

INCLUSION, WILD PLACES AND THE JOHN MUIR AWARD



PHOTOGRAPH: SCOTTISH PRISON SERVICE

Engaging with people from all backgrounds

THE JOHN MUIR AWARD, the main engagement initiative of the John Muir Trust, is a UK-wide environmental award scheme, focused on wild places. Involving people from all backgrounds has been at the heart of the Award since it was launched in 1997. A key aim is to ensure that circumstances aren't a barrier to opportunities to experience wild places.

Every year at least 25% of John Muir Awards are achieved by people experiencing some form of disadvantage.¹ This may be related to various factors, including age, ethnicity, health, unemployment, literacy, economic poverty and disability. It's these challenges that we seek to work with others to address. Research by Glasgow University, *The Health Impacts of the John Muir Award*, found that young people living in the poorest circumstances (most deprived 15% of Scotland) were six times less likely than their peers to have experienced wild places before their John Muir Award involvement.²

Across the UK, hundreds of organisations dedicated to supporting people experiencing disadvantage (referred to as 'inclusion organisations' in this document) use the John Muir Award to help people get out and enjoy natural environments. Indicators and Government statistics (including the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation³, English Indices of Deprivation⁴ and data on free school meals) – as well as our working relationships with these organisations – help us to interpret 'inclusion.'

Use this document to find out more about the John Muir Award and:

- who uses it (page 2)
- why inclusion organisations use it (page 4)
- how inclusion organisations deliver it (page 6)
- how this work relates to national policy (page 8)
- how to get involved (page 12)

¹John Muir Trust (register of John Muir Award activity)

²The Health Impacts of the John Muir Award www.johnmuirtrust.org/award-publications

³Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/SIMD

⁴English Indices of Deprivation www.gov.uk/government/collections/english-indices-of-deprivation

Introducing the John Muir Award

THE JOHN MUIR AWARD is an environmental award scheme focused on wild places. It encourages people of all ages and backgrounds to connect with, enjoy and care for wild places. It has origins rooted in youth work and is delivered through partnerships with schools and colleges, local authorities, community organisations, outdoor centres and charities.

To achieve a John Muir Award each individual participant engages in a range of activities that encompass Four Challenges:

Discover a wild place – from city parks to mountain tops

Explore its wildness – in an active way

Conserve it – take personal responsibility

Share your experiences – with other people

The John Muir Award can be done across a full spectrum of wild places, from what's right on the doorstep to remote landscapes, in urban or rural environments. It's free to get involved. It's not a set programme and doesn't have a syllabus. It is simply a framework that allows different organisations working with different people the chance to meet the Award Criteria in ways that are challenging and relevant to them. This semi-structured approach, and the support available, makes it accessible and attractive to inclusion organisations.

For information about the John Muir Award, the John Muir Trust, and John Muir, see www.johnmuiraward.org



Who uses the John Muir Award?

From youth work to mental health support, from addiction recovery to engaging with at-risk families, the Award is used across a wide range of sectors which aim to promote inclusion.

It is popular and effective with diverse groups in both public and third sector arenas – with unemployed people, ex-offenders, people with disabilities, and the elderly.

It can be a tool to help organisations access and work with hard-to-reach audiences across a spectrum of settings, from inner-city wildlife gardens to isolated island communities.



PHOTOGRAPH: BILL WALSH



PHOTOGRAPH: JESS SHURTE

Who is the John Muir Award suitable for?

The John Muir Award is a nationally recognised award scheme that requires each individual participant to meet all its Criteria. We don't set rigid guidelines for participation. Our experience, and the feedback we've had from the people and organisations we work with, is that the John Muir Award works best with participants working at later stage of primary education and beyond.

The Family John Muir Award category welcomes involvement of children of all ages and abilities as part of a family group. This invites a collective participation to meet Award Criteria, rather than requiring them to be fully met by each individual.

