



# Play Gloucestershire's My Park Project

Interim Evaluation  
Key Findings – July 2019



Proudly supporting  
youth social action



Department for  
Digital, Culture  
Media & Sport





# My Park Project

## About My Park

**My Park** is a social action project for 10 to 14 year olds, with the overall aim of making local parks in Matson, Springbank and Stonehouse, great places for sport and physical activity through volunteering, campaigning and fundraising. This social action project is vibrant, flexible and fun, empowering disadvantaged young people to effect positive change for themselves, their peers and their home community using the power of sport and physical activity.

Our **Get Active Team** are the key influencers on this project, and are gradually building connections and trust with young people, using their skills and experience as community based playworkers. Using a combination of school and community based work, the project works hard to create a desire in young people to get more active through sport and physical activity, and enable young people to be confident enough to step out into their local park where they can co-create informal sports and other physical activities with peers, supported by our Get Active team on a weekly basis, developing a regular habit and desire to be outdoors and be active.

Young people have the opportunity to formally sign up as 'Park Activists'. Participating schools and parks are within walking distance of each other, and we are seeing our young Park Activists encouraging peers to get active with them in their local park, for physical activity, friendship and fun. They are encouraging whole families to get active and involved. Our Get Active Team are helping them to campaign to make their park a better place to be, connecting them with stakeholders such as town, district and county councils. The Park Activists have taken part in training, received 'on the job' mentoring support and have set up their own incentive scheme that recognises achievements with appropriate rewards such as head torches, neck warmers and water bottles.

We use the power of sport and physical activity to engage with young people. They are taking part in a range of informal unstructured sport and physical activity that we call 'jumpers for goalposts' type sport. No whistles, no coaching but lots of encouragement, movement and fun, supported by our Get Active Team who inspire, nurture and motivate young people. As confidence grows, week on week, young people are stepping forward and co-creating sports and physical activity, organising themselves and encouraging others to join in, 'like me'.

'My Park' is a Potentials Fund project funded by **The #iwill Fund**. The #iwill Fund is made possible thanks to joint investment from The National Lottery Community Fund, and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), and Sport England to support young people to access high quality social action opportunities.

## Where My Park Happens

The project targets three disadvantaged communities that we have previously worked in. These areas were chosen because of their deprivation, our previous experience, local knowledge, strong relationships with local partners and the needs of young people living here.

### Matson, Gloucester

Matson is a large community of predominately social housing on the south-east side of Gloucester. Delivery here is focussed in Evan's Walk Park, owned by Gloucester City Council and Moat Primary Academy, which is in close proximity to the park. Evan's Walk Park has a small children's play park in the centre and open grass. The park is surrounded by social housing including many flats, the school playing fields and a busy road. The Indices of Multiple Deprivation shows Matson has a Lower Super Output Area in the top 10% nationally.

### Park Estate, Stonehouse

Stonehouse is a rurally isolated market town with a pocket of deprivation on the Park Estate with income deprivation affecting children in the top 10% nationally. My Park sessions take place in Stonehouse on two sites – Oldends Lane Playing Fields, a large green space including a park, skate ramp and multiple sports fields and The Three Greens, a small pocket of green space in the Park Estate which is surrounded by social housing. School sessions are delivered at Park Junior School, within easy walking distance of the park.

### Springbank, Cheltenham

Springfields Park is located to the west of Cheltenham and flanks both the Springbank and Hester's Way communities. In this large park there are multiple play spaces, a multi-use games area, a half pipe for skateboarding and lots of natural planting. The park is also very close to Springbank Community Resource Centre. Weekly Get Active lunchtime sessions and Get Active Groups are based in Hester's Way Primary school which is within walking distance of the park. Hester's Way Primary school has 41.2% of children eligible for Free Schools Meals.



