



Wild about our woods CIO

Woodland Holiday Club Report

Wild about our woods was funded by John Lyons Trust and The Grange Big Local to run 12 days of woodland holiday clubs from July 2108 until April 2019.

Six days of the holiday club took place during the summer holidays 2018. They ran on 24th, 26th, 27th, 30th, 31st July and 1st August at Martin School's woodland, N2.

One Hundred and eight session places were created for children aged 5 – 11 who live in the local area. Our ambition was to have children who are from low income families, from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and/or live on the Grange Estate N2 to join us. We approached 5 local schools to refer children under these criteria. We were pleased to be able to fill all the spaces but the referrals only came from two local schools, and one direct application from a family living on the Grange Estate.

The holiday club ran from 10am – 3.30 pm each day. Three team members worked the hours agreed to deliver the 6 sessions, ranging from 6.5-8 hours each day. 85 of the 108 places were utilised during the activity days which is a 78.7% capacity rate. This seemed pretty high taking into account the short set up time we had, and that half of the children were not known to Wild about our woods from previous work.

The objectives for running the woodland club was to create opportunities for specific children mentioned above) to explore the great outdoors in a safe and supportive environment. Alongside these activities we wanted to offer the children to chance to cook their own food from scratch over an open fire, alongside a trained adult giving them the benefit to learn new skills and promoting a healthy lifestyle.

The two weeks that the woodland club ran were very hot, even within the woods. Because of this we create lots of water-based activities. We made our own water balloons out of paper (and threw them!), had water fights, made shelters (and tested them out by throwing water on them with children inside), made our own bubble solution and using wands we'd made from willow. Homemade ice cream in the woods was an exciting activity too.

Children found different activities to connect to nature. They used loppers to cut down wood to use in their imaginative play, prepared and used natural clay to make clay faces or utilised the outdoor mud kitchen to invent muddy food. A particular favourite was using the butterfly nets to catch butterflies and then set them free. Ropes were used to make swings, sticks were used for imaginative play, willow was used to make dream catchers. We had organised challenges where children created different woodland obstacle courses, shelters and tried out bows and arrows.

The second week cooled down a bit so we were able to walk in the sun to the larger nearby woods of Coldfall Woods. This opened greater opportunities for exploration, climbing

challenges and physical activities. Lots of children fed back that they enjoyed going to the bigger woods.

Preparing food and cooking around the campfire became a much-liked activity too. Children developed their fine motor skills chopping, peeling, grinding down food. Wrapping food, mixing and string over an open fire. Food and safety inductions were given as the work was undertaken. Many younger children enjoyed the washing up and serving of food. From preparing food lots of children tried new foods they hadn't tried before. The cooking staff were able to bring in their knowledge of food to subtly explain the healthy components of what they were eating over other every day food choices.

Outcomes and benefits from the summer club

At the end of each day we would remind the children of the array of activities they had been involved in and then asked them what they liked about the session. Some liked trying out new food, others just liked eating, some like specific activities we had create while others mentioned things we didn't know they had done as they choose to be involved in deep in play with their friends.

They specifically responded;

Playing games, making new friends, helping to cook, using loppers, having roasted marshmallows over the campfire, climbing a tree, using the zip wire, catching butterflies, the water fight, eating outside, playing in the mud kitchen, imagination play, hanging out in the hammock.

But we also observed some ways that some of the children changed, especially form those who attended more than two sessions. They explored more, they became more 'brave'; moving from not feeling confident enough to climb the rope ladder to climbing up and jumping onto the zip wire. Some didn't like the dirt to becoming more adventurous and only washing their dirty hands before they ate or prepared food. Some refused all food and brought packed lunches to trying more each day and going home with half eaten packed lunches. Some used knives for the first time, joined cleaning up groups. One child with learning delay was accepted into a group and thrived form the new friendships he made.

After the summer we send a survey monkey to parents asking them to fill out a 3-minute survey. 12 families feedback. They included the following as the most enjoyable things their children did: Playing in the woods, exploring nature, making things with natural materials, cooking over the campfire, playing group games and the walk to and in Coldfall woods.

One parent explained she had returned to Coldfall Woods over the summer with her children so they could explore it as a family. Another mentioned that although her son came home filthy each day she really didn't mind. There was lots of thanks for us inviting their child and all who returned their survey said they child wanted to return. One parent was reminded of the activities he liked doing as a child in the woods which he shared with his child.

The school staff who supported the families to sign up feedback that they had heard positive things from the programme too for parents and children. We hope to capture more of the impact of the woodland club at the next sessions that take place in the next 6 months.

Finance

The total cost of the programme was £5,216. Half the amount has been spent and is broken down as follows:

Item from whole budget	Amount spent	Amount left
Forest School Leader 12 holiday sessions @ £150	£900	£900
Forest School Assistant 12 holiday sessions @ £105	£630	£630
Support staff 12 holiday sessions @65	£390	£390
Rental of woods £50 PD	£300	£300
Food; £2 per head for breakfast snack, cooked lunch and snacks (crackers, fruit) = £36 x 3 = £144 x 4 weeks	£288	£288
Equipment and materials for activities; £30 per week x 4	£60	£60
Development time to make connections/promote; 2 x days @ £100 pd	£100	£100

Learning from the summer scheme to carry forward

This was very much a pilot as it had never been offered in the local area before. We had some really good feedback and suggestions to make it better.

It was really effective to ask local schools to put children forward to make sure the criteria of funding could be met. But as the full funding could not be agreed until 4 weeks before we didn't have much lead in time to fill the spaces from across the 5 local schools. And as it was the end of term in the schools there wasn't capacity to support the scheme either. We now have more lead in time to offer the other schools to support us.

Utilising an existing children's support worker from the Grange Estate was really effective in helping parents and children to feel comfortable in joining the programme. We will definitely involve him again.

We were quite ambitious on the menu of food we cooked and offered for the children to eat. We wanted to offer a healthy selection of vegetarian food for the children to enjoy. After the first day we realised that more 'known' food was needed for the children to eat as their main food and offer them new food as a taster. This worked well so we cooked with them good quality burgers, jacket potato with salads which went down well rather than a vegetarian chilli.

We have a new monitoring and evaluation system which will allow us to capture more feedback at sessions which we hope will give us more qualitative information for reporting. We also plan to use film to capture feedback.

The very nature of Forest School is about being flexible with agendas and activities to suit the children. We found that changes were needed because of the weather, general wellbeing of the children. For example, one day a couple of children were particularly tired, so we set up an extra hammock for them just to rest in.

Report written by Janine Young

Programme Manager – September 2018