See our [suitability guidance](#) online or get in touch via the details below to discuss the suitability of the John Muir Award for the people you work with.

Search 'John Muir Award Suitability'.

Criteria

To achieve a John Muir Award, each participant must:

- Meet four Challenges – Discover, Explore, Conserve, Share
- Complete the required time commitment
- Show enthusiasm and commitment towards their involvement
- Have an awareness of John Muir
- Understand what the John Muir Award is and why they are participating

Why do inclusion organisations use the John Muir Award?

Inclusion organisations support a diverse range of people experiencing disadvantage, in a range of settings. The John Muir Award can provide a framework and support to enhance or stimulate activity to help meet key organisational priorities. It can complement other award schemes and initiatives, such as the National Citizen Service and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

Some common reasons for inclusion organisations using the John Muir Award include:

To promote engagement with education

Young people experiencing behavioural or self-esteem issues, which can affect their interaction with mainstream education, often respond well to practical and outdoor learning opportunities. The John Muir Award framework offers flexible ways to succeed and can be an ideal vehicle for re-engagement

with learning. It fits well with youth work approaches, helping to build commitment, confidence and aspiration by encouraging active participation; promoting acceptance and understanding of others; testing and exploring values and beliefs.

“ It has opened up education. Pupils are keen to relate their activities outdoors with enthusiasm



PHOTOGRAPH: NETTLECOMBE COURT FSC

in science, English and even technical studies. The John Muir Award is getting through to young people that are often a struggle to reach at school.” *Alan King, Teacher, The Good Shepherd Centre*

To promote wellbeing and healthier lifestyles

Being active and outdoors, connecting with people and place, learning new skills and giving something back all contribute to ‘Five Ways to Wellbeing’⁵, improving overall health. The John Muir Award can be a motivator to get people involved in these activities, particularly those who don’t normally engage in the outdoors, and plays a part in increased attendance rates. It is often incorporated into programmes based on ‘green care’ provision and ‘social prescribing’ of outdoor activity.

“ Social isolation and loneliness can be a major cause of depression. Branching Out uses the John Muir Award to bring people together, particularly through the ‘sharing’ challenge. For those who struggle with forming relationships with others, this can be life-changing. The programme enables them to learn new skills and give back to their woodland and community. This can lead to improvements in mental health and even employment opportunities.” *Nathalie Moriarty, Branching Out Programme Manager, Forestry Commission Scotland*

To build employability skills

The John Muir Award promotes ‘real world’ experiences, gives additional focus that encourages attendance, and provides recognition of achievement through a nationally recognised certificate. It is used to help develop attributes such as problem solving, technical skills and confidence in leadership which can be invaluable for moving towards positive destinations.

This contributes to constructive reference points for personal statements, job applications and interviews; some participants relate successful employment directly to their John Muir Award involvement.⁶

“ The John Muir Award fits perfectly with our aims of getting people outside and active but also gave the guys something really useful for their CVs, showing commitment and newly acquired skills as they were actively seeking employment.” *Mick Dunn, Shropshire Outdoor Partnerships*

To build positive relationships with ‘at-risk’ families

Spending time together whilst working towards a shared goal is recognised as a positive approach to building relationships. The John Muir Award can be an effective framework for family groups to do this. For families who have had little access to wild places, often from the most economically deprived sectors of society, it offers ways to share new and positive experiences, with staff support, ideas and suitable resources. Feedback from organisations working with families has shown improvements in parent/child relationships, an increased sense of



PHOTOGRAPH: SPEAN BRIDGE PRIMARY SCHOOL & OUTLANDIA

self-worth from parents and – quite simply – enjoyment of activities outdoors together.

