

Embracing Nature Project Evaluation

July 2017



"He struggles in halls or busy classrooms, so to be out in nature he's naturally getting the sensory input he needs.... People have said they can't believe it's the same child!"

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Cornwall Council (Tehidy Country Park and Luxulyan Woods)
Friends of Luxulyan Woods
Pencalenick School
Tresor (formerly Doubletrees) Hostel

Executive Summary

This evaluation focuses on four ten-week Forest School programmes, which were the primary focus of the Embracing Nature project. The wider project included several one-off outdoor events for families and the training of two parent members of PCCC to become qualified Forest School Leaders. The parent training has ensured the sustainability of the project, with Forest School clubs for PCCC members continuing after the funding delivery deadline.



A short film of the project can be found at the following YouTube link:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QdKG-ahFDMs>

Part 1: Introduction

Families with children with additional needs and disabilities – the need for intervention.

Special Educational Needs (SEN) can affect a child or young person's behaviour, reading and writing, concentration levels, ability to understand things, or their physical ability. It is estimated that there are approximately 193,707 children of school age in the UK who have a learning disability. It is estimated that one in 100 children in the UK have a form of autism.

Research suggests that there is a growing need for intervention to be able to provide a better framework of services for those children with additional needs as well as their families who provide the full-time care.

Some of the key issues that these families face are financial, with it costing up to three times as much to raise a disabled child, as it does to raise a child without disabilities. In fact, 'Contact a Family' statistics state that in the UK today up to 52 per cent of families with a disabled child are at risk of experiencing poverty. Another major issue for families is the high levels of support and attention demanded by having a child with additional needs. The result of this increased care can sometimes lead to parents or carers experiencing isolation. Research suggests that one in five parents say that isolation has led to the breakup of their family life.¹ Short breaks provide much needed respite for hard working families to have some time away from their children and also to provide new, stimulating and enriching experiences for the children.

Parent Carer Council for Cornwall

The Cornwall Parent Carer Council (PCCC) are a small, Cornwall-based charity who provide guidance and support for families with children with additional needs and disabilities. The PCCC also act to strengthen this community of families by acting as a signposting service, promoting information and events for Parent Carers around Cornwall. They organise events sporadically in order for families to meet, socialise and support one another.

The Nature Workshops Model

Established to be part of the wakeup call on climate change and social justice, 'Nature Workshops' take people of all ages and abilities out into the natural world in woods, on beaches and at sea in order to learn new skills, attain knowledge about the great outdoors, and build confidence and self-esteem. In sessions run by experienced Forest School Practitioners, children have adventures, learn how the earth works, how to use tools, make fires, build dens, learn about themselves, each other and they have fun. Nature Workshops

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https://www.cafamily.org.uk/media/381636/forgotten_isolation_report.pdf

stays true to the Scandinavian model of Forest School, and believes that by bringing up children to appreciate the value of the natural world they will grow up with a clear unequivocal desire to protect and conserve it.

"Forest School is an inspirational process, that offers all learners regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a woodland or natural environment with trees." (Forest School Association UK)

The evidence is growing about the profound and positive effect Forest School has on the way children and adults relate to each other and the world around them, particularly with regard to building confidence and self-esteem. The key features that when combined set Forest School apart from other outdoor education approaches are:

- The use of a woodland or 'Wild' setting, with the use of boundaries and strict safety measures enabling flexible child-led learning in a low-risk environment.
- Learning can be linked to the national curriculum whilst set within a different context and using innovative learning styles. Children are thus encouraged to develop their innate curiosity and motivation to learn.
- The freedom to explore using multiple senses with creativity and imagination being encouraged. The focus is on the 'whole child' (not just their academic ability) and how they can develop their own learning styles at their own pace whilst maximising the benefits from each experience they discover for themselves.
- Regular contact for the children over a significant period of time.
- A high adult to pupil ratio (maximum group size is usually twelve).

Nature Workshops has worked with a range of groups in Cornwall in the past six years, from children to adults, particularly those experiencing learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties. An evidence base to show the positive effects of using the model is emerging. The skills of measuring the impacts both qualitatively and quantitatively have been developed. In addition, there is the potential for others to learn the skills to deliver sessions with accredited Forest School training.

