

Camp Build: 2021 Case Study

Newham kids don't usually get to stare in wonder at wild rabbits ducking and diving in woodland. It's a sharp shift from the screens, concrete and chicken shops that colour their London lives. This was what a group of young teenagers from an Adventure Playground in Canning town did on arrival at Camp Build – creating in the wild, sleeping under the stars - now in its third and final year. The wild rabbits were residents of Debden House Campsite in Loughton, just 20 minutes from London. Over 48 hours with us they (the children not the rabbits) absorbed the type of imperceptible learning that's coated in fun, driven by natural curiosity and free of the stress of obtaining grades.

Our small team hosted 3 groups from inner London Adventure playground over a week where they learnt how to use basic handheld tools and were guided by us to build whatever was bubbling up in their imaginations. This included a go-kart with automated flapping wings, colourful boomerangs that almost made it back, wonky candlestick holders and a dining table with giant teeth marks cut out in each corner.

As well as gaining skills in basic carpentry and tool use, other learning was going on in the background. For example, the go-kart build required maths to measure out wood and physics to work out how best to reduce wind resistance. Children needed to modify their ideas to reality and, on group efforts, compromise on a joint vision.

Our children have fully enjoyed their camping experience and this has enabled them to step out of their comfort zones, become resilient and be free to be themselves. The importance of these aspects for young people is key to their mental well-being and self esteem. This opportunity is truly a first for many of our young people who have never experienced this before and would probably never get a chance like this again.

Observing how they handled situations such as disagreements with peers. This opportunity has given them time to handle these in such different surroundings, making choices and working together to work through them, specifically working on their emotions on how they feel, what they think and how they will act.

We would like to thank the staff team that make this happen!!

Alima, Lead Playworker, *Three Acres Play Adventure Playgrounds, Camden*

As ever, fun was a key motivator with all the children, everyone getting involved with banging and sawing, nailing, and drilling to realise an idea. Food was another motivator. As chef of the field kitchen, I had no shortage of young sous chefs willing to learn how to chop up an onion, make batches of French toast using slabs of Chola bread or remembering to keep a pan going for the vegans well away from the bacon sandwiches. One afternoon I saw one boy about 13 teach a younger lad to make his own cup of tea. The older boy demonstrated each step patiently and oversaw his younger friend's debut cuppa. 'I usually have three sugars but it's bad for my teeth so you should try it without' - a sweet scene even without the sugar.

All the usual out-doory activities were on offer - putting up tents with instructions in Klingon, building a campfire from a flint spark – but the real magic, the learning that was spontaneous and indelible occurred informally around the fire. One night I told them the camp site was once part of Henry VIII's hunting ground. This spawned conversations about Henry's marital arrangements, his unhealthy diet, who in the group was willing to kill animals to survive, astronomy (the night sky free of light pollution was in perfect HD) and whether if you stood in the way of a ghost could you trap it. These conversations rolled around the group for hours, once or twice dipping into a contemplative lull to watch the flames receive a fresh log.

This year the project brought 36 young people into the heart of nature, many for the first time. For some this exposure to the natural world, however brief, will create a lifelong affinity. Given the parlous state of the environment this is just what we need our youngsters to care about. Projects like ours - that let children follow their creativity and curiosity in a natural setting – really do pay out in educational attainment. I know this - I've seen a flying go-kart.

Paul Hocker, Director of London Play



**LONDON
PLAY**
www.londonplay.org.uk