



THE
ROYAL
PARKS

LONDON MARATHON
CHARITABLE TRUST

PLAY IN THE PARK
IMPACT REPORT
2019 - 2022



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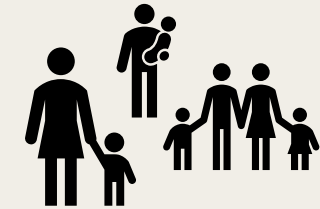
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IN NUMBERS



6,579
participants



3,810
children



2,769
adults

of which

1,474
engaged in
active play



121
play sessions
delivered

15

play events



3,340+
sign-ups

82
in the parks

33
in the community

6
online

71
play emails

24
e-newsletters

863 Instagram
followers

OVERVIEW

The Royal Parks charity aims for play in the parks to be seriously fun, free and child led, inspired by nature and the outdoors.

Guided by our Play strategy, four years ago we started a new play adventure: **Play in the Park**.

Funded by London Marathon Charitable Trust (LMCT), the project has helped engage thousands of local, underserved families, to reconnect them with nature and free play, in and around Greenwich Park Playground and the Gloucester Gate Playground in The Regent's park. Both playgrounds were recently redeveloped thanks to LMCT funding.

Aims

Play in the Park's main aims were to inspire local families with outdoor, active and nature play in the parks and playgrounds, in particular: low-income families with young children who were not regular visitors, families with children living with health needs, physical disabilities or neurodiversity, as well as local teenagers and parents with less active lifestyles.

In the first year we focused on Greenwich Park Playground and the local area, as the first one to complete renovations. We started with outreach, creating connections with local schools, community groups and organisations.

We identified needs and interests and slowly started play activity in the local housing estates, mixed with play sessions in the park. Hard hat tours, play trails, playful planting days and a playground opening summer event brought together families and groups from diverse backgrounds.

Lockdown and recovery

Due to the covid pandemic, the project was put on hold for several months and restarted in late 2020 with a mix of digital, self-led and safe outdoor activities in the parks. After feedback from families, it was clear we needed to adapt to help address some of their needs and priorities with the effects of lockdown and the UK's financial crisis.

Deepening engagement with communities and building partnerships with local groups and services, helped us understand the local context

more deeply, adapt our approach and grow our reach. Engagement varied with the seasons and weather: Instagram, online sessions, e-newsletters, and workshops in the community for colder months, and during warmer periods, play sessions in the parks and estates, peppered with successful play day events during holidays.

Our final year

In the final year we consolidated what worked well, increased participation and regular visits from local families, strengthened partnerships with groups incorporating intergenerational play memory and community mosaic projects.

Reflective learning and active listening, helped us to adapt, change and improve play at every step. With every challenge - covid, lockdown, extreme weather, staff changes and the cost-of-living crisis - we learned to adapt and inspire families to embrace and build confidence in outdoor child led play.

We share what we have learned, so the ethos of Play in the Park continues to inspire families, communities and the play sector at large.

This is our impact report.

OUR IMPACT

'I wanted to express my intense gratitude to every single play worker who helped to make these sessions such a positive, welcoming and fun space to play. Whilst the Royal Parks will always be there, I very much hope that these sessions will be able to continue, as they provide an immensely valuable play resource for parents and children alike. Without child led play, children's lives are, in my opinion, less rich and what we all needed, especially now, are spaces that are inclusive and welcoming for all. I cannot thank you enough for all you have done'.



OUTCOMES

Initial project outcomes for both playgrounds focused on increasing usership by local families, children with special needs and teenagers; it also aimed to make inactive adults more active. We reviewed these with LMCT during the pandemic and adapted to focus on supporting families after lockdown:

- **(Re)-engage local families with the project and understand needs and challenges**
- **Raise awareness of the project and nature play with local communities** through a refreshed communications and marketing plan
- **Safely restart activities in the local community and in the park**

These aims were successfully achieved and through them, Play in the Park was able to realise three of the four initial outcomes.

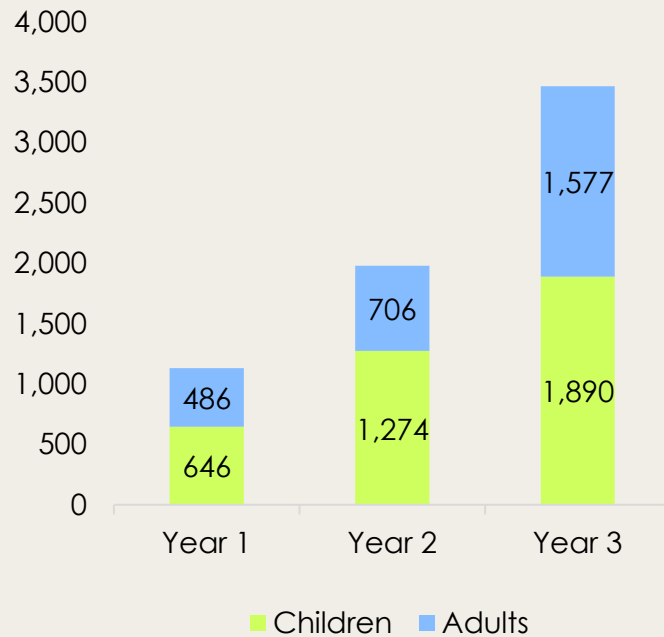
By the end of year 3 the project engaged:

- **Over 6,500 new playground users** (target: 4,000)
- **50 children with special needs enjoyed Greenwich Playground regularly** (target: 50)
- **1,374 parents and carers engaged in active play, and 215 adults did so regularly in year 3** (target: 75)
- **30 teenagers were engaged as regular users of Gloucester Gate Playground** (target: 150). Older children participated in go kart building workshops, races and outdoor team games, however observation showed they preferred independent play



6,579 NEW USERS FOR BOTH PLAYGROUNDS

Play in the Park participants



Through a mix of targeted and open sessions and events in the local estates, we encouraged over 6,500 new users by promoting new play facilities, activities and the benefits of outdoor child led play.

It was important to be sensitive to the barriers local families faced in accessing both playgrounds at Greenwich and The Regent's parks, so play activities were kept small and community focussed, with an average of 40 users per session. Events, on the other hand, were promoted to a wider audience and would see up to 200-250 participants each (and up to 500 for Play Day), with a mix of local families from diverse backgrounds.

The growing popularity of Play in the Park activities is demonstrated by the project's year on year growth. Playworkers' observations recorded repeated visits from local families, and confirmed Play in the Park's increased popularity, during years 2 and 3.

Kate, Stevie and Sam shared their story.



CASE STUDY: KATE, STEVIE AND SAM

Kate and her five-year-old twins, Stevie and Sam, joined Play in the Park's Teddy Bear's Picnic event in Greenwich park in Spring 2022 and became regular attendees at sessions throughout the spring and summer.

This case study is an abridged version as told in their own words.



CASE STUDY: KATE, STEVIE AND SAM

'We are a single parent family of 5-year-old twins, we live in Greenwich SE10, 15-minutes' walk from Greenwich Park. Before our introduction to Play in the Park, Stevie and Sam would largely play at home, in their after-school clubs and local street. They go twice a week, which they love and would like to go more, but cost makes it prohibitive.

We first came along to the Play in the Park Teddy Bear's Picnic which the children still talk about! Their teddy bears were dressed up for ages afterwards, we remember it absolutely poured down, but it didn't matter. It was a great introduction to what Play in the Park do and are about, it was so welcoming, such a stimulating, playful, environment.'

First impressions

'Our first impression was how sensory it was, so many materials and things to explore, and of course lots of playful creatives facilitating the magic!

One of my favourite things about Play in the Park is that the weight of responsibility felt as though it was lifted from me. I love going to the park with

my kids, but they require a lot of support, there's only one of me and it's hard to give them both the attention they need.'

