

# Impact Report

2025



Community Leadership,  
Belonging and Climate  
Resilience: *Start at the Park*

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people  
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Photo Credit: Toronto Arts Foundation (Kat Rizza)

## 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

Dear Friends,

At Park People, we often say that big change starts small.

It starts with a connection between neighbours at the splashpad.

A shared moment of awe when a cardinal crosses your path.

A conversation about what you would like to see change in your neighbourhood.

More often than not, these moments start at the park. With the right support in place, they become the origin story of the community groups and local leaders who bring our cities to life. And what starts at the park carries outward, influencing how people engage in civic life. Local leadership, connected to place and to nature, is the scaffold we use to rebuild our social connections and reclaim our political voices at a moment of great instability and uncertainty.

Thanks to your support, those moments of connection and acts of democracy happened across the country this year. Local leaders gathered their neighbours, built connections, and restored nature in projects big and small.

This report shows the results – what you made possible through your love of parks, your support of Park People, and your commitment to inclusive and thriving public spaces.

Thank you for being part of our movement,



**Erika Nikolai**

Executive Director, Park People

# Community Leadership Starts at the Park

By supporting Park People's national programs, you are investing in locally driven, community-led change. And that's what makes it work.

Instead of deciding what parks need, you help put resources in the hands of the people who know their communities best.

Park People provides everyday residents with tools, training, and resources to bring great ideas to life. In 2025, that took many forms: workshops, one-on-one coaching, and micro-grants that helped turn ideas into action.

## Edmonton

Apple cider pressing festival  
Newcomer stewardship events

## Montreal

Park clean-ups and tree planting  
Balcony gardening workshops  
Butterfly release celebration

## Vancouver

Indigenous cedar weaving workshops  
Eid stewardship day  
Beginner birding walks

## Greater Toronto Area

Edible Plant Treasure Hunt  
Composting festivals led by Women of Colour  
Bike camping skills workshops

## By the Numbers:

**265+** community members trained

**650+** community park events

**25,000+** park event attendees

# Belonging Starts at the Park

Belonging doesn't happen all at once or in a single moment. It happens over time, through repeated moments of connection to a place and the people within it.

That is what Park People's programs are designed to do. They create opportunities for people to build a relationship with a space and with each other. They are designed to consider who is using the space and who is left out, and to address those barriers.

Connection and belonging require intention and an invitation to take part. Through this work, Park People is helping create those opportunities at the local level — grounded in people's interests, skills, and care for their communities.

## COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT: **Meem Toronto**

Meem Toronto is a grassroots collective that organizes social gatherings for queer and trans people from Arabic-speaking communities across Toronto.

With support from Park People, Meem Toronto hosted a large summer gathering in High Park. Holding the event in a park was an easy choice. Cofounder Rayan told us, "The world is so heavy these days. As soon as people walked into the park, they started to look more open and relaxed. It was great to see people sitting in circles, meeting new people, and sharing food together. There was so much kindness."

Park People's support helped them secure a permit for the event, helping reduce concerns around racial profiling and allowing people to feel more comfortable in a public space.

For many attendees, the event changed how they viewed parks as spaces for belonging. Some newcomers shared that they had never seen Toronto parks as places where they could gather safely and comfortably. After the event, many expressed excitement about returning to parks and attending future outdoor gatherings.



*This was a much needed event to feel a sense of connection and community. The spot was very beautiful and we saw amazing birds and sat under beautiful trees, which was really inspiring.*

– Meem Toronto, a community for 2SLGBTQ Arabs



## RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT: **Parks Foster Health and Belonging**

In 2025, Park People partnered with researcher Dr. Nadha Hassen to better understand how Park People’s park programs play a role in people’s health and wellbeing, focused on communities who face barriers to accessing public space.

Participants consistently reported improved wellbeing, stronger social ties, and a greater sense of belonging in their neighbourhoods. Community-led programs also help people feel safer and more welcome in public spaces, creating opportunities to build trust, reduce isolation, and strengthen relationships across communities.

**The findings make a stronger case for investing in parks as spaces that support public health, social connection, and quality of life.**

[View the Report](#)



*The park and the gathering were a perfect retreat. I’m so grateful and will be visiting parks more to decrease stress and boost mental health.*

– Program Participant



*Our seniors group lit up after entering the park. Just seeing the green space brought smiles and conversations about peace, joy, and feeling good.*

– Program Participant

**Research findings  
across Park People’s  
programs show:**

**80%**

of attendees reported a  
stronger sense of belonging  
to their community

**87%**

reported increased sense  
of connection to nature and  
community

# Climate Resilience Starts at the Park

When you think about climate resilience, what comes to mind?

