



Forestry Commission Scotland
Coimisean na Coilltearachd Alba



The Way of the Woods

Contact dates: Feb 25th – April 3rd 2013

Venue: Craigmillar Woods, Craigmillar Castle Park, and Inch Park

Event duration: Dec 2013 – April 2014

Abridged version

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The Way of the Woods

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1. Introduction

“The Way of the Woods projects has completely exceeded anything we could’ve imagined in terms of success”

Way of the Woods was an innovative outdoors creative arts/environmental project set in urban woodland and greenspace - Craigmillar Woods and Inch Park, in Edinburgh. It was delivered by an artist and a drama specialist and was specifically designed to help develop confidence and responsibility in young people with complex additional support needs and to foster in them a love of woodlands and the outdoors.

“As arts specialists working in a woodland setting we are always looking for ways to adapt our methods for the benefit of each student group. The TEENS+ Way of the Woods project gave us an opportunity to work within FCS remits with a very challenging and hard to reach new group. Working closely with the expertise of the TEENS+ staff throughout both the planning and delivery of this project meant that we could ensure that the students were given the best possible chance to partake in a woodland project specially designed around their personal learning plans. The flexible and holistic approach of the Way of the Woods project forced us to be always thinking on our feet and to constantly exercise our ability to think flexibly and imaginatively in order to create a learning environment in which students, staff and facilitators could all be drawn into a compelling sense of adventure, possibility and discovery.”

(Joanna Boyce ,Creative Art Works Project Coordinator)

Creative Art Works is an arts practitioner co-operation combining creative arts skills to facilitate creativity and expression in others. This has involved collaborations with service providers, schools and teachers, event and exhibition organisers, community groups, local councils, police and social work departments and Countryside Rangers and Community Outreach Workers. Creative Art Works’ projects are usually issue based and often based outdoors.

“We see enjoyment of art and nature as great ways of making connections across languages and social and cultural divides. Whatever the theme, it is always our aim to make learning engaging, meaningful and fun. Our challenge when delivering projects for FCS is often to devise workable and relevant ways to encourage hard to reach communities to visit woods and green space and to inspire participants to continue woodland activities beyond our projects. We use a creative approach based on the principles of empowerment, collaboration, and creative group dynamics”

(Joanna Boyce ,Creative Art Works Project Coordinator)

2. Proposal

Concept:

To design and deliver an innovative outdoor creative arts/environmental project specifically designed to help develop Life skills, confidence and responsibility in young people with additional support needs at the TEEN+ Project. Through a specially designed programme catering to the students particular special needs, the project aims to support the students in the transition to adult life. It will also contribute to their understanding of the importance of trees and forests and their local green space and woodlands and encourage a sense of ownership and motivate them in the stewardship of their local woodlands. At the same time there will be an emphasis on staff training and inspiring the TEENS+ project workers to engage with nature and the outdoors in a creative way with a hard to reach group. Throughout the delivery there will be a focus on supporting the TEEN+ team to make useful and relevant connections to both human and educational available resources as well as directing them to the necessary materials and equipment, in order to ensure continued woodland engagement beyond the **Way of the Woods** project.

Approach:

The project contact delivery will span 6 weeks with a group of 6 - 8 students and 4 - 6 workers making a series of first time visits to local woodland together with an artist and a drama specialist. The sessions will be based on forest school holistic learning principles and will be designed and run by Creative Art Works working closely with The TEENS+ team and will involve 6 weekly trips to the same designated site within Craigmillar woods and 6 half day

“The project was highly enjoyable from start to finish and the level was pitched just right for our group”

“All in all it was phenomenal – and has changed how we all think about the potential of working in the woodlands”

“It was extremely satisfying to see individuals build up their confidence about being outdoors”

“It has been an extremely positive and worthwhile experience, which has inspired us... regular visits to the local woodlands is the obvious next step”

sessions within Inch Park. A creative approach will capture the participants' imagination and will engage them in a way that will be meaningful to them, inspiring them to respect and celebrate trees and the ecosystems that surround them while encouraging them to work as a team and to be more healthy, active, imaginative, self confident and self reliant. In order to ensure that the project programme is individually tailored to provide each individual with relevant learning opportunities, stimulation and support, the project design will reflect the “Individual Learning Plans” (ILP's) for each participant.

3. Project Background

The Way of the Woods was originally devised by Creative Art Works in 2011 as part of the FCS remit to remove barriers that exclude people with additional support needs from taking part in woodland activity. The first pilot of **The Way of the Woods** was successfully delivered with a group of 10 young people from Pilrig Park Special School in Autumn/winter 2011. The students then were special needs teenagers between the ages of 14 -18 all of whom were able to walk unassisted.

