



Neroche Woodlanders

Project Report for Rise Up Wild & Rooted Programme for 11–14-year-olds from September 2022 to March 2023

Key project Information

Project name: Rise Up Wild and Rooted

Project aims: Bringing young people into the woods – enabling local young people whose parents are on low incomes to attend – supporting young people to connect with and learn about nature, build relationships with place, learn about themselves and others – build young people’s wellbeing, confidence, and resilience.

Project dates: September 2022 to March 2023 (second series of sessions)

Funders: Somerset County Council, YHA Outdoor Citizen fund, parents of some of the young people participating.

This report, put together by Clare Smith with help from Jenny Archard, aims to inform internal and external stakeholders about the project, its achievements to date and next steps.

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1. Project description

The Rise Up project enabled a mixed group of young people (11-14years) from our local and wider areas to come to the woods once a month. These day-long sessions (11-4pm on Saturdays) are about

connecting with and learning about nature, building a relationship with the place, learning about themselves and others. They forage, play, cook, make, walk, dance, talk and explore, supported by a team of up to 3 qualified Forest School leaders and a therapist.

The staff team reviewed the session at the end of each day, using observations and reflections to guide the plan for the following session, with the aim of increasing well-being, confidence, resilience; better understanding of nature, cycles and systems and a greater love of and care for the natural world. Whilst this report covers the sessions from Sept 2022 to March 2023, this programme grew out of a first series of sessions for Rise Up. (Description to be added)

2. The young people who attended.

Across the five sessions, 19 young people attended between 11 and 14 years old, with approximately half of them attending regularly. It was a mixed group in terms of gender, neurodiversity, and socio-economic status. 10 participants were from the Taunton area and 9 from the wider area covering both Somerset and neighboring Dorset. Half of the young people came from low-income families and accessed the session for free. There was gender balance in the group in terms of participants identifying male or female. There was also a mix of support needs with several of the participants being SEND young people. Additional support needs identified by the parents included autism, sensory processing differences, learning difficulties, ADHD, ADD and dyslexia. High levels of anxiety and low confidence were also issues for some of the group.

Session	Attendance numbers
September 2022	9
October 2022	6
November 2022	11
December 2022	Cancelled (snow)
January 2023	15
February 2023	Cancelled (low signup)
March 2023	9

3. Enrolment and inclusion

As with all our work, creating conditions for inclusion is at the heart of this programme. We used several strategies to promote Inclusion and to attend to the different needs of the group. Providing free places and minibus transport enabled us to promote the programme to local families from low income areas around Taunton. Regular contact by phone and email was key in encouraging interested families to keep signing their children up each month, and to confirm arrangements for the free bus. This was time-consuming but necessary. It's interesting to note that the families who took advantage

of the free places had had contact with Young Wood In the past and puts emphasis on the need to keep building these relationships.

We included a hearty campfire lunch and snack for each session with the young people foraging for ingredients, preparing, and cooking the food, and eating together around the fire. The young people enjoyed lunches of pasta with tomato and vegetable sauce, a hearty winter vegetable soup, and beans with cheesy wraps and gained cooking skills along the way. Sharing food brought the group together and removed the potential for barriers around food poverty and stigma.

We delivered the sessions with a high adult to child ratio, a team of three or four adults per session. This allowed us to support different needs within our neurodiverse group and to allow the young people to choose from different activities and follow their own interests. We gave support to the whole group, smaller groups and one-to-one support. It allowed us to build on our different strengths as adults in facilitating the sessions, from cooking delicious and nutritious food, to supporting conversations about what it means to be a teenager, to helping the young people connect with place and use nature as a guide. It also allowed us to be attentive to the group in meeting their basic needs such as keeping warm over winter. A steady supply of hot stones was popular!



4. Finances

This group received small grants from the local authority to enable young people whose parents are on low incomes to come along. Funding covered transport, food, staff costs and any resources for making. This funding finished in November. Some parents have been funding their young people to come and this is getting harder as cost-of-living rises hit home.

In December 2022 we received funding from YHA's Outdoors Citizen project to run four sessions over the winter, the hardest time to keep these young people active. We received £2960 to cover transport, food, resources for making, and staff costs for the four sessions. It also included a small amount of funding for project management to allow regular contact with parents, and a planning and reflection session for the staff team. For these four sessions, we had an increased staff team of four forest school leaders and therapists to enable us to support different needs within the group.

