



a letter from playgrown founder

Michelle S. Johnson, PhD

I formed Playgrown in 2003 with an eye on creating play spaces and experiences for teens and adults, but commuting from Ann Arbor to Lansing as a MSU professor and the state's Freedom Trail Coordinator and from Kalamazoo to teach at Grand Valley State University sapped my playtime. In 2005 I co-founded the non-profit Fire Historical and Cultural Arts Collaborative and began to see play through the lens of the arts. Freestyle hip hop, improv comedy and even visual art became clear expressions of play. I started to see self-expression as an important aspect of play and play as a critical means and end to social justice.

In 2010, with a small Kalamazoo Community Foundation Changemakers grant, Playgrown piloted Park Hop where teens and adults "hopped" to Kalamazoo parks. Playgrown partnered with play organizers like interplay to create spaces and generate experiences in existing places to bring people together to play across age, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicities, and physical abilities. Playing with a wide array of people started a process of rediscovering my body, and while play still took a back seat to the demands of growing Fire, I began to think more clearly about how important play was to my well-being. I applied for and received an Arcus Center for Social Justice and Leadership fellowship at Kalamazoo College from September 2011 to April 2012.

During this fellowship, I researched multi and intergenerational play and focused on how play functions as a basic need. I collected local, national and international data and visited playground organizers and manufacturers in parts of Europe. But, most importantly, I played. I crawled, hung and jumped in a womens' parkour class in a London alley, climbed,

slid and crawled at City Museum in St. Louis, balanced and laughed at a Rotterdam park, responded to computer generated lights and targets in Amsterdam and saw that a city can embrace play as part of its identity in Odense, Denmark. I did all of this in spaces built with full-grown bodies in mind.

I am thrilled to be co-creating the very first playgrown installation in Detroit and look forward to the second in Kalamazoo, the third in Chicago and the fourth.....I'm open to ideas.....

Freedom in Play,

Michelle

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