



Feb 2021 – Rowan Rangers – A project update

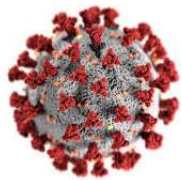
Project overview

Rowan is a small, vibrant, independent, registered charity providing an arts centre and a forest school for adults with learning disability in Cambridgeshire and the adjoining counties.

We believe that people living with a disability should have the same choice, quality of life, opportunities and aspirations as others and for over 36 years we have provided a safe, creative, enriching and welcoming environment where the arts are used as a tool to bring people together, tackle social exclusion whilst developing skills and potential and improving happiness, health and wellbeing. We also deliver much needed respite to families and carers.

Following a successful pilot in 2019, we launched 'Rowan Rangers' our NEW forest school for local adults with learning disability in and around Cambridgeshire in 2020.

Rowan Rangers enables our students to engage and connect with nature in a unique way and gain a better understanding of the countryside, whilst keeping active, staying connected and developing new skills and improving happiness, health and wellbeing.



COVID-19 Update – Outdoor projects are considered safer during Covid-19 and Rowan Rangers enables us to provide choice and opportunities for local adults with learning disability to get involved, keep active and stay connected. Many of our students have additional health conditions and are unable to currently return to 'normal' workshops at Rowan.

Funding Received

We received £5000 funding from the Nineveh Trust to enable us to launch Rowan Rangers in 2020.

Project update

With your funding and support we were able to launch Rowan Rangers in Autumn 2020 when Covid restrictions were eased and we were allowed to resume in person activities.

Rowan Rangers started running every Friday 10-2pm and we have had an average of 5 students attend each week. The pandemic has meant we have been unable to recruit new participants outside of our existing Rowan students.

Our current Rowan Rangers are existing Rowan students who pre COVID-19 attended our creative art workshops. Two of our five participants started Forest School because of the concerns of being in an enclosed space indoors at Rowan. This means we have two people we can offer an in-person social opportunity to meet and make friends in a COVID secure environment who otherwise would have remained at home – lonely and isolated

We plan to promote Rowan Rangers to a wider audience in 2021 as we are aware that there a number of people who may not currently attend Rowans creative art workshops but who would be interested in joining our forest school

We also hope to increase the size of the group, in line with changes to COVID-19 guidance.

We have established three key objectives for the Rowan Rangers Forest School Sessions in 2021/21 which are as follows:



1. *Nature Connection*
...instill a deeper connection between our participants and the Natural World by providing a positive and immersive experience with the woodland environment, natural materials and changing seasons
2. *Community Building*
...create a sense of group belonging and kinship by establishing an inclusive community space that empowers the individual and is responsive to their changing needs throughout the year
3. *Creative and Holistic Development*
...help our participants develop themselves both creatively and holistically by utilising the benefits and challenges of being in a natural space

The Autumn has been a wonder and witnessing the transition in the woods from the warmth of summer, through the temperate if wet autumn has been an inspirational, challenging and altogether enjoyable experience for everyone involved.



Follows are some of the things we have achieved so far....

1-Nature Connection

<h2>September</h2>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Elder bead necklaces• Elderberry Inks• Fire laying and lighting using found tinder and fuel• Den building• Tracking Animals – plaster casts of animal tracks   
<h2>October</h2>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Charcoal making (from willow on site)• Wildlife Cameras• Leaf art• Mapping the wood• Sensory games (touch – Halloween)   

We have started our Nature Connection activities through firstly trying to encourage the participants to explore their surroundings and not to be afraid to pick up and use what we can from the wood.

There is a general level of anxiety among all our participants about touching certain natural objects, such as mud or certain plants, so we hope this will improve throughout the year as we continue to interact with the living environment.

The tracking and wildlife cameras have already helped our participants understand what animals live in the woods. When asked at the start of the sessions they would either not know or reply something out of context such as 'tiger' or 'bear'. Now they confidently identify animals such as 'fox, deer, badger, woodpecker, mouse etc.' because they have either been witnessed first-hand, we have identified their tracks, or they have been spotted on the wildlife camera.

2- Community Building

September

- Stories of the week
- Interactive Story Telling – empathy and behaviour
- Wildlife miming games
- Space to socialise – e.g. campfire lunch



October

- Stories of the week
- Interactive Story Telling – behaviour and animals of the wood
- Halloween Party
- Wildlife games
- Space to socialise










The group has gelled together really well albeit there were already some existing close friendships between the participants.

We have been focusing on creating an open sharing space, with the campfire a huge draw and focus, and encouraging participants to share their 'stories' of the week and make suggestions of games or activities. The latter has been the hardest to promote.

A defining feature of Forest School is essentially it being 'participant-led', and our participants although really enthusiastic have been less open to make suggestions. We hope this will increase as they get more used to the space in the coming months.

3- Creative and Holistic Development

September	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Elder bead necklaces• Natural ink paintings• Clay animals• Personal journals   
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Charcoal drawings and rubbings• Leaf art• Wood hedgehogs• Natural decorated bat mobiles• Pumpkin Carving    

The woods have been a hive of creative activity and as is our 'Rowan mantra', we have been using Art as a means of helping our participants develop both creatively and holistically.