5. What the young people said about the programme.

During the last session, we asked the young people for some written feedback on their experiences. They were invited to write or draw on some flip chart paper that had been laid out on the ground in our woodland base. The responses, written up in the table below, show a range of positive feedback on activities (whittling, fire-making, identify plants, fungi and birds, games) as well as on how their time in the woods made them feel, such as *"I enjoyed meeting new people"* *"I love nature"* and *"I was able to let go and be myself"*. See Appendix 2 for full flip chart feedback.

We also practiced sharing our feedback around our campfire circle at the end of each session using Way of Council principles. We learnt from these council circles that the young people enjoyed being with each other and breathing space away from the pressures of their day-to-day lives. They enjoyed connecting more with nature and seasons and enjoyed the adventure of getting out and about in the woods. A feeling of being freer to be themselves was a theme that came up as an important outcome of the sessions to the young people. They also expressed a desire to keep coming and are excited by the idea of an overnight camp in the woods.

6. What parents said about the programme.

At the end of the sessions, we asked parents to complete a google online form with a range of questions. Whilst we had limited responses to the survey (6 responses), the answers show a range of positive impressions. These full responses are attached as Appendix 3. The overwhelming feedback – questionnaire and informal – was that these sessions built the knowledge and the self-confidence of the young people. People reported seeing the children flourish from the opportunities they had been given to exercise freedom in safe and supportive ways. The session cost (£40 per session) was seen as a potential barrier to coming again in the future by parents who were paying for the sessions.

7. Where the staff want to take this next

The staff team gathered for a reflection and planning session in March 2023, inviting into our reflections an external person to help challenge and guide us. We reflected on some of the benefits we felt the sessions brought to the young people, in feeling valued, heard, and creating a sense of belonging. We recognised that the directors at Neroche Woodlanders see that working with these

young teens is a priority as we increasingly hear of young people who are stressed and who suffer from high levels of anxiety or other mental health issues.

The longer aim of this group is to work towards an overnight solo time that marks a step into becoming a full teenager, when each young person is ready, constituting a rite of passage for the young person. We explore what it means to be alive at this time, the challenges young people face, and how to find hope through being with others and with nature.

The next steps are to:

- Be specific in what is required to create the conditions for a meaningful rites of passage process for the young people. One important aspect of rites of passage is an initiated community of adults that support the young people and receive them back into the community when they return from the camp. This raises the challenge of how to prepare the adults around the child to play this role. Another aspect is how to support some of the 'initiated' young people to become young leaders and help others to learn and be.
- Get new teenagers interested, in particular from lower income sectors of the community with fewer resources and access to the outdoors. Neroche Woodlanders is well connected with local agencies such as the police, community organisations and social services to enable this to happen, albeit it will take significant time and effort.
- Get a more substantial grant to enable us to run the rites of passage process and summer camp 2024.

Appendix 1: Poster for the Rise Up Wild & Rooted

**neroche
Woodlanders**

RISE UP WILD & ROOTED

**SATURDAY OUTDOOR
YOUTH GROUP
FOR 11/12/13/14 YEAR OLDS**

**MAKE FIRE, FORAGE FOOD, EXPLORE
100 ACRES OF FOREST, COOK, CRAFT,
LEARN ABOUT NATURE. CHAT, CHILL,
LISTEN AND FEEL HEARD.
DEVELOP REAL-LIFE SKILLS.
AROUND THE CAMPFIRE WE LISTEN
AND GROW.**

**2023
Jan 28th
Feb 25th
March 25th
11am-4pm**

- FREE for Taunton young people**
- Transport**
- Lunch and afternoon snacks**

**contact Jenny 07541 080397
info@nerochewoodlanders.org**

**Somerset West
and Taunton**

RISE UP

Appendix 2 – A typical day

A typical day:

