



CLOCKWISE
FROM FAR LEFT
 The head teacher, Dawn Ferdinand, and children at Chessington World of Adventures; excitement at Chessington; camping at Walton Firs activity centre, Surrey; dance classes were among the activities offered at the Willow Primary School in Tottenham; Demi and Nicola prepare for caving at Walton Firs; a sleepover in the school hall



OUR BEST SUMMER EVER!



In June, we revealed how children on the deprived Broadwater Farm estate were dreading the holidays. You responded by donating £340,000. Sharon Hendry reports on the life-changing summer you made possible

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TOM PILSTON



At the beginning of the summer, we reported on the plight of children living on one of Britain's most notorious housing estates, Broadwater Farm. Our article, Summer on the Farm (June 30), uncovered shocking housing conditions and gave a voice to families too poor to take their children off the north London estate during the school holidays — and too terrified of crime to let them play on it.

Dawn Ferdinand, head teacher of the Willow Primary School in Tottenham, which is a safe haven for the children of the estate, predicted many of her pupils would be shut inside stifling blocks of flats for the duration of the break. She asked us to help her set up a crowdfunding to take the children to the seaside and ensure they had one square meal each day.

What happened next surpassed all expectations. By 9am that Sunday, £5,500 had been pledged. Hour after hour, thousands of pounds poured into the JustGiving website as readers rallied to the cause, eventually raising an astonishing £340,000. Thanks to you, the school was able to reopen its doors and offer free breakfast, lunch and countless activities to children over the summer holidays.

At a special school assembly in July, more than 400 children sat mesmerised as they heard how the fund would transform their holidays. “We might go to the seaside,” their jubilant head told them, eliciting a symphony of squeals. “Or we might go to Chessington.” The sounds of joy rose an octave. The biggest cheer of all was reserved for last: “We might try to go camping!” It raised the roof. For children growing up in the concrete jungle of one of Europe's most notorious housing estates this was the stuff of fairy tales, a dream come true.

Through your generosity, the children have been given the summer of a lifetime and a legacy fund has been created that will ensure happier holidays beyond 2019. Below is a snapshot of just some of the activities The Sunday Times Magazine experienced with the ecstatic children this summer.

AUGUST 27-28, CAMPING IN SURREY

Walton Firs activity centre, set in 36 acres of forest near Cobham, Surrey, is only 54 miles from Broadwater Farm, but to the 22 pupils on board the bus it seems light years away. Most of them have never been camping before. En route, some children ask if they will see bears. Others wonder if they will need to kill wild animals for dinner. They disembark, armed with sleeping bags and cuddly toys, and pause to take in the pine trees skirting an endless expanse of grass before running excitedly to their accommodation — tents and pine cabins adjacent to a gazebo and campfire.

Ever watchful of her flock, Ferdinand looks on proudly as her pupils literally jump for joy. “Seeing my children beaming with

happiness, feeling safe and excited in a relaxed, natural atmosphere like this — it is simply a beautiful thing to watch,” she says. “Children having this much fun in the summer holidays is what every child deserves. When I first asked for money to provide activities for our children and families, I did not anticipate anything like the response we received. The generosity of the donors has meant that we have been able to provide a ‘summer of a lifetime’ for our community, and this will surely be one of the highlights.”

The eager adventurers waste no time in throwing themselves into activities including pitching tents, orienteering and even caving — in a manmade structure designed to help children gain confidence in confined spaces. During an orientation walk, a shriek of “Mushroom!” goes up, and an energetic girl with neat, side-swept cornrow plaits spots a hole in the earth. “Maybe a badger is under there.”

“What’s a badger?” asks a friend. “It lives under the ground,” she replies confidently before scooping up a handful of earth and hugging it to her chest, declaring wistfully, “I’m keeping this for ever.”

Others stop to stare at beetles idling on trees and spiders scurrying across plastic plates. These seem harmless compared with the dangers of the estate, where a 15-year-old boy was stabbed and left fighting for his life at the time this article was going to press.