Creative Art Works worked closely with the school staff to select individuals who would most benefit from the experience and who would work well together. All of the group were vulnerable young people with mild to moderate physical and/or intellectual disabilities and developmental difficulties such as Cerebral Palsy, Dyspraxia, Epilepsy, Down's Syndrome, some with multiple disabilities such as mobility and coordination issues, emotional disturbance, allergies and severe asthma. The project addressed needs informed by the Curriculum for Excellence:

- To devise new opportunities and development of skills for the existing staff;
- To create exciting opportunities for their children to enjoy the outdoors;
- To establish innovative learning spaces outwith the school building;
- To address the particular individual needs and abilities of pupils through the design of flexible bespoke learning programmes.

TEEN+ **Way of the Woods** 2014 involved working with an older student group. It was designed as follow up to the original pilot, with this project being the first delivery of a specially tailored programme designed for young vulnerable adults with additional support needs, communication difficulties, autism, ADHD and mental health issues.

4. Participating organisations

TEENS+ is an Edinburgh-based, full time, transitional education project for young adults, aged 17 to 24, with complex additional needs such as autism, communication difficulties, challenging behaviour and severe learning difficulties.

TEENS+ breaks down the barriers that these young people face and provides a full-time course concentrating on education, communication, life skills, and preparation for a working life. With the aim of ensuring that their students can participate in mainstream activities and take their part in society.

TEENS+'s philosophy is that everyone has the right to continue with his or her education, regardless of social barriers. Each student has an individual learning programme, tailored to his or her specific needs.

This person-centered approach allows the students to develop and fulfil their potential allowing them to be better equipped to deal with their future as adults. TEENS+ strongly believe that everyone is entitled to lifelong learning in whatever form it may come in.

Learning at TEENS+ is not only based within their building but also out and about within the community in various environments including local green-space. However to date, most outdoor activity has been set within mainstream activities such as litter picking, path clearance and assisting the park warden to remove trolleys etc. from pathways.

TEENS+ Management felt that a Project such as **Way of the Woods** could help the organization benefit from a structured learning framework to enable all of their students to learn in a contextual setting.

While having their value within the context of woodland stewardship, continued activities such as litter picking are not really engaging enough or relevant enough to young adults attending TEENS+.

Through the delivery of the **Way of the Woods** project team we wanted to develop a tailor-made programme that would be exciting and inspiring for both TEENS+ students and staff.

“It would be a good learning experience not only for our students but also for our staff team to gain skills-development in the delivery of activities that can be made into learning experiences for our students in a woodland setting.”

As we are based close to a woodland setting it could mean that learning can be carried out in very familiar settings for the students as well as familiarizing them with woodlands close to our location. It would also benefit our arts and crafts teaching by again using materials native to a woodland surrounding”

Tom Ritchie, Team + Project Manager

“Given the challenges we had to get the students to venture into the woods on the first day it was nothing short of staggering to see how each individual progressed in such a short time

Even parents at home are noticing a difference in behaviour and engagement”

“My daughter has never been to the woodlands before. I wouldn’t have thought she could have coped with going at all – let alone stay for whole afternoons at a time over a period of 6 weeks! The fact that she has done this is a tribute to Teen+ staff and the workshop leaders. She must have an angel on a shoulder leading her to you all and opening up these opportunities”

Project participants included both staff and students at TEEN+.

Not only would staff support the students but they would also be equal learning partners in this project as were the two arts specialists involved in the delivery, who relied on continued support advice and direction from the centre staff from the planning through delivery to evaluation.

Some of the staff was involved in all or part of the actual woodland delivery. Some were only involved in planning sessions, monitoring and quality control.

Restricted numbers were important in this instance so that the vulnerable young adults with complex needs that we worked with could receive the specialist support they each need.

From beginning to end of the project we worked with two Artist facilitators (Joanna Boyce and Philip Knight) and two musicians (Mat Clements and Chris Furness) 10 students per session and a total of seventeen staff members including a speech therapist, and arts workers. At least eight TEEN+ staff at every session ensured that each vulnerable individual was given the time and support needed to go through a process over six weeks to help them feel safe in and able to engage with their local woodlands in a sustainable and relevant way. Also this ration meant that staff and facilitators needed to be able to absorb and be inspired by the activities at the same time as observing each individual closely in order to ensure that the programme was working for them and that the individual attention was maintained.

5. Project Delivery

Sessions were led by visual artist Joanna Boyce and a physical theatre/movement specialist Philip Knight working closely with TEENS+ staff with on-going assessment, quality control and monitoring. We delivered a total of eleven sessions spanning a period of six weeks. As well as Friday half day Art sessions at Inch park, the project involved visiting the woodlands once a week every Tuesday, always returning to the same space in a sheltered clearing in small woodland of mixed Scottish native trees close to the yew tree walk, which links Inch Park to Craigmillar castle. (see Appendix 3)

Each session had a different woodland animal theme and involved students learning various bush skills and physical and creative activities through meeting five “animal guides” (actor in headdress). We also rebuilt the same den at each session and built a bonfire at most sessions. We enjoyed circle time and picnics at all sessions, usually around the camp fire. Routine and repetition was crucial for the needs of this student group.

