

London gets its first 'play quarter'

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In 2011 London started its Play Streets journey. Using existing legislation, residents of a street could come together and agree with their council a time slot to close their street to through traffic.

Typically three hours long and often on a Sunday afternoon or perhaps Friday after the school week, children were free to explore tarmac that until then had been the preserve of anonymous passers-by sitting in their cars.

And thus a micro community was born: children discovered other children on their own street, building links which often developed into fully fledged friendships with follow up house-to-house visits.

Adults too discovered neighbours who became true neighbours, colleagues and friends. A street came to life and even if all too briefly closed the friendship bonds endured and built the streets' social capital. More social events and more looking out for each other and the children of the street emerged.

Now with two-thirds of London boroughs having at least one Play Street, the next stage is about to unfold – Play Quarters. What works in one street should work just as well in a wider area of many streets, parks and schools.

Palmers Green in north London, an area with several established Play Streets and a spectrum of community-centric events that have developed over the last few years, has been chosen to pilot Play Quarters for London. A dedicated leader will be in place from early in 2017, funded by the Big Lottery, under the direction of the charity London Play to work some magic.

So what can Palms Green expect to see?

- Certainly more Play Streets and these will be 'joined up' with a schedule so children in one street can build new friendships with children in nearby streets;
- Safe walking routes to the park will be developed on weekends with walk groups led by the dedicated leader. Local parents have already formed a group to enhance and expand the playground;
- An app will map out local play streets, safe walking routes and supportive retailers;
- Local retailers and food outlets will be encouraged to develop a discount scheme on healthy eating options for local children;
- Shops will have signs highlighting them as Play Quarter partners so showing children that the whole community has their wellbeing in mind;
- 'Play and childhood' awareness sessions will be delivered for the public service workforce – street cleaners, traffic wardens, bus drivers, the local police and more to ensure the area is 'child ready'.

And there will be work with the local school to introduce play street sessions at the start and end of the day and to reduce school run traffic to the minimum.

The onus is on today's adult Londoners to care about the future of all the capital's 1.8 million children. The Play Quarter project encourages a collective response to each child's journey to adulthood and ultimately aims for children to become adult Londoners who care about the generation behind them. It will be the catalyst for a chain reaction, which puts heart into the city, starting with a friendly neighbourhood in north London.

- **Find out more at London Play**

Source: <http://newstartmag.co.uk/articles/london-gets-its-first-play-quarter/>