

Park Watch: Safe Play - Healthy Kids



Park Watch: Safe Play - Healthy Kids



World Wide Phenomenon

Lenore Skenazy
'America's Worst Mom'



Free Range Kids





Background

- ✓ Rising obesity levels
- ✓ Decreasing children's physical activity
- ✓ Increasing screen time
- ✓ Safety concerns – real and perceived
- ✓ More parents working
- ✓ Less community connections
- ✓ Hyper-concerned parents
- ✓ Parental peer-pressure



A common site – an empty park





Park Watch Aims

- ✓ Create a **supportive environment** for children to play in their local area
- ✓ Encourage and promote **after-school unstructured play** in the local parks
- ✓ Encourage families to **access** their parks
- ✓ Create a sense of **local community**



What is Park Watch

- ✓ 2 afternoons/week
- ✓ 3.30 / 4.00 – 5.00 pm
- ✓ **Park Watch Monitors**
- ✓ Monitor and encourage safe play
- ✓ Community connecting



Role and Responsibilities

- ✓ **Monitor** and encourage safe play
- ✓ Identifiable **'extra set of eyes'** in the park
- ✓ **Assist** in case of emergency
- ✓ Keep **records** of numbers
- ✓ **Report** unsafe playground equipment
- ✓ **Report** suspicious behaviour
- ✓ **Flags, jacket, signage**
- ✓ **'Meet n Greet'**

Park Watch Monitors

- ✓ Orientation Session
- ✓ Insurance cover – public liability, volunteer insurance
- ✓ Mobile Phone
- ✓ First Aid Kit

Monitor the park





Who was involved

Driven by discussion with parents

✓ Supported by:

- Albany Injury Prevention Association Inc.
- City of Albany
- Albany Volunteer Centre
- Great Southern Population Health
- Kidsafe WA
- Active After-School Officer & DSR
- Local business support

Established Park Watch steering committee

Target Parks

- ✓ Smaller (local) suburban parks
- ✓ Demographics (younger families, 5-12 years)
- ✓ Seating/Shade
- ✓ Access – shared path, footpath, traffic
- ✓ Playground equipment
- ✓ Sense of community/Interest
- ✓ Safety audit – upgrade, works program

Mills Park – Little Grove



Foundation Park – Central Albany



Good Publicity

NEWS Albany Advertiser Thursday 13 Aug



Adam Skogg and Rachael Thomas are part of Park Watch.

Watching out for kids

ALBANY children are healthier and more active thanks to an innovative program - which may be the first of its kind in Australia - allowing them to play in safe, outdoor environments.

Park Watch was started at Albany parks following suggestions from local parents who knew how important physical activity was for their children but had safety concerns.

Up to 25 children walk or cycle to their local park after school each Tuesday and Thursday afternoon. They are supervised by volunteer parents who have been trained as Park Watch members.

Coordinator Kim Butthold said she thought Park Watch was the first project of its kind in Australia.

"We are excited by children's increasing physical activity levels and higher usage of parks," she said.

"We have had fantastic support from parents, children, local businesses and the council, as everyone can see the benefits."

Park Watch volunteer parent Kate Hawkings said it was a win-win situation.

"Not only have the children met others from the area and had a great time, but some parents are meeting down at the park and getting in a half-hour walk around the area," she said.

"It is great to see the park being used more, even during the winter months."

When Park Watch is on, the supervisors wear fluorescent orange vests and the Park Watch banners are put up in the park. No flags mean Park Watch is not on.

Park Watch is currently running in Albany Central and Little Green park areas.

It is planned to continue in school terms three and four. Two new parks - Lange Park in Boyevod Head and Lakeside Park in McKean - are being considered for term four.

Park Watch will be reviewed in each park in December.

Albany Advertiser, April 2, 2009

Children to enjoy outdoors with Park Watch

By BRIDGET LACY

CONCERNS about the 'bubble wrap generation' and 'battery hen children' have motivated a group of community members to launch Park Watch.

