

Play Rangers - a brief history

'An empty crisp packet tumbles across the dusty path, a mother hurries her child behind the safety of a closed door, the only sound is the creak of a swing on its hinges. On the horizon two figures appear, they stride confidently into the park, unslung their rucksacks and wait. The play rangers have arrived.'

This scene is being repeated across the country, but what are play rangers, why are they here, what is their role, and when will they leave? In 2003 there were plenty of parks and open spaces, but no one playing in them. Lots of children had said in various surveys around the UK that they really wanted to be out playing in the parks, however, most of them weren't getting out to play. The main reason for this was fear. Parents were frightened to let their children out, children were frightened of older children, and adults were frightened of the children that were out. Something was needed to break this cycle – to form a bridge between the present state of underuse and a future where parks are active, social and playful places. Play Ranging was born.....



Play rangers have the potential to bring about lasting improvements to the quality of parks and open space and the way communities came together in them. A play ranger role includes elements of youth outreach, community development, participation and environmental park ranger work within the job. They need to know how to make the best use of the natural environment for play, how to make difficult judgements on appropriate risk taking and how to be catalysts for play without becoming either entertainers or childminders. They also need to be able to make the case for play in formal meetings and to advocate on children and young people's behalf to agencies.

In an ideal future, a successful park will not permanently need play rangers - the community will use the park because they like it, because it is the place for all ages to go, to meet, to hang out, to chat, to have a coffee and to exercise. Children will feel secure and welcome in a vibrant, well-used social space that meets all their play needs and where they are informally overseen by adults. The journey to the ideal future needs to begin somewhere, the right place to start is to get as many children as possible playing in our parks and play rangers are the ones who can make this happen.

'A boy on a BMX bike skids to a halt at the base of the new track, behind him a group of teenagers are having a game of football using new goalposts, he calls to his mum who is sitting on a new bench talking to her friends under the new cherry trees. Behind her two figures pick up their rucksacks and quietly leave, moving on to a new range, their job done.'