

# Priorities and Implementation Suggestions of Child Friendly Community from the Perspective of Residential Welfare

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** The primary objective of this article is to ensuring children's residential welfare by providing priorities and implementation ensurance suggestions for the development of child friendly communities in China. **Research design, data and Methodology :** This research employs mixed-methods research design. Data collected through questionnaire and literature review to analysis children's needs and existing problems in public service facilities, open space, mobility environment and community governance that are common in communities, as well as case study and studying the status-quo to understand the practical experiences and development trends of child friendly communities in China. **Results:** The results focus on the development priorities of child friendly communities in terms of functions, effectiveness and systems, furthermore, put forward strategic suggestions on policy guidance, multi-party coordination and sustainable operation to ensure the development of child friendly communities. **Conclusions:** To conclude, child-friendly community development is crucial for promoting holistic well-being and inclusivity, ensuring a sustainable, happy, and healthy environment for children and all residents.

**Keywords :** residential welfare, child friendly, community building

**JEL Classification Code :** I31, O20, R00

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## 1. Research Background

### 1.1. Overview of Child Friendly Community Development

In 1996, UNICEF and UN Habitat first proposed the "Child Friendly City Initiatives" (CFCI), pointing out that children's welfare should be the ultimate indicator of healthy residence area, democratic societies and good governance, and efforts should be made to create safe, inclusive and fully responsive cities and communities for children. Since the launch of the Initiatives, the footprint has covered more than 3,000 cities and communities (UNICEF. 2019a). In 2018, UNICEF released the Shaping Urbanization for Children: A Handbook on Child-Responsive Urban Planning, which for the first time set out the

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concepts, principles and means of urban planning in building child-friendly cities. By creating prosperous and equitable cities, children can live in healthy, safe, inclusive, green and prosperous communities (UNICEF. 2019b). In the process of rapid urban development in the past two decades or so, more and more countries and cities around the world have gradually fulfilled the development of child friendly cities.

China's urban development has arrived in the midst of the stock renewal stage, shifting focus from quantity to quality, which has raised the bar for high-quality urban development and refined governance. Community serves as the basic element of the city, where children as a group is one of the populations (Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development. 2021), who will stay the longest in and use the facilities most frequently, and whom the community development should give priority to satisfy and fully ensure benefits for. The development of child friendly communities is not only an important grasp for the development of child friendly cities and the high-quality sustainable development of cities, but also an important means to effectively ensure and improve the welfare of children.

## **1.2. Child Friendly and Residential Welfare Concepts**

The "child friendly" concept is deeply rooted in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), emphasizing children's rights to survival, development, protection and participation. A child friendly environment not only ensures children's equal access to protection and support, and to services such as education and medical care, and the development of their personalities and skills, but also ensures that they have opportunities to actively exercise their rights (UNICEF. 2019b). The United Nations closely links children's welfare to multiple factors, including themselves as individuals, family, social policy, economy, society and environment, etc.

The "residential welfare" concept was first proposed by a Japanese scholar, Kazuo Hayakawa, who believed that the residential environment would serve as the basis of welfare (Hayakawa, K., 2005). Hu Huqin believes that residential welfare covers housing security, residential safety, community development, integration of living and medical welfare facilities, road pollution prevention and control, quiet environment, clean air and beautiful streets, etc. (Hu, H.,2022). Residential welfare includes not only the accessibility and utility of housing and its supporting services and facilities, but also the subjective satisfaction and happiness of occupants under these circumstances (Zhao, J., 2019).

Children's growth is deeply influenced by their environment, so it is of great significance to promote child friendly urbanization (UNICEF. 2019b). As the basic element of child friendly urban space, the community is regarded as the "first environment" for children to exercise their rights, in which children's rights are embodied and ensured in a most straightforward fashion (Chen, Q., et al. (2021).

