

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PLAY: A MILESTONE FOR CHILDREN WORLDWIDE



JUNE 11 2024



The International Day of Play is a global celebration of the importance of play in human development held annually on June 11. With 2024 marking its inaugural celebration date, it signifies a shift in the global scene on the importance of play in the development of people and children more specifically.

Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children recognizes the right of play for children and is a foundational principle in the celebration of this event. Though largely undervalued in the global and African scene, play has a large role in the lives of children with it being an important marker in developing cognitive, physical, social and emotional skills among children. It also actively helps in the creation of relationships among children as well as promoting problem solving and critical thinking skills that end up benefiting the child in future stages of life.

Play is a universal language that breaks all societal and gender barriers, facilitating interaction among children from diverse backgrounds. With this knowledge, play- based learning is being advocated for in Early Childhood Development centers thus making it a complementary need rather than supplementary in the education sector.





With notoriety and public awareness of the International Day of Play being rather low, Early Start Africa; a non- profit organization on a mission to promote access to quality early childhood care and education for all children across the continent, together with various stakeholders not limited to: ChildFund, ECD Network for Kenya, Jamii Yetu Educational Centre, The Action Foundation, Nairobi City County, Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education, took it upon themselves to pioneer its celebration in Kenya and raise awareness on the importance of play in a child's development.



Though rather spontaneous which limited the contributing factor of some organizations, the planning team met up to plan for the day's activities which were to constitute of parent play engagement, a 2 km walk, outdoor play activities and key note addresses. Little Rock IECD based in Kibera was designated as the venue. The planning team also took measures to ensure the route mapped out was feasible for all aspiring participants. That did however mean that those on wheelchairs could only do the walk partially due to poor roads in some areas.

As expected with events done on short notice, resource mobilization for the event was an uphill battle. This was however offset by the active involvement of the stakeholders and shareholders, with funding for the milk, bread and water for all participants being provided in excess which would serve as a token of mere gratitude for having participated.

There was also need for licenses for use of the roads as well as a police escort that would guarantee order as well as safety. This was thankfully done expeditiously and the necessary documents and payments done before the day itself.



The event itself was truly special. As all events normally do, it started with an early arrival to ensure that everything was in place. From the banners to the public address system as well as the facilities present, it was necessary to ensure smooth operation of the day's events. People started streaming in a while later and within 30 minutes a sizable number had gathered.



I have to be involved
in anything that my
son is involved with.

Father of a child, little rock

The parent play engagement commenced swiftly with just a simple Q&A session on the definition, types and importance of play. The children would then stream out of their classes onto the field and with the guests in tow, a warm-up session soon started. The DJ was blasting some tunes and had parents, teachers, caregivers and children alike all dancing and stretching in preparation for the walk.



The main event was the walk and with the banners distributed and placed at strategic positions, it kicked off. The school had also graciously provided a daycare room for those with babies to leave with some staff to allow them to walk freely in order to increase the numbers on the road. As part of the last group myself, our walk was rather rushed as the children were adamant that they wanted to catch up with the main group. Though short lived, it was a valiant effort.

A great encouragement was seeing a group of ladies ahead of us; some expectant and others with children on their backs, refuse to turn back and complete the walk. It was a sign that impressions were made that day to the people. We also had passers- by taking photos and videos with some venturing as far as asking what the walk's purpose was with the odd one or two persons who would walk for a minute then leave. Advocacy and public awareness start at the smallest levels and we surely informed and impacted some people that day.

The outdoor play activities followed and it was a close contender for the event of the day. With the music playing, the facilitators engaging the crowd and the games, it was truly a sight to see. The games were interesting with everyone being included, disabled or not. From the sack race to the tyre race and relay races, the children were in full competitive mode with their friends and parents cheering them on.

The parents, not to be outdone, also had a relay race which was also closely contested with the groups varying in age and gender that made the spectacle even better. Seeing parents and guests cheering on their colleagues as well as the children cheering on their parents and teachers was truly amazing.

The speeches followed with a range of speakers gracing the dais. The children were able to articulate their messages well and it emerged as a common theme where all asked for more playtime in schools as well as increasing the scope of play with activities like dance and drama. They added that the event was very fun for them and asked their parents for more playing time at home with one child speaking on how they incorporated play with special needs children in her school and their efforts to make them feel like a part of the group.

The parents merely echoed what their children said but differed by stating that they had gained newfound knowledge on the importance of play. A few ventured and described how play was in their days and the difference in the current education system's lack of play. One mother spoke on how play had helped in the development of her physically disabled child with low muscle tone. The child was able to stand and was most jovial when playing and she wound up by saying that play is meant for all persons, children and adults alike.



The invited guests took a more formal approach with speakers from Nyota Care and ECD Network for Kenya who came on to speak on the importance of play and the works their organizations have been doing in the Kenyan sector to improve and incorporate play based learning in schools. Representatives from the National Council of Children Services and Ministry of Education came and talked about the government's efforts in promoting play in early child development centers and through the training of competent teachers. They also spoke on the importance of play, its benefits and why all interested parties in a child's life should ensure that play and playing spaces should be present.

Following the speeches, a word of prayer was made and the celebrations came to a formal close. The school then helped in the distribution of the foodstuffs to all the invited guests and children. KBC news station held interviews together with Mtoto News who were covering the event to even boost public awareness on the celebration of the event.

With all this, why have a designated day for play? I left the event all the wiser with a plethora of reasons on the benefits of play. Play should be for all people; adults or children and able or disabled. It doesn't discriminate and neither should we. With play being such an instrumental marker for the development of children, play- based learning should be incorporated in all learning centers to promote this growth that we yearn for. Government and policy makers should be frontrunners in creating a legal framework for play's incorporation all around the country in areas such as education and construction where play spaces should be paramount for designs to be effected. We all have a role to participate in and only through working together can this dream be visualized.

The day was by all means a success. With a media team as well as the large numbers that turned up, I believe the message on the importance of play was passed. All interested parties pulled their weight in order to ensure the day went on without hitches. With the bar already set, you are assured an even better event in the coming years.

We hope that at least the message on the importance of play was passed and invite you to the next event.



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