The program, which will involve volunteers monitoring local parks on two afternoons a week, will aim to get children out playing in a safe environment and foster a greater sense of community.

Kidsafe WA and the Albany Injury Prevention Association have joined forces to launch the program, which will begin next term.

Regional playground safety officer Tracy Blaszkow said a group of local mothers had come up with the idea because they were concerned modern-day children were not getting the chance to be active like previous generations.

"I grew up on a farm and we would have breakfast in the morning and all my parents would say to me it's 'be back by dinner,'" Mrs Blaszkow said.



Tracy and Darcy Blaszkow, Mily and Eliza Hawkings, Bryce Blaszkow and Kate Hawkings at Foundation Park.

"Now parents are too busy and too worried about stranger danger to let their kids out," she said.

"Kids who live in the same neighbourhood and don't go to the

same school often don't know each other nowadays."

Mrs Blaszkow said the program wanted two volunteers at each of the four designated parks to act

as an extra set of eyes between 4-6pm on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons.

She said if the Park Watch sign was on display parents could be

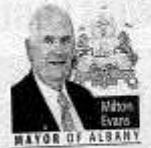
assured their children would be supervised for the allotted time.

If you would like to become a Park Watch monitor phone Kim on 9842 7504.

Finding balance for our kids

CHILDREN are most precious members of our community.

In recent years our society has begun to tie itself in knots about children's freedom to play and roam.



Milton Evans MAYOR OF ALBANY

On the one hand we hold them close and feel strong urges to protect them from a world that is seen as increasingly threatening to their wellbeing.

On the other hand, we worry about the loss of the freedoms of childhood and about health risks such as obesity and diabetes that may be related to children living more sedentary and protected lives.

We want our kids to run and play, and we want to hold them safe.

Recent publicity has referred to the Park Watch idea that will be tried in four Albany parks from May to early December.

It seems like a great way to encourage children to be active and enjoy their local parks.

Under the scheme, volunteers would attend the parks on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 4-6pm and monitor the area.

Parents could feel less anxious about encouraging their children to play away from home if they knew there was a friendly presence at the park.

Volunteers would be properly inducted and would undergo a Working With Children

check.

Park Watch is a project of Great Southern Population Health, Injury Prevention Association and Kidsafe WA.

It will start in four locations: Mills Park in Little Grove, Lange Park in Boyevod Head, Lakeside Park in Orana, and Foundation Park near central Albany.

I urge parents to support this initiative, beginning by taking your children to the park to familiarise them with the area and with the route to and from home.

Above all, talk to your children about safety, and show them any Safety Houses in your area.

Go to the park in May to meet the Park Watch members and then encourage your children to play outside rather than focusing on television, computers and electronic games.

Albany Advertiser April 2, 2009

Park Watch proves a winner

ENCOURAGED by a steady stream of positive feedback, the Park Watch program is set to expand to four more parks in Albany.

Up to 25 children each Tuesday and Thursday afternoon are walking or cycling to their local playground, supervised by trained Park Watch members.

The program is the brainchild of some local parents who expressed their concern about the safety of their children when they were out of their homes. They wanted to see their children playing safely in their own backyards.

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What is Park Watch? It's the most innovative and fun way to ensure your children are safe and healthy while playing outdoors. Park Watch is a program that allows parents to monitor their children's safety while they play in the park.

Parents are trained to monitor the park and to report any safety concerns to the police or the park authorities.

The program is the brainchild of some local parents who expressed their concern about the safety of their children when they were out of their homes. They wanted to see their children playing safely in their own backyards.



www.parkwatch.org.au
 Enjoy playing safe kids
 This is how you can
 help your family
 Plan Family Day care
 could be for you
 Start a new career right
 in your own home with
 full support and training
 from our friendly and
 experienced staff.
 WE NEED YOU! CALL TODAY
 9842 9998

park watch Tuesdays and Thursdays After School ... **safe play healthy kids**

Foundation Park, Parade St 4.00 - 5.00 pm
 Mills Park, Little Grove 3.30 - 4.30 pm

For information call Kim 9842 7504

And the Bad.....

