

Measuring Health, Wellbeing, and Equity in Greenspaces: **A Toolkit & Common Indicators Framework**

2025



Research Team: Written and developed by Dr. Nadha Hassen (lead) and Ayan Mohamed (research assistant), with support from Dr. Kate Mulligan.

Community Advisory Group Members: Evgeny Slonimerov (Eugene), Jessica Iraci, Leah Yuyitung, Mohiuddin Shah Golam, Ping Gu, Safia Parveen.

Park People Members: Cindy Hashie, Ayesha Talreja, Wesley Reibeling, Joy Sammy, and Natalie Brown.

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Photo credit: 2023 Park People Conference in Toronto.



Introduction

Parks and greenspaces are powerful spaces for community connection, health, wellbeing, and resilience. At Park People, we've developed a framework and process to better understand and measure the impact of our work across five key domains—including community health and wellbeing.

This toolkit shares our approach and work to date as a case study, with a focus on health and wellbeing indicators, and offers practical tools and questions to help others in the sector deepen their own impact measurement practices. Whether you're a nonprofit, municipality, or community group, we hope this resource supports your efforts to build healthier, more connected communities through parks and greenspaces.

We offer this toolkit as a case study and a starting point. It includes guiding questions, practical tools, and lessons learned from our work and our community-engaged approach, with the goal of supporting others in the sector to build a shared culture of impact. Together, we can strengthen the case for parks as essential to healthy, thriving communities.

Let's grow a shared culture of impact in parks — where health, equity, and connection are at the heart of every greenspace.

**Learn more from our
evaluation of the Sparking
Change Toronto program**





Photo credit: Melanin Skate Crew, Ksenija Hotic.

Purpose of this Toolkit

We want to support organizations and communities across the sector in developing a shared understanding of measuring health, wellbeing, and equity across parks and greenspaces.

1

Provide a Common Understanding:

To establish a common understanding of how to measure health, wellbeing, and equity across the parks and greenspaces sector. By sharing strategies, indicators, and questions, we can align our efforts and data across the sector.

2

Share our Approach and a Case Study:

By sharing the community-engaged evaluation of Park People's Sparking Change Toronto program, we offer a case study and example of impact measurement in this field. We will continue to build on this work.

3

Offer Community-Engaged Approaches and Ideas:

We offer suggestions and ideas throughout to support creative ways to capture the impact of programs.

4

Permission to Start Simple: Impact measurement can be overwhelming. This resource aims to provide a starting point to measure the impact of park and greenspace programs on health, wellbeing, and equity.



Photo credit: Park People's Sparking Change at their End-of-Year Gathering.

How to Use this Toolkit

Whether you are a not-for-profit, community park group, or park professional, this toolkit provides guidance and resources to measure the impact of your park and greenspace work on the health and wellbeing of the communities you work with, integrating a social equity lens.



Understand and identify the definitions and concepts that are most important to measure, using this document. Creating a shared understanding helps establish a baseline for impact measurement. Clear definitions and objectives establish a strong foundation for meaningful measurement, leading to more impactful and equitable community outcomes.



Use the tools provided to understand and track impact across key areas of interest. The purpose is to support health, wellbeing, and equity in the design, planning, and operationalization of projects at various scales across the sector. Apply these concepts to your context and goals where applicable, guiding the selection of suitable tools and methods for your project.



Connect with key players and interested parties to identify a collaborative approach where applicable. Partnering and fostering dialogue leads to innovative solutions and strategies. Engage diverse perspectives to enrich planning and strengthen community ties.



Measure and monitor changes to key areas of health and wellbeing, learning from experience and adapting programs and responses accordingly.