 Play Gloucestershire  
@Play\_Glos

ICYMI: on Saturday this group of [#ParkActivists](#) decided they would put into action the training they'd received from our Play Rangers about [#youthsocialaction](#) & clear the stream/canal adjacent to the car park at [@scrapstoreGlos](#)

Not all heroes wear capes!  
[#iwill](#) [#plasticfree](#)



“ Sometimes when we're here we would say if someone leaves their rubbish, we would go and pick it up, so we're like tidying up the park and making it better. ”

Honey, Park Activist

## The Delivery Model

Our **Get Active Team** are based in each community for a day each week, co-creating sport and physical activity with children both in school and in the community.

Table 1 – Delivery in Numbers July 2019

Numbers	Matson Gloucester	Springbank Cheltenham	Park Estate Stonehouse
Active Lunchtime sessions	40	41	41
In school Get Active Group sessions	11	10	15
After School Park sessions	41	42	42
Holiday Get Active Days in the park	9	10	10
Park Activists	9	14	6
<b>Total Beneficiaries</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>277</b>	<b>314</b>

### IN SCHOOL

**Get Active Lunchtimes**  
For the whole school

### IN SCHOOL

**Get Active Group**  
Build confidence in children affected by life's ups and downs

### AFTER SCHOOL

**Get Active in the Park**  
For young people by young people

### SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

**Get Active in the Park Play Days**  
For young people by young people

- Build connections
- Develop trust
- Motivate and engage
- Become a Park Activist
- Co-create sport and physical activity in school and the park
- Take part in social action that makes the park a great place for recreation for the whole community

## Outcomes and Impact

**My Park** is empowering disadvantaged young people to effect positive change for themselves, their peers and their home community using the power of sport and physical activity.

Young people are benefiting by:

- Developing key life skills
- Improved mental wellbeing through the pleasure and enjoyment of taking part and a strong sense of belonging
- Feeling good by helping others through social action and volunteering
- More and better social connections

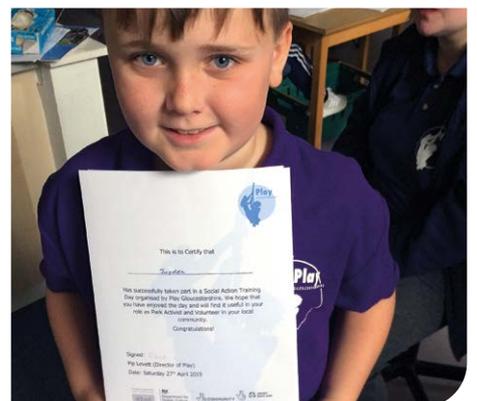
The wider community tell us that as a result of young people's social action that they recognise the park as a good place to gather and use for sport and physical activity – a great free community asset – helping strengthen these local communities.

*"My park sessions are helping to build friendships and bring families together through the use of play and sport. Because the sessions are local and many of the children also see the Get Active Team at school, families feel comfortable when they attend the sessions, which makes it so much easier for families to feel a part of the scheme."*

Jacky Edwards, All Pulling Together, Stonehouse

 **Play Gloucestershire**  
@Play\_Glos

Demi is 1 of our amazing #ParkActivists who volunteers her time to be part of our @Sport\_England #GetActive team. Thru #socialaction she wants 2help people use their local park more-trust us she means it!  
Thanks Demi keep inspiring people to #volunteer #iwillweek @iwill\_campaign



## Case Study – James’ Story

We first met **James** in 2016 at a one off event in his local community.

We then met again at the start of My Park just after James had moved schools. Attending our park sessions really helped him to make some new friends with different children.

We spotted his excellent leadership qualities and that he was a great role model.

He decided to become a Park Activist and since starting has flourished in his role, so far volunteering 70 hours. James regularly starts games, sets up, packs away and prepares healthy snacks. He has come up with some fantastic ideas for social action – including a Geocaching event he plans to organise over the school summer holidays. When asked about his experiences with My Park so far James said:

*“Being a Park Activist has changed my life. I want to make my park accessible for people of all ages. Before I used to see the park as a play experience. Now I see it as a place where people enjoy life as a whole.”*

*“Play Gloucestershire have been a brilliant addition to the existing provision and activities in Springbank for the communities around the park and also for Hester’s Way Primary School. They provide great opportunities for local children and families to engage in activities that they would otherwise not have a chance to experience. It has brought more people including a large number of our tenants to the park and gives young people in the area something to look forward to on a Wednesday!”*

