



Violet Park Youth Engagement Project Report

*A Collaboration between Boulder Meadows and Ponderosa Community
Youth & Caregivers, City of Boulder's Parks and Recreation
Department, and Growing Up Boulder*

Written by: Growing Up Boulder
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“When we come together, we create community and nature is our mother. The goal is to protect nature. It’s very important to have children involved in the beginning of making this new park.”

—Boulder Meadows resident

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Project Overview

About Growing Up Boulder

Growing Up Boulder (GUB) is a nonprofit program based in Boulder, CO. It launched in the spring of 2009 as a partnership between the University of Colorado, the City of Boulder, Boulder Valley School District, State Senator Dorothy Rupert, local nonprofits and businesses, and children and youth from ages 0-18. GUB's vision is to cultivate vibrant communities where all young people thrive. GUB's mission is to center young people's rights, voices and agency to advance equitable and sustainable communities for all. Since its inception, GUB has engaged more than 8,000 young people on more than 100 projects. Currently, Growing Up Boulder and the City of Boulder are partnering with UNICEF USA to work towards formal recognition of Boulder as a [Child Friendly City](#). See GUB's [website](#) for more details.

About City of Boulder's Parks and Recreation Department

The Parks and Recreation Department promotes the health and well-being of the entire Boulder community by collaboratively providing high-quality parks, facilities, and programs. Their mission will be accomplished through sustainable practices, partnerships, continuous improvement and a focus on the common good, service excellence and with health at the core of all they do. Visit their [website](#) to learn more.¹

Violet Park Youth Engagement Project Description

Growing Up Boulder (GUB) engaged with the City of Boulder Parks and Recreation Department to facilitate two community engagement sessions aimed at understanding the wishes of the Boulder Meadows Manufactured Home Community's children, youth, and caregivers regarding the future development of the park at Violet (temporarily called Violet Park). The two events included a Neighborhood Gathering of Family, Friends, and Neighbors (FFNs) of young children and a What's Up Boulder (WUB) event at Violet Park. Despite lower than anticipated attendance at both events, GUB received many ideas and preferences specific to the future park. Those who did attend were actively engaged and enthusiastic about communicating their ideas and participating in activities.



¹ <https://bouldercolorado.gov/government/departments/parks-recreation>

By the Numbers (both engagements)

- 38 Children and youth, ages 0-18
- 18 Caregivers
- 2 Community Connectors
- 2 City staff
- 6 Growing Up Boulder staff



Photo by Cathy Hill

During the Neighborhood Gathering, children, youth, and caregivers from Boulder Meadows and Ponderosa communities share their ideas for preferred activities for the future park



Photo by Erin Saunders



Photo by Darcy Kitching

At the What's Up Boulder Event, children participate in Nature Play activities and youth share their ideas for Violet Park by making dream banners



Photo by Cathy Hill

Summary of Findings

The overall themes for *both engagements*, and the community values underpinning the feedback, are listed below:

Overall Themes

- Commitment to and enjoyment of nature, open space, walking trails, and wildlife
- Requests for active play, such as climbing, jumping, sliding, trampolining, swinging, ziplining, and enjoying play structures
- Strong interest in water and creek play, with safe access to the creek using things like a bridge and stepping stones to cross the creek and seating nearby for adults
- Desire for educational and community programs to share and learn new things
- Gathering spaces for meeting friends, family for celebrating and for forming new friendships
- Spaces where everyone can come, relax, and have fun
- Adults are interested in maintaining health through exercise, getting fit, and eating well (with a place to grow food)

Overall Community Values

- Nature and spending time in nature
- Play
- Community and kinship
- Accessibility
- Inclusivity

“I want to see trees, ladders to climb, water to play, and a slide”

– Boulder Meadows youth

Neighborhood Gathering - August 11, 2023

By the Numbers

Total participants: 13

- 4 children, ages 4-6 years old (1 Latino, 3 Nepalese)
- 1 Nepalese youth
- 1 infant
- 6 parents; 1 grandparent

Total staff: 9

- 1 Parks and Rec staff
- 4 GUB staff
- 2 Community Connectors
- 2 National Wildlife Federation Staff

Description

The purpose of the Neighborhood Gathering was to learn from young children and their caregivers about their wishes and preferences of activities for the future park through the use of a Visual Preference Activity. There was a focus on outreach to the Latino and Nepalese Friends, Family, and Neighbors (FFNs) of the Boulder Meadows and Ponderosa Manufactured Home Communities.

