Charity’s campaign to reimagine parks for the 200,000 people in Bristol & Bath shut out

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Bristol and Bath-based charity, Your Park Bristol & Bath, is marking its fifth anniversary with the launch of an ambitious 12-month campaign to reimagine the two cities’ parks and green spaces and tackle the barriers that it believes means around a third of the local population is prevented from being able to access or fully enjoy them.

Your Park Bristol & Bath says the majority of the c. 580 parks and green spaces across the two cities are not inclusively designed, which significantly impacts access to them – in particular, for Disabled people and carers, women and girls, minority ethnic groups, and people in low income areas.

According to the charity, the three key factors preventing people from having the confidence or ability to get out into their local parks are physical accessibility, personal safety and mental wellbeing.

Its *Reimagining Parks* campaign, which launches on 9 May, aims to start leading the change, and has set itself a huge ambition for everyone in Bristol and Bath to have a park that is accessible to them within a ten-minute reach of where they live, work or study. That means making them physically accessible for Disabled people and their carers, designed with the safety and enjoyment of women and girls in mind, and used to support people with mental health issues.

It is kicking off the 12-month campaign with a six week £30k fundraising challenge to enable it to get initial work underway in both cities, but it hopes to attract further funding beyond that to help it deliver all of its targets. All donations during this period will be matched by Aviva.

> Charlee Bennett, chief executive of YPBB, says: “Parks are nature-rich, free to use, community assets that are good for everyone’s mental and physical health, but they have historically been designed through a very narrow lens. That means there are literally hundreds of thousands of people in our two cities – and millions beyond – who feel unable to make the most of their local green spaces.
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> “The statistics are horrifying for people who don’t have sufficient access to nature – for example, people growing up with little green space around them are 55% more likely to develop psychiatric disorders in later life, at greater risk of things like depression, anxiety, and obesity, to name just a few things.
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> “It’s actually not difficult to make parks more accessible – it involves simple measures like making information available better, creating wheelchair-friendly access, having accessible toilets, clear sight lines for safety, introducing inclusive activities such as sensory walks and wellbeing activities. Unfortunately, many of these measures are not possible within the shrinking budgets that local authorities, who are responsible for the basic maintenance of parks, have available to them.
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> “Our Reimagining Parks campaign is not just changing landscapes, it’s fostering inclusivity, safety and wellbeing. This is a huge campaign for a small charity like ours to take on, but through our work with local communities over the last five years, we are absolutely clear on what needs to be done and we are determined to start delivering the changes now.”

Key targets for the year include:

- Creating one exemplar park in both Bristol and Bath that is fully accessible to cater for all physical disabilities and differences;
- Developing a programme of accessible and enjoyable activities, such as sensory walks, supported play sessions, family activities and accessible gardening, in every neighbourhood in Bristol and Bath to support 2,000 people;
- Having one exemplar park in each city redesigned by a woman, with safety in mind and the introduction of female-focused activities and facilities.
- Expanding its *Roots to Wellbeing** GP-referral programme for people with mental health issues to

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two new areas of health deprivation in Bristol and Bath, to support 100 people each year.

- Adapting the *Roots to Wellbeing* programme to provide regular out of hours activities, such as a summer programme of community gardening, and activities for families, to support 100 people in employment and 100 young people struggling with their mental or physical health.

The campaign is being officially launched on 9 May at Hartcliffe Millennium Green, which is in a part of Bristol recognised as having one of the highest rates of health deprivation, green space deprivation and Disabled residents. YPBB has been working with the community in Hartcliffe for the past two years and has just completed an accessibility assessment with local Disabled people and carers, laying the groundwork for actionable plans to improve accessibility.

Whilst the maintenance of parks in both cities is the responsibility of the two local authorities, they are supported by YPBB, which was created five years ago as only the second UK parks charity to come out of Nesta's Rethinking Parks programme. In spite of the pandemic, YPBB has firmly established itself thanks to a dedicated core team and supporting volunteers. In 2023, it supported more than 3,000 people through its activities.

For more information about the Reimagining Parks campaign or to donate to the £30k Crowdfunder, please go to https://yourpark.org.uk/reimagining-parks.

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