

# FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

August 2016



## A SPECIAL THANKS TO MKE PLAYS SPONSORS:

*ZILBER FAMILY FOUNDATION*

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## Executive Summary

The MKE Plays initiative was conceived to transform the cities most deteriorated playgrounds into models for local collaboration and renovation. Through community engagement in the park design process, our program aims to improve quantity and quality of play, promote neighborhood collaboration, and ultimately enhance public space to uplift community self perception. These 3 objectives drive our efforts throughout the implementation of the program at each site.

The initial phase of the implementation is engagement, which includes establishing community partnership relationships and building awareness of our program within the target community. Once the groundwork is set, the design process driven by community input begins. When a vision for the new space is established, then vendors, the Department of Public Works and community members partake in the construction process. The presence of a new playground is the beginning of the utilization stage that includes community follow up and evaluation of program impact through a final evaluation.

This final evaluation, in conjunction with the baseline evaluation conducted Summer of 2015, is intended to help measure the extent to which program goals were met at Arlington Heights and 17<sup>th</sup> and Vine parks—the first parks to complete all phases—and to improve program processes. The evaluation of our program objectives was done via door-to-door surveys, park observations, and key informant interviews.

Surveys were conducted in partnership with community organizations in order to reach a wide group of residents and receive as many responses as possible; this is the main source of most data. Park observations were done twice at each site and served as opportunities to quantitatively capture activity as well as age demographics of those using the park. Finally, the key informant interviews served as a way to gather qualitative data about what worked and what could improve.

Through data gathered, our program found significant impact to the quantity and quality of play at both park sites with more people playing in more ways than before. There was also recorded impact to enhanced public space with more residents reporting the park and neighborhood appearance had improved as well as their pride in the community. Less impact was seen in the second objective to promote neighborhood collaboration as the engagement process, amongst other efforts, served as an opportunity for neighbors to meet one another, but did not directly correlate with increased unity among community members.

A primary recommendation based on baseline and final evaluation findings is amending the second program objective and/or increasing efforts to better reach this goal. An aspect that is a central tenant of the MKE Plays program, but that is not covered by the current evaluation is the quantity and quality of community engagement throughout our process. A measurement of current efforts paired with the potential impact on promoting neighborhood collaboration would better guide efforts throughout the phases of implementation and better highlight successes. The MKE Plays program will develop from this report a standardized process of evaluation of program goals that is time efficient, focused, and contextual for future parks. A key lesson worth highlighting is that the summer programming at these sites was vital to activating the space and maintaining this activity will be contingent upon the existence of future programming.

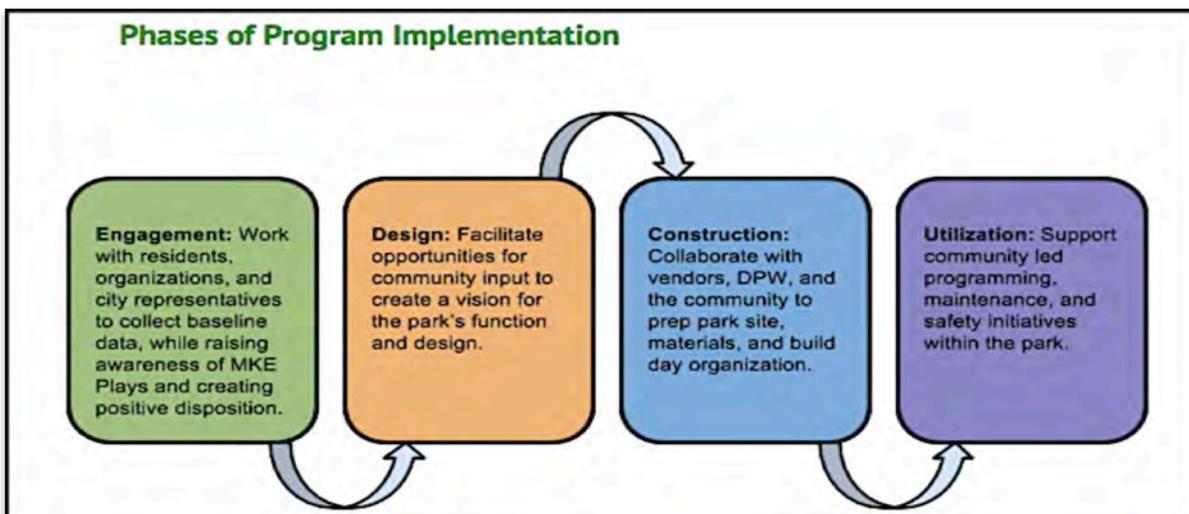
## MKE Plays Program

The MKE Plays initiative was conceived by Milwaukee Common Council President Michael Murphy aimed at transforming 12 of the cities most deteriorated playgrounds into models for local collaboration and renovation. Through community engagement of local residents and collaboration with community organizations, MKE Plays seeks to improve the quantity and quality of play, promote neighborhood collaboration, and enhance public space to uplift community self perception.

### Program Objectives



These 3 objectives are central to the program’s theories of change, which state: By reconstructing play space to suit local needs, we will enhance the local play experience and increase the incentive for children to spend more time playing outdoors. By incorporating neighborhood input in local playground design, we will encourage community-building activities that will improve the overall neighborhood collaboration and sustainability of park maintenance and use. By enhancing the physical and geographic space where children play and communities socialize, we will uplift how communities view themselves and their surroundings. These objectives provide the framework for the phases of implementation that have been established for all park reconstructions. The phases are as follows:



This evaluation will focus on 2 parks, Arlington Heights and 17<sup>th</sup> and Vine that have reached the utilization phase. For both of these parks a baseline evaluation was conducted before the construction phase to serve as a platform to understand the communities where the two first parks are located, reflect on measurement tools and goals, and create recommendations for the MKE Plays process and final evaluation.

## Final Evaluation Overview

The purpose of the final evaluation report is to gather data to assist in the evaluation of the MKE Plays' objectives outlined in Table 1 of the Appendix. The final evaluation is focused around 2 park projects, Arlington Heights and 17<sup>th</sup> and Vine, which have completed all 4 phases of the program implementation and for which baseline data was collected. At the time the evaluation was conducted and completed, the Arlington Heights Park reconstruction had been complete and the playground has been usable for over a year. The 17<sup>th</sup> and Vine Playground, renamed Johnnie Mae Phillips Park, only had less than a month of usability due to prolonged playground construction throughout the summer. The timeline of the evaluation was based upon the availability of the evaluator and the reconstruction phase of the playground for which reasons the evaluation at 17<sup>th</sup> and Vine was conducted earlier than usual. The effects of the timing of the evaluation are reflected in the data and clearly stated in the descriptions. Nonetheless, the information gathered for the final evaluation served as a way to measure program impact and identify changes necessary to improve impact in future parks. The intended results/targets for each of the goals can be found in Table 1 along with indicators, which were identified during the proposal period of MKE Plays. Results were measured by comparing baseline and end line, quantitative and qualitative data gathered through the following tools: surveys, park activity observations, and interviews. The results reported in this final evaluation reflect the efforts of MKE Plays, partners, communities, and countless others who have contributed in various ways to reaching the ultimate goal of increasing play by enhancing play spaces and uplifting beneficiary communities along the way.

## Baseline Evaluation Key Findings

### Objective 1: Improve the Quantity and Quality of Playing

According to surveys, quantity of use proved to be moderately high for Arlington Heights Park and very low for the 17<sup>th</sup> and Vine Playground. Reasons for low use at 17<sup>th</sup> and Vine may be related to safety concerns, a population skewing towards seniors, and the existence of nearby public space improvements including Johnsons Park. Park activity observation findings were consistent for each neighborhood. The perceptions of play experience (quality) at the park were difficult to determine as most residents surveyed suggested a lack of use.

### Objective 2: Promote Neighborhood Collaboration

At both playground locations, a high number of residents reported that there was a benefit to communicating with neighbors; however, a lower number of people reported that they actually communicated with their neighbors. At Arlington Heights, residents reported a higher likelihood to contact the police department and lower likelihoods to contact the Department of Public Works (DPW) when necessary. Around the 17<sup>th</sup> and Vine neighborhood residents responded with high likelihoods of contacting both the police and DPW.

### Objective 3: Enhance Public Space; Uplift Community Self Perception

Neighborhood residents at both playground locations rated the playground appearance as poor, but rated the appearance of their neighborhood more highly. Descriptive words for both playgrounds and neighborhood appearance were consistent with the ratings recorded in the survey. Pride in both neighborhoods was reported to be very high.

## Final Evaluation Key Findings

### Objective 1: Improve Quantity and Quality of Playing

The data for both park sites generally suggests that there is an increase in the quantity of play. Survey results demonstrate that residents are using the park more often than they did before the park was reconstructed and that there is also an increase in the amount of times people visit per week. The people who reported not using it more often explained that they were older age and did not have children to take to play anymore or that they used it the same amount as before the reconstruction. The increase in quantity of play is also reflected in the park observation, which showed an increase in the time people are spending in the park. The number of people present at the park has vastly increased at Arlington Heights due in part to the fact that there was programming, which included play leaders. There was also an increase in presence across all age groups, excluding seniors, which was supported both by the park observation data and the interviews at Arlington Heights.

The quality of play has also increased with an overwhelming majority of residents agreeing and strongly agreeing that children were able to play in more ways with the new equipment. The park observation findings and resident interviews also supported that more children are more active and that parents are also partaking in the play with their children. Both tools also brought to light the creative new ways children are playing on the equipment and the multiple uses they are finding for new park features. It was a little early to tell the depth of impact of the new playground at 17<sup>th</sup> and Vine on the quantity and quality of play, but results are already showing an increase.

