

Case study 3

Green outdoor gyms in Joburg Johannesburg City Parks

Contributing to a healthy city by developing active recreational nodes in public parks

Project Summary

The Green Outdoor Gyms were launched in 2012 in Petrus Molefe Eco-Park in Soweto as a pilot project between Johannesburg City Parks Corporate Projects and young entrepreneur Tim Hogins of Green Outdoor Gyms. The outdoor gyms provide world-class equipment in a secure park setting; the equipment at Petrus Molefe Park can be used by a number of people at a time and is free to the public. While still new, the project has generated high interest and has proved to be overwhelmingly popular with Soweto residents, many of whom might not otherwise have access to gym facilities.

Background & Introduction

Johannesburg City Parks (City Parks) is a municipal-owned entity within the City of Johannesburg that is known for supporting innovative projects. With responsibility for more than 2 000 parks throughout



the city, its mandate is to create, protect, maintain and develop green open spaces for the recreational use of the citizens of the city.

Since 2000 City Parks has built many more parks in previously disadvantaged areas such as Soweto, Alexandra, Diepsloot, Orange Farm and many other townships. The response to open green spaces was initially smaller than in more developed areas, but as people began incorporating these areas into their daily lives, the demands for more active ways to use the parks expanded. The usage of parks is also unbalanced, with some parks facing heavy over-utilisation and others being underutilised.

City Parks has been engaged in discussions with Tim Hogins of Green Outdoor Gyms since 2008. This project began as a pilot in 2012 and is in line with the organisation's donation and sponsorship drive. It is a project with the potential to help promote healthy lifestyles in the City of Johannesburg.

“Real quality of life requires that everyone enjoys easy access to a range of services that improves their quality of life and enhances their sense of belonging and patriotism. We will partner with people of this city to constantly find new ways of expressing and celebrating our diversity.”

Councillor Mpho Parks Tau, Executive Mayor of the City of Johannesburg



Objectives & Key Accomplishments

1. To develop active nodes of recreation proactively to help residents of the City of Johannesburg to develop healthy lifestyles that contribute to a strong, growing city
2. To work with partners whose values contribute to the City of Johannesburg's commitment to providing innovative, cost-effective solutions to increase the quality of life of its citizens and assist communities that otherwise might not be able to afford or have access to these facilities
3. To test the Green Outdoor Gyms concept in Petrus Molefe Eco-Park in Soweto to determine the interest, viability and long-term sustainability of rolling out outdoor gyms in Johannesburg's parks

According to Bohlale Mohlathe, Manager: Corporate Projects/Funding, project manager since its inception, observations made and recorded since installation reveal that the project is successful. At the time of writing this case study, the Green Outdoor Gyms had received press coverage from various local papers, and local and international television stations. Calls expressing interest have come in from various other areas within Johannesburg, and municipalities and institutions throughout the country. Tim Hogins says that he has counted 103 people at 9pm at Soweto's new outdoor gym, waiting to use equipment that currently can handle only 20 at a time.



From the City's perspective, the launch of the outdoor gyms has already chalked up some key accomplishments:

1. An innovative new concept has been launched that is free for residents to use, and provides high-quality equipment for them to work out on so that they can enjoy healthy lifestyle benefits that might not otherwise be available due to cost or availability.
2. It has provided an opportunity for partnership with a young City entrepreneur with a social and community focus who is keen to help people in disadvantaged areas gain access to healthy living and who covers the cost of the equipment, maintenance and security in the outdoor gym area.

3. The 24-hour, 7-day-a-week security services provided by Green Outdoor Gyms enhance safety and security for the benefiting parks at no cost to the City.
4. The project has provided job-creation opportunities with the security company employed to guard the gym every day. The guards are trained to double up as instructors, and can also build personal relationships with clients. This provides them with the opportunity to work as personal instructors in their own businesses when off duty.
5. It has enhanced the quality of lives of citizens; several users have reported improved health conditions following the use of the Green Outdoor Gyms equipment. These range from people suffering from obesity to those with high blood pressure and other non-communicable diseases.
6. It links to healthy lifestyle initiatives such as food gardens in previously disadvantaged areas.

