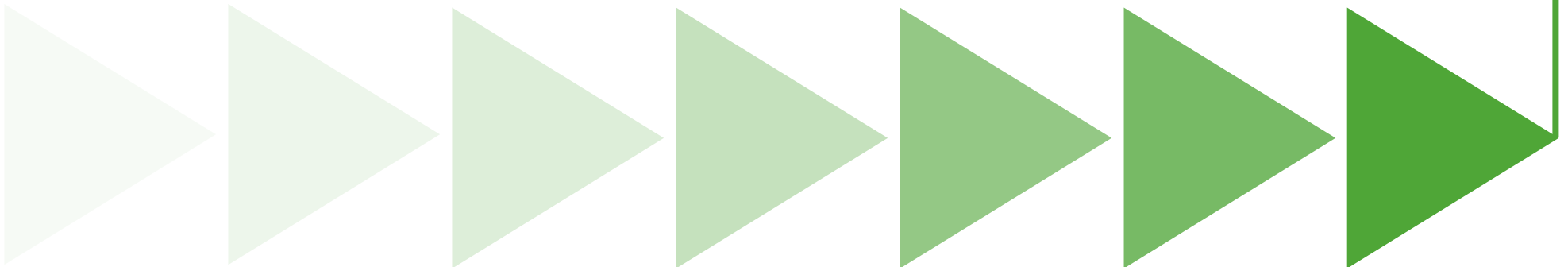


Going Green



LAAC Fun Day & Green Fingers Launch Event July 2010



enter

Green Fingers Project

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LOTTERY FUNDED



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Once again Worcestershire provides a shining example of its commitment to the emotional and physical wellbeing of Looked After Children and their Carers. Year on year, these fun days are growing in popularity, taking consultation, participation and engagement to new levels.

With workshops ranging from trampolining to judo and from pottery to circus skills, this fun packed day, seamlessly merges positive activities with a real chance for participants to have their say on future service development.