### Objective 2: Promote Neighborhood Collaboration

The community engagement process and the presence of a new playground seem to have created a stepping-stone to increased communication, collaboration, and unity amongst people in the community, but the desired effect was seen less in this objective. The survey demonstrated that while a moderately high number of residents believed their community was stronger than before, a significant number of residents did not believe so. While many residents agreed it was beneficial to speak with neighbors and a majority had had positive interactions in the past, there was a significant number of residents who did not communicate with neighbors. Residents described unity on a block-by-block or neighbor-by-neighbor basis more than as a whole community. However it is important to note that there is more communication and unity present in these neighborhoods than was originally assumed.

Responses did demonstrate that people would be more willing to contact the police, DPW, or other institution to help maintain the park. Park observations and interviews demonstrated that current residents are already maintaining the park with neighbors witnessed cleaning up and raising concerns when problems arose in the park. Interviews also demonstrated that the physical park is creating a space for neighbors to see new people in their neighborhood, which creates another opportunity for interaction.

### Objective 3: Enhance Public Space; Uplift Community Self Perception

A very large majority of residents believed that the playground appearance had significantly improved which was supported by the quantitative and qualitative data gathered in the survey and interviews for both sites. A majority also believed the neighborhood had been beautified and rated the appearance of their community higher than before. While most people made the connection between improved park and improved neighborhood, others separated the two concepts and were hesitant to say that the neighborhood at large was better because of the new park. The majority of people were already proud to live in the Silver City neighborhood and a majority reported increased pride in their neighborhood.

## Survey Evaluation Tool

The purpose of the survey was to hear from the beneficiary community about their use of the new playground as well as help measure the goals and indicators outlined in Table 1. The results of the survey questions were labeled respectively with the indicator they inform in the analysis section below. Some results are measured comparatively with the baseline and others are informed by results gathered in the end line depending on the significance of the results in the baseline.

### Design

The general design process of the survey included:

- ✓ Identifying primary objectives, indicators, and key results/targets (Table 1)
- ✓ Creating/Editing survey questions and response metrics based on baseline evaluation results
- ✓ Consulting community partners for suggestions on edits
- ✓ Drafting final survey
- ✓ Coordinating survey efforts
- ✓ Conducting survey
- ✓ Analyzing data and creating survey evaluation report

The structure of the survey primarily consisted of close-ended questions to provide raw quantitative data. The survey questions were designed to best measure the primary objectives and key results/targets based on baseline data and new data.

### Participants

A target region was identified within a 2-block radius of the beneficiary park (Table 2 and 3) to best capture the beneficiary community and residents. Homes within this region along with adults found at the park who reported living within close distance of the playground were surveyed.

People surveyed were all adults who identified as head of household or primary caregivers. This population was specifically chosen because they were direct stakeholders in their neighborhood and in the reconstruction of the playground.

The sample of participants was derived from the population described above that was approached and agreed to complete the survey. It is important to note that while the same area as the baseline was surveyed,

residents who responded varied based on their willingness to take the survey, person at home at time of survey, and residency moving cycles amongst others.

These influential factors mean that the results of the survey cannot be interpreted on a comparative individual basis (1:1), but rather as a comparative whole (community: community). For this reason, the sample number was kept similar to maintain a representative sample of the community.

### Method of Approach

All participants were approached in person during door-to-door outreach hours and asked to participate in our survey. Each participant agreed to being surveyed after hearing about the purpose of the survey.

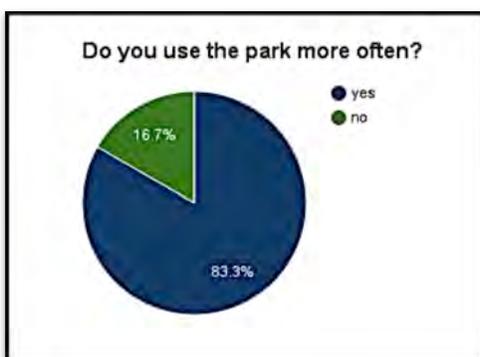
The survey was conducted outside the person's home in their preferred language, either English or Spanish. For consistency, the designated survey conductor recorded all responses as indicated by the resident. The questions included in the survey are displayed in Table 4.

## Quantitative Data Analysis

### Arlington Heights Neighborhood

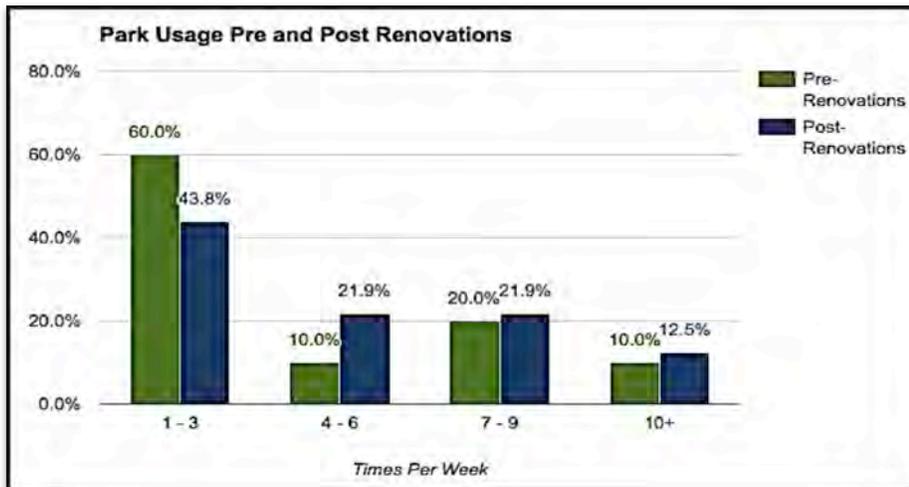
The total amount of homes visited was 110, with 47 total responses. The response rate for this park was approximately 42%, only 1% higher than the baseline, which makes the sample size close to proportional for comparative purposes. Although the same exact people were not surveyed, resident demographic information from the baseline remains pertinent. The baseline showed that 65.9% of respondents had children and 34.1% did not. Also, 74.4% of residents had 4 or more years living in the Silver City neighborhood and 56.5% rented homes and 43.5% owned homes.

### Objective 1: Improve Quantity and Quality of Play



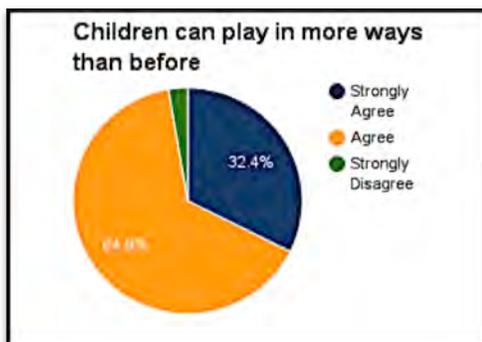
#### Indicator 1b: *Quantity of Use*

The baseline surveying demonstrated that 69.6% of respondents indicated they or someone in their family used the playground, while 30.4% indicated they did not use the playground either because they did not have children and/or because the playground was not in good condition. During the final evaluation we found that 83.3% reported using the playground more often. The people who reported not using it more often explained that they were older age and did not have children to take to play anymore or that they used it the same amount as before the reconstruction.



**Indicator 1b: Quantity of Use**  
(Continued)

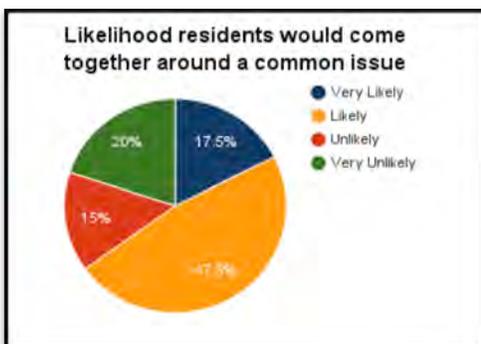
The baseline showed that a majority of residents who were using the park before renovations typically visited 1-3 times a week (60%). After the renovations the data shows that residents are visiting the park more times per week. The amount of people who visit the park 4-6 times more than doubled and the people visiting 7-9 or 10+ times also increased.



**Indicator 1c: Quality of Play**

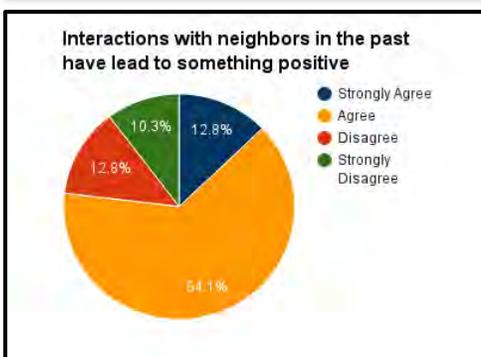
The baseline data for this indicator was deemed inconclusive as the survey question was confusing to respondents and thus yielded inaccurate results. The question was thus redesigned to better measure improvement in the quality of play and for respondents to better understand the question. The final evaluation responses demonstrated that an overwhelming majority (97.3%) of residents agreed or strongly agree that children could play in more ways than they were able to play before the reconstruction.

**Objective 2: Promote Neighborhood Collaboration**



**Indicator 2a: Perceived Unity and Strength of Community**

The baseline evaluation indicated that 71.1% of residents were likely or very likely to come together in comparison to only 65% in the end line. While it may seem like the perceived unity of residents has decreased, the conclusion cannot be readily made without that the situation of the question was changed from a commercial development replacing the park to an issue affecting the park. Residents were also asked in the final evaluation survey whether they believed relationships in the community were stronger than before. 66.7% said yes, while 33.3% said no.



