

John Muir Award: Wild places help narrow East Ayrshire's poverty-related attainment gap

From spring 2017 to 2023, a partnership between East Ayrshire Council and John Muir Trust created a dedicated role focused on the John Muir Award as an intervention to help close the poverty-related attainment gap. The role formed part of the Learning Outdoor Support Team (LOST), a strategic education support service working across the local authority, benefitting young people, educators, families and local wild places.

In the first two years, the partnership generated nearly a 300% increase in John Muir Award activity across East Ayrshire.



Partnership achievements

3,767 young people, educators and families achieved a John Muir Award



33% of Awards each year achieved by pupils from our most deprived communities



An average of **8 hours** per participant taking action for wild places



307 tailored support sessions including training, visits, 1:1s and delivery planning



Adapted support during Covid-19 pandemic, including **18** live virtual engagement sessions



21 stories, case studies and films sharing John Muir Award partnership impacts



Over 30,000 hours on conservation volunteering which can be valued at £144,954 based on Heritage Lottery Fund figures



Every school in East Ayrshire benefited from using the John Muir Award during the 6 year partnership



Ideas, resources and inspiration shared through 50 LOST newsletters, reaching **700 educators**



The difference made

East Ayrshire Award outcomes have been showcased through publications including [Closing the Gap: How the John Muir Award helps raise attainment in Scotland](#) and [John Muir Award and Education Recovery](#).

Evaluating the John Muir Award as an intervention with a primary school nurture group found an improvement in pupils' social emotional wellbeing, including:

- ↓ **25% reduction** in avoidance or rejection of attachment
- ↓ **24% reduction** in negativity towards self
- ↓ **24% reduction** in consequential or inappropriate student behaviour
- ↓ **14% reduction** in an insecure sense of self
- ↓ **8% reduction** in negativity towards others

Read more: [Using Nature for Nurture](#)

At Onthank Primary School, a Transformative Evaluation approach captured pupil and teacher voices and assess the impact of the John Muir Award in improving health, literacy and numeracy.

“When you are happy, then you want to learn a lot more. It makes you feel more enthusiastic, it [the Award] was really good and it helps you learn easier if you are enjoying it.” Alfie

“The children were more animated and engaged when participating in their John Muir Award and learning about biodiversity than they usually are in class. Certain pupils who are usually quiet or lack confidence became more involved outdoors than expected which was lovely to see.” Ms Anderson

Read more: [Wild places, attainment and the John Muir Award](#)

The partnership has been supported through the Scottish Government's Scottish Attainment Challenge Fund.



Through the partnership:

- Children and young people have benefitted from engaging in real world learning in their communities across East Ayrshire.
- Teachers and educators have been challenged and supported to enhance learning in wild places, building their competence, confidence and capacity.
- A generation of young people in East Ayrshire have been inspired to connect with, enjoy and take action for wild places – for example planting over 4,000 trees in their local communities.
- On the ground connections and insights from both educators and pupils have been highly valued, supporting each partner to understand and respond to education priorities and the societal benefits of wild places.