## **1.3. Children's Needs and Existing Problems in Chinese Communities**

In order to understand the actual needs of community residents in daily life, an online survey was conducted on the needs of community basic living service facilities. A total of 7,567 valid questionnaires were collected, of which 0.44% respondents were children and adolescents under the age of 18. In the statistics of the importance of facilities by children and adolescents, community green space, small plazas and other outdoor activity venues and community convenience commercial service facilities are very important, and primary schools, kindergartens, among other educational facilities and community health service centers, among other medical care facilities also account for a high rate of importance. In the statistics of demand for outdoor activity venues by children and adolescents in terms of facilities configurations, most respondents have greater demand for fitness equipment, fitness trails, children's playground and facilities, as well as ball sports fields. In terms of demand for cultural and recreational facilities, children and adolescents have a high demand for library and reading rooms and quite some demand for art activity rooms. It has revealed that children have a wide variety of demands for community space and a high demand for well-equipped facilities and diversified activity venues and facilities. Therefore, communities, while providing safety and health insurance, need to strengthen diversified resource building to meet the different needs of children at all stages of their growth, thus ensuring their all-round and robust development and welfare.

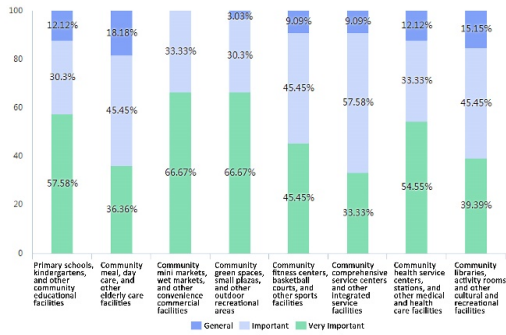


Figure 1. Statistics on the ranking of importance of facilities by children and adolescents

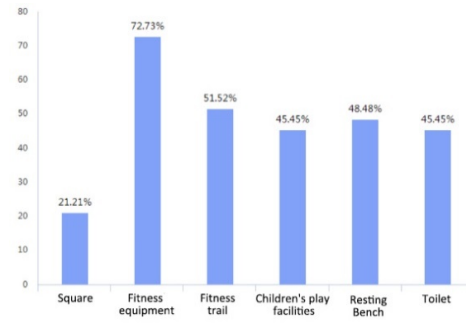


Figure 2. Statistics on the demand for outdoor activity venues by children and adolescents

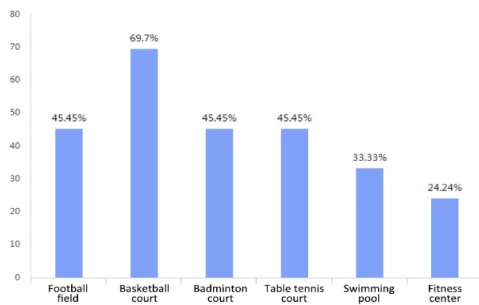


Figure 3. Statistics on demand for sports facilities by children and adolescents  
Picture Credit: Drawn by the Author

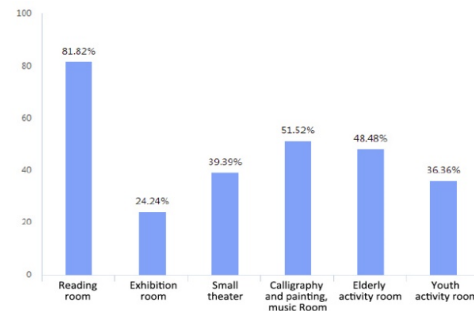


Figure 4. Statistics on demand for cultural and recreational facilities by children and adolescents

At present, China's child friendly community development is still in its infancy. Although some progress has been made, there are still some problems and challenges in the actual process of promotion. In terms of facility development, there are problems such as insufficient supply, low quality and lack of child friendly transformation of childcare, education and medical facilities, etc. At the same time, there are also problems such as low utilization rate of child friendly facilities in some communities due to large proportion of elderly population. In terms of outdoor activities for children, the problems mainly relate to the lack of or monotonous offerings of recreational facilities, the lack of fun, diversity and interactions with nature from facilities and venues for children, the lack of available play space for children, and the uneven distribution thereof, which all limit children's play-time opportunities. In terms of mobility, children generally face the problem of insufficient safety in mobility environment, with many unsafe factors such as shared space for pedestrians and vehicles in the community, and no coherent and systematic slow traffic system. According to a survey conducted by Beijing Municipality on mobility with children's accessibility, the vast majority of children respondents aged 12-18 would desire to be able to travel independently or be accompanied by their peers, but 40% of children can not travel independently due to various circumstances (Wang, X., & Zhang, J., 2021). At the community governance level, children's wide participation in community affairs is inadequate and such awareness is low, children's participation opportunities are not offered, and effective mechanisms and communication platforms are lacking.