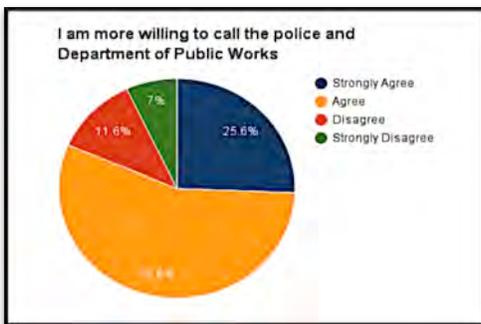
**Indicator 2g: Benefit of Communicating with Neighbors**

In the baseline survey a very high majority of respondents (93.3%) agreed or strongly agreed that it was beneficial for neighbors to communicate with one another, but a very low number of residents reported actually communicating with their neighbors. The question was thus changed to ask whether interactions with neighbors in the past had lead to something positive. The results explained that while the majority (76.9%) agreed or strongly agreed something positive came from their past interactions, it is important to pay attention to the small amount of residents who disagree as to help explain why resident may not perceive unity in the community.



**Indicator 2f: Frequency and Diversity of Communication with Neighbors**

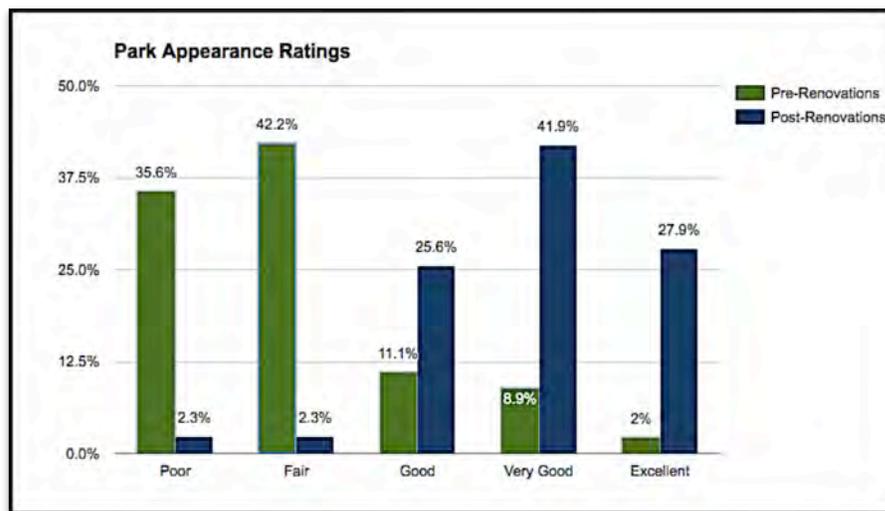
65.1% of residents reported they communicated often or very often with their neighbors. When asked if they communicated more often with their neighbors than before, only 46.7% said yes. The respondents that said no, included those that communicated with their neighbors the ‘same’ or less often. This question will be changed in the future to better capture if respondents communicate more, the same, or less.



**Indicator 2e: Tools for Park Maintenance**

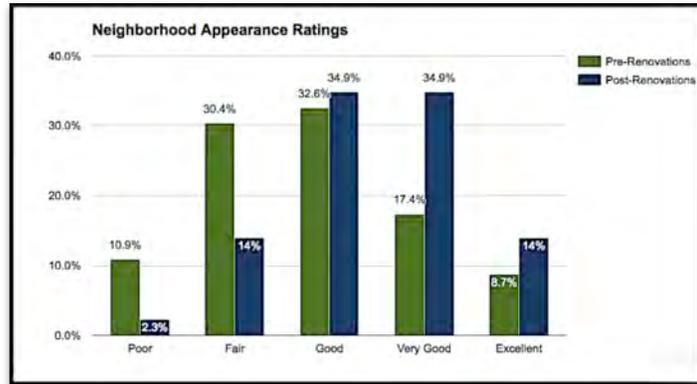
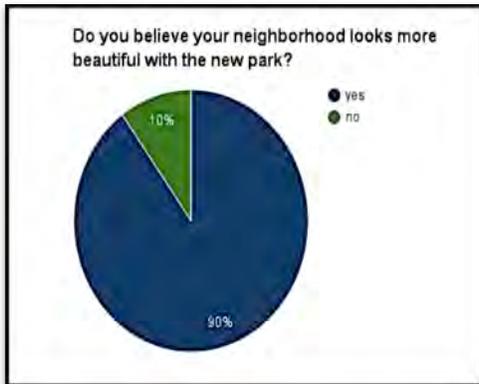
In the baseline 69.6% of residents reported they would be likely or very likely to contact DPW and 84.8% said they would be likely or very likely to contact the police. The final survey demonstrated that residents are more willing to contact both DPW and the police with 81.4% agreeing and strongly agreeing. The remaining 18.6% that disagreed or strongly disagreed responded that depending on the situation they may or may not.

**Objective 3: Enhance Public Space and Uplift Community Self Perception**



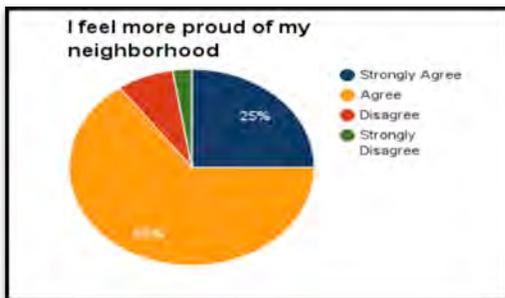
**Indicator 3a: Perception of Playground Appearance**

The survey before reconstruction showed that a large majority of residents (77.8%) thought the appearance of park was poor or fair. After the reconstruction, a stark difference was seen in perceptions of park appearance with 95.6% rating the park as good, very good or excellent.



### Indicator 3b: Perception of Neighborhood Appearance

90% of residents surveyed believed their neighborhood looked more beautiful than before now that there is a new playground. Amongst the 10% that did not believe their neighborhood had been beautified were residents that did not readily make a connection between enhanced park space and enhanced community appearance. Nonetheless, across the board more residents see their neighborhood as good, very good, and excellent than before the reconstruction.



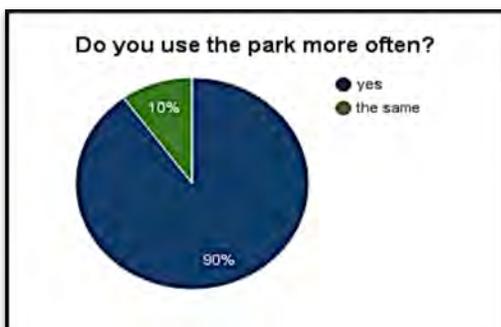
### Indicator 3c: Increased Neighborhood Pride

In the baseline we found that a majority of residents (84.8%) of this neighborhood were already proud of their neighborhood. After the new playground was reconstructed, 90% of residents reported having increased pride in their neighborhood because there was a new play space.

## 17th and Vine Neighborhood

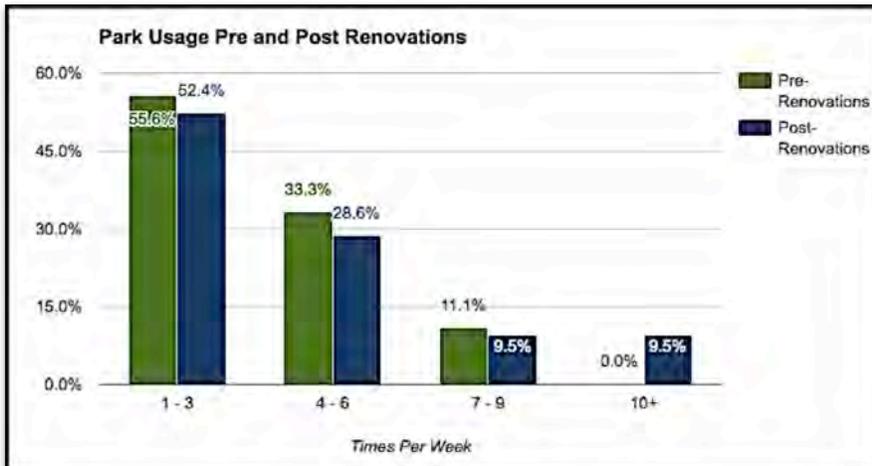
The total amount of homes visited was 62, with 26 total responses. The response rate for this park was approximately 42%, only 5% higher than the baseline, which makes the sample size close to proportional for comparative purposes. Although the same exact people were not surveyed, resident demographic information from the baseline remains pertinent. The baseline showed that half of respondents had children and half did not. Also, 80.8% of residents had 4 or more years living in the Johnson Parks Neighborhood and 34.5% rented homes and 65.5% owned homes.

### Objective 1: Improve Quantity and Quality of Play



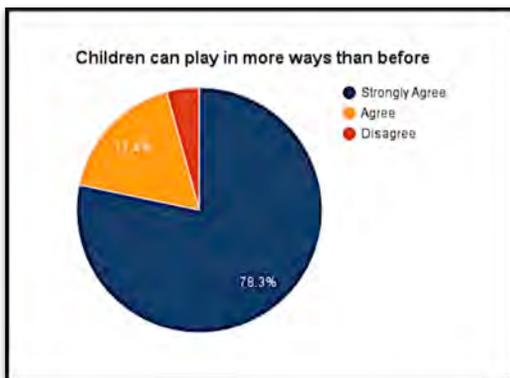
### Indicator 1b: Quantity of Use

The baseline surveying demonstrated that 30% of respondents indicated they or someone in their family used the playground, while 70% indicated they did not use the playground either because they did not have children and/or because the playground was not in good condition. During the final evaluation we found that 90% reported using the playground more often. The people who reported not using it more often explained that they were older age and did not have children to take to play anymore or that they used it the same amount as before the reconstruction.



