Calibrating Social Interactions:
v1. Slide+Bench

Witty modifications on playground furniture to afford for non-verbal interactions between elderly and children.

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Personal Motivation (The What?)

Like many, I grew up in Singapore's HDB heartlands. My first few friends were actually ones I made at the playground!

As children, we were so spontaneous in making new friends. We'd go around asking, *"Want to play catching[1]?"* and we'd all be friends. Growing up in such an environment has helped me define that true sense of neighbourliness - to know someone and be known.

I remember, as we played we would run pass a lone elderly resting under the void deck. Most of the time, it would just be the same *ah ma[2]*, who sits there everyday.

Observing that as a child, was what carried my thesis. The mental image of the lone elderly was stuck with me.

"By 2030, Singapore's population will have 28% of elderly persons with 83,000 of them living alone"
- UN's World Population Ageing Report, 2017
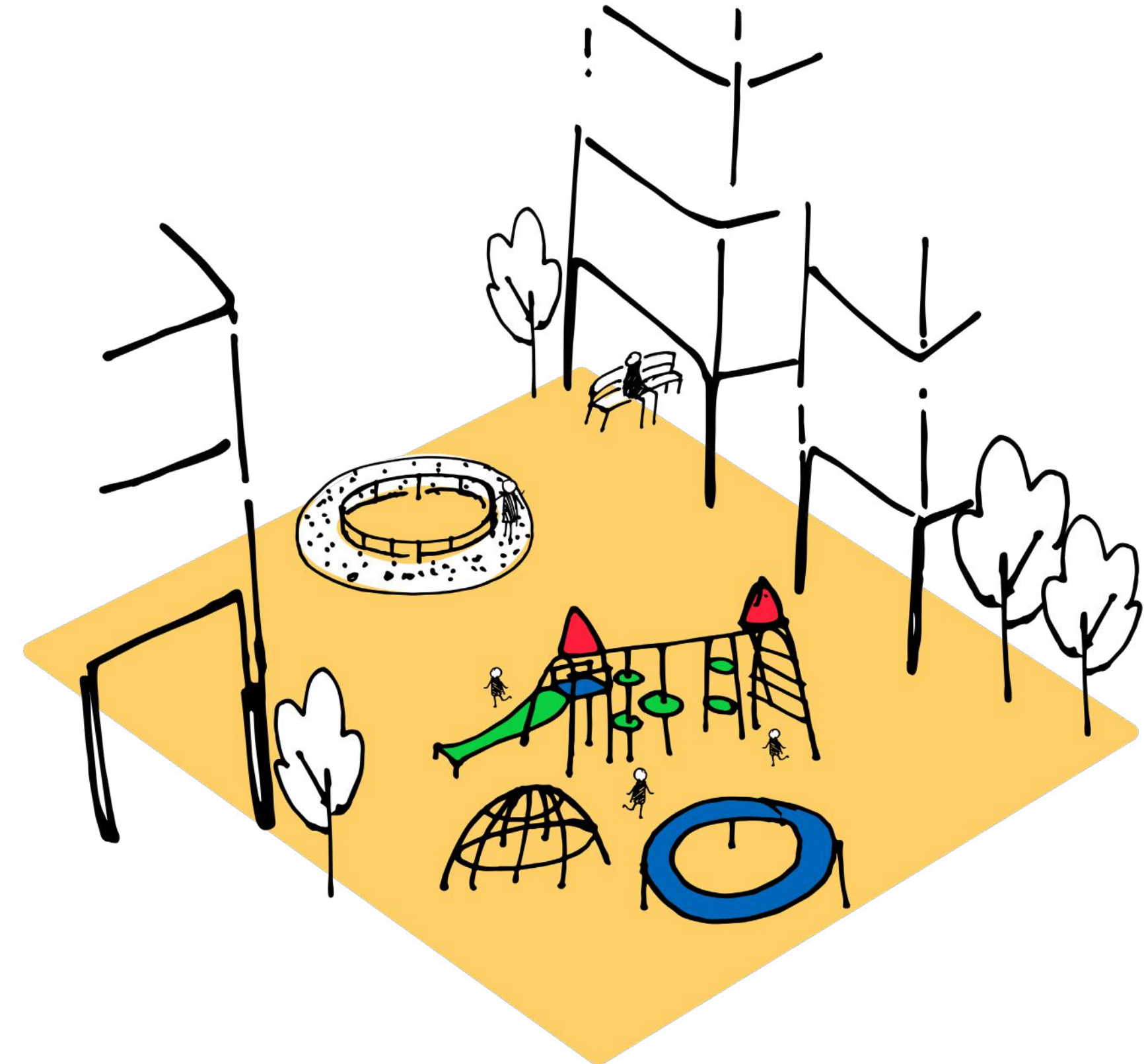
1 The Singaporean version of a game of tag

2 An endearing colloquial way of addressing an elderly lady

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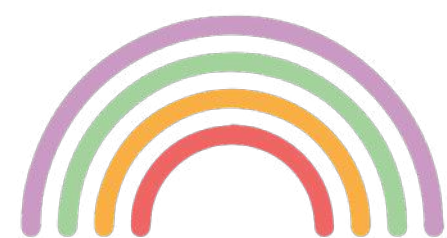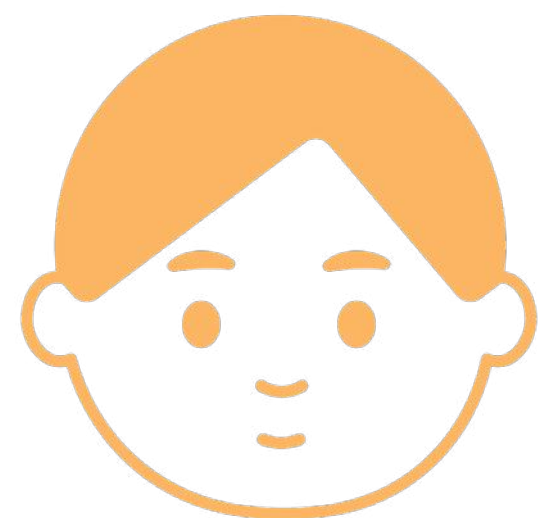
The Why?

Why are we sharing a space but not sharing a moment?

How could we have allowed each other to be seen; directing our attention to each other?

By recognising each other's presence, perhaps it could have created a deeper sense of neighbourliness between us.

I wondered **could we create a deeper sense of social inclusion for the elderly in our neighbourhoods?**

Perhaps tapping on the openness of children to achieve this social inclusion?

