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13 San Francisco Playgrounds Get Makeovers

November 23, 2009: Last year, 26 playgrounds in San Francisco failed to meet basic safety standards, according to the *2008 Playground Report Card*. Building on 2008 improvements, this year, the local non-profit Neighborhood Parks Council (NPC), in collaboration with the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department (RPD), has brought about another round of major playground enhancements through its Playground Initiative. The newly released *2009 San Francisco Playground Reassessment Report* shows that 8 facilities were upgraded thanks to community volunteer workdays organized by the Playground Initiative in 2009. The improved sites include McCoppin Square, Buena Vista, Kimbell, Palega, Stern Grove, Silver Terrace, Glen Canyon, and Christopher playgrounds.

Since 2008, the Playground Initiative has held volunteer workdays at 24 C, D, and F grade playgrounds. Workday improvements varied by park, but included the following tasks: trash pickup, sand sifting and addition, beautification projects, plantings, and equipment painting.

According to Meredith Thomas, Executive Director of NPC, “small improvements really make a difference in safety. Simply painting wooden elements seals in arsenic, eliminates splinters, and beautifies the play area. Adding new playground sand was also a valuable volunteer task this year, as having sufficient depth of sand decreases the probability that children will hurt themselves falling or jumping off of equipment.”

One of the year’s highlights was the involvement of JCC Maccabi Games’ athletes in Playground Initiative efforts. The JCC Maccabi Games, an athletic competition for Jewish youth held annually in North America, includes a community service project known as DOCAS, or the Days of Caring and Sharing. In August, hundreds of youth came out to needy playgrounds for DOCAS to clean up park facilities. Nicole, a teenager from Detroit, captured the spirit of DOCAS perfectly saying, “To me, playgrounds are like childhood and through helping to clean them up, we’re helping kids have a better childhood.”

Playgrounds are vital for community cohesion and child development. “In some cases, parks offer the only real backyard experience a child has. We want to make sure every child has a safe and inviting place for social interaction, physical activity, and creative play,” says Thomas.

The Neighborhood Parks Council and the Recreation and Park Department will be surveying all RPD-maintained playgrounds in February and publishing the 2010 Playground Report Card shortly thereafter. The Playground Initiative will then use 2010 grades to focus volunteer efforts during 2010-2011. Throughout the two-year effort, the Initiative will continue to advocate for high-quality, well-maintained playgrounds citywide to ensure that *all* children in San Francisco can play and exercise safely outside.