**Indicator 1b: Quantity of Use**  
*(Continued)*

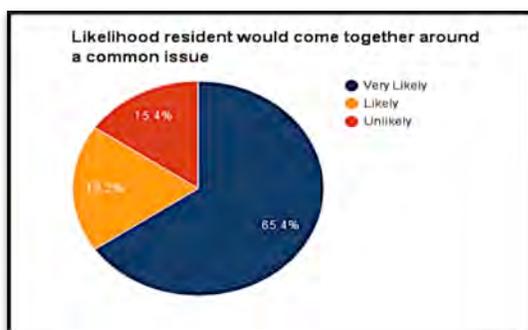
The baseline showed that a majority of residents who were using the park before renovations typically visited 1-3 times a week (55.6%). After the renovations, the data shows that residents are visiting the park more times per week with responses shifting to the next higher category. The amount of people who visit the park 10+ times per week grew from 0 to 9.5%.



**Indicator 1c: Quality of Play**

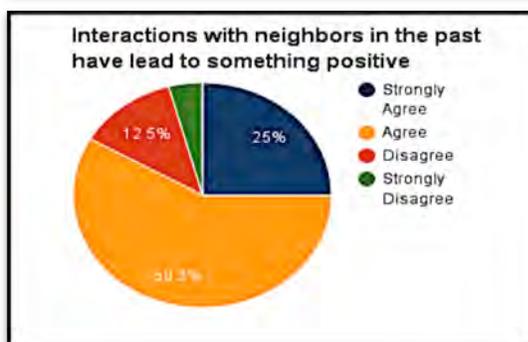
The baseline data for this indicator was deemed inconclusive as the survey question was confusing to respondents and thus yielded inaccurate results. The question was thus redesigned to better measure improvement in the quality of play and for respondents to better understand the question. The final evaluation responses demonstrated that an overwhelming majority (95.7%) of residents agreed or strongly agree that children could play in more ways than they were able to play before the reconstruction.

**Objective 2: Promote Neighborhood Collaboration**



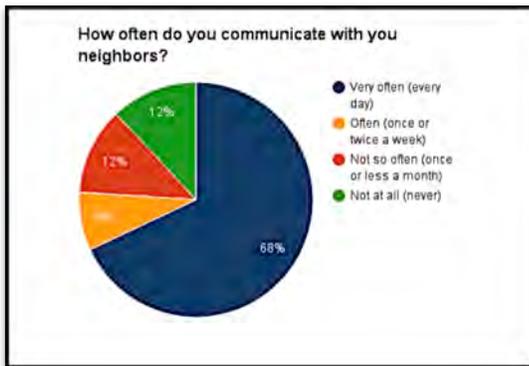
**Indicator 2a: Perceived Unity and Strength of Community**

The baseline data for this indicator was deemed inconclusive as the survey question was confusing to respondents and thus yielded inaccurate results. The question was redesigned and data demonstrated that a majority of residents (84.6%) perceived that their community would be likely or very likely to come together. Residents were also asked whether they believed relationships in the community were stronger than before. 68.2% said yes.



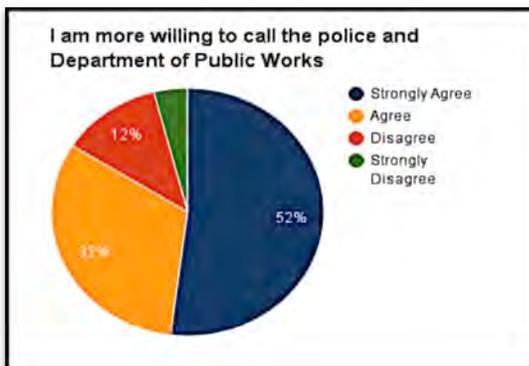
**Indicator 2g: Benefit of Communicating with Neighbors**

In the baseline survey 100% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it was beneficial for neighbors to communicate with one another. In order to gather further information, the question was changed. The majority (83.3%) agreed or strongly agreed something positive came from their past interactions, it is important to pay attention to the small percent (16.7%) of residents who disagree as they help to explain why resident may not perceive unity in the community and why residents may not interact as often.



**Indicator 2f: Frequency of Communication with Neighbors**

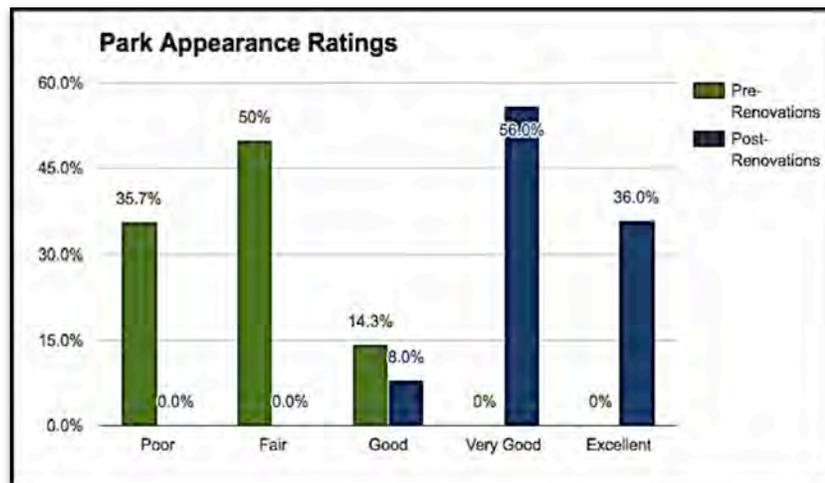
76% of residents reported they communicated often or very often with their neighbors. When asked if they communicated more often with their neighbors than before, only 36.8% said yes. The respondents that said no, included those that communicated with their neighbors the ‘same’ or less often. This question will be changed in the future to better capture if respondents communicate more, the same, or less.



**Indicator 2e: Tools for Park Maintenance**

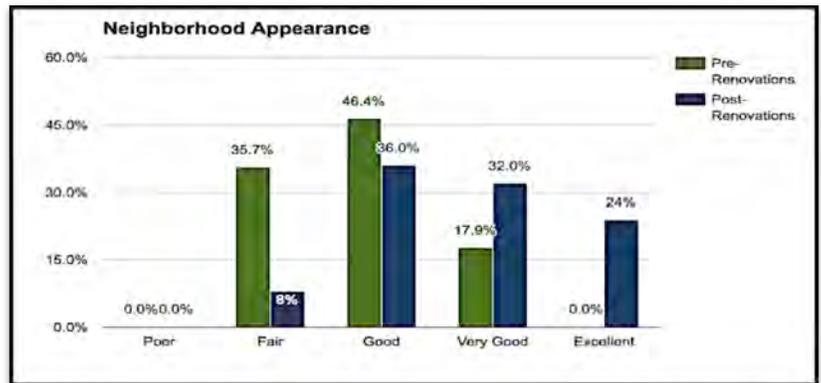
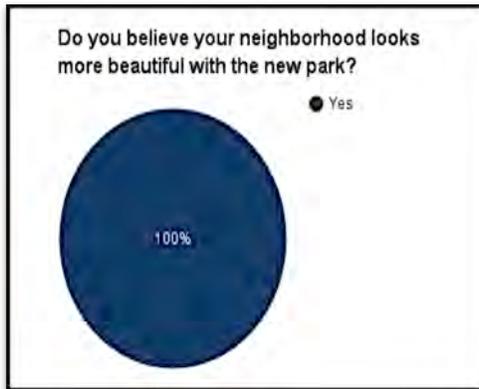
In the baseline 86.7% of residents reported they would be likely or very likely to contact DPW and 80% said they would be likely or very likely to contact the police. The final survey showed no stark difference from the baseline evaluation. The 16% that disagreed or strongly disagreed responded that depending on the situation they may or may not call. Events surrounding racial issues and police brutality may have affected the responses of this question.

**Objective 3: Enhance Public Space and Uplift Community Self Perception**



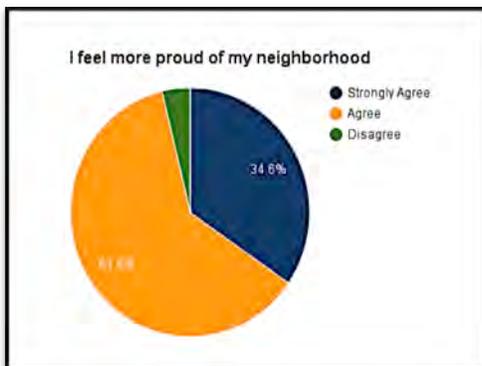
**Indicator 3a: Perception of Playground Appearance**

The survey before reconstruction showed that a large majority of residents (85.7%) thought the appearance of the park was poor or fair. After the reconstruction, a stark difference was seen in perceptions of park appearance with 100% rating the park as good, very good or excellent.



**Indicator 3b: Perception of Neighborhood Appearance**

100% of residents surveyed believed their neighborhood looked more beautiful than before now that there is a new park. The Neighborhood appearance ratings also demonstrated that more residents see their neighborhood as good, very good, and excellent than before the reconstruction.



**Indicator 3c: Increased Neighborhood Pride**

In the baseline we found that a majority of residents (96.5%) of this neighborhood were already proud of their neighborhood. After the new playground was reconstructed, 96.2% of residents reported having increased pride in their neighborhood because there was a new play space.

**Challenges**

- ❖ Due to a shortage of staff and partner volunteers at 17<sup>th</sup> and Vine, the entire target region was not covered. This affected the number of surveys we were able to complete, which nonetheless was proportionally higher than the previous year.
- ❖ Questions were redesigned from the baseline evaluation in order to better measure our goals and capture more accurate information. Redesigned questions made it difficult to compare data in the baseline, but did bring about data that is more useful and better measures our goals.