James Hayward, Cheltenham Borough Homes

*“The sessions have really brought us together. Looking forward to the summer months so we can all come out together and maybe have a picnic on the grass.”*

Parent, Stonehouse



*“ I used to be really moody and bossy. Ever since I started here I’m actually a bit kinder. ”*

Salima,  
Park Activist

*“ It’s such a lovely atmosphere. The Mums sit and chat, which we wouldn’t have a chance to normally, and it’s all free. What’s not to love? ”*

Local Resident,  
Stonehouse

*“I’ve always played sport, but I thought when I became a Park Activist and some of the kids go to our school, then I thought I should maybe up my game a little in sport as well and push myself more.”*

Salima, Park Activist

*“Well I’ve always been quite active, but I think it’s nice to get other people active as well.”*

Izzy, Park Activist

*“They are learning so many life skills such as communication, organisation, leadership as well as being active and promoting others to be active. We are very privileged to be working with you.”*

Kirsti Ashman, Head Teacher,  
Hester’s Way Primary School

## Testing New Approaches

Using all our knowledge and experience **My Park** is testing out some new approaches to supporting 10-14 year olds with quality long-term volunteering opportunities and in particular:

### **1: How our key influencers from a non-sport specific sector have effectively engaged and motivated young people to take part in social action that encourages the use of public open spaces for sport and physical activity**

Our Get Active Team are not from a sport specific sector. They are experienced community playworkers with a passion for physical activity, using child-led and non-directive approach. Young people are supported rather than directed, as may be the case in more formally organised sports. The emphasis is on agency, meaning that young people are encouraged to act independently and make their own free choices.

*"We believe that the Play Gloucestershire team are a vital strand of the local physical activity workforce. They have become embedded in focus neighbourhoods, having conversations, building trust and really understanding some of the most inactive young people and their families. Using play and fun to break down barriers, I have seen the passion and commitment to local young people build into sustainable social action. Led by local families and young people, Play Gloucestershire have supported personal development of local residents as well as the development of an accessible, community owned green space to be proud of."*

Kirsty Dunleavy; Physical Activity Specialist for Females and Low Socio-Economic Areas, Active Gloucestershire

*"The equitable relationships I've seen between our Get Active Team and the young people participating in the My Park project is for me, one of the big factors behind their motivation and effective, continued engagement. It is built on reliability, trust and mutual respect. This is what we call 'jumpers for goalposts' sport without whistles or cones. These young people are co-creating sport and physical activity in their own way. They adapt and make up hybrid games, negotiate with each other, players come and go and sometimes at the end of a game there is not a single person left playing who started the game. It is this sense of agency that young people love, and it's attracting more people into the parks to join in and get more active."*

Ben Morris, Urban Team Leader

### **2: How a broad range of approaches both in schools and communities supported by a range of partners helps to engage with 10-14 year olds including vulnerable young people experiencing anxiety, stress and mental health difficulties**

#### **Multiple Strands of Our Work Joined Up For First Time**

My Park brings together multiple strands of Play Gloucestershire's learning over the last decade, into one targeted project. This is the first time we have been able to work over a period of three years in the same community and same school each day of the week. By starting delivery in school lunchtimes, providing a small group session for vulnerable children in the same school and then meeting these children after school in the park, it has shown that this is an effective approach that works. It is the school-based work that starts the trusting relationship that develops over time into the community setting.