Engagement Data

Summary of Findings:

- Children, youth and adults were excited about being in the park space, participating in activities, and having a voice in the development of the new park.
- Children, youth, and adults were most interested in getting fit. There was interest in adult exercise activities where children were nearby playing and safe.
- There was interest in having a (free) gathering place where the neighborhood could host events to share and learn new skills (ie. sewing, dancing, cultural dancing), where ALL people are welcome.
- There was verbal interest in a community place to grow food, although this did not stand out on the Visual Preference Activity.
- At the end of the engagement, the children (from 2 cultures) spontaneously started playing with each other, and the adults noted that language is not a barrier for children. Adults asked, “How can we (adults) learn from children?”

Visual Preference Survey:

A Visual Preference Survey is an activity that asks children, youth, and caregivers to rate the types of activities they would like to participate in a given space; in this case at the future park. Posters with images and names of activities were shown, and once the participants had a chance to see and understand all of the choices, they were asked 2 specific questions. Then they voted with 3 green dots and 3 blue dots.

- With the green dots, participants were asked, “What would young people (early childhood age) like to do?” The children thought about what they would like to do while the youth and adults voted for things they thought their kids and other young people would like to do at the park.
- With the blue dots, participants were asked, “What activities would you like to do with your family or friends?”

“When the children are playing, language is not a barrier for them! How can we adults learn to come together as a community and learn from each other?”

– Boulder Meadows resident

Data from Visual Preference Survey:

1. Getting Fit (16 dots)
2. Water Play (11 dots; 2 way tie)
3. Spending Time Together (11 dots)
4. Climbing (8 dots; 3 way tie)
5. Going Fast (8 dots)
6. Going Slow (8 dots)
7. Music, Art, Dance (6 dots)
8. Food (5 dots)
9. Games (3 dots; 2 way tie)
10. Nature Play (3 dots)



*Children, Youth, and Caregivers engage in a Visual Preference Survey
Photo By Erin Saunders*

Park Activities	Children	Family
Nature Play	2	1
Climbing	4	4
Going Fast	5	3
Getting Fit	9	7
Music, Dance, Art	2	3
Water Play	8	3
Games	0	2
Going Slow	4	3
Spending Time Together	6	5
Food	1	4

What's Up Boulder Event - September 10, 2023

By the Numbers

- 32 children and youth (ages 0-18)
- 11 adults
- 1 City staff members
- 5 GUB staff

“I want to see children playing, a slide that looks like trees, a swing from the trees, monkey bars and a river”.

—Boulder Meadows youth

Description

The purpose of Growing Up Boulder’s participation in the What’s Up Boulder event was to engage with the Violet Park neighboring community to understand how children, youth, and their caregivers use the park currently (if they do), learning what they think is special about the space, what their dreams are for the future park, and to observe children and youth play interests using nature play materials and activities. GUB also aimed to understand caregivers’ interest in future nature-based programs at the park and ask what they would want to do in the space, including what they might like to celebrate. GUB staff led two stations: a Nature Play station and a Storytelling Tree station. In the Nature Play area, there were multiple activities set up. Some staff facilitated activities, while other staff observed how children played with the materials offered (no staff). At the Storytelling Tree, children, teens and caregivers used colorful markers to draw their dreams for the future Violet Park on 10’x10” fabric banners. Participants were also asked three questions related to their current experiences using the park.



*What’s Up Boulder participants make models of their dream park in Park as Play
Photo by Erin Saunders*

Engagement Data

This section describes the two stations, and highlights the data collected at each of the activities that GUB staff facilitated.

Nature Play Station Description:

The purpose of the Nature Play Area was to understand how children and youth use the park currently and observe their play interests by offering nature play materials and collecting data where and how children and youth engaged. Staff was also hoping to gauge caregiver’s interest in nature-based programs at the park, but there wasn’t sufficient adult participation from the neighborhood to do so. Staff utilized the “Park as Play” activity to gather specific information about what children and youth hope for the future park.

Data from Nature Play Behavior Observation:

Nature Play Activity	Number of Children
Park As Play	15
Nature Art- Create Fairies and Gnomes	9
Nature Art- Watercolor Painting	6
Grasshopper Catching	10
Dirt Kitchen	0
Fairy and Gnome Houses	6
Fort Building	4

Themes from Nature Play Station:

- Children and youth were engaged and excited about most of the nature play activities offered. They preferred the creative and active qualities within the activities, which aligns with the age group that participated (mostly 6-12 years old).
- Many people who participated in Nature Play (or were simply walking down the trail) noted that they liked the bridges and the art tables that the Parks and Rec staff made for the event; everyone shared that they hoped these features will remain at the park.
- Several caregivers mentioned wanting gardens, flowers, fruit trees, and maintaining the wildlife corridor.