The projects have been a good gauge for us to determine personal interests and ability in areas such as fine and gross motor skills, problem solving and creative responses to their surroundings.

Interestingly the group has responded very well to using tools, such as loppers and saws, which is something we will continue to introduce in the coming weeks. The participants are also filling in a creative journal each week to reflect upon the day.

Unfortunately due to the lockdown at the start of 2021 we have had to stop 'face2face' Rowan Rangers sessions but we have continued to get close to nature with Zoom sessions and our new "Rowan Rangers nature club" providing creative ideas for our students to keep active and explore nature from their home.

We are keen to resume Rowan Rangers in person as soon as it is safe for us to do so.

What difference have we made?

We are focused on monitoring and evaluation and we are keeping an observational record for each participant to establish a baseline which we will be able to use as a way of tracking progress numerically.

The baseline has been worked out by the participants average scores over the first eight sessions. This will be used as a gage for how they are doing throughout the year and highlight areas we need to focus on, improve and develop. The participants baseline scores are in Appendix 1.

We are thrilled to be able to get this project started and it has been a real boost for those who come in what is currently a really difficult time.

The general feedback and enthusiasm from the group has so far been positive and we are looking forward continuing to build our little community in the woods. With a nip in the air and the first frosts on the ground we are excited to see what Winter is like in the woods with all the challenges and joys it brings.



Moving forward we are hoping the COVID-19 situation improves and we can start opening the Forest School for more and more people to enjoy.

We thank you for your continued support of Rowan Rangers

Together we are making a real difference to the lives of adults with learning disability in Cambridgeshire.

To see video from Rowan Rangers in 2020 go to

<https://vimeo.com/479760267> and <https://vimeo.com/438887277>



Appendix 1 Baseline Scores

1. Nature Connection Baseline Scores

Participant name	Engagement with natural surroundings	Interaction with found Natural materials	Attitude to weather
	1= Not at all engaged 5= Extremely engaged	1= Not at all confident 5= Extremely Confident	1= Not at all coping 2= Coping 3= Fully Embracing
AO	2.35	2.125	1.625
FM	3.125	2.75	1.75
JK	2.75	2.625	1.875
MK	2.75	2.75	1.75
SB	2.75	2.875	1.875

2- Community Building Baseline Scores

Participant name	General attitude	Confidence with Peers	Confidence with Leaders	Wellbeing	Involvement
	1=Protester 2=Prisoner 3=Passenger 4=Player 5=Pilot	1 = Not at all confident 5= Extremely Confident	1 = Not at all confident 5= Extremely Confident	1 = Low 5 = High	1 = Low 5= High
AO	2.875	3.125	2.875	3.75	2.75
FM	3.65	3.5	3.75	3.875	3.75
JK	3.125	3.125	3.25	3.75	3.625
MK	3.75	3.375	3.75	3.875	3.875
SB	2.65	2.25	3.75	3.875	2.625

3. Creative and Holistic Development Baseline Scores

Emotional Intelligence Observations					
Participant name	Self - Awareness	Self-Regulation	Self-Motivation	Social Skills	Empathy
	Identification of own emotions, strengths and weaknesses and personal aspirations	Management of disruptive emotions and impulses and adapt to changing circumstances	Motivate oneself to achieve for the sake of achievement	Manage other's emotions to move people in the desired direction	Recognise, understand, and consider other people's feelings especially when making decisions
	1= Low 5= High				
AO	2.875	3.5	2.75	3.123	2.875
FM	3.125	3.625	3.75	2.875	2.875
JK	3.125	3.875	3.5	3.125	3.875
MK	2.25	3.75	3.875	3.125	3.125
SB	3.375	3.375	2.875	2.375	2.625

Appendix 2 - Observation Recordings guidance sheet

1 – Nature Connection

Engagement with natural surroundings		
1	Not at all engaged	The participant is clearly showing no interest in exploring their natural surroundings and are struggling to find stimulation. They make no attempt to contact the immediate environment and are unresponsive for most of the session
2	Slightly engaged	The participant may take interest in their surrounding environment when prompted by others, however the interest, will be short lived and they will not actively engage in the natural setting independently
3	Moderately engaged	The participant may be willing to make some observations and be willing to explore their natural surroundings independently when prompted
4	Very engaged	This participant is happy to explore and interact with their surroundings independently. They may make frequent observations or comments about their surroundings such as noticing animal tracks, bird song, changes in the weather, highlighting interesting plants and fungi etc.
5	Extremely engaged	This participant commits fully to exploring their environment and shows a keen interest/enthusiasm to explore and increase their understanding; they may ask questions, draw pictures, spend extended time observing certain natural stimuli etc.

