

# WEE GREEN SPACES



## Early Years Pilot Project Report

August 2014

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<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>Page 4</b>
<b>Background .....</b>	<b>Page 4</b>
<b>Pilot Aims .....</b>	<b>Page 5</b>
<b>The Approach .....</b>	<b>Page 6</b>
<b>Wee Green Spaces Pilot Project Outcomes .....</b>	<b>Page 8</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To raise awareness and use of local greenspace by Early Years settings</li><li>• For local organisations, parents and groups to work in partnership with Early Years settings to facilitate off-site visits</li><li>• To contribute to the <i>Year of Natural Scotland in 2013</i></li><li>• To use the project as an opportunity to focus on the Social Studies Experiences and Outcomes at an Early Years Level</li></ul>	
<b>Other Outcomes and Reflections .....</b>	<b>Page 13</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Quality of the chosen sites</li><li>• Getting to and from the sites</li><li>• Mindset and determination of participants</li><li>• The value of weekly visits</li><li>• Impact on practice at each setting</li></ul>	
<b>2014-15 Priorities and Future Improvements .....</b>	<b>Page 18</b>
<b>Appendix 1: National Commentary about Nature Kindergartens and the Benefits of Outdoor Play in Greenspace or Natural Environments.....</b>	<b>Page 19</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Invitation to Participate in the Wee Green Spaces Project.....</b>	<b>Page 24</b>
<b>Appendix 3: Information about Settings and Greenspace Used.....</b>	<b>Page 26</b>
<b>Appendix 4: Run Chart Data and Findings .....</b>	<b>Page 28</b>
<b>Appendix 5: Example of a Micro-Routine .....</b>	<b>Page 31</b>

## Summary

Between November 2013 and May 2014, ten schools and partner provider settings in Aberdeen City ensured their children had outdoor experiences beyond their designated outdoor space and mainly off-site using local greenspace on a weekly or fortnightly basis. This amounted to 3983 individual child experiences.

The nature of these experiences could not have been replicated in their designated outdoor space. They met and interacted with local people. One group rescued a seal. Another group discovered a “secret garden” tucked away in a local park. Almost every child from Fersands Family Centre visited Cruickshank Botanic Garden in their free time with their parents, yet only one family knew of its existence prior to the weekly visits.

In a rapidly changing society where children and their families are living increasingly chaotic lives, the consistency of regular visits to natural spaces provides an opportunity for each child to explore, discover, learn and simply “be”. The changing seasons, weather and events allows children to develop coping skills that helps grow their confidence. The contact with nature enables each child to develop a personal connection to the natural world that is the beginning of understanding why environmental sustainability matters. The health and well-being benefits are known to last into adulthood.

Many thanks go to the partner organisations, City Council staff, participants, parents, children and other people involved in this project who enabled these and countless other learning experiences to happen. Needless to say, the off-site visits have continued with the settings now gearing up for a second year and the ambition of embedding the visits as a permanent part of their practice.

Juliet Robertson  
On behalf of Aberdeen City Council Early Years Team  
August 2014.



## Introduction

“Wee Green Spaces” is an Early Years pilot project aimed at embedding and sustaining frequent, regular off-site visits by children to local greenspace almost all year round on a weekly or fortnightly basis following the basic training provided to Early Years practitioners.

Simultaneously, the participants are encouraged to use this experience to improve outdoor play provision within their setting and make links in the learning between school, local community and home based upon the children’s interests.



## Background

Research suggests that time playing in nature can help children understand and take positive action as adults about environmental concerns such as climate change. There is evidence that children who play in greenspaces will use and value these areas as adults. There are specific benefits for 3-6yr olds:

*‘When it comes to concentration capacity, the children within I Ur och Skur pre-schools are more than twice as focused as children within a normal pre-school. Their motor skills are better, they are less frustrated, restless and sick.’<sup>1</sup>*

*“It is necessary to be outside for our brains to be stimulated from the flow of sound, light, shapes and colours that nature provides. Especially between the ages of 3-6, when the energy flow in the human brain is at its greatest.” David Ingvar, Late Professor of Neurophysiology, Brain Researcher.<sup>2</sup>*

Since the introduction of Curriculum for Excellence, a number of Scottish policy documents make specific reference to the benefits of off-site visits and the advantages of children spending time in natural settings and establishing connections with nature. References to these national publications have been collated in Appendix 1.

During the past five years, Aberdeen City Council Early Years Team has been raising the profile of outdoor play through:

- A conference focusing on outdoor play in May 2009
- Supporting the early pilot of the *Nature Nurture* project
- The ongoing provision of a broad range of courses and training sessions with outdoor themes demonstrating the potential of the outdoors as an ideal context for Curriculum for Excellence for young children from 2009 to date
- An outdoor nurture project in 2011
- Close liaison with partner organisations through the City outdoor learning network

The Early Years Team recognised that as an authority, Aberdeen City Council had laid good foundations to put in place a pilot project that consolidates the work already taken place.

<sup>1</sup> Education Scotland (2011) Outdoor Learning: Practical Guidance and Support for Teachers and Practitioners in Scotland, p.9 [http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/OutdoorLearningSupport\\_tcm4-675958.pdf](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/OutdoorLearningSupport_tcm4-675958.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Robertson, J. (2008) “I Ur och Skur” Rain or Shine – Swedish Forest Schools p12 [http://www.friluftsfamjandet.se/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?folderId=39265&name=DLFE-5521.pdf](http://www.friluftsfamjandet.se/c/document_library/get_file?folderId=39265&name=DLFE-5521.pdf)

## Pilot Aims

### *Short term:*

- To raise awareness and use of local greenspace by Early Years settings.
- For local organisations, parents and groups to work in partnership with Early Years settings to facilitate off-site visits.
- To use the project as an opportunity to focus on the Social Studies Experiences and Outcomes at an Early Years Level which was a City-wide development priority in 2013-14.
- To contribute to the *Year of Natural Scotland in 2013*.

### *Long term:*

- To use this first cohort of settings to provide further support and mentoring in future years to other settings – developing capacity within Aberdeen City.
- To use local greenspace, ideally within walking space as one of many approaches to carrying out identified key recommendations in *Learning for Sustainability*<sup>3</sup> report, especially Recommendation 1.1, “*Outdoor learning is a key approach to learning within the curriculum and practitioners are encouraged to make outdoor learning a natural and normal part of practice.*”
- To monitor the impact of the pilot project as a route to improving pre-school provision for children in Aberdeen City.
- To assist practitioners to actively embrace and promote the principles and practices of sustainability in all aspects of their work as outlined in the GTCS Professional Standards.
- To consider the Wee Green Spaces project as a springboard to developing outdoor nursery provision within Aberdeen City.



<sup>3</sup><http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Schools/curriculum/ACE/OnePlanetSchools>

## The Approach

Wee Green Spaces is a derivation of the Forest Kindergarten training programme developed by Juliet Robertson and Karen Boyd for the Forestry Commission Scotland in 2011. It uses a sustainable and rights-based approach to supporting a change in practice which acknowledges the knowledge, understanding and skills Early Years practitioners have acquired through their own professional experiences.

It was developed through practical experience and blending ideas gathered from the UK and internationally combined with the ideas and feedback from the Forest Kindergarten Feasibility Study<sup>4</sup> and pilot. This included:

- The use of fantasy characters, songs, stories and games in the Czech Republic and Sweden and the emphasis on cherishing nature with young children.
- The need for greater awareness of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code which is about exercising rights responsibly and using this to reframe thinking about perceived health and safety concerns.
- The need to consider how we support practitioners through the change process.
- The 3-day course being split into "People, Places and Activities" so that it dovetails with the suggestion made by Sir Patrick Geddes that the relationships within and between these variables is where learning accrues as advocated in *Outdoor Learning: Practical Guidance for Teachers and Practitioners in Scotland*.
- The long-term success of Fife Council who established Nature Kindergartens in many local authority-run settings back in 2006-07.