What we did

'At Play in the Park there's [] brilliantly capable people [] who are really opening our eyes up to play, what is possible. One of the lovely things for me is that I can give 1:1 to my kids, knowing the other is fully engaged in play, which honestly never happens. Having Play specialists facilitating the sessions is so wonderful, it's so important for older children too. The natural way of the education system is to take play out more and more of it, that sensory play delight is something they just don't get at school. Entering the imaginative space with them is so great, having a space where you are being allowed and encouraged to do that, it's priceless.

These things can't be short term though, it takes years to bed in – it needs to be every week, there when your child is 5, when your child is 10.

Regularity is key - fortnightly isn't quite enough - although it was so nice to be able to look forward to it.'

The difference we made

The main difference I've noted in them after the sessions is that they are socially more confident. Even on the way home, their body language is so relaxed. They are happy. It's very positive for them to have interactions with children they don't know, it was great to note how quickly they were beginning to involve themselves in games with kids they hadn't met before, with kids of different ages and backgrounds.

We do feel more curious after coming to the play sessions in Greenwich, more able to look at things differently, to spend time in parts of the park in a new way engaging with all senses, to spend hours in the park looking at leaves (before the kids start moaning for ice lollies!). The way you were using the climbing frames for example, it's increased my repertoire for using the park, I've picked up all sorts of techniques from you.

Play in the Park takes you out of the ordinary, there's a flow. Every child wants to show something and share something. Just liberating and joyful.'

50 CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS ENJOYED GREENWICH PLAYGROUND REGULARLY OVER THREE YEARS

Parents of children with additional support needs appreciated the free-play ethos of the play session and playful events.

In their reflective practice, playworkers observed that because children were able to move freely around what was on offer and interpret it as they wished those with emotional, learning or physical needs were able to enjoy the freedom of no expectations.

The play team from The Royal Parks and London Play had extensive experience of working with children and young people with additional support needs, which led to an informed as well as empathic approach to delivery.

Rather than target a particular local group or groups working with SEND children and families, the play team focussed on ensuring that activities were inclusive. Through reflective practice and by listening to families, the team adapted activities and created sensory spaces for playful events and sessions.

The team also shared inclusive play ideas with families using the park and the playground. Families with children with additional needs felt valued, understood and catered for, and had a very positive experience. This helped their confidence and encouraged their use of the playground.

The team partnered with Autistic Inclusive Meets (AIM), a group of families with children with neurodiverse needs based in Greenwich. Discussing their needs, playworkers adapted play sessions and events, and delivered sensory sessions at less busy times, including visits to the Greenwich Park orchard, where families explored nature play. Play in the Park also supported their annual 'Not Back to School' picnic, with storytelling and play activities that highlighted diversity and inclusion.

AIM's Director Emma Dalmayne shares their experience with Play in the Park in the next case study.

'Play in the Park have been wonderful, so helpful and inclusive. The sensory activities were very popular with our attendees both young and old. I honestly cannot think of one thing better that the team could have done'.

Autistic Inclusive Meets (AIM)



CASE STUDY: 'NOT BACK TO SCHOOL' PICNIC

'These experiences have made the parks feel like a safe place for autistic people. Thank you to Play in the Park & The Royal Parks for everything and please, please consider partnering with us again for next year's Not Back to School Picnic!'



CASE STUDY: 'NOT BACK TO SCHOOL' PICNIC

Autistic Inclusive Meets (AIM) is a not-for-profit organisation created by autistic people to enable families with autistic children, and autistic individuals to get out into the community and socialise in an accepting, inclusive environment with like-minded peers.

The organisation provides support and advice to families and individuals, promotes acceptance of autism through education of the general public, and works to protect autistic rights.

Most of the AIM families are from Woolwich, with some from the Isle of Dogs, Essex and North London. Families can often feel isolated and face multiple barriers in accessing mainstream spaces.

What did we do?

Play in the Park coproduced two Not Back to School picnics with AIM in Greenwich Park Playground in years 2 and 3, providing a welcoming and supportive environment for neurodivergent families.

Emma Dalmayne, Director of AIM:

'It can be extremely hard for [] families of neurodivergent children to find places that are inclusive and friendly to our kids and teens. Many of our younger attendees are home educated due to being bullied in school and are nervous of being out and about. Getting us all out [] to meet up with their peers is so important for their mental health, the Not Back To School Picnic was an excellent opportunity for this.

Getting the kids and teens out in the sunshine to learn about gardening (an excellent tour of the Queen's Orchard was provided), how food grows and fun, interactive activities are of paramount importance to our attendees' mental and physical health'.

The team and park volunteers delivered tours of the Orchard on both years, and in year 3 organised storytelling with DragStory Tour, as many children identified as LGBTQIA.

'Many of our attendees identify as LGBTQIA so for them to have seen and heard our Patron Aida H Dee was so very important. Acceptance and LGBTQIA Pride is something we need to see more of'.

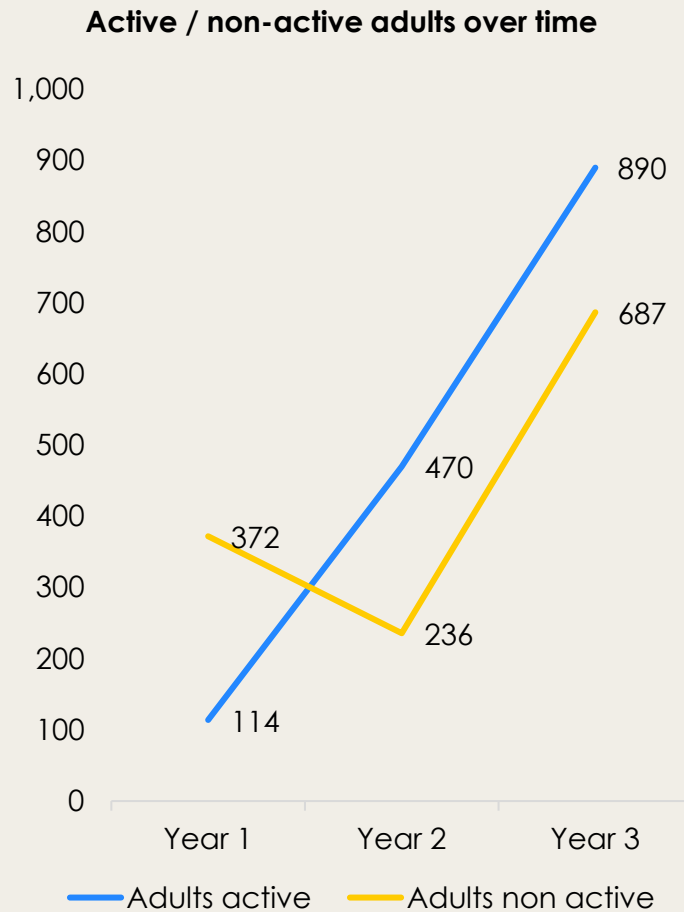
Lasting change

Over time, the Play team built a relationship with families, helping them gain confidence to attend mainstream play sessions and use the park. In turn, the team learned how to better adapt play with neurodiverse families in mind.

New families who attended the Not Back to School picnics with Play in the Park continued to attend AIM sessions, showing how important that initial positive experience was in reducing social isolation and building a network of support.

'These experiences have made the parks feel like a safe place for autistic people. Thank you to Play in the Park & The Royal Parks for everything and please, please consider partnering with us again for next year's Not Back to School Picnic!'

1,374 ADULTS ENGAGED IN ACTIVE PLAY OVER 3 YEARS, AND 215 REGULARLY



Parents and carers who actively played with children in play sessions and events, more than doubled between years 2 and 3 of the project.

We observed that at least half of the active adults in play sessions were regular users. By the end of year 3, circa 215 adults regularly took part in active play with their children.