- *Young people arrive.* “Hand-shake circle” where we briefly greet and check in with one another. We remind each other of any risks relating to the day and our agreements (looking after ourselves, each other, nature and things). We may then go for a walk via the woods to the camp or to forage for ingredients for an activity. This is a time to slow down, to arrive into the day, and to reconnect with each other in an unpressurised way.
- *Arriving at our base camp.* We gather at the old oak tree to greet the woods where we will spend the day and to recognise the abundance of life – flora and fauna – that we will be sharing the woods with that day.
- *Preparing lunch.* We split into groups to light the fire and prepare and cook the food. There are also other activities on offer but mostly the young people choose to get involved with preparing for lunch in some way. We may do some maintenance tasks and make good our camp for the day.
- *Walk and sit spot.* After lunch and some time for a game, to play or just be, we go on a walk to another part of the wood or to the meadow area down by the river. Here we share discoveries as we roam, listen out for birds, spot signs of animals or investigate a seasonal aspect through sharing knowledge or simply by experiencing it through our bodies and senses. We then practice our “solo muscle” by finding a sit spot alone in the natural surroundings for a period of time that increases over the months.
- *Back at camp activities and afternoon snack.* The young people may continue an interest from the morning or a previous session, or we offer new activities that they can have a go at. Helping with the afternoon snack such as toasting crumpets is another activity they may get involved in. Or they can just be or socialise around the fire. Some may initiate projects of their own creation or engage in play.
- *Circle time with refectation.* At the end of the day, we sit together in circle to reflect on the day’s theme that we had woven throughout the day, such as a theme around the new growth of spring: what new spring shoots are we tending in ourselves? How do we prepare for the new life that is coming or growing? What skills we will need? What do we need to ask of ourselves and others? We do this using the principles of Way of Council to encourage the young people to listen and speak from the heart. Around the circle, we hear from the young people what they enjoyed most that day and what they would like to do more of, to help with our planning for the following session.

Please see our facebook page for photos and descriptions of how we spent our days together [Facebook page - Rise Up Wild and Rooted](#)

Appendix 3 – Approximate session cost

Component of Project	Estimated Cost	Cost explanation
Project management: preparation and enrolment	£45	3 hours per session at £15 per hour
Staff costs for delivery including set up, pack down and reflection	£480	4 staff for 8 hours per session at £15 per hour
Staff team planning session	£240	4 staff for 4 hours planning session at £15 per hour
Transport – contract minibus	£155	£155 per session
Contribution to site costs	£75	£75 per session
Equipment and resources – for making or crafting	£15	Crafting supplies such as tins and oils for making natural balms or willow for weaving
Food for campfire cooked lunch and afternoon snack	£30	
TOTAL		

Appendix 4 – Flip charts young people feedback

What have you learned? Loved? Enjoyed?

I love nature

Fire-making

I enjoyed meeting new people, learning about birds, plants, trees and nature. I've also enjoyed cooking new foods and trying them and going on walks. I've learnt how to paracord, put up hammock and got better at making god's eyes.

I like whittling, cooking wraps and setting stuff on fire!

What have you learned? Been exciting? Boring?

I loved learning about mushrooms and identifying them with Clare

I enjoyed all the walks especially the long walks down the hills – in the summer especially

I also enjoyed power cording and all the things I learnt, and I was able to let go and be myself

I enjoyed picking the garlic

I enjoyed learning about birds with Claire

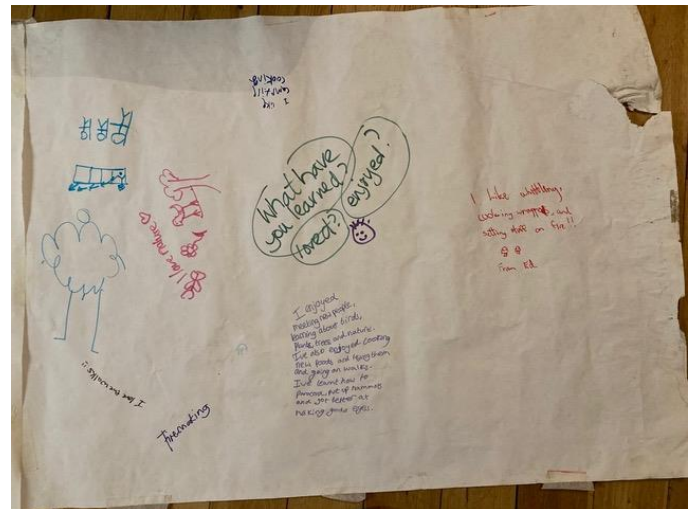
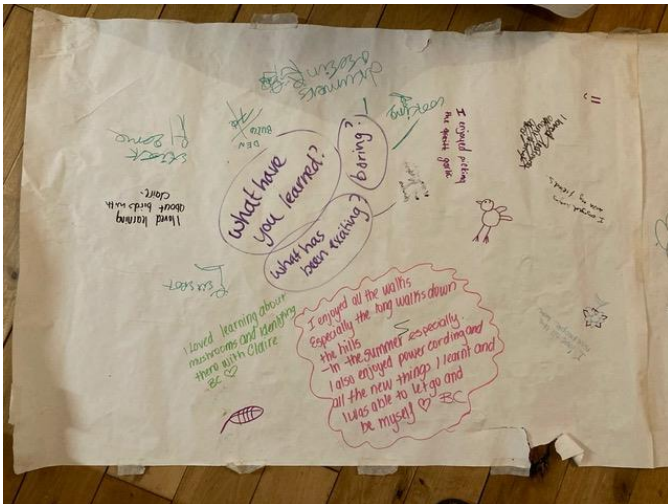
Sit spot

Den build

Cooking

Stick game

I love all the nice people here



Appendix 5 – Feedback collected through parents questionnaire

Q.1 What barriers might prevent your child/children from coming in future?