Each “animal guide” set the theme for the day and guided participants through a series of physical and creative activities and challenges. Each session focused on human characteristics found in different animals in order to encourage and inspire participants to work on similar characteristics in themselves. (e.g. the day of the Wildcat- might focus on learning skills of being quiet, self reliant, prepared and focused). Through specially designed workshop activities the

students were taken on a gentle and exciting journey leading them to an understanding “the ways” of five different woodland animals or birds before a final initiation where they chose their own “Animal Ally” (Totem)

Each week there was a different theme/focus/issue to explore and the team devised relevant exercises and activities to reflect the animals in question.

All sessions included an animal “stretch” (A series of stretches and balancing exercises, which through repetition build flexibility, strength and focus) each designed to reflect each animal and to introduce the participants to an awareness of their own body and its’ physical potential. These exercises were adapted from the disciplines of Yoga and Tai Chi and echoed the natural movements and stretches of each animal. The animal theme made the exercises fun. The session became a 20-minute exercise plan at the start of each session. When repeated these exercises not only increase flexibility and physical confidence but also the ability to concentrate and focus on other tasks.

All the sessions were designed to help participants express and control their wild physical side and instil within them qualities such as teamwork, self-reliance, focus, independence, problem solving and self-confidence as well as creating a life-long love of woodlands, nature and the great outdoors.

Observing each individual student’s responses and development throughout the sessions over six weeks was integral to the project. Between each session in the wood we also had a follow up art session indoors and throughout the week TEENS+ classroom staff were present at the Woodland sessions. As well as preparing them for the sessions to come the classroom staff also led follow-up reminder sessions with the group through out the week. Joanna ran the Friday art sessions and additional TEEN+ students who hadn’t visited the woods were also included and welcomed into the art & craft activities.

The first five delivery days were each followed by a debrief session when we made adjustments for the following week and monitored and evaluated each participant’s progress. Throughout we made character observations and noted special moments for each individual. Before the final session each participant was asked to fill in an animal questionnaire. The answers to the questionnaires combined with “magic moments” and observations on individuals throughout, helped us choose a special “animal totem” for each person.

The last session included music -in- the -woods activity led by music specialist Chris Furness who joined us for this last celebratory day

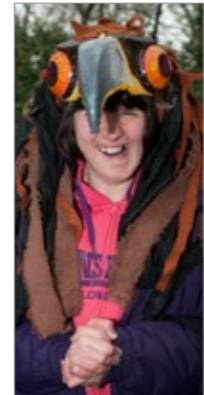
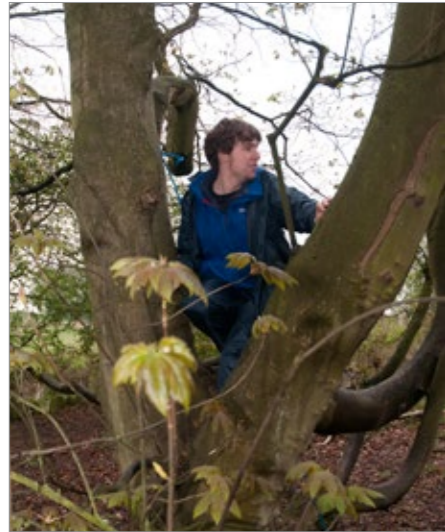
Creative Art Works prepared a “gift box” for each participant including “souvenir” objects, messages and memories of each animal day – as well as each participant’s own artwork from each session, now varnished and with backings and fittings for hanging/displaying.

A Music session with guitars around the camp fire led into a rhythm and chant session as one by one each participant stood up to be given their own “Animal-Friend” (based on their personality and strengths) and to be presented with their own ‘Way of the woods Memory box’.

After the ceremony all enjoyed the animal headdresses and proudly shared the contents of their boxes with visitors – who included teen + staff, parents, siblings and Forestry Commission Representatives and a Photographer.

“While out in the woods, staff notice an overall reduction in challenging behaviour from some of the young people as they seemed more relaxed and sociable with each other than they would normally in closed space”