Summary of Community Response to Nature Play Activities:

- **Park as Play** was the most popular activity (both in terms of numbers and time spent on the activity) for children and youth, and GUB staff received meaningful feedback from users about what they want as their future dream park. Children created models using natural materials, and GUB staff documented their ideas for their dream park through their own words. From this activity, we learned that young people are interested in trees at the park, making sure ALL children can enjoy it, and in nature play, including: water and creek play, active play (like climbing, sliding, swinging), and risk taking play (like ziplining and jumping across rocks). Data from this activity can be found in the appendix.



Photo by Darcy Kitching

- **Grasshopper Catching** was the second most popular activity. Children were simply offered nets, and even though there weren't a lot of grasshoppers (due to the cold weather), children spent a lot of time engaged in this activity and did have success!



Photo by Erin Saunders



Photo by Darcy Kitching

- **Building in Nature**, including a fort and fairy houses, was the third most popular activity. In the fairy house building area, we observed children both building homes and playing with their wooden fairies and gnomes in the houses (imaginary play).

- **Nature Art**, especially the craft of making fairies and gnomes, also received interest and participation. Children decorated wooden figures, making them into a fairy or gnome that they could then play with and take home. Children also were offered watercolor painting as an additional activity, but this proved less popular.



Photo by Luciana Escribens

- **Digging and the Mud Kitchen**, an activity geared for early childhood, received no participation. GUB staff believe this was because there was only one child under the age of 5, and also because there wasn't any water in the creekbed. If the event was held a few weeks earlier, we believe this activity would have proved to be more enticing.

Storytelling Tree Station Description:

Under the large oak tree in the center of the park, GUB staff set up the Park Dream Banner activity with the purpose of collecting information about what children, youth, and their caregivers wish for the future park. Participants used permanent, colored markers to draw their wishes on 10" x 10" fabric squares. The activity was inspired by Tibetan prayer flags, and completed banners were hung up on string around the oak tree. Adjacent to the Dream Banner activity, three questions written on flip chart paper were available for participants to answer.



Storytelling Tree area with Dream Banners. Photo by Cathy Hill



Teens visit the Storytelling Tree station and draw their wishes for the future park. Photo by Cathy Hill



Children and youth focus on their Dream Banner ideas. Photo by Cathy Hill

Park Dream Banner Activity Findings:

- *Feelings:* Children, teens and adults want to have a future park where they feel at peace, at home, connected to nature, loved, and where they can enjoy the outdoors.
- *Children:* want to walk in nature, enjoy nature and relax in nature. They are interested in community programs and learning new things. They want to play, laugh, and share at the park. They especially want to have opportunities to climb. They are committed to protecting wildlife.
- *Teens:* want people of all ages to be able to access and enjoy the park. They envision a nature-based playground (keep it green!) with accessibility to trails, play structures, swings, and seating throughout the park. An all-seasons covered structure is important to them as are places to hang out and places to hammock. They also want programs where they can learn new skills.
- *Adults:* wish to have a future park that respects nature and wildlife in its current state, and they want the park to continue to be pet-friendly. Gathering and community spaces are important to adults as are programs and learning labs. Adults desire a playground space for their children; a safe place where children can experience some freedom and independence exploring nature. One adult envisioned leadership opportunities for interested teens to be paid to help create the future park.

“The park is a special place to connect with nature, learn, play, experience native pollinator plants, wildlife, community gardens, and connect in community.

Feelings: At peace. At home. Connected. Loved.”

—Teen participant at the Storytelling Tree station



Additional samples in the appendix. Sample adult banner, "Attention and freedom for the children." Photos by Cathy Hill



Sample children's Dream Banners: "Read, laugh, play, learn..." and "Lots of greenery, open areas to hang out, stepping stones across the creek." Photos by Cathy Hill

Questions on Flip Chart Findings:

Question 1: Tell us what you think?

- It (the park) works. Don't fix it!
- Keep wildlife coming to the park (fox, deer, ducks, etc.)
- This abandoned place is occasionally occupied by homeless people and is very dark. Two years ago there was a big bear and it was in an unsafe place (Eva lugar abandonado, ocupado en ocasiones por homeless y es muy oscuro. Hace dos años había un oso grande y si era un lugar inseguro).