When setting up the pilot, we wanted an open model for practitioners to buy into, and which encouraged settings to liaise with local people and organisations. By raising the awareness and seeking advice, this can strengthen relationships between settings and the local organisations. It also meant that children could meet local people doing a much greater variety of job beyond the traditional school support roles and service providers.

### Other aspects of the pilot include:

#### 1) Any site

The Wee Green Spaces has adapted the Forest Kindergarten training module to enable practitioners use any local greenspace, not just woodland. The settings used a site appraisal form to consider the suitability of their chosen sites. We wanted to demonstrate:

- The breadth of green space possibilities that exist within Aberdeen City and to have ones with a sense of wildness or more natural feel.
- That in any part of Aberdeen there is a nearby greenspace which can be freely accessed by children and their families for play, rest and as public place of value.

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<sup>4</sup>[http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/ForestKindergartenReportApril09.pdf/\\$FILE/ForestKindergartenReportApril09.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/ForestKindergartenReportApril09.pdf/$FILE/ForestKindergartenReportApril09.pdf)

## *2) Any setting*

An open invite went to all local authority nurseries, schools and partner provider early years and childcare settings. There was no selection process. We wanted buy in from the establishments. We outlined the commitment needed and requested approval from the head teacher or manager of the establishment. See Appendix 2.

## *3) Any age or class*

Provided the children were aged between 3 and 6 years, then the teacher or Early Years practitioner was welcome to attend the training sessions. This ensured we had a spread of provision which included a P2 class and the Pre-school Additional Support Needs Nursery. Three schools had classes from both P1 and Nursery. This ensures continuity of provision across the transition. See Appendix 3.

## *4) Additional generic support material and visits*

In addition to the provision of a handbook of practical advice and guidance, extra support was provided through:

- Support visits for each setting involved.
- Training split into 7 twilight sessions so that supply cover was not needed.
- The development of generic risk-benefit assessments and site handbooks that dovetail with the Aberdeen City Council Educational Visits Policy and Guidance.
- The development of micro-routines to assist practitioners in creating safe routines which facilitate children's independence
- Audit advice about back linking established routines to the Early Level experiences and outcomes
- Provision of a resource rucksack at the end of the year-long training, containing portable seats, high visibility guy ropes, a hammock with micro-ropes, tarp, water container, puppet, book of ideas, waterproof kit bags and a bothy shelter bag.

## *5) The involvement of partner organizations in the training and support*

The support of local organisations and different Council departments was crucial to the success of the project. Different people proved to be valuable sources of advice and ideas.



## *6) Using the Early Years Collaborative Model for Improvement*

The project also became part of the Early Years Collaborative Model for Improvement. We decided to chart the number of children getting off-site on a weekly basis to see if the project was effective (See Appendix 4) At the start of the run chart in mid-November, no setting was managing this on a weekly or fortnightly basis. We wanted it to be used to track when groups were going out or not going out so that we could provide prompt support. When submitting their weekly statistics, some practitioners also gave a brief account of what happened.

# Wee Green Spaces Pilot Project Outcomes

## Short-term aims

### 1. To raise awareness of and use of local greenspace by Early Years settings

The awareness and use of local greenspace by Early Years settings involved has been considerably increased. This is evidenced by the run chart in Appendix 4.

#### *Using the Early Years Collaborative Model for Improvement*

Using the Plan-Do-Study-Act model enabled the Early Years Team to see the clear rise in the numbers of children getting the opportunity to be outdoors and beyond their designated outdoor space. It was a useful prompt to make contact with all the settings involved. It helped Early Years Team keep track on the practitioners' levels of enthusiasm. One nursery started to struggle to get out owing to staffing issues. However a brainstorming session between Juliet and the management team helped get the group back out again and have another six visits in the summer term.



The improvement model also enabled reflection about the Wee Green Spaces as a whole. All the settings involved ensured children had repeated and regular visits beyond the designated outdoor space to either part of the school grounds or local greenspace.

The quantity and nature of the experiences differed widely. This was in part due to the location of the settings and the quality of the nearby greenspace. Integrating the Wee Green Spaces pilot with other improvement priorities involved decision-making by the settings.

Another matter was working out the balance between free play and structured activities at the greenspace. For some nurseries, the experience of getting to the greenspace and freely exploring its unique characteristics kept the children continuously engaged and involved. Other practitioners found that a springboard activity into free play worked better. The Primary 1 and 2 classes developed their sessions to allow a balance between free play and specific activities, as outlined by a P1 teacher at Cults Primary School on her first woodland session, which lasted one hour:

*We had our leading stick and Sammy Squirrel showing the way, which the children enjoyed and kept us in order walking over. We also found some rubbish and dog poo that we cleaned up on our way.*

*We focused on signs of spring whilst walking to the forest and then got into a circle and revisited the rules that were explained before going out.*

*We then played the game "Primary One where are you?" This highlighted boundaries and*



*the children always being able to see me. We numbered the children 1 or 2 and when Number 1 went to hide, Number 2 had to find them and bring them back to our area.*

*Next, children were given time to explore the area and look for anything interesting or that they wanted to look closer at. Lots of children found holes that they decided were for rabbits and we found some spider webs and children found a ladybird on the wall. Children also climbed and walked over a small wall that they were really excited to explore.*

*We then gathered together. All children were permitted by parents to use hand wipes before snack and they sat on the special mats that they had carried in their rucksacks. Whilst children drank their water and ate snacks, I read the story "The Gruffalo". Afterwards, we packed up, took all of our rubbish and headed back to school.*

The main reason for a group or class failing to get off-site was either staffing shortages in partner provider settings or a lack of suitable volunteers or parents to assist in local authority establishments. However, many of the settings were very creative in their approaches to accessing additional helpers:

- Fersands Family Centre fully involved parents during every step of their efforts and journey. All parents and carers actively assist from being up for going to the Cruickshank Botanic Garden to collect their child. Prior to the Wee Green Space project, only one child and their parent had visited the place. By July 2014, every parent and child had visited the Botanic Garden at least once, outwith the nursery sessions there.
- Several settings invited Juliet to meet the parents and give a presentation. Some organised site visits so the parents and children could see what was happening.
- Students from B.Ed. courses at Aberdeen University were asked to volunteer. This approach was unsuccessful but worth a try.
- Retired members of staff volunteered and/or keen community members were utilised by some settings
- Fernielea P1 teachers got particularly adept at coping with last minute let-downs and still ensured activities took place in the school grounds when this happened. They also took a broader approach, integrating greenspace visits with their local area projects and visited local shops and a church.
- Charleston Primary held a special outdoor event one weekend at the start of their health week so that families could participate in a range of outdoor activities and find out more about how the school is planning to embed learning outdoors.

The ratios of children to adults varied across the setting in line with the availability of adults and the needs of the children along with the context of the nursery and the nature of the greenspace.

Establishing the routines and procedures for off-site visits to occur with larger child to adult ratios can work in some situations. For example a ratio of 1 adult to 6 or 8 children is not uncommon with some outdoor nurseries. This was built into the risk assessments and procedures for managing off-site visits with Covebay Kindergarten who have a very experienced practitioner.