About Johannesburg City Parks

Johannesburg City Parks, a section 21 company with the City of Johannesburg as sole stakeholder, was set up in November 2000 to manage the City's parks, cemeteries, open green areas, street trees and conserved spaces.

As custodian of 22 278 hectares of open space and green areas, City Parks' aim is for a greener environment for the present community and future generations. It is committed to upholding and maintaining Johannesburg's 'green crown' and it will continue to manage the parks portfolio in a manner that ensures that Johannesburg remains one of the greenest cities in the world.

Johannesburg City Parks is committed to the principles of Joburg's Growth and Development Strategy. Special focus is given to job creation, skills development and spatial planning as envisaged in the Johannesburg Metropolitan Open Space Strategy. Job creation is addressed through the Expanded Public Works Programme.

Source: www.jhbcityparks.com

City Parks' involvement in the Green Outdoor Gyms ties in closely with its own strategic mandate as a green organisation. The outdoor gym has increased the number of users visiting the Petrus Molefe Eco-Park, a new park in Dhlamini, Soweto.

The Joburg 2040: Growth and Development Strategy (GDS 2040) explicitly points out the need for a healthy city. It highlights that Johannesburg's population is at risk from chronic lifestyle diseases such as diabetes, obesity and cardiac diseases. According to Tim Hogins, *"South Africa is one of the most obese countries in the world."* GDS 2040 emphasises that the City can build awareness of health risks, coordinate care, and improve the environmental and living conditions that affect residents' health.

This makes the outdoor gyms a natural fit. Free, high-quality equipment in a park setting offers communities an opportunity to deal more successfully with lifestyle diseases. The setting of the parks in local Johannesburg townships allows residents, who may not be able to afford or have access to private gyms, an opportunity to work out close to home.

From the beginning, Green Outdoor Gyms raised a remarkable level of community involvement. There are stories of older women with their bottles of cleaning fluid and cloths coming to keep the equipment clean.

Scope, Impact and Timelines

Scope

The unprecedented reception and demand for the equipment, as well as observational studies, played key roles in informing the way forward on the project. Based on demand and the success of the project to date, more gyms will be rolled out to other parks throughout the City. Most of the gym pieces are double-sided and can be used by two people at a time. At present, an agreement is in place between City Parks and Green Outdoor Gyms to roll out 20 additional outdoor gyms and additional equipment in the immediate future. The 20 parks are as follows:

	Name of Park	Suburb
1.	Diepsloot Park	Diepsloot
2.	Johannesburg Botanical Gardens	Emmarentia
3.	Dorothy Nyembe Park	Soweto
4.	Joubert Park	Johannesburg CBD
5.	Orange Farm Regional Park	Orange Farm
6.	Krematart Park	Eldorado Park
7.	Pieter Roos Park	Johannesburg CBD
8.	Windsor Park	Randburg
9.	Sandhurst Park	Sandton
10.	Orlando West Park	Orlando
11.	Winston Ridge Park	Birnam
12.	Zoo Lake	Parkview
13.	Delta Park	Victory Park
14.	James and Ethel Grey Park	Melrose
15.	Ivory Park	Ivory Park
16.	Petrus Molefe Park	Soweto
17.	Rose Park	Lenasia
18.	Johannesburg Zoo	Forest Town
19.	Protea Park	Soweto
20.	Alexandra Park	Alexandra

Impact

As listed above in the key accomplishments to date, the equipment is providing recreational and health uses for multiple participants at a time in the Petrus Molefe Eco-Park. The outdoor gyms encourage a healthy lifestyle, promote social cohesion in the area, and create a space where communities can safely interact and enjoy the outdoor park area. The security employees/instructors at the site also take part in the job creation provided by Green Outdoor Gyms, whose own locally manufactured gym equipment gives further employment to local South Africans.

Timelines

One noted factor of this project was the length of time between initial discussion and the roll-out. It is found that projects of this nature, depending on their complexity, take three to eight years to roll out.