At Park People, we believe building climate resilience can – and should – include acts of connection and joy. Climate change is real and often overwhelming, but the tools to respond don't have to be. Your support is helping residents learn how to grow plants on their balconies, start biking groups, and host workshops on composting, biodiversity, and preparing for extreme weather.

Together, we are countering fear and apathy with education, engagement, and curiosity. And it starts at the park.

## COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT: **Parcours Âme – Les Bicyclettes Fleuries**

In Montreal's east end, Parcours ÂME used community art to reimagine Parc Thomas-Chapais as a space for climate awareness and ecological connection. Local residents were invited to a series of interactive park events that used creative expression and play to explore local biodiversity and climate awareness.

One event transformed discarded bicycles into flower-filled mobile installations carrying community-written ecological messages through the neighbourhood. Another brought murals to life through dance and theatre performances in the park. These activities connected residents to local greenspaces, sparked conversations about climate action, and fostered community connection and neighbourhood pride.

”

*These projects create a dialogue between art and the environment, turning green spaces into true places of social and collective transformation.*

– Parcours Âme, Microgrant Recipient



**96,600** hours of volunteer service in stewardship restoration

**33,265** trees and shrubs planted in urban parks

**60,270** Canadians connected to nature



*People saw us cleaning up the ravine and asked how they could get involved. Now we have neighbours who we never met before working together to keep this space cared for.*

– Humber River Pals, Microgrant Recipients



## International Recognition

In 2025, Park People received international recognition at the World Urban Parks Awards in Istanbul. Executive Director Erika Nikolai received the Distinguished Individual Award, recognizing Park People’s leadership in advancing parks as essential infrastructure that support health, social connection, equity, and climate resilience. The recognition reflects the growing influence of Park People’s research, advocacy, and community-led approaches in shaping how cities plan, invest in, and think about public space.

## Reducing Barriers in Practice

A recent milestone is the introduction of the No-Fee Community Activations Booking Option in Toronto.

Grassroots community groups do a lot with very little, and high permit fees can be a real barrier. Working closely with City staff and local residents, we advocated successfully for a more inclusive permitting process — removing booking fees, reducing insurance requirements, and making it easier for communities to gather, lead, and activate their parks.

# Systems Change Starts at the Park

When communities are resourced to take action in parks, something shifts. Parks are no longer seen as passive spaces or basic city services — they become vital places for connection, health, and civic life. This reframing starts to change how parks are valued, funded, and governed.

Because of your support, Park People is helping drive that shift.

We work alongside community groups and municipal partners to ensure community voices shape how parks are planned and managed. What does success look like? Fewer barriers, and more programs and policies that reflect the interests and needs of local communities.

## Convening Park Stakeholders

In 2025, Park People hosted three summits, gathering community leaders, municipal decision makers, and public space stakeholders to showcase what is possible when sectors work together to create thriving, inclusive public spaces.



*It was inspiring to connect with urbanists, community leaders, and city builders who are all deeply committed to reimagining parks as inclusive, resilient, and joyful public spaces. From climate action to social connection, parks truly are at the heart of healthier cities.*