6. Image Gallery



7. Timetable

Date	Session	Theme	Main Activities
FRIDAY 28th Feb 11.30am - 1.30pm	Intro Session	Meeting the facilitators and Introducing the animals	Talking about the woodland animals and being in the woods Introducing the headdresses
TUESDAY 4th March 11.30am - 1.30pm	DAY Of the BEAR	Feeling Safe and Being cared for	Bear stretch, Den building, Follow bear , Naming our land, Camouflaging our tracks
FRIDAY 7th March 10.30am - 12 noon	Art-Nature Day	Reinforcing Bear theme	Making Bear Talismans with red clay
TUESDAY 11th March 11.30am - 1.30pm	DAY of the WOLF		Working as a team, Sharing, Taking turns, Looking after each other, Meet Wolf, Wolf stretch, Join the Pack team game, Following the wolf trail, Making the Wolf jig saw puzzle, Wolf howl, Moulding the wolf -paw, Amulets, Camouflaging our tracks
FRIDAY 14th March 10.30am - 12 noon	Art-Nature Day	Reinforcing Wolf theme	Finishing wolf paws and threading Bear Talismans with leather thongs
TUESDAY 18th March 11.30am - 1.30pm	Day Of The Squirrel	Being organized, planning for year ahead, sorting and categorizing, Taking risks	Meet Squirrel, Squirrel stretch, Gathering sticks, Squirrel stretch/Movement, Making camp fire & baked potatoes, Wooden Squirrel models, Using trowels/picnic by fire, Foraging forest floor, Sorting and categorizing squirrel pictures, Tree climbing, Camouflaging our tracks

Date	Session	Theme	Main Activities
FRIDAY 21st March 10.30am - 12 noon	Art-Nature Day	Reinforcing Squirrel theme	Walnut Planner-Boats
TUESDAY 25th March 11.30am - 1.30pm	Day Of The Wildcat	Confidence building and independence, being courageous	Meet Wildcat, Wildcat stretch Sensory Experience (See, hear, touch, smell, taste etc.) Wild cat Art (clay cat face on tree with woodland foliage) Wildcat Day dreaming; making charcoal and writing tree poems, making pizza dough snakes, Wildcat Independence Challenge (Blindfold, Climbing with rope; walking barefoot etc.) Obstacle course, Camouflaging our tracks
FRIDAY 28th March 10.30am - 12 noon	Art-Nature Day	Reinforcing Wildcat theme	Wildcat plaques with motto's
MONDAY 31st March 10.30am - 12 noon	Art-Nature Day	Reinforcing all themes - Hopes And Aspirations	Making Eagles, Dream - catchers, Finishing all other artwork, Animal questionnaires, all artwork
TUESDAY 1st April 11.30am - 1.30pm	Way Of Woods Celebration Day	Celebrating all the animals and participants and giving each participant their "Animal Guide "	Fire lighting, Animal stretches, Bear's Den, Wolf puzzle and wolf howl, Acorn trail, Wildcat challenge, Music session, Animal chant, Music session and Fire, Praising each participant and receiving the animal guides and the gift boxes, Final Feast-peel and sharpen sticks, toasted marshmallows, Climbing the big tree, Music session and Fire, Praising each participant and receiving the animal guides and the gift boxes, Camouflaging our tracks

8. Aims

“One student in particular thrived throughout the whole experience. He liked making the fire, cooking from it tending to it, and putting it out at the end of each session. His parents reported that he was always eager to tell them about his day in the woods”

The main purpose of the project is to:

- Design a tailor-made programme catering to individual student’s special needs inclinations and abilities.
- Deliver a holistic and immersive learning programme in a challenging yet safe/supportive environment
- Develop bespoke activities designed around the student’s additional support needs with the specific aim of developing life skills/abilities relevant to them growing, living, working and coping in the contemporary world.
- Get the students outdoors and into the woods for the first time.
- Help students create coping strategies and take responsibility for self-care and for looking out for others and the environment.
- Support and inspire staff to engage with the woodlands in a creative way
- Demonstrate nature inspired arts activities and arts and crafts using organic materials from the woodlands

The project also aims to:

- Get Project Workers and Arts Specialists working side by side
- Provide individual support through transition school – adult services
- Share the importance of trees, woodlands and forests.
- Teach participants how humans, plants and animals all rely on trees and how living side by side we can all be part of them.
- Build in time to observe, reflect and evaluate throughout the project duration
- Offer nature exploration activity plans and point staff in direction of support services and resources e.g.: Scottish woodland Trust’s “Nature Detective” packs.

9. Objectives

To deliver a holistic and immersive learning programme in a challenging yet supportive environment, kick-starting a programme of regular visits to the woodlands that will give the students a memorable creative experience and instil in them a love and respect of Woodlands and the great outdoors.

To explore the feasibility of offering bespoke Forest school based activities to young people with additional support needs .

To provide the following opportunities;

for TEENS+ students to:

- Work individually, in pairs and as a team
- To explore their own physicality and appreciation of nature and woodlands.
- Enjoy and learn about woodlands and the countryside
- Use the creative arts as a way to express them.
- Work on their self-esteem, self-confidence/self-reliance and aspirations.
- Enjoy the beauty and fun of nature experienced first hand
- Try problem solving in a meaningful context
- Develop their imagination and creative learning.
- Express and Control them physically.
- Feel a sense of both global ownership and personal responsibility
- Feel a sense of individual belonging within both a team and in an outdoor landscape

for TEENS+ staff to:

- To work with creative specialists
- Take the students to an outdoor learning space
- To observe the students outside a class room setting
- To explore and enjoy an unconventional imaginative approach
- To gain skills and confidence to deliver woodland sessions under their own steam