Naz Edel, 9, a shy, contemplative girl, sums it up: “Here, it’s safer than usual. People in London are having a lot of violence. Here, it’s calmer and you get to hear birds chirping instead of sirens blaring. There is also nice air, rather than gas and smoke. I think it’s fun because it’s not like home where you are indoors and need to have the internet. Here, you can really make yourself an adventure. Usually during the summer I just play video games with my brother. I love it here.”

Nimet Kanisirin agrees. An earnest, bright-eyed girl, she appears older than her 10 years. She often has to look after her seven-year-old brother during holidays while her parents work long shifts in a cafe. “Children need to have more of this kind of environment because children use too much social media if they are left alone indoors. We really want fresh air and learning things in nature. I feel like I’m on a five-star holiday. The bed is perfect. The food is perfect. Everything is perfect.”

Umarani Nathan, the Willow’s parent engagement lead, is a keen camper. She led the team of seven staff and parents who volunteered to accompany the children.

“Fresh air is freedom,” she says. “Until you foster a love of the outdoors, it is scary — insects, bad weather, sleeping in tents. Once you’ve overcome it, you have the freedom to be a child. They are able to wander

WHAT YOUR MONEY PAID FOR

Amount donated: £340,000
Amount spent so far: £105,000

THE WILLOW PRIMARY SCHOOL EVENTS (children 4-11 years)

JULY Swimming • trampoline park • Chessington World of Adventures • school sleepover event • Chickenshed Theatre visit • daily school-based summer camp including free play and lunch, July 22-August 16

AUGUST Go Ape (treetop ropes adventure experience donated by Go Ape) • Whipsnade Safari Park • Museum trip • Southend seaside trip • Tottenham Hotspur Foundation football coaching (donated) • overnight camping trip • School of Rock theatre trip (70 VIP tickets donated by the Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation) • Butlins Holiday Breaks for Vulnerable Families • three-day PGL camp in Dorset for 27 of the Willow’s most vulnerable boys • climbing at Mount Palace (12 spaces donated)

OCTOBER The UK Sailing Academy, based on the Isle of Wight, has invited 30 children and three adults to attend a weekend sailing course

BROADWATERS CHILDREN’S CENTRE (children 0-4 years)

Daily children’s centre-based play scheme, July 22-August 16, including farm day • arts festival • magic day • music day • Southend seaside trip • Whipsnade Safari Park trip

COMMUNITY EVENTS SPONSORED BY THE WILLOW PRIMARY SCHOOL FUND

Broadwater Farm Community Centre summer camp (20 sponsored places) • Brook special educational needs and disability holiday programme week (40 sponsored places) • Bruce Grove Primary School (sponsored places at a holiday camp) • Park View School (PGL trip for 36 students) • Risley Avenue Primary School (10 sponsored places at the sports academy programme at Woodside High School) • Woodside High School (week of events including Wonderlab at the Science Museum) • London Zoo • London Aquarium • Alexandra Palace ice skating and trampoline park • Let’s Play community children’s street play events (x4) and children’s street carnival arranged by Haringey Play Association



anywhere, which is so different to life back home. Over this summer I’ve watched the Willow children grow in confidence, and that’s a magical thing. Camping was the dream and now they have experienced it.”

Time slips away on this special afternoon as the kids play hide-and-seek and discover the joy of communal cooking (pasta and sweetcorn in tomato sauce is the plat du jour). By 9pm they are seated on logs around a fire pit, roasting marshmallows, singing London’s Burning and gazing up at stars. “I’ve watched stuff like this on YouTube, but I never imagined it would be as good as this,” says Victoria Akinola, 10. “Outside it looks like...” Her voice trails off and she pauses for several seconds. “I mean it feels like there is a lot of space to play around. I will never forget this.”

Neither will I. I leave the children gazing up at the stars at 10pm before they head under canvas for the night and make my way to the car park with the sound of their gentle humming hanging in the balmy night air.

Did that just happen? Did Sunday Times readers really transport these incredible, appreciative, resilient children to the place they so deserve and need to be? Yes, they did. And we were all so grateful.

