



SUMMER 2020, COVID-19 EDITION

PLAY CAPTAINS IN THE PARK

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BACKGROUND:

In 2017, Fab Youth Philly piloted a summer job program called the Play Captain Initiative. Coined after the Block Captain and Jr. Block Captain roles, the Play Captains Initiative is a workforce development and civic-engagement initiative with the mission to empower and train teens in leadership, playful learning and facilitation to make the Play Streets and neighborhoods of Philadelphia more playful.

Each year, the program has grown both in the number of Play Captains we are able to employ and the number of Playstreets we play on. In 2018, Fab Youth Philly was one of three organizations identified to partner around a literacy initiative called the Playstreets of Wonder. This project is funded by the William Penn Foundation and managed by The Mayor's Office of Education.*

Fab Youth Philly partnered with Temple Infant and Child Play Lab to develop an assessment tool to be used to make observations on the Playstreets and collect data about the impact the Play Captains are having in various areas related to playful learning. Temple also analyzes the data.

In fall of 2019, the William Penn Foundation invited Fab Youth Philly to envision and develop an expansion of the Play Captain Initiative providing playful learning activities in parks and playgrounds. After submitting a proposal, the world stood at a stand-still due to the Covid-19 pandemic, resulting in a recommendation from the Board to postpone the parks pilot.

Despite Covid-19, Fab Youth Philly was able to provide jobs to a small number of teens and run a small Play Captain program in Kensington this summer, though was not able to provide jobs, or run the program in West Philadelphia, the other neighborhood we've been working in for four years. We felt badly about having been away from the neighborhood for months and for not being able to hire teens and continue to foster the relationships we've been developing with the community. So, we decided after we finished programming in Kensington, we'd try the parks model we proposed to WPF in West Philadelphia.

*The Mayor's Office of Education is now housed in the Office of Children and Families and the Playstreets of Wonder project has been moved to be overseen by Philadelphia Parks and Recreation.



THE PLAY CAPTAIN INITIATIVE IS A WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND CIVIC-ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE WITH THE MISSION TO EMPOWER AND TRAIN TEENS IN LEADERSHIP, PLAYFUL LEARNING AND FACILITATION TO MAKE THE PLAY STREETS AND NEIGHBORHOODS OF PHILADELPHIA MORE PLAYFUL.

PLAY CAPTAINS PARKS & PLAYGROUNDS SUMMARY:

For one week at the end of August this summer, two adults from Fab Youth Philly and two Play Captains offered three hours of programming Monday-Friday, at a playground located in the West Philadelphia Promise Neighborhood (WPPN) located at 37th & Mt. Vernon Street. The two Play Captains are both teens who live in the WPPN and have previously worked as a Play Captain; one has been working with FYP since summer 2018, and the other since summer 2019. They both worked in our afterschool program, where we place Play Captains in early childhood centers in the WPPN to provide playful learning activities two days per week.

Goals, Summer 2020:

- Provide employment for teens in the West Philadelphia Promise Neighborhood
- Reconnect with our teens/Play Captains and residents in the West Philadelphia Promise Neighborhood; and meet new residents
- Test ideas associated with the pilot we proposed to William Penn Foundation
- Activate an otherwise quiet and sparsely utilized playground



APPROACH:



"OUR NUMBER ONE PRIORITY WAS
KEEPING EVERYONE SAFE WHILE
HAVING FUN"

Safety: Wear masks, wipe things down, have and distribute hand sanitizer. Made masks and had extras (an adult asked us for a mask because she said she wanted to come sit with us but had forgotten her own mask). Wash materials down at the end of each day. We also provided shade over the two picnic tables, making it more comfortable for people to sit out and enjoy the activities without being in the scorching sun.

Marketing and Outreach: We put post cards in mailboxes and on cars parked on the blocks surrounding the playground and on Playstreets we've work on previously. We also hung posters and made several social media posts. One of our funders, Drexel University West Philadelphia Promise Neighborhood also made and hung posters and shared information via their social media.

