



Year 1 - Progress Report for the Nineveh Charitable Trust

Project title: Helping children with autism and related disabilities to learn about and experience the countryside

Dr David Blakesley CEnv MCIEEM (Autism and Nature)

Dr Andrew Powling (Chairman, Autism and Nature)

Our Project

This three year project will help a minimum of 6,500 children with autism and related disabilities (hereafter referred to as 'autism') to experience and learn about the countryside and their rural heritage (historic and cultural places that show how people lived and worked in rural areas in the past) in several counties in the Southeast, including Kent, West Sussex, Essex and Hampshire. It will also raise awareness amongst parents and carers, and teachers at local special schools, of the opportunities and benefits of engaging autistic children with nature, the countryside and their rural heritage.

By publishing a series of children's colouring books and guides for parents, carers and teachers, this project aims to help to reconnect disengaged autistic children, their parents, carers and teachers, with the countryside and their rural heritage across several counties in Southeast England. The publications will be free of charge, and widely distributed with the help of local autism and disability charities, and local authorities.

People with autism, especially children, often feel remote from the countryside. They represent some of the most disengaged individuals in the community, particularly children who live in urban areas that are removed from the countryside. Visits to the countryside or places of historical and cultural heritage may not feature in their everyday lives, and as a consequence they have little understanding and appreciation for, or contact with, the countryside. They may know little about their rural heritage. They do not enjoy the many benefits of visiting the countryside, for their education and also their well-being.

Progress in Year 1 - publication of our colouring 'story' books for children in Kent and West Sussex

Nineveh Charitable Trust funding was allocated to the production of two illustrated story books for children with autism in Kent and West Sussex as planned. Autism and Nature raised additional funding for the Kent project from Kent Community Foundation and the Ernest Cook Trust. For the West Sussex colouring book, we raised additional funding from Sussex Community Foundation, the Short Breaks Team West Sussex County Council and Woodlands.co.uk. The initial award of funding by the Nineveh Charitable Trust was extremely important to our subsequent fund-raising success with both projects.

The main beneficiaries of our colouring books are children of early years, pre- and primary school age. Our motivation for producing the colouring books was to help parents, carers and teachers to overcome some of the barriers to engaging autistic children with the countryside and to increase opportunities for many autistic children to engage with natural places in Kent and West Sussex.

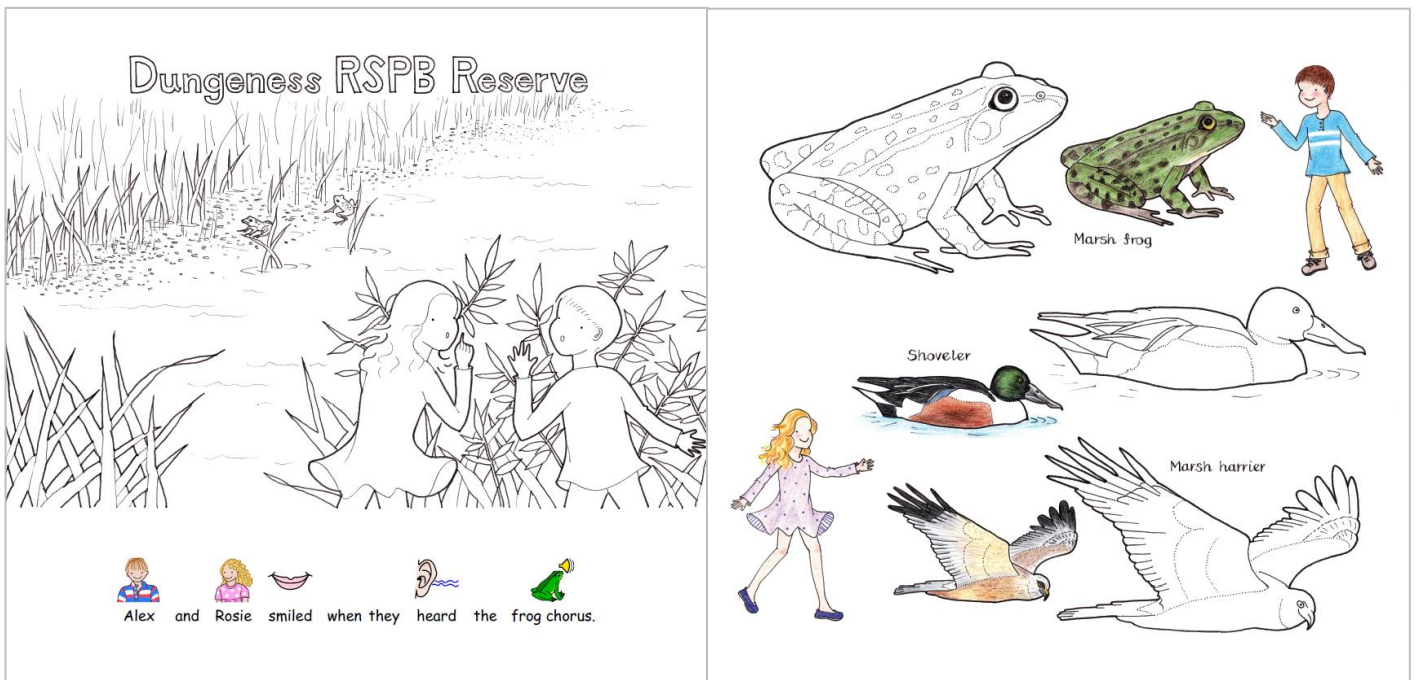
Art therapy can improve communication with children who are visually oriented, and who find the use of words or language difficult. Art has also been reported to be calming and to aid self-expression, to help the development of a child's motor skills and help children to relate to their environment. From the colouring activities in our books, children will learn about activities they might undertake and wildlife they might experience in the countryside. In West Sussex for example, Alex and Rosie find fossils at Bracklesham Bay, look for reptiles at Stedham Common, observe bee hives in the orchard at Standen and

