



Camp Build End of Year 1 report

What activity did you deliver this year?

The Camp Build project ran 3 'build in the wild' camps in 2019, with 6 more to follow in 2020 and 2021.

Each Camp was able to take up to 20 young people from London Adventure Playgrounds (AP) located in some of London's most deprived neighbourhoods. This year's APs were Bethwin and Triangle in Lambeth, Three Acres and Talacre in Camden, Somerford Grove in Haringey and Pearson Street in Hackney.

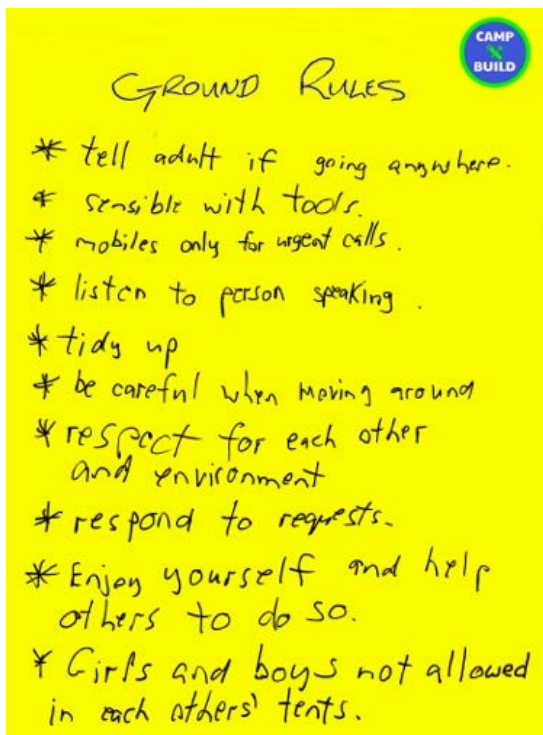
APs have been around since the 1950s and had a tradition of young people and their playworkers building and developing their own play spaces through rudimentary constructions such as towers, walkways, slides and treehouses. Over the last few decades this essential aspect of APs has ebbed with staff no longer having the basic building skills to pass on to the young people which has meant even the simplest of repairs and innovations has had to be outsourced to expensive contractors. Camp Build was designed to reintroduce some of those skills to the young people and their playworkers in a safe and fun way at residential weekends in Debden House campsite in Essex.

The three weekends were in late May, mid-June and mid-September. Prior to each weekend the London Play team of four held preparation sessions at the two participating APs that attended each camp, 10 young people on average from each.



These sessions were designed to give everyone a chance to get to know each other and:

1. Introduce the young people to the four main hand tools they would be using; a handsaw, screwdriver, hammer and spanner with nails and bolts to test them on. Each child received a booklet (right) that had a checklist of all the tools and a sign off page that demonstrated they were competent and confident to use the tools.



2. Develop design ideas to build at camp. This was typically one big structure and two smaller build.

3. Define ground rules for the camp. As with all our work we put the young people central to the task of coming up with pointers on how to keep everyone safe, general conduct and the practicalities around camping. In all three camps thorough ground rules were devised that both adults and young people felt were fair and achievable. Conduct on all three camps was exceptional with young people from both APs getting on and merging as one team from the first evening meal onwards.

4. Draw up ideas for menus. With a range of dietary needs, the majority of all meals were vegetarian. Where meat was included (sausages were a big favourite) halal, vegan and vegetarian options were available. Everyone understood the preparation, serving and cleaning up was an all-camp task and this was the case at every camp with young people enthusiastically pitching in to chop up vegetables, peel potatoes and perhaps with less eagerness to wash up.

The young people arrived at camp on Friday evening and left Sunday midday. The Saturday was a day of industry. With the young people choosing the build they wanted to contribute and with the help of skilled play workers much was achieved in four hours. Each camp built the following:

Camp Build One: A treehouse with swing seat, a rabbit 'hotel' and a go-kart

Camp Build Two: A forest den, a bridge across a small stream and a go-kart

Camp Build Three: A treehouse, a table tennis/dining table and a go-kart

When not building the group played games and toasted marshmallows around the fire, went for staff-led night walks in the woods, staged water fights, watch football in an impromptu outdoor cinema and made memories. The majority of the young people (and some staff) had never experienced sleeping under canvas. Many were seeing the stars clearly for the first time. One group of explorers into the woods encountered a deer while the endless scurrying wild rabbits were a constant and futile target for capture. Typically, the tents were buzzing with chatter on the first night but after a day of play and build there was silence and a few snores from the young people's tents on the Saturday.

'On the journey back, the young people slept the entire way. They had used all their energy exploring nature and building. It was a really positive experience for everyone' Playworker from Lambeth.

Camp Build 3 menu

Friday - Dinner

Spaghetti, veggie Bolognese, garlic bread on the fire

Saturday - Breakfast

Eggs, bacon, mushrooms, toast, yoghurt, fruit, cereal

Lunch

BLT/salami/egg, cheese, tuna, veggie slices sandwiches, nachos

Dinner

Hummus and carrots/celery, Sausage, mash, beans

Sunday - Breakfast

Pancakes, waffles, toast, yoghurt, fruit, cereal

Did this delivery differ from your project plan? If so why?

The project as planned in the application for funding was in actuality a fairly good blueprint for what was delivered with minor adaptations around timing and transport required for each AP based on their specific circumstances.

What were the key learnings from your project?