JULY 22-AUGUST 16, DAILY PLAY SCHEME

It’s just before 11am on Monday and a queue has already formed. Excited children begin hopping from one leg to the other while smiling parents hold tiny hands and reassure their offspring: “It’s just a few more minutes.” They are not waiting to clamber on a fairground ride or board a flight to Walt Disney World, they are awaiting the reopening of their school. This will be their safe haven for four weeks of the summer holidays, offering free play activities and, vitally, free breakfast and lunch. It will receive 1,088 visits, with many children attending multiple times.

“This is an incredible opportunity for our children,” says Parkash Vyas, 43, who arrives with his daughter Arya, 7. “We don’t want our children to stay at home staring at screens. It’s wonderful for all of us because the majority of these parents are trying to find work, and while they are doing that they have to find childcare. This helps everyone. We are all so happy.”

Today, blue skies and golden sunshine reflect the mood of more than 66 children who have left cramped, high-rise towers to choose from a Chickenshed theatre performance, dance classes, arts and crafts, Tottenham Hotspur football coaching, paddling pools and bike riding — fortified by breakfast bagels and hearty lunches. Later, a school sleepover complete with barbecue, camp fires and toasted marshmallows unfolds for a further 40 children.

Khepria King, 9, is a happy “school holidaymaker”, sitting in the sunshine meticulously crafting a colourful “K” on a canvas bag. “I love colouring and making



“EVERYTHING IS PERFECT” Campfire and caving at Walton Firs activity centre, Surrey

things,” she says. “If I wasn’t here I would just be at home with the TV on or by my computer. I want to come back every day.”

When The Sunday Times Magazine first asked children on Broadwater Farm about their summer holiday aspirations, some said they would simply like to ride a bike outside. Today, a group of children shriek with delight as they race around the playground on school bikes. “At least 10 have learnt to ride for the first time,” the activity

“I’ve watched stuff like this on YouTube, but I never imagined it would be as good as this. I will never forget this”

supervisor, Audrey Duah, 50, says proudly. She has been a teaching assistant at the Willow for 13 years. Surveying the playground, a heartwarming smile spreads across her face. “They are learning skills that many other children take for granted.”

Patrick Mpanumpanu, 8, screeches to a halt to discuss his new hobby. “I learnt to ride for the first time when school opened last week and now I’m having so much fun I don’t want to stop.”

Pick-up time for the day play scheme is 2pm, and wheelchair-bound mum Sherine, 42, is one of the first parents to arrive. She marvels at the canvas bag depicting rainbows over the sea that her daughter Sadeel, 5, has made. “For me, this is great,” Sherine says. “It’s done two things: given Sadeel something to look forward to every day and it helps me not to feel so guilty. Because of my physical condition she spends a lot ➤➤

of time in the house during summer and I want her to be out enjoying life.”

Next door, a dedicated youth worker, Clasford Stirling, is also grateful for the crowdfund that is supporting 20 places at his community centre summer football camp. “I am just amazed and ever thankful that people care about us,” he says. “I have been here for 40 years and never seen help like this. This sort of fund usually comes after an earthquake. One article means we now have funding that can go on for quite a few years. It’s about easing pressure for parents who are in low-paid jobs and cannot afford to give their children the same opportunities as everyone else.”

At the end of the day, Ferdinand says: “I want to say a great big thank-you to my staff who did not hesitate to sign up for supporting the activities over the summer. They have unselfishly given their time because they know what these experiences mean for our community. This is what my team and I came into teaching for.”

JULY 31, CHESSINGTON WORLD OF ADVENTURES

On yet another pleasant sunny day, 68 children and parents step off three coaches and into the Disney vibe of Chessington World of Adventures theme park in Surrey. Edita Calakovic, 37, is one of the first parents to disembark with her twins, Jemary and Jemal, 9, and their brother Casper Okumankoma, 10. “We’ve been counting down the days,” she says. “Thank you so much to the newspaper and all the readers who made this possible. In the summer I try to do as much as I can with

SECONDARY FUN

The size of the Sunday Times crowdfund also helped vulnerable secondary school pupils from the estate to find safe spaces this summer: 36 children from Park View, a secondary school in Tottenham, attended a five-day PGL camp, and 39 children from Woodside High School, in Wood Green, enjoyed an enrichment programme that included ice-skating, trampolining, museum trips and a visit to London Zoo. Some of them told us it was “the best week of our lives”.

