



## **Tall Trees Project Interim Report 2021 Outdoor Education Adviser Service and Early Years Service**

### **The Tall Trees Project**

A meeting between the Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council Outdoor Education Adviser and Cambridgeshire Early Years staff who are the county lead on Forest Schools Training identified potential gaps in practice, provision and expertise. A great deal of practice across the county did not develop or rise beyond forest school activity in reception years, and really should spread into all years through a Primary School. The two services therefore created Tall Trees, a project funded by the Outdoor Education Service, seeking to address the issue of Forest School embedded throughout a Primary School and to create across the County five schools who would stand as Tall Trees within Forest Schools across the education landscape.



To focus on best possible engagement and impact, the TT schools had to commit to hosting three staff whole afterschool meetings. The project would train 2 staff from each school allowing them to support each other with ideas. The Five selected Schools paid for one Level three Forest School leader training course, with Tall Trees funding the other training place and the three whole school staff meetings.

Due to Covid, the project from launch to completion has taken longer than anticipated, but is close to the finish and therefore this report to summarise the impact of a uniquely focused project. A full report will be published in the new year.

### **Impact**

To assess the impact of the project the five headteachers have submitted reports and been involved in an online verbal feedback session.

### **Impact on Young People, their Learning, the Staff and the Curriculum**

All Quotes below from Head Teachers conversational feedback and their written feedback

‘It must not be understated the impact that this project on children’s mental health has had.’

‘Yes ... Mental health – huge positive impact and made coming back to school easier’

‘in our small school 40% of the pupils are in the woods each week’

‘From the concrete jungle we were faced with the challenge of do we - hammer English and maths or to look differently and see the barriers, ask



the question where is the outdoors in lives of children who live in flats, or who are let out with no supervision and no idea on how to look after themselves with no risk management skills. Children who have very low self esteem and to use our brilliant untapped potential in our grounds. This project has now allowed us to unpick everything else and our curriculum and to re set it with a new timetable.'

'Forest Schools – we were dabbling in Nursey but the whole school and staff are now on board and fully engaged. This is true of all of the staff'

'We have seen huge success with our year 5 and 6. It has had huge impact on their confidence and behaviours, where in the past they might have expressed themselves aggressively when unsure, we are now moving away from those behaviours.'

'We saw year 5 and 6 become children, play and engage with childhood revisited which has become part of the gradual return to "normal"'



**We have had engagement in the community...**

'Parents and staff volunteering to help with staff coming in on their day off to make this happen'

'Parents who were fussy about mud and dirt now understanding the need to be organised about spare clothing and this is having a positive knock on affect'

'We know have a positive engagement with a pre school around the corner which will assist with transition.'

'Parental feedback and Governor feedback has been very positive, and another reason to continue to plan for impact.'

'Initially some staff were sceptical about the impact that Forest School could have when so much work is needed to improve our children's attainment in maths and English. Staff are now seeing the benefits and have been very positive towards the development in Forest School provision.'

'Many more of our teaching assistants are now choosing to join in with non mandatory in school training and support sessions'

### **Summary**

Five Schools, Five Head Teachers with other staff behind them all clearly expressing the impact of this project on individual lives, the impact on class groups, development of fresh and positive relationships, growing confidence to manage risks, and increasing self esteem.



## **The Final Quotes**

### **A Teacher**

It has been amazing watching how simple things can be used to make our in-class learning come alive. Being able to use the trees and bushes to imagine we are in the jungle, with the sights, sounds and smells that usually pass us by, has been fantastic to support our story writing.

### **A Young Person**

Last half term, I was free to enjoy Forest School which was a massive change for me – I don't usually like getting muddy or being outside much. The first time I went, I can remember feeling excited and curious but also scared and nervous – I definitely had mixed emotions! However, by the time the session had ended, I was so eager to continue because I felt so free and had learnt so much. I enjoyed every moment.

My favourite activities were using the saw to cut wood and being able to make my pendant – it was such fun but I also liked learning how to stay safe at the same time. I also loved being able to make a fire and learn how to keep it alive. It was so hard to begin with but I kept trying and eventually it worked!

Forest School makes me feel free and excited because we can do things that we aren't usually allowed to do. We are free to have fun and I've realised that taking risks can be a good thing. I learnt new skills and learnt how to work with new and different people.

## **The Future**

It is hoped that we might be able to run this excellent whole school training course again in this next year. The Impact not only on 5 schools but for other local schools to look at their examples, start to copy and imitate their practice and then develop their own is the next stage. One head has already requested that the school present at a Primary Heads forum both in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

The Annual Forest School Conference will also give an arena to the staff to share their experiences with other schools.

If it was possible, this small project would welcome some outside financial support to enable the impact of this approach to be experienced by a wider group of schools.

Thank you to all the staff who made this possible, to the Head teachers who made it happen, to the two trainers from Huathe for excellent staff meetings and Level 3 training courses and to the colleagues in the Early Years Service for the help with administration of the project

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