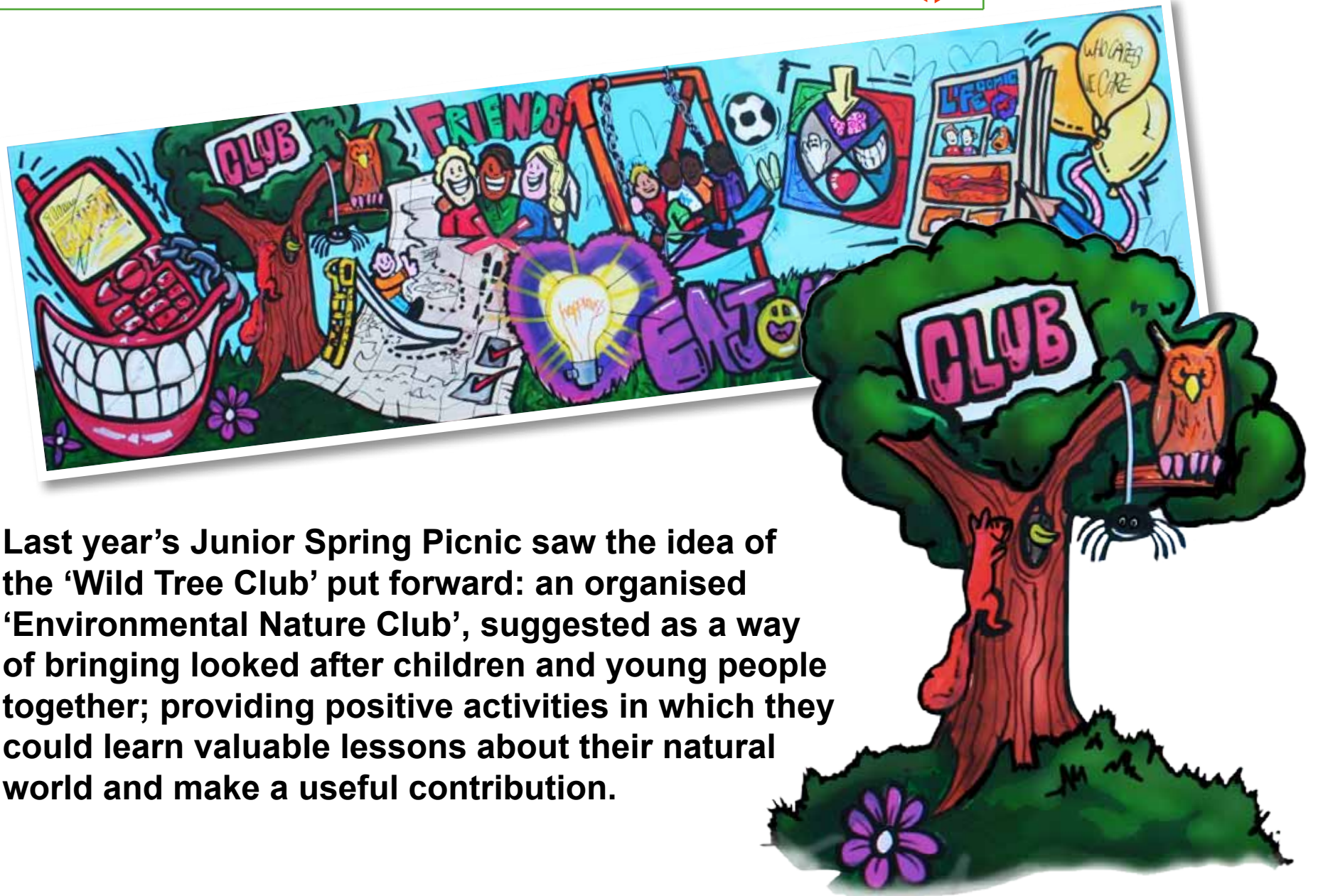


This year's focus on developing a deeper understanding of children and young people's perceptions of green activities, as part of the launch of the fantastic new Green Fingers Project, can be seen to grow directly from last year's Junior Spring Picnic.

This unique consultation approach invites participants to anchor their thoughts, feelings and aspirations, creating a large scale graphic record, made up of their own unique images, each one symbolic of the idea expressed.

Do you have internet access? Then click the 'i' below for further information.





Last year's Junior Spring Picnic saw the idea of the 'Wild Tree Club' put forward: an organised 'Environmental Nature Club', suggested as a way of bringing looked after children and young people together; providing positive activities in which they could learn valuable lessons about their natural world and make a useful contribution.



From previous consultations conducted with young people in 2008/2009, Worcestershire County Council, with support from the Big Lottery Reaching Communities Programme, have made the Green Fingers Project a reality.

At the heart of this innovative Green Fingers project is a new approach to 'healthy care' through all things green. The overall aim is to improve the life chances of children who have been taken into care, making a real difference to their lives.

With enthusiasm, the children and young people once again picked up the challenge and the paint brush, to create a fantastic series of images, illustrating what is most important to them about the future of this inspired Green Fingers Project.

What follows is a brief summary of the images and their embedded meanings.





Rooted in Exploration



The first image on the consultation boards came from a group of very young children who were clear about their chosen image and what was important to them about the environment and the natural world.

Fortunately they all attend a local school that had established a 'forest school' facility. This had clearly made a huge impression upon the children, as they talked enthusiastically about its role and the benefits to their personal development.

They warmly welcomed the Green Fingers project, seeing it as a way of being able to carry on the activities that they adored, outside of school. What they most enjoyed about the 'forest school', and hoped that the new project would carry further, was the informal and exploratory approach to learning. The opportunity to develop their own interests, games and activities, was seen as firmly placing control into their hands, giving them both a voice and a choice.





Nurturing Progress



The first image grew throughout the day, with other young people adding their own ideas to the motif. For younger people, it was the importance of feeling safe and homely, illustrated by the Bird's Nest, with the Friendly Fox looking on, symbolising the 'teacher/worker' keeping a watchful eye on who has access.

For the older young people, they saw an opportunity to gain transferable skills, even possible qualifications, represented by the Book, the Numbers and the Branching Pencil and Paintbrush.

