A Message from Stephanie Garst, Executive Director of the US Play Coalition, March 29, 2020

Today we would have kicked off our eleventh international conference for the US Play Coalition. The annual Conference on the Value of Play is a multi-day professional development conference for an incredible cross-section of industries – education, health, parks and recreation, landscape architecture, business of all kinds, and more. But that was pre-COVID-19.

Like many organizations, we had to cancel our in-person conference in response to the rapid pace of the COVID-19 outbreak. The decision to cancel three weeks ago was challenging because nothing was clear-cut at that time (so much has changed in just three weeks). There were still so many unknowns, so many contingency planning meetings, so many people to consult and engage, so many contractual obligations to consider, so many logistics, so many details.

Then there was the pivot to an online delivery. Sure! Put it online! Poof! Done! But not every conference session translates to online, not every presenter wants to record a session, not every in-person registrant will participate online. We had over 100 sessions scheduled for our in-person conference (close to 150 presenters), but we were not sure how many of those would be able to make the transition with us. This could have been a no-go before we ever really started trying...which would have been a devastating loss for our organization.

But we did it!

We have been heartened by the kindness, support and expertise that so many have shown as we continue to make our way through a sometimes seemingly monumental shift.

Tomorrow we kick off the 2020 ONLINE Conference on the Value of Play with the first in a series of weekly Monday “live” zoom sessions leading up to the official online launch of more than 50 recorded educational and research symposium sessions, bringing latest research and practices in the field of play to an even broader global audience!

Tomorrow is a big day for the US Play Coalition, and we thank you ALL for making this happen!

Respectfully,
Stephanie Garst