The project inspired adults to be outdoors and to play with their children by:

- Demonstrating the joy of child led outdoor play during play sessions and playful events
- Engaging the local community in 'The Importance of Play' memories project
- Creating and sharing play ideas through Instagram, newsletters and the Importance of Play e-zine
- Talking to parents in sessions about the benefits of play and helping them be comfortable enough to be playful



30 TEENAGERS ENGAGED AS REGULAR USERS OF GLOUCESTER GATE PLAYGROUND

30 local teenagers were directly engaged with Go Karting activities and events in years 2 and 3 over the warmer months (15 young people each year).

The Play team built a good relationship with local youth group Fitzrovia Youth in Action, getting to know their 'Regent's Park Champions', provided pop-up free play on their Cumberland Fun Fest event two years in a row, and successfully invited them to Go-Karting activities in The Regent's Park.

In year 2 the art department and student group of local secondary school Regent's Park High, participated in a street art project so young people could 'make their mark' on the playground to increase a sense of ownership. This project could not be completed to the planned extent of young people's input due to covid. However, this initiative would have been challenging to deliver in the playground, as facilities are geared towards younger children.

The Play team observed that the playground had some facilities for older children (zip wire), but this was not sufficient provision for teenagers, as the main play areas and equipment in the playground were aimed at younger children and infants.

The structures outside of the playground, which are more age appropriate, are in regular use by older children and teenagers. This group is using the climbing structure to chat and play on but want to do so independently and this needed no outside intervention.



WHAT WE LEARNED



OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

Delivering with local groups rather than for them

Engaging local underserved families was at the heart of the Play in the Park project. The coordinators' approach has been to identify organisations working locally, meet with them to identify needs and develop a programme together. Our main recommendations are:

✓ **Work with a local practitioner to engage with the community a project aims to reach**

It is helpful if the community engagement officer is from the area the project is trying to engage with. The knowledge, understanding and care from someone local will be more suitable than from an 'outsider'.

We saw this first hand with Kalisha Okore who, despite being in playwork rather than in an outreach role, significantly increased involvement in the project by local families. Her insight informed our practice. The time and resources it took the coordinator to gain an in depth understanding of local needs was extensive and achieved, for the most part, by local people and practitioners volunteering their expertise.

✓ **Open the parks to local community groups**

The Royal Parks is moving away from a culture of gatekeeping and plans to engage more actively with local underserved communities, as there are plenty of grass root organisations serving those families who are willing and able to deliver activities and events for these families.

Many much-loved organisations we engaged with (Sankofa, AIM, TAP, FYA, Somers Town History Club) had disappointing experiences in trying to use the parks for their own events and activities.

The Royal Parks is hoping to streamline the event application process for local groups.

From a play perspective, we recommend that enough time and resources are allocated when working collaboratively and, where possible, help facilitate groups' activities. Acknowledge groups' knowledge and expertise and moving away from a 'if we build it, they will come' mentality.

This facilitation approach was well received in the Not Back to School Picnics with Autistic Inclusive Meets (AIM). They requested use of Greenwich Park Playground and The Orchard, and we provided a performer (requested by them) and free-play provision from the team.

✓ **Consider including free nutritious food with sessions and events**

We learned that food poverty is a significant issue. Every other community group we met provided food for the local families. Not having food can be a significant barrier to taking part.

The Play team could engage local food suppliers to provide nutritious food in return for promotion. Many organisations are doing this, and with The Royal Parks reputation, finding willing partners should not be a problem.

CASE STUDY: KALISHA

A mum and community worker from the Regent's Park Estate shares her experience and insights:

Because of the unstructured nature of the sessions, parents would feel that they had to get involved and that was hard work, they felt they couldn't relax. [] over time, many did see the benefits [], with some really getting a lot out of them – the children understand instantly what to do and how to make the most out of it, but the parents need to be able to see.'



CASE STUDY: KALISHA

Kalisha is a mother of two (a girl aged 8 and a boy aged 4). She has been living on the Regent's Park Estate for almost eight years and works for Regent's Park Timebank (RPTB) and Third Age Project since May 2021. The Play Coordinator contacted Kalisha in 2021 and, from then on, the two worked collaboratively for the mutual benefit of Play in the Park and Timebank families.

Kalisha joined the Play in the Park team as a playworker for the summer term in year 3, providing invaluable local insight, promoting the sessions and events to her neighbours and, in turn, gaining more experience of playwork. Having other work commitments, Kalisha left the team but continued to promote the project through her network. Kalisha is eager to keep involved in the future.

Based on her experience with Play in the Park, Kalisha shared some key insights to help The Royal Parks and Play in the Park be more inclusive with local families:

'Lots of families around here don't know about free-play and don't understand its benefits. People are more used to activities with set outcomes or that are outside of their budget - like cinema and beach trips.

The initial feedback that I got from families was that the sessions were quite middle class, too messy and that the children were bored. Because of the unstructured nature of the sessions, parents would feel that they had to get involved and that was hard work, they felt they couldn't relax. [] over time, many did see the benefits [], with some really getting a lot out of them – the children understand instantly what to do and how to make the most out of it, but the parents need to be able to see.'

Community led marketing

Kalisha also referred to the project's flyers and posters: 'it's a shame that the marketing and flyers weren't aimed at people on the estate – they could have done with an injection of personality.' She pointed out that promotional material should be useful in educating and preparing parents for

what to expect and in combatting that initial, potentially negative, impression.

'The flyers should have simple, plain language that explains what to expect and the benefits of this kind of play []; the wording is important and should be done with someone from the estate. The flyers should visually represent the playfulness of the sessions and be specific to the different activities []'.

Food poverty

Kalisha talked about the importance of having food and snacks available on any kind of family activity, as RPTB always provided food. She also mentioned that a free programme of activities is an effective incentive for families to join:

'Family days that [] would usually be off your financial radar, it is important to remove the financial barrier that families face, as this would be a good way of getting people into the park and these family days should happen as well as play days.'

CHILD-CENTRED PLAY: FREE PLAY AND LOOSE PARTS IN THE PARK

- ✓ **Child-led play builds confidence in children** so they can explore and use green spaces as they want to
- ✓ **Parents have time to observe their children**, often triggering their own childhood experiences of play and **encouraging them to be playful as a family**
- ✓ **Loose parts allows children to engage imaginatively and without expectations.** It also shows parents that any object can be a playful. Play doesn't need to cost money and that recycling is useful
- ✓ **Free play is an approach - rather than product focused - is inclusive of all ages, backgrounds and abilities.** The play team observed many parents of children with additional needs relaxing in sessions, as they saw their children encouraged to express themselves without restraint or expectations
- ✓ **Loose parts facilitate a spirit of cooperation** amongst children who instinctively share materials, ideas and knowledge.
- ✓ **A child-led process is essential** in differentiating what a play programme provides as opposed to an arts or learning programme
- ✓ **It is crucial to make a distinction between a play and a learning programme**, to ensure resources are being allocated to play for its own (developmental) sake
- ✓ **Our 'The Importance of Play' project demonstrated the extent of the loss of childhood freedom to play outside** and with peers. It showed a national issue at local level

“I liked it because there was drawing and making and doing play dough and doing climbing. It was exciting and I loved it!

Sam – 5-year-old



CHILD-CENTRED PLAY: FREE PLAY AND LOOSE PARTS IN THE PARK

With all the positives of child-centred play, one significant downside is that it appeals to a more middle-class sensibility. The play coordinator explored the reasons for this, and the recommendations below are based on practical learning from reflective practice, peer to peer learning and academic reading.

- ✓ **The play team must be of diverse backgrounds.** Aside from visible representation being essential to any 'community' project, it is vital to capture the richness of diverse experiences. Play in the Park was lucky to have a diverse pool of playworkers but would have benefited from more local practitioners.
- ✓ **Reflective practice is a valuable tool** to harness the expertise and input of the play team and help inform a sensitively delivered play provision. Practicalities, inclusion, adapting to diverse needs, and active listening to feedback were recurring aspects to consider.