At St Peter's School, the P1 class managed 4 out of 6 planned visits to the Botanic Gardens. During two sessions there was heavy downpour and the class teacher switched the planned activities to the school's garden space and still went outside. A flexible approach like this helps children acclimatise to being outside in all weathers and enjoying the experience.

Another insight gained from the submissions was comments that were predominantly activity focused rather than learning focused. Perhaps this is necessary at the beginning of change when everyone is establishing routines which we had advocated being undertaken through stories, songs and games. However this will require more thought and follow-up. Real change does take substantial time and cannot happen all at once.

### **The use of the micro-routines sheets**

Planning and getting off-site requires planning and preparation. When Juliet accompanied groups on their Wee Green Spaces visits, she observed that attention to the little details made a big impact on the independence and safety of a child when out and about. For example, encouraging children to get their own backpack ready rather than have an adult do this, gives children genuine responsibility and they value the backpack, its contents and want to look after it. So a series of micro-routines sheets were developed as illustrated in Appendix 5.

Not every setting chose to use these. However those that did, welcomed the structure and how it made them reflect on what they had to do:

*"We are focusing on establishing routines and allowing the children to become familiar with the setting. This is going well. A particular "wow" moment for the staff was after a challenge for one child to get appropriate clothing on. When we arrived at the Secret Garden, he gave a beautiful smile, clapped his hands and was able to explore freely."* EY Practitioner, PASN Service

## **2. For local organisations, parents and groups to work in partnership with Early Years settings to facilitate off-site visits**

Local organisations, parents and groups worked in partnership with Early Years settings to facilitate off-site visits. Many organisations and people have been helpful in supporting and providing advice. In particular:

- **Aberdeen City Ranger Service.** The rangers spent a day walking and identifying possible sites with Juliet Robertson in July 2013. They have been the first port of call regarding who owns different sites and who to liaise with. They have first hand knowledge of issues to do with people and wildlife. A ranger co-delivered one twilight training session.
- **Aberdeen City Environmental Services.** A number of staff have been involved such as the dog warden, a performance and development officer and the grounds maintenance officer. For example, the officer whose remit



includes the public beaches has offered free litter picking packs to the settings and the dog warden has made extra visits to some sites.

- **Aberdeen Harbour** who manages the Breakwater Beach below high tide level.
- **Adventure Aberdeen** staff have helped with queries about the Educational Visits Policy for local authority establishments. They have made time to advise and share knowledge about risk assessments.
- **Creative STAR Learning Company**. By contracting out the training and support, the City Council were able to capitalise on the work undertaken previously by this social enterprise and the skills, knowledge and experience of Juliet Robertson.
- **Cruickshank Botanic Gardens**. The Curator has been proactive and genuinely welcoming. He ensures grounds staff know about the visits, and liaises directly with the settings. He has met parents, children and staff on their first visits. One twilight training session took place in the Botanic Garden and further twilights are planned for September 2014.
- **Donald Gray**, Aberdeen University assisted in putting a call out for B.Ed. students to volunteer.
- **Petra Babikova** – former manager of Mindstretchers' Whistlebrae Nature Kindergarten co-delivered two of the twilight training sessions.

### 3. To contribute to the *Year of Natural Scotland in 2013*

The twilight training sessions used different greenspace around the City, enabling participants to directly see the range of habitats and natural heritage within Aberdeen. As a result, two settings took had their annual end-of-year outings to different greenspace sites from their own local one. This is a meaningful celebration of *Year of Natural Scotland*.

One of the twilight training sessions run jointly with Aberdeen City Ranger Service focused on plant and animal identification as well as awareness raising of our rights and responsibilities under the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

The impact of visiting greenspace on a regular basis did raise children's awareness of the natural world. For example, at Cruickshank Botanic Garden, when the children enter the garden, immediately their conversations switch to comments about the changes they could see in the plants, "*There's purple now!*" The local radio station SHMU FM recorded children from Fersands Family Centre in the Botanic Gardens in April 2014. The comments by the children demonstrate their ability to acquire knowledge about the natural world through playing there.



#### **4. To use the project as an opportunity to focus on the Social Studies Experiences and Outcomes at an Early Years Level**

The Social Studies Experiences and Outcomes were looked at within the audit of experiences and outcomes. It was found that some require specific attention – to assume coverage simply by getting out and about is insufficient. One key next step is to encourage this cohort of settings to consider activities with their groups which involve caring for their greenspace. This will involve further liaison with the landowners and managers.

#### **Long-term aims**

The long-term aims will be reported on in due course. Further steps towards these aims are considered at the end of the report.

## Other Outcomes and Reflections

### Quality of the chosen sites



Some settings visited the same place each time; others chose a variety of nearby places. Even places which may not appear obviously wild are being used and enjoyed by the children and accompanying adults. They contrast with the outdoor space and many children look forward to their weekly visits, counting the days between the Wee Green Space sessions. The Pre-school Additional Support Needs (PASN) Service site was discovered by their children on one of their earliest visits to Seaton Park.

No site is free of incidents or issues, but the determination of practitioners to find solutions that enable children to use their wee green space has been the key factor here. Positive dialogue with landowners and managers has helped. For example, Jumping Jacks Nursery use an urban park frequented by dog users. Initially there were significant amounts of dog mess to contend with. However the dog warden has been proactive and the nursery created clear procedures around managing the dog mess. The positive aspect is that children learn to cope with hazards which are present in their environment.

The Cruickshank Botanic Garden is a particularly reassuring site for practitioners who are unused to working outside. The Aboretum is 3 acres of trees and meadows surrounded by fence and walls. There is only one entrance so children can explore freely. There are ground staff who are visibly present and the Zoology Building has toilets. There are clear rules for visitor use so this helps when setting routines and expectations with the groups of children.

The beaches in Aberdeen are all very different in character. As a consequence, each one requires very careful planning and preparation. Whilst one partner provider nursery has used the Breakwater Beach, it is recognised that further work in collaboration with the City Ranger Services and Adventure Aberdeen is needed to ensure that local authority settings comply with the Educational Visits Policy and Guidance.



## Getting to and from the sites

Distance from a greenspace can be perceived as a challenge in an urban area like Aberdeen City. Only Maisie's Children Centre and the PASN Service have access to a minibus. There were a number of approaches used:

- Fersands Family Centre put in place a system which involved the parents collecting or dropping off their children directly from the Botanic Gardens during the day. The morning group walks to the Botanic Gardens. The afternoon group walks back. The total distance is approximately 1 mile and takes the group just over 30 minutes.
- Jumping Jacks Nursery use the Woodies which is 0.6 miles from their base. However the walk is as important as the Woodies. The children and staff make time to jump in puddles, observe the traffic, notice changes in the gardens and trees on the way to the Woodies. On the way home, a different route is taken and the children are accompanied by the primary school-aged children going to the after-school care.
- With the PASN Service groups, some children find the transition walk between the base and Seaton Park hard, especially on the way back. Rather than insist on one approach, time is made to ensure a choice of options are given and the children's views are listened to and acted upon. These include walking responsibly near an adult, holding an adult's hand, using a buggy or using reins. Time is also allocated to ensure that the pace of the walk is appropriate to the children's needs and at times the group do not stick closely together for this reason.



What is noticeable is the positive impact on the children of the walks:

- They develop the stamina to cope with the duration of the walks.
- They learn about crossing the roads and travelling safely.
- Staff use the walks as an opportunity to chat to the children about their interests and what is happening as they walked along.
- The children begin to recognise key landmarks and learn the layout of their local area.
- At Covebay, several elderly members of the community watch out for and greet the groups of children on a daily basis.
- The children are met by parents or parents would walk alongside the travelling Fersands group with younger children in buggies. This feels welcoming and develops a sense of belonging.
- The social interactions afforded by the act of walking to and from the site are high.
- The children enjoy wearing their backpacks and carrying their own kit.