“Overall the Way of the Woods project was a great success. All students and staff that took part thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience of being out in the woods”

“The space around them gave them a chance to breathe without feeling stifled by closeness of others, at the same time the canopy of greenery and trees gave security and comfort”

10. Key Learning Outcomes

for TEENS+ students:

- Exploring the great outdoors and individuals place within it
- Interview techniques and developing healthy communication with others
- Expressing ideas about “wildness” and freedom
- Celebrating the community and environment
- Discovering what it can mean to be independent and self-reliant
- Understanding how eco systems work
- Simple plant/animal identification
- Using tools (flints, wood shavers, trowels etc.)
- Using specialist art materials
- Designing and Memorizing plans and sketches
- Following trails and working out puzzles
- Communicating things they believe in
- Thinking about ideas, solutions and ways to make improvements
- Working creatively to achieve a goal
- Presenting + exhibiting ideas
- Making positive change for our futures
- Health and well being
- Sharing our conclusions with others

for TEENS+ staff:

- Working along side Creative Arts Specialists
- Observing Individual students in outdoor setting
- Trying innovative creative arts approach
- Using the woodlands as an outdoor learning space
- Interactive, immersive learning in accordance to delivery of the Curriculum of Excellence

for the Creative Artists

- Working with a challenging group
- Flexibility and adaptability when facilitating sessions
- Delivery of FCS remits through the arts and environmental education
- Planning and on-going evaluation with staff and group leaders
- Understanding ILP’s and incorporating them into session planning

11. Participant Monitoring

Student Group

Age and Gender of those involved		
	Male	Female
16 - 25 years	7	3

Numbers of those who are registered disabled		
	Male	Female
Learning difficulties	7	3
Other disability		

Male/female	Disability
Male	Autism, Epilepsy, Learning difficulties
Male	Autism Epilepsy, Learning difficulties
Male	Autism, Learning difficulties
Male	Autism, Learning difficulties
Male	Autism, Down Syndrome, Learning difficulties
Male	Autism, Learning difficulties
Male	Epilepsy, Learning difficulties
Female	ADHD, Learning difficulties
Female	Autism, Learning difficulties
Female	Autism, Learning difficulties

Participants ethnic background		
	Male	Female
White British	6	3
White E. European		
Mixed Race	1	
Asian/British Asian		
Black		
Chinese		
Other		

Numbers of those who are registered Disabled		
City/Town	Area	Post code
Edinburgh	Mid Lothian	EH

TEEN+ Staff

Age and Gender of those involved		
	Male	Female
16 - 25 years	2	4
26 - 60 years	5	6

Staff ethnic background		
	Male	Female
White British	7	8
White E. European		
Mixed Race		
Asian/British Asian		
Black		2
Chinese		
Other		

12. TEENS+ Student Feedback

Due to the severe nature of their disabilities none of the student group are able to directly comment on the project by themselves, consequently we have included staff evaluations for several members of the group. The following quotations are from student’s personal End Of Term Report. Whilst each student is an individual and responded to the experience in a different way TEENS+ are happy for these to be taken as typical for the whole group.

.....

“Another great achievement this term has been Shona’s participation during the Way of the Woods project. Shona was extremely unsure and anxious at the early stages of the project but with consistent and continued preparation at TEENS+ and at home using symbols and visual timetables, Shona’s understanding of what was expected of her was clear and defined thus Shona was more relaxed and the experience as pleasurable as possible for her. Shona needed a great amount of encouragement and re-direction during the project but showed great listening skills, following of instructions and understanding of visual timetables. Shona’s tolerance of larger groups and ability to work within this type of environment has shown great progress. We continued to encourage Shona’s involvement in the Way of the Woods even though Shona was demonstrating negative feelings, but this push and positive reinforcement from staff at TEENS+ has enabled Shona to challenge herself, gaining confidence and tolerance within new tasks. This is a definite skill which Shona can manage and use appropriately within her life.”

.....

“Calum has been involved in “the Way of the Woods” project which was an exciting outdoors project set in the local urban woodland (Craigmillar woods). The programme was co-ordinated by the Forestry Commission and run for 6 consecutive Tuesdays and was led by an artist and drama specialist. The programme offered lots of additional opportunities for social interaction with his peers and he has shown great enjoyment of this. All the students that attended the programme have learned about different animals, their personalities, building a shelter and a fire and the different plant life within the woods. The students all made totems of the animals of the woods to which they felt most drawn to. Calum thoroughly enjoyed all of the activities both at Teens and in the woods. He was very focused during the arts and crafts section of the learning and enjoyed this large group activity. There is still one session to complete, which will be a celebration of the “Way of the Woods”, on 22nd April, to which parents are invited. We are continuing to facilitate Calum’s love of the outdoors and physical activities.”