Park People's Impact

Since 2011

3,000+

events hosted by
community park groups

\$7M+

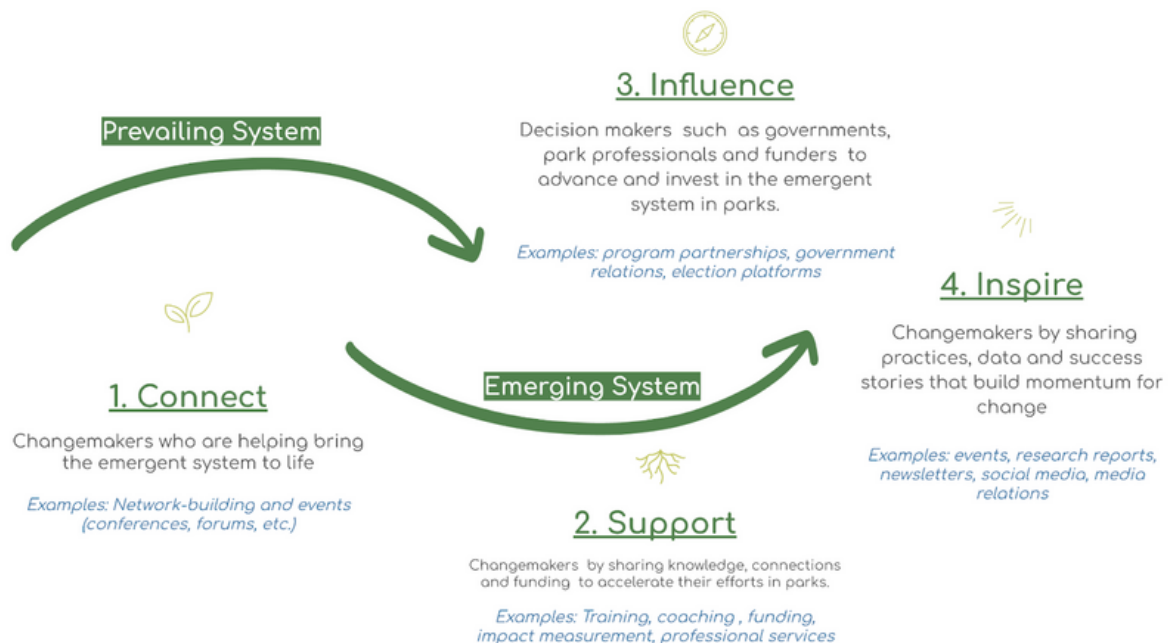
invested into parks and
park programming

275,000+

people connected to their
local parks and greenspaces

Park People's Theory of Change

Shifting the system through four main levers of change



Park People's Levers of Change



CONNECT

Canada's city park changemakers who are helping to bring the emerging system to life



SUPPORT

changemakers by sharing knowledge, connections and funding to accelerate their efforts



INFLUENCE

changemakers by sharing practices, data, and success stories that build momentum for change.



INSPIRE

governments, decision-makers, and funders to advance and invest in the emerging system.



Park People's Focus Areas



COMMUNITY HEALTH & WELLBEING

Parks and park-based programs support the physical, mental, emotional, and social health of individuals and communities. By creating accessible, inclusive, and welcoming spaces, parks can play a vital role in fostering healthier, more resilient communities.



SOCIAL EQUITY

Systemic inequities mean the benefits of greenspaces are not experienced equally by everyone. Parks are places to collectively address social inequities and challenge systems of oppression. We work to address inequities in the park system and create equitable access and use of urban greenspaces.



HUMAN-NATURE CONNECTION / RECIPROCITY

We work to connect people to nature and to each other, and we build relationships and partnerships based on mutual benefit and exchange instead of transaction and extraction. Parks are vital natural and social shared spaces; we respect the land and all beings who use it in diverse ways.



ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY

Parks enhance local biodiversity, preserve ecosystems, and build climate resilience. As climate change intensifies, urban greenspaces become ever more vital. Our survival in a time of ecological crisis depends on breaking down the separation between humans and nature.



Key Indicators

Focus Area	Key Indicator (i.e. What are we measuring for?)	Examples of Key Questions and Answers
Community Health & Wellbeing	Social Connection Sense of Belonging	• Belonging to Community: Through [Park People Program], I feel a sense of belonging to people in my community (Yes/No/Unsure) • Belonging to Neighbourhood: Through [Park People Program], I feel a sense of belonging to where I live and my neighbourhood (Yes/No/Unsure) • Action on Health and Wellbeing: [Park People Program/ Park People] has helped me/our group take action to promote people's health and wellbeing [Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly disagree, Unsure] • Sense of Community/ Social Connection: My work/our group's work in parks and greenspaces promotes a sense of community and social connection (Yes/No/Unsure) • Sense of Belonging: My work/our group's work in parks and greenspaces promotes a sense of belonging for people (Yes/No/Unsure) • Belonging and Connection to Parks/Greenspaces: Through [Park People Program], I feel a sense of connection and belonging to parks and greenspaces in my neighbourhood/city (Yes/No/Unsure)
Community Health & Wellbeing	Mental Health and Wellbeing Physical Health and Wellbeing	• Mental Health and Wellbeing: My work/our group's work in parks and greenspaces supports mental health and wellbeing (Yes/No/Unsure) • Physical Health and Wellbeing: My work/our group's work in parks and greenspaces supports physical health and wellbeing (Yes/No/Unsure)