LETTERS

Letters are welcome on the subject of child safety and health. Letters are subject to editing. Letters may be edited for clarity or length. We reserve the right to edit any letter. We reserve the right to use any letter in any form without notice.



We have battery hen kids

CHILDREN are more public than ever before. As a result, they are more likely to be seen and heard. This is a good thing, but it also means that they are more likely to be seen and heard in the wrong places. This is a bad thing. We need to find a way to keep them safe and sound.

After seeing a young girl in a park, I was reminded of a story I read in the *Guardian*. It was about a young girl who had been in a park for a long time. She had been playing with her friends and was having a great time. But then she saw a man who was taking pictures of her. She was scared and ran away. This is a sad story, but it is not an isolated incident. There are many other stories like this. We need to do something about it.

There is a simple solution. We need to make sure that all children are safe and sound. We need to make sure that all children are protected from harm. We need to make sure that all children are given the opportunity to play and learn. We need to make sure that all children are given the opportunity to grow up and become the best they can be.

John Lennon
1970

Parents take on patrols of playgrounds



Parents have banded together to form park watch groups in a bid to protect their children, according to a new survey. The survey found that more than half of parents who have children under the age of 16 are now taking part in park watch groups. This is a significant increase from just a few years ago. The survey also found that parents who are taking part in park watch groups are more likely to report incidents of child abuse and neglect. This suggests that park watch groups are playing a vital role in protecting children in parks.

John Lennon
1970



Park patrols denial

JOSH HYMAN

A PERCEPTION that police patrols of Albany parks were laxer because parents were fearful of objections or attacks on their children was wrong, Great Southern police district Superintendent Dene Leung said.

Park Watch was introduced in Albany by the WA Country Health Service Great Southern a year ago and is still practised in Mill Park and Federation Park.

Supt. Leung said parks in Albany had a history of being safe and parents had no reason to be anxious about children playing in them.

"We have no incidents in the past five years reported to police where a child has been interviewed with or sexually coerced by a stranger in a park," he said. "We have also got no historical data or intelligence indicating parks should be viewed as vulnerable areas."

Supt. Leung said children should be appropriately supervised to minimise the risks.

Park Watch co-ordinator Kim Briffield said parents understood Albany was a safe place.

"The beauty of Park Watch is that it provides a supportive environment that encourages taking a step towards independence," she said.

"The perception is that parents feel anxious, but we want to help them overcome these barriers. It is about getting people in neighbourhoods to know each other and connecting the community," she said.

