

# Wellbeing at Garon Park Newsletter



October 2022  
Issue 6  
Early Autumn Edition

## SUMMER HAF EVENT



After kickstarting the Summer HAF Programme on Monday 25th July, many different activities have taken place at Garon Park over 4 weeks of the summer holidays, including sports, games, cookery, arts and crafts, animal workshops, circus games, first aid and even the emergency services made an appearance for us.

Weeks of planning meant we could provide the best facilities and activities possible for the children to make sure they had summer to remember.

Ages ranged from 8 to 15 and it was great to see the older children getting involved in all the activities and helping the younger ones during the sessions. The overall experience was amazing, but we would like to make this even better in the future.

All the children thoroughly enjoyed themselves and parents were delighted with the range of activities on offer. It was great to see so many new and old faces throughout the 4 week programme and we can't wait to start planning for the next one.

It has also been extremely rewarding for the Garon Park Team running HAF, seeing all the happy faces and excitement when the children have been introduced to new activities. The children have had the opportunity to try new foods, make new friends and be involved in games and activities which they would never normally have the opportunity to try.

The older children made such a big effort to help the little ones to ensure they were all participating in the activities we had planned. It was great to see them involving everyone in every game and helping the children with the crafting and games we bought.

To celebrate the last day of HAF we organised a BBQ for all the children so their parents and siblings could come along and join us for an hour to see what their children had been up to. This was followed by a talent show where there were 2 lucky winners. It was so hard to choose as they were all amazing!!



## THE BIG MILE

Would you be interested in helping children to complete a daily mile at Garon Park? Two laps of our Vitality Park is a mile and in partnership with schools we would like to offer children the opportunity to come to Garon Park after school to complete the daily mile. Every child would be able to get their card stamped and we could have awards when children reach a distance goal. <https://thedailymile.co.uk/> If you would be interested in working with us to set this up and run it then please contact us via the office or by calling 01702 965959 or email [enquiries@garonparkcic.com](mailto:enquiries@garonparkcic.com). If we can get a team together, we would also be able to share out the days but how amazing to be involved in a project that so directly improves children's health and wellbeing.

# GARON PARK CASE STUDY

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My name is Joe. After finishing University in 2021, I had completed 4 years of higher education achieving a Master's degree in engineering but lacked real practical life experience. I soon realised that volunteering would be a good way to develop new skills and get into a work routine to help prepare me for life after university.

On January 5th I started volunteering at Garon Park, where I was welcomed by Liam King, Conservation Officer, who gave me a tour of the nature school and facilities. Over the next month I completed over 50 hours of voluntary work including building and painting two new sheds, landscaping and terraforming, planting, watering and conservation. I was even trusted with some report writing involving the management of the park as a sustainable site. I met a lot of friendly people who supported me and were always eager to help if needed.

Eventually, I was successful enough to be offered a part-time job as Maintenance Technician through a kickstart program organised by Mark. I started my first job on February 8th, where I outlined all the tasks that needed to be completed over the coming months, in the form of a Gantt chart. Around the same time, I started volunteering as a bicycle mechanic at JustRide on in the hopes of improving my hands-on practical abilities as well as learning the useful life skill of bike fixing. I worked closely with the experts, John and Peter, developing knowledge in all aspects of maintaining and fixing bicycles. I later used this knowledge to build, from parts, 2 Trikes for the guys at RE House.

My duties as maintenance technician covered a wide range of disciplines including carpentry through erecting a new custom shed, helping to manage volunteers, moving heavy items, digging, planting, designing and building a Teepee out of branches for the nature school, painting, maintaining equipment, inventory of tools, and mixing and pouring concrete. I also began work designing a new irrigation system for the brand-new community orchard surprisingly incorporating fluid mechanics equations from my Masters to determine flow rate and pressure.

Overall, my knowledge in construction improved drastically allowing me to widen the range of full-time graduate engineering jobs I may apply for. My organisation and problem-solving skills have been enhanced, engineering principles from my studies have been put into practice, my network has grown and my physical strength has improved (verified scientifically through throwing golf balls from increasingly further distances over the fence of Garons driving range). My experience at Garon Park enhanced my CV and provided subject matter to discuss in interviews which eventually influenced my offering of employment from AECOM, a global consulting firm, in Fire Engineering.

