

Designing with Children

Spark Park

Snug and Outdoor's work, led by Hattie and Tim Coppard, is primarily focused on '*making creative playgrounds*', often carried out via facilitation and mediation for and between clients and architects. The work almost always uses play and embodied design as tools to physically engage children and young people in aspects of spatial design processes. Spark Park at Houndwell Park Southampton was designed for Southampton City Council, with LDA as the landscape architects. It was initiated in 2007 as a pioneering example of a playground that addresses issues of accessibility and inclusive play for children and young people with every day and complex needs.

Motivation

Snug and Outdoor's ethos is one in which their work with children is seen as: '*creative consultation and design process that opens up new possibilities and leads to original and welcoming play environments*'. Both the Snug and Outdoor team's work and the products they create illustrate that they value the importance and ability of children to have some control over how they shape their play environments; both during a design process and as an on-going state of play. Hattie Coppard of Snug and Outdoor states that their work uses '*a variety of techniques that encourage children to think beyond their initial assumptions and imagine something new. We frequently work with writers and artists and many projects involve the use of large-scale objects, music, physical interventions. The aim is to develop an understanding of what children want in order that something really engaging and exciting can be created*'.

Children's involvement

The Spark Park design process involved children and teenagers with physical disabilities and complex needs who took on expert consultant and explorative trailblazing roles. Children between 5 and 16 years, from two special schools, took part in four day-long creative and experimental workshops. Additionally, two Mencap groups positioned the 11-18 year old

What

Playground

Where

Southampton, United Kingdom

Age

5-18

Group Size

200+

Project Stage

Design Development, In Use

Children's Roles

Clients, Expert Consultants, Trailblazers

Timescale

2007-2008 (4 day long workshops; 2 additional workshops)

Partners

Hattie Coppard (Designer)

Tim Coppard (Designer)

Southampton City Council (Client)

Chris Meade (Poet)

Children from Cedar Special School (Participants)

Children from Ridgeway House Special School (Participants)

young people as 'experts in their own lives'; they were creatively engaged in testing out play materials, using their own means of movement and play.

Outputs and outcomes

As yet, Spark Park remains unbuilt. One output of the work with children is a video about the few days when Snug and Outdoor worked with poet Chris Meade and children and staff at Cedar Special School and Ridgeway House Special School in Southampton. The designs created so far have been passed onto Groundwork Solent who hope to secure funding to start developing the park.

Resources

Neighbourhood Services Division and Key Central Parks Stakeholders (January 2010) 'Southampton City Council's Central Parks Management Plan 2010-2013'. Online. Available: http://www.southampton.gov.uk/Images/Mgmt%20plan%20Central%202010_tcm46-255399.pdf (accessed 3 December 2013).

Snug and Outdoor 'Spark Park'

<http://www.snugandoutdoor.co.uk/publicspace/sparkparkvid.html> (accessed 28 March 2013).

Snug and Outdoor <http://www.snugandoutdoor.co.uk/index.html> (accessed 28 March 2013).



Children's design for Spark Park involved them in roles as physical trailblazers. Courtesy: Snug & Outdoor