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Benchmarking of current initiatives

Co-location

Large Scale

Kampung Admiralty

Tampines Hub

3G Playgrounds

Inter-Gen Playground

Senior Wellness Centres

Intersecting

Interacting

Novel Void Deck Kitchen

#ForgetMeNot

Neighbours for Active Living

Pairing Progs

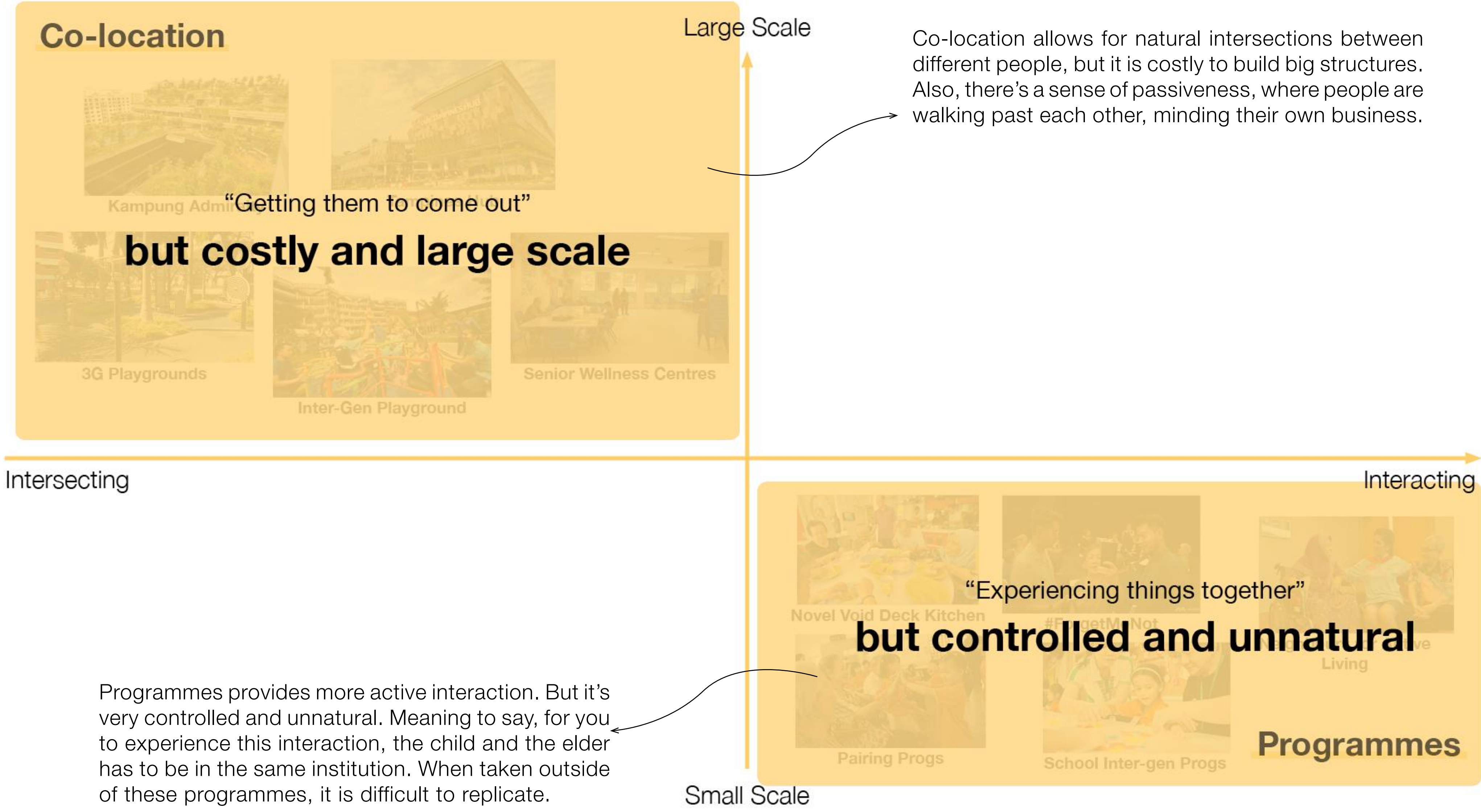School Inter-gen Progs

Programmes

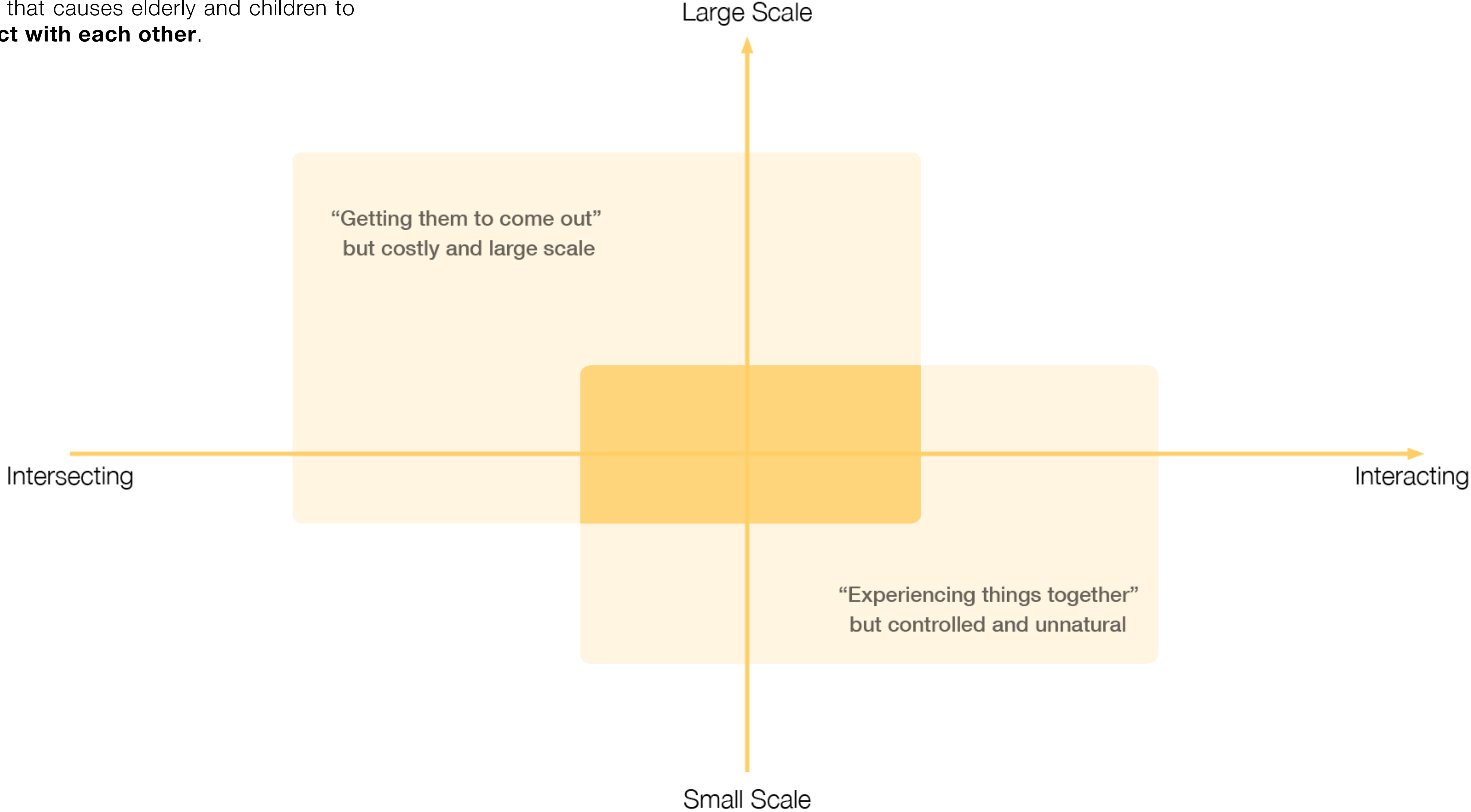Small Scale

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Benchmarking of current initiatives

Co-location allows for natural intersections between different people, but it is costly to build big structures. Also, there's a sense of passiveness, where people are walking past each other, minding their own business.

Co-location

Kampung Admiralty

"Getting them to come out"

but costly and large scale

3G Playgrounds

Inter-Gen Playground

Senior Wellness Centres

Large Scale

Intersecting

Interacting