parkwatch@albanypartners.com

- PLUS
- GWN TV
- Four radio interviews – ABC local and state



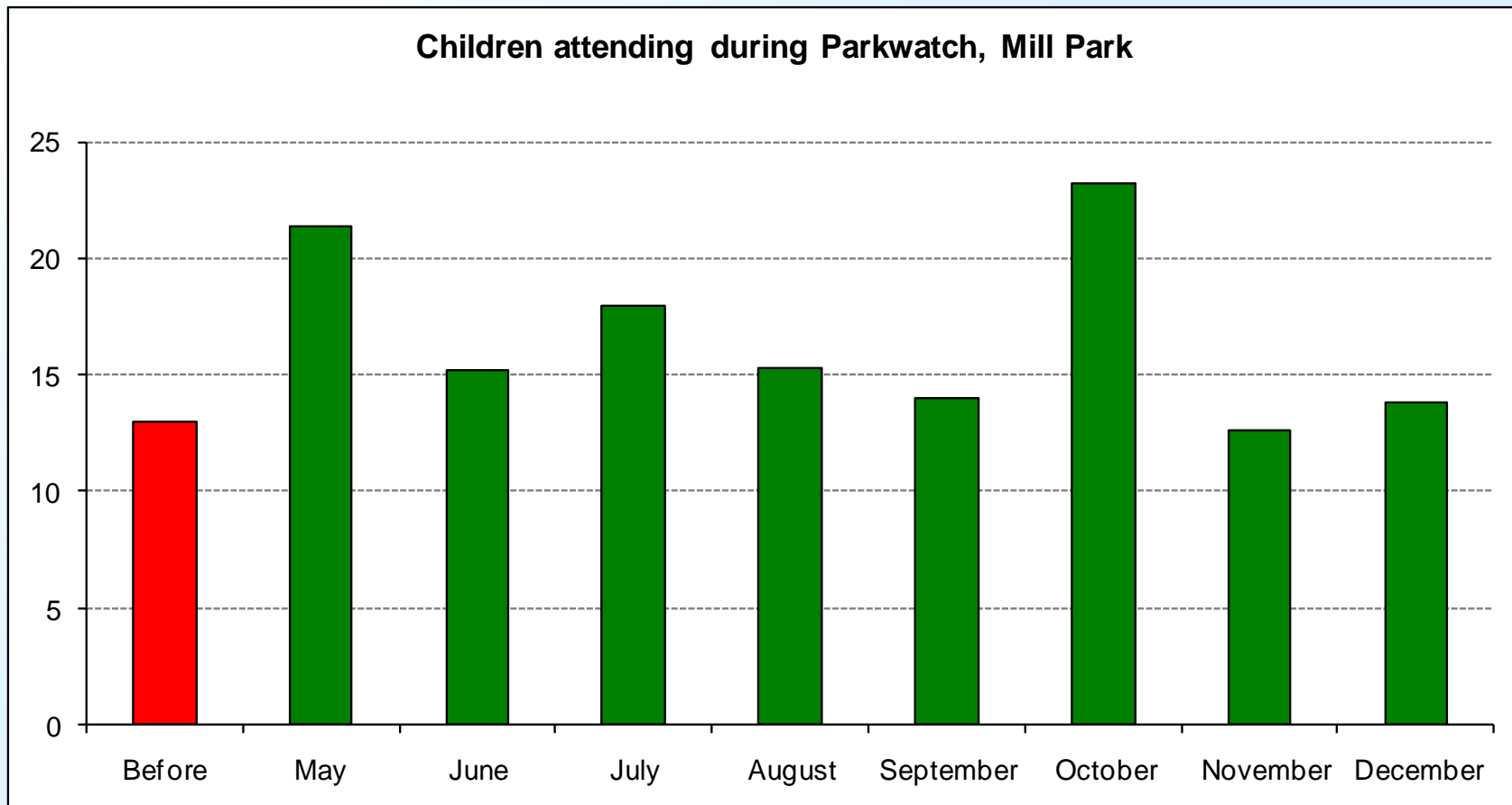


Results - Parks

- ✓ 4 Parks in pilot
- ✓ 2 going strong
- ✓ 1 commenced, non sustained
- ✓ 1 non-starter

