



# LONDON PLAY

**LONDON PLAY 2023**







# London Play is 25!

We can't believe it either! In 2023 London Play marks a quarter of a century – making us the same age as Google. More than a few things have changed over the intervening years but London Play's mission remains the same: to make sure that London's children have the space, time and freedom to play.

We are looking ahead to the next 25 years with plenty of optimism. Our new three-year strategy was launched in April, charting a path for the future which will be responsive to the challenges of an ever shifting socio-political landscape; and aiming to centre the voices and needs of the children and communities who are the focus of our work.

We are already on our way. Here are just a few of the highlights from the past 12 months.

## London's biggest play survey for a decade

As spring sprung we launched the results of the biggest survey of London play provision in a decade. To be honest, the findings didn't make for happy reading. Our research confirmed that six adventure playgrounds have closed under cover of the pandemic. And although some councils say they are investing in new playgrounds; many are not matching this with (revenue) spending on the staffing or maintenance costs that are vital to ensure they do not fall into neglect. This has only hardened our resolve to find more creative ways of supporting anyone and everyone committed to improving play for London's children.



**WORD CLOUD: what are the top three concerns for your adventure playground currently?**

## London's Saddest Playground campaign

Our campaign to find London's Saddest Playground launched on 'Blue Monday' in January. It elicited a stream of images of burnt out, neglected and just plain tokenistic playgrounds across the capital which were put to public vote. The playgrounds deemed 'most in need of love' were Bromley's Crystal Palace Park playground and Leyton Square in Southwark; with Southall's Emerald Square close behind. London Play has been working alongside groups in these and other areas to support their efforts to influence local decision makers in favour of play. It is part of our **Communities Unite for Play** project funded by **Trust for London**. Pictured right is Wilf who nominated Crystal Palace Park Playground, being interviewed by BBC Radio London's Anna O'Neill.





# London Adventure Play Awards



Hackney's **Shakespeare Walk Adventure Playground** took away the top prize in the 2023 London Adventure Play Awards over October half term. Around 200 children from 16 shortlisted London adventure playgrounds converged again on the Prince Charles Cinema in London's West End to watch the films they'd made about the places they love to play up on the big screen. Crazy games including a 'flickathon' and fashion show for playworkers kept the roof raised and the fun factor high. **Markfield, Triangle** and **Barnard** adventure playgrounds won category awards and runners up were **Pearson Street, Somerford Grove** and **Max Roach**. The seven winning playgrounds each received a small fund to support a community celebration over the coming months, as part of our new **Adventure Play for the Community** project funded by the **National Lottery Community Fund**.

**"We won! It's really exciting... and we deserved it!"**

Child from the winning adventure playground

**"This continues to be a real highlight in the adventure play calendar!"**

Adventure playworker



## East end play-states

Coronation weekend was wet but fruitful in Tower Hamlets, where the London Play team joined residents celebrating the King's Coronation with community event on a housing estate. On offer was inspiration and support in running playful events to transform underused estate spaces with play and community. Residents on two estates took up the challenge and we will continue to promote play on estates in the borough into 2024.







# Playful streets on Car Free Day



London Play was commissioned by the **Mayor of London** and **Transport for London** to inspire and support people across the capital to try out a play street over **Car Free Day** weekend in September. Despite a late start to the campaign more than 10,000 people in 18 boroughs transformed over 100 streets into playful community spaces. In doing so they reclaimed the equivalent of 22 football pitches and gifted children 22,000 hours of extra playtime.

The London Play team also ran a spacehopper race zone at **Great Ormond Street Hospital's** play street. The following day we transformed Lewisham's **Deptford High Street** with just a few cardboard boxes and loose parts, a bit of chalk (and more spacehoppers), showcasing the potential for streets to become playful community spaces when cars are less dominant.



**'Everyone, kids and adults alike, had a wonderful time. Adults re-lived their childhoods and kids learnt new games, made new friends, and felt the bliss of playing freely. Thank you all for making this happen for us.'**

Car Free Day play street participants

**'I just wanted to say a massive thank you to the whole team. Great job.'**

Will Norman, London walking and cycling commissioner





## Our Royal Park-nership

Our **Play in the Park** initiative with **The Royal Parks (TRP)** came to an end early in the year. London Play worked to engage children, young people and families living near newly built playgrounds in Greenwich Park and The Regent's Park through outreach, public events and working with schools, to ensure that they benefit fully from these wonderful public play areas. The impact report showed that over nearly four years, (with a gap in the middle during Covid) more than 6,500 people attended events and play sessions in the parks, 3,800 of whom were children.

Our partnership with TRP will endure and we continue to work together where possible to promote and support more and better play opportunities in some of London's most iconic parks. In August a 'Not back to School' picnic in Greenwich Park was attended by families including children with additional needs. And keep a lookout for adventure on the high seas in 2024!

***"As a parent, it has encouraged me to be more creative and to see the value even more intensely in loose parts play."***

Parent participant, Play in the Park

## Go Kart Build and Race events to return in 2024

London Play's famous Go Kart Build and Race events have had to go a bit off-piste since the pandemic hit. For two years we went mobile, taking kart making to adventure playgrounds with 'Together A-Kart'; and 2021's Formula Fun saw kids in karts take over central London streets. We are delighted to share that we have been awarded funding from the Barbara Ward Children's Foundation to help support the next three annual events - and hope to return to Mudchute Farm in summer 2024

But it will not be the same without our great friend and colleague, Peter Wright (pictured, right), who sadly died in the summer. Many will know that Peter was chief engineer for all our go kart events for many years. He was also a meticulous organiser of our tools; and a great friend who is dearly missed.



**Peter Wright 1949-2023**

## Staff changes

In July we sadly bid London Play director Paul Hocker farewell after 15 years at the charity, of which the last seven were spent at the helm alongside Fiona Sutherland. Fiona has taken on the new combined director role and with the support

of our committed team of trustees is working hard alongside Catherine Togut and Chrissy Baxter to develop new projects that we hope will allow us to expand the team in 2024.

Watch this space!

## Welcome to new trustees



In April we were pleased to welcome Sara Martins and Rafael Portillo to the London Play board. Both are parents of school-aged children who love London's adventure playgrounds. Sara is a social researcher and forest school leader; Rafael is an architect who runs a design studio in east London.

## ...and seeking new ones

We are actively seeking new trustees to join the London Play board. In particular we would love to hear from people involved with London's adventure playgrounds who can help direct our efforts to support them. We are also on the lookout for people with skills in marketing, finance or IT.

Joining our board is a great opportunity to help set the direction of London Play as we embark on our second quarter century journey!

**If you are interested in finding out more please get in touch for a chat or email [info@londonplay.org.uk](mailto:info@londonplay.org.uk)**

## Thank you to our funders

We do a lot with very little at London Play and are ever grateful for the enlightened funders that recognise the vital importance of play for children and support our work to make sure that it is recognised and valued by those who make decisions affecting children's lives.



**Trust for London**

Tackling poverty and inequality



**TOWER HAMLETS**



Newham London



**COMMUNITY FUND**



The Barbara Ward Children's Foundation

**MAYOR OF LONDON**



**Garfield Weston**

FOUNDATION



**Lewisham**

If you like what you see and you are in a position to support London Play - or are in touch with an organisation or individual who might be able to provide us with funds, we would love to hear from you. We have no shortage of ideas but competition for funds is fierce. Contact [info@londonplay.org.uk](mailto:info@londonplay.org.uk)

**[www.londonplay.org.uk](http://www.londonplay.org.uk)**