‘Rory has been involved in “the Way of the Woods” project which was an exciting outdoors project set in the local urban woodland (Craigmillar woods). The programme was co-ordinated by the Forestry Commission and run for 6 consecutive Tuesdays and was led by an artist and drama specialist. The programme offered lots of additional opportunities for social interaction with his peers and he has shown great enjoyment of this. All the students that attended the programme have learned about different animals, their personalities, building a shelter and a fire and the different plant life within the woods. The students all made totems of the animals of the woods to which they felt most drawn to. Rory thoroughly enjoyed all of the activities both at Teens and in the woods. He was very focused during the arts and crafts sessions of the learning and enjoyed this large group activity. There is still one session to complete which will be a celebration of the “Way of the Woods” on 22nd April, to which parents are invited.’

“He gets along well with staff and students and has shown an increase in his willingness to join groups such as the ‘Way of the Woods’. He seems to have got a lot out the Way of the Woods project”

‘Andrew really impressed us this term with how he got involved in the ‘Way of the Woods’ project. He enjoyed spending time with the other students during this out doors project and got involved in all the different activities including learning about the different woodland animals, doing exercises, making fires and doing arts and crafts projects. He seemed to really enjoy being in the great outdoors and was very calm throughout all the sessions.’

“Overall the Way of the Woods project was a great success. All students and staff that took part thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience of being out in the woods and doing many educational scenarios and fun activities that the facilitators had planned for each session. One student in particular thrived throughout the whole experience. He liked making the fire, cooking from it tending to it, and putting it out at the end of each session. His parents reported that he was always eager to tell them about his day in the woods and all the fun activities he had done each time. It was a main conversation starter at the family dinner table which was a joy to the parents as this young man was never one engage in conversations before. This young man’s family even made it to the ‘Celebration’ session which was the last session of the project.”

“While out in the woods, staff notice an overall reduction in challenging behaviour from some of the young people as they seemed more relaxed and sociable with each other than they would normally in closed space. Even new friendships were beginning to develop through this experience.”

13. TEENS+ Staff Feedback

Feedback from all parents whose children participated was very positive. It was a great and well worth it experience for both students and staff at TEENS+.

“Many of our students have confidence issues due to their communication difficulties and use varying ways of communication other than verbal. Many do not like close contact with others and frustrations and anger can quickly build up causing outbursts of arguments and aggression. Although we were doubtful about the workability of The Way of the Wood project at first, we very quickly discovered that this type of outdoor learning really benefited some of the students who find it difficult to cope within a classroom setting. The space around them gave them a chance to breathe without feeling stifled by closeness of others, at the same time the canopy of greenery and trees gave security and comfort and the sounds and sights of nature, like birds and flowers gave feelings of peace and well being. Initially One student, on arrival in the woodlands, asked immediately to be taken home saying “I hate everything about this place – there are no cars or buildings, I want to phone my mum to take me home” however remarkably he very quickly he settled into the peace of nature and his grumbles turned to smiles. He enjoyed sitting on a tree trunk near the den and when asked if he wanted to a join a new activity said, “No, I am just enjoying sitting and day dreaming”. The project had flexibility so the “quirks and ways” of our students could be accommodated.”

TEENS+ staff member

“When we first discussed The Way of the Woods project we doubted it would work – we thought – “Well that’s not going to happen ! The students wont be up for it ! They’ll kick off ! They wont be able to cope !”- But we were up for the challenge and, in spite of protests – we got them to the woodlands – Once there so many worries and stresses disappeared – not only the students but ours too . The project was highly enjoyable from start to finish and the level was pitched just right for our group. All in all it was phenomenal – and has changed how we all think about potential of working in the woodlands.”

The Way of the Woods projects has completely exceeded anything we could’ve imagined in terms of success. Given the challenges we had to get the students to venture into the woods on the first day it was nothing short of staggering to see how each individual progressed in such a short time. Even parents at home

were noticing a difference in behaviour and engagement. It has been an extremely positive and worthwhile experience, which has inspired us and taught us a lot. A programme of regular visits to the local woodlands is the obvious next step.

TEENS+ staff member

“My daughter has never been to the woodlands before. I wouldn’t have thought she could have coped with going at all – let alone stay for whole afternoons at a time over a period of 6 weeks! The fact that she has done this is a tribute to Teen+ staff and the workshop leaders. She must have an angel on a shoulder leading her to you all and opening up these opportunities”

Parent

“Overall the Way of the Woods project was a great success. All students and staff that took part thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience of being out in the woods and doing many educational scenarios and fun activities that the facilitators had planned for each session. One student in particular thrived throughout the whole experience. He liked making the fire, cooking from it tending to it, and putting it out at the end of each session. His parents reported that he was always eager to tell them about his day in the woods and all the fun activities he had done each time. It was a main conversation starter at the family dinner table which was a joy to the parents as this young man was never one to engage in conversations before. This young man’s family even made it to the ‘Celebration’ session which was the last session of the project.