## Mindset and determination of participants

The participants who experienced the greatest satisfaction and success about getting children outdoors and off-site were those who:

- Engaged in frequent positive dialogue with parents and partner organisations:  
*“Great news! Six of our families all went down to the Botanic Gardens over the Easter weekend including one parent who has done nothing but moan and say “I’m not walking down there.” She now realises it is closer than she thought and not “that bad a walk”. We are really pleased. We were also down there over the Easter holidays and the Twos Group joined us. They also loved it - staff, children and parents. It feels like we have made a lot of progress in such a short time.”* Fersands Family Centre, April 2014
- Who made sufficient time for the project and did not underestimate what was needed:  
*“After my previous trips to the garden I felt I needed to change the way I was to get ideas from the children for the garden as a lot of them had no idea what a garden was.”* Riverbank Nursery, February 2014
- Had a belief and a determination to succeed and this was actively supported by the management team: *“We are in the process of working through the risk assessments and check lists. I think Ana and Kelly were a little overwhelmed to begin with but we sat down and went through it and they are more confident at adding in the relevant bits.”* Jumping Jacks Nursery Manager
- Observed the impact on their children and parents and celebrated the success. For example, very early on it was apparent at the PASN Service about the benefits of the visits to Seaton Park:  
*“These sessions have been focusing on letting the children become familiar with the setting and becoming aware of their boundaries. It has been observed that these outdoor experiences are having a calming effect particularly with our children with Autism and it appears to be enabling them to be more receptive to learning. There has been more positive interaction, eye contact and initiating communication.”* February 2014
- Who clearly linked the visits to ongoing routines and practice in the nursery: *“Stephen Bly came today and we have now got a small turfed and bark chip area in our outdoor space.”* Fersands Family Centre, April 2014



A factor which requires more investigation is the acquisition of staff who have had previous work experience in a different setting where regular off-site visits had been established. So the question here is, does success breed success? For example:

- The PASN Service has a staff member who had participated in Young Explorer visits at Ashgrove Family Centre
- Covebay Kindergarten have a practitioner who used to work at Mindstretcher's Auchlone Nature Kindergarten. The week following her arrival, the number of off-site visits rose considerably and have remained significantly higher.
- Fersands Family Centre have a practitioner who used to work at Clentry Nursery in Fife, which has a very established use of local woods.
- Cults Primary School appointed a Principal Teacher who has undergone Forest School Level 3 training into the nursery and who had worked at Durris School in Aberdeenshire, which has an established use of a local forest.

Several practitioners have further diversified and developed their outdoor work. For example, one practitioner lead a morning's training session with her PASN Service colleagues to provide them with ideas and skills to develop their outdoor practice. The manager at Maisie's Children Centre was involved in setting up a woodland play scheme for children with autism during the summer.

## The value of weekly visits

The following observations demonstrate the value of visiting the same place on a weekly basis. The children can continue the learning experiences, picking up where they left off:

*"Once at the Woodies the children were collecting sticks and seeing what shapes, patterns and pictures they could make out of them. One of the children found a very long stick and starting using it as a horse and a few of the other children joined in. The children took some of the sticks back to the nursery so they could continue the fun."* 18.3.14

*"...Following on from the fun they had with sticks the children were taking shorter sticks to see how many of them would make a metre. Also the big stick they had so much fun with last week was still there so the children decided this time before they leave they would hide it somewhere and see if it was still there next week."* 25.3.14

*"As soon as the children got to the Woodies they couldn't wait to see if their big stick was still there and it was! They began taking turns to hide the stick and see who could find it. They also played lots of other games such as hide and seek and duck duck goose."* 1.4.14





## Impact on practice at each setting

Practitioners involved in the Wee Green Spaces project were encouraged to consider the off-site visits holistically and to link the learning happening with other events, activities and happenings back in each establishment.



*Fersands Family Centre Outdoor Space*



*The Aboretum at Cruickshank Botanic Garden*

During the course of the year, it was evident from photo displays, big books and the changes to the outdoor space, that this was happening at every setting. The changes primarily involved efforts to naturalise outdoor spaces as children brought back treasures such as sticks and clearly valued the contact with nature. Examples include:

- Jumping Jacks Nursery children ended up creating bird feeding stations and linked the nature observations between the Woodies and their outdoor space
- Charleston Nursery further developed their woodland strip at the border of their school grounds.
- Fernielea Primary 1 classes developing a natural space in their school grounds where the grass has been left to grow.
- Covebay Kindergarten have undertaken a greater range of adventurous outdoor activities in their outdoor space including cooking snack over a firebowl.
- Maisie's Children's Centre put in a spacious sandpit and rockpool splash zone into their refurbished outdoor area providing a direct link to the beach experiences.



*Maisie's Children Centre – Before*



*... and After (Photos ©Pauline Smith)*

## 2014-15 Priorities and Future Improvements

Aberdeen City Council Early Years Team remains committed to ensuring that more children have opportunities to access their local greenspace on a frequent and regular basis and experience the benefits this brings to their learning and well-being. This will be achieved through:

- Continuing to support the current settings to fully embed the Wee Green Spaces visits so that they have experienced a full year.
- Formally seeking participant's perspectives on the training and project to inform the next cohort of settings coming on board by November 2014.
- Developing the capacity of Aberdeen City to run the Wee Green Space projects through identifying suitable practitioners to attend "training the trainers" course developed with the Forestry Commission Scotland and the Forest Kindergarten and support Juliet with supporting the next cohort of Wee Green Spaces.
- Continuing to share ideas and feedback into the future of Forest Kindergarten work in collaboration with the Forestry Commission Scotland.
- Considering further the use of beaches by local authority run establishments and to expand the number of greenspace sites used.
- Developing opportunities for all Early Years practitioners to access training on using local greenspace through training sessions, regardless of whether they are part of the pilot project:
  - *Giants, witches and elves*: exploring the role of fantasy and literacy to help children connect to nature
  - *Who's afraid of the big bad wolf*: Nature-based maths play and using greenspace visits as a context for maths.
  - *Happiness is a hammock*: Looking at how basic science concepts are covered through the use of hammocks and routines in nature play.
  - *Minibeasts and muckle bugs*: Developing empathy with animals through wildlife discoveries in greenspace.
  - *Exploring art and creativity in greenspaces*
  - *Engaging parents with outdoor play*.
- Developing a nature kindergarten approach at Ashgrove Family Centre as part of the Me2 provision for vulnerable children and a second similar provision in partnership with Camphill Aberdeen and Nature Nurture.



This pilot continues to run and is much a learning experience for the trainers, partner organisations and Aberdeen City Council Early Years Team as well as the practitioners and teachers involved. Examples include:

- Settings not being permitted to begin Wee Green Space visits until all the paperwork has been submitted including risk benefit assessments, site appraisals, handbook and evidence of communication with the landowner or manager of the site.
- Greater focus on the learning which is taking place rather than activities.
- Continuing to expect the practitioners to plan, lead and undertake the Wee Green Space visits and not rely on an outdoor professional or expert to be present. This has been very empowering for the staff involved.
- Working in conjunction with Forestry Commission Scotland and the Forest Kindergarten project to continue to share ideas and mutually learn from each others' programmes.
- To examine ways of enabling the children to undertake environmental stewardship activities associated with their wee green space.
- To review the Wee Green Spaces project alongside the Learning for Sustainability GTCS Standard: Professional values and personal commitment aspects.
- To remember that everything will take twice as long as originally planned.



