

‘Into the Woods’

Accessible Forest School
Sessions

2023

Project Summary



Sessions were fully booked throughout, with the 2 free places per session, for low income households, continuously utilised from a variety of local families, and the volunteer opportunities fulfilled too.



100% of parents said they felt their children's wellbeing improved from being outdoors

100% of parents said they felt their children had learnt something new from their sessions



95% reported their children had enjoyed their time in the woods "a great deal"

100% agreed that their children had become more enthused about the natural environment following the sessions



All parents agreed that the sessions provided a good service for the local community, with the subsidised places being beneficial for local families.

Spring Half-Term Sessions

Session Content: Dormice, Spring Foraging and Woodland Crafts



Celebrating spring in the woodland...

These sessions celebrated the return of life to a woodland, teaching the children about the different animals that start to emerge with the return of new growth, with a special focus on dormice and the importance of their different woodland food sources and habitats. Anne Belgrave kindly lent her beautiful artistic creations in the form of her felted dormice and nests to illustrate these beautiful creatures to the children, inspiring their own clay dormice creations and to find suitable summer and winter homes for them.

We foraged our own spring greens and food, using recipes supplied by local forager and chef, Rory Bunting, making

simple recipes such as nettle crisps and crystallised violets to go on our dandelion petal pancakes, celebrating simple woodland flora that so easily gets overlooked.

Our last day focused on woodland spring crafts, and we were joined by local artist Georgina Righton, who has been installing a series of traditional hazel benders at various locations locally as part of her PhD in Fine Arts. The inspiration clearly struck the children and creativity flowed, with the children building, decorating and adorning their own woodland structures. We also utilised the fresh growth of willow, stripping the bark to make our own willow bark pouches to store our treasures we may find when exploring wild spaces.

Summer Holiday Sessions

Session Content: Adders, Woodcocks and Woodland Camps

The importance of corridors, open spaces and 'mapping' within woodlands...

These sessions focused on celebrating the different open spaces within ancient woodlands. Alan Reid provided ample information on adders within Shropshire woodlands and the benefits of creating 'corridors' for them to move around to encourage a healthy gene pool. Of course, we made some wonderful elder-beads adders and damper bread which resembled some good slithery adders! We myth-busted on these wonderful creatures, encouraging children to celebrate their presence instead of fearing them.

We had a session dedicated to woodcocks, explaining the importance of open areas within woodlands so our native species can perform their 'roading' mating rituals. We practiced making ourselves as camouflage as a woodcock too!

Lastly, we talked about how us humans can benefit from open spaces within a woodland, setting up our own camp and surviving within this space. We crafted our own bowls and cups out of clay, whittled knives, and made our own woodland medicine of a willow bark balm - a natural pain relieving aspirin-rich remedy!



Autumn Half Term Sessions

Session Content: Samhain, Soil and Underground Life



It all starts with mud and decay...

Our first day in the autumn half term fell on Halloween - a perfect time to let our imaginations go wild in the woods! Everyone made a potion to take home, using everything from petrified frogs, ram's teeth and squirrel tails, to ghost's blood and witch's tea. These traditions led onto discussing older traditions of Samhain and celebrating this time of the year as the real 'start' of the year, rather than the end, as this is when everything returns to the soil ready to be 'rebirthed'.

This opened the door wonderfully for welcoming Ren Fisher from The Soil Association in joining us to explore more about soil. We looked more closely at just how much life there is under our feet, explored the different types of common soil, and techniques on how we can identify different soils when out in nature.

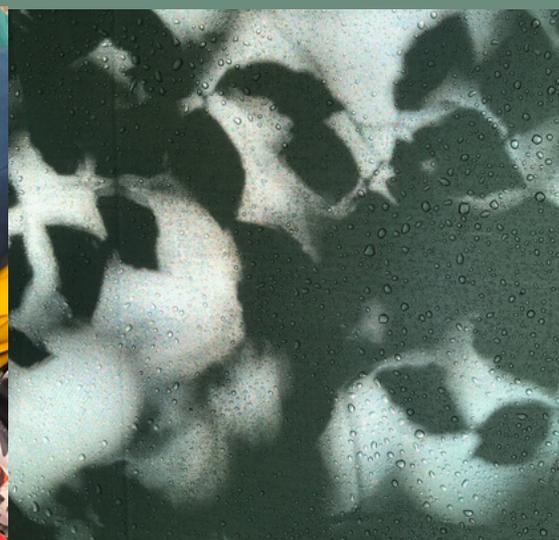
It's fair to say the children truly embraced mud within these sessions, making good friends with one another and all the joy bonding over getting dirty brings!

Thank you again for the opportunity to inspire the next generation in connecting and caring for our Shropshire woodlands through play, art and wildlife education. The children, and our staff, have had a super time throughout 2023, with many memories made, friendships formed, and practical skills harboured. Thank you!

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