



A staff Explorer Award at Charterhouse Do it 4 Real



Background

YHA Do it 4 Real summer camps bring together young people from different backgrounds to share a week of new experiences away from home. YHA has worked with the John Muir Award for four years to encourage them to enjoy and care for the natural environments they discover on camp.

Charterhouse Do it 4 Real runs in conjunction with the Charterhouse Centre in Somerset, who provide the main activity programme. The 'Action Adventure' theme and the location - in the Mendip Hills Area Of Natural Beauty (AONB) - provide a great basis for a stimulating John Muir Award experience.

YHA employs Team Leaders to mentor the young people on their residential. They take the lead role in running the Discovery Level John Muir Award with the campers. The team at Charterhouse embraced their role with gusto and decided to do their own Explorer Award alongside the campers.



The onsite nature reserve

How the staff Award came about



Di, Head Team Leader

The impetus to run a staff Award alongside the young people came from the Head Team Leader, Di, and was enthusiastically agreed by all members of staff. It made perfect sense as they would spend the whole summer taking part in the same activities as campers to meet the Four Challenges of the Award – Discover a wild place, Explore it, do something to Conserve it and Share these experiences. Team Leaders set up extra activities in the evenings to support campers to fully meet the criteria. They guided campers through the whole experience by introducing, reviewing and celebrating the Award.

As the Team Leaders were new to the area, and many to the Award, they had to get up to speed

quickly. This extra level of commitment and responsibility required, and the time they would spend over the course of the summer made the more advanced Explorer Level of the Award a suitable aspiration for staff.

What did they do?

Team Leaders planned and ran a range of evening activities, including exploring the nature reserve and shelter building in the woods. Bracken was pulled up and used to make the shelters, helping the AONB to manage the nature reserve. This formed part of their Conserve Challenge, which also involved planting trees, installing insect towers and habitats, preparing an area of the grounds to create a wildlife habitat, and planting herbs to provide the kitchen with fresh local ingredients. The team regularly discussed conservation issues with the young people and encouraged them not to pick living things. Sustainability was a strong theme running through the week. Campers were encouraged to recycle, compost and save energy during the camp, and to make pledges to 'do their bit' back home.

Daytime activities had an Explore challenge focus (e.g. hill walking, climbing, and caving) and Team Leaders used different ways to engage the campers in the environment around them e.g. making their own 'mini AONBs'.



For the Share challenge, Team Leaders created their own film and displays to introduce the Award to the campers. Each week they made a slideshow of photos, they created a scrapbook of their experiences, and a pack of activities to leave at the centre for future groups.

'Staff eagerly participated in their own Explorer Award challenges, and even planted the herbs on their day off.'

Diana Kurkul, Deputy Head Team Leader

← One of the displays created by the Team Leaders

Benefits of a staff Award

By observing the enthusiasm of the staff at camp, the young people became keener on completing the challenges themselves. It also helped everyone to connect with the messages of the Award; *"It is easy to pass on the knowledge of John Muir but Team Leaders have to understand the importance of it. A child will never engage in something if you don't believe in it too."*

Commented Diana Kurkul, Deputy Head Team Leader.

Di Mills, Head Team Leader, also reflected on the impact of the Staff Award; *"I think by completing the Award for ourselves we were more enthusiastic and understanding about the campers' experiences. Personally for me, the more I did for my own Award the more I wanted the children to know about it. The range of activities they were able to engage in was because we'd tried and tested them ourselves."*



"What we have to understand is that you are teaching children about the future of the world, that in itself is scary, so you have to break it down and it has to be fun." Di

Future impacts

On Team Leaders... Taking part in the Award seems to have been transformative for the Team Leaders. *"Prior to camp most of the staff (including myself) were not treating John Muir Award with seriousness; however the whole camp experience changed our perspectives"*. Diana believes that participation in the Award has significantly influenced her daily life, now that camp is over. She has started recycling (for the first time ever!) and has displayed numerous signs at her workplace saying 'Think twice before printing', 'Save the trees' etc. to encourage colleagues to consider their impacts. She also believes the Award will boost her and other Team Leaders' CVs and make them stand out more when applying for jobs.

On the young people... Di believes that doing the Award will make a difference to the lives of the young people who took part, but is unsure whether that will be on a big or small scale; *"I'm happy if they've gone home and switched a light off when before camp they might have left it on because they will have understood the message we tried tirelessly to instil in every young person that passed through our camp. That is possibly the most important thing."* These words from the campers show the positive impact it has had on individuals;

"The best thing about the Award is doing something you didn't realise you could do. I've never put myself down as a great nature enthusiast, but you slowly learn when you're doing the Award. When you think of the environment you think Oh god! Doing the Award you realise what you can actually do to help" Matthew

"When I get home I'll start recycling and think about the environment a bit more and be a bit more cautious" Georgia

"It's opened our eyes to it. I see it as not boring now" Becca

