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A NEW SOEC PROGRAMME

This project is supported by Scottish Natural Heritage



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# THE OUTDOORS – A NATURAL PLACE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH AUTISM

## End of Project Report

This **End of Project Report** describes an innovative **Transition to Work Programme** for young people with autistic spectrum diagnoses and is the result of a pilot programme developed by **Lothian Autistic Society (LAS)** and **Scottish Outdoor Education Centres (SOEC)** and made possible through funding from **Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)**. The pilot had the twin aims of developing employability skills and exploring the therapeutic value of the outdoors. This **End of Project Report** should be read in conjunction with the earlier **Interim Report** and the **Feedback from Parents**, copies attached.

### Executive Summary

This pilot project has been a great success achieving all of the outcomes sought and more. Feedback from participants and parents/carers shows the outcomes have exceeded expectations. The young participants developed a wide range of qualities and skills that will enhance their employability and have shown they can apply them in different and increasingly demanding contexts.

The participants demonstrated several changes toward more positive behaviours. Feedback confirms they became more relaxed, more positive and happier as the programme progressed both in and outwith the programme. From expressing apprehension or indifference to the outdoors at the start of the programme, they now acknowledge the outdoors as somewhere they like to be and that there are things they like to do in the outdoors.

Positive changes are manifest in various ways. One 18-year old caught a bus on their own for the first time. Another participant was happy even the day after an activity day. Another took the initiative to establish contact with a careers advisor. Yet another is doing well in a work experience setting. Parents/carers attribute these changes in large part to their participation in the programme.

Beyond the benefits and positive changes for the young people involved, there are other important lessons from this pilot. The programme highlights the vital importance of partnership working. The programme was forged in several early meetings between LAS and SOEC including meetings with senior managers; early engagement of SOEC staff at LAS play schemes; and in joint training on managing behaviours. This formed the basis for close collaboration throughout the programme.

The importance of this partnership should not be underestimated in the context of **Transition to Work**. All parents and carers would wish their children to gain work experience with other trusted adults who can establish work behaviour expectations such as time keeping, job commitment, importance of task completion etc. This is particularly important for young people with autism spectrum diagnoses. After several years in the security and routines of the school setting, there is a general concern among parents/carers and support groups that young people could 'retreat into their shell'; that the stresses of the new settings and unknown expectations will act as a brake on the young person 'going out into the world'. This programme has shown how structured experiences and challenges, focussed on the development of skills and linked through continuity and progression, can overcome concerns of inertia.

The partnership approach was essential for the success of the programme. Sharing skills, knowledge and experiences between SOEC and LAS staff and volunteers played a vital role in supporting the young people. LAS have been able to learn group management skills and methods for observing group dynamics from SOEC instructors. SOEC instructors have benefited greatly from the knowledge and experience that LAS have in working with young people with autism.

The programme also highlights how genuine partnership working can add value to the experience of the young participants. This is apparent in the way the programme achieved the balance between, on the one hand, empowerment of the young participants to take control over the direction of the programme, decisions about the activities they undertook, setting targets etc. and on the other hand, them being encouraged, supported, and sometimes cajoled into undertaking activities outwith their comfort zone. This highlights the high levels of skill, care and understanding in the collaboration between LAS and SOEC teams.

Partnership working also facilitated the necessary flexibility in the programme. An early intention to commence with outreach in the city was changed to the Centre to support delivery of activities and development a sense of ownership of the space. Early on poor weather necessitated changes to programme dates and the partnership approached ensured the young participants remained engaged and enthusiastic despite these changes. Further, as the programme developed, changes were required to the outline plan to reflect the direction determined by the young participants for example to the more challenging experiences of different climbing venues and canoeing. Accommodating these changes required some adjustment in the original plan but the group progressed well and were ready for more demanding activities that required greater levels of staff input.

SOEC could not have been as flexible or dynamic in their approach to designing and delivering activity sessions without great communication and information about individuals and the group from LAS. We reviewed every session together and subsequent activities were planned, discussed and determined by the group. Because LAS have such a great relationship with the young people, SOEC were able (where necessary) to alter activities depending on the mood of the group in the morning. Flexibility was essential for project success and that could only come about through close collaboration between the two organisations.

SOEC could not have been in a position to encourage the young participants to challenge themselves without the care and support they received from the LAS staff in the years prior to the programme, and during the programme. The LAS staff team benefitted from working with the SOEC staff team which being less associated with the caring role, were able to mimic the work environment and through the activities raise expectations in performance. The rapport, care and support of the LAS team made it possible for SOEC staff to encourage the young participants to challenge their own expectations and ultimately change their self-perception.

Finally, it is noteworthy that the programme also impacted positively on the parents who have seen the children performing tasks and rising to challenges they had not thought possible. The challenge of a young person leaving school and seeking employment is stressful for parents and carers too. Their feedback has been fabulous and provides strong indications that such programmes for young people with autistic spectrum diagnoses should be developed further and be made more widely available.

