

# Profiles in Caring

From The Visionary Who Transformed Governor's Island, To The Doctor Dedicated To Providing Healthcare To The Uninsured, To The Business Wiz Building Playgrounds At Underserved Schools, Our Annual Honor Roll Of New Yorkers Making A Difference In The Lives Of Families

## Giving Children A Place To Play

**ANDREA WENNER,**  
Founder and Executive Director of Out2Play

By Elisabeth Frankel Reed

Laughter, shrieks of joy, children racing around the playground. Those are the memories Andrea Wenner has of recess, and so will thousands of New York City school children, thanks to the efforts of the organization she founded, Out2Play.

Wenner, who grew up in the suburbs, recalls her surprise when she moved to Manhattan and saw a street that was blocked off for school children to play in during recess. The image stuck with her. "The kids weren't active at all," she recalls. "They just sat on the curb or the stoop."

While attending Columbia Business School, Wenner learned about an organization that restored athletic fields for high schools. She explains, "I thought why not do what they did, but do it for elementary school playgrounds?"

Inspired, Wenner started Out2Play four years ago, the idea being to bring together public schools who needed playgrounds and private donors who were interested in funding them. Wenner's goal is for every New York City school to have a playground, but for now she prioritizes schools based on local income levels, health risks, and lack of existing facilities. Each playground is custom-designed with the participation of students and faculty. As of now, the organization has completed 81 playgrounds and has another 75 on their list that they're close to having the funding to start.

Each playground typically takes less than a year to complete. Wenner says that their ability to move so quickly is one of the organization's biggest strengths. "When we meet with schools, they ask, 'When will this happen, is it going to take three years?' They are incredulous when we say, 'No, you'll have a new playground next summer.' One of the main things I was shooting for when I started the organization was that we can't wait 10 years to provide these kids with a playground, we need to provide it to them now."

Wenner loves going on follow-up visits after the completion of a project, and seeing completely different behavior



Andrea Wenner

from the children. "They're running, they're playing ball, they're climbing on jungle gym equipment, they're just having a good time with each other and getting all these benefits that being outside and being active provide," she enthuses.

Out2Play boasts a two-person staff—Wenner and a program administrator, meaning that Wenner has a hand in every step of any given project. "The other day I rented a U-Haul truck to deliver soil to one of our schools," she notes.

But it's definitely worth it to Wenner, who sees the installation of playgrounds as an opportunity to shape the character of the next generation of city residents. "I hope that they get a great place to play and be active and engaged with their peers in a really positive way. I hope they feel a sense of ownership over the playground because we try to involve the school and the kids and the whole school community in the process as much as possible."

Photography by Jeffrey Shaw,  
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