encounter Belted Galloway cattle grazing at Black Down. In Kent they walk on the boardwalk through Stodmarsh reedbeds, make natural art in Blean Woods, listen to marsh frogs at Dungeness RSPB Reserve and learn about apples at Bough Beech Apple Festival. The colouring books also help children and their carers to prepare for visits to the natural places featured in the respective countryside guides, as autistic children often lack imagination, and respond well to visual images.

Three thousand copies 'Alex and Rosie's West Sussex Colouring Book' and 1,500 copies of 'Alex and Rosie's Kent Colouring Book' are being distributed (free of charge) by Autism and Nature, with the support of the Short Breaks Team West Sussex County Council, Kent Autistic Trust and Includes Us 2; we are very grateful for their support. The books are also available as pdf e-books on the Autism and Nature website.



Excerpt from 'Alex and Rosie's West Sussex Colouring Book'



Excerpt from 'Alex and Rosie's Kent Colouring Book'

Year 2

In the second year of the project we plan to use our Nineveh Charitable Trust grant to contribute towards the costs of a guide that is designed to engage families with children with autism with Hampshire's rural heritage. This planned guide will resemble past guides which have focused on places where children can learn about their rural heritage, including: tide mills; windmills; museums of agriculture and rural life; 'ancient' village museums; archaeology; rare breeds centres and so on. We also plan to put the funds towards the costs of an 'Alex and Rosie' book to engage children with rural heritage in Essex.

Current project schedule:

| | 2018 | 2019 | | | | 2020 | | | | 2021 | | | |
|--|----------|------|-----|-----|--------|------|-----|-----|--------|------|-----|-----|--|
| | Year one | | | | Year 2 | | | | Year 3 | | | | |
| | NDJ | FMA | MJJ | ASO | NDJ | FMA | MJJ | ASO | NDJ | FMA | MJJ | ASO | |
| Kent children's colouring book | X | X | X | | | | | | | | | | |
| West Sussex children's colouring book | | X | X | X | | | | | | | | | |
| Hampshire rural heritage guide | | | | | X | X | X | X | | | | | |
| Essex children's rural heritage book | | | | | | | X | X | X | X | | | |
| West Sussex heritage rural guide | | | | | | | | | X | X | X | X | |

We are extremely grateful to the Nineveh Charitable Trust for their generous support of our work. This funding has been critical to the success of our organisation. The flexibility afforded to us by the Trust has enabled us to make the best use of the funding to undertake and complete two major projects in the first year.