# THE OUTDOORS – A NATURAL PLACE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH AUTISM

## End of Project Report

### Introduction

The twin objectives of this **transition to work project** were: to explore therapeutic value of the outdoors and to develop qualities and skills to enhance employability. Following consultation between SOEC and **Lothian Autistic Society** it was identified that “**the reluctance to try new things**” was an issue common to all the group members and one that needed to be addressed. We began by assessing participants’ attitude towards the outdoors and being outside. Most members of the group spent very little or no time in the outdoors and when asked to describe how they felt about being in the outdoors “**cold, wet and uncomfortable**” were terms commonly used. Armed with this information we planned a programme of adventurous and environmental activities to challenge the young people’s opinion of the outdoors and encourage them to feel more comfortable trying new things.

The outcomes we were looking for were increasing skills and qualities including:

- Confidence
- Resilience
- Teamwork
- Communication
- Problem-solving
- Following instructions
- Timekeeping
- Navigation
- Self-awareness
- Nature awareness
- Environmental issues
- Positive ‘can-do’ mind set

Given the needs of the group, we determined that to achieve these outcomes, there would need to be a dynamic and flexible approach to planning and delivering the activity sessions and this depended on good communication between LAS and SOEC staff. SOEC had the skills, knowledge and facilities to challenge the young people and LAS had expertise in working with people with autism and had worked with this group of young people for many years. Collaboration and sharing information allowed the programme to be designed and adapted to meet the needs of the group as a whole and tailored to the abilities of individuals within the group. This was the precursor to enabling the young participants to be fully engaged in the design of their programme, and empowering them to make decisions about the activities, the level of challenge and setting their own targets.

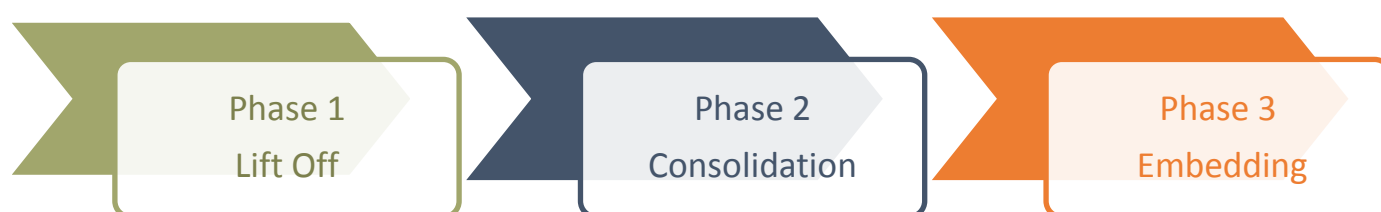
We used adventurous activities to build confidence and resilience, and environmental education techniques to give a greater understanding (and therefore appreciation of,) and better connectedness to the natural world. Problem-solving challenges were used to develop teamwork and communication skills with the use of personal protective and other safety equipment, timekeeping, and following instructions being used to replicate the workplace.

The programme was divided into **three phases**. We would initially build a rapport with the young people which would help us when assessing their abilities, needs, hopes and concerns while introducing new experiences and skills in the

outdoors. The second phase was to consolidate these skills and start working as a team under close supervision with SOEC staff with LAS staff and volunteers on hand to help. Phase 3 was all about the application of skills learned through team challenges and independent working. Challenges were set and the group were expected to work independently with input from SOEC staff being primarily to ensure safety only. Phases were not of fixed duration but merged as progress was made by individuals within the group as well as the decisions made by the group overall.

Initially, the intention had been to commence with outreach work with the group in Edinburgh but it was quickly found to be more helpful for the group to meet at the Centre, facilitating the use of the outdoors (e.g. for camp fires) and developing group familiarity with the outdoor spaces. Because continuity is very important for people with autism, the Broomlee Lead Tutor ran all the activity sessions, supported by the Centre Manager and other tutor staff where needed. We also used the same meeting room for every visit, enhancing the sense of group ownership and familiarity.

## The Three Phases



### Phase 1 - Lift Off

The young people came together for outdoor activities at Broomlee Outdoor Education Centre. During this phase our tutors built up a great rapport with every member of the group making them feel safe and relaxed; essential requirements for young people to try new things outside of their comfort zone. We introduced new skills (knot tying, fire building and map reading) and the use of safety equipment (helmets, harnesses and rope systems). We also used problem-solving and team challenges to evaluate the abilities of individuals and how they worked as a group, this was then used to determine subsequent activities and methods of delivery.

The skills and equipment that were introduced during this stage were used repeatedly. Fire lighting was demonstrated during the first session with the group building and lighting their own fires for outdoor cooking during session 3 and again in session 7. By session 7 no instructional input was needed.

In the early stages of this phase, one of the participants who spent most of his time inside playing computer games told us, *"I didn't think that I liked the outdoors until now"*

Feedback from his mother following the same session told us, *"Just a short note to say how much M enjoyed his day out on Saturday. He was even still in a good mood on Sunday! Thank you."*



## Phase 2 - Consolidation

Continuity and progression were key to the success of this phase and developing self-management, self-awareness and confidence. We built on the skills and techniques learnt in Phase 1 while expecting more input from the group.