<p>2008</p>	<p>Green Outdoor Gyms engages in dialogue with City Parks.</p> <p>Tim Hogins is invited to present his proposal to City Parks' Project Steering Committee (PSC), its second highest decision-making body, where he receives comments/advice on changes that should be made for the proposal to fit in with City Parks' open spaces. An In-Principle Approval is granted on condition that recommendations made are actioned by Green Outdoor Gyms.</p>
<p>2009 – 2010</p>	<p>Green Outdoor Gyms implements the suggested changes.</p> <p>A safety inspection by City Parks' Safety, Health, Environment and Quality (SHEQ) team takes place at the local manufacturing warehouse. Following the inspection by the safety team a report is tabled to the PSC.</p>
<p>2011</p>	<p>Approval is given to Green Outdoor Gyms to implement the project on a Pilot Project Basis.</p>
<p>2012</p>	<p>A Memorandum of Agreement is signed for two pilot locations and the first roll-out pilot opens at Petrus Molefe Eco-Park on 21 March, with a second to be opened on a date to be confirmed. The overwhelming response for the first gym installed at Petrus Molefe enabled City Parks to make immediate observations informing the way forward on the outdoor gyms project.</p>



Critical Success Factors

1. Innovative & Creative Approach. One of the key factors of success with this pilot in its early stages is the innovative and creative approach to a healthy lifestyle in the parks. Initially, when parks were built in townships where parks had never been built before, people tended to look at them as a pretty space for walks. Over time, however, they began to perceive them as active recreational nodes with playgrounds, basketball courts, and now, outdoor gyms. This brings a new, previously not considered, mode of recreation and enjoyment to people's lives.

2. Pilot as City Parks Corporate Project with Green Outdoor Gyms. Green Outdoor Gyms' Tim Hogins had been in discussions with City Parks from an early stage to reach the point of launching a pilot programme. By bringing in equipment for just one park, which City Parks could not provide – and by handling maintenance and security – Green Outdoor Gyms was able to provide services that brought extra benefits to City Parks' open spaces. In addition, the security-services employees have also worked as instructors, providing extra job-creation opportunities in the area.

The equipment itself is state of the art, and provides five different exercise routines. It is tested to be weather resistant, durable and strong enough to handle the volume of usage expected. Since it is locally manufactured in South Africa by Green Outdoor Gyms, changes, alterations and adjustments can be quickly made.

A challenge for both City Parks and Green Outdoor Gyms is how to make the project viable for the future. At this time, subtle branding solutions, such as branding on the equipment and aerobics pitches, are being explored that would allow Green Outdoor Gyms a method to recoup their investment, but this has not yet been finalised.

3. Links with the Biokinetics Association of South Africa (BASA). BASA currently visits the Petrus Molefe Eco-Park once a month to provide services for residents in need of assistance for muscle damage, atrophy or injuries due to incidents such as car accidents. Most of these people, many of them pensioners or physically disabled, could not afford the specialised medical assistance that can be provided by volunteers from BASA and with the use of the outdoor gyms. This programme is under discussion to increase the number of visits in the future.

4. Spreading usage of the parks. One of City Parks' operational issues is preventing over-usage of some parks, while encouraging greater usage of others. This type of project lends itself to encouraging usage of less-known parks.

5. Technology and local manufacture. With the service provider bringing in the equipment and technology, the park benefited from the latest in outdoor equipment which went through all necessary SHEQ processes. Having the equipment locally manufactured not only benefits the country by creating employment, but also allows for adjustments, spares and new equipment to be more readily available.

6. Community buy-in with benefits and additional security. The park is popular with people of all ages. Groups of pensioners come by bus from throughout Soweto to make use of the innovative gym. The initial project was launched with an event featuring a group of aerobic dancers, all from Soweto, who provided an aerobics exhibition which meant employment and a showcase for them, and entertainment for the community. Though the gym facilities have just opened (in March 2012), indications are that the usage is greater than anticipated. In addition, the 24-hour security at the gym makes the parks a safer space for all residents and users.



7. Political and organisational support. The outdoor gyms concept has long been of interest to City Parks, and with the launch, Executive Mayor Parks Tau has become an avid supporter, as has Cllr Chris Vondo, Member of the Mayoral Committee (MMC) for Community Development. Having the necessary support, from operational teams in the parks up to mayoral level, will assist the future success of this project.

Key Learnings

Though the introduction of the Green Outdoor Gyms has just begun, already there are key learnings that contribute to the future of this project.