*“Just to confirm that P2G went to the woods on Friday 25<sup>th</sup> April. 29 children, 4 parent helpers and myself. The weather was a bit rainy at times and the ground was wet and slippery but a good experience as we recapped on safety, boundaries, etc. We talked about, and used, the bothy bag and put up a giant tarpaulin shelter. Some of the children started to make their own shelters. We also did a song about litter during a story. We then picked up the litter with litter pickers and gloves. Some children then continued to pick up litter in the woods with a parent helper and we took it back to school to dispose of.*

*I felt that we are starting to build on skills already established and that the children were familiar and quite confident in the environment. Some were venturing further away and were becoming involved in their own interests and learning individually, in pairs and in groups. My parent helpers were also great. It's the In-service next Friday but we have 7 more outdoor sessions planned this term. Thanks.”* Teacher, Cults Primary

# APPENDIX 1:

## National Commentary about Nature Kindergartens and the Benefits of Outdoor Play in Greenspace or Natural Environments

### **The Early Years Framework** (Scottish Government, 2009)<sup>5</sup>

Nature Kindergartens are highlighted as a medium term priority

*“Nurseries and schools supporting outdoor learning and outdoor play. Trying out innovative approaches such as nature kindergartens is a medium term priority.”* Section 5: Priorities for Action – medium term priority, p26.

The Framework also recognises the need for children to be able to access free play opportunities in their local area:

*“Developing play spaces, and play opportunities for children and removing barriers to play is therefore a priority. This has wider implications for development planning and particularly provision of open space and green space.”* p9.

### **Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning** (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2010)<sup>6</sup>

This document provides a continuous rationale for outdoor experiences in a range of places. Some notable quotes:

“In the light of outdoor learning becoming more ‘regular and frequent’, current practice will evolve as more use is made of school grounds and local areas.” (P10)

“There are associated health benefits to learning outdoors. Research indicates that the use of greenspace or ‘green exercise’ improves health. In particular, learning outdoors generally results in increased levels of physical activity. In addition, interacting with greenspace (walking, gardening, etc) improves emotional wellbeing and mental health.” (P15)

“At local authority level, collaborative working and strategic planning across services is essential to developing or building upon an authority-wide plan for children and young people to have greater access to quality outdoor learning experiences.” (P25)

“At an individual level, those directly responsible for learning are often best placed to plan and deliver learning experiences outdoors...on a more regular and frequent basis in the local community and beyond.” (P25)

### **Good Places, Better Health** (Scottish Government, 2011)<sup>7</sup>

This report considers how to plan and deliver new and more effective ways of considering place and health, in order to identify what is needed to create places that nurture health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities. It identifies the characteristics of place and states “‘Good’ places are more likely to produce healthy, happy, productive people.”(P2)

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/257007/0076309.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/images/cfeoutdoorlearningfinal\\_tcm4-596061.pdf](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/images/cfeoutdoorlearningfinal_tcm4-596061.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0039/00398236.pdf>

Two of its vision statements (P7) link directly to the Wee Green Places Pilot Project

- Children play, explore and relax outdoors in streets, parks, green places, open spaces and have contact with nature in their everyday lives.
- The presence of children outdoors is welcomed, supported and valued by parents and the wider community.

Its recommendations (P14) include:

“We wish to see a Scotland where neighbourhoods are safe, appealing, support a healthy diet and have outdoor spaces that are well used, valued and respected. Activities consistent with this vision would be:

- National and local support and encouragement for activities that use the local outdoor environment
- The provision of spaces suitable for all age groups, including teenagers
- Communities empowered in the management and use of outdoor areas”

“There is now strong evidence to demonstrate that access to green, natural or semi-natural outdoor spaces is a significant dimension of good health. This is because it is associated with increased levels of physical activity as well as stress relief and enhanced mental wellbeing.

Green spaces can be therapeutic for children and can help them deal with mental health issues. They are also good for children’s physical activity levels, and development of social and interpersonal skills such as listening, negotiation, problem solving and self esteem.

The evidence indicates that children who play in natural and greenspaces develop a life long association with nature that continues into adulthood and creates a virtuous cycle.

To enable this association to develop it is important that greenspaces are close to the home, within a range of 300 metres and that young children spend more time in them.

It is therefore imperative that we create the right physical and cultural conditions to increase children’s access to nature and natural outdoor spaces, and provide the potential for children to have access to greenspace in their everyday lives. This is a crucial component to our wish to see a substantial increase in the amount of time children spend outdoors in their everyday lives.” (P16)

### **Outdoor Learning: practical guidance, support and ideas for teachers and practitioners in Scotland** (Education Scotland, 2011)<sup>8</sup>

This document has a specific Early Years section which states:

“Quality practice in outdoor learning through play is often characterised by ...opportunities for children to experience natural places which give a feeling of wildness through regular and frequent off-site visits to woodlands, beaches or other areas of greenspace – this also includes time to visit and get to know the local community, its people and its services.”  
(p16)

### **Sciences 3-18 Curriculum Impact Project** (Education Scotland, 2012)<sup>9</sup>

Outdoor learning is recognised for its contribution to improving science:

“Staff across all sectors are increasingly using the local environment and wider community and are extending partnerships to enhance and support learning well within the sciences. Outdoor learning in particular is emerging as a strong feature of learning in the sciences”  
(p20)

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/OutdoorLearningSupport\\_tcm4-675958.pdf](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/OutdoorLearningSupport_tcm4-675958.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/Science3to18v4\\_tcm4-731895.pdf](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/Science3to18v4_tcm4-731895.pdf)

“In a pre-school nature kindergarten, the children spend almost all of their time outdoors. This provides them with a rich natural environment which is used very effectively to promote early science skills and develop children’s interests in living things.” (p25)

### **Social Studies Curriculum Impact Project** (Education Scotland, 2012)<sup>10</sup>

“In early years education, there is increasing good practice in using outdoor learning to encourage effective cross curricular work as well as contributing to health and wellbeing.”(P9)

“Staff are increasingly using the local environment and wider community for learning and are extending partnerships to support learning within social studies. This is engaging learners more effectively.” (P33)

### **Learning for Sustainability – The Report of the One Planet Schools Working Group** (The Scottish Government, 2012)<sup>11</sup>

This report has considerable commentary on learning outdoors. Below are some key points:

“This is a Scotland where learners are educated through their landscape and understand their environment, culture and heritage; where they develop a sense of place and belonging to their local, national and global community, and have a deep connection to the natural world. Here, learners will understand the significance of their choices, now and in the future.” (p6)

“The Working Group examined the concept of One Planet Schools in a holistic sense, giving consideration as to how sustainable development education, global citizenship and outdoor learning can be woven together to assist in the delivery of other high level educational priorities including raising attainment, improving behaviour, supporting inclusion and promoting health and wellbeing.” (p7)

“Our intention is to ensure that learning relating to sustainable development, global citizenship and outdoor learning is experienced in a transformative way by every learner in every school across Scotland.” (p8)

“As many practitioners are discovering, sustainable development education, global citizenship and outdoor learning provide motivational, relevant, challenging and creative learning experiences which engage learners and improve behaviour, attitudes and attainment - a view supported by a growing body of evidence and research<sup>i</sup>. In addition to this, with regard to outdoor learning, direct experience of the landscape and the natural and cultural heritage of Scotland helps all young people and teachers understand the Earth’s systems, develop respect and care for our planet, create a personal connection with the environment<sup>ii</sup> and, as recent research has shown<sup>iii</sup>, improves their physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing. As such, outdoor learning<sup>12</sup> is a key aspect of learning for sustainability and should be a core pedagogical approach in its delivery.” (p13)

“Recommendation 1 All learners should have an entitlement to learning for sustainability

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<sup>10</sup> [http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/SocialStudies3to18\\_tcm4-731894.pdf](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/SocialStudies3to18_tcm4-731894.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Schools/curriculum/ACE/OnePlanetSchools/LearningforSustainabilityreport>

<sup>12</sup> This refers to Outdoor Learning as defined in *Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning* using locations including school grounds, the local area, day-long experiences and those farther afield including outdoor centres and national parks. Ideally all such locations should model best practice in their approach and facilities.