TEENS+ staff member

While out in the woods, staff notice an overall reduction in challenging behaviour from some of the young people as they seemed more relaxed and sociable with each other than they would normally in closed space. Even new friendships were beginning to develop through this experience”

TEENS+ staff member

14. Facilitator feedback

“Observing the individual’s responses and development throughout the sessions was integral to the project and it was important that the workers could step back and observe the individual participants in a fresh way. Over the course of the project we saw a strong team spirit develop with individuals being particularly caring and kind to each other. It was extremely satisfying to see individuals build up their confidence about being outdoors – especially regarding their physicality in the woods. Returning to the same site on a weekly basis certainly helped to foster a feeling of security and safety and the role-play was so enjoyable to participants and workers alike that it never felt like work. Team exercises such as the Den building and the trails were especially beneficial and the final ceremony was incredibly moving. This project has definitely inspired me to work with young people with additional support needs. I have learned never underestimate the power of high expectations.”

Joanna Boyce – Arts Specialist

“It was a pleasure to be working with such warm enthusiastic honest people and so good to work on a project that included proper planning time. Regarding the benefits to participants I saw a definite increase in confidence in being off the beaten track, they became physically more sure-footed in the woods. A strong feeling of group developed and they all worked well together.

An excellent and surprising project. Having had misgivings at the start of the project as to the suitability of the w.o.w.s project for the teen+ students. It was amazing to see how successful the project was and the progress made week by week by the students.

Each student seemed to become more relaxed with the activities as the weeks went on – every one of them participating and engaging a little more at each session. The woods seemed to have a positive effect on the group allowing them to tolerate each other to a much higher degree than inside rooms.

Likewise the fire seemed to have a calming and focusing effect.

Lots of personal learning for me too – I would now be much more confident in designing a project for autistic adults.

Many little triumphs but the first time the whole group climbed into the same tree was a magic moment.”

Philip Knight – Drama and Movement specialist

15. Recommendations

Feedback from the staff and participants strongly supports the Way of the Woods Project. Now that the project has been completed, tried and tested and evaluated Teen+ team would like to continue a programme regular visits to the local woodlands with all staff and students. Constraints on staff time make it difficult to apply for funding but they would welcome advice in this matter and would like to meet the local FCS outreach ranger for central/South Edinburgh

Regarding future Way of the Woods projects we recommend the following:

With view to partnership working, we recommend early approaches to relevant community groups, Special School, Adult Day Centres and other organizations working with children and adults with additional support needs with the suggestions that they make partnership applications to funding bodies to match FCS engagement budget.

When working with this type of group it would be beneficial to design the sessions to spread over a longer time with perhaps more sessions, starting with initial meetings which were very short indeed, but also beneficial to staff, students and facilitators

Having lunch in the woods worked very well - this could be developed and incorporated more into activities

Backing up and following up the artistic work at the centre worked very well and the resulting extra time on the nature-inspired artworks contributed to the participants sense of pride in their finished work and added to the sense of enthusiasm and achievement outdoors

We would like to increase the rhythm and music element in future projects. This was hugely successful but with only one day with a music specialist we were unable to achieve the true possibilities of making music outdoors. A musician and different instrument/s at every session would've been fantastic.

There is potential to produce a Way of the Woods Education/follow up pack. This would support way group leaders to continue activities in the woods beyond the project.

A teacher/staff pack could be designed working closely with FCS staff and teens+ staff.

The Education Adviser at Forestry Commission Scotland has expressed interest in developing a Way of the Woods outdoor classroom resource pack.

"As part of my role as Education Adviser for Forestry Commission Scotland I am always looking at innovative ways of developing resource packs for teachers. We would be interested in working with the creative arts specialists and school staff to explore the possibility of designing/developing a "Way of the Woods" teachers resource pack that could be used with other schools/teachers that work with additional support needs children."

Karen Boyd - Education Advisor FCS

16. Appendices

Appendix 1. Project Relevance to TEENS+ Vision statement

Addressing the particular individual needs and abilities of students through the design of flexible bespoke learning programmes.

Partnership working

To devise new opportunities and development of skills for students and staff.

To create exciting opportunities for students to enjoy the outdoors

To establish innovative learning spaces out with the TEENS+ building

Bringing arts specialists and teachers together to create a flexible, sustainable initiative

Developing staff skills especially in the fields of creative arts and environmental studies

Catering for the diverse needs of individual students in line with Individual ILP's in a way that is both relevant and meaningful to them

Creating resources to be utilised in the short term and sustainable in the long

Giving the students regular experiences outdoors within a woodland setting

Exposing the participants to challenges allowing them to take responsibility for themselves and the environment

Seek the students views, thoughts and ideas at all times

Focus on each individual's strengths and abilities

Giving staff valuable stand-back time for staff to observe students in action

Appendix 2. Project fit with Scottish Forestry Strategy

a) Assisting in community participation: The project will provide a focus for TEENS+ students and staff to meet and get out and enjoy activities in the woods and to be inspired by woodland education.