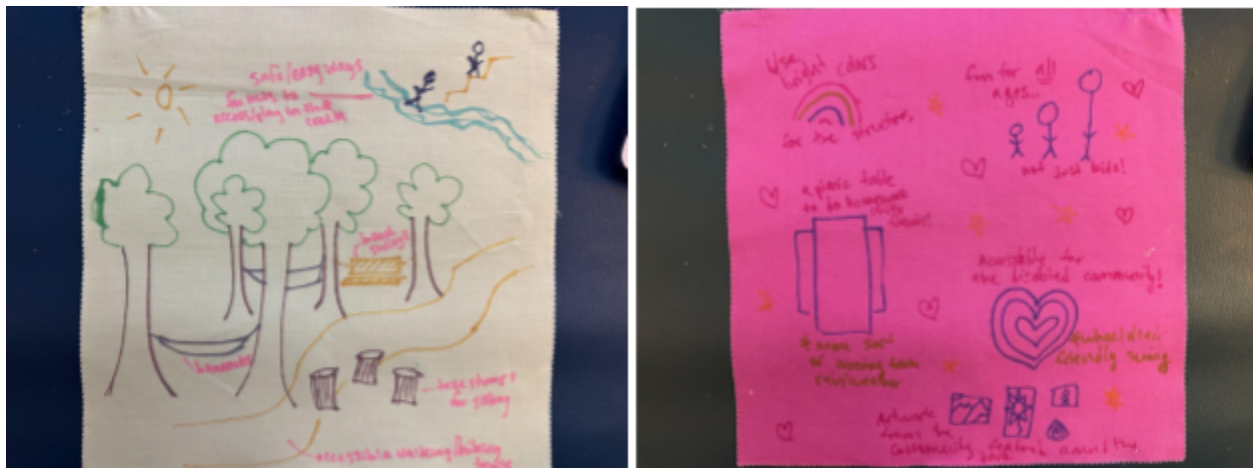
Question 2: What do you like to do here?

- I like to watch the many bird species (flicker, jays, doves, warblers, hawks and many more) and other animals (deer, moms and fawns, antlered bucks, and sometimes fox and rabbits).
- Walking the paths
- Draw
- Play in the water; swim and take our shoes off

- The surprise when seeing wild deer grazing 10 feet from me—that is rare.

Question 3: How is this place special to you?

- This park is close to my home
- I like animals a lot
- This place is park of the old rural North Boulder area...now everyone can access and enjoy this beautiful outdoor space
- It is special because it is quiet and used by many animals; a sanctuary



Samples from teens, "Safe/easy ways to access the creek, accessible walking/hiking trails..." and "Fun for all ages, wheelchair-friendly swing, covered area for rain and weather, artwork from the community featured around the park..." Photos by Cathy Hill

GUB Staff Engagement Reflections

Below are some GUB team reflections about the project:

1. Both events had lower participation than anticipated. GUB staff feel it will be beneficial to continue to engage the community as the park is designed and activated with programs. That said, the feedback we received was consistent with other projects that asked children and youth about park preferences.
2. Most of the children and youth at WUB were between the ages of 6-12 years old, so we didn't fully have the opportunity to observe how our youngest community members engage in nature play. GUB staff feel it would be beneficial to continue to observe and learn from the early childhood age group and their caregivers about their preferences for the park.
3. To understand if caregivers want nature-based programming, GUB staff believe that having repeated experiences with the same small groups of children and their caregivers would be helpful to build trust and build engagement.

Conclusion

In conclusion, children, youth, and their caregivers who participated in the two Violet Park events, shared their experiences and ideas for the new park, including:

- Commitment to and enjoyment of nature
- Requests for active play
- Strong interest in water and creek play
- Desire for educational and community programs
- Gathering spaces where everyone can come, relax, and have fun
- Adults are interested in maintaining health through exercise, getting fit, and eating well



GUB staff engage with children and youth from the Boulder Meadows neighborhood. Photo by Cathy Hill

Partners and Appreciation

GUB would like to thank our partners at the City of Boulder for their collaboration on this project. We are grateful to the City team for all their efforts, especially in their preparation of the What's Up Boulder event. City staff went above and beyond to ready the park spaces to be inviting to children, including building bridges and tables for the nature play activities. Additionally, we send our heartfelt thanks to the children, youth and caregivers/staff who attended these events and shared their experiences and opinions about the future Violet Park with us.

- Growing Up Boulder Staff/Team
 - Cathy Hill, Education Director
 - Erin Saunders, Program Director
 - Jetzabel Martinez, Bilingual Educator
 - Luciana Escribens, Volunteer
 - Mara Mintzer, Executive Director
 - Nicole Sager, Educational Consultant
- City of Boulder Staff/Team
 - Curry Rosato, Education Manager, Open Space and Mountain Parks Dept
 - Deryn Wagner, Senior Landscape Architect, Parks and Recreation Dept
 - Leidy Pineda Flores, Bilingual Education & Outreach Sr. Representative, Open Space and Mountain Parks Dept
 - Mark Davison, Senior Planning Manager, Parks and Recreation Dept

Appendix

1. [Photos from Neighborhood Gathering](#)
2. [Photos from What's Up Boulder Event](#)
3. [Data from Park as Play Activity](#)
4. [Park as Play Designs by Youth](#)
5. [Violet Park Dream Banner Photos](#)