

International Design Collaboration Brings Healing Play Landscape to Tucson Nonprofit

Written by Mallory Gleich

Monday, 22 December 2025 15:12 -



A chance meeting at an international design conference has blossomed into a meaningful project for Arizona families. When Charlie Ray, owner of Phoenix-based [The Green Room Landscape Architecture](#), attended a conference in Sweden last year, he crossed paths with the founders of Netherlands-based nonprofit [Office for the New Earth](#) (ONE). Inspired by their mission and work, Ray invited founders Niels Hofstee and Michael Vrijhof to Phoenix, where the group began designing a healing play environment for an Arizona nonprofit, marking the start of an impactful international partnership.

ONE brings together expertise in design, architecture, and environmental psychology to create spaces rooted in neuro-aesthetics, using the natural environment to foster calm, curiosity, imagination, and agency. Their work, which has supported refugee children in Greece and Cyprus, emphasizes biophilic materials, natural daylight, organic forms, harmonious proportions, and layered sensory experiences. That philosophy aligned with Ray's vision and led to the selection of Tucson-based Second Sky as the project's nonprofit partner after a months-long vetting process.



Second Sky serves as a community hub in South Tucson, offering after-school programming out of a 12,000-square-foot community center that

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includes a café, activity rooms, and an adjacent acre of undeveloped land. That land will soon be transformed into Oasis for the Senses, a healing play landscape inspired by the desert surroundings of Ray's childhood home. The design features rolling dunes, shade trees, water elements, shrubs and desert flowers, creating a natural environment. Vrijhof notes that while many playgrounds prioritize constant stimulation, research shows children benefit most from environments that offer a balance - 80 percent calm and 20 percent excitement.

"We envision a sensory garden where children can come together to rediscover peace and fascination, stillness and adventure... a botanical oasis reconnecting children with nature, and with themselves, so they can embrace a spirit of light and joy, and grow into the visionaries of tomorrow," Ray said.



"We feel so fortunate to be partnering with Charlie and the team at The Green Room," Hofstee added. "Together, we have designed a play space that allows for enriching and healing experiences for children."

The Green Room is donating its time, expertise, and studio resources, while ONE has been working alongside Second Sky to raise funds. Phase one is scheduled for completion by late spring and additional phases are planned for late 2026 and early 2027. Arizona Wholesale Growers has already committed to donating trees, shrubs, grasses, and ground covers, and the project team is actively seeking additional support for construction, irrigation, lighting, fencing, water features, and materials. Learn more at new-earth.one.