Part 2: Methodology

The four Forest School programmes were delivered in different locations across Cornwall for four separate groups of children. Each was delivered one day a week for 10 weeks. Each programme of activities was advertised as after school clubs running from 4:00 - 5:30pm, and were situated entirely outdoors in local woodland. The participants had a minimum of 15 hours over 10 weeks in a natural environment, with activities based around learning from the natural environment and using of all-natural materials.

Activities included tool use, games, making fires, cooking and natural crafts. Each week the session was designed by the session leader based upon what the children had responded well to and showed natural interests in, with the participants leading the learning journey. £

Data was gathered before and after each 10-week programme with either parents, carers or teachers. For the Tehidy and Luxulyan groups the children were asked each week to choose from three 'smiley faces' to how whether they had enjoyed the session. At Pencalenick the students were slightly older and more able to communicate, therefore a special feedback session was designed to gather more detailed feedback on their experiences of Forest School.

Three methods were used to collect 2 types of data:

- quantitative data from Emotional Literacy Checklists (ELC)
- qualitative data from parents and staff interviews
- qualitative data from Pencalenick school students group interview

Quantitative data from Emotional Literacy checklists

Definition

'Emotional literacy may be defined as the ability to recognise, understand, handle, and appropriately express emotions.' Sharp (2001:1)

Standard Emotional Literacy Assessment checklists were used before and after the sessions to provide a baseline and a means to evaluate any changes in emotional literacy. The assessment used covers five key areas of emotional literacy addressed in the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) curriculum including:

- Self-awareness - the capacity to recognise feelings as they happen
- Self-regulation - the resilience to self-manage emotional reactions
- Motivation - perseverance and determination to work with emotions to overcome challenge
- Empathy - emotional sensitivity to other people's feelings
- Social skills - handling relationships with self-confidence and social skills to work collaboratively

Qualitative data from parent and staff interviews

Interviews with parents and teachers were conducted before and after the Forest School sessions in order to gather a more detailed and in-depth picture of each participant's experience. The interviews consisted of the same open-ended questions:

1. What do you think the child will get / got out of the sessions?
2. What do you think they will enjoy / enjoyed the most?
3. What do you think they will find / found the most challenging?
4. Any other comments?

Interviews were also held with staff and volunteers who participated in the sessions to gather their impressions of the impact to the children. These were more targeted towards the outcome themes:

1. Why do you think it is important for children with additional needs/disabilities to spend regular time outdoors?
2. What have you most enjoyed from the Forest School sessions you've worked at?
3. What have you found the most challenging?
4. What impact/change have you seen in the child/children's confidence and self-esteem?
5. What impact/change have you seen in the child/children's resilience (physical or emotional)?
6. What impact/change have you seen in the child/children's social connections?
7. What other impact/changes have you noticed?
8. What impact/change have you seen in the parents/carers attending the sessions?

Data Analysis Themes

The themes chosen with which to evaluate the findings are those that have been shown to have had impact in previous Nature Workshops research programmes, and that were felt to be pertinent to children with additional needs and disabilities:

- **Improved confidence and self-esteem** - children have the freedom, time and space, to learn, grow and demonstrate independence.
- **Improved Social skills** - children demonstrate an increased awareness of the consequences of their actions on other people, peers and adults, and acquire a better ability to work cooperatively with others.
- **Improved Physical skills** - children develop physical stamina as well as gross and fine motor skills.
- **Improved Skills and Knowledge** - Children develop life-skills such as fire making, cooking and using tools to make simple artefacts and build shelters.
- **Increased connection to the natural world** - children are connected to their environment, increasing awareness and knowledge about the natural world and fostering a protective nature towards wildlife and animals.