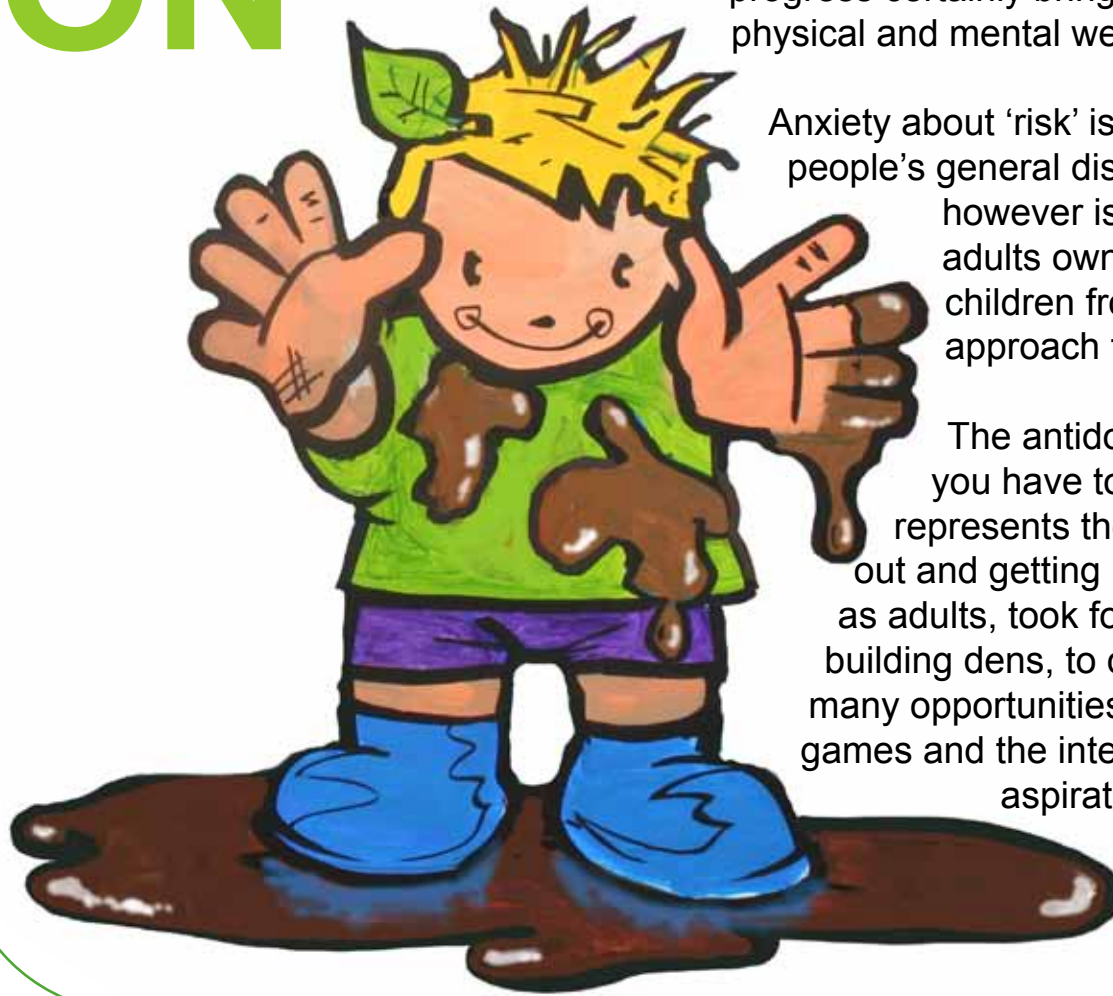
Clearly the Green Fingers project resonated with the young participants. Whilst many saw the new venture as a way of nurturing their own progress and development, everyone involved in this image prioritised 'fun'. The addition of the Paper Airplane 'crowns' the Project with the welcomed acceptance of the type of behaviour that might not be accepted in a traditional classroom. Whilst the plane represents having fun, it also aspires to be the force that lifts young people up, carrying them forwards to new interests and opportunities.