- ✓ **A flexible approach to delivery** (informed by the team's reflective practice) meant they effectively responded to feedback and observations.
- ✓ **Comfortable seating for parents** encourages them to stay for longer and makes them feel welcome.
- ✓ **Spare clothes, 'washable' paints and knowledgeable playworkers** are key for messy play. Parents from the local estates were often concerned about this, as getting messy or ruining clothes can be a significant barrier for underserved families.
- ✓ **Having an 'in' activity available for parents.** The team planned specific 'in' activities and play objects on arrival, so parents felt more confident with child led and loose parts play. Simple things – balloons, wooden discs - were effective for first interactions and a gateway to other available resources. Some families feel less entitled to take and do freely, and this should be taken into consideration.



CASE STUDY: HANNAH, MOTHER OF NOAH

'Play in the Park meant that we could be outside, engaged in play with other children and the whole experience felt like a community. He always spoke of the children as his friends and the play workers too'

Hannah and Noah joined Play in the Park's free-play sessions in The Regent's Park in Spring 2021. They continued to attend sessions and events in both Regent's and Greenwich through to September 2022.

This case study is in her own words and has been abridged.



CASE STUDY: HANNAH, MOTHER OF NOAH

'We are a single parent family who live in Kensington. I am a 40-year-old female, who is a lecturer and home educator. My son is 4 years old and has ADHD (and possibly other SEND yet to be diagnosed).

Before Play in the Park our play experiences centred on using parks, forests and other designated play spaces; however, as is so often the case, these experiences were less communal in the sense that whilst he played there wasn't necessarily the infrastructure to make the experience the best it could possibly be. Covid however, made this more challenging, as an only child and with the limitations presented by social distancing, he really longed for opportunities to interact with other children more regularly and this is one of the very many positive things the project brought to our lives.

The sessions were wonderful and without a doubt enriched the play experience for my son. The sessions were not in the most local park to us, but we gladly travelled to the events in Regent's Park and in Greenwich Park. They [] were so valuable to us that the travel time was more than worth it for

the wonderfully positive experience. The fact that these were free events was so helpful; bringing up a child in London is frequently expensive and most events have a charge associated with them. The fact that Play in the Park was free to access was so appreciated.

My son has SEND and I was always very grateful for how inclusive the sessions were. He was able to play independently with other children whilst I was able to let him move around freely and without adult interruption. There was never an occasion where I felt that I was being expected to 'manage' the situation; we were welcome, and he was made to feel welcome as he is. That is something exceptionally rare and special and I cannot thank the play workers enough for facilitating this. Without question, all the play workers were delightful, kind, welcoming and inclusive.'

Free play in the park

'This really was an example of free play in the truest sense: financially free and with clear, intentional spaces for the children to freely explore their

environments and the play opportunities. The fact that the sessions were in the park was lovely too as it's always wonderful to be out in nature but also, the nature that surrounded us [] became an important part of the play experience, from leaves, sticks, conkers, and available natural materials, to the simple fact that we were in the park's space.

The sessions were always brilliantly active and clearly very carefully thought through, [the children] always had the opportunity to be actively moving and running around, [they] were always actively playing with each other, or in their own creative spaces.'

Changing through play

'Over time and throughout the sessions I saw a range of changes. Firstly, the sessions originally occurred at the end of the first lockdown period which had been a hugely difficult time for us; at one point, he had asked why no-one wanted to play with him anymore and so these sessions came at the perfect time. [] Play in the Park meant that we could be outside, engaged in play with other children and the whole experience felt like a community. He always spoke of the children as his friends and the play workers too []'.

'For us there are three stand out sessions (though I really need to underscore that every session we have attended has been fabulous). The first ever session where there were balloons, dressing up clothes and a wide variety of paper opportunities was memorable for us as it was the first time he had been able to engage, post-lockdown, in such a vibrant play experience.

The second session was one in Greenwich Park where the children were playing with a wide range of painting materials and experimenting with textures. There was a racket which he loved playing with and tried to attach as a tree-play feature. The third session that was especially memorable was the last one we attended in Regent's Park []. Parents were relaxing around the base of trees as play unfolded before them. There was a cricket bat and, as we arrived, he noticed it. An older child then engaged with him and they spent about 15 minutes playing together.

'Lastly, he spent time playing with conkers, and peeling back the layers before collaboratively building a structure and using the trolley to transport items; it was wonderful to watch.'

'I wanted to express my intense gratitude to every single play worker who helped to make these sessions such a positive, welcoming and fun space to play. Whilst the Royal Parks will always be there, I very much hope that these sessions will be able to continue as they provide an immensely valuable play resource for parents and children alike. Without child led play, children's lives are, in my opinion, less rich and what we all needed, especially now, are spaces that are inclusive and welcoming for all. I cannot thank you enough for all you have done.'



PEER LEARNING AND INFORMATION SHARING

To help make the case for a child-led ethos in the delivery of play sessions and events, the Play Coordinator drew on the wealth of experience and knowledge of the international playwork community.

The Playwork Foundation

Playwork in Progress are weekly reflective Zoom meetings attended by playwork practitioners, academics and policy makers from all over the world. In year 2, the Play Coordinator attended these meetings regularly learning an extensive amount – especially about the role of play in meeting the needs of children during the lockdowns. In year 3, she was not able to attend these meetings as regularly as before, though became a member of the Playwork Foundation - an organisation that 'promotes Playwork to policy makers, parents, the media and the world at large, so over time, more children can benefit from the Playwork approach'. She maintained a relationship with those taking part in Playwork in Progress.

Playwork Conference

The Play Coordinator was invited to give a presentation at **2022 National Playwork Conference**, and then and then asked to share her presentation as a blog on their website. Having experienced some of the issues with delivering free-play opportunities as part of a community outreach project, she facilitated discussion with the 15 play professionals and gave a presentation entitled "**Community Playwork in The Royal Parks?**". Participants were very interested in Play in the Park and wanted to know more about playwork in The Royal Parks. They had a wealth of information to share on issues about community outreach and play, playing in public parks and inclusion.

Instagram

The Play Coordinator had used Instagram in previous projects to connect with other local initiatives, both local and international, and used the social media platform to share reflective learning and to promote the project's sessions and events.

She engaged in cross promotion with local play projects such as **@Make.Do.Play** and **@assembleplay**, helping boost Play in the Park's profile with other free-play advocates such as **@play.is.my.work** and **@adeleplatworker** (author of Children Don't Dissolve in the Rain). Her online relationship with those play projects, as well as others abroad, benefitted Play in the Park's delivery by keeping ideas and activities fresh, inspired by what she saw and discussed.

Instagram was an invaluable tool for connecting with parents so they could keep up to date with what was on offer and contact the project directly. Local parents with thousands of followers - such as **@teatime.english** (68k), **@bablands.london** (26.1k) **@thehardlifeoflillyandviolet** (11.8k) -, have shared information about Play in the Park and their positive experience of it.

PROMOTING EVENTS AND CAPTURING FEEDBACK

- ✓ **Promotion needs to share the ethos and playfulness of the project**, and appeal to the underserved families we want to reach.

Families shared that The Royal Parks branding was not for them ('too 'Waitrose-y').

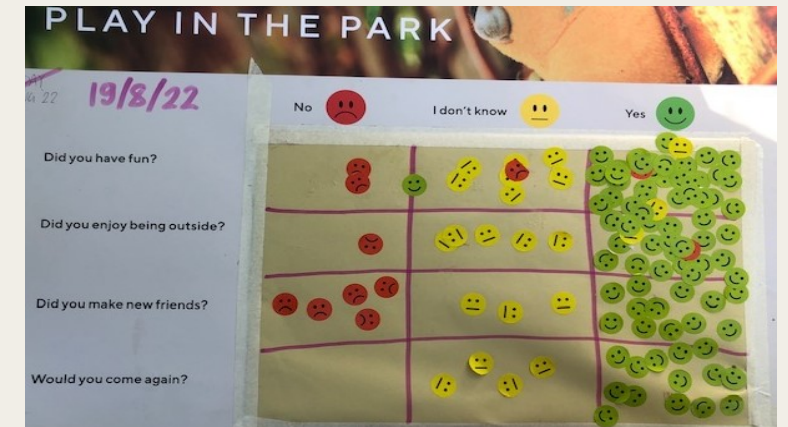
Using a template meant that people thought they already had a flyer from a previous event, as they looked too similar.