“ It’s improved my confidence and my children’s confidence too. I found out lots of interesting facts about all different things, including John Muir, the environment and wildlife. I made lots of new friends and built up relationships, and the same for the children.” *Parent participant, 3D Drumchapel*



PHOTOGRAPH: EDUCATION FUTURES TRUST

To complement drug and alcohol addiction recovery programmes

Making a positive contribution to the environment and wider community is key to the success of outdoor-based recovery work. The John Muir Award gives a structure for this. It encourages care and responsibility for wild places, and integrates this with wider learning opportunities and enjoyment outdoors – making for a meaningful holistic experience. Participants regularly comment on the importance of having an opportunity to give back to a community they may have had a negative impact on in the past, and the recognition they receive for this. They also identify the benefits of having time in wild places for reflection.

“ The Recovery through Nature (RtN) Programme, which heavily involves the John Muir Award, has been a large cornerstone in my recovery. I have always had a keen interest in nature but this was constantly suppressed by my addiction. John Muir and RtN gave me the opportunity to reawaken my interest and curiosity around nature. Because of this my recovery took a huge leap forward.” *Phil, RtN participant, Phoenix Futures*

⁵Five Ways to Wellbeing and the John Muir Award www.johnmuirtrust.org/award-publications

⁶Employability and the John Muir Award www.johnmuirtrust.org/award-publications



How do inclusion organisations deliver the John Muir Award?

These examples show how the John Muir Award is built into organisations' work with inclusion audiences.

PHOTOGRAPH: NETTLECOMBE COURT FSC

In education settings

College courses, transition and life skills programmes framed around the John Muir Award within schools, colleges and adult education projects are developed to help to reach young people and adults who may not traditionally engage with mainstream education.

Over half of the further education colleges in Scotland and a growing number across England and Wales use the John Muir Award, integrating it into a wide range of courses. The College Development Network (the Scottish national body supporting the sector) recognises the John Muir Award as a meaningful way in which colleges reach inclusion audiences, fulfil their responsibilities for health and wellbeing, meet requirements for offering recognised awards and help to deliver the Curriculum for Excellence.

“Colleges are attracted to the John Muir Award because it gives greater recognition to achievements beyond formal qualifications, plus it is free. It is not bureaucratically focused, and it allows personalisation and choice.” *Aileen Duffy, College Development Network*

Many secondary schools use the Award to support students vulnerable to disengaging with education at times of transition. At Torfaen Transition Project in Wales, the John Muir Award provides a focus and

structure for summer holiday support for at risk young people. Through tailored, fun activities, young people are helped to establish new peer groups and relationships, making for a smoother and stress free transition from primary to secondary school.

“The pilot was so successful that it was rolled out to five school cluster areas in its second year. Participants started secondary school with a new and supportive group of friends, built on meaningful connections with people in wild places.” *Helen Keeble, Torfaen Youth Service*

The John Muir Award is non-competitive and, providing Award Criteria are met, can be used to 'meet people where they are at' by tailoring the experience to suit participants' needs (see page 8 for more information). At Royden Park on The Wirral peninsula, adults with learning disabilities worked together to look after a historic garden for the benefit of their local community, whilst also gaining a deeper appreciation of wild places on their doorstep.

“Staff and volunteers have become aware of the increased confidence of group members and a greater willingness to contribute and interact. For us the success has been twofold - greater awareness of the environment and greater personal development.” *Mark Humphreys, Royden Park Project Wirral Evolutions Team Leader*

In community settings

Community development workers successfully embed the John Muir Award in a diverse range of projects, from improving social integration to health and physical activity. It provides an effective vehicle for partnership working, with the voluntary sector, local authorities, community organisations and schools. Health walk programmes aimed at improving activity levels incorporate the Award to offer additional motivation and encourage prolonged involvement. It is used as a focus for adult literacy programmes, promoting active, enjoyable experiences in the outdoors to talk and write about.

Brighton Housing Trust's Finding Futures project focused on supporting adults at risk of social exclusion and housing vulnerability, through building relationships, developing life skills and raising self-confidence. Participants acquired practical conservation skills and were supported to gain travel independence in order to explore their local countryside.