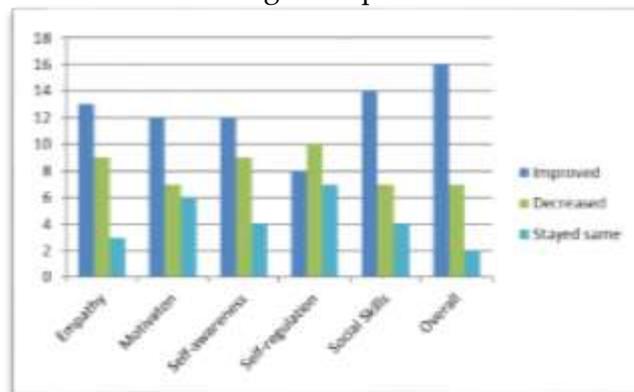
Findings

Emotional Literacy Checklists

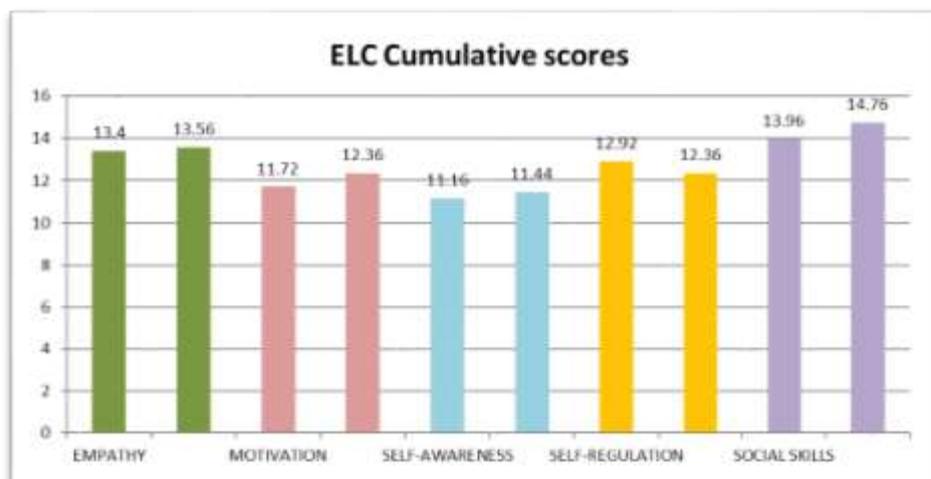
Fully completed ELC checklists were collected for 25 children out of a total of 39 who participated. Overall results for each individual participant show that fifteen out of twenty-five had an overall improvement in emotional literacy. Two stayed the same and seven saw a decrease in their scores.



Social skills was the theme with the most reported improvement, with 14 out of 25 participants, or 56% of the total group reporting an improvement. This was followed closely by Empathy (52%), then motivation and self-awareness (48%). Self-regulation had the lowest number of improvements with 32% seeing an improvement in their score.



Cumulative scores by theme show that on average the improvements in score reported were not large. Social skills scores showed the biggest increase and self-regulation saw a decrease in score.



Confidence & self-esteem

There was a clear expectation from parents and teachers that the Forest School programmes would benefit children's confidence - 15% of all responses cited confidence in the 'Before' questionnaires. Most responses did not state how this might occur; those that did mentioned meeting new people and having new experiences.

The Post feedback responses highlighted how increased confidence was a significant theme, with 20% of all responses citing it.

"These workshops have given S a real confidence boost." (Teacher)

"I've noticed such a massive boost of confidence levels. C didn't want to hold a fire steel at the beginning, would hardly speak as she was so shy... by week 3 she was bounding up to me, chatting lots and really engaged." (Session Leader)

The way sessions provided opportunities for participants to try new things at their own pace appears to have helped many to recognise their own abilities and improve their self-esteem.

"D is more confident in his abilities." (Teacher)

"She now feels more able to take unfamiliar tasks whereas previously she would not have tried them." (Teacher)

"He was buzzing after he got home, he was so proud of all the things he made, really helped his self-esteem, so positive for him." (Parent)

Some expressed how the freedom of the sessions helped the children to become more independent - the lack of pressure, strict routines or expectations within safe boundaries helped develop the confidence to explore and try new things within a familiar space.

