

Scranton, PA Makes City Parks a COVID-Safe Destination

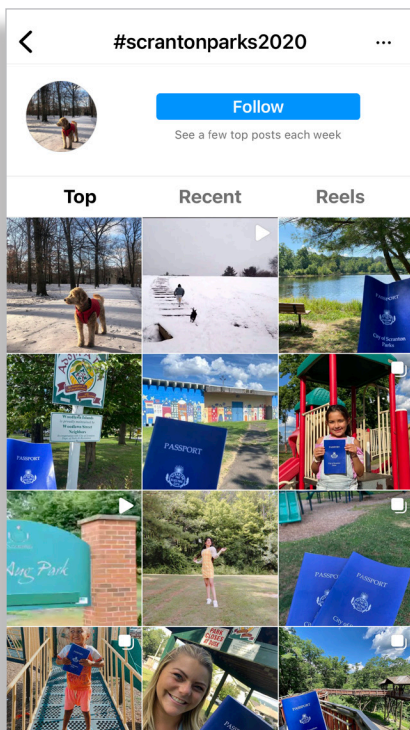


While schools and daycares were closed during the COVID-19 lockdown, children and their families were desperate for safe recreation options. In many cities, this meant the highest ever use of public spaces—parks, playgrounds, and pedestrian trails—which put additional pressure on city staff to maintain these spaces.

City staff in Scranton, PA wanted to support families by ensuring the safety and visibility of city playgrounds and parks. To this end, staff rolled out a new parks cleaning and sanitation process that used

backpack sprayers equipped with non-toxic sanitizer to clean park and playground equipment using grant funding from Healthy Babies Bright Futures and the Mayors Innovation Project.

Staff also created a successful City Parks Passport program to provide a fun, interactive way to encourage and track visits to Scranton's 23 city parks. Free passports remain available to residents at multiple locations throughout the city. At the height of the pandemic, residents were able to track their progress by taking pictures and posting them to social media using #ScrantonParks2020.



BRIGHT CITY: SCRANTON, PA

CONCERNS:

- Underutilized city parks

PROJECT OUTPUT:

- Purchased 2500 backpacks; 5 aerosol sprayers and 50 cases of non-toxic sanitizing spray; 800 gallons of foaming soap and hand sanitizer
- Thousands of City Parks Passports to distributed to Scranton children and families

KIDS POTENTIALLY IMPACTED:

- More than 4,400 kids under 5 years old live in Scranton
- 34% of kids under six live in poverty

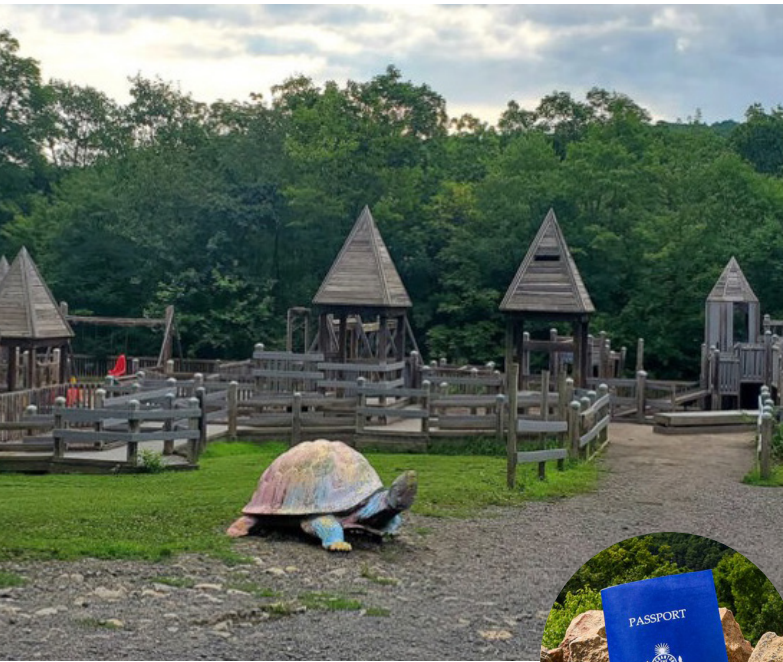


For a version of this document with clickable links, visit www.hbbf.org/bright-cities or www.mayorsinnovation.org/our-work/publications/



"Our goal is to steward a clean and healthy environment for Scranton's children and their families. This project enabled us to robustly clean playground structures using non-toxic methods and encourage families to visit different City parks via our innovative Park Passport program. The Park Passport was a creative way for families to 'travel' to different parks during the pandemic and to help give our kids an opportunity for an active and safe summer."