**Qualitative Data Analysis**

The qualitative data was gathered primarily through survey questions that asked respondents to share words that came to mind when they thought about the new park. More data was gathered through an activity with children at Arlington Heights Park that included creating pictures with words about the new park.

Data collected in the baseline and end line evaluation about the appearance and spirit of the neighborhood were not included because there was no significant difference between words used to describe the neighborhood before and after the park. While some people made the connection between improved park and improved neighborhood, others separated the two concepts.



## Design

The general design process of the park activity observation included:

- ✓ Determined SOPARC Application tool for data collection
- ✓ Determine day(s) and time(s) of observation
- ✓ Execute Park Activity Observation for allotted time
- ✓ Record and Observe Results

## SOPARC Application

A SOPARC App was used to record activity witnessed at the park. The mobile application allowed the user to record the age and activity of people by touching screen buttons labeled with combinations of age and activities. The options were defined as follows:

### Activity:

Sedentary (S) = Individuals are lying down, sitting, or standing in place.

Walking (W) = Individuals are walking at a casual pace.

Vigorous (V) = Individuals are currently engaged in an activity more vigorous than an ordinary walk (e.g., increasing heart rate causing them to sweat, such as jogging, swinging, doing cart wheels).

### Age:

Child = Children from infancy to 12 years of age as children.

Teen = Adolescents from 13 to 20 years of age as teenagers.

Adult = People from 21 to 59 years of age as adults.

Senior = People 60 years of age and older as seniors.

## Pre-Park Activity Observation Process

- ✓ Observation Day was determined by considering when schools were generally out of session and presence of fair weather to play.
- ✓ Time of day was chosen considering optimal time for children to play.
- ✓ The duration was determined by consulting social research professionals at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.<sup>1</sup> The duration would give the observer enough time to capture the activity of the playground.
- ✓ At time of arrival at park, a tentative map of the park was created manually.
- ✓ Target areas of interest were determined by defining playground equipment or play areas where children or adults play. Areas utilized by a high number of individuals were also included.
- ✓ Areas were marked on the map and boundaries around target areas were determined and marked on the map using natural landmarks and existing playground equipment lines.
- ✓ Observation location, the place where the observer would be able to get the best view of the park and target area being scanned, was determined.

## Park Activity Observation Process

- ✓ An initial scan of the whole park was performed at the starting time of observation and the total number of people present was recorded.
- ✓ Scans of individual target areas were done left to right from observer's view recording along the way the number of people present throughout the scan and using the SOPARC App to record their activity on that target area.
- ✓ Total scan time for each observation was approximately 30 minutes

<sup>1</sup> Meetings were held with staff from the University of Wisconsin's Center for Urban Initiatives & Research.

- ✓ At the completion of individual target area scans, the results were recorded.
- ✓ A final whole park scan was performed before the end of the park observation.

## Data Analysis

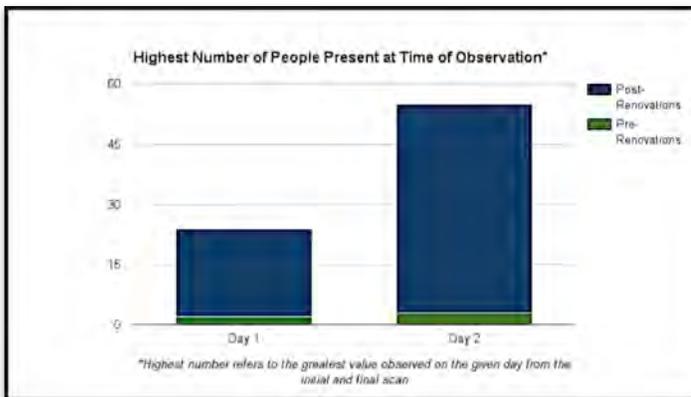
The results gathered from the SOPARC application were documented on a tracking sheet and listed below in comparison to the results gathered in the baseline. More contexts to the numbers recorded is given in the ‘Challenges’ section of each neighborhood.

### Arlington Heights Neighborhood

Pre-Renovations	Post-Renovations
<u>Day 1</u> Initial Scan: 0 Final Scan: 2	<u>Day 1</u> Initial Scan: 22 Final Scan: 20
<u>Day 2</u> Initial Scan: 3 Final Scan: 0	<u>Day 2</u> Initial Scan: 13 Final Scan: 52 *daycare joined

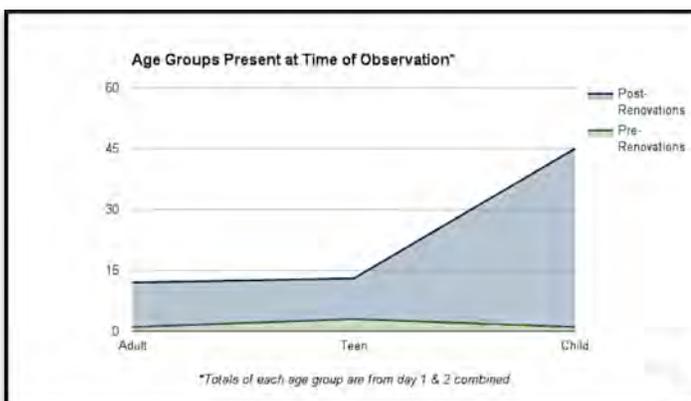
### Raw Scan Data (Increased Time Spent Playing)

The initial and final scans post-playground renovations, in comparison to those in the pre-renovations, demonstrate that within the 30-minute observation period, more people are staying or coming to use the new playground whereas before people came and left quickly.



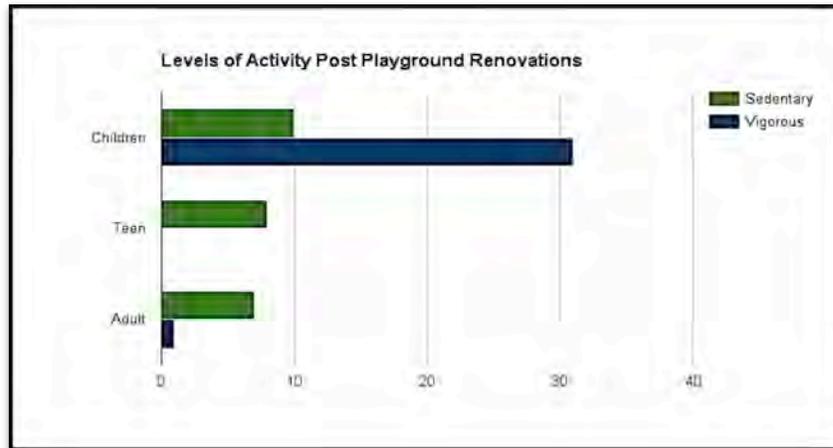
### Highest Scan Value (Increased People Presence)

A comparison of the highest values recorded pre and post renovations demonstrated that there are a significantly higher number of people present at the park (approximately 17 times larger) on a given day now that there have been renovations.



### Age Groups (Increased Number of Children)

There has been an increase across all 3 age groups post reconstruction; though no seniors were recorded on any observation. The most significant increase was in children, which grew from 1 to 44. The stark increase is most likely due to playground equipment for this age group and programming from Milwaukee Rec.



### Activity Levels (Increase in Activity)

Levels of activity in the baseline evaluation showed a sedentary adult with a child that was vigorous for about 10 minutes then left the park. Another showed a group of youth who were sitting and hanging out at the park. Although activity levels are similar post reconstruction in that parents are usually sedentary, teens are sitting, and children are vigorous, the quality of play and opportunities for play for all groups has increased. More children are more active now on all structures and more parents play with their children, even if they are only standing. Teens were not alone in the park like before.

### Challenges

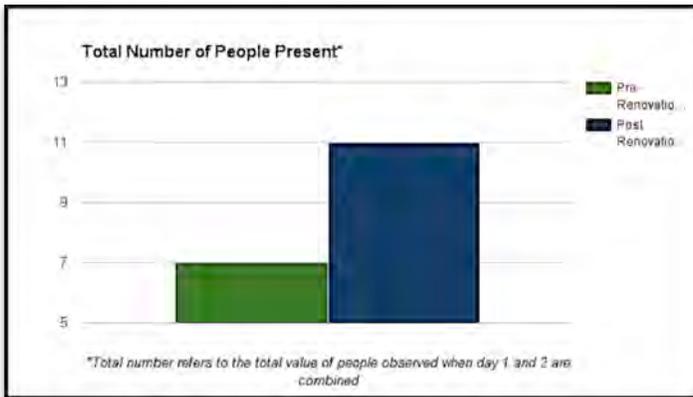
- ❖ The observer conducting the park activity observation was also the author of the final evaluation report, which although truthful and accurate results were reported, is important to disclose.
- ❖ At the time of observation, the Milwaukee Rec program was present with various activities for children to do which may have increased the presence of children in comparison to an average day.