*"The Midday Supervisors say they always look forward to you coming in, there are so many more children engaging and running around."*

Richard Gasser, Head teacher, Park Junior School

*"The children loved their time with you and often spoke about how excited they were. I have noticed a willingness to work together and much more confidence to have a go."*

Cara Greenlee,  
Learning Mentor  
at Moat Primary  
Academy

*"Play Gloucestershire has played an important role in promoting the wider benefits of creative play and physical activity in local educational settings. This develops relationships and builds trust with children and school communities in areas of high need. I have seen numerous examples of how they have used their innovative, creative and fun approach to play and physical activity to successfully open up opportunities for local green spaces to be used in a more positive way."*

Tom Hall, Physical Activity Specialist for Children & Young People, Active Gloucestershire

*"Having the Get Active Team here at Hester's Way Primary School every week allows the children to build positive relationships with them: learning new ways to stay active rather than the traditional football games at lunchtime."*

Clare Godzisz, Teacher, Hester's Way Primary School

*"Can we play my game again after school in the park? I'm going to get everyone together. See you in the park after school!"*

Darcy, Park Activist



playgloucestershire Fantastic to be at the @activegloucestershire #SchoolGamesGloucestershire based at @hartpurycollge today, showcasing how play & some playful interventions can get pupils active in simple easy ways. This image is of an intense game of "CONES!" #activeplay #activeschools #playtime #maketimeforplay

55w



activegloucestershire Awesome!!!! You guys rocked it today!



55w Reply

**“** It has been lovely to see them blossoming into little leaders and having their first experience of being able to volunteer their help and expertise to others. **”**

Natalie Lawday,  
Head of PE at  
Park Junior School



## Project Partners and Other Collaborations

Building community partnerships has been an important part of My Park with school and community partners and wider stakeholder support in each neighbourhood. Working together with local organisations has been vital to build trust and extend our reach, with a wide range of people and organisations sharing information and promoting the work of the Park Activists. Social media is now a big part of our marketing and communications. However, at a local level word of mouth is just as important and having local support has been key.

## Case Study – Partnering with No Child Left Behind Cheltenham

Our Get Active Team are partnering with **No Child Left Behind Cheltenham**, supporting this year long campaign that highlights the difficulties children have growing up in poverty in the town, and the inequality between them and their more affluent peers.

There is a 12-month programme of events and activities and a call to action for all sectors to work together to make transformational change over the longer term. The Get Active Team have been involved in the planning of events to engage with children during the summer holidays. The Park Activists will help organise and deliver free physical activities for children from across Cheltenham, showing just how important it is for children from all backgrounds to be active.

*“There are around 4400 children living in poverty in Cheltenham; children living in areas of deprivation are more than twice as likely to be obese than their wealthier counterparts. By providing free ways that children in these areas can access physical activity we can improve the quality of their physical and mental.”*

Jennifer Tucker, Partnerships & Research Officer,  
Cheltenham Borough Council

*“If we can invest in our communities through schemes like this it gives young people opportunities and possibilities which they may not get living in a deprived area. It will help build pride and identity in our communities if our young people like living there because of the opportunities to have fun, helping to fight stigmas about our communities. I love when I get the opportunity to pop into sessions. Everyone is having fun and everyone is included.”*

Chris Jenkinson, Police Community Support Officer



The face of a child who really wanted to play football! Arrives and within 10 minutes finds 10 friends to join in. #ActivePlay #SportEngland #Potentials



“It’s about creating the conditions that enable young people to feel connected to something they really care about with people that they want to spend time with.”

Ben Morris,  
Urban Team Leader

### 3: The key characteristics that motivate young people to volunteer

- **Making it fun and appealing**
- **Feeling Valued and part of the team**

*“It’s about creating the conditions that enable young people to feel connected to something they really care about with people that they want to spend time with. Young people want to be part of something and get a sense of belonging. For these young people they are choosing to get involved in something that is not only fun and makes them feel good, but they are also helping others along the way. Doing good helps you feel good, and our Park Activists are definitely motivated because they are connecting with us and having fun.”*

Ben Morris, Urban Team Leader

*“My Park’s not inspired me to take part in sport because I’m horrific at sport but it’s definitely has made me more active and made me think there’s a world that we live in that is really nice and we need to use before houses are built on it.”*

James, Park Activist

- **Flexible through life's ups and downs**

Young people know that there is no requirement to volunteer every week, they can dip in and out depending on what is going on in their lives. Some young people have stopped volunteering for extended periods of time due to some challenging personal circumstances and then have then returned, warmly welcomed back and carried on where they left off.

