

Impact Report

2024



*"We often have limits in our heads, where we don't always feel capable of taking action. I overcame this barrier by meeting other people who are doing great things in the parks. Thanks to the Park People program, I was able to get the myth out of my head that I am limited. **Everything is possible!**"*

–Montreal Champion

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Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the enduring presence and resilience of First Nations, Inuit and Métis people on these lands, and recognize their role as caregivers, stewards and storytellers across Turtle Island.

We believe that parks should play a vital role in providing shared spaces for all people and are an important space for reconciliation and decolonization. We understand the infrastructure that lets us communicate digitally is physically located across Turtle Island, including on unceded territories.

Park People commits to the stewardship of these lands as Indigenous peoples have done since time immemorial, and to further recognize the history of colonization and commit to truth and reconciliation as a part of how we bring people together on common ground.



Erika's Letter

Taking the helm of an incredible organization meant I had big shoes to fill. When Park People's founder, Dave Harvey, retired from his role of Executive Director after 13 years and I took on a new role, I spent a lot of time thinking about what can inspire us to take action and make change.

Dave said, "When launching Park People, our goal was to spark a city parks movement that could fundamentally change how our society sees the value of these public green spaces. It was an ambitious vision, but I think that through our work with many great partners and community leaders, we've achieved it."

As we face some of the most significant challenges in generations, parks remain relevant in addressing climate change, social cohesion, and political polarization. Parks and public spaces are more than physical landscapes; they're where we learn to share, to compromise, and to adapt to the needs of people we don't yet know. From a simple chat with a fellow parent at the playground, to planting seeds alongside volunteers in a community garden, parks hold the key to nurturing new connections.

In an increasingly online world, where it's easy to assume the worst in others, public spaces are training grounds for cooperation and cohesion across differences. Every day, I see examples in our work that prove that change is possible if we take the time to connect and work together. From Park People's incredible staff team to the community leaders we support in activating their local parks to the municipalities that use our insights to create better park policy, the movement continues to expand. I'm pleased to share just some of these impacts in Park People's 2024 Impact Report.

As you'll see, it can be hard to predict where these small actions will lead. A senior in Vancouver might graduate from our Sparking Change program and become inspired to start organizing her own community events via our TD Park People Grants. Or a young man in Scarborough might transition from working with artists to becoming one himself animating his local park through an Arts in the Parks Grant.

I hope that when you read their stories in our Impact Report, that you imagine what your next small action might be, and dream about the possibilities for where it might take you. From all of us at Park People, thank you for being a part of our impact in 2024. It's clear that if we work together, we are truly limitless.

Park People's future will continue to advance connections and build relationships, because we believe that parks connect us. Our public spaces connect us to our neighbours, to nature, to a sense of community, and to a deeper relationship with our city. And we will continue to bring Dave's values and approach to what we do—working with all of you—towards a future where parks are key to the diversity, richness, and joy of urban life.



Erika Nikolai
Executive Director, Park People

Activating Parks

We work directly with equity-deserving communities by providing hands-on training, network-building opportunities, seed funding, and one-on-one coaching. This support helps transform parks into vibrant spaces that strengthen local neighbourhoods.

TD Park People Grants

Our TD Park People Grants program provides tools and resources to help people organize dynamic events in their green spaces, in 9 cities across Canada. From community park clean-ups to Indigenous plant workshops, our funded events bring people together around themes of environmental education, sustainability, and stewardship.

In 2024,

We supported **70**
park groups to
connect **14,557**
Canadians to
nature

733 event
volunteers
contributed
4,398 hours of
service

As a result,
5,626 trees and
shrubs were
planted on city
parkland



Spotlight on Accessibility

In 2024, we enhanced the TD Park People program with a new Accessibility Initiative. This included additional grants, a comprehensive toolkit, and interactive training webinars to help 15 groups create events that are inclusive to people with disabilities. As a result, 80% of participants reported feeling confident and prepared to create events that are accessible to a broader audience.

A standout example: the Chinatown Pop Up Movie Club, is an event series that shares Chinese culture through cinema in parks while highlighting the unique public spaces within Calgary's Chinatown. With the help of their grant, the team worked to make their events more accessible for the aging population in their community, ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to connect with one another (and with some great flicks).



**Chinatown Pop-Up
Movie Club**

CALGARY

Spotlight on Reconciliation

The Kapabamayak Achaak Healing Forest in Winnipeg is a living memorial to Indigenous children affected by the residential school system. It's part of a growing network of sites linked by the National Healing Forest Initiative, and serves as a land-based classroom for elders to share teachings and ceremony. In 2024, these elders used their TD Park People grant to bring together over 300 children and educators to reflect upon Truth and Reconciliation and the value of environmental conservation over a nourishing meal of bannock and jam.

"The schools we work with have large numbers of Indigenous children. Many have relatives who are still dealing with the intergenerational trauma of residential schools. These events honour their lived experience and provide a path to healing based upon Indigenous Ways of Knowing."



**Kapabamayak Achaak
Healing Forest**

WINNEPEG



Photo Credit:
Micah Donovan
at Cloverdale Mall

Arts in the Park

Arts in the Parks brings free arts programming to parks across Toronto. Managed by the Toronto Arts Foundation in collaboration with the Toronto Arts Council, the City of Toronto, and Park People, this program provides an opportunity for residents to experience the vibrant artistic culture of their city.

