



TEPEE (Teignbridge Play Network)

Play Ranger Project 2006

The Play Ranger project ran for 20 weeks with 2 sessions per week in Victoria Park, Buckfastleigh. Sessions started in May 2006 as an after school facility and ran through till September both after school and during school holidays.

The sessions were run by two qualified play workers, who had experience of working in an open access, outdoor situation.

We had funding from the Local Network Fund of £5680 and £200 from Buckfastleigh Town Council.

The work was prompted by consultation with children and adults who said that:

- They did not use the park because of the threat of bullying from older children.
- They wanted a free supervised play facility.
- They would not let their children go to the park on their own because of perceived dangers such as bullying, stranger danger and road safety.
- They wanted a safe place to play and meet friends.

Play rangers seemed to be a good way of tackling these barriers to playing in the park and the needs expressed.

The work of the play rangers involves:

- Being a children's play facilitator and an enabler.
- Consultation with children is a big part of the work: listening to what children have to say about how they like to play, how things could be improved, and what stops them from playing in the park.
- Boosting children's self-esteem and confidence, by giving them control over their free time and encouraging them to make positive decisions.
- Encouraging children and adults to use the park in a positive way and introduce new ideas for play activities
- Working with the community, so that if problems arise we have a good network of contacts.
- I.e. community police, youth workers, play workers, Surestart, Homestart, community liaison officer, zero14 development workers, Teignbridge district council park rangers, teachers and parents.
- Also providing good role models and good practice in playwork and promoting the importance of play for children.

In practice we found that for the children to get full value out of the sessions, they had to be fully involved in planning what they wanted to do, and in making things work for them. Simply bringing things down for them was not the key. We used simple and inexpensive resources, things they could easily access themselves, for example a football, some clay, sticks and string. We also gave parents an area to sit by laying out plastic tarpaulins with a few rugs and cushions. Parents and children could hang out and relax

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here, but also this was where much of the talking and planning, consultation and evaluation went on in an informal way (by chatting). We also used questionnaires and boards with stickers.

The Play rangers need to know when to and when not to intervene. Good communication skills and behaviour management skills are also essential. Knowing how to diffuse a situation before it escalates.

Difficult situations arose at times with children that were disruptive to what was going on, there was some bullying which had to be dealt with, as well as aggressive and disruptive behaviour. This came from a small minority of children and we tried hard to involve them and get them to co-operate with the other children. Sometimes we had success and at other times we didn't. We involved the primary school, getting background information about the children and the community safety wardens. The police let us know if other incidents around the town were kicking off. We always tried to keep a positive approach, although at times they did take us away from the other children. We devised an emergency procedure that we could put into use if things got out of hand. Thankfully we didn't have to use it.

If there are no other adults in the park the rangers can feel quite vulnerable at times, and the community wardens advised us to use 999 if we felt in any danger.

Training for these situations is something TEPEE would advise and something we will look into for the future.

Activities have been dictated by the children's wishes and have included den building, clay, mask making, bows and arrows, football, cricket, circus skills, cooking, dream catchers and weaving. At each session we had a combination of active and creative play. Children were encouraged to use the materials and equipment that we brought to the park in their own way and the rangers were there to facilitate this free play.

We had help and collaboration from mini surestart Buckfastleigh, Teignbridge community safety wardens, the police and Buckfastleigh Primary School.

There is anecdotal evidence that we made the park a safer place for the children to play in and that we encouraged more children and families to use the park.

The project has been a great success and has been accessed by many local children and parents.



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Evaluations:

191 individual children participated in the Play Ranger sessions in the park, with an average of 18 children per session. Most children attended more than one session and a core group became regular attenders.

117 were male.

74 were female.

Children were aged between 0 – 15 years of age.

0-4 = 37

5-9 = 75

10-13 = 42

14-16 = 9

Most participants lived within walking distance from the park and came on foot or bike.

We engaged 4 parent volunteers and one other volunteer.

Attendance in the park was up 85% when the play rangers were there.

Comments taken from evaluation forms and comments book:

From parents:

What difference did the play rangers make?

Occupied children and they had a great time.

Less bullying, more fun!

As I can't get out easily it has been very good for my son to have time outside, safely with other children.

Gave children a chance to play together outside of school, including different activities – things they don't normally get the chance to do.

It made the play for the children much more interesting, exciting and enjoyable. They offer a good variety of activities to suit all needs.

The children played together as groups better.

It gave ideas to parents for activities. It gave children something creative and expressive to do.

Welcoming, with plenty to do for all ages.

We stayed and played for a lot longer than we normally would.

We would not come to the park if the rangers were not here.

Probably would not come to the park if they were not here.

It gave the children more to do and also more people to play with.

I believe this provision is essential for children in Buckfastleigh, even more so since the after school club has finished. The Play Ranger project is the only provision of it's kind in the area and is essential to encourage young children to play in the open air in a safe environment.

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From Children:

Stopped a lot of bullying
People don't get bored.
Made it fun.
More activities to do.
Things to do.

Would you like this to continue?

Yes, My children love it
We want to see you back as soon as possible.
Yes, its great to have the children out in the fresh air mixing with different children.
Yes, it's been great
Yes, it would be fab if it continued as it also provides a vital environment for children to socialise outside of school.
Yes, very much needed in a rural area such as Buckfastleigh, gave my daughter a chance to relax and enjoy!!!! Thank you.



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