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Back to Urth playgrounds: Addressing sensory needs of children in deprived settings

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Involvement of the Occupational Therapy Department, University of the Free State in disadvantaged communities confirmed developmental needs of children in rural settings. Previous research indicated a high prevalence of sensory integration (SI) difficulties in children from low socio economic settings and improvement in development and SI functions when exposed to stimulation programs aligned with a SI principles.

The challenge for OT's working in the field of SI is how to provide services to children that is in need, but will never be able to access OT-SI services. The development of "Back to Urth" playgrounds are an effort to provide in the sensory needs of children from disadvantaged communities by building playgrounds that are low cost, sustainable and provide enriched sensory experiences impacting on development.

This presentation will tell the story of how an interdisciplinary, collaborative effort between the university and communities in the Southern Free State led to the building of low cost, sustainable playgrounds. The building process works on the principle of community participation and collaboration between different stakeholders. Skill transfer is prioritised and thus everyone benefits through the building process, whilst investing in children's futures.