"Generally being able to have freedom and roam bit more. Being away from me he is able to have more trust, risk awareness and have more independence." (Parent)

"J began to run with other children and joined in some hiding games with delight, laughing, beaming, clearly being part of a group in non-competitive ways and ways which he could cope with sensory wise." (Parent)

"I was told by the school that I would have to hold J's hand the whole time - but he has been really content exploring close by and has never run off - the complete opposite to what we were told." (1:1 Support Worker)

"It boosted his self-esteem because he was with mixed ages in a non-competitive way. The course allowed children to participate when they could in ways that they could without pressure which was essential for J." (Parent)

"F is 4 years old and very clingy with mum. The last few weeks she has spoken more, grown confidence and exploring away from mum." (ASL)

Each session involved making food over the fire, which children were encouraged to be involved with. This was a popular part of each programme and their confidence was boosted through learning this key life-skill. Being trusted with 'risky' activities such as fire making and tool use also increased levels of self-esteem and feelings of responsibility.



"The first time we left the session with Lucy, N said 'Mum isn't it really nice that people trust kids like us to use tools and make fires'. It was a big deal for him to be trusted and allowed to be independent, and not treated like a child with a 'disability' I suppose. It's very liberating for them to come here."(Parent)

"I liked being trusted to do the cooking."
(Pencalenick student)

"At the start he was so scared of the concept of holding a knife, really nervous but built so much resilience. He came on leaps and bound - ended up making the only working carrot whistle!" (Session Leader)

"For M learning independent living skills and having responsibility to use tools had an impact on his confidence" (Volunteer)

"They've been building confidence making their own tea and food"(Teacher)

"He liked being given the responsibility to be helpful." (Teacher)

"D is now volunteering as a peer mentor in another programme, his confidence came on leaps and bounds!"(Session Leader)

"J was able (after 3 weeks of watching at a distance) to join in making a mallet using real tools; he had pride about this as the photos showed how impressive this was and he liked others seeing this." (Parent)



Social Skills

Teachers and parents predicted an improvement in social skills before the sessions began. 20% of responses highlighted meeting new people, making friends, working as a team as expected benefits. However, the social aspect was also predicted to be one of the most challenging parts of the programme: teasing, difficulty working cooperatively, not listening to others ideas, and telling others what to do/being in control were issues that were repeatedly highlighted by parents and teachers before the sessions started.



Word Cloud of results from Before question "What will they find challenging?"

Given the expectation of challenges by many, the positive impacts on social skills were perhaps more enhanced and noticeable.

"Generally, the social connections improved so much throughout the weeks." (Session Leader)

"Social interaction with others was a real benefit. At school he is 3:1 so really great chance to mix with other peers." (Parent)

The sessions allowed the freedom for the participants to work together naturally. Examples demonstrated how the children learnt what could be achieved and enjoyed through cooperation with others.

"One week the swing was caught up in trees - before I knew it, the two children have climbed the tree and worked together to bring it down." (ASL)

"Has helped him learn to how to co-operate and interact better with others." (Parent)

(He's benefited from)"Working with others, especially new external Forest School staff."(Teacher)

(I saw changes in social skills while doing)"Book marks and nature walks, the young people started 'high fiving' each other when they got the correct ID match." (Volunteer)

Many of the children who participated are on the Autistic Spectrum, where social interactions can be challenging. However, many responses from parents of children with ASD highlighted that making friends had been a positive outcome for them.

This photograph is significant as it shows a boy who found it difficult to cooperate well with others at the beginning of the sessions showing another boy how to make a mallet.



At Forest School Session Leaders give encouragement for those who've learnt how to do something to then teach it to others.

Key benefits of the programme were having the opportunity to play and socialise freely without strict rules, enabling participants to become better at social interactions in an unstructured and relaxed way.

"Playing! Being with other children."(Parent)

"It gave him the chance to socialise with the freedom to retract if necessary."(Parent)

"Made a new friend, which was so nice. It was just so brilliant something that like was provided for children like him." (Parent)

"J was able to name lots of the other children on the course; he was keen to meet up with certain children and thought they were fun when we discussed previous things that they had done." (Parent)

"She came out of her-self. Much better at socialising now, the only other socialising she does is at school so really good for her."(Parent)

"After 5 weeks (I) saw a change, she was happier to go off with other people and have more independence."(Parent)



Positive changes in behaviour were noted, reflecting improvements in social skills through increased self-awareness, awareness of others and empathy.