I would like to thank everyone that helped me get to this stage including but not limited to: Clive who paid me my first working days wage and taught me how to mix and pour concrete. Mark for making me laugh and offering me employment (and ale). John Roy, for being friendly and always helping me find whatever I needed or just helping me carry things. Nick, for being friendly and unlocking the office door for me in the mornings. Bert, for going above and beyond to help me out even jumping into a dirty water tank. Bill, for generously offering me many lifts home, teaching me many of the basics of construction and the words "that'll do". Will, for regularly pumping the wheelbarrow wheels up saving me valuable energy. Alesha, for all the tea, useful information, and friendly chat. Sharon, for being the backbone of Garon Park keeping me and everybody else fed. Finally, I would like to thank Liam who worked with me on my first and last days, provided friendly advice, and was a fantastic mentor throughout my 3 months working at Garon Park. I hope to return to the park as soon as I can.

.....and the good news is, Joe has now landed his first full time job!



# UKRAINIAN FRIENDSHIP GROUP

As you will know many Southend families are sponsoring Ukrainian refugees who have fled the war. Wellbeing at Garon Park has been attending the Support Group in the Victoria Shopping Centre each Tuesday morning to provide support to these families who have lost everything. I have been amazed at the resilience of these people whose homes and lives have been completely destroyed as they seek to build their lives in Southend, not knowing if this is temporary or long term.



Lots of agencies have come together to provide support but it became clear to me that many of the families just needed to have a space where they could come together for friendship, fun and of course wellbeing. So what better place than Wellbeing at Garon Park for a friendship group!!! Approximately 40 Ukrainian visitors join us each Thursday evening from 6pm – 8pm where they have enjoyed the opportunity to talk to and make new friends and enjoy a meal together.

The children have played in the park and on the play equipment and with the support of Active Life we have also been able to offer Yoga sessions for the adults. On some weeks we have provided a chef to cook but on two of the weeks the Ukrainians themselves have prepared the meal and it has been amazing. The food has been provided by The Experience Project this is real community partnership.

It has also been lovely to welcome some of our Ukrainian friends to the park as volunteers.



# GARON PARK YOUTH



In August 2022, Wellbeing at Garon Park launched a new pilot project called Garon Park Youth.

The aim of the pilot was to establish a traditional youth club for local children aged 8-15, offering activities such as sports, games, arts and crafts, cookery, tuck shop, pool, table tennis and the opportunity for youngsters to meet, have fun and make new friends, whilst improving their social skills and physical and mental health and wellbeing.

The pilot has been such a huge success, with 150 local children joining as members in just 4 weeks, with over 70 children attending regularly every week.....and the numbers keep on growing! As the club grows, we will be introducing new activities based on the interests of the young people.

As a result of such a fantastic pilot, which absolutely highlights the need for youth provision in the local area, we are delighted that the club will continue to run every Wednesday evening from 6.30pm – 8.30 pm. Weekly subs are £3, which allows us to offer a subsidized tuck shop, food and cookery sessions.

There will be an annual membership fee of £15 per child or a reduced family rate and payment plan. Every penny from the membership fee will go back into the club to cover the running costs and will enable us to put on more activities and special events as well as buying additional equipment for the children to enjoy.

On 28th September Garon Park Youth were delighted to welcome Southend Mayor, Cllr Kevin Robinson and his wife as well as Cllr Darryl Jones from Southchurch Ward.

We were also joined on the night by the High Sheriff of Essex, Nicholas Alston, who presented awards to one of our youth leaders, Damien Harvey and one of our Young Leaders, Robin Mantell, to thank them for their outstanding work and commitment.



# THE EXPERIENCE PROJECT

Wellbeing at Garon Park is delighted to be partnering with an amazing local project called The Experience Project, who are based just down the road from Garon Park, in Whittingham Avenue Southend. The project is located within the large Whittingham Mission church building, which is no longer used for worship and was given to the project by Southend & Leigh Methodist Circuit.

