



MEET THE 2024 PAW TEAM!



**Back row from left to right:** Janelle, Emilie P, Riley, Emily R, Gage, Ellen, Amy C, Kaenan, Weina  
**Front row from left to right:** Thannaël, Julliane, Erin, Amy P, Vanessa, Paige  
**Missing:** Brynn Walmsley

PAW 2024



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# 2024 Leadership Team



**SAM MCDUGALL  
RAYONG**

Sam has been involved in the PAW community since travelling to Rayong Thailand for her PAW experience in 2019. She has been a member of PMC since and continues to play in her everyday life. She is a nurse at the Royal Alexandra Hospital working on a Postpartum & Women's Health unit. She use the skills and experiences she learned during her PAW experience to create a positive, encouraging and supportive environment on her units. Sam is very excited to be able to support this year Rayong team on their PAW journey and can not wait to see what they can accomplish!



**ANTHONY BOURQUE  
PHNOM PENH**

Anthony completed his PAW experience in Phnom Penh in 2014 and returned as a leader in 2017. Anthony was a member of PMC from 2016 until 2018 when he moved to Calgary to work as a social innovator for a public health project using play as a health intervention. Through this work, Anthony hosted and supervised the 2021 PAW team in Calgary. He is currently working in Edmonton at Skills Society as the Director of Research and Social Innovation, and is excited to support the new Phnom Penh team in their playful endeavours!



**HEATHER CRAIG  
CHIANG MAI**

Heather was a member of the 2006 team in Pattaya, Thailand. She returned as a leader in 2007. Over the past 15 years, Heather has stayed involved in PAW in numerous roles, volunteering on PMC, program coordinator, leading student debriefs, and most recently led the 2022 Chiang Mai team. In 2023 Heather completed her Masters where she interviewed past PAW participants on their perceptions of disability before, during, and after their PAW experience. Heather currently works full-time for the City of Edmonton on Accessibility and is excited to support a new group of students in their journey with PAW.



**JOEL JOHNSTON  
FORT PROVIDENCE, NWT**

Joel Johnston did his PAW placement in 2016. After graduation, Joel signed on to be the leader for Fort providence 2017 and joined the program management committee. In 2019 Joel accepted his second role as leader for the 2020 team. After being invited to be M/C for PAW team 2023 Joel decided to step back from the PMC role and support as a guest.... or so he thought. Now in 2024, the Play Around the World program is ready to be reestablished in the North and who better to go than the guy who just freed up some time not being on the committee. For his third time as Leader, with expressed gratitude and excitement Joel Johnston has accepted the role as leader for team Fort Providence.

# Meet the Leaders Cont...



JACQUIE KINGSTON  
CUSCO, PERU

Jacquie began her involvement with PAW in 2010 as a member of the first team to head to Cambodia and returned in 2013 as a leader. In 2015, she was part of a 3 person pilot project in Cusco, Peru. Jacquie has stayed connected with PAW as part of the Program Management Committee, as the Leadership Chair, and as a presenter for the U of A's International Week. Jacquie completed a Post Graduate Program in International Development and Food Security with a focus on Indigenous Populations and Health from Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University). She isn't finished with school just yet and has returned to pursue a professional degree in the Health Sciences field. Jacquie has spent the past few years programming, leading, and creating access to sport, recreation, and play opportunities through the City of Edmonton's Leisure Access Program, Abundant communities, River Valley Programs, Strathcona County and with the Alpine Club of Canada. She is looking forward to working with the new PAW 2024 team and connecting with new communities.

## Save the Date: Fundraising Opportunities

### Silent Auction

Date: April 12, 2024

Location: Central Social Hall, 10909 Jasper Ave

Tickets: \$45

Stay tuned for event details coming soon!

### Crowdfunding Campaign

Dates: February 1 - March 13, 2024

Support our students in their endeavour to start games around the world, where we share and connect with communities across borders through the power of play! To view the campaign or donate [click here](#).



# “Free Play”: An Alternative to Structured Sport in Social Development Work?

BY: MAT BLUNDELL

The following is a write-up about the tensions and criticisms that exist within structured forms of sport-for-development (SfD) work and the possibility of the free play approach – mobilized by the Play Around the World (PAW) program – as a de-sportized methodology. My hope is that in reading this, you will gain insights into the challenges of using sport as a social development tool, and the ways in which we might better approach said work, for the benefit of the populations we serve.



Criticisms central to the use sport as a social development tool are located in its highly structured, competitive nature. In the Northern (Western) world, sport and development have embodied political ideologies and agendas associated with Northern, neoliberal thought. Simply stated, neoliberal politics mobilized through the SfD movement have resulted in programs designed to develop target populations into ‘productive’ workers who can contribute to the global economy. In this way, SfD initiatives are imbued with the cultural features and values of Northern societies: which are then imposed upon target populations through said initiatives. They are thus viewed by scholars as assimilative interventions, and for this reason, are criticized as neocolonial projects.