THEMES & ACTIVITIES:

Each week on the Playstreets, the Play Captains provided playful learning activities based on a theme (e.g., Philly Pride, Science, Nature, Carnival, etc.). We used the themes from the five weeks of programming on the Playstreets to guide the activities that were offered each day.

M	T	W	TH	F
Get to know you	Science	Olympics	Carnival	Block party

Each day the Play Captains planned:

- 1-3 craft activities based on the theme
- Books to read (based on the theme when possible)
- 5-8 playful learning and sports activities
- Special treats on days like Carnival (popcorn and prizes) and Block Party (water ice)

Daily Average Attendance:

Adults: 5

Children: 13



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WHAT WE OBSERVED AND WHAT WE LEARNED



- People heard about us from the post cards and the flyer made by our Drexel Partner (a few people even brought the post card with them!)
 - By the third day, children were arriving before we even set up and stayed for the entire three hours.
 - Parents and caregivers stayed with their child the whole time they were there, often more than an hour and they typically participated in arts and crafts activities with their child/ grandchild or did their own crafts activities with the materials we had.
 - Adults who did not know each other, sometimes exchanged contact information with each other, or pointed out where they lived.
 - Providing shade and seating made it possible for people of all ages to participate in crafts and science activities, as well as protect people from the late afternoon heat.
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AT THIS PARTICULAR PLAYGROUND, WE ENVISION A MORE CURATED EXPERIENCE FOR VISITORS, BUILDING FROM THE CORE GOALS OF THE PLAY CAPTAIN INITIATIVE- MAKING PLAYSTREETS AND NEIGHBORHOODS MORE PLAYFUL.

Provide daily programming Monday-Friday from 3pm-7:30pm. This allows children to go to summer camp, to enjoy neighboring Playstreets, which end at 4pm, and it allows parents coming home from work to stop by and play with their child/ren before dinner and for children to come back out after dinner for a last round of play. This approach also allows us to showcase teens doing positive things in playgrounds and parks. In nearly 30 playgrounds or parks throughout Philadelphia are sonic devices called "Mosquito Machines" that emit a high-pitched sound designed to irritate young people so they will not gather in the playgrounds or parks.

Partner with Neighborhood Agencies to Bring More Programming. There is a section in the park where agencies could set up a table and provide information around a host of things like: Blood pressure screening, voting information, etc.

On the far side of the playground is a basketball court and two grassy areas across the street. We envision partnering with sports-based youth development programs and sports teams to offer tournaments and weekly games, for example: Workout Wednesdays (Zumba or boot camp), Three on Three (basketball) Thursdays, and Flag Football Fridays.

PROVIDE A SPECIAL SECTION FOR ADULTS.

While we loved seeing parents and caregivers interacting with their child making arts and crafts, we asked them if they'd like to do more adult activities if provided and they said "yes!".

In this particular playground, we can build an adult section around a set of benches that are already there by adding a few folding tables with daily activities led by other partners; one person said she'd like to learn how to crochet and would love to take part in line dancing. A schedule for adults could look like:

SAMPLE ADULT SCHEDULE

M	T	W	TH	F
Book Club	Crochet	Line Dancing	Arts & Crafts	Poetry

We plan to survey adults this fall to learn more about what they would like and like to do. It could be that having a person reviewing resumes on Wednesdays may be of interest to people, or playing dominoes or card games, for example. Provide WIFI via hotspots so adults can do work, read, use the internet while their child plays.



CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

We are glad to have had the opportunity to test some of the ideas we originally proposed to WPF in our proposal and learned a lot in a short amount of time. We plan to keep testing and learning this fall in the following ways:

We are going to offer programming in the playground on Tuesday afternoons from 3:30-5:30pm and will provide weekend play activities on three dates between September and the end of October.

We welcome the opportunity to roll out a more robust version of the Play Captains in the Parks pilot and hopeful for the opportunity to revisit our proposal to the foundation.



sample marketing materials