Key Indicators & Questions

Domain	Key Program Indicator or Construct	Examples of Key Questions and Answers
Social Equity	Access	• Access: [Park People Program/ Park People] is increasing access to parks and greenspaces for equity-deserving communities (Yes/No/Unsure) • Access to nature-based programming: [Park People Program/ Park People] is increasing access to nature-based programming for equity-deserving communities (Yes/No/Unsure) • Physical Accessibility: [Park People Program/ Park People] has helped me/our group take action to make parks and greenspaces more physically accessible [Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly disagree, Unsure]
Social Equity	Safety and Social Access Working Definition of Social Access in Parks and Greenspaces: access is influenced by the socio-cultural and historical relationships that people have with greenspaces. It includes the nuanced ways that different people use, perceive, navigate and experience greenspaces.	• Safety: [Park People Program/ Park People] has helped me/our group take action to make parks and greenspaces safer for everyone [Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly disagree, Unsure] • Social access: Generally, there has been an increase in social access to parks and greenspaces in recent years [Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly disagree, Unsure] • Welcoming/Inclusivity: [Park People Program/ Park People] has helped me/our group take action to make parks and greenspaces more welcoming for everyone [Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly disagree, Unsure]

Key Indicators & Questions

Domain	Key Program Indicator or Construct	Examples of Key Questions and Answers
Social Equity	Decolonization City of Toronto Definition of Decolonization: the process of removing colonial elements from ways of thinking and the systems and structures within which we live and work, including but not limited to imperialism, white supremacy, patriarchy, paternalism and human centism (City of Toronto definition from the Reconciliation Action Plan). This could include land-based activities. Anti-Racism Definition of Anti-Racism: the practice of identifying, challenging, preventing, eliminating and changing the values, structures, policies, programs, practices and behaviours that perpetuate racism.	• Decolonization: [Park People Program/ Park People] has helped me/ my group work on decolonization in parks and greenspaces. [Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly disagree, Unsure] • Anti-racism and equity: [Park People Program/ Park People] has helped me/ my group work on anti-racism and equity in parks and greenspaces. [Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly disagree, Unsure] Note: These are early questions that are continuing to be developed.



Note: Outcomes are different from indicators. Outcomes represent the broader changes or goals you aim to achieve, while indicators are the specific, measurable elements used to track progress toward those outcomes. It's important to recognize that even if different indicators are used, they can still reflect progress toward the same outcome, so the focus should remain on what you ultimately want to accomplish rather than on uniform measurement tools.

Other Definitions

Finding Common Language

Park People's Working Definitions

Equity is about working toward fair outcomes by giving people what they need instead of treating everyone the same both historically and currently. It also requires addressing these barriers through researching, implementing, and advocating for equity-based park policies/programs that affect systems change.

Equity-deserving communities are communities that, because of systemic discrimination, face barriers that prevent them from having the same access to the resources and opportunities available to other members of society. These may include but are not limited to; Black, Indigenous and People of Colour; disabled people; 2SLGBTQ+; newcomers; women, non-binary and low-income people.



Photo credit Vancouver Senior Champions events

Tips for Impact Measurement



Prioritize a few key indicators that are most relevant to your goals and the specific needs of your community and those you work with.

This approach allows you to focus on collecting meaningful data without becoming overwhelmed. As your systems grow, you can gradually expand the scope of your measurements.



Use qualitative and quantitative data, and creative approaches where appropriate. Numbers tell one side of the story, but qualitative insights, such as testimonials and personal narratives, can provide compelling depth and context to your findings.



Review and adapt your measurement strategies periodically. As your projects evolve and new challenges arise, revisiting and refining your indicators will help maintain the relevance and accuracy of your impact assessments.



To ensure effective impact measurement, allocate adequate resources, budget, and personnel for data collection and analysis.

Train staff and volunteers and foster collaboration across teams. Recognize that impact measurement is ongoing; celebrate milestones to motivate continuous improvement and inspire support for healthier, equitable communities.