- ✓ **Promote via Instagram** helps connect with local organisations and increase reach through their channels. Many parents who we met told us they had heard about the session or event through Instagram.

- ✓ **Playful feedback boards**

We gathered feedback using 'smiley faces' boards and tried to make them playful and accessible, to minimise disruption to the flow of play as possible.

We explored where a child had responded 'no' without making them feel this was the wrong answer. Sometimes they had chosen 'no' as they liked the colour red, and 'don't know', because English was not their first language and didn't understand the question. This highlighted the importance of providing space to qualify the feedback.



MARKETING AND COMMS SNAPSHOT

The project's communication and marketing plan played a pivotal role in helping raise awareness of Play in the Park's activities, events, ethos and purpose.

With the support of the Marketing & Communications team, Play in the Park began its online presence with a [project web](#) area on The Royal Parks website, followed by activity updates, online sign-ups for play sessions and events, and play newsletters for local families. The project also featured in TRP content newsletters and social media channels - including organic posts and paid promotion. A new Instagram page helped share updates regularly and on site, helping reach influencers such as @EnglishTeatime with over 65k followers.

Third party listings included The Evening Standard, Young Londoner, Hortweek, Discover South Kensington, The Resident, Press Association, Pramstead (a North London family website), Londonist.

Highlights include:

- ✓ **3,342** event sign ups
- ✓ **71** play emails
- ✓ **14** newsletters (open rate growth from 14% Y1, to 48% in Y3). Some examples:
 - [Summer of play](#) newsletter
 - [Autumn play](#) newsletter
 - [Play feature](#) in events newsletter
- ✓ '[What's the big deal about play?](#)' blog
- ✓ Play feature in **Top 10 things to do in the Royal Parks blog**, shared with over 200 publishers
- ✓ [Play Instagram page](#)
- ✓ [English teatime](#) with **69k** followers (she created a [play video](#) and shared many social posts)
- ✓ High quality photos and a Play in the Park video
- ✓ [Press release](#) for Gloucester Gate Playground launch

Press Play!



SOCIAL MEDIA EXAMPLES



Watch: 'Jump jump!'



Watch: 'Touching the rainbow'



LEAFLETS AND POSTERS EXAMPLES

Get in touch

Come along and embrace nature play as we let our imaginations and curiosities lead the way.

To find out more visit us online, email us or join us on social media:

royalpark.org.uk/play
play@royalpark.org.uk

@playin.thepark
 @TheRoyalParksLondon
 @theroyalparks

Scan the QR code with your mobile phone to see what's on and to register your interest.

SCAN ME

To book, please visit: royalpark.org.uk/play

The Royal Parks. Registered Charity No. 1172542. royalpark.org.uk

Play in the Park

Fire Up Kids' Imaginations

Inspire children to Play in the Park and join our free drop in sessions and events for families

FESTIVAL OF PLAY!

Join us for a free day camp of Play in the Park activities for families of all ages and abilities.

GREENWICH PARK: Saturday 28 May, 12pm to 4pm
THE REGENT'S PARK: Saturday 4 June, 12pm to 4pm

Find out more online:
www.royalpark.org.uk/play
 or email: play@royalpark.org.uk

@royalpark

Scan the QR code with your mobile phone to see what's on and to register your interest.

SCAN ME

Registered Charity No. 1172542

Play in the Park with The Royal Parks

Play in the Park brings a FREE programme of fun play drop in sessions and events for families in The Regent's and Greenwich Parks, giving children space, time and support to play freely inspired by nature.

From dressing up to constructing cardboard spaceships, knocking down towers of teddy bears, the possibilities are endless!

Play in the Park is funded by the London Marathon Charitable Trust.

Find out more online:
www.royalpark.org.uk/play
 or email: play@royalpark.org.uk

@royalpark @TheRoyalParksLondon @playin.thepark

Scan the QR code with your mobile phone to see what's on and to register your interest.

SCAN ME

Registered Charity No. 1172542

Routes and Roots Spring Treasure Trail

A free self-led activity

THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY

~~COMMIT NO NUISANCE~~

Childhood reflections from young and elderly residents of The Regent's Park area and ideas for what we can play today!

Play in the Park

Since 2019, The Royal Parks has been running free play sessions in The Regent's and Greenwich Parks, and in the local community. Our play team help children do what they do best - lead the way and play freely.

The benefits of nature play

Did you know that by the time the average child is eight they have spent a full year sitting in front of a screen?

Nature play is instrumental in creating resilient, well balanced, happy and healthy children. Playing outside also helps increase children's appreciation and enjoyment of nature, and can have huge benefits for them and their families:

- Nurturing creativity and imagination,
- Exploring the world around them,
- Developing communication skills and making new friends, and
- Supporting an active and healthy lifestyle for later in life.

Our aim is to offer exciting nature-inspired play opportunities across the Royal Parks.

Play in the Park is a three-year initiative funded by the London Marathon Charitable Trust. Together we want to ensure that children have the space, time, and freedom to play.

Take part

From dressing up to making up games, from constructing cardboard space-ships to knocking down towers of teddy bears - we will ensure that the possibilities are endless.

Our free play sessions run from April to October complimented by events in the summer holidays. During autumns and winter we engage with the local community - and develop mini play projects inspired by the parks.

Bring your family along to one of our fun and creative play days in and around The Regent's Park Gloucester Gate and Greenwich Park playgrounds.

SPRING 2022

TEDDY BEAR'S PICNIC

The Regent's Park
Greenwich Park
 Wednesday 6th and 13th of April
 12pm to 4pm

Summer of Play with The Royal Parks

The Royal Parks is proud to take part in the #SummerOfPlay, a nation-wide campaign giving children, space, time and support to play freely.

Join our FREE drop-in sessions and events for families. From dressing up to making up games, constructing cardboard spaceships to knocking down towers of teddy bears - we will make sure the possibilities are endless!

Find out more online:
www.royalpark.org.uk/play
 or email: play@royalpark.org.uk

@royalpark @TheRoyalParksLondon @playin.thepark

Scan the QR code with your mobile phone to see what's on and to register your interest.

SCAN ME

Registered Charity No. 1172542

KEEP PLAYING

"In the past even if there were cars they would slow right down and expect children to be playing."

TIN TIN TOPPERMAN

One year on stood in the middle of the grass with a tennis ball. What that was was to be used to kick. Everyone made a goal. The ball was not to go to the ground. The ball would not be kept by the ball but down by the ground. In the middle. If the ground was to play they could call you and you could be a longer ball.

HOW TO MAKE A ROPE SWING

One year on stood in the middle of the grass with a tennis ball. What that was was to be used to kick. Everyone made a goal. The ball was not to go to the ground. The ball would not be kept by the ball but down by the ground. In the middle. If the ground was to play they could call you and you could be a longer ball.

BRITISH BULLDOG

One year on stood in the middle of the grass with a tennis ball. What that was was to be used to kick. Everyone made a goal. The ball was not to go to the ground. The ball would not be kept by the ball but down by the ground. In the middle. If the ground was to play they could call you and you could be a longer ball.

SKIPPING SONG

One year on stood in the middle of the grass with a tennis ball. What that was was to be used to kick. Everyone made a goal. The ball was not to go to the ground. The ball would not be kept by the ball but down by the ground. In the middle. If the ground was to play they could call you and you could be a longer ball.

"We would wait for the sun to go in and then use the washing line as a skipping rope."

"In the summer shoes were just gone."