Programmes provides more active interaction. But it's very controlled and unnatural. Meaning to say, for you to experience this interaction, the child and the elder has to be in the same institution. When taken outside of these programmes, it is difficult to replicate.

Novel Void Deck Kitchen

#ForgetMeNot

"Experiencing things together"

but controlled and unnatural

Living

Pairing Progs

School Inter-gen Progs

Programmes

Small Scale

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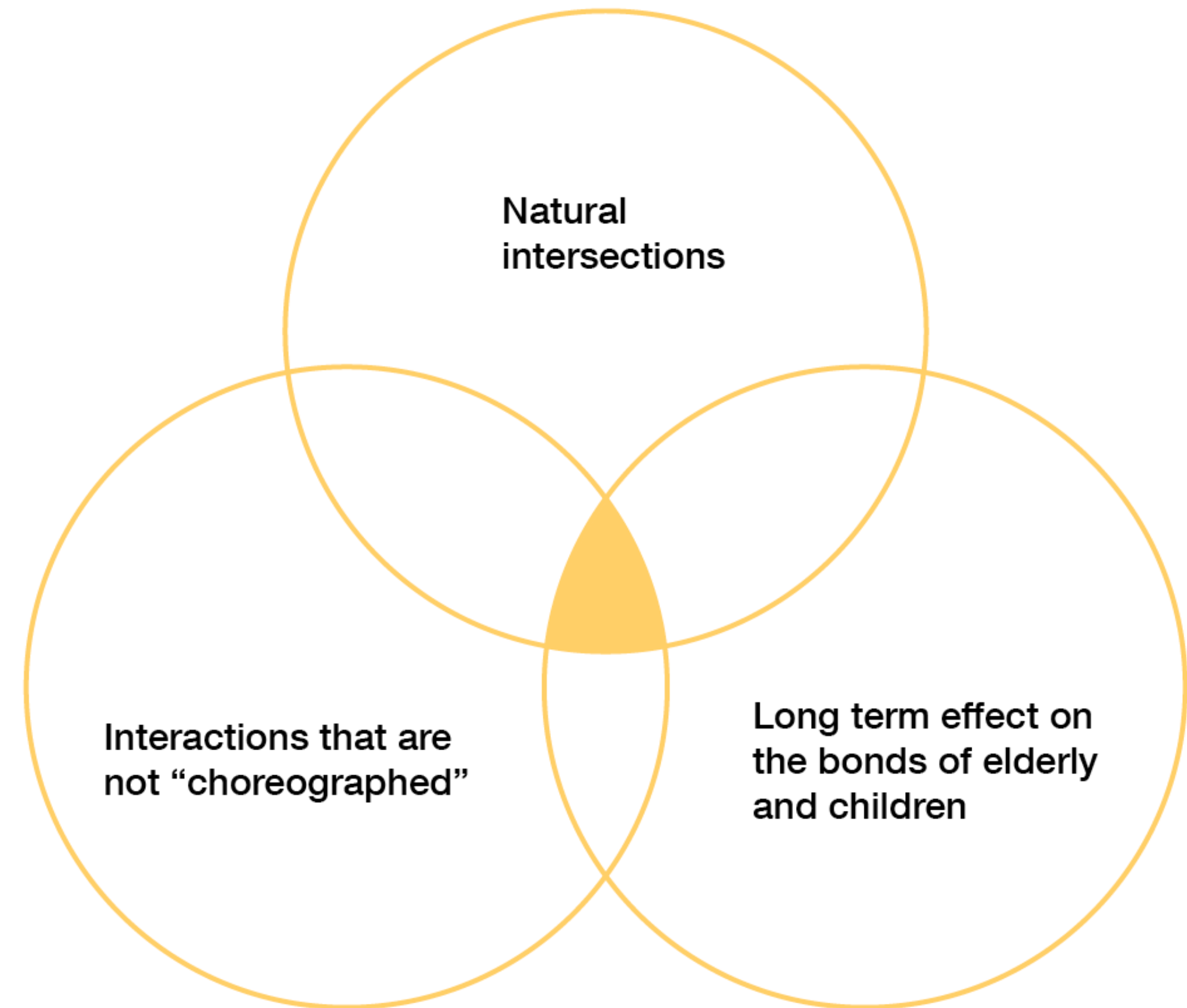
An Opportunity Area

This reveals an opportunity to design a nudge within
a public space, that causes elderly and children to
naturally interact with each other.

Large Scale

"Getting them to come out"
but costly and large scale

Intersecting

Interacting

"Experiencing things together"
but controlled and unnatural

Small Scale

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I wondered, there has to be a way to design a point where it hits the spot of
- natural intersections
- with interactions that are not 'choreographed'
- yet having a long term effect on the bonds between elderly and children

How do we calibrate a natural social interaction between them?

