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FALL '15

Growing Up Boulder

TORI DERR

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CHILDREN.”

“We bring the expertise and the framework for what participatory planning looks like, the city and the civic area make the project real, and the teachers bring their skills and know-how to make the curriculum effective,” says Tori, Senior Instructor of Environmental Design and Co-coordinator for Growing Up Boulder. “If you take any of those pieces away, it wouldn’t work.”

FRESH PERSPECTIVE: GROWING UP BOULDER INVOLVES YOUTH IN CITY PLANNING

In an on-going effort to make the city of Boulder an increasingly youth-friendly and inclusive community, environmental designers from the University of Colorado Boulder, city officials, teachers, and, perhaps most importantly, children have joined forces to tackle urban planning projects. With guidance from CU-Boulder faculty, staff, and students, local youth are playing important roles in discussions about the upcoming redesign of the city’s civic area.

Third graders have a lot to say about where they live, where they are from, and ways their communities could improve. Through the program Growing Up Boulder, faculty and students from CU-Boulder’s Program in Environmental Design and city leaders are all ears.

Established in 2009, Growing Up Boulder is a child- and youth-friendly city initiative that provides meaningful opportunities for youth participation in urban planning and design. The program’s goals are to: make Boulder a more inclusive place for young people from all income levels, ethnicities, and abilities;

ensure meaningful opportunities for participation; give partners a voice in setting the direction of the project; and disseminate lessons learned to other local, national, and international youth-friendly communities.

As the city embarked on a major redevelopment of its civic area, Growing Up Boulder coordinators, Tori Derr and Mara Mintzer saw an opportunity to infuse youth ideas in the planning process. Boulder’s civic area is the greenway area along Boulder Creek that is just footsteps from the city’s downtown and major hubs, including the public library, municipal buildings, museums, and farmer’s market.

CU-Boulder environmental designers and city planners have been visiting classrooms in Whittier International Elementary School, Casey Middle School, and Boulder High School where teachers have incorporated civic-area-redesign projects into curriculum throughout the school year.

“Growing Up Boulder is a synthesis between the University, the teachers, the city, and the kids,” said Derr, senior instructor of environmental design. “We bring the expertise and the framework for what participatory planning looks like, the city and the civic area make the project real, and the teachers bring their skills and know-how to make the curriculum effective. If you take any of those pieces away, it wouldn’t work.”

With support from a CU-Boulder outreach award, Growing Up Boulder students took field trips to the civic area, created personal nicho boxes — multimedia art boxes inspired by Latin American folk art — wrote persuasive letters to local officials, and built 3D models of their design ideas for the area.

Their work resulted in recommendations that incorporate nature play, active play, arts and cultural expression, affordable and diverse

OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT



food options, and outdoor learning spaces. From tree houses to affordable food stands, common themes emerged throughout the age groups. Most ideas were practical and feasible, and all age groups took careful consideration of other children, both younger and older, in creating their designs.

Growing Up Boulder leaders were not surprised by the students' thoughtful approach. Derr's research focuses on the intersections of people and place and how engagement of children and youth can contribute to more resilient, vibrant, and sustainable communities. She said incorporating youth voices in urban design is common in many international communities, and as the city of Boulder incorporates these recent ideas and others, the Growing Up Boulder method could serve as a valuable model for other cities.

"We are beginning to see a shift in adults taking kids seriously," Derr said. "Children have valuable ideas and they can make (the design process) better. In essence, we are changing what it means to effectively engage with the community, not just with kids, but with the whole community."

About Outreach and Engagement at CU-Boulder

Extending educational resources to the citizens of Colorado is a vital part of the university as well as the mission of Continuing Education. The Office for Outreach and Engagement, housed in the Division of Continuing Education, supports campus-wide outreach efforts and connects the university's research, teaching, and creative resources with communities throughout Colorado and the world.

The office also provides administrative support and oversight for the CU-Boulder Outreach Committee, which distributes funding for outreach projects that engage faculty in mutually beneficial partnerships with external constituents. These awards are made possible by funds from the Office of the Chancellor, the Office of the Provost, and Continuing Education.



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