- Transport
- High cost (5)
- Having outdoor clothing
- Nothing (1)
- Other:

Q2. What are the things that stand out for you most about these sessions?

- Being taught new life skills
- Everything. The staff, the activities, the venue.
- This is a phenomenal opportunity for teenagers to flourish in an outdoor environment connection with nature and “real” things. At this fragile age they are able to interact with and value the place around them bringing innumerable mental health benefits due to the mindfulness but also the science of nature which is healing in terms of sights and smells. The physical movement is important for their growing bodies and spatial awareness. The get to be stakeholders in the direction and running of the group and can have autonomy. The very experienced and trained staff here use a forest school (child informed) approach to shape the days around then teenagers. This gives incredible self-worth and value to them each. This is an opportunity for my teenagers to be in a safe space where they have choice and can form friendships with other teenagers in a very healthy way
- Caring supportive group
- Lovely that our son has enjoyed being outside and doing something definite
- My son has the opportunity to develop his independence. The volunteers have a wonderful understanding of young people including those with special needs. They are patient and calm and encourage my son to take part in activities, while also giving him the freedom to enjoy nature and socialise at a level he feels comfortable with. The sessions are flexible and give my son access to a world outside of home. My son has the opportunity to explore independently and learn skills he would never attempt at home, such as cooking on an open fire and whittling. He has the opportunity to meet other young people in a safe environment, but with the level of independence that he craves.

Q3. What difference do think that coming has this made to your child?

- More confidence
- Independence
- My children enjoy being valued and listened to by adults. They flourish from working as a team and considering others. The staff trained and skilled in SEN are able to help all children not just exist safely in a space but to flourish. My children feel independent and valued. It’s something different from computer games and peer pressure.
- Increased confidence, made a new friend, learnt new skills
- Confidence
- X looks forward to these sessions immensely. He enjoys the entire experience, the calmness and freedom of the woods, meeting other young people who don't judge him and the activities that are on offer. Attending has done wonders for his confidence and also his sense of wellbeing. Going to the woodland sessions has helped him practice valuable life skills and also given him the opportunity to socialise with other young people: something that he doesn't get much opportunity to do outside of his special school because other activities either do not interest him or cannot cater adequately for

his sensory needs or learning difficulties. In the woods he can just relax and be himself, and he CAN do things that others do!

Q4. What difference has it made to you as a parent?

- Like to see my children happy going somewhere they enjoyed going
- Happy to see my son growing in confidence
- I know they are safe and happy and with friends. They are getting a healthy dose of woodland chemicals, sights and physical activities. I know they will be welcome and wanted.
- I am happy to find an outdoor group for this age group
- No difference
- There are very few term-time social activities that my son can take part in. He has tried Scouts, but the sessions are too prescribed and too advanced for his understanding at times. He also has a lack of interest in and difficulty understanding the rules of team sports and therefore, he has little opportunity to exercise and socialise outside of his (special) school. The forest school sessions have been a life saver for our family. I have always felt guilty that Jack has not had the same opportunities as other children. He is desperate to be independent, but it is not safe for him to be. However, at the forest school sessions I can completely relax knowing that he is in safe hands. The volunteers know him well and are understanding and accept him for who he is. He loves going and as a parent it is a joy to see him doing something that he loves. It is wonderful to see his confidence growing and to hear him being proud of what he has managed to do at a session.

Q5. Is there anything that we could do differently or better so that your child can come?

- Nothing
- No
- Find out if there's certain projects they want to work on or particular skills or game playing or nature spotting. I struggle with the cost. The value is brilliant given the length of session, staff ratio, activities however everything's a stretch atm.
- I don't know
- Nothing differently, all good
- Twice a month would be good! Or even an after-school session in the spring/summer months.

Q6. If we were to do further sessions what kinds of activities would your child most like to be involved with?

- More different walks
- N/a
- Cooking. Knife work. Game playing. Feeling valued and listened to.
- Whittling and tool use
- camping out maybe
- Cooking, general playing (answers from Jack!)