- 1. Demand for more outdoor recreation in under-resourced areas is greater than expected.**
No one could anticipate that the first outdoor gym would be as wildly successful as it turned out to be. The great interest from the residents, the media and the public indicate that people are keen to become healthier and fitter, and seeking out ways to do so.
- 2. Finding local service providers whose values match City Parks in terms of providing benefit to communities is important.** Discussions are under way with potential service providers whose values match those of City Parks to assist communities. With the pilot through Corporate Projects with Green Outdoor Gyms, Tim Hogins brought to the table his vision for outdoor gyms and a healthier South Africa, as well as his passion for assisting less advantaged communities. This project also provides City Parks the opportunity to support and partner with young, developing entrepreneurs to grow economic development in the City and meet GDS requirements for supporting business opportunities for small businesses.

- 3. Sustainability of the outdoor gyms is critical going forward.** In addition to meeting City Parks Corporate Projects' requirement to meet community needs at little or no cost to the City, part of the next challenge in working with outdoor gyms is for service providers to find ways to make projects financially viable. The current finding is that corporate donors/sponsors seek partners that can offer the community both passion and sustainability across a broad sector, ie many parks. Corporate sponsors may seek large branding opportunities which are not in line with the use of public space; however, many are open to discussing different approaches.

City Parks is working to identify ways to provide subtle branding that would be suitable for corporate sponsorship yet does not compromise the integrity of the public space. Since City Parks does not control all the space in the area, which is controlled in part by the Johannesburg Property Company, this is also a challenge to coordinate between agencies.

One example of a sponsorship that works well for City Parks is the Simba sponsorship at Zoo Lake, with a character and subtle branding on the mats in the playground area. Similar concepts to this are being explored. The March launch was sponsored by Green Outdoor Gyms without a corporate sponsor, so this is a key priority going forward in terms of sustainability for service providers.

- 4. Community buy-in ensures success.** There is no greater success for a community project than when it is endorsed and appreciated by the local community. According to Bohlale Mohlathe, *"A sense of community ownership is a huge element."* Working with ward councillors of a community also plays a critical role in the success of the project. The ward councillor is able to garner community support for projects through public consultation and community notices. This in turn ensures community ownership of projects.

Early indications are that the residents in the area of the Petrus Molefe Eco-park, including the previously mentioned older women with their bottles of cleaning fluids, are both keen on the gym and appreciative of the benefits it brings to their area and their health in general. Continuing to find local residents who champion the outdoor gyms through the ward councillor will help ensure their success.

- 5. The timing is right.** With Johannesburg's growing middle class, higher levels of obesity and other health issues, the timing is right to introduce outdoor gyms. As the population moves to a more car-based society, people walk less than they did before, and the need for exercise has increased. Greater awareness on healthy lifestyles contributes to a developing need for addressing health issues.

- 6. Managing the outdoor gym project for a way forward.** The success and popularity of the pilot outdoor gym has taken the City by surprise. Minor operational innovations, such as rolling out sporting pitches for the entire area, putting in a fence that can be used for stretching purposes, and better signage are being explored to help handle the unexpected numbers of people using the equipment.

To address the interest expressed by other companies operating in the same field of outdoor gym equipment, an innovative method of handling requests was undertaken through the posting of an Expression of Interest (EOI) notice in local newspapers, as well as on City Parks' social network sites. City Parks posted a notice for Donations, Sponsorships and Submissions of Innovative Project Ideas to encourage residents and local citizens to send in ideas for sustainable projects, especially those not requiring funding from the City. As anticipated, the EOI generated many more innovative concepts which City Parks Corporate Projects will look forward to developing in the future.



Next Phase & Conclusions

With requests coming in from residents in other areas around Johannesburg, from various media and television stations, from Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal and other provinces, it is anticipated that the outdoor gyms projects in parks will continue to be an outstanding success.

Interviews

Jenny Moodley, Marketing Manager, Johannesburg City Parks, 29 March 2012

Bohlale Mohlathe, Manager: Corporate Projects/Funding, 29 March 2012

Tim Hogins, Managing Director, Green Outdoor Gyms, 2 April 2012

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