### 17<sup>th</sup> and Vine Neighborhood

Pre-Renovations	Post-Renovations
<u>Day 1</u> Initial Scan: 0 Final Scan: 7	<u>Day 1</u> Initial Scan: 1 Final Scan: 3
<u>Day 2</u> Initial Scan: 0 Final Scan: 0	<u>Day 2</u> Initial Scan: 4 Final Scan: 7

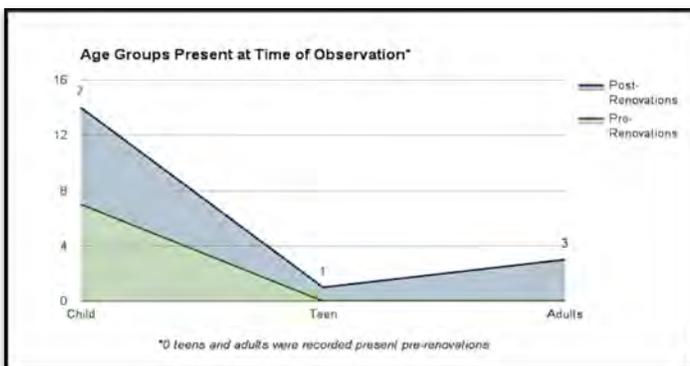
### Raw Scan Data (Increased Activity)

The initial and final scans show that more people are coming and going more often which shows an increase in activity. While the highest number observed, 7, is the same for the pre and post-renovations, it is important to keep in mind the challenges outlined below.



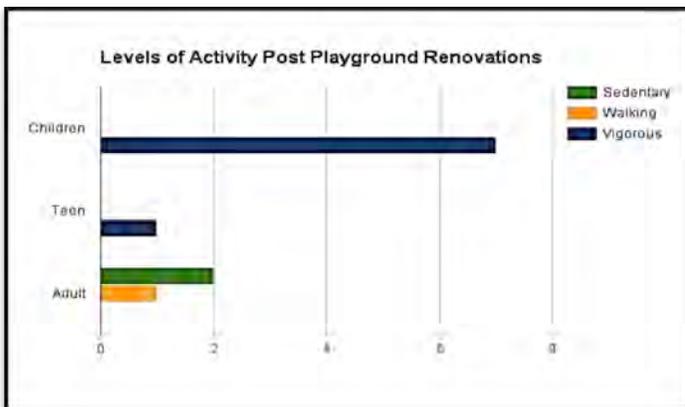
### Total Number of People Present

The combined values of day 1 and 2 pre and post reconstruction demonstrate that there was an increase, though small, in the number of people who visited the park. Taking into consideration the early nature of the evaluation and all the challenges, this number reflects a positive initial impact and provides a look into possible increase in use over the following year.



### Age Groups (Increased Adult Presence)

The total number of children observed pre- and post reconstruction stayed the same while adult and teen age groups post reconstruction increased slightly. No seniors were recorded on any observation.



### Activity Levels (Increased Adult Activity)

In the baseline evaluation, 7 children were observed playing vigorously. The end line evaluation demonstrates that child activity has remained the same, but adult and teen activity was observed this time. An evaluation with more time post reconstruction could give results more reflective of the potential impact for all age groups.

## Challenges

- ❖ The observer conducting the park activity observation was also the author of the final evaluation report, which although truthful and accurate results were reported, is important to disclose.
- ❖ The playground at this location only had 1 week of being complete when the observation was done and there was no widespread knowledge in the community that the park was officially open for use.
- ❖ The Milwaukee Rec program scheduled to be present at the park was not able to complete programming and construction work at this site was prolonged which may have affected the number of people who would have come to the park throughout the summer.
- ❖ Events and circumstances that affected this neighborhood such as increased gun violence and police shootings may have affected the willingness of parents/guardians to allow their children to play on the playground.

## Key Informant Interviews

The purpose of the key informant interview component for the final evaluation was to hear from stakeholders, individuals engaged with the MKE Plays process, and residents to hear about the impact of community engagement and new park renovations. Responses of these individuals were meant to help us evaluate the extent to which our goals and objectives were met and to guide us in our approach with other MKE Plays parks renovations.

### Design

The general design process included:

- ✓ Identifying key topics informants could address
- ✓ Identifying key individuals who have been involved in the process
- ✓ Identifying key individuals such as children and residents who are stakeholders/beneficiaries
- ✓ Contacting individuals with invitation to participate or approaching on the spot
- ✓ Conducting interviews and gathering data
- ✓ Analyzing data and organizing for evaluation report

Questions were loosely structured to capture information in the following key topics:

- ✓ Quantity and Quality of Play
- ✓ Neighborhood Collaboration
- ✓ Enhanced Public Space
- ✓ Community Self Perception
- ✓ Other

### Participants

The individuals interviewed were either participants in the MKE Plays community engagement phase, beneficiaries of the new playground reconstruction, or both. Those interviewed were either local residents or worked in the vicinity of the park and a requirement was that they made use of the playground or worked with the community that reported making use of the playground.

### Method of Approach

Some individuals from partner organizations were contacted via email with an invitation requesting their participation in an over the phone or in-person interview. The email stated that the key informant interview would be utilized to evaluate MKE Plays process, goals, and impact. Interviews were conducted over the phone or in person depending on location and time convenience for both the key informant and interviewer.

Other individuals were approached on the spot during visits to each park. The individuals asked to participate were present at the park at the moment and appeared to be making use of the new playground or were identified by playground leaders as regular attendees of the park. The same interviewer conducted all interviews for consistency in data collection.

### Data Analysis

A total of 7 key informants were interviewed about the Arlington Heights Park. 2 were residents in the immediate vicinity of the park, 2 were youth/children of the area and 3 were community stakeholders.

A total of 7 key informants were interviewed about the 17<sup>th</sup> and Vine Park. 2 were residents in the immediate vicinity of the park and 5 were community stakeholders.

Data was analyzed by reporting key phrases, words, and ideas that were mentioned during the interview. While questions for each participant varied, all questions captured the key topics listed above. Responses reported below were selected for being either reflective of trends in responses or most substantive.

### Arlington Heights Neighborhood

**Tania**, School Age Teacher at a local Day Care

Before the renovations at Arlington Heights Park, Tania said she would take the daycare kids out to parks as far as the lake, because most local parks did not have newer type of equipment that the kids could play with and have fun. When she saw the new park renovated she thought it was ‘really nice’, ‘within walking distance’ of her daycare, and a ‘safe park’ for the kids to play in. She likes the new equipment because ‘multiple kids can play on it at the same time’ and she has noticed that her day care children really enjoy being able to play together on the web structure. She says this will be her new park where she will bring her kids to play on a regular basis.

**“It’s so much better than the last one where my [day care] kids could hardly swing [on the swings] or do anything. When I pulled up to the park all the kids were like ‘Yes! Yes!’ because they could hardly wait.” - Tania**

**Veronica**, Resident of Silver City Apartments

Veronica lives across the street from the park and when interviewed she was in the park with her 3 year old daughter carrying around a trash bag and cleaning up the park. She says she recently moved into the neighborhood and feels good about moving because the park is so close and so nice. She says she likes to make walks around the park and her community with a trash bag to help keep the trash off the playground for kids to be able to play safely.

**Natalie & Melanie**, Youth Residents

Natalie and Melanie are residents of the neighborhood and they are friends. They are making use of the park regularly this summer as a place to hang out, meet new people, stay active, play with their younger siblings, and get out of the house.

**Jennifer**, Play Leader with Milwaukee Recreation

Jennifer is responsible for keeping kids active and having fun on the playground this summer. She says she has noticed throughout the summer that there is high attendance and a variety of people that come to the park. From day care groups to local parents with children, from younger age groups to teenagers, she has witnessed how they take advantage of all the equipment and the programming. Teenagers use the benches to socialize, children use nature structures for lunchtime and generally most children come with parents to spend time together.

**“I have seen [the kids] make obstacle courses from one end of the playground to the other. They also play tag on the web structure and pretend that the ground is hot lava, so they are holding on to dear life [on the structure]. There’s a lot of creativity and fun going on at the playground everyday.”- Jennifer**

**Maria**, Resident of Arlington Heights for 10 years

Maria is the mother of 8-year-old twins and a 10-year-old boy with whom she now spends more time at the playground. Before the renovations at Arlington Heights Park, she made the walk to Mitchell Park playground because the equipment in place easily bored her children. With the new park she says she has noticed more parents coming out to play with their children more often and staying for longer periods. She said before the park renovations, she did not know or see many of the faces of people who live in her neighborhood that she now sees at the park. Maria feels the neighborhood looked ‘sad’ before and is livelier now with new people coming and going from the park.

**Joey Zocher**, Advisor at Escuela Verde

Escuela Verde is a high school that moved into the community in the past year and was elemental in youth input during the engagement phase. As an advisor Joey has witnessed some of the benefits of the new park space. She says the park is frequently used in various ways by the school, from daily soccer practice on the field to occasional physical education days on the equipment. The students have met some of the other youth in the neighborhood at the park and have even played soccer with them. She reported that the students that gave their input on playground features were ‘happy to see that something they voted on wasn’t just hypothetical, it actually happened.’ One of the students was so involved throughout the MKE Plays process he even did his senior thesis on the new playground reconstruction. Joey wanted to emphasize that the process of involving youth in the project was crucial for the future maintenance of the park.

**“Teenagers will be the ones to use the playground, by allowing them to design it and give their input it gives them ownership and they can claim the space [in a positive way] and take care of it.” -Joey**

### 17<sup>th</sup> and Vine Neighborhood

**Laura Rohling and Gwendolyn Spencer**, Co-Directors of Shalom High School

Shalom High School is located directly behind the park and has the most optimal view of the playground. Laura and Gwen recall looking out the window of the school throughout the summer, often losing track of time, and observing the reconstruction process with excitement. “It was just amazing to watch the transformation!” commented Gwen. The reconstruction process also spiked curiosity in the students throughout the spring and the renovation to the park even resulted in the directors making improvements to back of the high school.

