

End of Project Report 'Into the Woods'

Thanks to funding from Ninevah Charitable Trust, we have been able to work in partnership with local charity Marches Family Network to provide 10 Forest School sessions to children and young people with a wide range of disabilities and needs at Queenswood Country Park and Arboretum.

The young people we work with through Marches Family Network have a wide variety of different disabilities, disorders and needs, including autistic spectrum disorders, Down Syndrome, learning difficulties, developmental delay, chromosomal disorders, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, sensory impairments, and spina bifida. The young people that we work with often find it challenging to access 'mainstream' services and facilities without specialist or individual support; over 30% of the young people that access our services require one to one support.

Children with disabilities often experience discrimination and prejudice; social exclusion plays a significant role in how these young people come to be disadvantaged within society. Inclusion and access to opportunities are the main challenges experienced by the families we work with.

Through providing Forest School sessions based at Queenswood Country Park and Arboretum we aimed to provide inclusive, accessible opportunities in an outdoor, natural setting, through overcoming barriers that some families had previously faced in accessing outdoor spaces.

The Project outcomes were to:

- Improve confidence and independence for the young people through new and stimulating experiences provided in a safe, enabling environment.
- Improved social opportunities and holistic development for young people.
- Development of the young people's skills and abilities, including the development of life skills, promoted through specialist support in sessions with a particular emphasis on health, wellbeing and being active.
- A greater understanding and enjoyment of local wildlife.

To achieve these outcomes we provided 10 Forest School sessions between October 2017 and June 2018, for a total of 77 children and young people who were accompanied either by family members or support staff from Marches Family Network. We provided:

-A family forest school session in October half term

-2 x school holiday sessions with Marches Family Network support staff in February Half term

- 1 x youth group session in February
- 4 x school holiday sessions with Marches Family Network support staff in the Easter Holidays
- 1 x youth group session in May
- 1 x outdoor birthday party in June

Our sessions took place in our Forest School site. We provided a range of outdoor sensory play, wildlife themed crafts and games, den building and camp fire cooking. When the weather was very cold or wet we were able to make use of our onsite resources such as our Jubilee Building and woodstove heated yurt to provide some cosy indoor activities too.

We used some of the grant money to hire a 'Mobiloo' for 4 of our sessions which is the world's first attended mobile toilet service with hoist and changing bench. Marches Family Network told us that toileting facilities could be a major barrier to some children and young people being able to come to places such as Queenswood where we have a disabled toilet but not one fully equipped with a hoist and adult changing facilities. Marches Family Network support staff and parents confirmed that this was a valuable resource and made the sessions more accessible to a wider range of children and young people.

The children, young people and family members who attended were supported to visit a beautiful outdoor setting, providing new and stimulating experiences throughout different seasons of the year, for example, exploring the woods by torchlight in the snow, and making dens in the woods in Springtime.

The Forest School sessions we provided enabled children and young people to meet and socialise. Some of the feedback we received from parents was that they felt really pleased to be able to go out with the entire family including children with and without disabilities, and parents also told us that they appreciated the opportunity meet other families too.

All of our Forest School sessions were outdoors, providing opportunities for children and young people to be outside and active, promoting health and wellbeing. Our activities also helped support life skills. One of our youth group sessions was themed around 'survival skills team challenges' where young people needed to communicate and work together to overcome challenges, and many of our sessions involved cooking over a camp fire which involved teaching children and young people safety awareness and cooking skills.

Many of our activities were themed around local wildlife. In our winter sessions we made bird feeders, and in the Spring we used flowers and leaves to make head bands and sun catchers.

Through developing our partnership with Marches Family Network we were also able to make use of some free training by charity Active about inclusion, that 2 of our staff members attended.

Feedback from parent Rita Scott was that

“ our additional needs were dealt with superbly.....(there was) something for everyone and the site exceeded expectations, it was a magical setting.”