“The benefits to our learners of taking part in the John Muir Award were wonderful to see. Many would otherwise not get the opportunity to take time out from their day-to-day lives or be able to have time to focus on themselves or get involved in their communities.” *Sarah Blessington, Finding Futures Project Leader*

New Reflexions provides homes for looked after children. The John Muir Award is used to package a range of meaningful tasks with tangible results, such as creating habitats for wildlife and learning to identify and track wild animals. Underpinning these opportunities with a nationally recognised Award has helped to create a sense of pride and improved self-esteem, essential to enabling young people with a difficult start in life to succeed.

“Working towards his John Muir Award gave X huge motivation to learn and got him talking about what he might want to do in the future. Prior to this he was extremely disconnected from others and unable to focus on tasks. Our use of the Award gave him structure and an outcome to be proud of, resulting from his passion for being outdoors.” *Caz Wood, New Reflexions*

Through National Park partnerships

“The John Muir Award is a fantastic way for people to engage with the special qualities of Loch Lomond & The Trossachs in a really positive and meaningful way. It helps us to raise awareness of the National Park with groups from a variety of backgrounds - particularly those that don't know much about it - and promotes responsible access when visiting and enjoying the area.” *Alison Cush, Education and Inclusion Adviser*

The John Muir Award is used in all 15 National Parks in the UK. It is integral to the engagement and learning activity in the Cairngorms, Lake District, Peak District and Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Parks. It is a tool to bring new audiences to the Parks, and to encourage repeated involvement - particularly with people from the most deprived backgrounds. Research on overcoming barriers to engagement with National Parks summarised:

Amongst the strongest feedback from external partners was the value of the Park Authorities in providing well-structured and packaged experiences for those seeking to engage in the Parks. The use of existing award schemes such as John Muir Award or Duke of Edinburgh's Award provides a more structured basis upon which external organisations are able to build engagement.”⁷

The National Trust at High Wray Basecamp in the Lake District uses the Award to engage people recovering from substance abuse problems. Being active in the outdoors whilst noticing and learning about their surroundings helps them relax and connect with nature. Giving something back to their National Park really boosts their self-esteem.

“Coming up here, in this environment - it cheers me up...it does! It's something you're going to get some self-worth out of. In addition you find that you've zero self-worth.” *Paul and Dave, Litledale Hall Therapeutic Community*

⁷Scotland's National Parks: Overcoming barriers to engagement www.lochlomond-trossachs.org

