

‘Working It Out’ into employment in Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Working It Out is a 10-week self-development programme run by the employment charity Tomorrow’s People, who support 16-24 year olds furthest from the jobs market. These young adults face multiple barriers to moving forward with their lives.

The John Muir Award is used to support individuals within the wider Working It Out programme to engage, achieve, build positive experiences, and in doing so raise self-esteem whilst fostering an understanding of the environment around them. Tomorrow’s People leaders integrate the John Muir Award into the Community Challenge aspect of the timetable, incorporating the 4 days’ minimum time commitment of the Discovery Level.



Since 2008 more than 90 young people have been supported into employment by Tomorrow’s People through Working It Out. This represents 52% of programme participants with a further 19% moving into Further Education courses.

Getting active

Earlier this year, a team of 10 participants headed out on foot and by cycle in partnership with Newcastle Bike Right and Active Newcastle. They explored two local Country Parks – Leazes Park and The Walker Riverside Park – and the old ‘Waggonway’ railway line that now forms part of the National Cycle Network. Photography was used as a way of recording journeys.

“Different activities in the parks every week gave the group a sense of focus and achievement, and a chance to learn new skills. Changes to planned events can be difficult, but the group handled them well. They were happy to work on the Conserve element of their John Muir Award, and built up a real sense of responsibility during these regular sessions.”

Leanne Smith, Group Leader

Making a positive difference

Group members were expected to attend, work hard, and take on all tasks asked of them within the Working It Out programme. There was a strong focus on learning new skills, planning and recognising achievement. A hands-on environmental project fitted the ‘Conserve’ requirement of the John Muir Award, and gave group members the opportunity to take pride in making a difference to their location.



Group members worked alongside Groundwork Newcastle and South Tyneside – another example of partnership working in action. Park biodiversity benefitted through tree-coppicing and pruning, and the creation of a ‘dead hedge’ nature habitat. Visitor access also improved from edging, weeding, and building a willow arch and viewing screen – all part of a wider restoration of a boardwalk and pond decking area.

The activity involved much that relates readily to the workplace, such as:

- new skills – *“I’m out of practice, I used to spend time at the allotments”*
- working together – *“I’m really excited to be doing something in a group”*
- enthusiasm and commitment – *“we could just carry on for miles”*.

Personal benefits were evident too:

- *“I’m surprised, but I find it really relaxing”*.

Not only did group members benefit personally and gain workplace skills, they also contributed significant environmental benefits too. The first two groups of 2015 helped to build 3 compost bins, planted 100m of hedge, collected 20 bags of litter, removed 100m² of willow overgrowth, built a mini-beast habitat, and helped clear a large pond. These outcomes contributed towards the Newcastle and North Tyneside Biodiversity Action Plan.

Shared experiences

Everyone participating produced their own poster outlining their experiences and what they meant to them. They used photographs from throughout the 10 week programme to create a collective ‘John Muir Award Wall’. The group were also encouraged to engage with visitors to the parks and work-sites, and to talk with them about why they were doing these activities. These sharing moments served to increase confidence and help to give a sense of pride.

A blueprint for the future

Tomorrow’s People aims to get young people into work, in a region that stubbornly retains one of the highest unemployment rates in the UK. In many families, long-term unemployment has been a fact of life for two generations. Many of the Working It Out group members have at least a chequered school history, can experience chaotic lives, and have little or no structure around which to plan their lives.

The Working It Out programme – with the John Muir Award as an integrated part – is helping to motivate these young people to endeavour and succeed. It helps them develop and enjoy the skills and attributes of teamwork, risk evaluation, commitment and responsibility. There is real pleasure and increased self-esteem, not just from being outdoors in a wild place, but also from making a genuine contribution to their local environment and community. These are all essential building blocks towards future employment.



Tomorrow’s People use the John Muir Award to engage with young people in other regions across the UK too. It is one of an increasing number of John Muir Award Providers that recognise how it can add benefit to wider employability programmes.

Employability and the John Muir Award – visit the John Muir Award website to download an overview of how the John Muir Award is being used to help move participants towards employment – including specific examples from organisations looking to build key employability skills.

The John Muir Award in North East England – is supported by the Local Environmental Action Fund, and the Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Sustainable Development Fund. These environmental funds seek to inspire and support regional communities, and combat social exclusion.