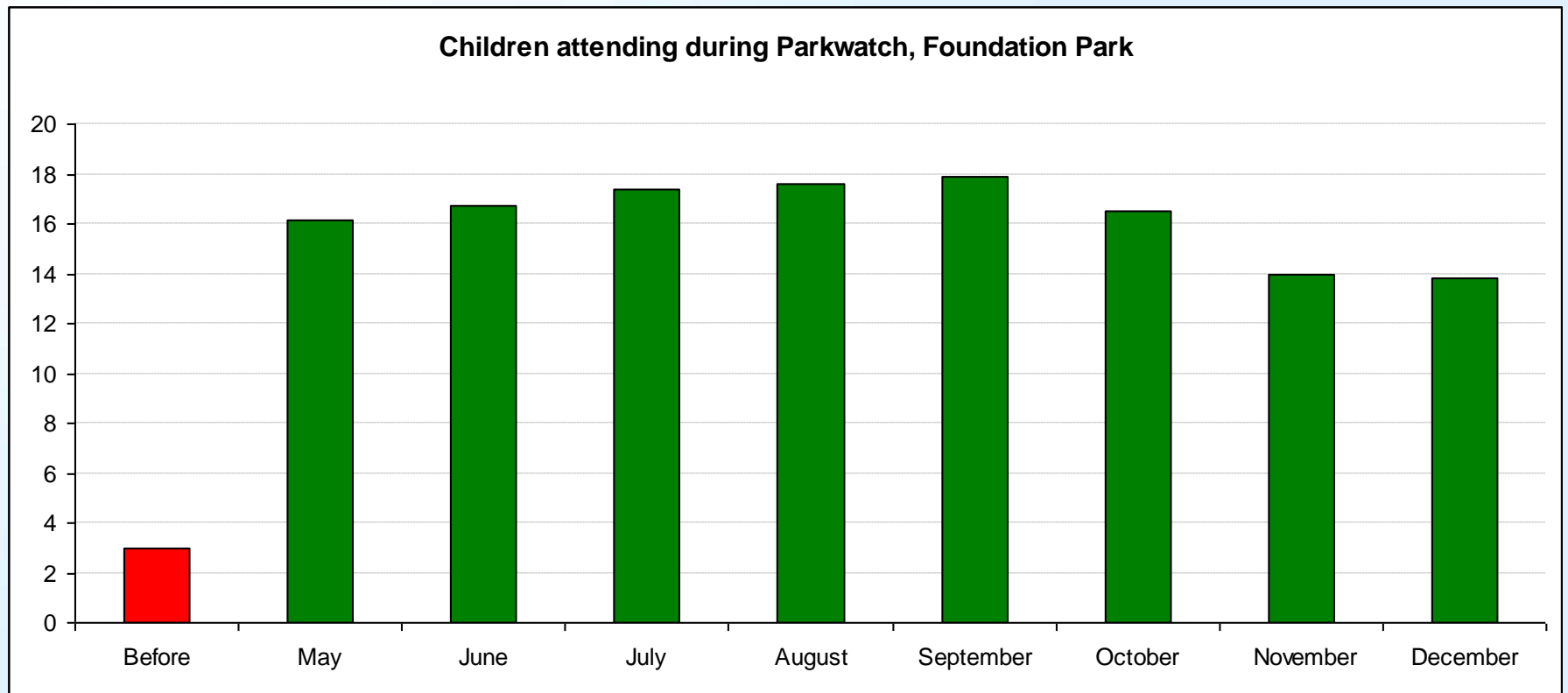
**Key Issue: Park Watch volunteers
Parent and/or community champions**