PLAY OUTSIDE

LOOKING AHEAD

Evaluating the impact of Play in the Park over the past four years has provided us with an insight into the ways in which nature free play can support and enable local families to not only (re)connect with imaginative child led play in urban parks and cope with the immense challenges that the pandemic, lockdowns and the cost-of-living crisis have brought, but to also develop their confidence and risk taking with play for play's sake.

The pandemic forced us to reimagine the project and to adjust our aims and approach, rethinking how, when and where activities should take place, as well as the value that play can bring to both children and adults. We believe we have responded with flexibility, thoughtfulness and creativity, making real local connections to boost engagement and benefits, shared with participants as well as community organisations.

Play in the Park has helped The Royal Parks gain confidence in building collaborative local partnerships with local groups and organisations that bring expertise, local knowledge and a deep understanding of the local context.

Our commitment to play in the Royal Parks will focus on forging partnerships at a local level and provide support and value where the need is most urgent and the opportunities greatest.

Our next steps will be advised by the recent playground provision audit and a revised Royal Parks Play strategy, and by a new Access and Engagement plan for the parks and local underserved communities.

A Play and Engagement team formed by people from the local community, would strengthen this approach and support the Royal Parks' inclusion and diversity aims.



THANK YOU!

A special thanks to the London Marathon Charitable Trust for their support in making this project possible.

**LONDON MARATHON
CHARITABLE TRUST**



Thanks to all the families, community groups, schools and local organisations for their work, ideas and participation, and a special thanks to:

Assemble Play
Autistic Inclusive Meets
Camden Council
Camley Street Nature Reserve
Charlton Athletic Community Trust
Cumberland Market
Fitzrovia Youth in Action
Global Generation / The Story Garden
Greening Phoenix Road project
Kalisha Okore
Life After Hummus
Meridian Estate
Netley School
Polygon Open Space
Regent's Park Estate
Regent's Place
Regent's Park Time Bank
Sankofa Art of Storytelling
Somers Town History Club
Surma Community Centre
Stepping out in Sommers Town
The Anchor Charity
Tessa Hunkin and London School of Mosaic
West Euston Partnership

With thanks to our Play team, our partners London Play and all Royal Parks colleagues for their unflinching support. A special thanks to:

Panda Gavin and Belle Benham, Play Coordinators
Chrissy Baxter and Scheherezade Soodeen, London Play
Paul Hocker, Director, London Play
London Play playworkers, Learning and Play volunteers
Nick Biddle, Park Manager
Daniel Steel, Assistant Park Manager
Graham Dear, Park Manager
Michael Loughnane, Assistant Park Manager
Helen Wallis, PACE Officer Greenwich Park Revealed
Jane Pelly, Head of Landscape
Andrea Ingle, Senior Marketing Officer
Sharon Donovan, Senior Communications Officer
Kimberly Jones, Graphic Designer
May Webber, Engagement Officer, Help Nature Thrive
Graham Alderton, Operations Coordinator
Chris O'Donovan, project photographer
Id Verde, Benugo and The S.C.R.A.P. project

A photograph of children playing on a pirate-themed ride at a beach. In the foreground, a girl with long brown hair is wearing a black pirate hat with a white skull and crossbones and a colorful lei. She is sitting on a wooden cart and holding onto a yellow and black striped rope. Behind her, another girl with brown hair is leaning over her, also smiling and holding onto the rope. The background shows a sandy beach with other people and a large building in the distance under a cloudy sky.

APPENDICES

PARTICIPATION AND ACTIVITY STATS

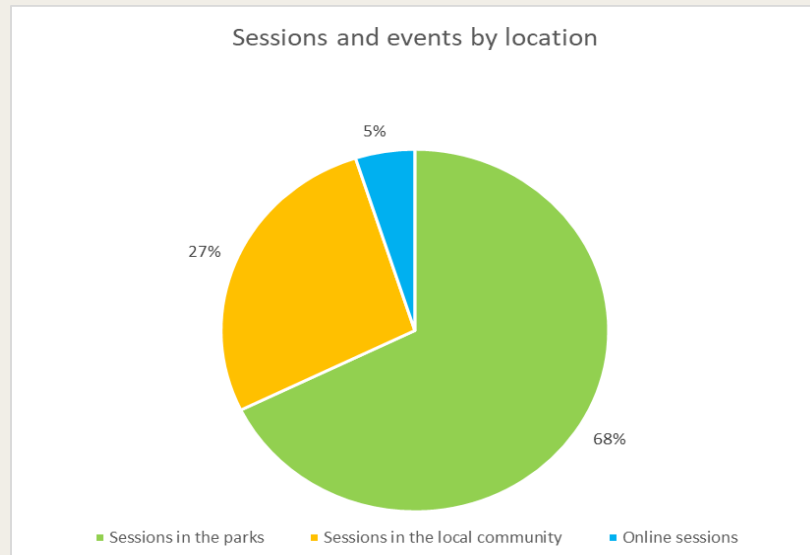
FINANCIAL REVIEW

YEAR 3 ACTIVITIES

PARTICIPATION AND ACTIVITY STATS

Project participation	Children	Adults	Adults active	Adults non active	Total
Year 1	646	486	114	372	1,132
Year 2	1,274	706	470	236	1,980
Year 3	1,890	1,577	890	687	3,467
Total project	3,810	2,769	1,474	1,295	6,579

Play activity		Breakdown by activity type			Regent's Park		Greenwich Park	
	Total sessions and events	In the parks	Locally	Online sessions	In the park	Locally	In the park	Locally
Year 1	41	35	6	0	3	0	32	6
Year 2	42	17	19	6	9	13	8	6
Year 3	38	30	8	0	17	8	13	0
Total project	121	82	33	6	29	21	53	12



FINANCIAL REVIEW

Direct project costs amounted to **£ 164,520**, distributed between TRP Play Coordinator's salary, our contract with partners London Play, and operational costs that included materials, marketing and comms.

Although the breakdown of costs refer to 3 years, the project was delivered across 4 years. Due to the pandemic and Government lockdowns, we couldn't deliver activities across the Royal Parks or in the community. The project was put on hold from May to September 2020 with a slow restart from October 2020 to May 2021.

Year 2 reflects these changes as it refers to an 18-month period that include: the first Play Coordinator leaving the Royal Parks in February 2020, recruitment of a new Coordinator in March 2020 with a delayed start in September of that year on a 2 day per week basis, to reflect the slow restart of activities agreed with LMCT. London Play's contract was put on hold for several months and restarted in October 2020 on a 50% of the contract value. From June 2021, the Play Coordinator increased to 3 days per week and London Play resume activities at 100%.

The project's operational budget helped cover costs for materials and resources to support the restart of play sessions and delivery of events. This budget also helped cover communications and marketing costs, such as photography, videography and social media costs.

Of the direct project costs, LMCT's grant amounted to £80,000, with the remainder of costs being funded by The Royal Parks. Other associated and indirect costs have also been absorbed by TRP.



Budget areas	Y1 (Feb 19 - Jan 20)	Y2 (Feb 20 – Sep 21)	Y3 (Oct 21 – Oct 22)
London Play	£30,504	£27,962	£33,046
TRP staff	£19,137	£15,647	£20,696
Operational costs	£6,594	£7,573	£3,361
Total per year	£56,236	£51,182	£57,103

YEAR 3 ACTIVITIES



YEAR 3 HIGHLIGHTS

Engagement and play activities were delivered in both sites, Greenwich Park Playground and The Regent's Park Gloucester Gate Playground, as well as outreach sessions and events in the local area:

- ✓ **Total participants engaged: 3,467** (1,890 children, 1,577 adults)
- ✓ **Play sessions and events: 38** (30 in the parks, 8 locally)
- ✓ **Outreach activities: 6** (4 play memories workshops, 1 play session, Cumberland Fun Fest)
- ✓ **Community events: 9** (Community events, of which 4 were developed in collaboration:
 - ✓ 1 AIM picnic
 - ✓ 1 BBQ and play session with RPTB and FYA
 - ✓ 1 Go kart event with FYA
 - ✓ 1 Tea celebration with TAP



PLAY IN GREENWICH PARK

Year 3 of the project began with a new lead from London Play, Chrissy Baxter taking over from Scheherezade Soodeen.