At the same time, child friendly community services are inadequate and there is a lack of rich community activities. In addition, the separation of children's exclusive spaces from social public life results in children's activities being confined to specific areas and lack of integration with other social activities. The development of child friendly community should integrate with local characteristics, and on the basis of meeting children's needs, make up for weak links, promote intergenerational interaction and fusion, realize the friendship of all age groups of the community, and drive the transformation of the community from enclosed space to public space by strengthening the internal and external links of the community.

## 2. Status-quo and Trends of Child Friendly Community Development

### 2.1. An Overview of Child Friendly Community Development in China

The guideline of China's 14th Five-Year Plan for the first time calls for 100 demonstrations of child-friendly cities, strengthening the development of off-school activity venues and children's homes at communities, upgrading public spaces to be well-suited for children and improving public service facilities for children (Qiu, H., et al., 2021). In 2021, 23 departments of government, including the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), the National Working Committee on Children and Women under State Council and the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development (MoHURD), issued the *Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Development of Child Friendly Cities*, which further specified that 100 pilot child-friendly cities will be built nationwide by 2025. It also proposed to promote the development of China's child-friendly cities from five dimensions: social policy, public services, rights protection, development environment and growth space, which pointed out the overall direction for the development of China's child-friendly cities.

It put forward six requirements for child friendly spaces, including the development of child-friendly communities (National Development and Reform Commission joint 22 departments., 2021). In 2022, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development (MoHURD), and the National Working Committee on Children and Women under State Council jointly issued the *Guidelines for the Development of Child Friendly Spaces in Cities (Trial)*, clarifying the requirements for the planning, design, construction and development of child-friendly spaces at the city, district (county), neighborhood/town and community levels, as well as the child-friendly renovation of all types of spaces, so as to provide important reference and guidance for local governments and relevant departments to promote the development of child-friendly spaces (National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, & Office of the National Commission for Women and Children., 2022 ).

### 2.2. Local Practice of Child Friendly Development in China

Child friendly communities are the foundation and key to the development of child friendly cities. In recent years, for which a series of policy documents, development guidelines and guide rules have been issued successively to guide the development of child friendly communities in various places to be adapted to local realities. Shenzhen City and Changsha City are pioneers in the development of child friendly cities nationwide. Since 2001, Shenzhen Municipal Committee of the Communist Party of China and the municipal government have issued two rounds of Shenzhen's Ten-Year Plan for Children's Development, incorporating "actively promoting the development of child friendly city" into Shenzhen's 13th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development and the Annual Work priorities of Shenzhen Municipal Committee of the Communist Party of China in 2016, and issued *Shenzhen Child Friendly Community Development Guidelines (Trial)* in 2018 with the goal of realizing healthy and happy growth of children in the community (Shenzhen Women's and Children's Work Committee., 2018). Changsha City proposed to create a "child friendly city" in 2015, and released the first officially recognized child friendly city development white paper (Shen, Y., et al., 2023) in China in 2019. In recent years, Zhengzhou, Wuhan, Wuxi and other cities have successively compiled guidelines for the development of child friendly communities, covering many requirements from space development, community service, children's participation, cultural development, system insurance, etc., thus providing guidance and reference for the development of child friendly communities.

### 2.3. Trends and Inspirations

To sum up, the introduction of a growing body of child friendly city-related policies marks that China has entered a new period of high-quality urban development. People are increasingly aspiring for a better life and have higher expectations and requirements for high-quality urban space and habitable residence environment. Community is the basic element of urban structure, urban residents' life and urban governance, as well as the living element that provides essential services and facilities for residents' daily life. Therefore, it is also an important space carrier to practice the development of child-friendly cities. In

order to advance a broader development of child friendly communities nationwide, attention should start from the needs of children from the perspective of children, aim at providing safe, healthy and happy community environment for children to grow in, and build child friendly communities with well-equipped functions, improved efficiency and sound systems.

