



Wild Ways Well and St Maurice's High School

"John Muir said that 'between every two pine trees is a doorway to a new life'. We step through that doorway every time we venture outside into the woods and while we're looking among the trees for signs of bumblebees or badgers, sometimes the most unexpected thing we find is ourselves."

- Paul Barclay, Community Networks Officer, Cumbernauld Living Landscape

[Wild Ways Well](#) is a unique wellbeing project developed by TCV and Cumbernauld Living Landscape. It aims to demonstrate the potential of high quality greenspace in providing real life benefits for the people and communities who live near them.

A pilot in 2016-17 trialled a new programme of environmental activities for those at risk of mental ill health with one key aim - to demonstrate that spending time outdoors, in nature, makes people feel better about themselves and their lives.

Students from a Prince's Trust class at St Maurice's High School - comprised of young people identified as at risk of marginalisation and mental health issues - helped to pilot the project whilst working towards their John Muir Discovery Award.

What did the young people gain through taking part?

- Increased opportunities to connect with others
- Pleasure associated with learning
- Feeling more active and feeling better
- Changing expectations about local greenspaces
- Enhanced confidence and independence

Five Ways to Wellbeing and the John Muir Award

The project was based on the [Five Ways to Wellbeing](#) actions created by the New Economics Foundation (NEF). The five actions (see box¹) are based on evidence of the positive steps people can take that are strongly associated with improved mental health and wellbeing.



The John Muir Award was identified as a good fit with the key aim of the project - to improve wellbeing through engaging with nature. The Award is recognised as a tool that can help promote the Five Ways to Wellbeing actions (see links below), through participants being encouraged to get to know and enjoy wild places, to get active outdoors, to give something back for nature, and to share their Award experiences with others. Integrating the John Muir Award into the project also created an opportunity to recognise the achievements of pupils who may gain little formal recognition in a traditional academic setting.

For examples of how the students' John Muir Award activities were framed around the Five Ways to Wellbeing actions, see appendix. To read the project executive summary, visit <https://cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk/project/wild-ways-well/>



¹ NHS Gloucestershire www.onyourmindglos.nhs.uk/five-ways/

What were the benefits for the young people?



PHOTO - PAUL BARCLAY

Connecting with others

Opportunities for social interaction were a key benefit identified by the pupils themselves. Both the students and class teacher noted an improvement in team work, with the group working better together to achieve tasks, communicating more freely with each other and happily working out with of friendship groups by the end of the pilot.

The group's awareness of others needs also improved; in particular, the class became better at including one pupil who uses a wheelchair, choosing accessible routes and activities that allowed him to be fully involved as the weeks progressed.

"It was fantastic just to see them out there talking to one another. Face to face rather than at a screen or on their phones. These kids are forgetting how to just sit together and talk."

Class teacher, St Maurice's High School

Pleasure associated with learning

At the start of the project, pupils' awareness and knowledge of wildlife was relatively limited, with many unable to identify common birds or trees. Through different activities, the class became familiar with identifying species, with newfound knowledge being reinforced week on week.

Participants learned new skills, such as how to safely work with fires and use tools responsibly. For some, being taught to handle tools such as pruning saws brought with it a real sense of pride and achievement - *"I can't believe you're letting us use these!"*



PHOTO - PAUL BARCLAY

Litter proved to be a topic that provoked the interest and engagement of the whole class. Examining and discussing images of how litter can affect wildlife had a profound effect on some students who had previously questioned why they were bothering to litter pick at the site. A follow up visit to the school to join an outdoor cooking session after the pilot had ended showed that the pupils continued to put their learning into practice, working safely around the fire and taking care to leave no trace.



PHOTO - PAUL BARCLAY

Becoming more active and feeling better

The students walked a 1.7km loop around St Maurice's Pond each week, and got involved in various practical tasks and activities including undertaking wildlife surveys, building bird boxes and litter picking. Results from participant surveys before and after the project show that by the end of the pilot, participants were exercising (for 30 minutes or more a day) more often, with

the group average increasing from 4.8 days per week to 5.4, and were also visiting Cumbernauld's greenspaces more frequently.

For some students, gaining exercise through walking was noted as preferable to participating in PE classes at school, and being in the outdoors was seen as a benefit in itself.