The outdoor element of the project will give TEENS+ students, all who have complex communication needs, a chance to engage with and be active in their local woodlands. Connections will be made with the FCS Engagement Officer, FCS woodland outreach worker and the Natural Heritage Service. The indoor creative element of the project will give the students time to reflect on the outdoor experience and will involve participants finishing the nature-inspired arts and crafts activities already started outdoors.

The engagement will focus on creating a relevant “woodland Journey” experience for each vulnerable individual. This type of active participation should: lead to greater understanding, participation and responsibility in such activities in the foreseeable future (and even later in life) as well as instilling a love of the great outdoors; feelings of well being and a disposition towards caring for themselves, each other and the environment.

b) Enhancing opportunities for health and Enjoyment:

Not only will the project be fun and educational it will also have health and well being benefits through the outdoors nature walk elements and the nature inspired arts/crafts elements of the delivery. The artists and service providers will lead session's outdoors and direct participants in the enjoyment of their local woods. Students and staff will be shown how to access their woodlands and given ideas of games and activities to enjoy there. Participants will have enjoyable first experiences of one of their local nature reserves. Throughout the project there will be many opportunities for participants to work individually, in pairs and as a team and the delivery will always be holistic and tailored to individual's abilities and interests. This approach will contribute to a sense of well-being and confidence building among staff and students especially regarding disadvantaged students participating in environmental activity and being outdoors. The project will enable young adults with additional support needs to make positive and meaningful connections to The Scottish woodlands.

c) Contribute to growth in learning and skills:

Through the involvement of FCS outreach worker and City of Edinburgh Natural Heritage Service, participants will be able to gain knowledge and understanding of how to access and enjoy their local woodland. They will also be encouraged to understand the importance of its conservation and will be able to learn some simple woodland plant, animal and bird identification. The art element will help the participants to delight in the details of nature through the observation and research. The outdoor bush skills and nature inspired art activities will increase manual dexterity and abilities such as using tools for art, den building, gardening and fire lighting etc. There will also be opportunities for the group to make plans, use specialist paints and art materials and to understand processes through concept to design and creation as well as getting to grips with the woodland themes. Participation in the project will mean both facilitators and participants' can practise communication skills, leadership skills and interpersonal and social skills. The project will enable the arts workers, FCS outreach worker and Engagement officer and the Natural Heritage Service to deliver a bespoke programme to a group of young adults isolated because of their disabilities and the failure of many service providers to accommodate the low project numbers and the additional support and understanding they each need to participate fully in engaging with woodlands and enjoying the benefits of mainstream environmental education.

d) Woods for Health

The outdoor setting for parts of the delivery of the project will motivate the group to visit the woodlands and take exercise. The Art element of the

project will create opportunities to use the imagination, to relax among trees and leave stresses of work and isolation behind. The inter-generational engagement will encourage staff and students to work together. The project will also encourage interpretation of the local woodlands and group ownership and personal stewardship of the woodland. We will be engaging with an under represented group and follow-up work with the local natural heritage service should provide opportunities for future participation in woodland conservation and volunteering.

e) WIAT programme.

The project will encourage local woodland use through the themed arts activities. It will support a group

With complex additional support needs and communication difficulties to use and enjoy their local urban woodlands thereby improving the quality of their lives and potential for outdoor learning - giving them equal opportunities for enjoyment through outdoor activities.

f) FCS Engagement Strategy

The Signs in the woods project will involve first time visits to the group for several individuals. The project will long term contribute to enhancement of local social cohesion and use of local woodlands.

The additional support needs among the group participants will include autism, communication difficulties, challenging behaviour and severe learning difficulties.

The Way of the Woods themes will provide a common interest for the diversity of the group and we will maximise all opportunities to encourage discussion and example of how we can become responsible active citizens who respect wildlife and take responsibility for the stewardship of local woodlands.

Appendix 3. Location Map



Appendix 4. Creative Art Works Mission Statement

Inspiration

We create a happy and positive environment that engages participation, sparks imagination and stimulates the curiosity and interest of the group.

Exploration

We draw on the experiences and ideas of the group to encourage communication and self-expression in a way that values each individual's uniqueness and celebrates collective creativity.

Discovery

We believe that our way of using art and drama effectively encourages personal and group development through dynamic and creative learning.

- Creative Art Works uses art and drama to facilitate creativity and expression in others by developing the use of these art forms as tools for communication and learning.
- Creative Art Works collaborates with event and exhibition organizers, teachers, youth and community workers and all educators committed to making learning engaging, meaningful and fun.
- We come together as and when we are required according to the nature and needs of each creative art works project. We are committed to find imaginative ways to use the arts to explore ideas and issues in a way completely relevant to our audience – who range from under 5 to over 60.
- We work with children, young people and adults both in the community and in a variety of educational settings using art and drama to nurture inspiration, exploration and discovery.

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