*“Anything that improves the look of the community and is inviting and shows that the city people care about what this community looks like can only enhance what we are doing here [at Shalom] with our children. The new park is a major improvement from what was there before and I think it is an amazing project. You are taking a piece of a community that is in crisis and you're doing something really nice and you're making the space safer somewhere down the line.” –Gwendolyn Spencer*

**Linda Carr-Carlson & Michelle Townsend**, Parish Administrator & Pastor of Cross Lutheran Church

Cross Lutheran Church is located directly across the alley from the park and was a key player in the creation of the park and a vital resource to the MKE Plays process. Linda believes that the community of color is in need of more play spaces that can be of interest to the youth and older population. She was happy to see the basketball court because now the youth can play ball within their own community and don't need to go far away to find one. Overall she thinks the new park sets a positive mood, which is a step in the right direction considering the lack of play spaces.

Michelle says parents that visit her church and services are excited about the playground because it reminds them of the nicer parks in other parts of the city like by the lake. Many parents are giving thumbs up to the new equipment and the new base material, which makes it safer for kids to play freely and even fall.

*“I like that the park is multi-able and multi-generational because I have seen people with disabilities on the playground as well as adults and kids throughout the day.” –Pastor Michelle Townsend*

**Joyce Ellwanger & Joyce McGhee**, Residents Engaged in Park Planning

Joyce Ellwanger felt the multigenerational theme for the park was generally met and was personally happy to see that the basketball courts stayed despite disagreements that arose during meetings over their presence. Other points of contention that were brought to the table during meetings, she felt, were reflected in the final park although her preferences were not met. She also suggested that the process of engagement and construction were lengthy which took a little away from the enthusiasm of having a new park.

Joyce McGhee, like resident Ellwanger felt that the community was given an opportunity to voice their opinion although she felt the final result was not very toddler friendly amongst other concerns she voiced. The responses from these interviews conducted reflect challenges that were faced at this location and their feedback serves as a point of reflection for recommendations on improving our engagement process.

#### **Gerri Sheetz-Howard**, Executive Director of House of Peace

House of Peace was a vital partner that provided space and support for community meetings during the engagement process. Gerri was interviewed in the baseline evaluation where she expressed enthusiasm with MKE Plays coming to 17<sup>th</sup> and Vine and she also served as an Ad-Hoc board member. She feels the number of meetings were sufficient and that the MKE Plays team did their very best to get as many people to attend the park planning meetings as they could. She often encourages people who come to House of Peace to use the park and believes that the new space gives the community more options of things to do. She is glad the partnership was made and appreciative and pleased with the new space that reflects the multigenerational theme the community decided.

**“In every possible way the MKE Plays Staff tried to make [community requests] happen and when they couldn’t happen, it was communicated and explained well to the community why [the request] was not feasible.”-Gerry Sheetz-Howard**

#### **Challenges**

- ❖ The interviewer was also the author of the final evaluation report, which although truthful and accurate results were reported, is important to disclose.
- ❖ Some of the resident interviews for the Arlington Heights Park were conducted in Spanish and their testimonies were translated into English for the report by the interviewer. Some content was lost in translation.
- ❖ Points of contention during the 17<sup>th</sup> and Vine Park planning meetings were reflected in the final park design and those disagreements were mentioned in different views and manners by all interviewed.
- ❖ The construction stage at 17<sup>th</sup> and Vine was prolonged and when the interviews were conducted there was less than a month of usage.

## Summary of Key Findings

### Objective 1: Improve the Quantity and Quality of Playing

- ❖ All 3 tools supported that more people are playing more often and for longer periods of time. Due to the increase of people and the presence of programming at this location, activity levels are higher. Overall, there is significant gain in this objective and it is in this objective that the most direct impact was observed from the renovation of the space.

### Objective 2: Promote Neighborhood Collaboration

- ❖ This objective was where the least amount of impact was captured using our current tools and through our current efforts. Results for the strength of the community remained generally the same from the baseline with a majority of neighbors who report regular communication with neighbors and benefits from interactions, but a significant amount that do not interact with neighbors. The “strength of the community” seems to be clustered by blocks where all residents know one another and neighbors that communicate with one another, rather than as a whole. Almost every person surveying expressed a higher likelihood to contact the necessary institution to help maintain the park as a clean and positive space.

### Objective 3: Enhance Public Space and Uplift Community Self Perception

- ❖ The baseline demonstrated that communities were generally already proud of their neighborhood and that while some made the connection between park appearance and neighborhood appearance, others separated the two spaces. The final evaluation tools demonstrated that a majority of people reported increased pride in where they lived. A very high majority also rated the appearance of the park positively, a stark difference from the baseline results. While a majority also connected better park appearance to enhanced neighborhood appearance, a significant portion did not.

## Lessons and Recommendations

- ❖ Increasing the safety of parks will be an important aspect to focus on during the design phase, as it is an aspect of concern continually raised in community meetings and an aspect worth measuring in the final evaluation.
- ❖ Particularly at 17<sup>th</sup> and Vine it will be important to return a year after use to both test the new evaluation and re-test what activity levels are like given that the community did not have enough time for use when the evaluation was completed.
- ❖ Standardizing and synthesizing the evaluation process will be key going forward in order to make it more efficient and reliable to gather data.
- ❖ Interviews and talks with community members during surveying brought forth the need to have a follow up/reflection meeting with the community before construction and post playground reconstruction to assure the majority of the community is on board with the design.
- ❖ A better process for effective communication during the community engagement period must be established and follow up if key to assure the enthusiasm behind the park does not simmer.
- ❖ Continued summer programming will be vital in maintaining the activity levels currently observed.

Appendix

Table 1: MKE Plays Objectives, Indicators, and Targets

PRIMARY OBJECTIVES	INDICATORS	KEY RESULTS/TARGETS
<p><b>Objective 1:</b> Improve Quantity/Quality of Play</p> <p><i>TOC 1: By reconstructing play space to suit local needs, we will enhance the local play experience and increase the incentive for children to spend more time playing outdoors.</i></p>	<p>1a. Physical Reconstruction of playgrounds complete by end of implementation period.</p> <p>1b. Neighborhood residents report an increase in frequency of time spent playing at the playground upon playground reconstruction completion.</p> <p>1c. Increase in the perceived quality of play at the playground.</p> <p>1d. Neighborhood residents report they are more likely to visit the park as a result of the playground reconstruction.</p>	<p>1a. Complete reconstruction of all 12 playgrounds within 3 years of program initiation.</p> <p>1b. Change in quantity of play. Our target is to increase time spent playing at the playground by 25%.</p> <p>1c. Change in quality of play. Our target is to increase the perceived quality of play for 100% of respondents.</p>
<p><b>Objective 2:</b> Promote Neighborhood Collaboration</p> <p><i>TOC 2: By incorporating neighborhood input in local playground design, we will encourage community-building activities that will improve overall neighborhood collaboration and sustainability of park maintenance and use.</i></p>	<p>2a. Neighborhood representatives--both youth and adults--perceive a strengthened relationship among community members.</p> <p>2b. Neighborhood representatives and key stakeholders from neighborhood organizations participate in meetings dedicated to the playground design process</p> <p>2c. Neighborhood representatives and key stakeholders from neighborhood organizations participate in Build Day.</p> <p>2d. Neighborhood representatives and key stakeholders from neighborhood organizations participate in park clean-up day.</p> <p>2e. Neighborhood residents feel they have the communication and management tools to sustain park maintenance/usability.</p> <p>2f. Neighborhood residents report more frequent and diverse social interactions with neighbors as a result of activities related to the park reconstruction process.</p> <p>2g Neighborhood residents report benefits to increased social interaction with neighbors.</p>	<p>2a. Increase in % change in perceived strength of community relationships.</p> <p>2b-2d. Get participation from local residents--both youth and adults--throughout the park reconstruction process.</p> <p>2e. Increase in % change of local residents that feel they have increased capacity to affect positive change in their neighborhood.</p> <p>2f. Increase in % change of interactions among local residents.</p> <p>2g. Increase in % change of perceived benefits of social interactions</p>

Table 1: MKE Plays Objectives, Indicators, Targets (Continued)

PRIMARY OBJECTIVES	INDICATORS	KEY RESULTS/TARGETS
<p><b>Objective 3:</b> Enhance Public Space; Uplift Community Self-Perception</p> <p><i>TOC 3: By enhancing the physical/geographic space where children play and communities socialize, we will uplift how communities view themselves and their surroundings.</i></p>	<p>3a. Neighborhood residents report the playground appearance improved as a result of reconstruction.</p> <p>3b. Neighborhood residents report the neighborhood has been beautified as a result of the park reconstruction.</p> <p>3c. Neighborhood residents report that the park is a more inviting public space as a result of the park reconstruction.</p> <p>3d. Neighborhood residents report an increase in pride in their neighborhood.</p>	<p>3a. Increase perceived improvement in appearance of park by 100% of respondents.</p> <p>3b. % change increase (by 50%) in the number of residents that perceive the neighborhood as a whole has been beautified.</p> <p>3c. % change increase (by 50%) in the number of residents that perceive the park as more inviting public space.</p> <p>3d. % change increase (by 30%) of residents reporting increased pride in their neighborhood</p>