"I often get phone calls asking to pick him up as he's not following instructions, but I never had one phone call."(Parent)

"One child who had ADHD, only spoke in 'riddles' by the end of the 10 weeks he was more a helper - engaging/chatting with the other children and asking adults if he needed help." (Volunteer)

"The children have been able to resolve disputes quicker." (Teacher)

"Really good for him to interact with other children who are different. Gave him a confidence boost and was able to identify with his own character traits and be much more forgiving of other children's quirks." (Parent)

"Mum mentioned he often has 'melt downs' and often gets sent home from school due to behaviour. But here he is so mature, sticks up from other peers and suggests coping strategies, he defends peers from unkind comments." (ASL)

"This encourages and promotes acceptance, tolerance and appreciation of difference/disability. Builds harmony and teamwork." (Parent)

"It was good to see J able to cope with a group activity without becoming disruptive. This is a positive step for J."(Teacher)



Physical skills

All sessions were physical and enabled the development of gross motor skills. Each site had a short walk to the 'base camp' and participants were encouraged to move around freely. The sessions at Tehidy involved included a slack line and a swing so that the children had additional exercise through play. Improving physical stamina is important for all children as part of their overall health and well-being.



The participants clearly enjoyed the physicality of the programmes - den building, slack line, cooking, and craft activities were hugely popular. Children were able to explore their boundaries, develop fine motor skills and experience their bodies in a different way.



*"I want to do a larger, more intricate dream catcher.
I found it calming."
(Pencalenick Student)*

For those with sensory issues the outdoors provided the stimulation needed to improve their experience.

"Not being in a classroom/hall, no artificial lighting, sounds, echoes, having a natural environment to get muscle stretch easily when he chose through climbing, jumping off logs, swinging on tree swings/ropes bouncing, hammering, knocking using tools, fire lighting...all this is recommended by J's occupational therapists as helping him with emotional response to sensation and getting the extra sensory input his body requires to be able to be calm and happy and know where his body is." (Parent)

One location required everyone to climb through or over a fallen tree to get to the base camp. Teachers and session staff commented on how this was an opportunity to increase physicality and stamina.

"One boy, whose communication quite poor, finds the accessing the site challenging - reluctant to climb through the fallen tree entrance. He has become much more confident doing this throughout the weeks."(Volunteer)

"D benefited from the freedom of walking around and climbing around."(Teacher)

"I witnessed one boy trip over but he got straight back up and carried on." (Session Leader)

Attendance was high in each group each week, despite inclement weather at times. This desire to come suggests a physical resilience and understanding of how to stay warm and dry.



"L, M, & B are regulars, they're getting on despite the weather." (Volunteer)

"They look forward to it every week regardless of the weather." (Teacher)

"I'm more confident - if I'm bored I can do crazy stuff outside rain or sun." (Pencalenick student)

"I learnt to have fun outside even when it's raining."
(Pencalenick student)

Skills and Knowledge

It is clear that the practical skills learnt during the sessions were incredibly popular and rewarding. The opportunity to learn things not usually taught in school or at home was welcomed by participants and parents, and the skills learnt helped to increase levels of self-esteem and awareness of their abilities. As mentioned before, using tools and fire was a novelty for most participants and gave huge learning and development opportunities.

"S really enjoyed the making of dream catchers and was very proud showing them off to others. It was very good for her self-esteem." (Teacher, Pencalenick)

"He was able to explore tasks and wasn't held back like they often experience in a school environment. Carving, he didn't stop talking about it and explaining what he did. There was a huge excitement with him while explaining. He doesn't often describe anything he does with such delight, so this was a pleasant welcome for me to witness. I felt very proud." (Parent)

(He enjoyed) "So much. Doing stuff with his hands. It also gave him the freedom to explore things he wouldn't ordinarily do at home. Like carving." (Parent)



"I gained skills that I didn't know how to share with him" (Parent)

"M benefitted from learning independent living skills and being given the responsibility to use tools."

"I want to keep doing crafts." (Pencalenick student)

" He loved making things from things from the woods, all creative. Really good." (Parent)

The fire and food were overwhelmingly expressed as the most enjoyed part of the sessions. Sharing food was an important part of socialising and building the community within the group; having a fire made learning to cook an even more exciting and enjoyable life skill.

