been working hard to design something that they can build and provide to their children.

Since we are working specifically with preschoolers, we have been directly addressing the issue of safety. Research has shown that it is important to review and select age-appropriate equipment. Preschoolers specifically lack upper body strength; it is best to keep away from items from which they must hang. They also do not possess a large reaching and stepping range. To address this, everything must be properly proportioned. Items need to be relatively close together, and it is best not to have anything that entices them to jump. Although it is important to address these safety issues, “A playground is a child’s laboratory for learning,” says Corly Petersen Brooke, professor of human development and family studies at Iowa State University.

⁴ <http://www.ippa.ie/play.htm>

‘Developmentally appropriate play areas should consider the normative abilities expected of a child at a particular stage and then create experiences that actually enhance a child’s development.’ (Fedorczyk, 12)

Bring the community together to build a playground for their children

Success for this project is dependent on grassroots organizing and planning.

Without the support and cooperation of the parents, the teachers would not be able to accomplish this project. The parents are essential in the fundraising and project design and building stages. The parents want to assist in their children’s education, but most of the times are not able to. By working with the teachers to design and implement this project, the community will grow stronger as parents help contribute to education.

Background

Four years ago, as a Peace Corps volunteer in Grenada, West Indies, I worked for GRENSAVE. Since that time, I have continued to volunteer for the organization by assisting in various ways. In September of 2001, Gail Straughn, Executive Director at the time, approached me for assistance in helping the schools with curriculum and fundraising efforts. The teachers and parents had more specific ideas for what I could help with, recruiting me to assist them in the creation and implementation of the playground systems.

Throughout this project, other major players who have gotten involved have been: the Grenadian Government, through the donation of wood from the Minister of Agriculture; the Lions Club and a few other private contributors with monetary donations; the Peace Corps with additional volunteers to help with the building phase.

VI RESULTS

If the project was completed, then, as stated above, the objectives were:

- **To provide the students with a better education**
- **To design and build a playground system**
- **Bring the community together to build a playground for their children**

At this stage of the project, we have been able to achieve most of the stated objectives.

At this point, the community has designed the playground system and come together as a community to do it. As of August of 2003 when the build day arrives, they will reach these objectives. When school opens in September the students will be able to utilize the system helping them with:

- Development of large muscle skills
- Improvement of hand-eye language expands
- Growth of social skills
- Advancement of cognitive skills
- Emotional development

The parents and teachers have been working hard throughout this project for the benefit of their children and their community. They met on several occasions and determined what it was their children needed. They then needed assistance in determining if it was possible and if so, how to achieve it.

Throughout the process, the two most prominent factors contributing to delays and changes have been the changes in staff and parents. The Executive Director of GRENSAVE left last December, and it took three months to replace her. Since she was the major point of contact at that time, communication became difficult, if not

impossible. Similarly, parents who were involved at the beginning saw their children graduate without the project coming to fruition. Other factors that caused difficulty were location and distance. Since I was physically thousands of miles away from Grenada, communication was very difficult. I was able to visit twice in the last year; this visit better provided me with insight into why phone calls were not being returned, and why faxes were ignored.

It is my recommendation that any project manager sits down with the project leaders and discusses timetables and desired results. The manager must also keep a detailed list of what each leader has volunteered to take care of, in order that they can be held accountable to the group. It is important that a clear line of communication be open throughout the process. Without these recommendations in place, it is very difficult to complete the project.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Each time one embarks on a new project, it is essential to realize that there will be bumps in the road. This project proved no different. Some of the bumps I expected to find. Clearly, I knew that it is difficult to work on any project located thousands of miles away. These issues of time and travel become additional factors that need to be worked around. There were also bumps that I did not expect to find. When Gail Straughn left GRENSAVE and did not tell me, it was a major setback in the project's timing, resulting in three months worth of project time wasted. It is also very important to realize when a problem is insurmountable, and when it is something that can be worked through.

