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Park Life

Co-founders *Evie Martin and Caitlin McCarthy*

What's the story behind Park Life? *Caitlin:* Just over a year ago, we were on tour performing with Miss Represented [an arts collective of artists, support workers and young-women who face challenging life situations]. Evie was saying there are no decent parks in East Brighton. Someone asked if we'd thought about setting up a campaign. We started planning in January [2018] and we had our first public meeting in May. In the summer, we ran an event called the Big Picnic, where about 500 Whitehawk residents came along for live music, a barbecue and garden games in the park. We were out there speaking to people and getting signatures for our petition.

Evie: Miss Represented had good connections; one of them knew a park designer. We've had meetings with the council – they've said we've got the money, £163,000, and there is a new park coming. Phase two will be about getting match-funding to build our ideal, beautiful park.

What's wrong with Whitehawk's parks?

Evie: They're basically inadequate. A lot of the equipment has been there for years, and it hasn't been thought through properly. We felt like a lot of the decisions were being made by people who don't care as much as we do, who aren't from the same generation as us.

Caitlin: I don't take my son to the park at the Crew Club because the equipment there is really old and dangerous. It's got all these frames but no swings. There are holes in the ground, benches that are just slats of wood, graffiti from



the 90s! To get to any decent parks, you have to get on a bus.

What have you learned about parks across Brighton & Hove? *Caitlin:* We've noticed things other parks have that ours don't, for example, toilets and sandpits. I do think we get labelled for being an estate. But you get problems in every area, no matter where you live.

Evie: One thing that's come up, is that Whitehawk is 'not a destination'. But it's *my* destination – I live here! I think if our area did have nicer parks, people would look at us differently. And I think that's why people don't mind funding us. We're two young Whitehawk girls speaking up. It hasn't happened in a very long time.

What does the future hold for Park Life?

Evie: We're working with the council to draw up the park plans and finish our consultation, so that the new Middle Park will be finished by the end of 2019. I'd love to improve Whitehawk's Top Park too. And for Park Life to keep organising events. So many people came out for the Big Picnic because it wasn't about raising money, it was about bringing the community together.

How else have local people responded?

Caitlin: Now, the community comes to us for things they're concerned about, because they don't feel like they'll be heard if they speak directly to the police or the council. We pass their concerns on to our contacts at the council, and we're on their side. *Interview by Rose Dykins*
bhparklife.org.uk

Photo by Rose Dykins