As soon as the project was open to applications from London's APs the response to the idea and offer demonstrated there was an appetite for participation for the project, with a sign-up for all 9 camps over three years in place at the start of 2019. A waiting list has now been established as word has spread among the sector activating interest from APs that did not respond first time around. A brief Camp Build 'coming soon trailer' was screened at the Prince Charles cinema to 150 AP young people at the Adventure Play awards in October 2018 attended by deputy Mayor Joanne McCartney. This short film got a great reaction at the event and when the team asked the young people at the sessions prior to camp if they'd heard of London Play and Camp Build many young people cited the short film as the source of awareness.

Another key aspect of the learning was ensuring the young peoples' participation was not always guaranteed due to the chaotic nature of some of their lives, with issues at home, school and on the APs impacting on their involvement. This was compounded in a few cases with the APs themselves experiencing issues around staff retainment generally that meant the named lead worker would change during the run up to the residential weekend.

An unexpected issue that Camp Build illuminated was the degree of confidence playworkers had in handling the tools and building in general. All the focus leading up to camp was centred on assessing the young people's skills and experience with rudimentary construction, but it became evident at camp that a number of playworkers benefited from support in this area and their confidence raised. This lack of competence in this area would have been unusual among AP staff thirty years ago.

What were the highlights from your project?

Without doubt seeing the young people enjoying the freedom of being a natural environment and supporting them to bring their design ideas to life and the pride they took in their work.

Feedback from a Playworker from Triangle AP in Lambeth said:

"I asked one of the young people if she had been in woods or forest before and she told me never. Camp Build created an opportunity that would otherwise be inaccessible to them"
Playworker from Lambeth

Debden House was the perfect location for the first year of Camp Build. The young people loved exploring it, seeing the wildlife and at night sitting around the campfire telling stories under the stars.

What do you believe are the conditions needed for vulnerable young people to be able to access volunteering opportunities?

A clear pathway to future opportunities that will have a tangible benefit to the young people involved. Each camp provided 2 or 3 young people that wanted more opportunities to volunteer (although all the young people wanted to be involved in the day of building work on their AP lead by Camp Build scheduled for spring 2020). For those that want to take it further we drafted a young volunteer pack and will be emailing them and their AP a list of volunteering opportunities for 2020 including helping out at future Camp Builds, our go-kart events, Royal Park and Play Street projects.

Case study 1

To mobile phone or not to mobile phone?

At each of the prep meetings at all 6 APs in year one, when it came to the devising of ground rules, without fail the young people would ask if they could take their mobile phones, quickly followed by enquiries on the strength of the signal at camp. The starting point was always whatever the policy was at each respective AP and the hope that the partner AP would have a similar stance. In most cases the playworkers would insist that mobile phones would not be needed with the exception that young people could call home arrival and departure at camp and if there were extenuating circumstances. In all the ground rules this arrangement was included and for the most part the young people, perhaps reluctantly, agreed this would be okay. However, at Triangle one young person, CT, was very anxious at the prospect of being parted from her phone. CT was a quiet, self-contained character with enormous maturity, and it was clear her mobile phone was a key source of contact with friends and the things that interested her. CT was reassured that she could bring her mobile but sceptical that she wouldn't be tempted to use it. At camp CT got involved enthusiastically with building the treehouse and enjoyed time on her own dangling on the swing. By the end of the second day she revealed a hitherto unseen playful side to her character (see picture above). CT took part in breakfast preparation, a night-time walk and a game of rounders. CT did not use her mobile at any time during the weekend.



Ella, a playworker from Triangle wrote feedback for her manager describing the young people's experience at camp. It featured quotes from the young people, including one from CT expressed before the journey home in response to another young person complaining their phone had no charge.

'What's the point in being there if you're just going to be on your phone?'

It's a small detail but worth highlighting, given that many young people feel like CT about their phones. It seems if young people have a stimulating and absorbing alternative, the need may be less about a mobile phone enhancing their lives and perhaps more about filling a void.

Case study 2

Bunny B&B



Camp Build is a creative space and creativity works best with a plan but with the flexibility to develop and incorporate new ideas. Prior to Camp Build 1 the young people at the two Camden APs had decided to build a treehouse and a go-kart. One of the most active contributors was BT, a very confident and influential young person at Talacre AP.

Once at camp BT joined a group taking a twilight hike across the camps surrounding fields. She returned, along with her friends, brimming with accounts of the wild rabbits they'd seen on their travels.

On Saturday morning as the young people decided what build group, they wanted to join BT said she and an idea to build a rabbit hotel and drew out her design for the chief engineer Peter. Peter rethought it a wonderful design and asked BT if she'd like to lead a spur group supported by a playworker. BT's group followed her

instructions and pitched in their own ideas. By the afternoon the group had built a rudimentary but sturdy four-sided structure with a base. This last-minute addition to the building plans clearly had the young people as 100% the driving force in realising their creation from start to finish, delivering on completion something BT and her group were very proud of. Less successful was their attempt to populate the hotel, despite the spirited pursuit for residents across the fields until it got dark.

Additional Comments from the young people and staff from the 2019 Camp Build cohort:

'We should make this [A table] back at 'venture. We just need wood and brains'
PT from Haringey

'I was happily surprised by how well everyone got along...I think the trip allowed a lot of the young people to relax. At the beginning there was a lot of loud swearing but by the end there was less of this kind of showing off'
Playworker from Haringey

'Can we do this again? I've got an idea for a boat with wheels''
SN from Camden

'On the journey back, the young people slept the entire way. They had used all their energy exploring nature and building. It was a really positive experience for everyone'
Playworker from Lambeth

Report by Paul Hocker, Director London Play, October 2019