With this project, I knew that distance would be a problem from the beginning. Luckily, I knew the culture and the area very well. It is clear that if distance had not been a factor, the project could have been completed months before August 2003. Distance specifically affected the communication between the teachers and myself. Since my main sources of contact were email and the post office, I had to rely heavily on people in Grenada to send me status updates, letting me know exactly what was being accomplished. When the fax machine was broken for over a month, or the email did not work correctly, many deadlines were missed.

Expect the unexpected - the factor that no one takes into account during the project design. It can be something that ruins a project or something that increases your ability to complete the project and to achieve the stated goals. In this project, money was an unanticipated factor. Materials for this project are expensive in Grenada, and those

that are not available in Grenada are expensive to ship. The teachers and staff began thinking of fundraising ideas, but at times the overall cost seemed overwhelming. That was when the Minister of Agriculture offered to donate the wood. This was an important event that not only saved a significant amount of money, but also at the same time re-motivated everyone. The overwhelming idea of raising thousands of dollars became achievable. It gave a much-needed push toward finalizing plans and concepts.

When designing a playground build project, there is a lot of information to review. It is important to know both the ages of the children that will be using the system and the number of children that will be using it at the same time. Since there is so much equipment available in the United States, a project can be completely unique or common. To create a design that would be the most beneficial for the children that will be using it, one needs to know generally who they are and how many of them will be there. A system that is not properly designed can be dangerous as well as unsuitable.

A second important factor to consider when creating a playground is fundraising. In the United States, the cost of equipment is high. An average neighborhood playground can cost anywhere from \$25,000 to \$40,000. In my project, we considered it very important to keep the costs low. Searching out and using materials like old tires, or even unique designs like a boat or a dragon built of wood, could save money when it comes to the purchase of equipment. Fundraising is a must and it is important to make sure you can raise enough funds to create the playground you need.

The one consistent thing about this project was the Project's Goal. Having a goal from the beginning helped the participants move past the difficult spots. This project was designed around the goal. By setting this in motion early on, it was easier to see

what changes could and could not be made. No project is without bumps and unexpected curves, but, by having a goal, the ability to see the larger picture keeps everything in focus. By keeping an open mind and working through these factors, the project has a much better chance for completion and success.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. <http://www.bbbsi.org/grenada/index.htm>
2. <http://www.caribbean-connection.com/grenada/map.html>
3. www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print
4. www.HealthScoutNews.com
5. <http://www.interknowledge.com/grenada>
6. <http://www.ippa.ie/play.htm>
7. www.kaboom.org.
8. <http://www.scn.org/ip/cds/cmp/curframe.htm>
9. <http://www.spiceisle.com/grensave/pam.htm>
10. <http://www.voice.bloomu.edu/3-21-96/news/alternative.html>

11. Castle, Kathryn, and Elaine Wilson. "Children Solve Problems as they Invent Playground Games. Educators' observations prove that play is more than just recreation," Dimensions of Early Childhood. Summer 1992
12. "Children Study Longer and Play Less, from the University of Michigan Institute of Social Research." The New York Times. 11/11/98."
13. Child-Development Experts Agree: Free-Play Time is still Tops." Health Scout News.11/25/2001
14. "Early Years are Learning Years: The Value of School Recess and Outdoor Play," NAEYC 1997.
15. "Educators' program shows the connection between movement and learning." The Chicago Tribune, November 5, 2000

16. Falcetta, Frank M. "Why International?" The Community Service Catalyst.
Summer 1994.
17. Fedorczak, Alicia. "Designing for Child's Play." At Play. Fall 2001.
18. "Parents say Early Childhood Play is More Than Fun." Gymboree Play Survey.
Dialogue Market research. Gymboree Play Programs, 11/13/98.
19. Smilansky, Sara. Children's Play and Learning, ed. Kiugman, Edgar and Sara
Smilansky. New York: Teachers College Press, 1990.
20. Snow, Harrison. Indoor/ Outdoor Teambuilding games for Trainers.
New York: McGraw- Hills. 1997.
21. Yates, Miranda and James Youniss. Community Service and Social
Responsibility. Chicago: University of Chicago. 1997.