"I love eating outside! It's my favourite kind of cooking." (Pencalenick student)

"I'd like to do cooking again - I like working with fire & the staff/family feel." (Pencalenick student)



This Word Cloud, made from comments about what was enjoyed the most, shows the importance of making things, cooking and sharing of food around the fire to participants.

Connection to the natural world.

Being outside was very important to those coming to the sessions - the pre-session responses touched on how some parents were keen to encourage their children away from devices and gadgets, while others knew that being outside was the environment in which their child responded well to.

"R rarely tries new activities. Being outside and not on his game console will, with luck, encourage him to try other new activities after this." (Teacher)

Some responses suggested a deeper connection with the natural world was made over the weeks, with feelings of comfort and calmness being outdoors.

"H progressed hugely in being outdoors. He's more comfortable in general touching natural objects and being out in the woods." (Volunteer)



"She is now much more able to relate to the outside environment which previously she would have found scary." (Teacher)

"J struggles in Halls or busy classrooms, so to be out in nature he's naturally getting the sensory input he needs. He can self-regulate in this environment. People have said they can't believe it's the same child" (Parent)

"He functions much better outside." (Parent)

"Have noticed they have more interest in the wildlife" (ASL)

Some feedback highlighted a change of attitude towards the outside, with suggestions that nature was a source of stimulation and creativity while also having a calming quality.

"D loved being outside and the creative element of the workshops has opened his eyes to a whole new aspect of its potential to be entertaining." (Teacher)

"Since Forest School session, F goes out all the time, can't keep him in! Before he wouldn't really want to without a lot of encouragement - now he is always playing with other children in the fields." (Parent)

"J enjoyed the novel experience of making things from items which are found outside. This has made him more aware of the environment around him and the potential fun to be had from using his hands to make things in the absence of D.T in our school." (Teacher)

Harnessing a love of nature was shown to help concentration and memory.

"Using wildlife ID charts, his memory recall has improved as he is interested in a subject he's engaged with."

Additional outcomes

The sessions were an opportunity both for respite and for families to spend quality time together.

"Really good respite, we had 4 hours a week paid but that has stopped now. Really good for J to do things away from the family too." (Parent)

"Really good experience to bond with his brother, having other adults there to resolve any issues, taking the responsibility away from me. Gave me the opportunity to spend quality time with A. So good that the siblings there meant we could go, it was really good experience for all of us. (Parent)

"Really good experience to mix with other children and with own sister and mum in a different setting." (Parent)

Pupils expressed how they have taken their learning and shared it with their families.

"Sometimes we go out and do similar stuff now and I get my sister involved - stuff we wouldn't have done before." (Pencalenick student)

But did the sessions give too much freedom for some?

"Noticed he found it more challenging after the sessions to hold hands, wait in line. Got use to the freedom!" (Parent)

General enjoyment

The regular attendance at the sessions of the majority of participants was a clear sign of how much they enjoyed and valued them. Many comments stated how children were sad to end their participation in the programme.

"N would jump at the chance to be able to join a group like this again. He is going to miss it. N needed no encouragement to get ready, no prompting, he seemed at ease and liked people asking him how his nature workshops were going. He would smile proudly when I said 'nature workshop tomorrow!'. (Parent)

"Another course please! D was so disappointed when it stopped" (Parent)

"We noticed back in class the pupils were talking about Forest School a lot. The whole experience was really stimulating. It allowed them to opportunity to interact with new staff members, really refreshing." (Teacher)

"J doesn't usually give any eye contact, he only says two words very occasionally. Last week he looked me straight in the eye and smiled at me. Mum says she knows he loves it as he gets straight in the car with no complaints."(1:1 support worker)

Conclusions

The children who attended the Embracing Nature Forest School programmes benefited in many ways from being involved in the project. It is clear that they found great enjoyment from attending the sessions, with parents and practitioners reporting how much they looked forward to each week.

Before the programmes started, parents and teachers overwhelmingly predicted that being outside would be of most benefit to the participants. Interestingly, feedback from after the sessions focused more around confidence, social and practical skills. The responses highlight how being outside provided a gateway to these positive impacts.