Hands ON

Whilst the event firmly had young people at its centre, parents, carers, workers and mentors were also encouraged to share their views, helping build a more coherent and inclusive approach to service development. This image grew from a project Mentor's acknowledgement that our approach to the natural world is rapidly changing as we become more technologically advanced. Whilst our progress certainly brings benefits, it also has potential costs to our physical and mental well-being.



Anxiety about 'risk' is playing a major role in increasing the people's general disconnection with the natural world. Risk however is a part of life and it can sometime be the adults own fears about dangers that actually prevent children from developing a healthy understanding and approach to their own risk taking.

The antidote however is simple; to get green fingers you have to get dirty hands. This 'Cheeky Chappie' represents the importance of experiential learning, getting out and getting messy. Doing the things that many of us, as adults, took for granted in our own childhoods. From building dens, to climbing trees, the natural world offers so many opportunities to learn essential life skills. Forget computer games and the internet, the Green Finger project Mentors' high aspirations are grounded in muddy puddles and an appreciation of 'wild' life.



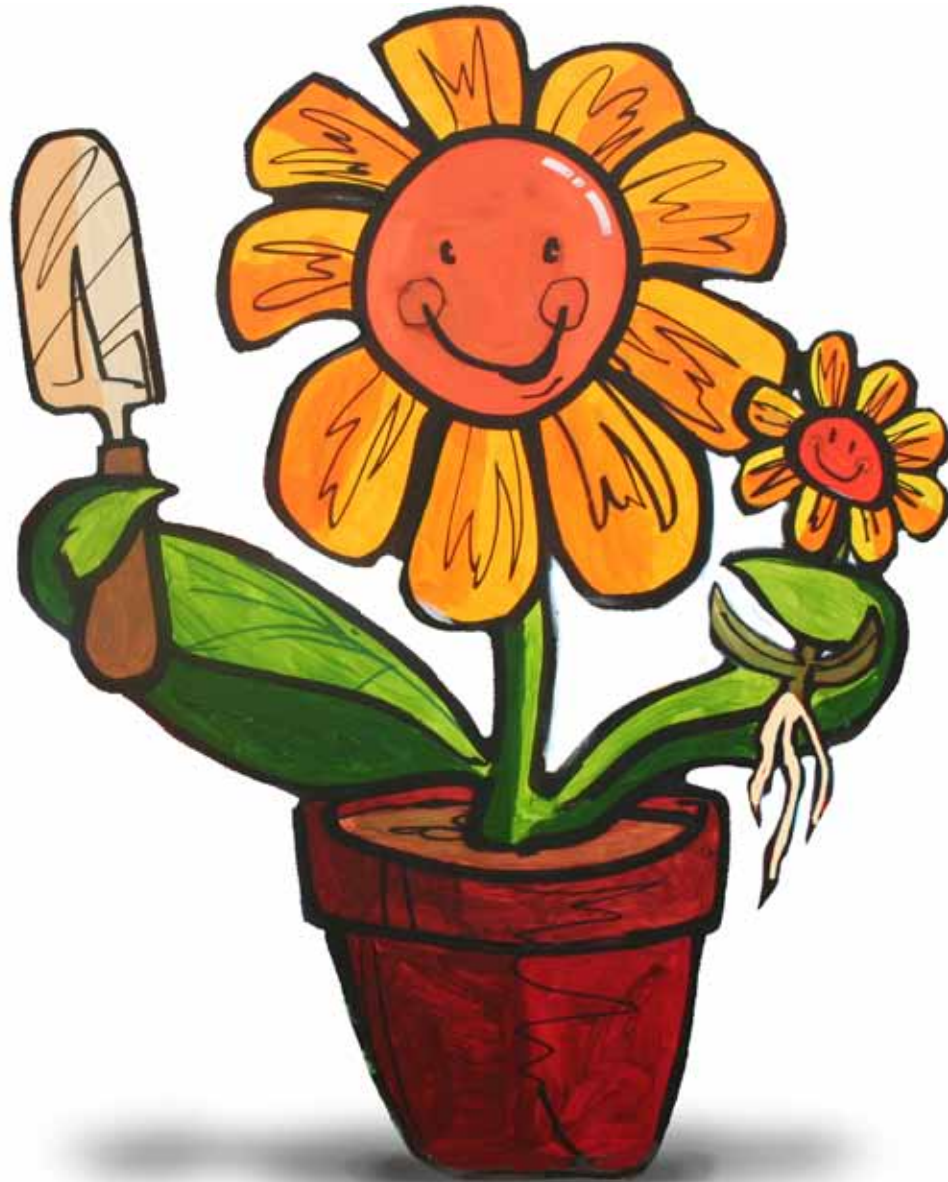


Raindrops Keep Falling...