Engage with the communities you work with regularly to understand their needs and experiences. By involving community members in the process, you can ensure that the indicators you choose are truly reflective of the impact your work is having on their lives.



Photo credit: Greystone Neighbourhood Group.

Case study

Advancing Equity and Wellbeing Through Parks and Greenspaces: The Sparking Change Toronto Evaluation

Park People's Sparking Change Toronto program empowers equity-deserving community groups to transform local parks into hubs of community development. Through training, seed funding, coaching, and access to professional networks, the program supports grassroots leaders in activating parks to meet community needs. Since its inception, it has trained over 250 leaders and engaged more than 5,000 residents in park-based activities.

Methods: In partnership with a community advisory group and City of Toronto staff, the evaluation employed a mixed-methods approach, including surveys with community leaders, focus groups with residents, and interviews with city staff.

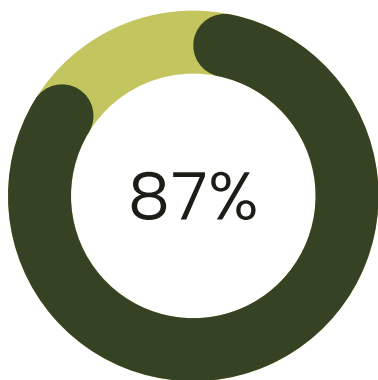
The evaluation explored four key domains from Park People's Theory of Change:

- Community health and wellbeing
- Social equity
- Human-nature connectedness and reciprocity
- Ecological integrity

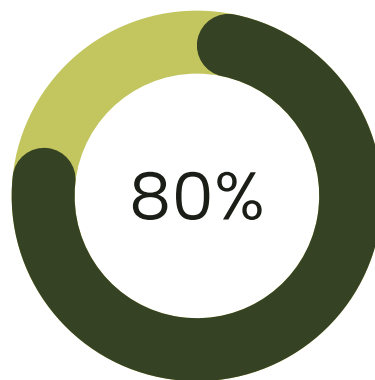
Implications: The evaluation highlights the vital role of public greenspaces and community-led programming in advancing health, wellbeing, and equity goals. The evaluation successfully captured meaningful impacts and can inform future assessments using both qualitative and quantitative methods. These insights guided the development of this toolkit to measure and amplify the value of community-driven park initiatives.

[Read our evaluation report of the Sparking Change Toronto program](#)

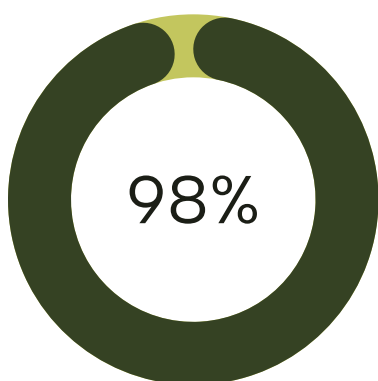
Results & Impact from the Sparking Change Toronto Evaluation



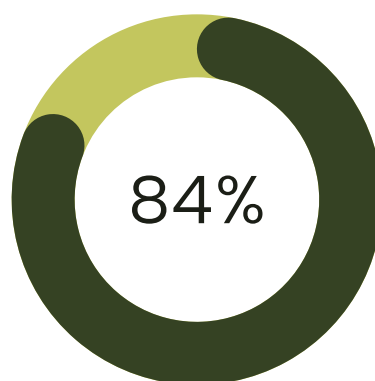
87% either strongly agreed or agreed that “Sparking Change has **helped me/our group take action to promote community health and wellbeing** (i.e., in relation to people)”



80% responded “Yes” to the statement: “Through Sparking Change, I feel a **sense of belonging to my community.**”

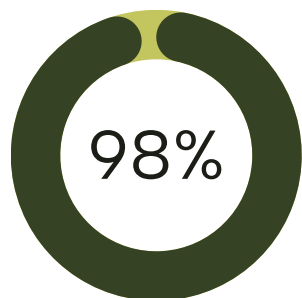


98% of respondents said “Yes” to the statement: “My work/our group’s work in parks and greenspaces promotes a **sense of community and social connection**”

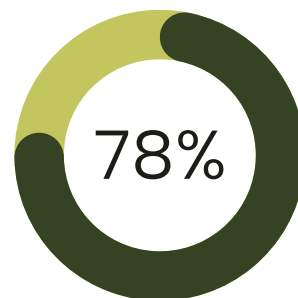


84% responded “Yes” to the statement: “Through Sparking Change, I feel a **sense of belonging to where I live and my neighbourhood.**”