Table 2: Map of Arlington Heights Neighborhood —Survey Target Region

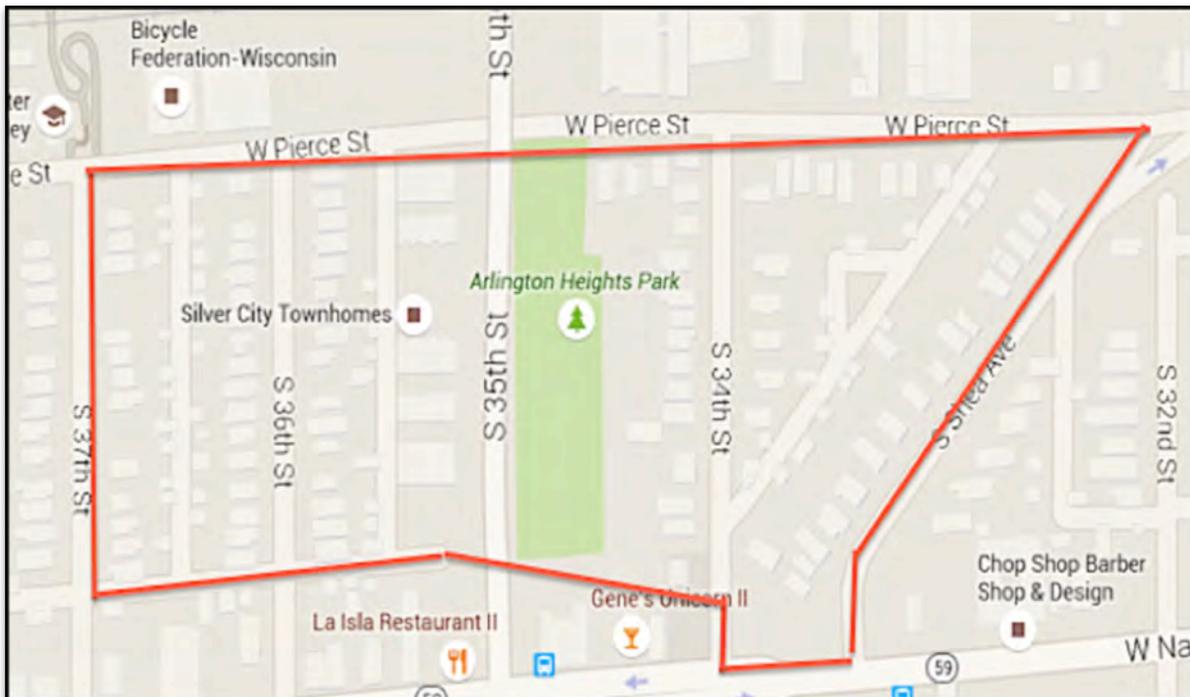


Table 3: Map of 17th and Vine Neighborhood —Survey Target Region

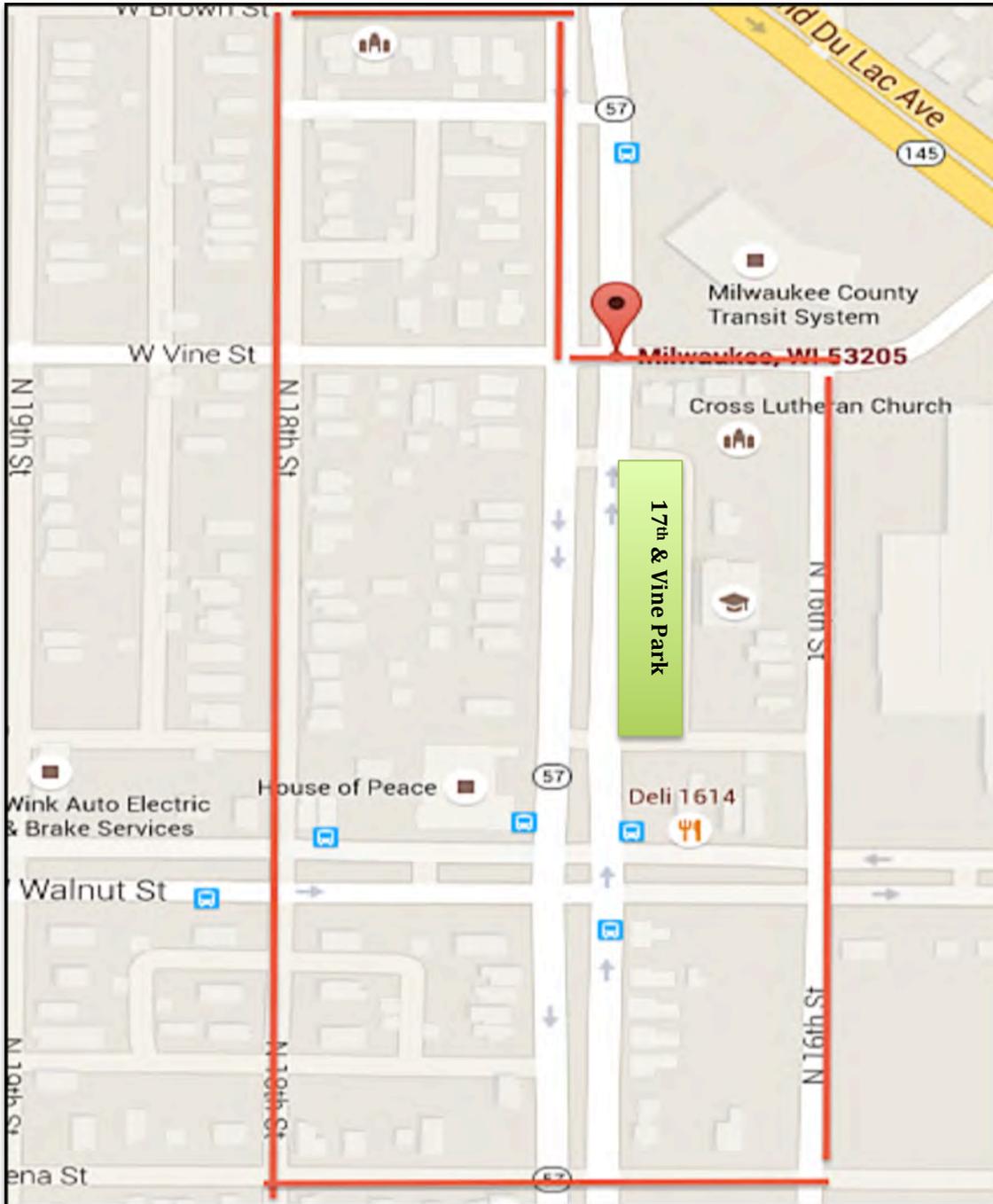


Table 4: MKE Plays FINAL Evaluation Survey

**MKE Plays Final Survey**

This survey is being used by MKE Plays to see how the park is used and if the reconstruction has made a difference. All of the following questions refer to the current park with the new changes.

\* Required



**1. Please select the park for which this survey is being completed:**  
*Mark only one oval.*

Arlington Heights  
 17th and Vine

**2. Did you or anyone in your family participate in any community meetings related to the park reconstruction?**  
*Mark only one oval.*

yes  
 no

**3. How often do you use the park now?**  
1b  
*Mark only one oval.*

0 time per week      *Skip to question 6.*  
 1 - 3 times per week  
 4 - 6 times per week  
 7 - 9 times per week  
 10+ times per week

**Please Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:**

**4. Since the playground was reconstructed, do you use the park more often?**  
1b  
*Mark only one oval.*

yes  
 no

Table 4: MKE Plays FINAL Evaluation Survey (Continued)

5. Kids can use the equipment to play in more ways than they were able to before.

1c

Mark only one oval.

- strongly disagree  
 disagree  
 agree  
 strongly agree

**Please Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:**

6. I am more willing to call the police and Department of Public Works (DPW) for issues related to the park now that there have been renovations made.

2e

Mark only one oval.

- strongly disagree  
 disagree  
 agree  
 strongly agree

Click the 'continue' button at the bottom of the page to move onto the next section, or the 'back' button to return to the previous page.

7. How often do you communicate with your neighbors now?

2f

Mark only one oval.

- very often (every day)  
 often (once or twice a week)  
 not so often (once or less a month)  
 not at all (never)      *Skip to question 9.*

8. Do you communicate with neighbors more often than you did before?

2f

Mark only one oval.

- yes  
 no

9. In the past year, how many times have you interacted with someone in your neighborhood that you had not interacted with before?

2g

Mark only one oval.

- 0 times  
 1-2 times  
 3-4 times  
 5+ times

Table 4: MKE Plays FINAL Evaluation Survey (Continued)

10. Most of my interactions with my neighbors in the past have lead to something positive.

2g

Mark only one oval.

- strongly disagree  
 disagree  
 agree  
 strongly disagree

11. How likely is it that neighborhood residents would come together and do something about an issue affecting the park (i.e vandalism)?

2a

Mark only one oval.

- very unlikely  
 unlikely  
 likely  
 very likely

12. Do you believe relationships in the community are stronger than they were before?

2a

Mark only one oval.

- yes  
 no

## Playground

13. How would you rate the appearance of the park with the new playground features?

3a

Mark only one oval.

- poor  
 fair  
 good  
 very good  
 excellent

14. What words come to mind when you think about the appearance of the park with the new features? \*

3a

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Table 4: MKE Plays FINAL Evaluation Survey (Continued)

<p><b>15. Do you believe your neighborhood looks more beautiful with the new park?</b></p> <p>3b <i>Mark only one oval.</i></p> <p><input type="radio"/> yes</p> <p><input type="radio"/> no</p> <p><b>16. How would you rate the appearance of your neighborhood now that you have a new playground nearby?</b></p> <p>3b <i>Mark only one oval.</i></p> <p><input type="radio"/> poor</p> <p><input type="radio"/> fair</p> <p><input type="radio"/> good</p> <p><input type="radio"/> very good</p> <p><input type="radio"/> excellent</p> <p><b>17. What words come to mind when you think about the appearance or spirit of the neighborhood with the new park renovations? *</b></p> <p>3b</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p><b>18. I feel more proud of my neighborhood now that there is a new playground.</b></p> <p>3d <i>Mark only one oval.</i></p> <p><input type="radio"/> strongly disagree</p> <p><input type="radio"/> disagree</p> <p><input type="radio"/> agree</p> <p><input type="radio"/> strongly agree</p>
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REPORT WRITTEN BY MAYRA ALANIZ

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