Mayor Paige Cagnetti, Scranton, Pennsylvania



Scranton's Nay Aug Park has two adventure playgrounds —featured in the Parks Passport Program—that are regularly maintained with non-toxic products.



What Have Other Cities Done to Purchase Healthier Products?

Environmentally preferable purchasing (EPP) strategies create conditions for healthy community spaces by requiring that products purchased are free of neurotoxic chemicals and instituting practices that reduce waste, conserve energy and water, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. **Bright Cities Anchorage AK and Providence RI have made significant progress towards adopting municipal EPP strategies** ([Providence City Council authored a resolution](#) calling for the adoption of Environmentally Preferable Purchasing practices in January 2021).



The Keys to Kick Off Your City's Playspace Enrichment

1

Find your team.

Teamwork truly makes the dream work. Equipped with a good idea, Scranton staff worked to put together the right team to implement the vision. In addition to parks and administrative staff, a researcher helped create the Passport with rich information, and a designer helped make it attractive and interactive for children of all ages and developmental levels.

2

Have a Plan A and a Plan B.

Be ready and able to change some of the logistics of the project without changing the spirit or purpose. In Scranton, staffing constraints and other priority shifts led to deprioritization of the original idea in favor of the Parks Passport—which ended up being one of the project's most successful components.

Bright City Duluth, MN—with support from the [Sustainable Purchasing Leadership Council](#)—also plans to examine purchasing policies and practices in City operations, identify opportunities for more environmentally preferred purchases, and implement changes to create healthier public spaces for residents and visitors.

The Ecology Center in Ann Arbor, MI compiled a [pragmatic roadmap to help develop a sustainable procurement policy](#) that you can implement in your community. The roadmap consists of four steps that will lead to cleaner, safer environments—(1) foundation building; (2) creating an EPP; (3) implementing your EPP; and (4) tracking progress.

Interested in learning more about this project?

Contact Liza Carroll, Deputy Director of the City of Scranton Office of Economic and Community Development, at lcarroll@scrantonpa.gov.



“I loved connecting with other Healthy Babies Initiative grantees. It was inspiring to learn of the many amazing things going on to keep kids healthy. Here in Scranton, ensuring that our City’s fabulous parks stayed safe during the COVID-19 pandemic was the ultimate resolution of how to help keep children, pets, and families active during a difficult time.”

Ann Marie Jason, Scranton's Construction Coordinator



The Bright Cities program provides up to \$35,000 in grant funding for US cities and community based partner organizations to reduce exposures — in pregnant women and children under 2 years — to the nine neurotoxins with the strongest associations to developmental delay.¹ These neurotoxins are arsenic, flame retardants, lead, mercury, combustion byproducts called PAHs, banned industrial chemicals PCBs, organophosphate pesticides, a rocket fuel component and fertilizer contaminant called perchlorate, and plastic additives called phthalates.

Curious about funding and technical support to reduce neurotoxic exposures in your city? Contact **Kyra Naumoff Shields**, Bright Cities Program Director, at knaumoff@hbbf.org



The Mayors Innovation Project is a national learning network for mayors committed to shared prosperity, environmental sustainability, and efficient democratic government. Around the country, mayors are taking the lead on pressing issues— climate change, racial equity, economic revitalization, housing, and more. The Mayors Innovation Project supports mayors by providing cutting-edge thinking and concrete examples that mayors can implement.

Looking for peer networking and best practices for city leaders focused on equity, sustainability, and democracy? Contact **Katya Spear**, Mayors Innovation Project Managing Director, knspear@mayorsinnovation.org.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Bennett D, Bellinger DC, Birnbaum LS, et al. Project TENDR: Targeting Environmental Neuro-Developmental Risks The TENDR Consensus Statement. *Environ Health Perspect*. 2016; 124(7):A118-A122.