The Get Active Team are trained in Mental Health First Aid and Place 2 Be Counselling. This enables them to support both Park Activists and wider beneficiaries with difficult issues such as stress, relationship breakdown between parents, bereavement and living in poverty.

*'I saw a child who often walks or cycles through the park with his family but today he was alone. He looked upset so I walked alongside him and he was nearly in tears as he told me they hadn't had a good half term as they have no money to do anything. I reminded him that all of our sessions are free and lots of fun.'*

Charlie, Get Active Team

- **Unconditional positive regard for young people**

The Get Active team make every effort to provide 'unconditional positive regard' towards the young people they support. It is about providing acceptance and support for young people, particularly when they are having a bad day, or exhibiting what is often described as challenging behaviour. The social and emotional challenges of everyday life can be tough, and some of the young people that we come into contact with in the parks have complex psychological or physical challenge, trauma or crisis to cope with.

- **Good quality meaningful volunteering opportunities including training**

There are few volunteering opportunities for 10-14 year olds, which was the motivation behind Play Gloucestershire setting up our formal volunteering scheme in 2009.

Young people have so many talents and skills to share with others, as well as energy, kindness, enthusiasm and a way of connecting positively with others.

The My Park project has seen a range of social actions including setting up activities, organising games and activities, helping other children and welcoming new families to the park. A training day for all Park Activists enabled young people to meet up, share ideas for social action and clear a local stream of plastic with fishing nets. Empowering, meaningful and fun!

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## Case Study – Helping Refugee Children

**Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, an organisation that we collaborate with regularly, has been working with a group of newly arrived refugee children and we recently hosted a visit by this group to My Park in Matson.**

The Park Activists had chatted about hosting this visit the previous week, and it sparked a conversation about what it must be like to be a child refugee. Although a little nervous, they planned some games and soon got involved in table tennis, skipping, den building and football with the visitors, sharing some fruit and yoghurt with them.

After they left, the Park Activists reflected on the visit, and there was an overwhelming sense of pleasure that they had been able to help others.

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“You can tell lots of us kids aren't having a good childhood.”

Child, age 10



We're with them through this transition and when everything's changing it is very reassuring to have your My Park team around you.



- **Recognising achievements with appropriate rewards**

The Park Activists have helped create a rewards scheme, so that their volunteering and social actions are recognised and valued. These incentives chosen by the young people are really useful – head torches, water bottles and the much sought after purple polo shirt.

*"It's the best feeling giving out rewards to Park Activists that have worked so hard, whenever they receive a t-shirt they always have the proudest smile on their face."*

Charlie Marsh, Get Active Team

- **Supporting young people's journey over several years and through key transitions**

The age range of our Park Activists is 10-14 years, meaning many of them are transitioning from primary to secondary school during their time with us. Having worked with children in transition over many years, we understand that this period often results in stress and anxiety and it is a major change in their lives. Research shows that young people can end up isolated and vulnerable without a successful transition, so the My Park project has been able to provide some stability and consistency in their lives.

*"I've always been very active and sporty, but ever since I came to secondary school, I've not been as active, being at the park made me do more"*

Honey, Park Activist

*"I decided to join as I thought it would be a good experience for me as I am moving up into the higher years into secondary, I thought it would be a good part of volunteering for experience."*

James, Park Activist

### **Get Active Team Log Sheet Extract:**

***Tonight we set up swing ball and without intending to, it was used it as an activity for young people to talk about school transitions whilst whacking the ball. It seemed to work well, using it as an indirect approach to sharing feelings about something that is causing a lot of anxiety amongst year 6's. This transition is a big event in their lives, and we know that some young people find it very, very difficult to cope with. We're with them through this transition and when everything's changing it is very reassuring to have your My Park team around you.***

- **Progression from informal to formal volunteering**

Many of our current Park Activists started volunteering informally before they were 10 and during this time aspired to becoming a Park Activist, with a weekly countdown to their 10th birthday. There are so few volunteering opportunities for under 16's and yet the group of young people involved in the My Park project are demonstrating just how committed, talented and motivated they are at supporting social actions in their home community.

