

Youth are United, Prospect Park No Longer Divided

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HIS SEVEN years in office, Mayor Michael Bloomberg gave a tentative nod towards banning car traffic from the Prospect Park loop drive. "It would be great if we could keep cars out of all parks," he told the *New York Sun* in August, when questioned about the car-free Prospect Park campaign. In Brooklyn, four teenagers slapped high-fives, knowing they had helped make it happen.

This summer, with the financial support of Bikes Belong, Transportation Alternatives hired its youngest and most enthusiastic employees: 15-year-old Kelena Matthews of the Brooklyn College Academy High School, 17-year-olds Farah Karimova and Michael Cheng of Edward R. Murrow High School, and 16-year-old Oswald Bowman of the Brooklyn Academy for Science and the Environment. Branded the Prospect Park Youth Advocates, they commandeered T.A.'s historic campaign for a car-free Prospect Park and after a rigorous education in the tools and tactics of environmental advocacy, developed a campaign that reset the rungs on the ladder to making New York's parks car-free.

Prior to their employ, these young Brooklyn students had never campaigned, had never been on camera or spoken to a reporter, nor had they been granted a meeting with their elected officials. At summer's end, their campaign had the backing of park-side Council Members Bill DeBlasio, David Yassky and Letitia James, and the Youth Advocates had



Marching with dozens of classmates in tow, the Prospect Park Youth Advocates hand-delivered 10,000 signed postcards to Mayor Bloomberg.

been featured on WNYC, NY1 and News12 and in the pages of the *Daily News*, *Brooklyn Eagle*, *New York Sun*, *Brooklyn Paper*, *Park Slope Courier* and *Downtown Brooklyn Star*.

They performed street theater to make the case for car-free parks a demonstrable visual: in cardboard costumes the youths assumed the role of the trees of Prospect Park and went on strike to protest cars in the park. They donned helmets and suits of bubble wrap, demonstrating the safety equipment neces-

sary to stroll down the narrow loop drive during car-use hours.

The Youth Advocates also completed a series of studies, including clocking the speed of cars using the park's loop drive and the comparative measurement of decibel levels between a car-filled and car-free Prospect Park. They discovered that 90% of automobiles driving through the park exceed the speed limit (with some driving fatally fast speeds of 50 mph) and that noise levels within the park increase nearly 20 decibels, the difference between a chirping bird and a blow dryer in your ear, when cars drive through the park.

The centerpiece of their efforts was the collection of 10,000 signed postcards over their three-month program. Each one represented an individual interaction with a Prospect Park user who had decided to support a car-free park. In the end, the Youth Advocates exceeded their targets and set out to hand-deliver their message.

On September 15th on the steps of City Hall, the summer of advocacy culminated as the four Youth Advocates responded to the Mayor who had recently recognized their efforts. They marched across the Brooklyn Bridge with 10,000 signed postcards, hand in hand with Council Members Yassky and James, a slew of supporters and over a hundred students from Brooklyn high schools, pumped up by the Brooklyn Stepper Marching Band. "Mayor Bloomberg," they beckoned in unison, "We are the young people of Brooklyn. Mayor Bloomberg, we are the future of New York City. Mayor Bloomberg, we have a lot of mail for you!" □

Strolling Towards Victory



With strollers in tow, Mobilized Moms put their stamp on the decades-old campaign for a car-free Central Park.

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FED UP WITH CARS RECKLESSLY exceeding the speed limit, illegally entering the park during car-free time and discouraging recreational use of the park before and after school, a group of mothers organized a march and rally in Central Park in early October to demand the loop

drive be closed to car traffic.

The new community effort, "Mobilized Moms," is a coalition of mothers from Harlem, the Upper West Side and the Upper East Side. The effort is modeled on the famed Mothers of Central Park, who successfully blocked Robert Moses' plan to pave part of Central Park for a parking lot in 1956.

"I'm sick of rushing my family out of the park as the waves of cars come rolling in. Central Park and its playgrounds can't be a safe place for children and function as a traffic artery at the same time," says Lisa Sladkus, an Upper West Side mom and founder of Mobilized Moms. T.A.'s Car-Free Central Park Committee joined in the rally, which drew fifty parents and kids, safe streets champion Mary Beth Kelly and Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer. □

TakeAction!

Are you a parent trying to tame reckless driving near your park or playground?

Visit www.mobilizedmoms.wordpress.com.