Natural
intersections

Interactions that are
not "choreographed"

Long term effect on
the bonds of elderly
and children

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Where would their paths naturally cross?

I first looked at where they would naturally intersect within a neighbourhood.

Many of these, experience brief transient encounters. You are not as likely to meet the two same people again and it is difficult to ensure a specific time where both meet.

Difficult to meet the two same people again

Difficult to ensure a specific time where both meet

HDB corridor

Libraries

Hawker Centres

Supermarket

Walkways

Bus Interchange

Shopping Malls

Void Decks

Playground

Exercise Corners

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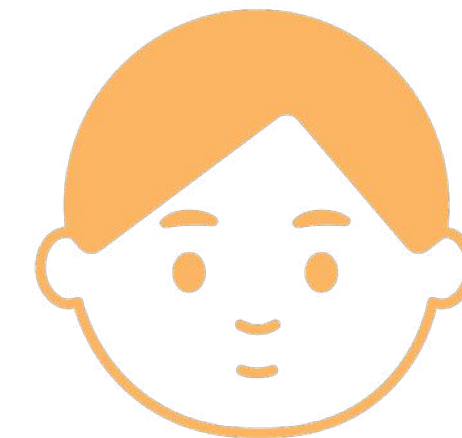
Where would their paths naturally cross?

Hence, communal play areas stood out.

The spaces are heavily utilised by these two groups. One where elderly and children are seen more as a "familiar face" than a "never-see-before" stranger.

HDB corridor

Libraries

Hawker Centres

Supermarket

Walkways

Bus Interchange

Shopping Malls

Utilised the most

Void Decks

Playground

Exercise Corners

A "familiar face"

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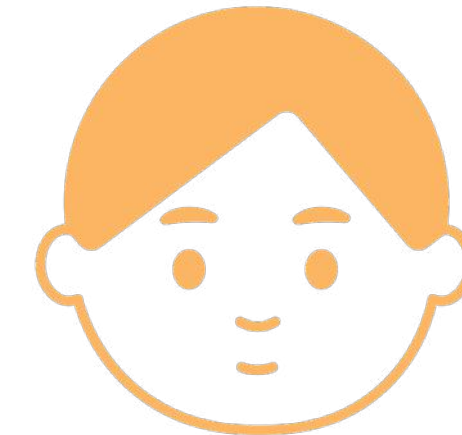
Observations at the playground

https://www.straitstimes.com/forum/letters-in-print/society-has-much-to-gain-from-inter-generational-programmes

Along the playground, there will be benches facing it.

In the evenings, elderly would come out and chill on those benches, watching children play.

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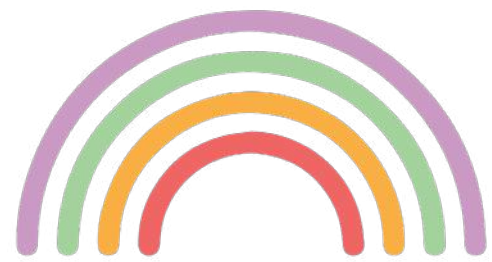
The intention here is..

To promote the start of meaningful bonds

by increasing the 'encounter-ness' between them

Where children playing around in the space can have at least an eye contact or a smile to the elderly sitting around there.

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bump

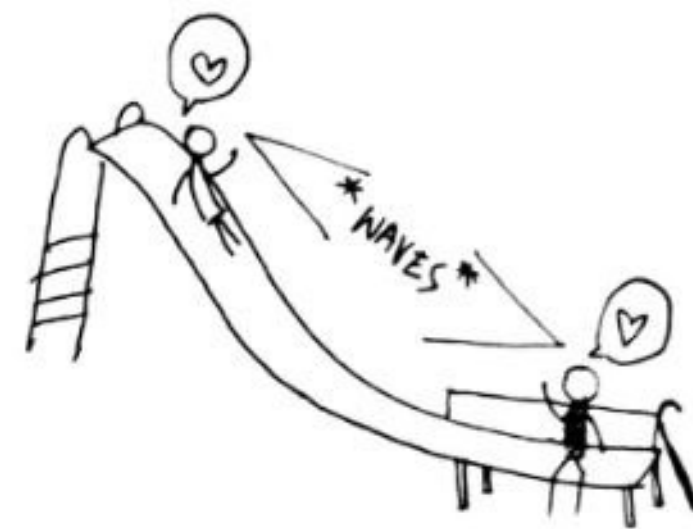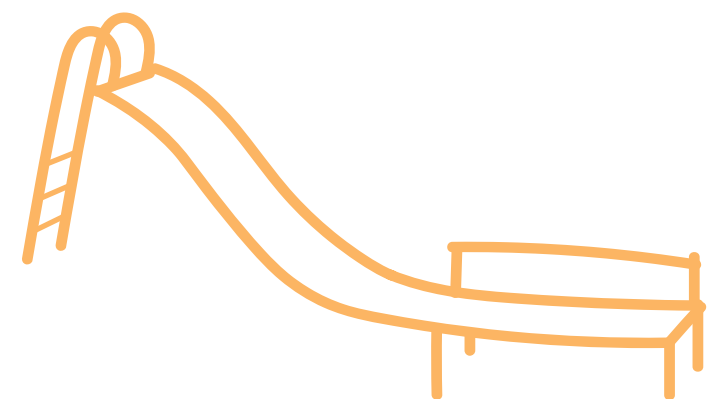Just like how we bump into neighbours and start to form friendship, our playground environment could achieve that sense of 'bump' between elderly and children.
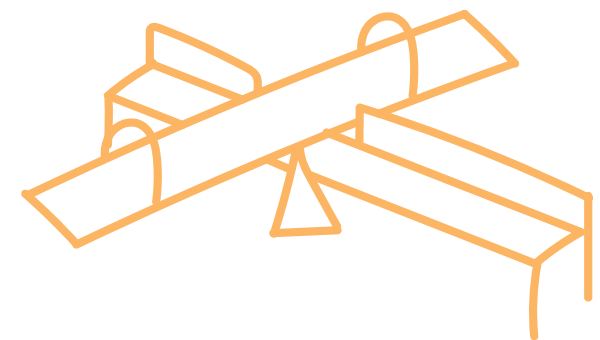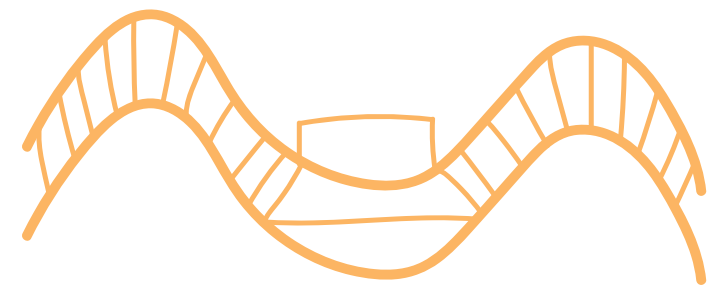
Instead of trying to force it, why don't we increase the chances of 'accidental' encounters.