National policy

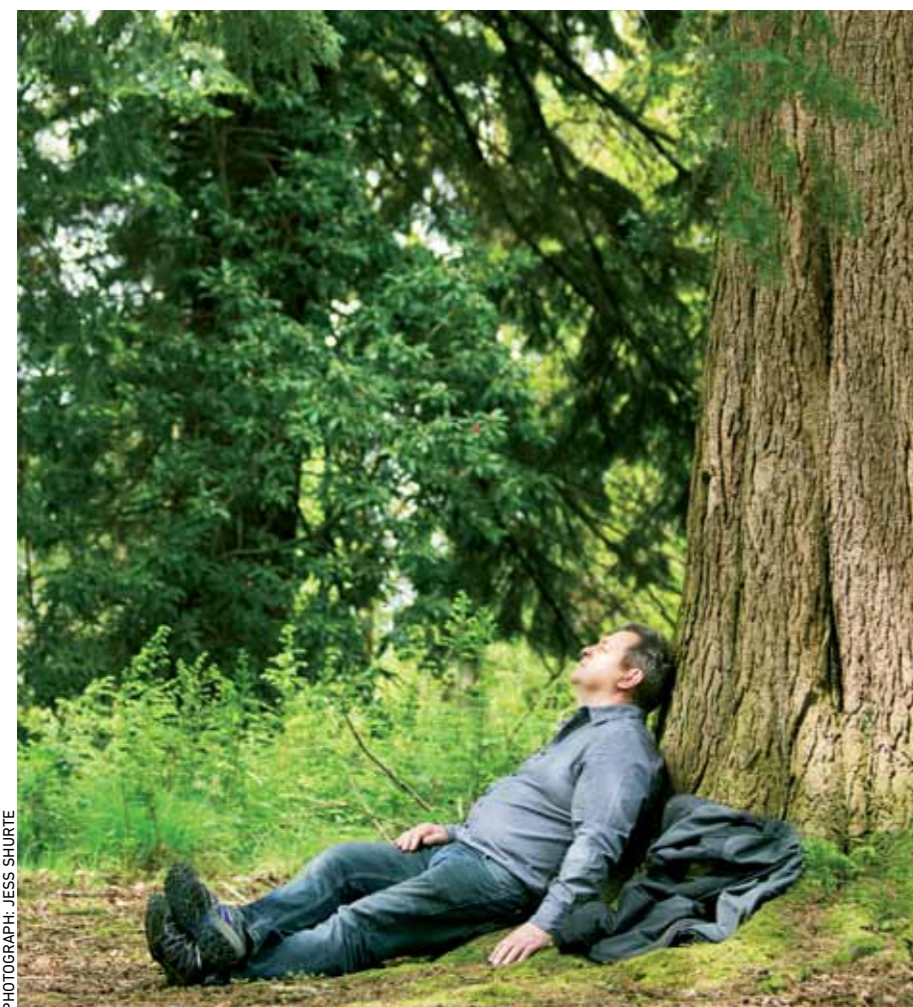
Policy and national initiative objectives that are focused on education, young people, children and families, health, wellbeing and the environment can be realised through John Muir Award participation. In Scotland this activity relates directly to 4 out of 16 National Outcomes.⁸ Across the UK, inclusion organisations use the Award to help contribute to a range of government priorities and relevant initiatives.

Health and wellbeing

“Recognising the role of the natural environment as a primary determinant of health is, in many ways, the foundation of modern public health. Good health and wellbeing is not solely the absence of illness; the role of the environment we live in is hugely important in shaping our lives and,

consequently, our health.” *Duncan Selbie, Chief Executive of Public Health England*⁹

The value of the natural environment as a resource for improving health and wellbeing outcomes is increasingly acknowledged. *Conservation 21: Natural England’s Conservation Strategy for the 21st Century*, recognises that connecting



PHOTOGRAPH: JESS SHURTE

people with nature contributes to a healthier environment and a healthier society.¹⁰ Scottish Natural Heritage’s *Our Natural Health Service* aims to deliver nature-based interventions with partners across multiple sectors in order to deliver better health and social care.¹¹ The Welsh Government’s *Well-being of Future Generations Act* aims to create “a nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience.”¹²

John Muir Award participation can contribute to tackling physical inactivity and improving health outcomes. A [survey of John Muir Award Providers](#) in Scotland, found that the Award contributes to the Scottish Government’s SHANARRI wellbeing indicators.¹³ 87% agreed that participation in the John Muir Award helped people to be more active, with 81% stating participants felt healthier. Search ‘[John Muir Award Provider Survey Scotland](#).’

Environmental organisations, NHS services and health charities integrate the John Muir Award in programmes that improve mental health of people of all ages. Our [Five Ways to Wellbeing and the John Muir Award](#) publication uses guidance from the New Economics Foundation to highlight how groups use the Award as a tool to support improvements in social, mental and emotional wellbeing. Search ‘[John Muir Award Wellbeing](#).’

