



Countryside outreach project



An update:
annual report 2018

From 2015, the Housing Review Board has funded one and a half days per week, for an Education Ranger from the Countryside team to work in areas of the district with high levels of council housing.

The main focus of activities has been in Littleham in Exmouth, Millwey in Axminster and St Paul's in Honiton. The aims of the project are to engage EDDC housing tenants with the outstanding East Devon environment; to encourage more people to use their local green space; and to provide a supported 'way in' for families and young people to spend more time outdoors.

Through taking part in a range of outdoor activities participants should grow in confidence and go on to spend more time outside in their local green spaces. Research shows that spending time outdoors helps to improve people's health and wellbeing, along with providing a free and positive activity for family and community bonding.



Key partnerships and work areas

East Devon District Council (EDDC) Community Development team

During 2018 28 sessions have been delivered in partnership with the council's Community Development team. Ten of these sessions have involved delivering activities with the SWITCH youth clubs. These have included campfire cooking, bushcraft skills, crafts using natural materials and walks, as well as supporting and providing activities for the annual Easter camp.

Family friendly activities were provided for the four SWITCH

community festivals and eight summer fun days across East Devon as well as an orchard apple blossom event and a community barbeque in Littleham and two community lunches held in Millwey.

Three sessions were run with families supported by the Sid Valley family Liason Officer, Tracey Tipton. These involved taking the families out into the countryside around Sidmouth (The Knapp local nature reserve

and Fire Beacon Hill) to take part in activities designed to aid communication and learning and playing together as a family in a relaxed setting. Challenges were broken down into small achievable tasks to improve the group's confidence. The group built shelters, learnt how to light a fire with a spark, cooked over campfires and used maps to follow a trail.

Children's Centres

Through a strong partnership with 'Action for Children', 13 children's centre activity sessions were provided for families with pre-school children and babies from their centres in Honiton, Axminster, Seaton and Exmouth. The sessions provided were designed to encourage young children and their carers to explore outdoors through activities that could be easily replicated in their gardens or local greenspaces. Through exploring the children developed motor skills, risk taking (taking small managed 'risks' to develop new skills) and communication skills.

'Forest school' style activities that engage all of the children's senses were provided at many of these sessions. Families used natural, found and low cost materials for open-ended play and crafts. The children made mud pies, moved logs and planks to create stepping stones and bridges, hunted for creepy-crawlies, drummed with sticks, hammered tent pegs and painted with mud, went for walks and much more.

Buggy walks were also run with new parents and their babies. The groups went for a sociable stroll in their local area including an outdoor stopping point with a hot drink for the adults and a chance to explore a range of natural materials laid out on picnic blankets for the babies.

Littleham primary school wellbeing week

As part of Littleham Primary school's wellbeing week, Education Ranger run sessions were provided for five year groups over two days. The sessions focused on the children using all of the senses to explore a quiet, wild area in the school field. Children from as young as three spent time sitting quietly and listening to the sounds around them and then looking closely at the plants in the area to find a range of different colours. They then searched for minibeasts and each group did something positive to help wildlife (from creating a solitary bee hotel to planting wild flower seeds). The feedback from the school staff was very positive with several teachers saying that they were keen to take the children out more often in the future.

Summary

Over the year 700 young people and family members have participated in 31 activity sessions. In addition to this approximately 1,050 people attended the 12 Community development festivals and fundays. These sessions and events have taken place on 22 green spaces across the district.

It has been another great year for this partnership project. In addition to regularly engaging with new young people and families, it has been fantastic to have the continuity allowed by working regularly with the groups. The growing trust and familiarity of those joining the activities allows participants to feel increasingly comfortable with being outdoors, helping them to embed this within their behaviour beyond the sessions. To further encourage this, housing tenants are given subsidised places on Countryside events.



700 people participated events



31 events organised



12 community festivals and fun days



22 green spaces visited

Future development



Next year the Education Ranger will continue to work with the Community Development SWITCH clubs and to support their other outdoor events across the region. A further four sessions have also been planned for the Sid Valley families group.

The partnership with the Children's Centres will also continue, although with a slightly different focus. The groups will be more focused and are provided for families needing extra support in areas including speech and language, behaviour, and for children with additional social and emotional needs and with learning difficulties.

Following on from the success of one-to-one sessions in 2017, a further series of similar sessions are planned with a young person from the St Paul's estate in Honiton. Supported by the Education Ranger, he will join a local countryside volunteer group to learn practical outdoor skills and work as part of a team.

Feedback from partners

“Over the past two years Penny has supported and worked in collaboration with myself on a long term project in Sidmouth with our tenant families residing in the Sid Valley schools. Working alongside the Family Liaison Officer, Tracey Tipton, Penny and I were able to coordinate and facilitate a series of adventure days focusing on family dynamics, social interactions and breaking down family barriers. Aspects of family life such as wellbeing, isolation, physical activity and educational outdoor work were our key focus. Penny’s professional approach and attention to details on her tasks and delivery was a huge benefit to the families and the running of the sessions. The input that Penny offers and brings is hugely appreciated and having her on board allows me to focus on the more intensive support mechanisms within the programme and leave the outdoor education to the professional.”

—Aaron Clark, *Community Development Officer*

“Penny’s work with the children centre has been invaluable to the families that attend our groups. Many of our families would not have the opportunity, or confidence, to experience the outdoors and gain environmental learning opportunities. Penny provides a stimulating and multisensory place to play outdoors which in turn makes for excellent learning and development. This encourages our families to live a more healthy and outdoor lifestyle and to develop their knowledge of the outdoors through learning and having fun – positively impacting on the whole family. Feedback we have received from families includes:

“We always made an extra effort to come to the sessions when Penny was there, my little boy loved it!”

“My child found it fascinating and exciting making a fire and cooking popcorn! It was such fun!”

“It is great to get outdoors with my child”

—Charlotte Curtis, *Early Years Worker
Exmouth Children’s Centre*

CONTACT THE COUNTRYSIDE TEAM

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