### 3. Priorities of Child Friendly Community Development from the Perspective of Residential Welfare

#### 3.1. Building Well-Equipped Child Friendly Community Space Environment

Improve the allocation of public service resources for children. In combination with the actual needs of children and their caregivers in the community, complement the shortages in the development of children's service facilities, and promote the child friendly transformation of community public service facilities. Build safe and standardized nurseries, kindergartens, children's homes and other facilities that meet the needs of community residents, providing inclusive childcare or nursery services and space for children to read, study and interact outside school. Promote the transformation of community comprehensive service stations, community health service stations, elderly service stations and other public service facilities to be suited for children, and set up child friendly facilities such as children's reading areas, rest areas, study rooms and baby care rooms adapted to local realities. For example, Yue 'an Community, Jianye District, Nanjing City, Jiangsu Province, has merited from existing kindergartens to upgrade and perfect supporting facilities to provide safe and reliable childcare services for infants aged 0-3. Incorporate child friendly elements into community convenience service stations, build baby care rooms, children's book reading areas, activity venues, etc. to provide community residents with a variety of child care and custody services (Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development., 2023).



**Figure 5.** Nursery at Yuean Community

Photo Source: Reference [14]



**Figure 6.** Little Things of Livelihood Observer Series Activities

Expand outdoor activity space for children. Build children's activity venues, based on the age group characteristics and needs of community children. Existing communities provide safe, entertaining and age-appropriate play and fitness venues and facilities for children through child friendly transformation in community parks, plazas, idle spaces, etc., setting up rest areas for caregivers, or coordinating with adult fitness venues comprehensively. Encourage communities to build natural aesthetic education places, wherever permitting, including creating community farms, art walls, science popularization spaces and facilities, so that children can get close to nature and to art, learn knowledge and enjoy life and happy growth in the community while playing in the community. For example, Xianghu Community, Xiaoshan District, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, has built Xianghu Xiaoya'er Farm, which has integrated with children's playground and community farm, by transforming idle space, so that children can participate in field labor, get in close contact with nature in the city, broaden their horizons and enrich their life experience (Future Community Exploration Camp., 2023).





Photo Source: Wechat Official Account of "Architecture Magazine"

**Figure 7.** Xiaoya'er Farm in Xianghu Community

Improve the experience of safe mobility for children. Build child friendly community slow-traffic systems connecting common facilities and venues for children, implement static transformation such as raising road surface and adding buffer zones around these places, set up conspicuous and easily legible special signs, interesting and beautiful street furniture, and install intelligent surveillance cameras to provide children with a safe, continuous and comfortable mobility environment. For example, Binfen Community in Binjiang District, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, has built a 1.5-kilometer long "Worry-Free Road to School" for children. By drawing prominent color strips on the sidewalks, setting up uniform conspicuous signs, and combining IoT technology, it shapes a well-protected accessible learning mode, featuring "full-process monitoring, automatic warning, and fast-responsive protection", so that students are ensured to access learnings safely without parental accompaniment.



Picture Source: Weixin Official Account of "Hangzhou Women's Federation" "Binfen Future Community"

**Figure 8.** "Worry-free Road to School" by Binfen Community

### 3.2. Create Child Friendly Community Spaces with Enhanced Effectiveness

The development of child friendly community should value the enhancement of effectiveness. Community public spaces create places for all. However, the current planning lacks the flexible sharing of public space. Sharing is not only the efficient composite utilization of space, but also the community education function through common use and neighborhood interaction. The efficiency enhancement in community development is mainly reflected in the effective use of space and time.

In the spatial dimension, flexible adaptive design, functional composite utilization and equipment and facilities sharing should be considered. Flexible adaptive design is given priority in community planning, allowing facilities to adjust to