Interaction with found natural materials		
1	Not at all confident	The participant is showing a general repulsion and refusal to interact with any natural objects
2	Slightly confident	The participant may make a laboured attempt at interacting with some natural objects when prompted
3	Moderately confident	The participant may be willing to interact with some natural objects, and utilise them for a purpose when prompted
4	Very confident	This participant is happy to interact with most natural objects and explore their different qualities. They are happy to utilise them for another purpose such as play, being creativity, or consumption (foraging)
5	Extremely confident	This participant commits fully to interacting with all natural materials and shows a keenness to explore their properties. They may show specific enthusiasm to find out a more in-depth knowledge about the materials and show ingenuity and creativity in their use

Attitude to weather		
1	Not at all Coping	The participant is showing clear signs of discomfort and is unable to self-regulate in the conditions
2	Coping	The participant is coping with the conditions and able to self-regulate. They may interact when prompted
3	Fully Embracing	The participant is clearly enjoying the conditions and fully interacting influencing activities (e.g. snow sculpting, mud play, rain painting, kite making, shadow drawing etc.)

2- Community Building

General Attitude (the five P's of delegates)		
1	Protester	The participant clearly doesn't want to be there and will let everyone know about it! They will often disagree with everything, be extremely negative and generally go out of their way to make the session as unpleasant as possible by being confrontational, disruptive and un-engaging
2	Prisoner	This participant is resigned to being there but feels trapped and just wants to escape. Unlike the Protester they are not confrontational. Instead they may show their disinterest and reluctance to engage with the session through negative body language (such as yawning, folded arms, sullen demeanour, rolling eyes etc.)
3	Passenger	The participant may engage in part and has no intention of disrupting the session, but they will not help with it or play an active role and will get by doing the bare minimum and taking the easiest options
4	Player	This participant is happy to be there. They want to learn and are enthusiastic and fully engaged with the session. They offer positive help and responses
5	Pilot	This participant commits fully to the process and guides or leads others in the group. From a session leaders perspective, this can be a valuable help and peer-support should be encouraged. It does however need to be managed suitably

Adapted from: <https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/managing-4Ps-delegates.htm> (Last accessed 20.5.19)

Confidence Scale with Peers/Leaders		
1	Not at all confident	The participant will avoid contact with others at all costs. They will shy away from questions and be unwilling to work in a team. They may try and hide themselves and look away when being spoken to or approached
2	Slightly confident	The participant may contribute short responses when prompted by others but will not actively engage in tasks, group activities or offer their own opinions
3	Moderately Confident	The participant may be willing to offer their opinions, contribute to discussions, and work with others when prompted
4	Very Confident	The participant will be happy to engage in discussions and offer in-depth opinions unprompted. They will be happy and willing to speak out in the group and work with others
5	Extremely Confident	They will actively offer opinions and insights in discussions and be open to them being debated. They will be very happy to communicate within a group and will regularly volunteer to help and work with others

Adapted from:

The Leuven Scale for Involvement		
1	Low Activity	Activity at this level can be simple, stereotypic, repetitive and passive. The participant is absent and displays no energy. There is an absence of cognitive demand. The participant characteristically may stare into space. N.B. This may be a sign of inner concentration.
2	A Frequently Interrupted Activity	The participant is engaged in an activity, but half of the observed period includes moments of non-activity, in which the participant is not concentrating and is staring into space. There may be frequent interruptions in their concentration, but his/her Involvement is not enough to return to the activity.
3	Mainly Continuous Activity	The participant is busy at an activity, but it is at a routine level and the real signals for Involvement are missing. There is some progress, but energy is lacking, and concentration is at a routine level. The participant can be easily distracted.
4	Continuous Activity with Intense Moments	The participants activity has intense moments during which activities at Level 3 can come to have special meaning. Level 4 is reserved for the kind of activity seen in those intense moments and can be deduced from the Involvement signals. This level of activity is resumed after interruptions. Stimuli, from the surrounding environment, however attractive cannot seduce the participant away from the activity.
5	Sustained Intense Activity	The participant shows continuous and intense activity revealing the greatest Involvement. In the observed period not all the signals for Involvement need be there, but the essential ones must be present: concentration, creativity, energy and persistence. This intensity must be present for almost all the observation period.

The Leuven Scale for Well-being

1	Extremely Low	The participant clearly shows signs of discomfort such as crying or screaming. They may look dejected, sad, frightened or angry. The participant does not respond to the environment, avoids contact and is withdrawn. They may behave aggressively, hurting him/herself or others.
2	Low	The posture, facial expression and actions indicate that the participant does not feel at ease. However, the signals are less explicit than under level 1 or the sense of discomfort is not expressed the whole time.
3	Moderate	The participant has a neutral posture. Facial expression and posture show little or no emotion. There are no signs indicating sadness or pleasure, comfort or discomfort.
4	High	The participant shows obvious signs of satisfaction (as listed under level 5). However, these signals are not constantly present with the same intensity.
5	Extremely High	The participant looks happy and cheerful, smiles, cries out with pleasure. They may be lively and full of energy. Actions can be spontaneous and expressive. The participant appears relaxed and does not show any signs of stress or tension. He /she is open and accessible to the environment. The participant expresses self-confidence and self-assurance.

<https://www.tes.com/teaching-resource/well-being-and-involvement-leuven-scale-6340990#> (Last accessed 20/5/19)