At My Park sessions we have Park Activists and participants that are home schooled. These sessions have helped children build relationships making new friends with other children in their own community. Home schooled children have attended training days, giving them an opportunity to meet up with other children across the County.

### **Log Sheet Extract:**

*I spoke with T. at the start of the session. He's so enthusiastic about what we do with My Park. He told us how he's watched the other Park Activists and now he's turned 10, he'd like to become a Park Activist too. **The positive peer role modelling going on is great, it's a really effective recruitment method, and there always seems to be younger ones aspiring to become involved and wanting to help out in their home community.***

## Interim Evaluation Key Findings

**After 15 months, My Park is steadily gaining momentum, with increasing numbers of young people wanting to become Park Activists now, following the motivational force of those already signed up.**

Children under 10 are informally volunteering and supporting My Park in increasing numbers. They cannot wait to reach the age of ten and sign up. This shows the benefit of a three-year project, developing a culture and an ethos over time that becomes 'what we do here'. As we say, you're never too young to volunteer and help your home community!

The project has effectively built trust with children and families living in low-income communities. The My Park sessions take place within local community spaces, taking away the transport and cost barriers into participation. My Park sessions are open to all, inclusive and are welcoming to new participants. The 100% reliability of My Park sessions means parents have confidence that trusted adults will be in the park as advertised.

The interim evaluation has shown:

- Park Activists are coming up with creative ideas for a range of physical activities in their local park and gradually becoming more confident to set up and run these activities with support from the Get Active Team
- Increasing awareness in Park Activists that their social actions are helping others and making them feel good at the same time
- Park Activists enjoying their sense of agency, being in control of what they do and how they do it, which is helping their self-esteem and independence
- Children and families in Matson, Springbank and Stonehouse gathering on a weekly basis in local parks to meet and make new friends, be active and have fun resulting in increased physical activity
- A range of people feeling safer using their local park when the Get Active Team including the Park Activists are present
- Appreciation by the wider community of the park being used in a positive way. Many people still think their local park is an under used community asset that has much more potential to be used for community events and gatherings
- A range of valued partnerships emerging through the work of the Park Activists and the Get Active Team, including schools, community organisations, the police and local councillors. Feedback from these stakeholders has been extremely positive
- Joining up multiple strands of Play Gloucestershire's work - both school and park based - has built the trust and confidence of young people by starting in school and created a desire in them to be active and sociable in their local park
- Non-sport specific staff being highly effective in engaging and motivating young people to take part in social actions supporting physical activity. It's all about a non-directive approach built on reliability, trust and mutual respect
- The project is fun and appealing. The Park Activists (and those under 10's in waiting) have a strong sense of team and belonging and are proud to be part of 'Team Purple'
- Young people have been well supported through life's ups and downs with trained and experienced staff who are able to provide nurture and support, and resilient enough to cope with some challenging situations
- The range of social actions are growing with Park Activists coming up with bigger ideas as they become more experienced and more confident
- Young people feel their contributions are valued in their home community and recognised by the rewards scheme they have developed
- School transitions are supported with mentoring and young people benefit from My Park continuing during this time of disruption and change



*As we say, you're never too young to volunteer and help your home community!*



## Acknowledgements

Play Gloucestershire would like to thank **Sport England**, the **#iwill fund**, **The National Lottery** and **DCMS** for funding the 'My Park' project. Thanks to **Hester's Way Primary School**, **Moat Primary Academy** and **Park Junior School** for welcoming our Get Active Team on a weekly basis. We are grateful for the support of local community groups, the land owners (Cheltenham Borough Council, Gloucester City Council, and Stroud District Council, Stonehouse Town Council) and Town, District and County Councillors who have helped this project become a success. **Most importantly thank you to our Park Activists, children and families who are collectively making their local parks a good place for everyone to be.**

“ If we can invest in our communities through schemes like this it gives young people opportunities and possibilities which they may not get living in a deprived area. ”

Chris Jenkinson,  
Police Community  
Support Officer

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