As part of this entitlement, outdoor learning should be a regular, progressive curriculum-led experience for all learners (1.1)

As part of this entitlement, learners should have active curricular learning experiences that develop their understanding of the inter-relationship of environment, society, economy and inequity, of the ecological limits to development and the interdependence of ecological and human wellbeing.” (1.3) (p14)

“...This will require a renewed focus on teacher education to enable practitioners and school leaders to develop the values, attitudes, knowledge, skills and confidence required to embed learning for sustainability within the curriculum, within their approaches to learning, including outdoors and off-campus, within the way the school campus is managed, within the culture of the school and within the way the school community works and reaches out to the wider world.” (p15)

“Learners need to experience belonging to groups; actively protecting, conserving and transforming their physical environment; building relationships with local people, and engaging in genuinely reciprocal partnerships across generations and nations. This fosters attitudes of love and care, and a high regard for interdependence and collective wellbeing.

Learning of this nature requires schools to be outward looking; viewing the school as a valued part of the community, and the community, in its widest sense, as a valued part of the school. The manifestation of this is the forging of partnerships ‘beyond the school gate.

Key to this is the recognition of parents and carers as partners in learning. Establishing collaborative relationships between parents, carers and school staff with regard to the school’s culture, ethos, values and aspirations for its pupils is an essential aspect of a whole school approach to learning for sustainability. Fostering productive relationships with parents and carers has long been viewed as vital to a child’s learning and an essential part of building a vibrant, successful school.” (p19)

### **Play Strategy for Scotland: Our Vision**<sup>13</sup>

“When children have access to natural spaces for play, it fosters a sense of close connection with and respect for, nature. Staff in early years have an important role to play in maximising outdoor play experiences for children. Many learning establishment practitioners recognise the potential of the outdoor environment and use it as creatively and positively as possible.” P18

“Recent years have seen positive developments for play opportunities in Scottish schools and early years settings. Approaches such as nature and forest kindergartens typify how free play in nature can be integrated into the curriculum on a frequent and regular basis throughout the year, in almost all weathers.

*Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning* encourages the creative use of the outdoors as a context for helping children and young people to develop their skills for learning, working and living in a complex and changing world. Outdoor free play offers a powerful way of providing some of these enriching outdoor experiences on a daily basis.” P19

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0042/00425722.pdf>

“As a society we need to encourage children and young people to spend time outside and to start exploring the fantastic and often wild and open space which Scotland has in abundance, be it in the local town, city or countryside. Children playing outdoors is something we want to see happening much more in all outdoor spaces including green space, parks and streets that are valued by the community.” P20

“In particular, daily contact with nature and playing in natural spaces has additional benefits and promotes greater use of these community green spaces as adults.” P20

“Avoiding the outdoors because of fear of traffic, concerns of personal safety or even the weather can impact on opportunities to play. Fears for children’s safety have at times resulted in restricted access to outdoor play. Whilst the risks are real, the perception of them is often higher than the reality and should be balanced against the benefits of outdoor play. We know that learning to deal with challenges will help to build children’s resilience into adult life. Learning to enjoy the outdoors in our climate and manage risks and challenges will help children and young people grow and develop into healthy confident adults.” P22

### **Play Strategy for Scotland: Our Action Plan<sup>14</sup>**

The overarching outcome for nurseries and schools:

“All children and young people enjoy high quality play opportunities particularly outdoor free play in stimulating spaces with access to nature on a daily basis in early learning and childcare, nursery and school.” P15

The overarching outcome for play in the community:

“All children and young people have sufficient time and space (physical and social) for playing within their community and have contact with nature in their everyday lives. Play is valued, encouraged and supported in communities...”

### **Teaching Scotland’s Future (Scottish Government, 2011)<sup>15</sup>**

This document advocates a move towards more action research collaborative models of CPLD rather than just one off training sessions without further support measures in place. Specific recommendations include:

*Recommendation 33:* The balance of cpd activities should continue to shift from set-piece events to more local, team-based approaches which centre around self evaluation and professional collaboration, and achieve an appropriate blend of tailored individual development and school improvement.

*Recommendation 34:* Teachers and schools should plan and evaluate cpd more directly on its intended impact on young people’s progress and achievements.

*Recommendation 37:* At the outset of any cpd activity, the intended impact on young people, and the aspects of the relevant professional standard the teacher will improve as a result of the activity, should be clear.

Finally, the benefits of nature kindergartens are being highlighted in inspection reports. For example, Mindstretchers Auchlone Nature Kindergarten report<sup>16</sup> and Cowgate Under 5’s Centre<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0043/00437132.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/337626/0110852.pdf>



# APPENDIX 2: Information and Invite to Participate in the Wee Green Spaces Project

Dear Early Years Practitioner

During 2013-14 session, the Early Years team are piloting a “Wee Green Spaces Project.” It aims to help early years settings and classes develop the habit of using local greenspace on a frequent and regular basis. It fits nicely with the focus on the social studies experiences and outcomes and the *Year of Natural Scotland*. It also meets some of the recommendations of the *Learning for Sustainability* report.

Partner providers, local authority nurseries, ASN and P1 classes are all invited to participate. This will ensure cohesion between these sectors. If a school wishes to involve P1 and nursery staff then this is particularly helpful in terms of transition.

What is important is that you are able to access a suitable area of greenspace. This might be the beach, a nearby wood or another place with a sense or feeling of wildness about it. Ideally this will be within walking distance unless your setting has access to a minibus.

The other important matter is that you have the genuine support of your manager or head teacher. In the information below, there is a section about the school/setting commitment which gives an indication of what is involved here. It is substantial. Please read it carefully and discuss with your head teacher/manager before jumping on board!

Juliet Robertson from Creative STAR Learning Company will be leading the project on behalf of Aberdeen City Early Years Service. Fiona Thomson will be the Early Years team contact.

At this stage no commitment is needed. If your class or setting is interested in being part of this pilot, then you are invited to attend a meeting at 4pm on Monday 24<sup>th</sup> at Woodside Primary School. Here you will have an opportunity to ask questions, find out more information such as twilight training dates and places, etc.

Many thanks.