How then, can we use sport and physical activity to enrich the lives of those we work with without contributing to an assimilative process that academic work has shown causes harm to the cultural values and norms within the Global South (Eastern World), (who are the primary targets of SfD work)? Having worked with the free play methodology as a former PAW student in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and having conducted research on the

Play Around the World program as a graduate student, it is my personal belief (as my research has suggested), that free play can be a way of meaningfully engaging communities in the Global South in physical activity whilst minimizing the negative affects here described.

Specifically, the free play approach can be viewed as what is called a de-sportized 1 approach to interventionist work. To de-sportize our sport and recreation work is, simply put, to reduce its competitiveness. Free play does just that, as it encourages children and youth to self-direct their engagement in sport and recreation, thus removing (or at the very least reducing) the influence of the SfD practitioner: and thereby allowing the opportunity for target populations to play in ways that align with their own cultural norms and preferences. Further, the non-competitive nature of free play as a de-sportized approach distances SfD work from the competitive spirit associated with traditional SfD programs, who emphasize a neoliberal spirit in their work through developmental approaches that seek to produce ‘winners’ who can compete within the global marketplace.

# “Free Play”: An Alternative to Structured Sport in Social Development Work? Continued...

BY: MAT BLUNDELL

An additional tension remains, however. What happens when children and youth in the Global South choose to engage in highly structured and competitive sport? As practitioners, do we “force” them back towards the free play method, risking the very ethos of free play as intrinsically motivate and self-directed? Or, in keeping with this ethos, do we “allow” them to engage with competitive sport knowing that they will inevitably come in contact with, and be influenced by, “Westernized” understandings of “positive” development?

There are no easy answers. However, in such an event that a child chooses highly competitive, structured sport, I believe that free play can remain an integral feature of our work if we mobilize it as an ethos. What I mean is, the practitioner can maintain the spirit of free play and cultural protection by thinking about and doing structured sport using a “free play mindset”. I believe this can be achieved by being both reflexive and adaptive to structured sporting spaces. For example, you can engage in sport, without keeping score. Or you can reduce the competitive atmosphere by rotating team members after every goal is scored. <sup>2</sup> In doing this, you move away from sport as being highly competitive and structured and towards an environment that is more inviting of playfulness and which places the emphasis on a collective experience, rather than an individualized one. In this way, I see free play as an embodied mindset. If we remain playful ourselves, then we are able as practitioners to see these tensions and find ways of circumventing them, so that children ultimately feel empowered to make decisions that work best for them, and which challenges the issues here described of Northern-focused SfD programming.

*Mat Blundell is a 2nd year Ph. D. Student in the Faculty of Kinesiology & Physical Education at the University of Toronto in the Center for Sport Policy Studies. He is also a former member of the Play Around the World program (Team Cambodia, 2019).*



<sup>1</sup> The term “de-sportized” was coined by scholar Davide Sterchele (2015) in their paper “De-sportized physical activity: From sport-for-development to play-for-development.”

<sup>2</sup> Sterchele, D. (2015). De-sportizing physical activity: From sport-for-development to play-for-development. *European journal for sport and society*, 12(1), 97-120.

# Where are they now?



WITH PAW ALUMNI ALI JONES JONZON

I I can't believe it's been 17 years since my PAW experience in Pattaya! Nevertheless, my time with PAW still continues to influence my life today. You might say I've had PAW imPRINTed on me!

I remember the Oilers had a good playoff run that year we were in Thailand and my teammates and I tried to listen to the games on 630 Ched through dial-up internet, early in the morning on our PAW laptop. My teammate from Chiang Mai introduced me to wireless internet shortly after that, but we still mostly used internet cafés to keep in touch with home. The other thing we used was international calling cards and a Nokia-type cell phone. That's how long ago it was! A lot has happened in my life since then, but I can honestly say that a lot of it has stemmed from my PAW experiences. It changed the course of my life and has defined my career(s).

PAW was my final practicum for my BSc Kin. degree and when I returned to Canada, I began my Masters in Adapted Physical Activity, also at the U of A. As a result of my participation in PAW and exposure to the importance and power of play, I wanted to focus my thesis on play. As the result of a conversation with one of my PAW teammates, I studied the play experiences of daughters of mothers with MS. I graduated in 2010 and I then went on to publish this as a paper, which I presented at the International Play Association (IPA) conference in Cardiff in 2011.



The year before I finished my Masters, I became the Adapted Physical Education Specialist in Early Learning with the Edmonton Catholic School District (ECSD). This job was so cool because I had resources to do lots of amazing things! I learned about the concept of Forest Schools from attending the IPA conference in 2011 and brought the idea back to Edmonton, where I became Forest School trained and began a Forest School taster program in ECSD. Teachers would bring their Kindergarten classes to the program for 3 weeks in a row to get a feel for it and see that they could maybe do the same in their own settings. It was hands-on professional development and a way to share the importance and benefits of play-based outdoor learning. I was also able to help design a natural, outdoor playscape at our Early Learning Centre as well as an indoor one. Again, teachers would bring their children There for hands-on professional development with their own class. All of these things that I did at ECSD was because of the connections, training and experiences I gained with PAW.