“Helping people to engage with and benefit from the natural environment as part of their day-to-day lives is fundamental to conserving the environment for now and for future generations. The vital link between the environment and people is particularly highlighted by the role that the natural environment can play in supporting those with mental health issues and dementia.” *James Cross, Chief Executive of Natural England*¹⁴



PHOTOGRAPH: BEN MARGOLIS

Education and employability

Outdoor learning experiences can contribute to a varied and enriched curriculum for young people and educators. Natural England’s Principal Advisor for Outdoor Learning, Jim Burt, recognises that “regular, locally based outdoor learning has a range of positive impacts on schools, pupils and teachers”, including increasing pupil engagement, motivation to learn and improving attainment.¹⁵ Throughout the UK there is recognition that disadvantage should not be a barrier to success in education.

“Our vision is to have high expectations for all learners, regardless of their socio-economic background, and to ensure that they have an equal chance of achieving those expectations.” *Welsh Government*¹⁶

In Scotland, “progressive and curriculum-led approaches to outdoor learning” are a government-endorsed entitlement for all learners through Learning for Sustainability.¹⁷ [Curriculum for Excellence and the John Muir Award](#) and [John Muir Award and the Curriculum](#) demonstrate how it can be used to contribute to curriculum delivery in formal, informal, and youth work settings. Search ‘[John Muir Award Curriculum](#).’

The *Scottish Attainment Challenge* focuses on delivering interventions for equity and overcoming the poverty-related attainment gap.¹⁸ The John Muir Award can offer new and different ways for individuals to succeed. See [Attainment and the John Muir Award in Scotland](#) or search ‘[John Muir Award Attainment](#).’

Across the UK, schools recognise that building character has a key role to play in raising aspirations and influencing pupils’ capacity to reach their full potential. Use of the John Muir Award can reflect and meet specific individual needs, and help recognise progress. See [Developing Character and the John Muir Award](#) or search ‘[John Muir Award Character](#).’

The John Muir Award can give structure and focus for personal development and building skills for learning, life and work in young people and adults. *Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland’s Youth Employment Strategy* highlights the importance of creating opportunities for all through employment, education or training.¹⁹ [Employability and the John Muir Award](#) sets out how the Award can help move participants towards employment. Search ‘[John Muir Award Employability](#).’

“From week one it was clear that the stunning natural environment was having a powerful effect on the participants, allowing them the opportunity to become immersed in nature, discover new environments and escape negative cycles of behaviour.”

Luke Funnel, Education Futures Trust



PHOTOGRAPH: PORTOBELLO HIGH SCHOOL

National policy *continued*

► Environment and social action

“We know that young people want to play an active part in improving their communities, and that in doing so, they develop their own skills for work and life. We’re excited that the John Muir Trust has pledged its support to the #iwill campaign to recognise the work that the John Muir Award does in encouraging young people to take practical action for nature.” *Charlotte Hill, #iwill Campaign Coordinator, Step Up to Serve CEO*²⁰

The John Muir Trust supports the #iwill campaign, launched by Step Up to Serve in 2013, and has pledged to continue to inspire social action from at least 100,000 young people by 2020.²¹ Every John Muir Award recipient not only has an increased awareness of nature and the importance of looking after it, but they also take practical action to care for wild places. By encouraging responsibility and stewardship of the natural environment, the John

Muir Award acts as a catalyst for social action by young people, adults and families.²² Organisations tell us that these opportunities to make meaningful contributions to local environments help participants experiencing disadvantage to develop a sense of self-worth and self-confidence.

“It’s not just about me, I am doing something that really means something, that makes a difference to this place.” *Phoenix Futures service user*

Children and families

“Effective family learning can make a powerful contribution to our ambition for achieving excellence and equity in education outcomes for Scottish learners, with positive outcomes for both the adults and the children involved.” *Dr Bill Maxwell, Former Chief Executive of Education Scotland*²³

The John Muir Award is used by organisations that promote the United

Nation’s Convention on the Rights of the Child²⁴ and improve the life chances of children, young people and families. *The Getting It Right For Every Child* approach (GIRFEC) in Scotland recognises the importance of tailoring interventions for children, young people and families in need.²⁵ Participation in the John Muir Award can support positive shared experiences for those at risk; it can be used within a partnership approach, engaging families in activities that can be replicated at home. Through the ‘Family John Muir Award’ category, families achieve the Award Criteria as a collective unit (rather than as individuals), enabling family members across different generations to learn and achieve together.

