

# Designing with Children

## Spaceshaper 9-14

Spaceshaper 9-14 is a workshop-based toolkit developed to engage young people in activities to improve their local environments. It follows the success of the original Spaceshaper, which is a practical toolkit measuring the quality of a public space before planning changes for improvement. Both toolkits are now being used nationally and internationally offering examples of good practice methods in community consultation on the development of public spaces.

In this project, Tilbury's Daisy Fields had undergone some important developments, including new paths and play equipment. The Spaceshaper 9-14 project enabled opportunities for further improvements; this time thanks to children's inputs. The goal was to stimulate design ideas for Daisy Fields.

### Motivation

The project aimed to give children and young people with disabilities a vehicle through which to express their voices about the environment. This reflects the broader ethos of Architecture Centres in engaging children and young people in design, the goal being to involve them in the process of improving their local spaces through a range of hands-on activities and facilitated discussion. Architecture Centres seek to develop children and young people, alongside others, as an expert client group and design advocates.

### Children's involvement

Spaceshaper 9-14 engages children in structured, hands-on activities and facilitated discussion, in such a way that the gathered data can directly contribute towards improving a space as part of a wider consultation process. Children are asked to give their views on eight themes: access, use, other people, maintenance, environment, design and appearance, community, 'you'. They vote on questions related to each one of these themes and the outcomes feed into a software package that illustrates their views and promotes debate. Indoor and outdoor activities, such as photography, card games, role-playing and drawing support all children in contributing and feeling included in the process, depending on their

#### What

Place space development

#### Where

Tilbury, Essex, United Kingdom

#### Age

9-14

#### Group Size

16

#### Project Stage

Brief, Concept

#### Children's Roles

Advocates for Change, Expert Consultants

#### Timescale

December 2009

#### Partners

The Architecture Centre (Bristol, Beam)  
(Facilitation)

Kent Architecture Centre (Facilitation)

Thurrock Council (Client)

Local children in Essex (Participants)

interests.

For the Daisy Fields project, a half-day workshop took place that involved nine young people with a range of disabilities. Sylvia Yates, Play Strategy Manager at Thurrock Council, commented that *'the visit was the absolute focus and the observations and comments picked up on site were really important.'* She also expressed her great enthusiasm at children's contributions: *'Children are very astute at coming up with solutions, and if they are then involved with resulting actions they can take ownership of that space.'*

## Outputs and outcomes

The Spaceshaper 9-14 software displayed the group's views on the eight themes, including access and community. Although children seemed to enjoy Daisy Fields, access was a problematic issue for wheelchair users. The results, which showed an acknowledgement of the variety of play equipment, pointed however to the lack of a shelter. The ideas developed through the consultation process included a swing for wheelchair users, a 'faster, higher, harder' conventional swing and improved information on site showing the nearest toilet.

Sylvia Yates was pleased that: *'Spaceshaper 9-14 was well prepared and provided a structure to enable children to think about how improvements could be made.'* Children's views were to be taken on board to shape forthcoming changes at Daisy Fields.

## Resources

The Architecture Centre, 'Spaceshaper 9-14'

<http://www.architecturecentre.co.uk/spaceshaper-9-14> (accessed online 5 September 2013).

The Architecture Centre, 'Spaceshaper - Involving young people in improving their neighbourhoods – Daisy Fields, Tilbury, Essex'

<http://www.architecturecentre.co.uk/assets/files/Daisy%20Fields,%20Tilbury,%20Essex.pdf> (accessed 5 September 2013).

The Architecture Centre, 'Spaceshaper – Involving young people in improving their neighbourhoods – How does Spaceshaper 9-14 work?'

<http://www.architecturecentre.co.uk/assets/files/education/How%20does%20Spaceshaper%209-14%20work.pdf> (accessed 5 September 2013).



*Spaceshaper 9-14 workshop, Greville Smyth Park, Bristol.  
Courtesy: Amy Harrison, The Architecture Centre, Bristol*

