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Fundraising proves to be child's play

The tragic death of three youngsters was remembered yesterday as the Spon End community unveiled a £27,000 play area in their memory.

La Toya Jackson, aged two, who died in an accident, Leon Dacres, aged two, who caught meningitis, and five-year-old Hayden Lee, who was killed in a car accident, all passed away in 1991.

The deaths sparked a huge outpouring of community spirit as Spon End residents rallied together to raise £12,000 to build a new play area. Their efforts were successful, but it was destroyed by mindless vandals in an arson attack in 1998.

The refurbishment that followed became out of date, and the park unused, so Whitefriars Housing Group earmarked £27,000 to revamp the area and make it into a facility for the whole community.

Work to replace the play equipment and install safety flooring is now complete, and more than 70 residents turned out to the official opening. All children who attended received goodie bags provided by Wicksteed Leisure.

Suzy Smith, 35, mother of Leon Dacres, was at the opening with her two children Parris, 12, and seven-year-old Kory.

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She said: "It looks fantastic. It's really nice and its great the community has the facility again. It is really special that it is in memory of Leon and the other children, and all the parents I've spoken to appreciate it. Now our other children can use it.

"I really hope the community will respect the play area and make the most of it. I'm really grateful to Whitefriars for giving all the money. If it wasn't for them it wouldn't have happened.

"It's really nice how many people turned out today. It shows a real community spirit."

Whitefriars teamed up with Spon End Residents' Association to create the play area and give the community a welcome boost.

One moving addition to the park has been to re-erect the plaque dedicating the area to the three local children who died 14 years ago.

Spon End Residents' Association's Olga Miller, of Trafalgar House, said: "It is so nice to see the park being used again. I really hope the local children will make respectful use of it and think about the reasons it was created.

"We approached Whitefriars with the hope they would offer to maintain the area, so its generous offer to pay the full £27,000 was very much appreciated.

"Thanks to Darren who provided the music."

Whitefriars' estate services manager Geoff Goring said the official opening was a real success

He said: "More than 70 people turned up which was fantastic. We tried to make it a real community event, and thanks to residents that hope came true.

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“Whitefriars is about so much more than housing, so we are working hard to provide community facilities and strengthen neighbourhood spirit where we can. Hopefully the park will provide a lasting memorial to the three children to ensure they are never forgotten.”

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Notes to Editors

Whitefriars Housing Group is a not-for-profit housing and regeneration organisation established in 2000 that owns and manages approximately 18,000 homes across Coventry.

The Group has committed £240 million to the repair and improvement of its housing stock, ensuring that the Government’s Decent Homes Standard is met five years ahead of schedule.

Working in neighbourhoods, Whitefriars is committed to the national ‘iN business for neighbourhoods’ agenda and is a major player in the regeneration of Coventry and the provision of affordable housing.

In addition to providing homes, the Group works in partnership with communities and other agencies to provide training and employment opportunities and support services for local residents, with the aim of building sustainable communities.

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