²⁰Scottish Government National Outcomes www.gov.scot/About/Performance/scotPerforms/outcome

²¹Natural England & UCL Institute for Health Equity www.instituteoftheequity.org/resources-reports/natural-solutions-to-tackling-health-inequalities

²²Conservation 21 www.gov.uk/government/publications/conservation-21-natural-englands-conservation-strategy-for-the-21st-century

²³Scottish Natural Heritage - Our Natural Health Service www.snh.gov.uk/land-and-sea/managing-recreation-and-access/healthier-scotland/natural-health-service/

²⁴Future Generations Commissioner for Wales <https://futuregenerations.wales/about-us/future-generations-act/>

²⁵Scottish Government SHANARRI indicators www.gov.scot/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright/wellbeing

²⁶Natural England Blog - ‘James Cross: People at the Heart’ <https://naturalengland.blog.gov.uk/2017/01/27/james-cross-people-at-the-heart/>

²⁷Natural England Blog - ‘Busting the myths on outdoor learning in schools’ <https://naturalengland.blog.gov.uk/2016/07/21/busting-the-myths-on-outdoor-learning-in-schools/>

²⁸Welsh Government - Tackling deprivation in education <http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/deprivation/?lang=en>

²⁹Learning for Sustainability in Scotland: A work in progress www.johnmuirtrust.org/vision2030

³⁰Scottish Attainment Challenge www.gov.scot/Topics/Education/Schools/Raisingeducationalattainment

³¹Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland’s Youth Employment Strategy www.gov.scot/Topics/Education/developingtheyoungworkforce

³²The John Muir Award - a catalyst for Youth Social Action [www.johnmuirtrust.org/assets/000/001/812/Youth_Social_Action_-_Final_\(3\)_original.pdf](http://www.johnmuirtrust.org/assets/000/001/812/Youth_Social_Action_-_Final_(3)_original.pdf)

³³#iwill Campaign www.iwill.org.uk

³⁴John Muir Award Conserve Audit 2015: www.johnmuirtrust.org/whats-new/conservation-audit-2015

³⁵Scottish Government - Review of Family Learning <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/Family-Learning-Report-full-document.pdf>

