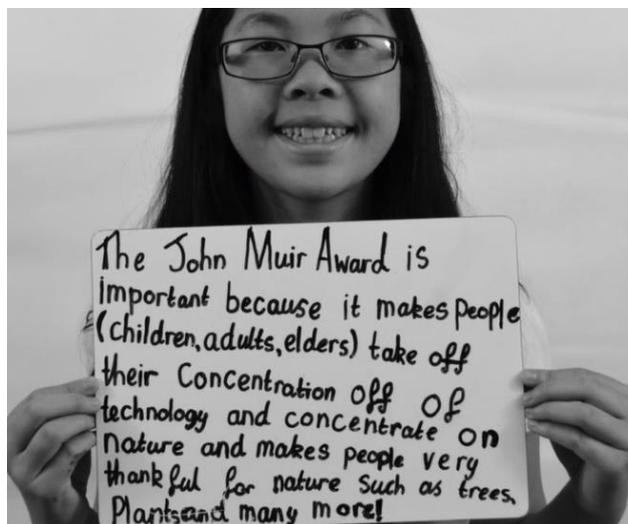


Residential experiences and the John Muir Award An Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre case study

Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre (OEC) is a charity that supports over 2,000 young people and teaching staff each year to experience the outdoors around Lochgoilhead in Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park. Over the last 15 years the Centre has supported schools, youth and adult groups to take part in the John Muir Award.

Ardroy OEC integrates the John Muir Award with the Centre's diverse activities to give a stronger environmental context and focus. It's also used as a way of 'book-ending' the experience, engaging schools both before and after their residential programmes at the Centre. Presently over a quarter of their groups participate, and both the centre and visiting schools have noticed benefits.



Benefits to Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre

"The John Muir Award encourages hands on connection with the outdoors", says Phil Thompson, Ardroy's Development Manager. "It compels us to get outside, off site and make connections with the land. We deliver the same activities but using the Award adds an extra dimension and value to the experiences, which become more varied and memorable."

Phil also noted that involvement has enhanced their offering to schools, and has directly increased uptake of their residential programmes.

Many schools using the John Muir Award at Ardroy continue with follow up activities within school and in their local area, an approach that Phil strongly endorses: "It can really help schools integrate their residential experiences into curriculum programmes, as well as encouraging more outdoor learning back at school. Residentials shouldn't be a week in isolation – we strive to embed them in the curriculum and to be an integrated part of every child's long term learning."

The approach to using the John Muir Award at Ardroy OEC shares many of the key aspects identified in a significant 5 year study into residential experiences, 'Learning Away - Brilliant Residentials'. These include:

- Fully integrated with a school curriculum and ethos
- Part of a progressive programme of experiences
- Designed to allow space for students to develop collaborative relationships with both peers and staff
- Planned so that learning is embedded and reinforced back in school

[Brilliant Residentials](#), Learning Away Report, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, June 2015



Benefits to visiting schools and pupils

Donibristle Primary School returns to Ardroy OEC each year because of its high quality outdoor residential programme and its links with the John Muir Award and Curriculum for Excellence. Working in close partnership, school staff developed a two year cross-curricular model taking part in both the John Muir Discovery Award (in P6) and Explorer Award (P7) as two progressive levels of involvement. In addition to the activities at Ardroy OEC, the school carry out follow up activities in the school grounds and surrounding environment as part of their Award experience. This effective model has since been adopted by other primary schools that visit Ardroy OEC.

Sharon Clark, Depute Head Teacher at Donibristle Primary school commented, "Our partnership with Ardroy has really helped our successful delivery of the John Muir Award. The staff's knowledge of habitats and environmental issues has been so useful and has allowed us to go into a lot more depth than we would manage alone."



Sharon also commented on the impacts of the residential experience for individuals: "One particular pupil struggled to interact socially in larger groups. We convinced them to come on the trip, and within a few days the other pupils could see they had lots of knowledge to offer. They became more respected, more of a leader in the group, and now they are often the leader in our school-based John Muir Award activities. We've seen a significant improvement in their attainment and wellbeing."

"We've seen that pupils who participate in the John Muir Award become more resilient, confident, responsible, reflective, better at goal setting and at being team players. Strength in these attributes impacts on attainment, and using the John Muir Award definitely provides opportunities to develop them." Sharon Clark, Depute Head Teacher, Donibristle Primary School

Impact on wild places

Having hundreds of pupils complete their John Muir Award each year has had benefits for the local environment in Lochgoilhead. As well as learning about responsible behaviour outdoors, participants are given the opportunity to put something back. In just one year, Award participants at Ardroy removed over 300m² of invasive rhododendron from the local Atlantic oak woodland.

A collaborative approach has helped Ardroy to develop links with local conservation groups as well as wider partnerships with Forestry Commission Scotland and Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park.



"It's fantastic that Ardroy OEC has got so many young people engaged with biodiversity and invasive species removal through the John Muir Award. It's had a really positive impact for wildlife in the area, and helps achieve some key actions in our National Park Biodiversity Action Plan – Wildpark 2020."

Linda Winskill, Biodiversity Officer, Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park