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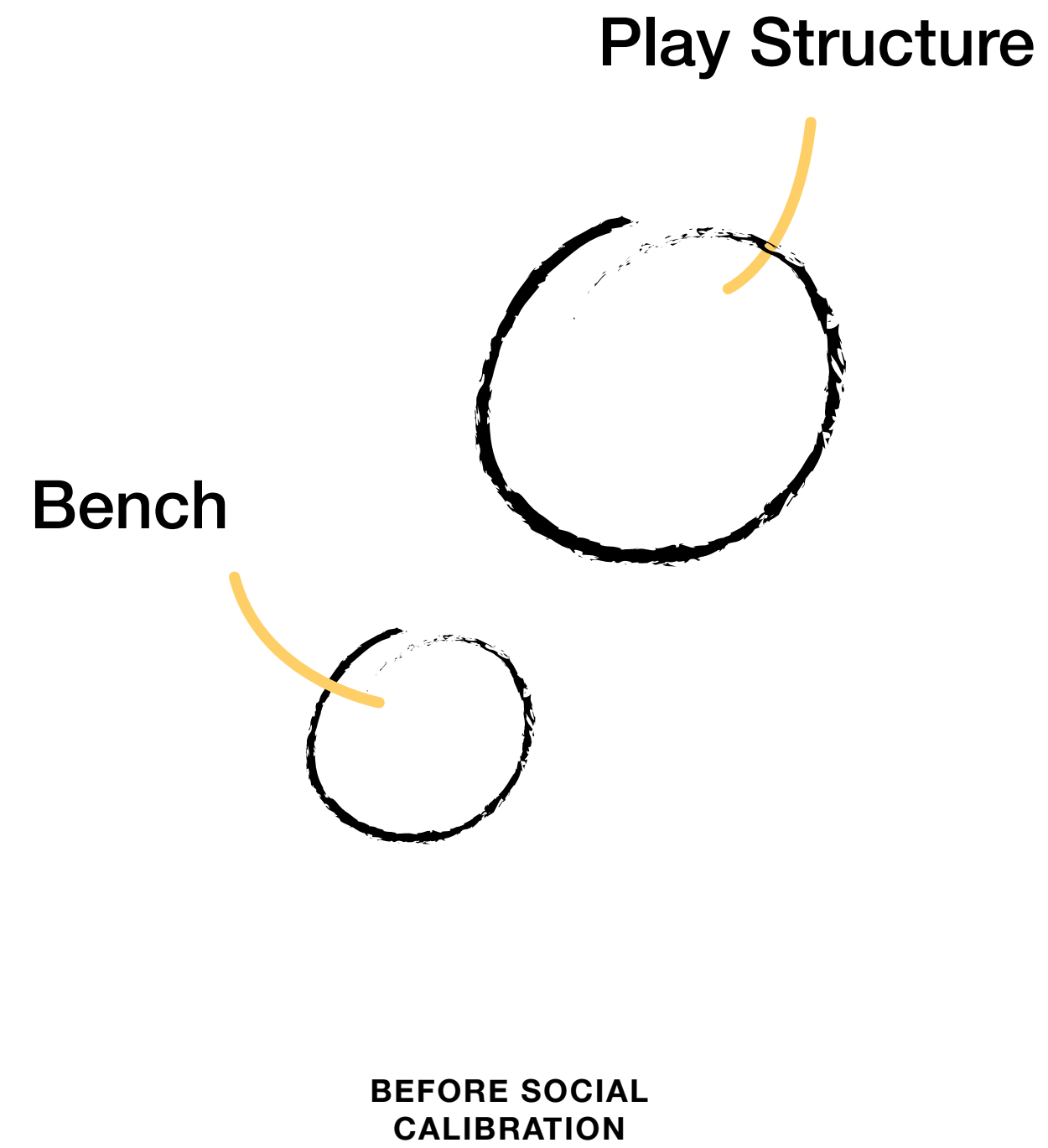
Concept (The How?)

Witty modifications on playground furniture to afford for non-verbal interactions between elderly and children.