changing needs and environments through flexible layouts and strategies, thus improving efficiency and sustainability. Modular and multifunctional designs should be adopted to meet the diverse needs of children and other residents. The *Guidelines for the Development of Urban Child friendly Spaces* encourages schools, organizations and other ancillary activity venues around the community to share resources with nearby residents and children (Hangzhou Women's Federation., 2022). The interior design of Qinghe Residential Hall in Haidian District of Beijing Municipality adopts the "Boundary-free" mode to promote linkage across all types of spaces and population interaction through flexible shared spaces (Liu, J., & Deng, X., 2019). In addition, community facilities will also need to consider the ability to respond to emergencies, such as suggested in *Toronto: Growth-New Vertical Community Planning*, that new communities be equipped with multi-purpose sports fields that can serve as makeshifts in emergencies (Toronto City Planning Department., 2020). Composite functional utilization improves the efficiency of space resources by integrating residential, commercial, educational, recreational and other uses, meeting the demands of different populations, thus creating multi-layered public spaces. For example, the *Guidelines for the Development of Child friendly Community in Shenzhen (Trial)* require that shared spaces include children's libraries, comprehensive activity rooms, parents' schools, etc., and can be combined with community commercial service facilities in the layout, and children's discussion spaces can be comprehensively designed with other public spaces. Equipment and facilities sharing; through the sharing of equipment, improve the utilization rate of community resources, reduce duplication of development, and promote neighborhood interaction.



Photo Source: Liu, J., & Deng, X. (2019).

**Figure 9.** Flexible Shared Activity Space of Maofang North Community in Qinghe Neighborhood

In the time dimension, community planning should consider flexible management and time-sharing utilization, as well as all-day accessibility and multi-generation sharing. Flexible management and time-sharing aim to improve the efficiency of space and resource utilization by flexibly adjusting the use mode and time arrangement of community resources to meet the demands of different populations in different time slots. The *Guidelines for the Development of Urban Child Friendly Space* suggests that traffic control can be implemented in children's playing blocks for specific slots of time, and laneway functions can be adjusted to provide safe playing space for children; primary and secondary schools should coordinate with the surrounding public facilities and residential parking lots to realize time-sharing of parking spaces. For example, the underground parking lot of Hefei Zhaoxia Primary School is regularly open to residents in nearby communities to alleviate the parking shortages in communities. All-day accessibility and multi-generational sharing, through reasonable design and management, enable facilities and spaces in communities to serve residents of all ages 24/7 and promote inter-generational interaction and sharing (The Paper., 2021). The *Child Friendly Urban Planning Manual* suggests to enhance community accessibility for 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, through a mix of functional projects, and offering multi-generational programs to promote cross-age interaction and benefit sharing (Shen, Y., et al., 2021).

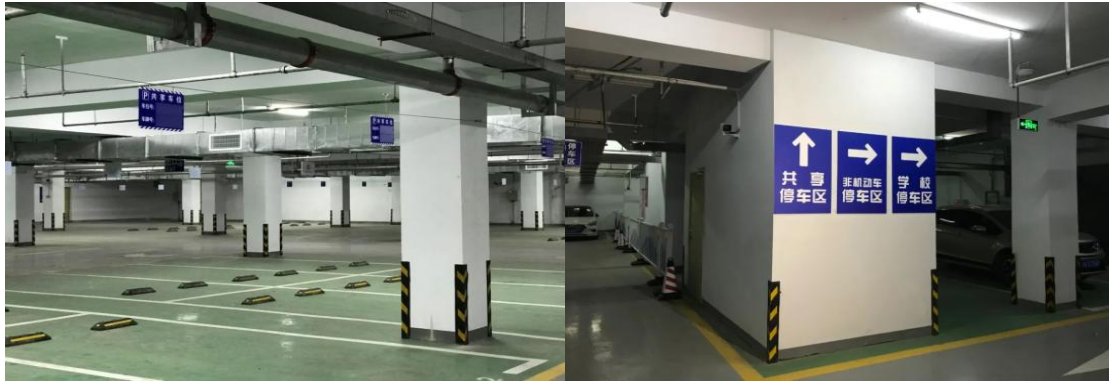


Photo Source: The Paper. (2021, January 12). This primary school's parking lot in Hefei can be "shared"

**Figure 10.** Regular and Directed Opening of Parking Lot by Hefei's School

### 3.3. Build a 3-Dimensional Child Friendly Community Development System of "Development + Service + Governance"

In combination with the characteristics and needs of the population of children, with the goal of ensuring and improving children's residential welfare, in addition to the development of spatial scenario, attention should also be paid to the service supply for a variety of scenarios and the development of governance mechanism to ensure the sustainable development of the community, so as to build a 3-dimensional system of "development + service + governance" of child friendly community development system.

The development dimension is to improve facility allocation and function, add special and interesting children's activity space adapted to local realities, create safe and comfortable slow-traffic area, and a child friendly community environment meeting the needs of children and their families for various scenarios of service facilities, open spaces, mobility environment and other spaces, frequently used by community children.