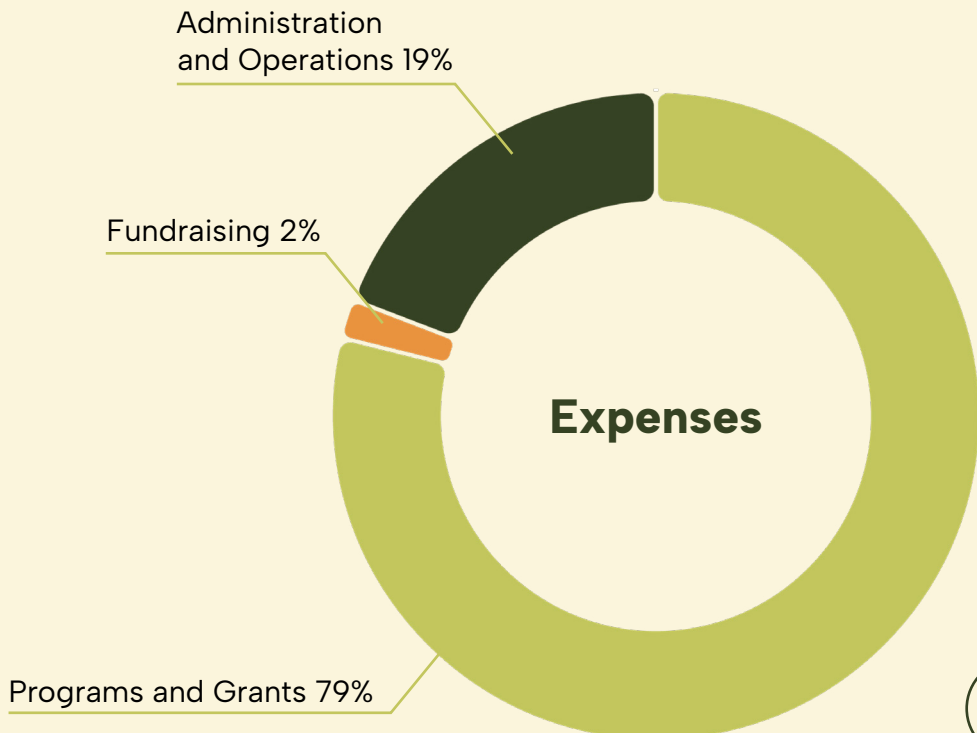
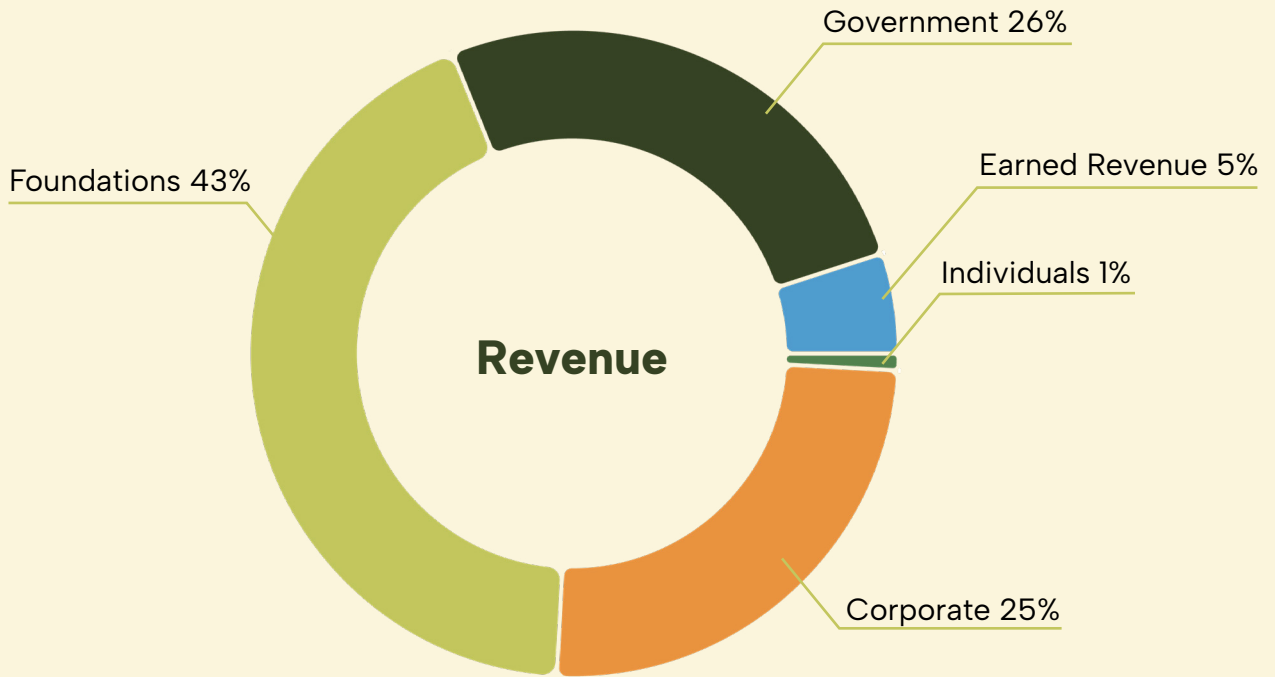
– Jineel Modi, Urban Designer and Architect

Convening over **600** park stakeholders in **3** City-Summits in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver





# Financials



[View the 2025 Audited Financials](#)

# 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.

## Founding Sponsor



## \$300,000 +

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We would also like to thank our monthly donors and individual donors who supported Park People in 2025. Thank you for believing in our mission and vision. We couldn't have done it without you!

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