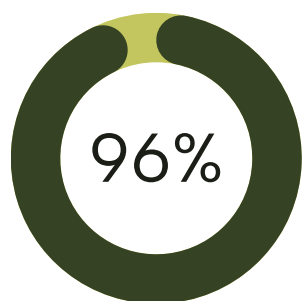
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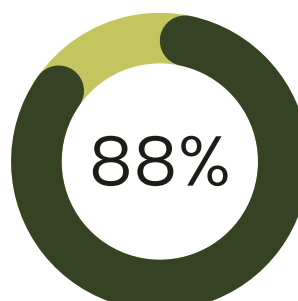
98% responded “Yes” to the statement: “My work/our group’s work in parks and greenspaces **supports community health and wellbeing.**”



38% strongly agreed and **40%** agreed that “Sparking Change has helped me/our group **take action to make parks and greenspaces safer for everyone.**”



96% responded “Yes” to the statement: “My work/our group’s work in parks and greenspaces **promotes a sense of belonging for people.**”



88% responded “Yes” to the statement “Sparking Change is **increasing access to nature-based programming** for equity-deserving communities.”

Survey Respondents: A Snapshot



Photo credit: Women cycling network.

53%

Black, Indigenous,
or Person of Colour

13%

Identified as
2SLGBTQ+

20%

Identified as
having a disability

63%

Identified
as women

85%

Aged 20-59

47%

Earned between
\$25K-\$99K

10%

Earned
under \$25K

3%

Had no stable
housing



Photo credit: Little Communiy Garden



Photo credit: Little Communiy Garden

70%

Were community
members

57%

Subscribed to the
newsletter, WhatsApp

53%

Attended in-person
park events

51%

Received Park
People microgrants

Sharing Quotes and Stories that Capture Impact



These issues are at the very root of many institutions and create barriers for many people in our society. I love the way Park People strive to break down these patterns so we can all have the same access to our community parks and feel safe to enjoy nature.

– Sparking Change Toronto Community Member



We know that Park People reaches members of the community that we may not be reaching, we're continually impressed with especially the equity lens that Park People puts on the work.

– City of Toronto staff



Many greenspaces are far from equitable. This includes ravines, which are often surrounded by wealthy landowners who have built property along the ravine or around a park. The Sparking Change grant gave us an opportunity to give these young people a different perspective; that they can enjoy a ravine walk, no matter what their background is.

– Sparking Change Toronto Community Member



We have witnessed firsthand the positive impacts that well-maintained parks and greenspaces have on the health and wellbeing of our neighborhood's residents. Through Sparking Change, we have worked to ensure that outdoor spaces are more inclusive and accessible, promoting physical activity, mental health, and bringing people together.

– Sparking Change Toronto Community Member

Qualitative insights



The Sparking Change microgrants is a pretty low barrier grant program whereby you don't need to be an incorporated, not-for-profit, or registered charity to apply. So it segments out some of those more established organizations who are very deserving of funding, absolutely, but there needs to be funding carved out for even smaller grassroots groups to access resources. It's really the extent to which the money can flow directly from a source to an end user.

– City of Toronto staff



No budget, no change! Parks budget process favors affluent communities, areas with existing parks get more money than areas lacking parks, so how do you decolonize an area when there are no facilities or resources?

– Sparking Change Toronto Community Member



We never were accepted for a permit for our event, and we still went and we did our event because we believed that there was something wrong with the process, not with us.

– Sparking Change Toronto Community Member



Any recommendations as to how the grant is? Do more! Because only out of 90 applicants, only seven of us got it, and I would say I felt privileged, but also, you know, I wanted to make the best use of it.

– Sparking Change Toronto Community Member



Photo credit: Black Creek for Families.

Measuring Impact in Community

Creative Approaches to Capturing Stories and Data

One of the challenges of impact measurement and evaluation at Park People has been that the organization supports community park leaders to activate and make change in their local parks and greenspaces, making us one step removed from the process. While our work is in line with the vision of supporting and connecting changemakers to the necessary resources and tools to make this happen, it presents a real challenge in terms of capturing stories and data.