The Autumn saw a final session in Greenwich Park and a playful Halloween event, before focusing on plans for the year ahead.

Spring saw the resumption of bi-weekly play sessions and regular events in the park beginning with the popular Teddy Bears Picnic- the inclement weather did not put families off attending. Many new families became regulars during this time and ended with the **Festival of Play**, a lively day camp celebrating all things playful in the outdoors.

In Summer we had over 500 children and parents joining us to celebrate national **Play Day** in Greenwich Park, with popular go-kart building, paddling pools with leaf boats, mega junk modelling and lots of bubbles and team games in the park.

We were joined by new Play Starters from London Play, offering paid work experience for those who would like a career in playwork.

Following feedback from parents, we made a few changes to activities and location, moving play sessions near Maze Hill entrance. The move made the play offer more accessible for families and more practical for the team - with water, toilets and play store nearby - and helping maximise playtime.

Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with families regularly commenting on how the atmosphere was better and more relaxed, as it felt more enclosed without being restrictive. Parents grew in confidence as they let their children explore and lead their own play.

Ensuring that parents felt comfortable and more likely to stay and return with their children, was a focus for us this year. We invested in soft materials and a relaxed setting to create an environment adults and children could relax in, encouraging them to play.

Following the **Teddy Bears Picnic** in April, we began to see regular faces on the sessions and new friendships begin to develop, as well as a bond with regulars and the small pool of playworkers. A visit to a local primary school, Meridian, alongside the Community Engagement officer for the park, prompted a class of children to enthusiastically tell us about the Play in the Park sessions, evidencing how the sessions had become embedded locally.



We continued to engage with Autistic Inclusive Meets (AIM), a local not for profit organisation by autistic people for autistic people. One strand of the organisation's work is supporting families of neurodivergent children who are home educated; these families can often feel isolated and struggle to access mainstream play opportunities.

We met regularly with AIM and helped them organise a picnic in the park so families could meet, play and share experiences together. Thanks to this partnership, the team were able to further develop their inclusive practice, ensuring that the play sessions met the needs of all children.

As a result, several AIM families with children who were neurodivergent and / or lived with disabilities, regularly attended Play in the Park sessions in Greenwich. Parents and carers were appreciative of the inclusive nature of the play sessions.

We also began to forge new relationships with park neighbours at the National Maritime Museum, meeting with them alongside Greenwich Park's Community Engagement officer to discuss Play in the Park, and our strong ethos on freely chosen, child led play. We explored how their new play space could be inclusive, accessible and had scope for extended play.

The average number of attendees on Greenwich play sessions was 61 children and 26 adults.



PLAY IN THE REGENT'S PARK

Continuing with a strong ethos of child-led play with bi-weekly play sessions and playful events, the Play Coordinator strengthened relationships with community organisations made in the second year of the project, with a focus on the Regent's Park Estate.

Having supported Regent's Park Timebank's (RPTB) play scheme in their free-play sessions in Summer 2021, we furthered our contact with estate-based services to include Third Age Project (TAP) who share a community space on Cumberland Market with RPTB.

Play memories

We developed a play memories project with TAP over the Winter, engaging Netley Primary School and created reminiscence workshops, play sessions for children, a tea in the park for TAP participants and intergenerational activities; all reflected in the booklet '**The Importance of Play**', which recorded our extensive learning about how childhood has changed since the 1950s.

Find out more about this intergenerational play memories initiative on the next page.

We continued our close relationship with RPTB and, in Spring, when we relaunched our bi-weekly play sessions and playful events in The Regent's Park, they promoted to their families through WhatsApp, flyers, posters and helping them into the park. The group brought packed lunches for families at our first event of the year – The Teddy Bear's Picnic.

Finding the way

Packed lunches and organised local groups were significant factors in having a large turnout of families from the estate on our events and sessions. During year 2 of the project, we realised that food poverty was a challenge for many families from the estate. This need grew in year 3 due to the cost-of-living crisis, and we were the only local project that we knew of that did not provide a meal with activities.

Another factor was that organised groups lacked confidence in visiting The Regent's Park. The Play team themselves saw park visitors showing negative attitudes towards families from the estate.

Another challenge was the high turnover of young families in the Regent's Park Estate. As a result, many Play in the Park users did not know the local area.

During spring and summer Kalisha Okore from Regent's Park Timebank (RPTB) joined the team as a playworker. As a local mum, community leader and aspiring playworker, Kalisha provided us with thoughtful input that felt invaluable on play sessions and our Festival of Play – a day-long celebration of outdoor play and loose parts near the playground.

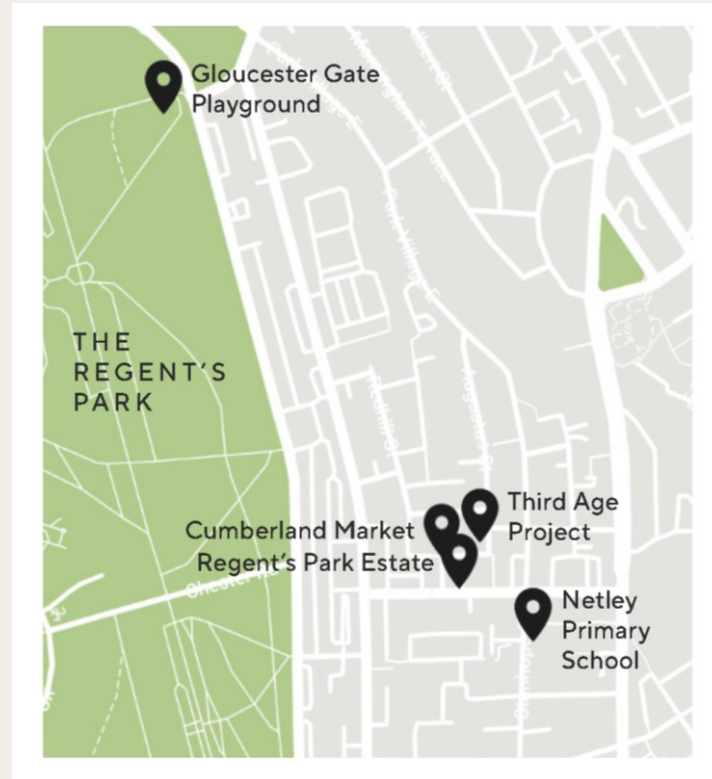
The Fast and the Curious

The Fast and the Curious was a day-long event with partners RPTB and Fitzrovia Youth in Action (FYA). The August event began with a mosaic workshop in Cumberland Market, followed by a Go Kart making activity in Regent's Park with FYA's Regent's Park Champions. The two groups joined a barbecue catered by Benugo at the Broad Walk Café. The families joined us for our afternoon play session, where over 200 children took part.



'THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY'

An intergenerational play memories initiative with participants from the Third Age Project and students from Netley Primary School.



NETLEY PRIMARY SCHOOL

I love football and I prefer that I will play outside because if I play inside I might break something like the TV

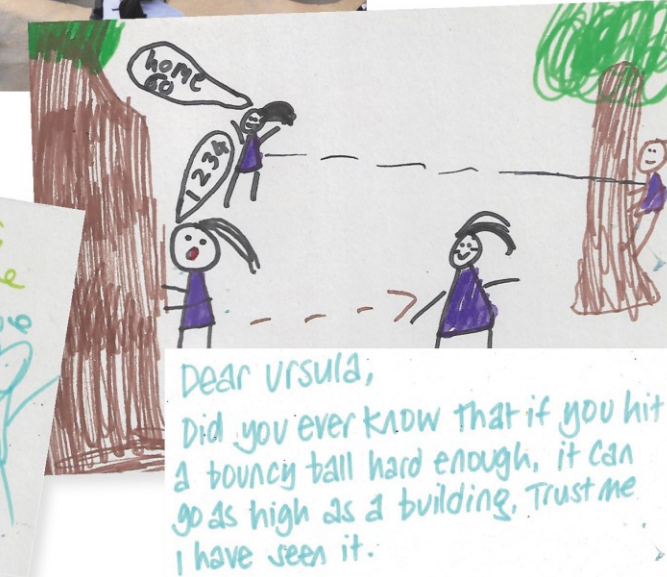
Dear Brigid
I like playing Superheroes and chickens I don't like playing hop the snow or know how to play hopotch. from Rajyan.