The sentiment of the adults was reinforced with the addition of the Umbrella containing the Smiling Clouds.

This poignant image of 'happy rainbow coloured' Raindrops was the request of two young siblings who both longed to be allowed out to play in the rain. This simple request succinctly illustrates the inherent curiosity children share about a sensory world.



Choice is prioritised in this oversized image of the Planting Flower with its Trowel and Seedling in Hand.

The young people welcomed the opportunity to try out gardening through the Green Fingers Project and wanted the chance to take control of their own small patch; planting the things that they wanted to grow.

For them, this activity took on a more symbolic role around ownership and decision making, giving them the chance to watch the result of their choices bloom.

Growing Confidence

Many of the young people felt that whilst they were involved in the vast majority of the choices that affected their lives, often these choices were limited or had to be weighed alongside the needs of others. The Flower in the image can be seen planting part of itself, its 'confidence', encouraging it to grow and thrive.



Fruitful

The large group of children and young people who collaborated on these images all agreed that what they wanted to plant was Fruit.

This emphasis was underpinned by their shared logic that fruit both looked 'nicer' and could be eaten immediately without being cooked.

Enjoyed by nearly everyone, this focused strategy to growing your own was seen as a winning approach to promoting healthy eating without either the 'carrot' or the 'stick', but instead with the 'sweet strawberry'.

Did someone mention smoothies!

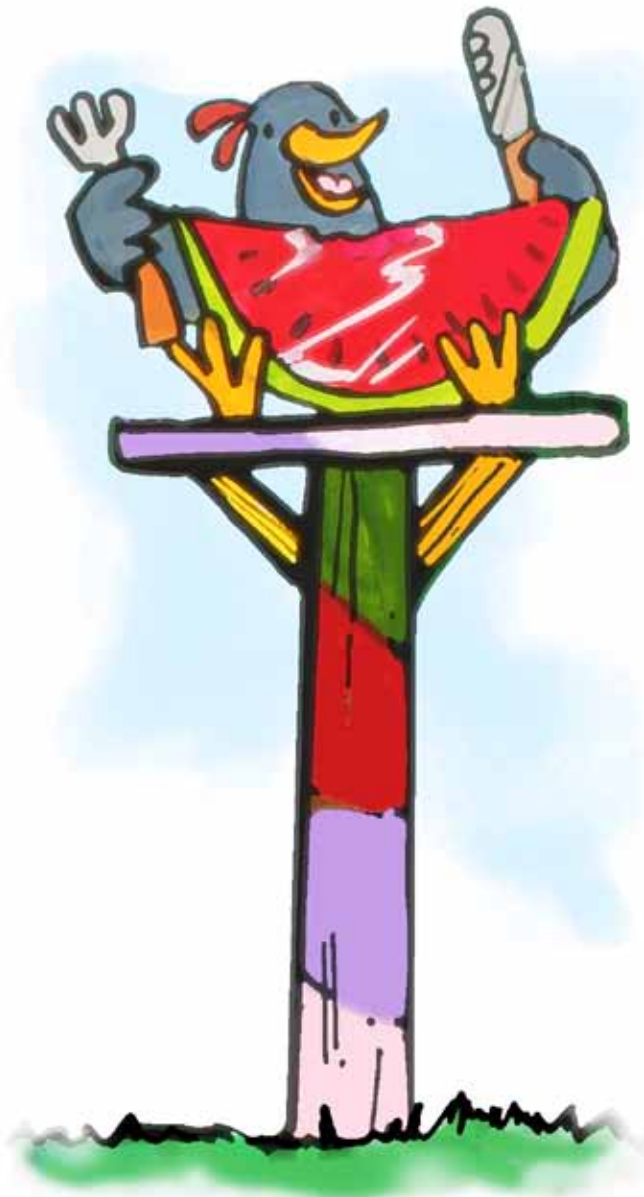




Buzzzy

Wildlife was an important factor for the children and young people, who wanted to both encourage and support threatened species, especially amongst winged insects.