Forest School allows children to make their own choices, which has been shown in the feedback to lead to increased independence and confidence in their abilities. The more relaxed and freer environment benefitted children with additional needs who struggle with the confines of a classroom environment. Having the opportunity to explore an outdoor space provides a huge variety of sensory experiences that can help those who need this sensory input in order to connect to their bodies and their environments.

Life skills are an important aspect of learning for children with additional needs and disabilities. During the Embracing Nature programmes children were encouraged to be involved with lighting and maintaining fires, preparing and cooking food. These activities were reported to be the most enjoyed, suggesting that Forest School can teach important lessons without participants being aware of the learning. Through cooking, fire lighting, and simple tool use participants of Forest School learn how to assess risk for themselves and others, how to use tools safely, and how to cook simple healthy meals. These activities allow participants to learn about and test their own abilities in a safe environment. Parents and teachers reported that the feeling of being trusted with 'risky' activities further improved the confidence and self-esteem of the participants.

The impact reported on social skills in the ELC checklist correlates with the quantitative feedback received for the same theme. The freedom within Forest School was highlighted as giving opportunities for children to work and play together naturally, fostering friendships and positive interactions. The emphasis on learning something then teaching to others encourages participants to have feelings of responsibility and to learn to cooperate together, particularly when activities involve sharing tools and requiring two or more people to achieve a task.

At Forest School the adults leading and supporting the sessions role model behaviour expected from all involved, treating everyone equally and with respect. Children at sessions are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions and support others both with practical tasks and emotionally. This culture of positivity combined with a natural trust put in the capability of participants encourages them to try new things and 'live up' to the expectations of them. Many positive changes in behaviour were reported from the groups; with session leaders and volunteers reporting that the 'challenging' behaviour they were told to expect did

not emerge for many children during the sessions. It was reported that disputes were resolved positively and that tolerance of others increased. It is clear that the Forest School ethos addressing social skills worked particularly well for this group.

At Forest School children are active for a lot of the time and over regular sessions their stamina can improve along with gross motor skills. This was certainly the case for some participants who were reported to have, over time, become much more at ease with the rough terrain. The emphasis on the regularity and continuity of the sessions suggests that a series of ten weeks is not enough to ensure sustained impact on physical skills. Participants, parents and teachers overwhelmingly stated a wish for the sessions to continue.

It is clear that the children enjoyed being in the natural environment, however, further assessment would be required to establish whether the children have retained knowledge of wildlife and whether the sessions have encouraged them to spend more time outside in and protect the natural environment.

In addition to the predicted outcomes, the sessions provided additional benefits to the whole family with children with additional needs and disabilities. For some, the opportunity to have respite was welcomed, particularly with cuts to other services reducing hours for some families. Some children reported sharing their experiences with their families when they got home, leading to more family outings in outdoor settings. This desire to share their newfound skills and experiences will support a more active lifestyle and could have positive effects on the whole family over time. For some the sessions provided an opportunity for families to spend valuable time with each other, either siblings on their own, parent and child, or the whole family. Quality family time to bond and have shared experiences was appreciated.

Change does not happen in isolation and reported changes in behaviour could have also been affected by situations occurring outside of Forest School. However, the comments from parents and teachers often attributed changes to specifics in the atmosphere and culture of the sessions. More regular sessions are needed to ensure that any impact is lasting, and more detailed reporting of behaviour outside of Forest School over time would be useful to ascertain whether the sessions benefit the participant's lives in a holistic way.

Recommendations

- Forest School sessions should continue for children with additional needs and disabilities so that more can experience this form of learning environment. Opportunities to attend should continue regularly and over longer periods of time in order for children to receive and sustain the benefits reported.
- The benefits of Forest School should be impressed upon decision makers at special schools, in order to encourage regular opportunities for all learners to engage in the experience.

- Time should be invested to either research or develop a self-appraisal technique that allows children with additional needs and disabilities to feedback their own experiences in a more comprehensive way.
- In order to gather more detailed examples of impact, future programmes should invest in monitoring to take place within each session, either by session leaders or those assisting.
- In future the project team would benefit from the support of an educational institution in the design and implementation of monitoring and evaluation, in order to ensure that results are captured and analysed efficiently and effectively.