The Experience Project was launched as a pilot in January 2020, specifically to support the Whittingham Estate, which lies between the two poorest wards in Southend - there is currently no community centre on the estate or within the locality and the families the project support come from the most forgotten pockets of deprivation in the area. The community they serve falls within the 10% most deprived areas in England (IMO 2019), with child poverty over 50%, child protection levels much higher than local and national levels, domestic violence and addiction and social isolation are commonplace and county lines drugs, gangs etc all take advantage of the vulnerability of the local community.

The project's objective is to reduce food poverty and improve the health and mental wellbeing of the local community. Over the past two years, the project has grown exponentially to meet the growing need during and post the pandemic, and they are now the first point of contact for over 250 immediate families within the community, providing advocacy, foodbank and community services which are proving to be a vital lifeline to an already fragile community.

During lockdown The Experience Project started door-to-door delivery in response to the pandemic and was a lifeline for many. Throughout lockdown they delivered over 4300 food parcels to multiple households. For many residents, the project volunteers were the only contact they had with the outside world, with many socially isolated and living in the neighbouring tower blocks with no balconies or access to outside space. During this time, The Experience Project volunteers were able to build trust and identified some of the most vulnerable residents, signposting many to social service teams that work within the mental health, child protection and domestic violence.

Now, thanks to a long term, in-kind, ongoing agreement with Ocado, The Experience Project team are collecting in excess of 6-8 tonnes of food and ambient products per week, which would normally go to waste.

The team travels to Ocado depots in Essex & Kent 6 times per week, collecting fresh meat, fish, vegetables as well as ambient goods, baby, and household products. The team then return, unload, sort, and store supplies at their base at The Experience Project as well as delivering goods to the other local projects they support.

Every Thursday they open the doors to their foodbank and distribute food bags to local vulnerable families every week. Many of their clients return on a week after week. They also run monthly pop ups by taking a van loaded with fresh meat and vegetables, directly within the community in St Luke's and Kursaal wards.

The Experience Project team fully understand the stigma many people feel relying on foodbanks to support their families, so their volunteers dress up and create a fun, relaxed environment for their guests. They never judge and nobody ever has to explain themselves.

However, The Experience Project is not just about food, it is about bringing together a severely fragmented community in a positive and empowering way so they also run a host of community engagement initiatives which include: Advocacy - providing the community with 1:1 support, offering confidential advice and helping people understand their rights and have their voices heard without being judged, signposting to external agencies as appropriate; Community Coffee Morning - enabling local socially isolated, elderly residents to meet in a safe place, Bingo afternoons, After School Club - offering 1:1 piano, singing and drama sessions to 12 vulnerable children per week; Holiday Club - providing a twice weekly holiday club for 60+ local children, Music Workshops, Older Children's Youth Club - Aged 11+, and thanks to generous donations from BENQ are able provide children with the opportunity to express their creativity using the latest technologies (interactive flat panels, Augmented reality projectors and virtual reality headsets).

In addition to the services, they offer directly out of the Experience Project hub, they also partner with 15 other local charities and organisations to supply food and provisions to their projects as well, all of which are in line with and complement their own objectives - to reduce food poverty, lessen food wastage and improve health and wellbeing in the community. In total the project supports a staggering 7,000 people per week. With the looming fuel and food crisis over the coming months, the project and its partners expect to see the number of people they support increasing rapidly.

Wellbeing at Garon Park is fortunate to be one of these partners and we are extremely grateful for the support we are receiving from the Experience Project team.



On a weekly basis we are provided with ingredients and supplies free of charge, which are used to cook healthy and nutritious meals for our Ukrainian families during our weekly Community evenings, as well as feeding our many volunteers on site, who are generously giving up their time to support the Wellbeing At Garon Park project. In the coming weeks, Wellbeing at Garon Park plans to host weekly community meals for up to 60 people. These will aim to provide vulnerable local families who are really struggling, with an opportunity to come to site to enjoy a relaxed home cooked meal together, a bag of provisions to take home with them and fun family activities to improve their health and wellbeing. These families will be referred to us, to ensure support is given to the people who need support the most.