This naturally grew into conversations about nature gardens, building appropriate habitats and learning how to identify, understand and appreciate indigenous species.



Building Up an Appetite

The idea of encouraging wildlife was extended to include birds, though the emphasis here was on learning how to build useful items, such as nesting boxes, feeders and bird tables.

Whilst some said they would enjoy watching the prospective birds, the majority saw the practical experience of measuring, sawing and hammering as potentially both the most fun and the most useful component.





Kick-Starting Something NEW!

When talking to the young attendees about their understanding of the term 'environment', it became apparent that their awareness was rooted in both the immediate and local.

This image helps to remind us to literally 'keep our eye on the ball' and not lose track of the true goal of adopting a child centred approach. For many, 'the environment' and 'nature' was the local park, playing football on the grass instead of tarmac, or visiting the zoo and seeing animals.

Understanding and using this information as a way to gradually open children up to new ways of interacting with nature, through the things that they are both familiar with and enjoy, was seen as the way to win support and encourage participation right across the range of potential ages. The subtle image of the Football has the potential to get young people out into the fresh air enjoying exercise.

Though it may not be obvious at first glance, however, this is a Green Football, with the potential to move a deep understanding of nature off the sidelines and into the game.





2 GETHER

The young person that put forward this image expressed concern that some young people may fail to take up the opportunities offered by the project, due to issues with confidence and friendships.

He recognised that for many young people in his position, it was often a struggle to make new friends.

He felt that the key to overcoming this challenge was to have a more holistic approach to provision, which allowed greater involvement, so that he could attend with his existing friends, finding his feet before branching out.



Peak Performance



Cycling was this participant's route to the outdoors. Whilst he enjoyed mountain biking and getting out on his own, the picture of the Solitary Rider was his suggestion to the Green Fingers Project as he wanted them to consider doing some organised group bike rides. He felt that this could be a tour de force with other teenage boys, setting them a challenge to get out and get fit.





The Rainbow Palette suggests using art as a way of deepening young people's understanding of nature and the environment.

Whether it's drawing inspiration from natural patterns, or making drawings of found specimens, nature has influenced art across the generations.

The opportunity to creatively translate real experiences and observations was seen as a great way of anchoring learning.

A SPLASH of Colour





The suggestion of a variety of craft activities to be set up by the Green Fingers project, excited this group of young people. However the group were quick to make the idea their own, by suggesting that they could make props and costumes for role play.

From treasure chests to fairy wands, the group hoped to combine natural and recycled materials to develop their own games and stories.

Whilst managing to bring together many different elements, the Glue also embodies the idea of cementing new and lasting friendships, forged in the creative melting pot of imaginative play.