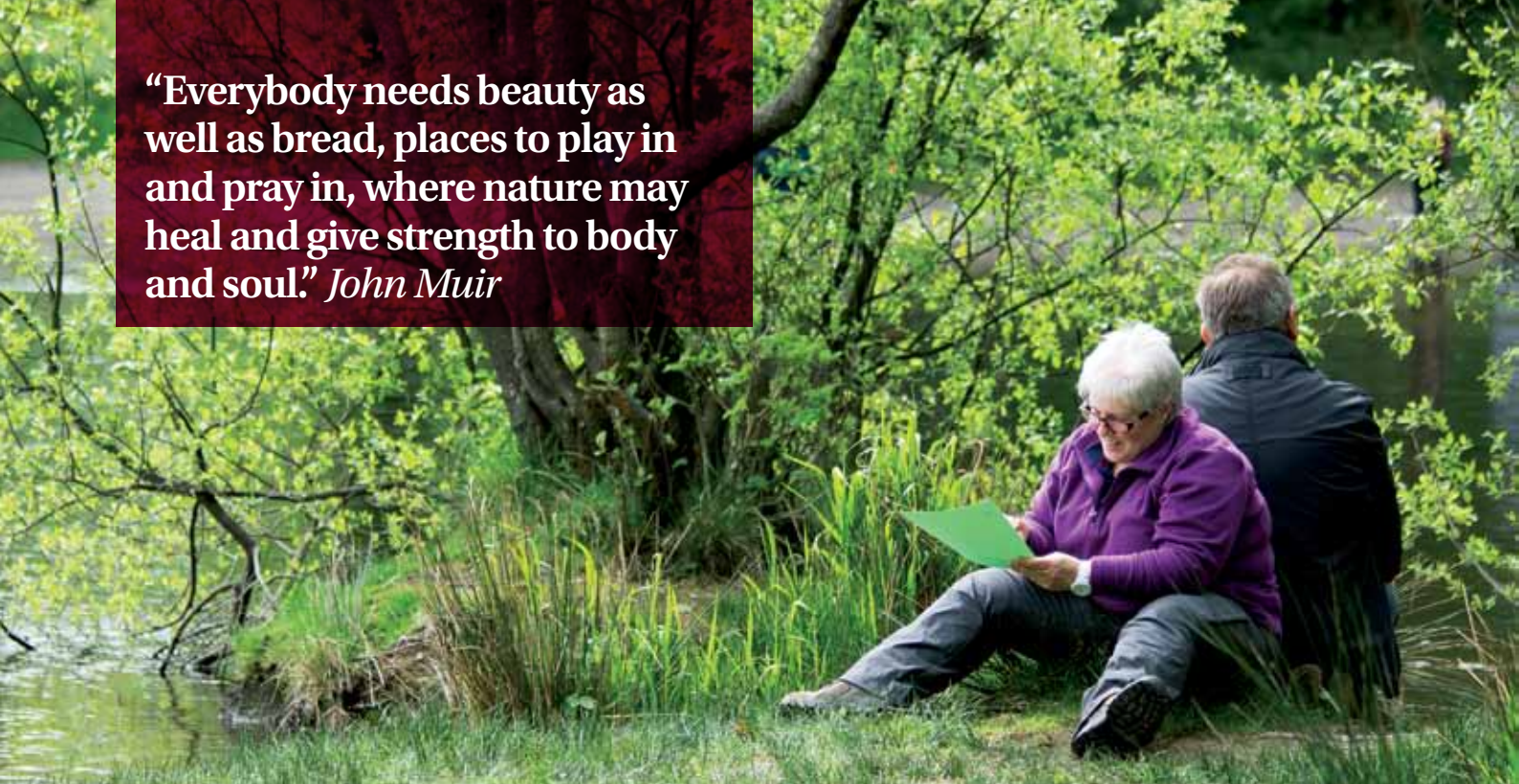
³⁶UNCRC www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights

³⁷Scottish Government - Getting It Right For Every Child www.gov.scot/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright



PHOTOGRAPH: EDUCATION FUTURES TRUST

“Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul.” *John Muir*



PHOTOGRAPH: JESS SHURTE

Planning your next steps

For further information, visit our website www.johnmuiraward.org where you can:

- Watch a 10 minute introductory film
- Download an Information Handbook – detailed guidance on delivering the Award
- Read case studies – see the Award in action in a wide range of settings
- Download Resource Guides on: Outdoor Learning, Biodiversity, AONBs, Wildlife Gardening, Sustainability, Surveys, Outdoor Access, Campaigning, National Parks and John Muir
- Find Key Documents to plan and review an Award, including Proposal Form guidance
- Find out about John Muir at www.discoverjohnmuir.com
- See training opportunities - training is not a requirement to deliver the Award

To register, outline your activities on a Proposal Form and email this to info@johnmuiraward.org. We will review and (if necessary) develop this Proposal with you.



PHOTOGRAPH: URBAN ROOTS

Contact

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The John Muir Trust is a Scottish charitable company limited by guarantee, Charity No. SC002061, Company No. SC081620, registered office: Tower House, Station Road, Pitlochry PH16 5AN
Printed on FSC certified paper. 2017

The John Muir Trust is the leading wild land conservation charity in the UK. We love wild places and are dedicated to protecting and improving them for people and wildlife. Over 11,000 members support us in our work. Find out more at johnmuirtrust.org

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