"Fresh air is good because it wakes you up in the morning" Student participant

Changing expectations about local greenspaces

Prior to getting involved in Wild Ways Well, students had identified some barriers that prevented them from spending time in local greenspaces. These included past experiences, which had not always been pleasant, such as mud, graffiti and litter, and a feeling that they needed a specific reason to spend time outside, rather than visiting for pleasure. By the end of the pilot, the students had become more familiar with spending time outdoors and gained an appreciation of the nature in their local community.



PHOTO - PAUL BARCLAY



PHOTO - REBECCA STROFTON

Increased confidence and independence

The group grew in confidence throughout the programme as they gained new experiences and broadened their interests. This culminated in some pupils presenting their Citizen Science work at a Scottish Natural Heritage conference to over 50 delegates, a completely new experience which they recognised as something they would never have considered prior to being involved in Wild Ways Well.

Want to find out more?

See the appendix below for examples of how the Five Ways to Wellbeing actions were realised through the pupils' activities.

To find out about the Wild Ways Well project, visit the [Cumbernauld Living Landscape website](#).

To read more about how the John Muir Award can contribute to improving health and wellbeing:

- See the [Five Ways to Wellbeing publication](#)
- Read the [Health Impacts of the John Muir Award research](#)
- Find out about the wellbeing benefits identified by organisations delivering the John Muir Award, through the results from the [Scotland Provider Survey](#)

All resources available on the John Muir Award website: www.johnmuiraward.org

Appendix - Wild Ways Well in action

Programme length: 14 weeks

Location: St Maurice's Pond, a large Site of Importance to Nature Conservation (SINC) adjacent to the school with a mosaic of habitats.

Approach: The Five Ways to Wellbeing actions were introduced to the pupils in week one. The group shared their own ideas for how their weekly sessions could link to these themes through a range of art, science and environmental activities. Linking outdoor sessions with additional John Muir Award work back in class and for homework helped to reinforce learning during the programme.

Pupil motivations: John Muir and his adventures were used as a point of inspiration for the pupils, helping to foster motivation towards being involved in the project. Celebrating through receiving their John Muir Discovery Awards also helped the students foster a sense of pride in what they had achieved both for nature and their own personal development.

The table below provides some examples of how the students integrated the Five Ways to Wellbeing actions into their John Muir Award activities.

Five Ways to Wellbeing Actions	Examples of students' activities
<p>Connect... With the people around you. With family, friends, colleagues and neighbours.</p>	<p>Meeting new people, sharing experiences with each other and new audiences, connecting with wildlife</p> <p><i>"The class presented their experiences to the rest of the class, school teachers and representatives from the programme funders."</i></p>
<p>Be Active... Step outside. Go for a walk, run or cycle. Garden. Dance. Discover a physical activity you enjoy and that suits your level of mobility and fitness.</p>	<p>Participating in health walks and a range of practical outdoor activities</p> <p><i>"It's better than PE because you're exercising by walking around but you don't realise it because you're busy doing other things"</i></p>
<p>Take Notice... Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Notice the changing seasons. Savour the moment. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling.</p>	<p>Listening to birds, making natural art, engaging the senses, using all of our senses, creating maps of the area, visiting in different weather, using binoculars to observe wildlife, photography</p> <p><i>"If I was here [at St Maurice's Pond] with my friends I'd probably just walk round quickly but when I'm here with the [Wild Ways Well] group I want to stop and look at things"</i></p>
<p>Keep Learning... Try something new. Rediscover an old interest. Set a challenge you will enjoy achieving. Learning new things will make you more confident as well as being fun.</p>	<p>Identifying plants and wildlife, learning new crafts, developing skills in shelter building and outdoor cooking, using tools safely, undertaking Citizen Science surveys</p> <p><i>"Everyone cut and decorated their own tree cookie to make a key ring and we also made bark rubbings and sketches of different plants"</i></p>
<p>Give... Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger. Volunteer your time. Join a community group.</p>	<p>Giving something back for nature by building bird boxes, litter picking and learning how to behave responsibly in the outdoors</p> <p><i>"We discussed safety considerations of having fires outdoors then learnt how to site, set, light, sustain and then put out a small fire. The highlight of the session was toasting marshmallows."</i></p>