

## APPENDIX 8: Staff Training and the Introduction of Forest Kindergartens



### Staff Training and the Introduction of Forest Kindergartens



There is no set way to establish forest or nature kindergartens and deliver training pre-school staff. Here are some examples of how different authorities, organisations and individuals have approached the matter.

#### Open College Network (OCN) Forest School Training

Open College Network (OCN) Forest School Training is a formal recognised training route for adults wishing to set up a forest school. In England and Wales, many local authorities recommend and organise this training for education staff wishing to undertake forest school activities.

#### *Positives*

- There is uniformity of philosophy and approach to forest schools and forest kindergartens within the UK.
- The courses are generally well run and feedback is positive.
- A person who achieves Level 3 certification may organise and deliver training sessions at Levels 1 and 2. Thus authority staff who are Level 3 trained can train their own education staff.
- Practitioners have received training for undertaking 'higher risk' activities such as tool use, fire lighting and cooking. Outdoor first aid is also required for completing the course.
- Participants have to plan, deliver and evaluate a series of woodland sessions with children as part of the coursework. It's very hands-on.

#### *Negatives*

- The Level 3 training is intensive. It is the equivalent of studying for an A-level in 9 months.
- Some pre-school practitioners have found that the training and study is not entirely relevant to the pre-school sector as it is aimed at working with children of all ages
- The cost of training a person to Level 3 are high especially if supply cover is required (Appendix 11).

#### **1. Scotland**

##### **1.1 Mindstretchers Nature Kindergartens at Auchlone and Whistlebrae**

<http://www.mindstretchers.co.uk/nature-kindergartens.html>

In the past three years Mindstretchers have established two nature kindergartens. At Whistlebrae thirteen children aged 2-5yrs attend from 9.30-4.30pm daily. Two adults work with these children. The house has an outdoor area surrounding it where the children begin the day. After an hour, all the children put on their little rucksacks containing their packed lunch and head across the road and up the hill to their wild woodland area. They sometimes return to the house to enable the 2 year olds to have a short nap and then choose whether to remain in the outdoor area beside the house or to venture back into the woods. Most staff have Forest School Level 3 training. Mindstretchers will shortly be delivering its own OCN Nature Kindergarten training, aimed specifically at Early Years practitioners.

### **1.2 The Secret Garden, Fife** <http://www.secretgardenoutdoor-nursery.co.uk>

The Secret Garden was set up by Cathy Bache, opening as a registered nursery in 2008. With school experience initially as a drama teacher and then as nursery teacher, Cathy registered as a childminder in 2004 in order to develop the Secret Garden on a small scale. She has not been Forest School trained but is self taught and attends wilderness, bush craft and other similar courses. **Appendix 9** is a detailed case study.

### **1.3 Fife Early Years Approach**

Chris Miles, a former Early Years Officer set up a unique training programme for pre-school staff to assist them in getting children outside into woods and other nearby greenspace. Over an 18 month period more than 60 pre-school establishments became involved and started taking their children beyond the designated outside area on a weekly basis. The Fife model used in-house training aimed at staff who were committed, keen and prepared for the challenge. It included:

- Attendance at an initial conference where a Norwegian educator, Anders Farstad spoke
- Pre-school staff identifying and organising access to suitable woodland near their establishment
- 3 days training which included time spent in the woods with a forest ranger and observing a forest kindergarten session

The funding for this training was spread over 2 years and came from the ring fenced staff development budget and the Child Care Strategy. 200 pre-school staff received the 3-day training sessions. The budget primarily was spent on staff cover costs. Further information can be obtained by contacting Chris through her e-mail: [chrissie.miles46@yahoo.com](mailto:chrissie.miles46@yahoo.com)

## **2. Sweden: I Ur och Skur Skola: Rain or Shine Outdoor Kindergartens. A national approach**

Since 1985 more than 180 I Ur och Skur nursery schools have been established. All are run in different ways but adhere to the same principles. Friluftsförbundet (the Association for Promotion of Outdoor Life) oversee the I Ur och Skur schools and provide support to teachers and nursery nurses who wish to set up an I Ur och Skur kindergarten.

All staff must be members and the school pays a fee to cover administrative costs and courses. Friluftsförbundet activities such as skiing, skating and Skogsmulle (forest activity) methods are routinely incorporated into the life of all I Ur och Skur nurseries.

All staff who work in the I Ur och Skur kindergartens have undergone a 4-day "Skogsmulle" training course. It is targeted specifically at adults working with 5 and 6 year old children. This is open to any adult as Skogsmulle activities are also popular at weekends and volunteers run these sessions. For adults who work with younger children there are two additional training days aimed at programmes for 1 and 2 year old children and for 3 and 4 year old children.

A case study can be freely downloaded from the link:

<http://www.creativestartlearning.co.uk/index.asp?refID=67&pageType=C&openFolders=undefined>

### **3. Czech Republic: A partnership between the regional government and a non-government organisation**

In Southern Moravia, a forest school day centre, Jezírko wanted to support local kindergartens to access their nearest woods. They developed a series of monthly activities based on woodland characters for staff to undertake with their children.

The nurseries received their pack free of charge which included:

- An A1 monthly calendar and woodland activities
- Indoor activities to do at the nursery in different curriculum areas
- Outdoor activities for the nursery such as seeds for planting

In June, a staff member from each nursery was invited to Jezírko to celebrate the success of the project. The nurseries who had undertaken the activities were rewarded with a felt puppet of one of the key woodland characters.

The first year, 2007-08, was hugely successful with fifty nurseries getting involved (out of a total of eighty-six in the network). The nurseries involved were very positive about the resources, stating there was enough inspiration and ideas to go out to their local woods on a weekly basis, which many were choosing to do.

The scheme has continued for a second year with a storyline approach being used this time. No formal training is involved and the activities do not involve tool use or fires but foraging for food from the forest does happen.

### **4. England: Norfolk County Council and OCN Forest School Leader training**

<http://schools.norfolk.gov.uk/myportal/index.cfm?s=1&m=1654&p=1123,index>

This is the most detailed and helpful website of all English local authorities. In 2005 Norfolk County Council Environmental and Outdoor Learning team received funding to train an advisor, an early years teacher and a Norfolk Wildlife Trust officer as Forest School Level 3 leaders. The funding was also used to subsidise time to develop strategy and support to schools, including the website development.

Several pilot projects were established which linked closely to the equivalent of Local Improvement Objectives and other local and national initiatives. These were carefully monitored and evaluated to see whether there was a tangible benefit on the children and staff who participated.

The team set out to use the initial funding sustainably. Schools were actively encouraged to send at least one member of staff to gain Level 1 training provided by the original team. The charge made for this course was used to part fund keen teachers in different school clusters to achieve their Level 3 status at a hugely discounted rate. The Level 3 places were also part funded by Forestry Commission Grants (WIG) and from the Early Years team subsidising places for Early years practitioners after seeing the potential from the evaluations.

The website provides a lot of support and information for the local schools. There is a local online forum to provide follow-up and ongoing mutual support. Also plans for different year groups and risk assessments have also been put on the website to assist schools. There is even specific advice for establishments who want to undertake forest school activities in their own grounds. A wide variety of different training events are offered throughout the year to further extend teachers' skills.