

ESAF Global Summary Report 2024



Introduction

ESAF Global Canada (EGC) worked throughout 2024 to make cities more livable by improving and reclaiming public spaces. Our mission focused on creating inclusive, healthy, and sustainable urban environments through community-driven events and local partnerships. Together, we are working to help Sri Lanka achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to health, education, gender equality, and urban sustainability.

Public parks and green spaces help people stay healthy, connect with each other, and build resilient communities. In Jaffna, our research showed that parks are often underused due to poor infrastructure, limited safety, and a lack of inclusivity. In addition, there are too few public spaces in the city, which means people need to travel farther distances in order to go to a public spaces. With the ideal walking distance being a maximum 10-minute walk (800 m), many residents, especially women, children, and those living with disabilities, struggle to access these spaces. In 2024 our efforts focused on making parks cleaner, safer, greener, and more welcoming for everyone.

Open Public Spaces

Out of the seven parks identified in Jaffna, EGC and its partners successfully engaged with the communities surrounding five through at least one reclaiming activity, where an activity is organized that encourages people to use the space and understand the space's potential. Such activities are important in revitalizing public spaces and promoting community involvement.

The first activity occurred at Gurunagar Park, where the community came together for a major clean-up drive. With 52 volunteers contributing 78 hours of service, the park was cleaned making it safe and inviting once more. The event was supported by local leaders and organizations, including the Municipal Council, Dan TV media, and volunteers from the Jesuran Healing Ministry and the University's Healthy City Team. Vendors from the fisherman's community provided refreshments, reinforcing the sense of shared purpose. Local families were thrilled to see the park revived and requested further upgrades to benefit their children.



The momentum continued at the Gurunagar Public Grounds, where a playtime and drug awareness program welcomed nearly 100 participants. Children and teenagers engaged in fun games, theatre performances, and discussions about healthy lifestyles. The day combined joy and learning, encouraging young people to embrace physical activity while raising awareness about the dangers of drug use.

At Beach Road Park, our efforts were focused on environmental stewardship. On October 26, 2024, a plantation drive was held in partnership with Holy Cross Hospital staff, the Jaffna Healthy City Team, Jesuran Healing Ministries, and local volunteers. Together, they planted 20 saplings, tree guardians are appointed from the community who will be responsible for watering, checking for pests, and reporting damage, each one a small step toward a greener and more climate-resilient city.

In Madathady Pocket Park, children were invited to discover the joy of movement and wellness. On December 20, 2024, a physical wellbeing program engaged 25 children in games and fitness activities. Experts shared tips on health and teamwork, and each child received play and fitness kits to take home, encouraging them to stay active beyond the event.

At the heart of all the activities was Subramaniya Park — a significant public space in Jaffna. Originally funded by a donation from local physician S. Subramaniam, the park was built in the 1950s by the Jaffna Urban Council. It holds historical and cultural importance and has long served as a popular recreational area for the community. We organized a series of monthly programs (8 events) under the Healing Park initiative that turned the space into a hub of learning and community care. Starting in April, the "Music and English for Fun" program welcomed 42 children—many from underprivileged backgrounds—who explored music and language in a playful, supportive environment. Another session was held at the Jaffna Public Library, where interactive lessons helped build confidence and foundational English skills. Later in the year, on November 28, a group of 15 women gathered in the same park for an aerobics and wellness session. Through guided exercises, they not only learned how to improve their physical health but also experienced the power of shared movement and community support.





One of the most meaningful transformations of Subramaniya Park in 2024 involved creating the Inclusive Reading Space. Research had revealed that many public spaces in Jaffna had no facilities for people living with disabilities, parents with young children, and caregivers. In response, our team envisioned a space that not only welcomed everyone but also inspired learning, relaxation, and connection.

Designed to serve people of all ages and abilities, the Inclusive Reading Space (<https://healthbridge.ca/library/healthbridge-mini-public-spaces-interventions-summary-report>) blended educational features with the calming influence of nature. It offers books, quiet corners, and open areas where visitors can read, play, and reflect. More than just a park feature, it has become a symbol of what inclusive urban design can look like when guided by empathy and equity.

The success of the initiative was made possible through strong local partnerships. Jesuran Healing Ministries, the University of Jaffna, and the Jaffna Municipal Council were instrumental in its planning and implementation. Local schools including St. John's College, Chundikuli Girls' College, and Jaffna Central College, donated books to help fill the shelves and spark imaginations.



Supported by UN-Habitat, the Inclusive Reading Space -

<https://healthbridge.ca/library/healthbridge-project-playbook-on-public-spaces> now stands as a working model of how public areas can serve broader segments of society. By prioritizing accessibility, knowledge-sharing, and emotional well-being, it shows that parks can become much more than green patches in a city—they can be gateways to healing, learning, and belonging.

As we look ahead, we remain deeply committed to expanding these efforts, continuing to shape public spaces that are safe, functional, and enriching for all. Through lasting partnerships and community-led action, we believe Jaffna can grow into a city where no one is left out.

Each of these experiences helped transform not just the parks themselves, but also the people who use them—reigniting a sense of ownership, belonging, and pride. These activities show that when communities come together, public spaces become more than just land—they become places of healing, growth, and connection.

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INCLUSIVE READING SPACE

Under Livable Cities Project, an Initiative of
Healing Park by: **ESAF Global Canada**
In partnership with: Health bridge Canada

UN-HABITAT

Jaffna Municipal Council