A RECENT FAMILY PHOTO, OVERLOOKING THE BEAUTIFUL GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNTRY-SIDE!



# Where are they now?

WITH PAW ALUMNI ALI JONES JONZON  
CONTINUED...

I worked at ECSD for 5 years and then my life changed again! I went on Maternity Leave in 2014 and I moved to the UK! I had met my husband, Luke, while doing my Masters and he was (still is) British. He finished his PhD in 2013 and got a job at the University of Hull, in north east England. So I moved to the UK and had a baby 34 days later! When I returned to work after having baby Erik, I was the Team Leader for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Practitioners in a Reception (Kindergarten) class. I had another baby in 2017 and when I went back to work after having Lewin, I got a new job as the lead practitioner in a Nursery/Reception class at a small village school. It was in this position that I realised I could do the job of a teacher, so I applied to do my PGCE (Post-Graduate Certificate in Education – it's the equivalent of an Education after degree). However, Luke then got a job at the University of Bath, so we moved down south and I have begun my PGCE in Early Years (ages 3-7) at the University of Gloucestershire just this past September. I have worked in Early Years my whole career as it is when I am playing with or watching children play that I know that's what I'm meant to do with my life. I had a Year 6 student ask me the other day, "how old do you have to be to go to university?" As in, aren't you a bit old to be in university? I am nearly twice the age of many of my colleagues, but that's OK. A VERY mature student, right?

Play has been the guiding principle in my career and in raising our two boys, and that has developed from my work with PAW. I have 'play' in Thai tattooed on my foot and every time I look at it, I think, 'yep, still relevant, still trying to play each day'.



OUR BOYS ON A RECENT WALK IN THE WOODS. IT'S NOT A STICK, IT'S A... (USUALLY A STAR WARS BLASTER THESE DAYS)



## Program Management Committee

We would love the input and perspectives from previous past PAW students. If you are interested in becoming a member of the program management committee please email Mary Ann to learn more.

A BIG THANK YOU TO JOEL JOHNSTON AND KENADI KUZYK FOR THEIR YEARS OF COMMITMENT AND SUPPORT WITH PMC

# Johann Gnanapragasam

## Team Cambodia 2023

The Paw experience afforded me one of the best summers I've ever had. Initially, I didn't know what I signed up for, and honestly, nothing could have prepared me for it. It is one thing to travel to another country, but another thing completely to live and work being fully immersed in the culture. I found the Cambodian people to be very friendly and family-orientated. They were so helpful and some would even treat me like their own son. I was able to spend time celebrating birthdays, singing karaoke, trying various foods, playing various sports (hockey and volleyball), and building really strong friendships with the people there.

My favourite part about it all was the job itself. The kids there are so amazing and completely engaged in every activity you show them. They would have so much energy that it rubbed off onto me. No matter what kind of day I was having, I was looking forward to playing with the kids because it allowed me to be a kid myself and get lost in the play too. Even though I've taught kids my whole life, Paw provided a teaching experience that was much different than I would ever have imagined, from orchestrating a play day for 1000 children with only 3 paw members to developing activities for every age from kindergarten to high school. In the 3 short months I got to spend in Cambodia, it became a second home for me. I miss the culture, the people, and especially the children we played with. I am grateful for the PAW program and the impact everyone in Cambodia had on me, as well as the support from everyone, especially my leader Kenadi and Professor Mary Ann Rintoul. I can't wait to hear about the adventures of future PAW students!



SCAN QR CODE  
TO WATCH PLAY  
DAY VIDEO !





## Tribute to Royle Harris (December 27, 1935–August 29, 2023)

As many of you will remember, Royle was a huge part of our PAW community and a strong advocate for the work (play) that we do around the world. As an organization, we looked forward to his presence each year, for decades. Royle was a regular contributor at the PAW fundraisers, and accompanied many students to the dollar store each year to stock up on Canadian supplies before departure overseas. Students were sometimes treated to lunch by Royle and there was so much joy in his heart from knowing each and every one. He believed wholeheartedly that PAW students both contributed and benefited from their experiences with PAW, and often expressed how proud he was of the work and the growth as a result. Personally, I had the pleasure of many lunches with Royle, good conversations and lots of laughs. Royle served on the Advisory Committee for over 15 years. We will all miss him dearly.

Please find his obituary here and visit the site to leave condolences or messages for the family.  
<https://edmontonjournal.remembering.ca/obituary/royle-harris-1088818802>

SUBMITTED BY: MARY ANN RINTOUL

2023 ROYLE HARRIS AWARD RECIPIENT:  
CONGRATULATIONS JACELYN ANTONIUK



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