Juliet Robertson  
Creative STAR Learning Company  
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<sup>16</sup> [http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/AuchloneNatureKinderIns20110705\\_tcm4-704339.pdf](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/AuchloneNatureKinderIns20110705_tcm4-704339.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/CowgateUnder5sCentreIns110314\\_tcm4-827605.pdf](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/CowgateUnder5sCentreIns110314_tcm4-827605.pdf)

## APPENDIX 3: SETTINGS INVOLVED IN THE WEE GREEN SPACE PROJECT AND THEIR ACTIVITY

<b>Charleston Primary School</b>	<b>Nursery – am and pm classes (&gt;50 children) P1 class (24 children)</b>	<b>School grounds beyond designated outdoor space which includes a strip of woodland. Aiming to use Cove Community Woodland.</b>
<p>The Wee Green Spaces project is part of a current whole school focus on outdoor learning. The nursery have an outdoor space and have also identified and cleared part of the boundary woodland area to create a “wee green space” within their grounds. As part of the Health Week in the middle of June, the morning nursery went to their identified off-site space with parents. There was a whole school outdoor learning fun day held at the weekend following this event with lots of outdoor activities in the grounds.</p>		
<b>Covebay Kindergarten</b>	<b>Pre-school am and pm (up to 15 per session)</b>	<b>The Park, The Nest, The Field</b>
<p>Covebay Kindergarten has a highly committed staff member who takes a group off-site most days of up to 15 children. They use several areas in the local vicinity. The choice of location depends upon the children’s interests, the weather, time and staff ratios. The long term aims are to have longer sessions where children can walk down and spend time at the beach, having lunch there and to encourage more staff to take groups off-site.</p>		
<b>Cults Primary School</b>	<b>Nursery – 2 classes (70) Primary 1 – 2 classes (48) Primary 2 – 1 class (29)</b>	<b>Woodland over the road from the school</b>
<p>The nursery classes alternate visits to the woods every Monday. This means that every child has an opportunity to participate once a fortnight. The P1 and P2 classes go out weekly. The woodland is spacious enough to accommodate 2 classes at once whilst giving seclusion.</p>		
<b>Fernielea Primary School</b>	<b>Nursery – 2 classes (80) Primary 1 – 2 classes (40)</b>	<b>The Burnie – mixed parkland with a burn running through it.</b>
<p>The nursery classes have had 2 visits to The Burnie in March and June. Their end-of-year visit was to Covebay Community Woodlands with 80 children. The nursery aim to ensure The Burnie is used on a regular basis next year. The P1 classes have been doing local off-site visits linked to project work since January 2013. This has included urban sites of interest such as local churches, hospital and shops as well as The Burnie. They also use the school grounds as a back up when insufficient parent volunteers are available for an off-site visit.</p>		
<b>Fersands Family Centre</b>	<b>Pre-school class (24 children)</b>	<b>Cruikshank Botanic Garden – The Aboretum</b>
<p>The morning session children arrive at the Family Centre and immediately leave and walk down to the Aboretum. The children are collected from Botanic Garden at the end of the</p>		

<p>morning by their parents. The afternoon session begins at the Botanic Gardens where parents drop their children off. They walk back to the Family Centre at the end of their session where they are collected by their parents. The centre is just under one mile from the Aboretum and the walk takes around half an hour.</p>		
<b>Jumping Jacks Nursery</b>	<b>Pre-school class (about 9 children each week)</b>	<b>The Woodies – urban park</b>
<p>The group walk to the Woodies one afternoon per week immediately after lunch. Their route is along Anderson Drive, one of the busiest roads in Aberdeen. On the way back, the group collects children from the local primary school who attend the afterschool club at the nursery. It is a round trip of 1.2 miles.</p>		
<b>Maisie's Children's Centre</b>	<b>Pre-school children (group of 4 per week)</b>	<b>Breakwater Beach</b>
<p>The minibus is used to access the Breakwater Beach. 4 children and 2 staff go in blocks which are rotated. The children were involved in rescuing a seal in December 2013. Visits began in November 2013.</p>		
<b>Pre-school ASN Service - Seaton</b>	<b>The pre-school class (10 children)</b>	<b>Seaton Park and other locations</b>
<p>The Pre-school Additional Support Needs Service use Seaton Park and the most popular destination is the "Secret Garden" – 3 walled gardens which were discovered by the children during one of the first outings to the park. The number of children visiting each week varies according to staff numbers and needs of the children. The aim is to enable every child to access the park on a weekly basis. Some children have multiple and profound needs. The nursery have also begun use Fittie Beach occasionally too.</p>		
<b>Riverbank Primary School</b>	<b>Nursery class (20 each session)</b>	<b>School grounds beyond designated outdoor space. Aiming to use Cruickshank Botanic Garden.</b>
<p>This nursery is developing a new patch of ground created on their refurbished school site. It is a long term project. At the end of the summer term, the staff, children and their parents all visited Cruickshank Botanic Garden and with the increased nursery hours, the nursery are exploring the use of this site.</p>		
<b>St Peter's RC Primary School</b>	<b>P1 class (17 children)</b>	<b>Cruickshank Botanic Garden</b>
<p>The P1 class visited the Botanic Gardens on a 6-week block in the summer term as part of their Fairy project. In autumn, the teacher is continuing the visits with a P1/2 class and a focus on dinosaurs. During inclement weather, the class uses the environmental garden in the school grounds.</p>		

# APPENDIX 4: Aberdeen City CPP PDSA and Run Chart

**Aim:** Increase the number of children participating in weekly 'off-site' outdoor learning experiences by 800% by June 2014

## What is the Objective of this particular PDSA test?

To create a measurement system to help us to track how many settings and children are participating in weekly 'off-site' outdoor learning experiences

## Why?

If we know which settings are going out and which aren't we can focus support promptly on those settings who are not managing to get going make the necessary sustainable changes to practice. It is a way of ensuring early intervention to those settings who need it and to acknowledge the efforts of those settings who are managing to get going with off-site visits.

Describe your first (or next) test of change	Person Responsible	When to be done	Where to be done
<p>To create a run chart for the Wee Green Spaces Project to record numbers of children involved in a WGS off-site visit each week.</p> <p>This will enable EY Officer and Juliet Robertson to see which settings are getting off-site and which are not managing to do so. We can then provide prompt support. We can evaluate effectiveness of this early intervention on increasing the likelihood of more settings embedding the off-site visits on a frequent and regular basis (e.g. once per week or fortnight). We can use findings to inform subsequent approaches to training and supporting settings as we know the common barriers which can stall progress.</p>	Juliet Robertson	Dec - Jun 14	Aberdeen City – WGS settings

## Plan

List the tasks needed to set up this test of change	Who is Responsible	When to be done	Where to be done
<p>Set up Excel sheet</p> <p>When visiting each setting explain the purpose of the data collection</p> <p>Agree system of reporting numbers, e.g. by text, by email or by phone</p>	Juliet Robertson	Nov 14	Aberdeen City – WGS settings CC