Calibration of social interactions through the arrangement, positioning or combining of existing furniture.
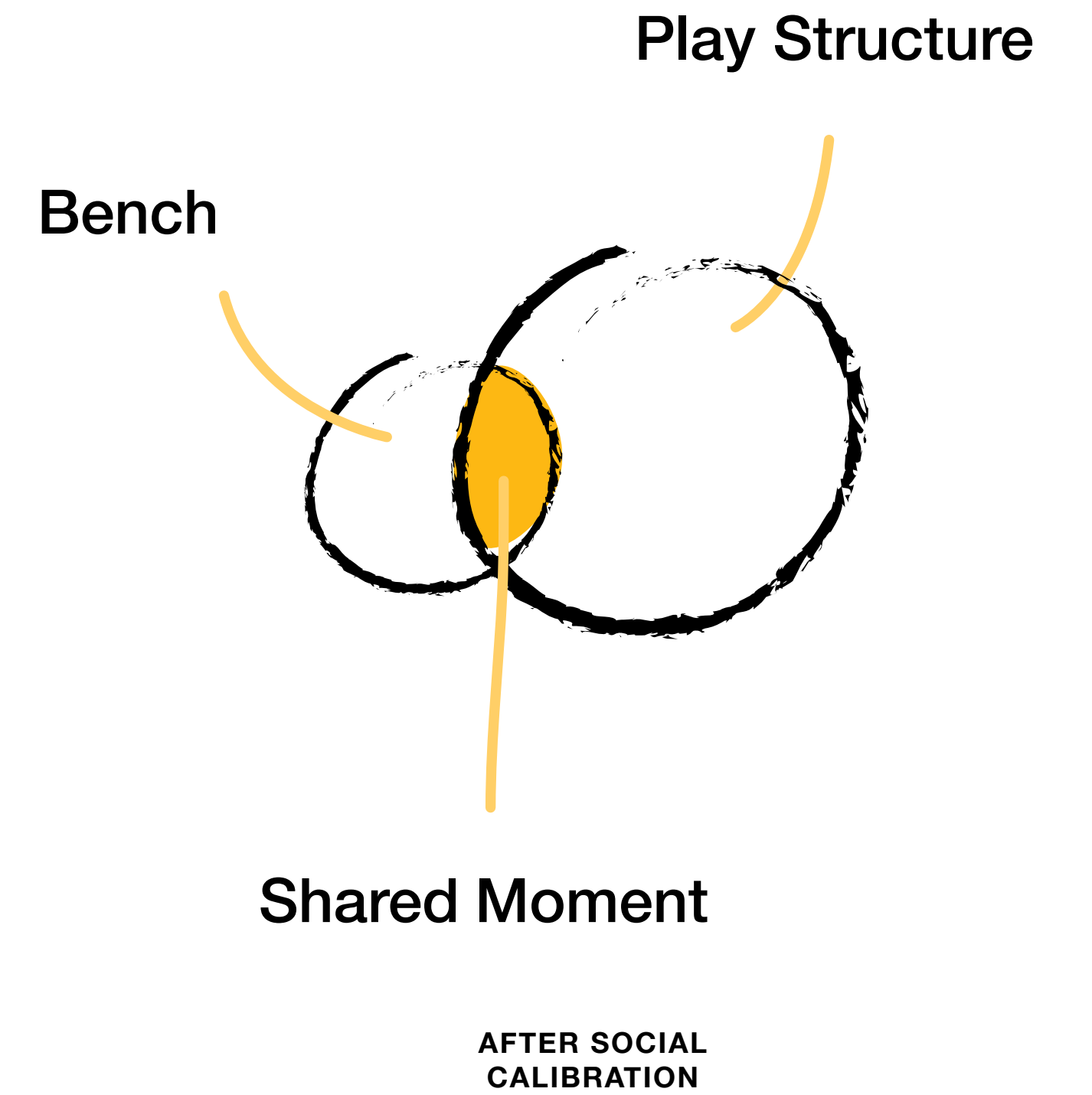

repositioning

arranging

combining

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We create nudges to direct the gaze of users and gently divert attention to each other.

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Play Structure

Bench

This method of hybridsation, pushes the idea of
co-locating to co-integrating of elements.

This allows for that chance of a shared moment
to be experienced.

Bench

Play Structure

Shared Moment

**BEFORE SOCIAL
CALIBRATION**

**AFTER SOCIAL
CALIBRATION**

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Form Iterations
v1. Slide+Bench

To capture the essence of this concept, the Slide+Bench configuration was chosen as the final product for my thesis.

I was drawn to this pairing because it felt effortlessly merged with no complex mechanics.

It was as if children could *slide right up* to the elderly.

After rounds of developing it's form, pushing it beyond a simplistic slide-to-straight bench, to achieve a design that truly represented the concept.
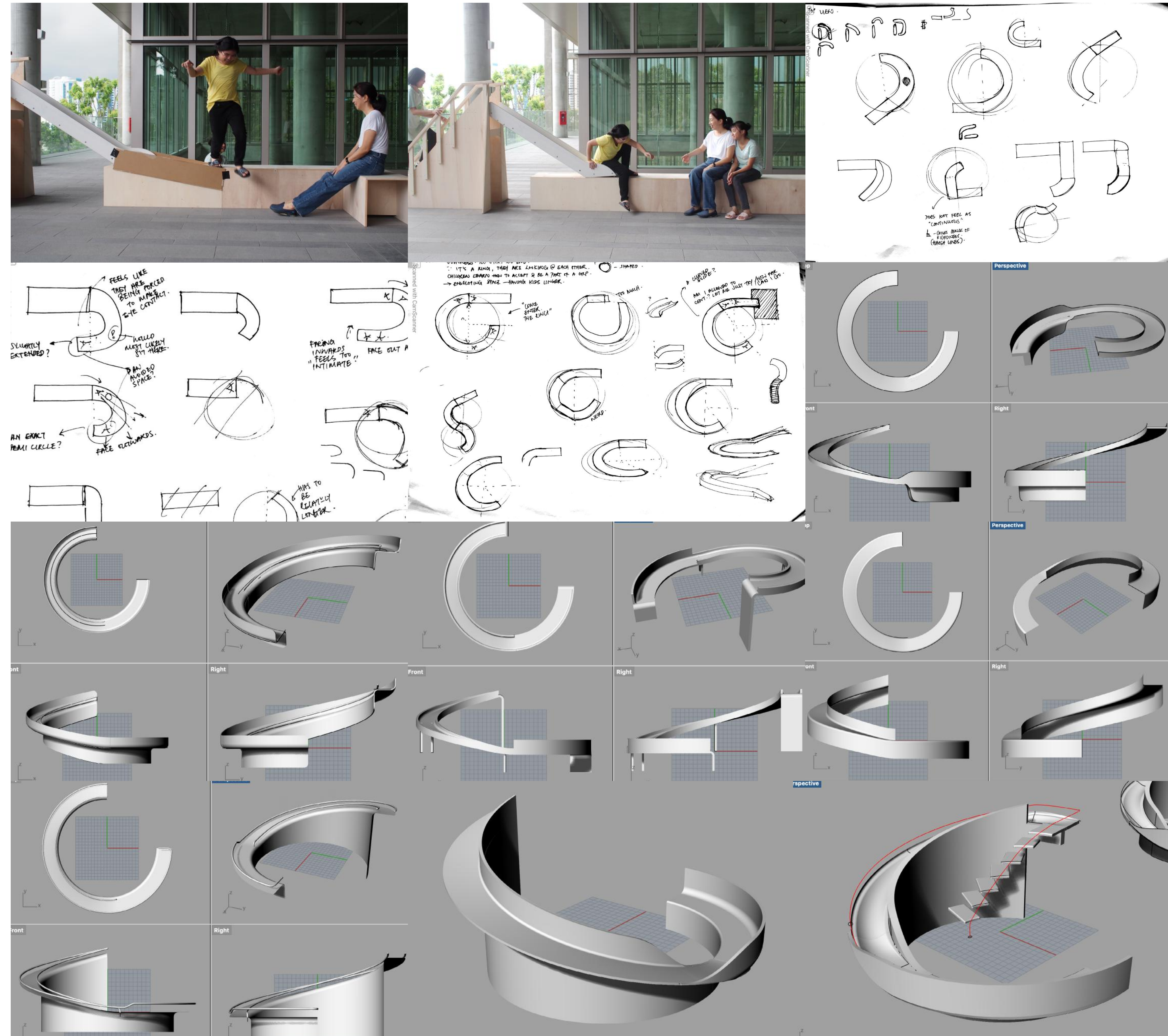
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The circular spiral form was the key breakthrough. An iconic structure that achieves the right balance between an "encounter-ness" without feeling too "confrontational" between users.