Meanwhile, 50 special educational needs children from the Willow’s sister school, the Brook, enjoyed a weeklong summer programme, and the fund enabled its next-door neighbour, the Broadwaters Children’s Centre, to keep its doors open to parents and children aged up to four years. Daily play events included an art festival, magic show, musical day and a petting zoo with a donkey, a goat, a sheep, a giant rabbit, sugar gliders (a gliding possum) and a tortoise that delighted hundreds of curious children, many of whom were encountering some of the animals for the first time.



“SO MUCH FUN” Teacher Nathaniel Kennedy and Ovarni Haughton-Hodson play dodgeball

the kids, depending on my finances and what I can afford. This fund is helping to take the pressure off me and allowing me to do one or two other things I couldn’t normally afford. I hope it will be an example and demonstrate that there is a need for this not just on Broadwater Farm but in many places across Britain, because the problems are not going to go away.”

Accompanied by trusted staff, scores of happy children sprint off like greyhounds out of the traps to experience the fast rides, fast food and fast spending. They don’t whine for candyfloss or pizza and no one breaks down in tears begging for further “goes” to win gigantic fluffy toys. Instead, they seem grateful to be in the moment, in the company of friends. One boy tries to save half his lunchtime burger to share with family members stuck back at home.

Several children head for the petting farm. “Aaahhh, there’s a sheep,” says an excited seven-year-old girl before sprinting off to plant her little hands squarely on its head. “How does it feel?” I ask her. She thinks for what seems like an age before replying: “Furry. No, wiry. No, funny.” She moves to the goat, slipping her fingers through its hair with a look of sheer elation on her face.

Animal sightings prove hugely popular. Two sad-looking gorillas behind a clear plastic screen pique the children’s curiosity — and perhaps sympathy. Kieran Stevens, 11, says: “I love watching the gorillas because they are so fascinating. I’ve never been that close to a wild animal before. I’ve also had so much fun on the Dragon Fury rollercoaster and the Vampire ride. They are high and fun and so scary at the same time. I also like the fact that we get fit walking round this big place all day. This has been one of the best days ever and I hope I can come back again next year.”

The children are eloquent and full of insights. Theodore Williams, 11, adds:

“I really like how they combine the zoo with the theme park here, and I like how the rides are connected to animals. They are called things like Cobra and Dragon Fury. Usually, all I would be doing in the summer is maybe going to Southend and then sitting down and watching TV. This has been amazing and I want to thank everyone who made this possible for us. It is very kind.”

“Thank you” is repeated multiple times by many children throughout the day.

David Ayensu, 11, says: “One of my favourite things today was just getting wet in the sprinkler and being with my friends in a fun place. Normally I would just go to the park, but it gets boring if you go too many times. Thank you so much.”

“It’s been fantastic to see how much the children love and appreciate what has been given to them this summer,” says Anthony Weekes, a popular year 4 teacher, as we watch the children clamber back on the buses tired and happy at 4pm. “The buzz for what comes next every day is really giving them a summer they’ll never forget.” ■

Our appeal to help children enjoy rather than dread their holidays touched such a nerve with our readers and has had such an amazing result that we will return with an expanded scheme to reach more children for our Sunday Times Christmas Appeal. We are grateful to all the individuals who donated so generously and to the organisations including School of Rock, GoApe and the National Trust that offered the children trips. If you or your organisation would like to get more involved, please contact magazine@sunday-times.co.uk

For more information about Willow Primary School and how it will spend the legacy fund, or, indeed, to donate, visit thewillow.haringey.sch.uk/Contact