Participation – Mill Park



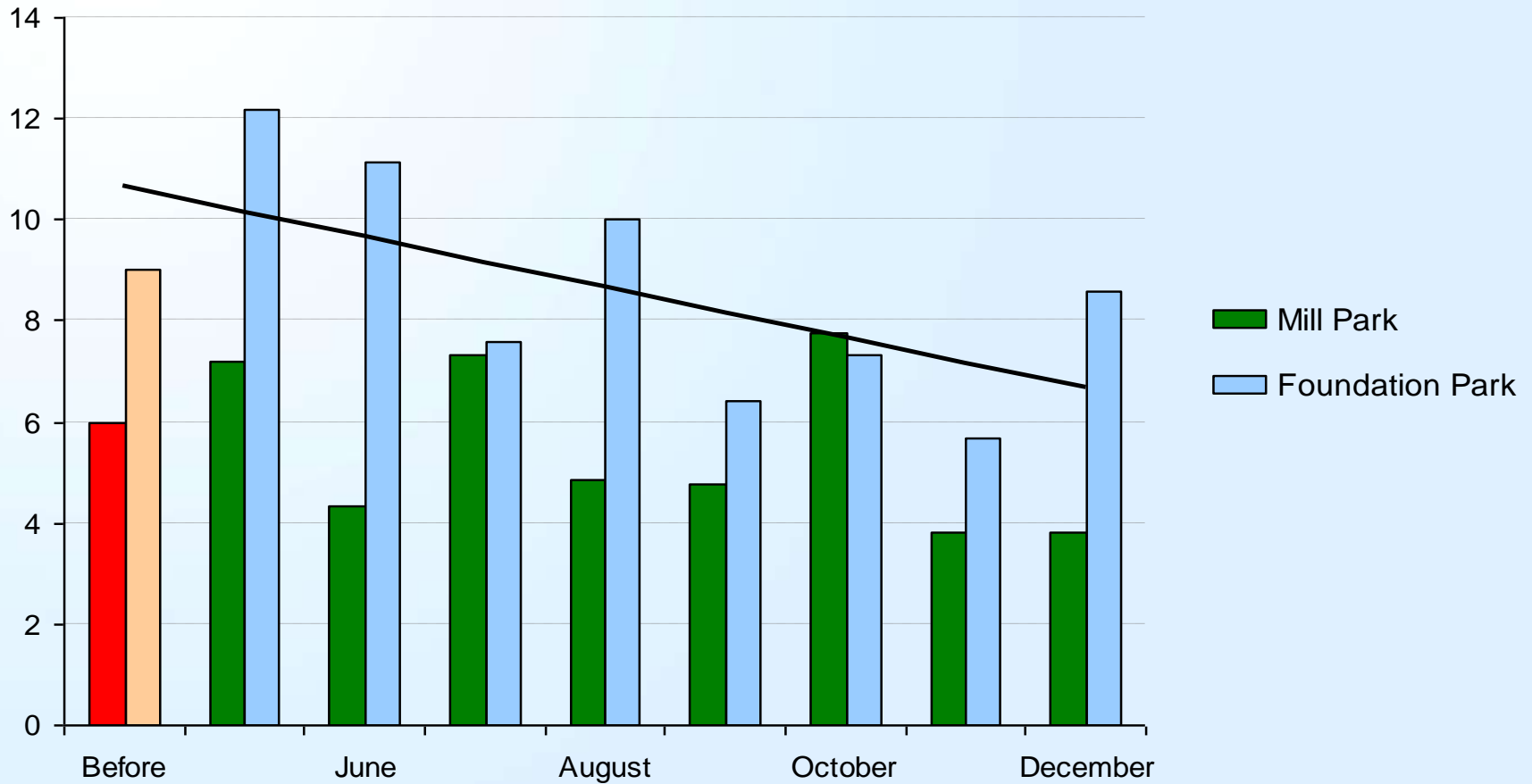
Results from pilot program in 2009

Participation – Foundation Park



Results from pilot program in 2009

Parents attendance – both parks



Factors Affecting Attendance

- ✓ Weather
- ✓ Coffee Van/Fruit and drinks
- ✓ Play Mates
- ✓ Word Of Mouth
- ✓ Other after-school activities



Parents Summary

'It brings children and parents together at a very nice location to chat and play.'

It feels like community.'



Challenges

- ✓ Didn't fit the grant box
- ✓ Lead-in time
- ✓ Council engagement/contact point
- ✓ Evaluation tools – children, parents



Surprises - Volunteers

- ✓ Volunteer Support
- ✓ Use of Roster System
- ✓ Park Coordinator
- ✓ Contact and Feedback



Other Surprises

- ✓ **Play things**



Other Successes

- ✓ Infrastructure – eco toilet, seating
- ✓ City of Albany Crime Prevention Plan
- ✓ Community engagement in planning
- ✓ Interest from other towns



In Summary

- ✓ Increased **physical activity** levels
- ✓ Reduced '**screen time**' after school
- ✓ Building **resilience** and **independence** in children
- ✓ Encouraged families to make greater use of their **local parks**
- ✓ **Connected** families and their community

FREE RANGE KIDS





A Challenge

‘Take our Children to the Park ...

And Leave Them There ‘

Day





Acknowledgements

- ✓ Park Watch Steering Committee
- ✓ Kate Hawkings and Julian Blogg
- ✓ Ken Matts – Weekender Newspaper
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- ✓ Rachael Thomas – Pre-emptive Strike
- ✓ Alan Smith – Bluebird Video productions



Thank you to our sponsors/supporters:



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