If you would like further information about the work of The Experience Project or if you would be interested in volunteering opportunities at the project, please email the Project Lead, Simon Matthews at [thewhittinghammission@gmail.com](mailto:thewhittinghammission@gmail.com)



## KEEP FIT

**Outdoor Fitness for Everyone**

**Mondays & Wednesdays**

**Morning & Evening**

**Dare to be Great!**

A collage of four images showing outdoor fitness activities. The top image shows a white tent on a grassy field. The middle-left image shows a person jumping over a hurdle on a grassy field. The middle-right image shows two people stretching on a grassy field. The bottom image shows a group of people participating in a fitness activity on a grassy field.

**ROOTS TO SHOOTS PROGRAMMES  
 AT THE  
 HIVE NATURE SCHOOL**

BUILDING A HIVE COMMUNITY THAT SUPPORTS AND NURTURES EACH OTHER AND THE PLANET

 <p>ROOTS TO SHOOTS</p>	<p><b>OUTDOOR YOGA</b>                  Date: Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> August                  9.30am-11.00am                  Normal Price: £8.00                  Introductory Offer for this session                  only: £5.00.                  Please bring your own mat and come                  suitably dressed for yoga.                  ALL ABILITIES WELCOME                  IMMERSE YOURSELF AND OPEN YOUR SENSES.                  GUIDED MEDITATION, ABDOMINAL BREATH WORK AND A SENSORY WALK                  OF SILENCE IN BEAUTIFUL NATURAL SURROUNDINGS.</p>
<p><b>WILD AT THE HIVE</b>                  Date: Friday 16<sup>th</sup> September                  11.30am-1.00pm                  Cost: £5 per person                  CONNECT WITH THE OUTDOORS TO                  NURTURE YOUR WELLBEING                  THIS HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE WILL SEE YOU IDENTIFY THE                  BIODIVERSITY AT THE HIVE NATURE SCHOOL AND A CHANCE TO                  GIVE BACK TO NATURE.</p>	<p><b>NATURE INSPIRED ART</b>                  Date: Monday 26<sup>th</sup> September                  9.30am-11.30am                  Cost: £8.50 per person                  Equipment provided                  HERE AT THE NATURE SCHOOL, WE ARE                  SURROUNDED BY NATURE'S BEAUTY.                  WE INVITE YOU TO PAUSE, OBSERVE, AND SKETCH AND LET THE TRANQUIL                  SURROUNDING INSPIRE YOUR CREATIVITY.</p>
<p><b>TO BOOK A PLACE</b>                  Roots To Shoots programmes are booked on a first come first served basis.                  (Terms and conditions apply)                  To book email <a href="mailto:enquires@garonparkcic.com">enquires@garonparkcic.com</a> or contact 01702 965959                  Enquiries contact <a href="mailto:hello@stepsahead.life">hello@stepsahead.life</a></p>	

[Stepsahead.life](http://Stepsahead.life)

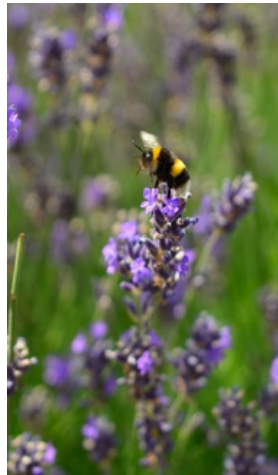
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**Please visit our website [stepsahead.life](http://stepsahead.life) for our current and forthcoming workshops.**

# OLYMPIA RECEIVING HER PRIZE OF A BEE-LIEVE IN YOURSELF TSHIRT FOR GUESSING HOW MANY BEES ON THE STEPS AHEAD PLATINUM JUBILEE TRAIL



# FUN WAS HAD BY ALL AT THE STEPS AHEAD 'STEP OUTSIDE' HAF PROGRAMME DELIVERED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH WELLBEING AT GARON PARK.



**STEPS** creative journeys • **AHEAD** colourful destinations



# LITTLE HEROES CITY FEST

On a gloriously sunny day in August, Wellbeing at Garon Park were delighted to welcome their good friends from Little Heroes ASD, to the park, providing a venue for them to host their City Fest celebration.

Little Heroes ASD are an amazing local charity who work tirelessly to provide support to families of children with autism.

