

**THE GARDEN CLASSROOM
REPORT ON
THE NINEVEH CHARITABLE TRUST'S GRANT FOR
EQUIPMENT AND A COOK TO SUPPORT
DISADVANTAGED URBAN CHILDREN CAMPING IN
KENT**



Introduction

In September 2017 The Nineveh Charitable Trust kindly gave a grant of £4,930 to The Garden Classroom (TGC) to enable TGC to provide a camp cook and extra cooking equipment to provide camping opportunities for disadvantaged urban children. We can confirm that the grant was spent as set out in the accompanying budget.

Benefits of the project

This is the third year we have camped at Hobbs Hill Farm in Chiddingstone, thanks to the generosity of local farmers the Boomaars family, and this year we set up camp for three weeks, 30th April to 17th May. Year 5 pupils from three schools, Newington Green Primary, Mandeville Primary and Nightingale Primary came. All these schools are high on deprivation indicators and it was clear that this was a unique experience for the children. One teacher, Madeleine McGinty the Wellbeing Leader from Nightingale School described what the experience had been like for her. She talked about all the changes she had seen, children mixing and making new friends and working as teams. She was impressed by the improvements in behaviour and the way the children had regulated their emotions and said that the biggest change was an increase in children's resilience which would stand them in good stead as they transferred to secondary school. For herself she had loved having the opportunity to observe the children in such a beautiful, safe environment and confessed to feeling tearful as she watched the children awestruck by the magical bluebell woods. Class teacher Kate Togut said, "I could see children who never smile laughing so that was a great thing". She noted that her pupils spend all their lives indoors so they are safe and being outdoors and learning to take risks had increased their confidence greatly. Like Madeliene, Kate felt the experience would be very beneficial as the pupils prepare to transfer to secondary school. As 10-year old Jeremiah said, "It's good to get out of your comfort zone and do teamwork – you can achieve anything with teamwork."



Activities and camp programme

The children travelled from London to Cowden by train then hiked for an hour to get to our camp site. Each day started with a hearty breakfast of porridge followed by fried pancakes, eggy bread, fritters, beans etc and there was fruit on hand throughout the day. We had three forest school trained facilitators leading the camp, plus our camp cook plus a volunteer and they were an outstanding team who combined strong pastoral care, a keen awareness of health and safety and the desire to make every activity enjoyable and fun as well as educational. The day was split into whole class activities such as games, wood collecting and hikes and group activities such as whittling, learning to light a fire and tree climbing. Each group took turns to do vegetable preparation and washing up. On the last evening the children worked in smaller groups, lighting their own fires, preparing their own vegetables and cooking their own sauce for pasta and for many this was a highlight. Reflecting on this experience Jeremiah said, "I learnt to listen to my peers, particularly when we were cooking our meal, we had to share ideas."



Meeting the Trust's objectives

The Nineveh Charitable Trust's objectives parallel The Garden Classroom's objectives of making people healthier and happier by connecting them to nature. We work with disadvantaged nature-deprived London children, young people and families teaching about trees, bees, food growing, plants, insects and animals so they can appreciate the rich diversity of the natural world. Camping, being in the countryside for four days, gives the children the opportunity to appreciate just what the countryside is (many have never been there before) and how it is used for agriculture and horticulture and the importance of those practices even to people living in cities. We compare rural life with urban life so children understand the importance of preserving the countryside. Emmanuel was overwhelmed he said, "This has changed me a lot. To be honest I'd rather live here – I don't even remember my home! It's a free big place to be in."

Outcomes

We set ourselves the following targets:

120 pupils and 12 adults have an outstanding countryside experience which prompts them to seek out opportunities for nature connection in future. It is clear from the feedback from children and adults that this was an outstanding experience. As Kate Togut says, "These children will never forget this." All the schools have indicated that they would be keen to participate in future TGC residential.

The TGC team, including volunteers, have an enjoyable and rewarding experience and are willing to extend the amount of time they spend taking children to the countryside. Having a camp cook really took the pressure off the team who were able to spend more time with the children and felt they were doing a good job. The team bonded, which stood them in good stead as they moved a month later to the pilot seashores adventures project.

TGC's reputation for delivering high quality residential experiences in the countryside increases so more landowners are keen to work with TGC to increase the opportunities for immersive countryside experiences. While we were at Hobbs Hill we were in touch with a nearby farming family who are keen to work with TGC in the future. We will be meeting them in the Autumn.



The future

We have learnt that there is a demand for this type of unstructured countryside experience which offers an alternative to the traditional end of primary school residentials with their zip wires and dormitories. We have also learnt that it takes an inordinate amount of time to recruit schools, meet each set of children, teachers and parents, resource and set up the camp and finally to derig it and pack everything away. This suggests that a longer camping period will be more cost/time effective and in 2019 the Boomaars family have given us permission to extend the camp to five weeks. We also plan to look at how the weekends are used and are looking at the possibility of setting up some short weekend camps for young carers. We were particularly glad to have been able to accommodate one wheelchair-bound child in the last group. We hired a special rough terrain wheelchair which enabled her to access virtually all the activities and during her stay she became more and more confident. This may enable us to offer camping to small groups of children with special need and we will look into this further.

In October 2018 we are running a week of one-day visits to a new site in Shoreham, Kent and if these are successful we will look at piloting camping there next year.

The Nineveh Charitable Trust and The Garden Classroom

As ever we are extremely grateful for the support that The Nineveh Charitable Trust has given to The Garden Classroom over the past few years. We were very glad to welcome Robert Lewis when he visited us recently at our Seashore Adventures site in Kent so he could see the tents and equipment that the Trust have financed being put to good use. We will be in Kent again in September 2018 for three weeks and would welcome any other Trustees who would like to meet us there as we bring even more children and teachers to the countryside to gain an understanding of the environment and countryside. Last word goes to Emmanuel.... "I'll always remember it was fun, great and beautiful. I loved being in the woods, seeing and animals and the deer, it's everything you ever dream of."

Thank you again for your support.