The service dimension is to further provide and improve a variety of community child friendly services to meet the needs of children and residents on the basis of the development of child friendly community space; provide community services such as childcare and parent-children classes, pay attention to left-behind and disadvantaged children in the community, train community workers and volunteers, and enrich cultural activities for community children. The governance dimension refers to the foundation and ensurance of space and service supply. It is necessary to establish and improve the long-term governance mechanism of child friendly community across the community, set up a routine mechanism and platform for children to communicate and discuss, encourage children to express their views through organizing designers to enter the community and other activities, enable children to fully participate in community affairs, cultivate children's sense of responsibility for participating in community governance, enhance self-confidence, promote integration and enhance ownership consciousness.

## 4. Suggestions for Ensuring the Implementation of Child-Friendly Community Development from the Perspective of Residential Welfare Improvement

### 4.1. Policy Guidance, Advancing Ensurance Efforts Comprehensively

It is suggested to strengthen the top-level design and promote the development of child friendly communities in a



coordinated manner, against the context of relevant policies such as urban renewal, urban renovations on old communities and comprehensive community development, etc. Through the practice of child friendly city development in recent years, it is suggested that child friendly community development standards and evaluation systems be established at the national level to provide clear guidance for the targeted implementation of all development items in various places. At the same time, it is suggested to establish fiscal policies related to the development of child friendly communities, support local development work by setting up special funds and incentive mechanisms, and encourage all sectors of society to participate in it.

## **4.2. Multi-party Coordination, Realizing Joint Development, Joint Governance and Sharing**

Build a multi-party participation platform to bring together the strengths from government, enterprises, designers, social workers, children and residents. Through collaboration mechanisms, the rights and responsibilities of all parties are effectively coordinated to ensure that all players actively participate in community development and operation. With such collaboration mechanisms in place, the government drives social capital into the community through fiscal investment, establishes a multi-level financing network, provides an enabling policy environment for market players, and ensures the sustainable development of communities. Encourage community partnerships to ensure children's rights of participation by engaging them in initiatives such as local planning, listening to their voices, seeking their comments, and addressing their needs.

## **4.3. Sustainable Operation, Driving Sustainable Development**

Build a full-life cycle operation framework to lay a solid foundation for sustainable operation and maintenance of community public service facilities and event venues, so that every stage from planning to implementation can accommodate future demands. Through flexible and refined space resource management, revitalize idle space, integrate fragmented space, and tap into potential space, so that various types of spaces in the community can be managed at a refined granularity, thus providing better service experience for residents. Achieving capital balance and profitability model on multiple channels is particularly critical for sustainable operation of various types of spaces. By establishing a financing network with diverse participants, broaden the sources of funding. Value-added services, advertising revenue, venue leasing and user fees, etc. have provided sustainable profit-making paths for community services, while compensating for operating costs through government subsidies. In addition, build a model of sustainable participation, including school-community co-development, and promote joint participation of universities, communities and schools in community building in the long run.

## **5 Conclusion**

Child friendly community development is an important measure to implement child friendly concept and help children grow up healthily and happily, which exerts a far-reaching and significant influence on ensuring and improving children's residential welfare. Children are the future of the country, and their healthy growth is linked with the future development of the country. The development of child friendly space in cities is also an important part to promote the sustainable development of cities. From the perspective and demand of children, efforts can be made to comprehensively advance the development of child friendly communities by making up for the weak links of community functions, facilitating space quality improvement and efficiency enhancement, constructing an all-round multi-dimensional development system and other key development tasks, and taking policy guidance, multi-party coordination and sustainable operation as strategies and implementation assurance. In addition, the developments of child-friendly integrated communities are not only for children, families and caregivers, but also for the elderly, young people and other residents of other ages in the communities, as well as the disabled, and pregnant women, etc. with special needs, for they are also members of the children's family and communities. Therefore, amidst the development of child friendly communities, innovative models should be explored to drive "friendliness for all-ages" through "child friendly" approach, so that community development can accommodate the diverse demands of residents of all ages, improve the residential welfare of all residents, and allow people to have a stronger sense of happiness, fulfilment and belonging, so as to realize harmonious integration from communities to the society.

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