Ever since coming out of lockdown, Little Heroes have wanted to do something on a larger scale where they could bring families of children with autism together in a safe and understanding space. Social isolation can be a challenge at the best of times, however, for children with autism and additional needs the loss of daily routines, retracting from socialisation and activities during lockdown has had a huge impact and they wanted to arrange something for families to enjoy together in an environment where they could all relax without being judged

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However, for children with autism and additional needs the loss of daily routines, retracting from socialisation and activities during lockdown has had a huge impact and they wanted to arrange something for families to enjoy together in an environment where they could all relax without being judged.

For the past 3 summers Little Heroes have used Wellbeing At Garon Park as a venue, as they do not have their own outside space. They have found it the perfect place for their families to meet, providing them with lots of outdoor space, its own play park and plenty of parking.. Over time they have slowly built up the numbers who attend their themed summer picnics, sometimes with as many as 80 attending each week. . As these have always proved so popular, they decided they would like to arrange a one-off event for around 150 people, so when they heard about the opportunity for City Celebration Funding from the Community Investment fund, they saw it as a perfect opportunity to celebrate Southend becoming a City with Little Heroes families.

Working with the team at Wellbeing At Garon Park, the staff at Little Heroes set to work planning a celebration event.

Kim Drake, Charity Coordinator at Little Heroes said 'As much as we are regular visitors to Wellbeing at Garon Park, being busy at the picnics and supporting the Little Heroes families, we do not always see what else is happening and available at Garons. It has been wonderful to see the changes over time and every time we go for a walk around, we always notice something new. Communication is key and we get so much from the face-to-face catch ups we have with Kay and the team and through their experience and contacts, what we initially thought of as far out ideas actually turned into reality and were not a problem.

'We did lots of preparation leading up to the big day as we wanted this to be as stress free for families as possible, therefore we arranged for food, drink, and plenty of entertainment. We aimed for 150 guests but once shared the details with families, interest was quickly registered, and we could have easily been able to fill double the spaces. However, just because Garons can accommodate more people, it was always a priority to consider the needs of our families. Space is so important because not all children with autism can cope with being in crowded noisy areas, so by having space between activities and a number of chill out zones, this meant families could distance themselves from others if needed.

Another huge advantage of using Wellbeing at Garon Park is familiarity, with established areas which the families are used to, such as the covered gazebos/seating areas, outdoor gym equipment around the path providing familiar features. As we are regular visitors to the site for our picnics, we were able to chat with the Garon Park team on an ongoing basis to ensure everything we planned was ok and any queries from either side could be addressed quickly. This took a lot of pressure off of us, for which we are grateful.





On the day it was fantastic to see a real community atmosphere with the teams from Little Heroes, Wellbeing At Garon Park and outside suppliers all working together to ensure the site was safe and set up properly before the families arrived. The volunteers from The Garon Park Shed also stepped in and saved the day helping to set up the registration area and knocking up a fantastic feedback box, which children absolutely loved.

Many of the activities were a complete surprise to the families as the organisers wanted to keep it under wraps until they arrived, and it was fantastic seeing the children and families having such a fantastic day. There were inflatables, traditional games, an adorable therapy dog and pony as well as pony rides, football with SUCET, police car, balloon modelling, facepainting, with Crazy Ryan providing entertainment all day. There was also a much-needed chill out tent which provided a fantastic tranquil space for families to be able to take time out from the excitement of what was going on outside. There were also freshly baked pizzas and mocktails for everyone which were absolutely delicious!



The glorious weather helped the families to chill and enjoy their time at the event, which for many families attending, just would not have been possible at funday in a mainstream setting.

As Kim said, 'being surrounded by people that understand and who just get it really does make all the difference.'

The day was a huge success, plenty to celebrate and fun was had by everyone. Feedback was amazing and the most common comment was 'how can you better this for next year!'. Kim said 'We have had great fun looking through the photos from the day, which were kindly taken by a fantastic professional photographer. When you are so busy running the event, you do not always see everything that is happening, so it is wonderful to be able to look over the moments captured.'

'We are so thankful to all our staff, volunteers, and everyone at Wellbeing at Garon Park for making it happen. Thank you also goes to the Community Investment Board for awarding us the funding from Southend City Celebration fund and who knows what is next? As we always say at Little Heroes ASD Support Group "Never Say Never!'