Highlighting the meaning of **blurred boundaries between elderly and child**. The ring-ness to suggest **an enveloping space for both to linger**. The functional aspect of a circle being that, at all angles, **we allow each other to be seen**.

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The ring-shaped structure creates an enveloping space. By having the ring open, we invite the elderly and children to enter. With the strong wall, attention is centred on the interactions between these users.
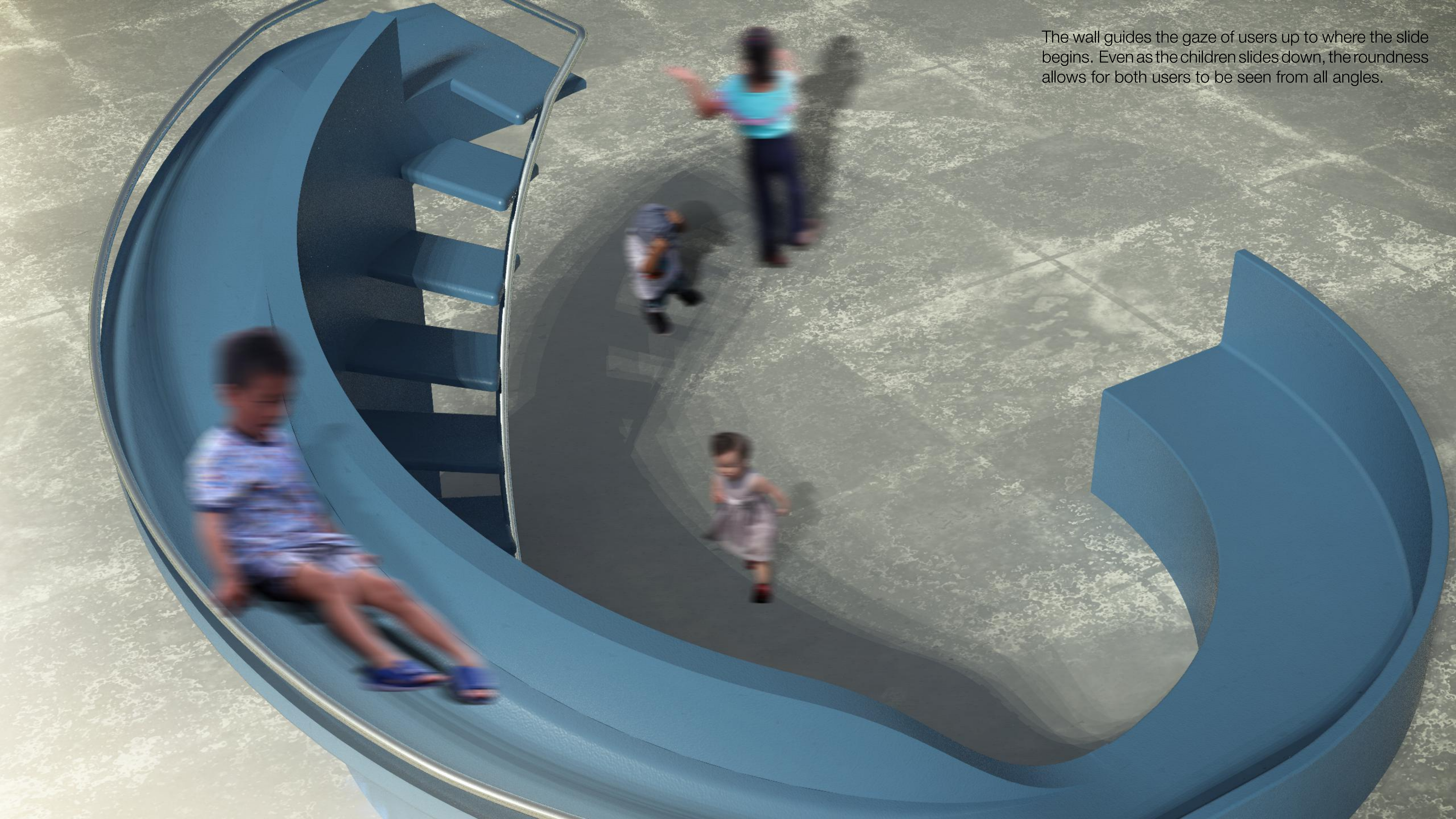
The wall guides the gaze of users up to where the slide begins. Even as the children slides down, the roundness allows for both users to be seen from all angles.
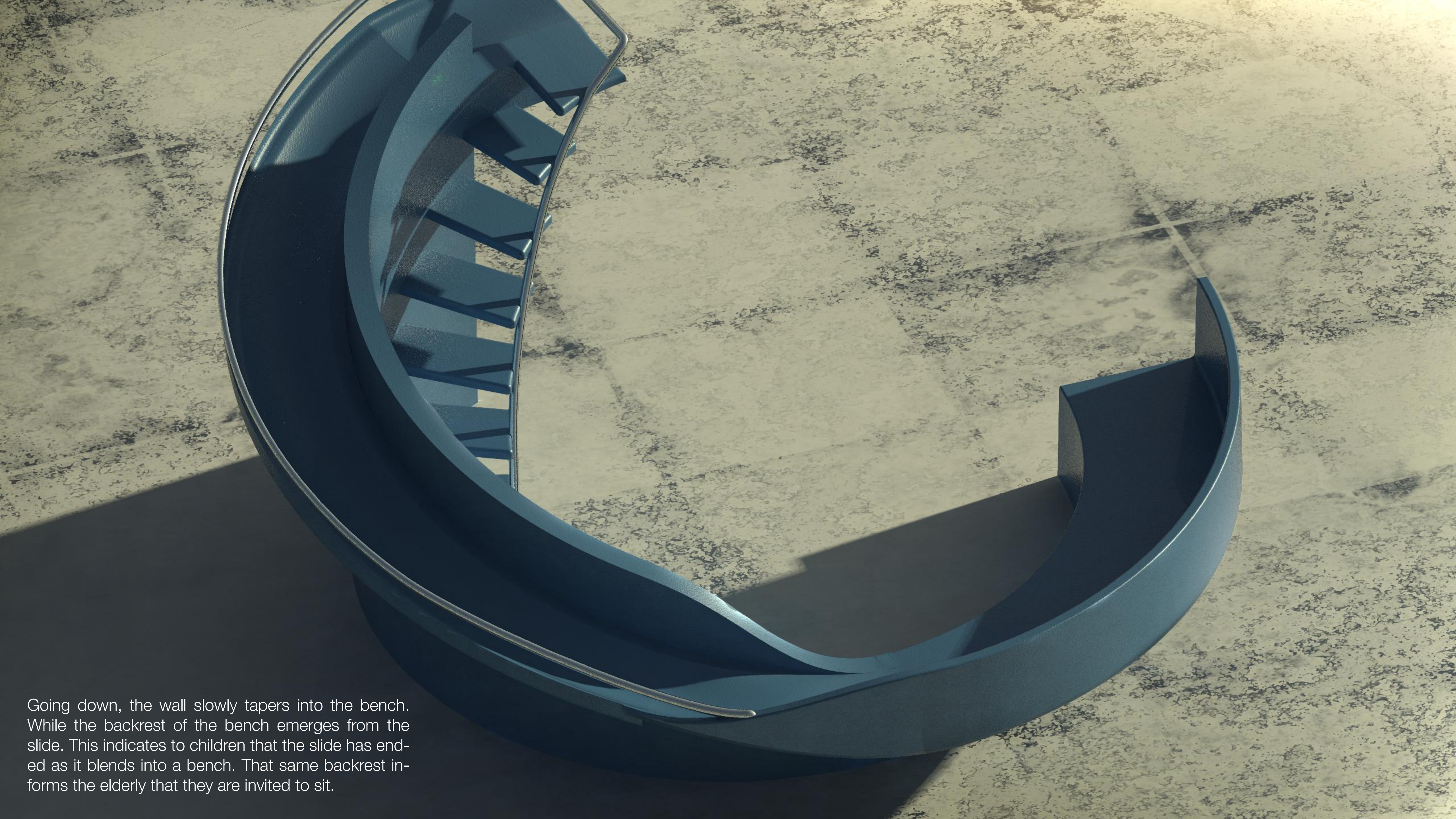