In 2024, Park People worked closely with dozens of community groups and artists to build new partnerships. As a result, the season saw 70 days of exciting park events. Our team also conducted a thorough review of past applications to ensure the selected projects truly reflect the needs, voices, and creative aspirations of the communities we serve.

Spotlight on Local Leadership

Park People's programs have a powerful impact on their participants. Take Nithursan Elamuhilan, for example. After graduating our InTO the Ravines program, he was selected as an Ontario Community Changemaker by 8 80 Cities. From there, he launched his own park project *Scarborough Made*, joined the board of 8 80 Cities, and transitioned from partnering with artists in parks to becoming a fully funded artist via Arts in the Parks.

Nithursan's latest project, *It's Neerby*, brings local history to life through augmented reality, allowing people to view archival photos and documents exactly where they were originally taken. It's a uniquely moving experience that enables communities to learn and share their history.



It's Neerby

SCARBOROUGH

Building Community

We bring together park leaders and emerging advocates to celebrate community-driven initiatives, facilitating peer learning and exchange. We also promote best practices in park programming, community engagement, and operations to support their work more effectively.

Sparkling Change

Park People's Sparkling Change programs in Toronto and Vancouver support people from equity-deserving communities to transform their parks into powerful engines of community development.

In 2024,

Toronto

We supported **67** community groups to animate **21** greenspaces

We catalyzed **110** days of park programming that engaged **3,300** people in meaningful experiences with their community and nature

As a result, **78%** of participants felt better connected to nature and **96%** felt a stronger connection to their community

Vancouver

8 seniors received mentorship from **4** Sparkling Change graduates

With the guidance and expertise they gained, seniors organized **16** community events

160 senior participants were connected to their community and park



Spotlight on Older Adults

The social benefits of parks are especially important for seniors. While 30% of elderly Canadians are at risk of becoming socially isolated, a CARP study found that living near a park helps older adults avoid loneliness at a rate four times greater than that of having children. Our Sparking Change Vancouver program provides seniors with hands-on training and mentorship to create accessible experiences in their local parks. In 2024, their events included outdoor creative writing, lawn games, and guided forests therapy walks — to name just a few!



InTO the Ravines

Our InTO the Ravines program offers people living near ravines training and support to learn, explore, and celebrate Toronto's one-of-a-kind ravines system. Via our Champions program, 20 people receive the knowledge and skills to engage with and protect these unique natural spaces, while our micro-granting program offers resources to ravine-based events that focus on environmental sustainability and appreciation.

In 2024,

30

ravine sites were
animated with
community events

83%

of participants
report feeling greater
connection to nature
and living things

91%

of event attendees
report they would be
more likely to visit the
ravines after the event

”

I was extremely lucky to get involved with the Sparking Change Senior Champions program. It boosts my overall health—physically, mentally, spiritually, and emotionally—and I made some friends. It's not only benefits I got, but also the whole community as well. As I can organize a few events with the TD grants afterwards, the vibrations spread immensely to the whole community.

– Rita Wong

”

In India, where I'm from, people worship trees. They understand that people and nature are one and the same. I appreciate the Ravines program because it reminds people how important it is to protect nature and to treat it with care.

– Bina Israni, Ravines Champion

Creating Change

We track the trends, challenges, and opportunities that are happening in city parks. We use this knowledge to collaborate with municipalities and partners to ensure that parks are places that everyone can enjoy.

Canadian City Parks Report

For the past six years, we've collected data and inspiring stories from cities across Canada to inform our annual Canadian City Parks Report. 2024's report focused on exploring the collaborations and partnership—across city departments, community members, nonprofits, and more—that can bridge the gap between what we expect from city parks and what they are today.

We heard from 35 municipalities and 2,500+ residents of Canadian cities and shared their insights with park policy makers and government representatives.



[View the Report](#)

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This report is really nailing the actual scales, dynamics and situations that obstruct democratic human ecologies and meaningful, place based engagement with green spaces and public realm!

– Heidi Clelland-Sauer, Breathing Landscape



Photo credit: LE
POTAGER SU
SENTIER URBAIN

Sharing Our Knowledge

In Montreal and Vancouver, our Park People Forums united people in conversations about the future of urban parks and public spaces, and shared fresh perspectives from diverse voices in the community.

In 2024, Park People staff reached over 5,000 park and municipal professionals through our presentations at eight North American conferences.



Park People networking session at Greater and Greener

SEATTLE

A few highlights:

- We presented at Canada's Social Prescribing Conference and participated in the CISP Community of Practice as the sole voice for Canada's public green spaces
- We contributed to Parks Canada's new Interim National Urban Parks Policy, adding a focus on equity, diversity and inclusion and impact measurement frameworks
- We traveled to Seattle for the Greater and Greener Conference, where we offered sessions on micro-granting and grassroots empowerment
- We shared our insights on social connectivity, environmental sustainability, and equitable urban design with the media, appearing in CBC, the Globe and Mail, and Global News
- This year, we launched a dynamic new website designed to better connect people to our national network and make our extensive resource library more accessible, ensuring that community park leaders can easily find the tools and support they need to thrive



Thank you Dave!

In 2024, Park People's founder, Dave Harvey, retired from his role of Executive Director after 13 years of service. We're grateful to continue benefiting from Dave's passion and knowledge in his new role as Strategic Advisor.

Thank You To Our Park People

Thank to you to the donors and funders who are helping us connect people to parks in communities across the country.

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We would also like to thank our over 100 individual donors who supported Park People in 2024. Thank you for believing in our mission and vision. We couldn't have done it without you!

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