

Park It!  
celebrating people in parks

# Park It! London



# Y3FD, Southwark

## Southwark Park, Sunday 30th July 2006

### The park

Southwark Park first opened its gates to the public in 1869 and was one of the earliest parks to be opened by the Metropolitan Board of Works. The design of the park is attributed to Alexander McKenzie and covers an area of 63 acres. The bandstand was installed in 1884. The bandstand and its sister, which went to Peckham Rye, once stood in the Royal Horticultural Society grounds at South Kensington, now the site of the Royal Albert Hall. The park also boasts London's first public memorial to honour a working class man.

In 1998 Southwark Council was awarded £2.5m from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Many parts of the park were restored to their former glory; a new bandstand and bowling pavilion were built along with a new children's play area. The lake was finally restored to its original pre-World War II size and the main gates were repaired.

The park has a very active Friends group and also a Young Friends group. It was the Young Friends of Southwark Park who applied to Park it!

### The event

The Young Friends auditioned a number of young musical acts in advance of the day. They wanted to ensure that the musical performances would be of high quality for the visitors. One of the rules the Young Friends introduced for the day, was that all adults had to be accompanied by a child.

The bandstand played host to five children's acts. Four of which were solo singers and one group. All the acts had to perform twice during the afternoon. These logistics were managed expertly by the Young Friends who stage managed the bandstand, ensured that each performer was ready and provided refreshments for them in the specially erected performers area.

Over 500 people came along to the children's event. The majority of which were children. They were able to try their hand at blacksmithing at the mobile forge. Others were able to make their own badges at a special workshop. Punch and Judy gave a performance, watched by the Mayor and Mayoress of Southwark, while a wandering storyteller enchanted children of all ages. Fun activities such as a bouncy castle and face-painting proved to be great attractions.

More serious, but fun activities, were the sports and games. Children could choose between an egg and spoon race, or try sports such as football, cricket and basketball. These energetic activities were complemented by the handing out of cups of fruit for all children, free of charge. This was all part of the drive to encourage local children to adopt healthier lifestyles.

Fittingly, the end of the day saw the Young Friends gather on the bandstand to be presented with a prestigious Civic Award by the Mayor. The award was in recognition of Citizenship for Improvement of the Community. It is the highest award that Southwark Council are able to bestow.



## The community group

The Young Friends of Southwark Park group formed five years ago and is made up of local young people aged between 8 and 13 years. They have worked on numerous projects within the park and hold monthly meetings open to all the community. The adult Friends group actively facilitate, fundraise, run events and liaise with the council on parks management issues. One member of the adult Friends of Southwark Park, assisted the Young Friends throughout the organisation of Park it! as did Southwark Borough Council. The Young Friends group were keen to take on a large scale event, to stretch their abilities and raise their profile locally.

Being an event led by young people, the event planning process developed quite differently than an adult led event, with meetings being themed and regular hands on site visits undertaken to assess size and infrastructure requirements.

The sessions enabled the children to work the process out for themselves.



## Feedback

The Young Friends and the local authority really liked the flyers and posters. Everything fell into place on the day. The Young Friends felt proud in the knowledge that their efforts resulted in a successful event in which over 500 people attended. From feedback 69% of visitors said they would now use Southwark Park more often.

**“I liked the free fruit cocktail, facepainting and bouncy castle and the community involvement. Well organised and well staffed.”** Visitor, Southwark Park.

**“An amazing day! More days like this one please!”** Visitor, Southwark Park.

## The benefits

Holding this event proved to be a truly positive experience for the Young Friends, boosting their self-esteem and the esteem in which the community hold them. They have had fantastic feedback from local families and attracted a large amount of people to their park.

Being able to see the bandstand used for a different type of act, such as children singing pop songs, meant young people were able to see the park restoration works as benefiting them.

Volunteering on this project truly offered the young people a real insight into event management, which in turn developed their life skills and raised their confidence.

## The future

- The Parks Manager now wishes to introduce a range of diverse acts to use the bandstand.
- The Young Friends are going to be encouraged to start a health promotion project for the parks. A pilot project for tackling obesity is to be launched, in which the Young Friends are going to play a part.
- The Young Friends next project may be a video diary.



## Lessons learnt

- Young people are capable of participating fully in organising their own event.
- Restored Victorian bandstands can be used for a variety of acts and performances.
- When working with young people, theme each meeting and concentrate upon a different aspect to keep their interest over a long period of time.
- Allow more time when developing a project with young people.
- Break aspects of the process down and think laterally about simplifying complex concepts, such as critical paths and milestones.
- Organising events is a great way to involve young people and to teach them important new skills they wouldn't necessarily learn at school.
- Be aware of wider constraints on young people's time, such as school days, holidays and parental requirements.

## Further information

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## Links

Park It! – [www.park-it.org.uk](http://www.park-it.org.uk)

GreenSpace – [www.green-space.org.uk](http://www.green-space.org.uk)

Heritage Lottery Fund – [www.hlf.org.uk](http://www.hlf.org.uk)