Going down, the wall slowly tapers into the bench. While the backrest of the bench emerges from the slide. This indicates to children that the slide has ended as it blends into a bench. That same backrest informs the elderly that they are invited to sit.
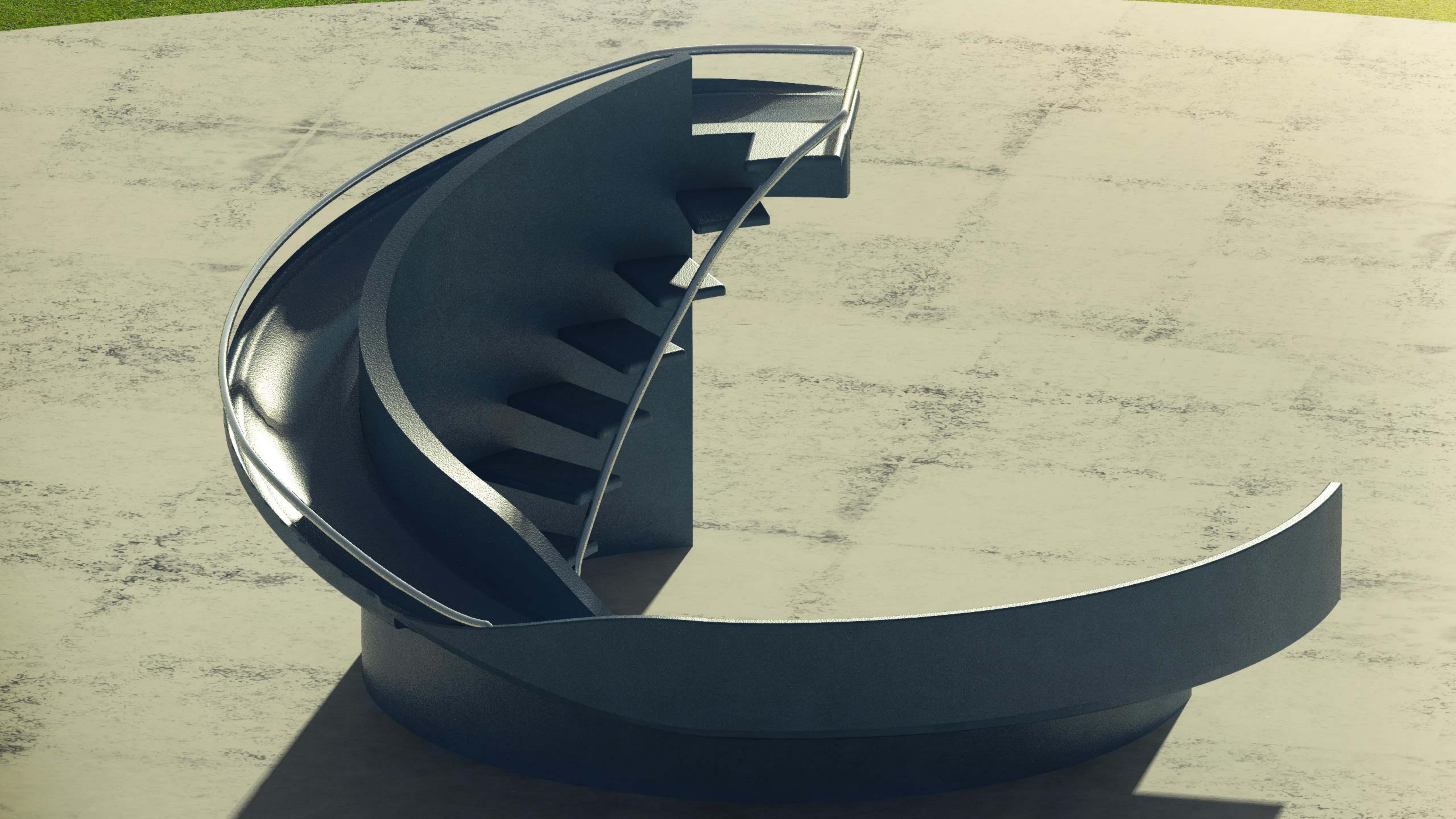
Thank You

The Slide+Bench shows the many possibilities of social experiences that can be designed through delicate combinations of objects.

That being said, a playground is more than a slide, as such, I hope to continue developing my thesis piece into a series of hybrid play-furniture.

Starting with slide+bench.

To experience this concept, please check out:
https://youtu.be/LhY76YvhyG0

An earlier 1:1 scale prototype testing before the COVID-19 lockdown:
https://youtu.be/qbhAFZz97RY

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