‘Making’ Friends



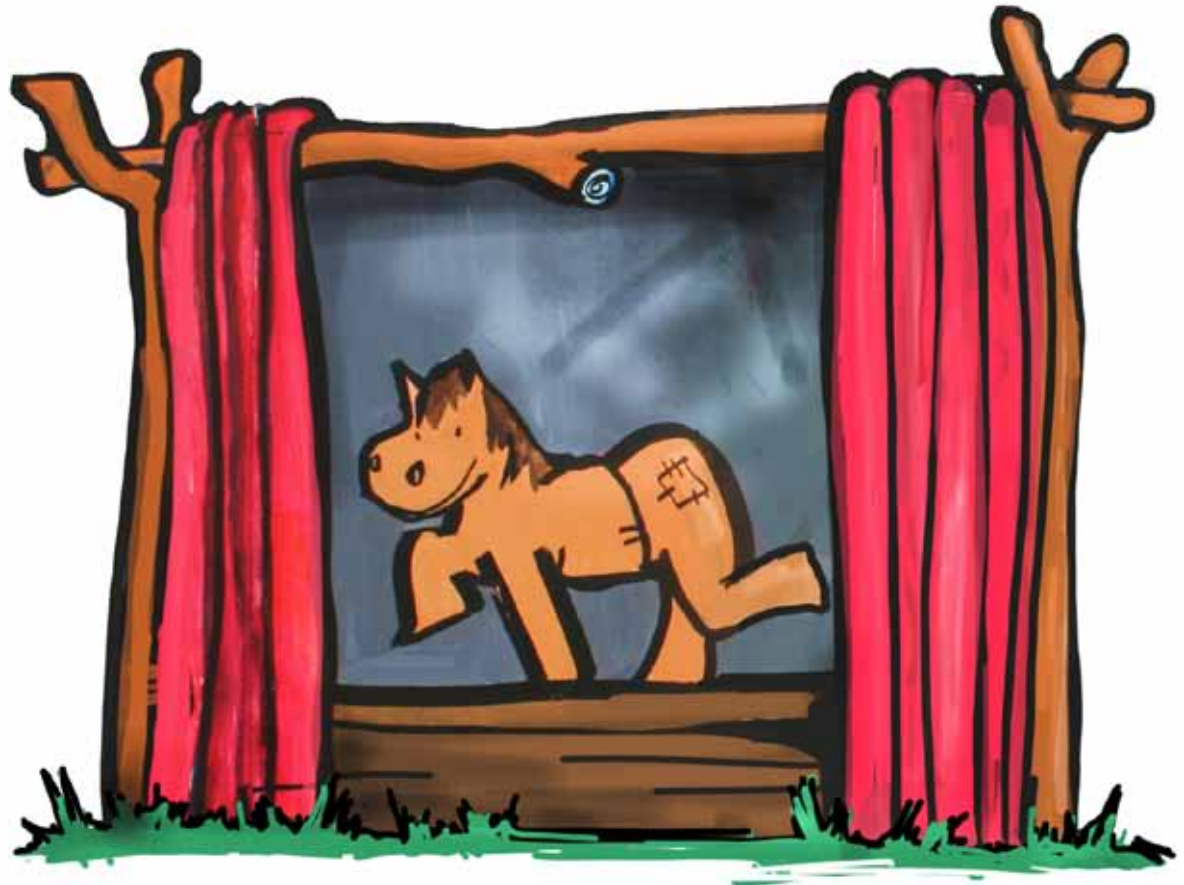


All Natural Talent

A developing idea to the craft work, represented by the Glue Pot, was put forward independently by an older young person. Her suggestion was for an Open Air Theatre, as a hook to pull in older children and young people.

This improvised affair was seen as a way of exploring issues creatively with groups and giving them an opportunity to work through their thoughts and feelings in a positive and constructive way. Her idea was that older teens could take on production roles, from director to stage designer, whilst their younger peers could take up the acting challenge.

The image of the Pantomime Horse started life as a real horse galloping across a field, to represent the idea that it would all take place in the open air; the idea being to make use of the natural settings, breaking free of traditional ideas of drama and theatre.





Home Sweet Home

Dens and Tree Houses were seen as a must for this group. Though they are to be built by young people, at the centre are parents and carers.

Rather than an activity that leaves young people to their own devices, this approach would see parents and carers join in, helping support the construction with practical tips and guidance. A great way to bring generations together, this venture was seen as a fun way of building close ties.





Say...

The Photographer Tree was another creative suggestion to help encourage older young people to join in the Green Fingers Project.

By giving participants a digital camera and a crash course in photography, those involved would be tasked with documenting their lives through photographing nature. The images would hopefully provide a spring board for revealing conversations that enabled young people to open up in a safe way about the things that are important to them.

As well as the potential to hold a mini exhibition, the main outcome was seen as developing new insights, exposing limiting beliefs and finding constructive ways in which they could focus on the positive.

...Trees!

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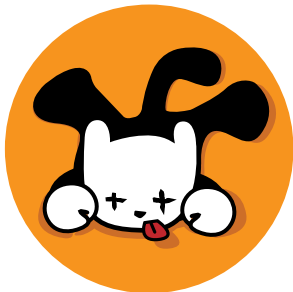
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