To address this, Park People is embracing creative approaches to better capture the stories and data that reflect the true impact of our efforts. By leveraging participatory methods such as engaging a community advisory group and creating simple ways of capturing stories and numbers, we are reimagining how we demonstrate our impact on the ground.

Our aim is to empower park leaders to share their experiences and insights with us in simple ways. This not only enriches our understanding but also strengthens the community bonds. Read on for some examples of the ways we are doing this.

This is still a work in progress and we know that we are not alone in wanting to do this work. We have heard from many partners across the parks sector, about the challenge of measuring impact in meaningful ways.

By combining these creative and innovative techniques with traditional evaluation metrics, we aim to create a comprehensive picture of our impact and continue to support the vibrant transformation of local parks and greenspaces.

Case Study

Creative Engagement to Measure Impact

Capturing Impact at In-Person Events through Creative Approaches

At an in-person event, Park People used **interactive engagement boards** to gather meaningful insights into the impact of their work and programs.

Attendees responded to key indicator questions by placing **dot stickers** on boards, visually representing their experiences and perceptions. They also used **pins to map their personal connections** to parks and greenspaces across the city, and shared **stories and reflections on post-it notes**. These qualitative insights were later digitized into an Excel sheet for analysis.

This approach offered a **dynamic, participatory alternative to traditional surveys**, fostering deeper engagement and storytelling while capturing rich, community-driven data on health, wellbeing, and equity outcomes.

Through Park People, I feel a sense of connection and belonging to parks and greenspaces in my neighbourhood and city

Strongly disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly agree

Park People has helped me/our group take action to promote people's health and wellbeing

Strongly disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly agree



Photo credit: Toronto Park Summit, Park People.

Conclusion & Next Steps

Parks and greenspaces are essential to creating healthy, connected, and equitable communities. Highlighting and sharing their impact encourages ongoing commitment by funders, policymakers, communities, non-profit organizations and other interested parties and ensures these benefits are experienced by everyone.

Ways To Take Action:

- **Strengthen your programs** by applying the indicators, tools, and guiding questions to inform design, delivery, and evaluation.
- **Share your results** with your local councillor, municipal staff, or community networks to build awareness and support.
- **Collaborate with others**—partner with Park People or like-minded organizations to align efforts and share learnings.
- **Advocate for change** by speaking at City Council, participate in community advocacy efforts, or using your data to influence policies and funding.

Together, we can build a shared culture of impact and ensure parks remain a foundation for thriving communities.



RESOURCE: Community Leader Reflection Sheet

A simple guide to help reflect on your park or greenspace activity and its impact. Use this reflection sheet after your event to think about what worked, where you made an impact, and how Park People can support your work.

Name of the park or greenspace where the activity took place:	
Name of your activity or event:	
Activity Date(s):	
 What did your park or greenspace activity focus on? (Check all that apply) ☐ Helped build new personal or professional connections ☐ Supported our community's health and wellbeing ☐ Made the space more inclusive, welcoming, or safe ☐ Supported connection to nature or greenspaces ☐ Took action to protect or care for the environment	 What is one moment or story that stood out to you today? For example, a positive comment, a connection that was made, number of trees planted.
 How can Park People better support your work and activities?	 How did you consider equity, accessibility, and/or inclusion for this event?

Thank you for leading this work in your community!
Your response helps us understand the impact of your efforts on the ground.

RESOURCE: Event Participant Form

Your Voice In The Park Matters!

We'd love to hear how today's event felt for you!

Take a moment to check what felt true and share your thoughts so we can keep improving.

Name of your activity or event:

Activity Date(s):



What felt true for you today?
(Check all that apply)

- ☐ I felt welcomed and included
- ☐ I made a new friend or connection
- ☐ I felt a sense of belonging to the group or neighbourhood
- ☐ I felt mentally better from being there
- ☐ I felt physically better from being there
- ☐ I felt more connected to nature or the park
- ☐ I cared for the environment
- ☐ I felt the space was safe, accessible, and inclusive
- ☐ I felt proud to be part of something that supported my community's wellbeing



What's one moment you'll remember from today? (A story, a conversation, something that stood out)



What would you suggest we do differently next time?



Would you attend another event like this?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

Your responses will help Park People understand the impact of our community leaders' work in parks and greenspaces. Thank you for sharing your experience!



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Park People

401 Richmond St. W., Ste. 119 Toronto
Ontario M5V 3A8

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