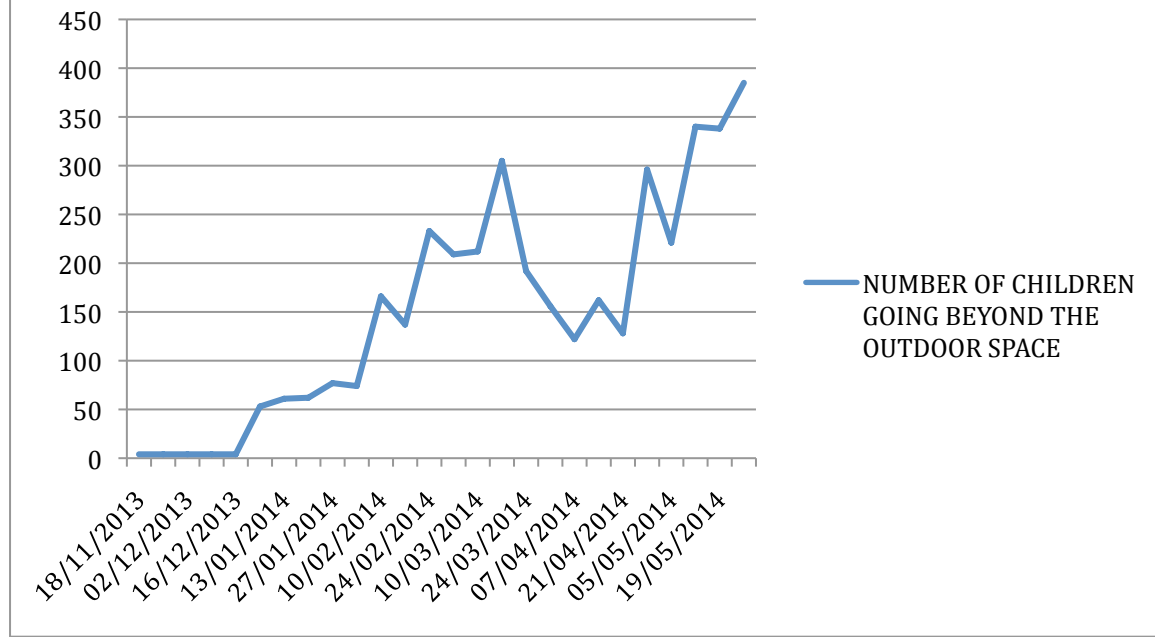
Predict what will happen when the test is carried out	What will determine if your prediction succeeds
<p>The run chart will demonstrate more children are getting off-site at least once per fortnight or week</p> <p>Some settings will manage to get the off-site visits happening frequently and regularly with minimum support (20%)</p> <p>Others will require some support but will get going (60%)</p> <p>Some will not manage to embed the changes (20%)</p>	<p>It will be interesting to see if those settings who have sent less staff or have attended less training sessions have less impetus to implement the changes to routines required.</p> <p>Some settings it could be barriers such as attracting volunteer helpers.</p>

### Do

Run chart data collected from the settings involved in the Wee Green Spaces Project:

DATE	18/11/2013	25/11/2013	02/12/2013	09/12/2013
NUMBER OF CHILDREN	4	4	4	4
DATE	16/12/2013	06/01/2014	13/01/2014	20/01/2014
NUMBER OF CHILDREN	4	53	61	62
DATE	27/01/2014	03/02/2014	10/02/2014	17/02/2014
NUMBER OF CHILDREN	77	74	166	137
DATE	24/02/2014	03/03/2014	10/03/2014	17/03/2014
NUMBER OF CHILDREN	233	209	212	305
DATE	24/03/2014	30/03/2014	07/04/2014	14/04/2014
NUMBER OF CHILDREN	192	156	122	162
DATE	21/04/2014	28/04/2014	05/05/2014	12/05/2014
NUMBER OF CHILDREN	128	296	221	340
DATE	19/05/2014	26/05/2014		
NUMBER OF CHILDREN	338	385		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3983</b>			

## NUMBER OF CHILDREN GOING BEYOND THE OUTDOOR SPACE



### **Study**

All settings managed to increase the amount of outdoor activity happening beyond the designated outdoor space on a weekly basis. 7 out of 10 settings put in place regular off-site visits to greenspace.

The settings began their activity at different times, which is why there is an increase as the weeks go by. The dip in April is the impact of the Easter holidays.

From the emails submitted to Juliet, aside from holidays, the biggest issue for settings was the availability of staff in nurseries which offered all-day care and the availability of parent helpers or volunteers for local authority nurseries and classes.

### **Act**

Please see the 2014-15 Priorities and Future Improvements on page 18 of the Wee Green Spaces report.

# APPENDIX 5: WEE GREEN SPACES MICRO ROUTINES CHECKLIST

The aim of these charts is to help early years practitioners know what routines need to be embedded as part of their off-site visits. The aim is to encourage children to be independent and secure in these steps. The more responsibility children can accept for their personal safety, the greater their confidence and ability to cope if faced with unexpected events when out and about.

Whilst the lists suggest routines, it is recommended that these are shared and discussed with the children who can make suggestions and help amend the strategies as needed. This will help create a collaborative learning environment which can be very empowering for children.

## *Think about what you say and do*

How these routines and expectations are shared with the children matters. As practitioners, we need to model appropriate routines and be aware of what we say and do and how this may come across to the children in our care.

## *Focus on one routine per visit*

This makes the observations and notes manageable. Recap the next week and move on, if possible to another routine. Go at the pace of your group and adjust your expectations accordingly. Revisit the micro-routines as needed.

## *Change the routines to suit the needs of your children*

These routines are not set in stone. Some statements may not be applicable. Some may need tweaking. With children who have additional support needs some of the statements may be micro-routines in themselves.

If a new routine is needed, e.g. being around fire, then add this to the sheet.

## *The recording system*

With the chart, you may wish to insert a child's name in the blank columns and use a key as suggested below.

- 1 – Not achieving quickly and easily
- 2 – Achieving with adult support
- 3 – Achieving independently
- 4 – Helps Peers

The "Helps Peers" aspect is important it is showing awareness of other people and taking action to support. As the saying goes, "Health and Safety is not simply paperwork. It is about effective communication, personal responsibility and looking out for each other."

Remember to consider how to transfer the information to each child's files and data protection matters when recording.

## *Back link to the curriculum*

Take time to consider how each micro routine links to Curriculum for Excellence. Once you know your children are managing a micro-routine independently then you can be assured that certain experiences and outcomes are being achieved through the routines. Always consider next steps too.

*Reflect upon what you observe. Consider:*

- What are the advantages of frequent and regular repeated visits to the same place in terms of developing children independence and personal safety skills?
- What positive outcomes do you notice for a child or children who are participating in the off-site visits?
- How can you further build upon and develop the quality of a child's learning experience during an off-site visit?

*Involving parents and carers*

With a bit of thought and adaptation, these micro-routines can also be shared with parents and carers. If this happens, take the time to follow up and find out how this benefited the family and in what ways.

## **Copyright**

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## We are aware of the sea

<b>Achievements Can each child...</b>	<b>Child C</b>
Work out if the sea conditions make it safe to paddle (calm water, warm weather, not too windy)	2
Ask if an adult if they want to enter the water	1
Wait until permission has been given	1
Know where they can paddle	1
Stay within the boundaries	2
Paddle no deeper than critical welly depth	1
Know if they have wet clothes which need changing	1
Come out of the water when requested to do so	2

<p><b>Curriculum links:</b>  <i>HWB 0-16A, SOC 0-12A</i></p>
<p><b>Comments, reflections and observations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• C enjoys paddling and initiates sessions. He comments on the waves and how big or small they are. He is interested in the tide moving in and out.</li> <li>• Adult support and perseverance needed in laying out boundaries is needed.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Possible lines of development:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group discussion about rules and asking permission before entering. Take a story-based approach.</li> <li>• Encourage C to take the lead in reminding others during safety talks/stories. This may help keep him focused. He is interested in the waves and tides so this is a useful entry point into safety reminders.</li> <li>• Purchase splashsuits for use in summer as currently only have winter suits.</li> </ul>

<sup>i</sup> Christie, B (2012). *The impact of outdoor learning experiences on attainment and behaviour in schools: a brief review of literature*. Prepared for the Forestry Commission Scotland.

<sup>ii</sup> Christie, B (2012). *The impact of outdoor learning experiences on attitudes to sustainability: A review of literature*. Prepared for the Field Studies Council.

<sup>iii</sup> See e.g. Bird, W. (2007) *Natural thinking*.  
[http://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/naturalthinking\\_tcm9-161856.pdf](http://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/naturalthinking_tcm9-161856.pdf)