

# How can primary school children improve their local parks?

Blog: July 19<sup>th</sup> 2022, <https://sites.gold.ac.uk/educational-studies-blog/how-can-primary-school-children-improve-their-local-parks/>

I was very excited to watch the young Parklife researchers at John Donne Primary school present their research to their local councillor [Jasmine Ali](#) on Monday 18th July 2022. It was one of the hottest days of the year, but these valiant researchers, in Year 3 (aged 7–8), soldered on and produced a brilliant series of presentations to Jasmine.

As many as fifty Year 3 students had been involved in this part of the Parklife project. They had been trained as ecological researchers and activists by the marvellous Laura Dempsey, founder of [Volunteers for Future](#) who deliver free climate and conservation workshops to schools, Rebecca Deegan, founder of [I Have a Voice](#), an organisation which helps young people advocate for change, and [Kat Crisp](#) founder of Social Innovation for all.

Working with myself as Principal Investigator of the Parklife project and funded by seed money from the Goldsmiths Strategic Research Fund, Laura, Kat and Rebecca drew up a great plan of action in collaboration with the brilliant Year 3 teachers David Ash and Kelly Wild. They used the Parklife research methodologies of using art, combined with the science curriculum, and ecological awareness training to support the young people become researchers into parks. Collectively they were tasked with:

- Investigating the ways in which young people can become expert researchers into their local parks and seek to improve the wellbeing and environmental awareness of park users of different ages and backgrounds.
- Demonstrating to the students a link between the study of plants in their science curriculum and the importance of plants and biodiversity in their community and for the planet.
- Preparing and creating an opportunity for students to present to policymakers and/or other influential people who could assist in exacting purposeful environmental change, including local council representatives.

Their combined key deliverables with John Donne Primary school included:

- Delivering science-based lessons focusing on the life of plants, their structure, why they are important for biodiversity, nature and habitats for wildlife
- Visiting examples of park spaces to observe, identify and discuss the various positive and negative aspects within each park
- Creating stop motion animation films
- Developing the lesson plan, workshops and resources to support the children to identify how best their park can be improved
- Organising and overseeing a presentation to local policy makers
- Developing a method to measure the quality and impact of this pilot project

In essence, they had to design, develop and deliver a Park Life pilot project in Southwark, which they managed to do triumphantly well. The pieces and presentations that the primary

school students produced were really wonderful. Their focus was the school's local park, [Cossall Park](#); as part of Year 3's science curriculum, they learnt about the ecological cycles in the park, and considered how the flowers in the park might attract bees.

They also thought long and hard about how they might best redesign the park to meet different users' needs. The pupils made 3D paper sculptures of their redesigned parks, a couple of which you can see here:





This also made stop motion animation films which illustrate the creation of these models, which you can watch here:

[embed]<https://youtu.be/Q1P110yGxYE>[/embed]

<https://youtu.be/RoAQ8jI-25A>

They also wrote persuasive speeches which aimed to justify their suggested improvements to the park. Here's the beginning of one:

Monday 18<sup>th</sup> July 2022

Lo: To write a Persuasive speech

Cossall Park is a very important.  
and by adding more improvements  
we could make Cossall Park the  
most impressive park in the local  
area. ~~Air Pollution~~

~~Air Pollution~~ causes Asthma  
in children. People who come  
to Cossall Park don't want to  
be sick, they want to be healthy.

Planting more trees  
will reduce noise  
Pollution, noise



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Jasmine Ali was particularly impressed by one of the Year 3 pupils who talked about this very issue; the planting of more trees in the park could improve air quality and the environment more generally, and therefore help those with asthma or any breathing issues.

for the council to plant.

We should plant a more green area for the animals to feel welcome into their new home. Secondly, reducing air pollution by planting trees and plants around the park would help us by cleaning the air around us also might encourage wildlife like insects and bees.

In conclusion, I strongly believe by making these small changes to Cassall Park



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The presentations also focused upon the ways in which rewilding the park could have big benefits for animals and park users, making it a much more magical place to be in.

Jasmine Ali was hugely impressed by what the young people had found out during their research and made a number of pledges: she would investigate how the park could be made more nature friendly by rewilding it more; she would see if it was possible to put in more equipment in the park (such as an outdoor gym); and she would see if more imaginative things could be done with it. One of the students suggested creating an artists' enclave in the park, with outdoor easels and artists' materials. Jasmine was particularly struck by this suggestion, and thought it was extremely original. There are many artists in the local area who could possibly help out to create such a space.

Jasmine promised to return in September to tell the young Parklife researchers whether the council would move ahead with any of their suggestions. All in all it was a very successful day. Hurrah for the John Donne Parklife researchers! Well done all of you!

[caption id="attachment\_90" align="aligncenter" width="1024"]



The young Parklife researchers at John Donne Primary School with Jasmine Ali, Laura Dempsey and Rebecca Deegan[/caption]