We ran two workshops and a play session with a group of 12 children from Netley Primary School. We did our best to learn some of their games (some of which are in this booklet) and played some of what we had learned from the TAP group.

One thing that was interesting was that, although the children all liked skipping, they didn't know any skipping songs and were happy to learn some.

It was about a 50/50 split of who liked playing inside vs outside. The children who liked playing outside described playing with neighbours in the walkways of the blocks and playing football in the park with older brothers. Those that preferred inside were worried about losing their marbles outside and liked being cosy.

In the online call one of the children asked, "what did you do about losing your toys?" The answer was quick, "we didn't have any toys."



THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY

Over the Winter (2021-22) we engaged residents local to Gloucester Gate Playground in a project which explored how play has changed from the 50s up until now. The impetus of this 'mini-project' was to engage the local community in advocating for child-led outdoor play, by facilitating reminiscence on the freedoms they had in their childhood.

Our partner Third Age Project (TAP), an organisation based in Cumberland Market at the heart of Regent's Park Estate, provides lifeline services to vulnerable elderly residents who 'slip through the net' of local mainstream services. We invited Netley Primary School to join and facilitated intergenerational activities, some online due to covid restrictions during winter, postcard writing and followed by face-to-face sessions in summer at Cumberland Fun Fest, in partnership with Fitzrovia Youth in Action.

Using photos, reflections and quotes we created a 'zine' entitled 'The Importance of Play', which was distributed to everyone who took part, as well as local families and wider participants from our play sessions.

The play memories initiative helped us realise the profound loss of children's freedom to play outside over the decades. We discussed the reasons and profound impact of that loss between young and old participants.

The zine captures the twists and turns of how play has changed for two generations, and we hope will be a useful advocacy tool.

- ✓ 31 participants
- ✓ 16 participants from Third Age Project
- ✓ 12 students from Netley Primary School
- ✓ 3 community leaders
- ✓ 4 workshops
- ✓ 1 play session
- ✓ 2 events
- ✓ 300 zines!

**"There were no adults,
no one was watching,
we made our own rules
and did our own thing."**

- Reenie, Seven Dials



The *Play in the Park* project is funded by the London Marathon Charitable Trust and delivered in partnership with London Play.

LONDON MARATHON CHARITABLE TRUST **LONDON PLAY**

The Royal Parks. Registered Charity No: 1172042



Dear Isra,
 "When I was a girl I liked playing in the street with my friends. There weren't many cars then. Some of my favourite games were British Bulldog, Tin Tan Topper Man, skipping and two balls.
 All the children used to play out together - girls and boys and all different ages."



Sea Shells, Cockle Shells
 Ery, luy, Over
 (Name)'s in the clover.
 All right (name), I'll tell your mother,
 Kissing (boy's name) in the clover.
 How many kisses did you give him?
 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 etc.

SKIPPING RHYMES.

A COMMUNITY MOSAIC

Over winter 2021-22, we worked on engaging an artist to produce an artwork with longevity, that celebrates play as vital to children's health, happiness and development, and that would be sympathetic to the Gloucester Gate Playground's natural and wildlife centred design.

We were delighted to begin working with Tessa Hunkin and the London School of Mosaic. Tessa's work include commissions as diverse as London Zoo, Westminster Cathedral and Aston Villa FC!

We offered two workshops to families from the local Regents Park Timebank charity. The charity provides a safe, secure, inclusive and accessible space on the estate at Cumberland Market, aimed at local families with children under 12. The families RPTB work with are from diverse backgrounds and the charity aims to work together to deliver activities and build trusting and lasting relationships with each other.

The workshops offered families an opportunity to input into the design of the mosaic aiming to increase the sense of ownership of the play space by the community and to empower them by making a positive difference to their environment.

Tessa and her team offered a hands-on tutorial and the chance to create their own mosaic artwork to take home.

The workshops culminated in a BBQ in The Regent's Park provided by our park colleagues at Benugo, and ended with a play session in the park fostering a real sense of community between the projects.

The mosaic is currently in production and will be installed in Spring 2023 with plans for a celebratory community play event.

- ✓ 12 families per workshop
- ✓ 2 workshops
- ✓ 1 summer event (plus 1 planned for spring 2023)



PLAY SESSIONS AND APPROACHES

In year 3, the Play in the Park team delivered 21 free play sessions in The Regent's and Greenwich Parks. Building on the learning and resources from year 2, these regular sessions maintained their child-led ethos focussing on developing each child's confidence to play outside by nurturing their autonomy. The team worked together to develop a programme that was fun, inclusive and welcoming to all parents and children.

The reflective practice used by the team in the second year of the project remained essential to how feedback, numbers and observations have been recorded and informed how the activities were resourced and delivered. As far as possible, 'Loose Parts' were used in these pop-up mini events to foster a sense of endless possibilities for the children, with the team playing with the appearance of scarcity and abundance:

- ✓ the **illusion of scarcity** can enable children to cooperate, to share and to think outside the box
- ✓ The **illusion of abundance** can inspire children in a different, but equally imaginative way

Messy Play became a feature of many play sessions from clay to slime to collaborative painting – this type of non-product-oriented creativity was very popular – a steep learning curve was the importance of having spare clothes as well as washable paints to be fully inclusive – they did this by sourcing second hand clothes and watering down the paints.

An inclusive approach

The team ensured that there was always a 'chill out' area available for children (or parents) experiencing sensory overload. The inclusive approach helped children with additional support needs to thrive in play sessions.

Curating resources

Resources used on the play sessions were curated over the duration of the project and, when possible, were second-hand or recycled.

Most bric-a-brac, toys and fancy dress came from second-hand shops. Paper, cardboard and fabric were sourced from The Community S.C.R.A.P. project in Homerton.

Reflecting and improving

The team's reflections - on everything from use of space and equipment to children's interactions - were recorded and showed the team's commitment to constantly responding and improving, based on what they were seeing and learning.



PLAYFUL EVENTS

Unlike the play sessions - which used a targeted approach to promote to local under-served families and were tailored to their needs and interests - Play in the Park's Playful events were promoted through The Royal Parks communications channels. As a result, they were very well attended and loved by park users.

Building on learning from year 2, the team decided to replicate events on both parks, helping streamline delivery and increase collaboration with London Play.

Delivery paused for the Winter after Halloween themed events in Greenwich and The Regent's Parks, with messy potion making, playing in the dark (a blackout tent), pumpkin carving, and of course dressing up.

Activities restarted in Spring 2022 with the **Teddy Bear's picnic**, where children were invited to bring their soft toys to the park and create paw-traits inspired by wildlife - idea from the Play Saviours children's panel, January 2021.

Play in the Park's events have generally been an expansion of play sessions with the addition of themed activities. The **Festival of Play** events (May half term) was a celebration of Loose Parts play. Families were invited to move around the different play stations, from junk modelling, messy play, and team ball and water games.

Play Day in Greenwich Park took on a similar feel to The Festival of Play and built on the success of the previous year. **The Fast and The Curious** event in The Regent's Park engaged several local groups in targeted activities (go kart building and racing) and ending with a large open access play session in the afternoon, where team and water play were the main attractions.

In June, Play in the Park took part in Cumberland FunFest, a much loved and well attended community run family day on Regent's Park Estate. We also collaborated with Autistic Inclusive Meets in their 'Not Back to School Picnic' in Greenwich Park Playground.

