



## Abbey Hill School and Technology College, Stockton-on-Tees Case Study



Abbey Hill School is a specialist secondary school for students with a wide range of special educational needs. They initially became involved with the John Muir Award whilst participating in a project run by Tees Valley Wildlife Trust. Since then the Award has become an integral part of their in-school vocational programme. By working together with Stockton Riverside College, another local John Muir Award Provider, Abbey Hill students are engaging with wild places in new and exciting ways.

### Vocation Fridays



Abbey Hill School believes in the importance of developing practical skills which will prepare young people for the future. Students aged between 16 and 19 spend Fridays experiencing a vocation of their choice. In 2009 teachers, Kathryn Lindop and Gary Smith introduced the John Muir Award as a 'Vocation Friday' option to help young people develop confidence in wild places and gain experience with tools. Kathryn and Gary soon realised that an array of personal skills were emerging as well.

**"Not only did the group gain valuable practical skills and respect of their local environment but their skills of working with others improved immensely."** Kathryn Lindop, teacher

**For their Discovery Award** the group explored a variety of local wild places such as parks and community farms. For many students this was their first exposure to different habitats. The group completed conservation activities at Billingham Beck and Clarence Wildlife Area, ranging from trimming overgrown areas to restoring fences. The students enjoyed path restoration the most because it was extremely challenging and rewarding.

**"I like visiting different places and finding new things."** Connor, participant

The students challenged themselves further during **their Explorer Awards** – the next, intermediate level of the John Muir Award. The group visited several sites and learnt about their wildlife in order to select an area to focus their Award on. After careful consideration they chose the Daisy Chain Project. The Daisy Chain Project supports people with autism and their families and has close ties with Abbey Hill School. The young people created a wild flower garden on an area of abandoned land at the Daisy Chain Farm to celebrate the International Year of Biodiversity 2010. The ground was overgrown and the soil was difficult to turn. Through perseverance and



hard work the area has been transformed into a haven for biodiversity. Wildflowers and habitat piles attracted a wide range of insects including a variety of butterflies and bees. Bird and bat boxes encouraged greater biodiversity and a healthy ecosystem. The students made improvements across the site as well – taking part in ‘The Big Tidy Up’, a national scheme run by Keep Britain Tidy.



**“I like the John Muir Award because we do great garden work together.” Dan, participant**

The teenagers progressed through two levels of the John Muir Award to achieve personal and group goals. The Award has helped the participants improve their communication skills. Previously the young people lacked experience speaking with adults from outside of the school environment. Interaction with Countryside Rangers and site staff helped them to develop social skills as they became more confident speaking to new people.

*“They were fully committed and applied 100% effort to every project in all adverse weather including the snow. The staff at*

*Abbey Hill are immensely proud of the students’ achievements.” said teacher, Gary Smith.*

### **John Muir Award Providers Sharing together**

A group of students from Stockton Riverside College (SRC) teamed up with Abbey Hill School to meet the Share Challenge of their John Muir Awards. Students from SRC led hands-on activity sessions to help Abbey Hill students with physical disabilities engage with wild places. Activities included creating insect homes, making bird feeders and leaf printing. Matt Wigmore from the Prince’s Trust at SRC said, *“The students from SRC thrived with the work that was undertaken. They felt ownership for the lessons, not only in the planning of the activities but in the delivery of the sessions.”*

Kathryn Lindop said, *“The young people from Stockton Riverside College have been amazing. They brought innovative ideas and enthusiasm to the classroom. The students at Abbey Hill really look forward to their lessons.”* The partnership between John Muir Award Providers has been a valuable learning experience for staff and students from both schools.



### **What’s next?**

Abbey Hill School and Technology College are continuing the John Muir Award as part of the Vocation Programme. Stockton Riverside College students really enjoyed their experiences and hope to work closely with Abbey Hill School again in the future.