We introduced the importance of timekeeping and the need to arrive prepared with the correct equipment. These employability skills were highlighted and discussed. The young people knew what equipment was needed for a high ropes activity and where the equipment was stored therefore we expected them to organise themselves, to collect the correct equipment and meet us at the activity site for a certain time.

The **Consolidation Phase** began with the first of the Family Days. This enabled the parents to see where the young participants had been coming to and the activities they had been engaged in. Equally as important, parents could see how the group were interacting with SOEC and LAS staff, with each other and with the outdoors. Bushcraft outdoor cooking and the high ropes activity Crate Climb were chosen because they involved skills we had been developing during Phase 1. Under supervision the young people delivered these activities to participating parents.

The day began the young people showing the parents around the Centre and serving teas and coffees in one of our meeting rooms. One parent was amazed to see the way their daughter left them immediately when they entered the meeting room and went to talk to her friend, telling us, “we have never seen her leave our side when we are out in a group of people. It’s amazing to see how comfortable she is here”.

Another parent told us, “it was a great day; amazing to see what they had been up to.”



Before the activities started we wanted somebody from the group to introduce the day. We had deliberately not given this information out in advance because we wanted to start introducing new things without any warning. We were so pleased to see R. step forward and volunteer for this task. His condition makes it very difficult for him to be in a large group of people especially inside where there can be a lot of background noise. He gave the introduction brilliantly despite it being obvious this was a very difficult thing for him to do. His parents were amazed and he received lots of

compliments from the rest of the group. During this day SOEC staff were supervising for safety reasons but the group introduced the activities, displayed the correct use of safety equipment and gave the instructions and rules necessary to carry out the activities.

To raise awareness of nature and environmental issues, the group carried out an ecological survey of Broomlee. This included looking for evidence of animals (footprints, tracks, nests, droppings etc.) and a river survey using kick tests and identification keys. The results were recorded with the intention of being used to create a new nature awareness day for other, younger children. The group were told this at the start and were aware that they were helping us carry out our job and helping younger people learn more about the natural environment. This day was a great success and we saw the group actively looking for animal evidence on most subsequent sessions. It really made them look at the natural environment with an inquisitive mind.

The young participants determined they wanted to build on the skills and knowledge developed during high rope activities so the Consolidation Phase concluded with a trip to Ratho International climbing arena. We wanted to see how the group would react to transferring their climbing skills to a new venue. One person in particular had shown a real aversion to climbing, telling us they were scared of heights and becoming very anxious about 1 m off the ground on our tree climb. This person always wanted to be in control of every activity. We suspected that rather than having a fear of heights the issue was allowing other people to be in control of the safety system. For this reason we decided to start the indoor climbing session in their bouldering room. Bouldering is a discipline within rock climbing where people climb short routes without using ropes and harnesses and crash mats are used to protect the climber in the event of a fall. The young person in question excelled at bouldering and then went on to climb and abseil with partners as part of our subsequent outdoor rock climbing session. This was a great example of increasing resilience.





### Phase 3 – “Embedding”

A series of group challenges were set to allow the young people to learn for themselves how to transfer the skills they had been developing to real-life situations. We gave instructions and information and the group were expected to organise and look after themselves while completing challenges in new outdoor spaces.

An outdoor rock climbing day started the Embedding Phase as we wanted to see how the skills that had been developed climbing at Broomlee and Ratho could be transferred to a new and more challenging location. When we arrived at the crag, the group were given the task of setting up a tarpaulin as a shelter to protect us in case it rained. They were given no warning of this nor any instructions or help with planning and organising roles/jobs within the team. We were delighted to see the way they approached this task and observed people allocating jobs, discussing ideas and remembering how to tie different knots (and their uses) from earlier in the programme. Rock climbing and abseiling can be a very challenging activity where people have to deal with fear and anxiety. We used peer belaying (where the young people are responsible for holding the safety ropes for each other) to develop deeper levels of trust and responsibility for each other. It was great to see the young people really challenging themselves mentally as well as physically and a great deal of the success was due to encouragement and empathy shown on this day. Below is an extract from email conversation between the LAS Transition to Work Leader and a parent...

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“I just wanted to say how wonderful it was to see T. blossom on Saturday. She was very nervous about trying the rock climbing as I know she struggles with physical challenges, but she did climb up to the top via the slope without ropes and then abseiled down. This took a lot of trust on her part in the SOEC tutor and the ropes, but she did it and must be feeling very proud of herself. I hope she did tell you about it as the look of accomplishment in her face was so fantastic to see and the cheering from the group was lovely. I know it is a challenge to get the group out each week and I really appreciate the work you probably have to do to get her to come along. The banter and teamwork between the group is just growing better and better each week.” **Lynne LAS**

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“Thanks Lynne, that’s lovely to hear. She was very proud of herself and happy when she got home! It’s actually not a bother to get her out at all; she’s up and dressed in time every week! I’m really glad she managed the abseiling; that’s brilliant.” **Parent**

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The next challenge was an incident hike in the Pentland Hills, preceded by a day's training and preparation. The training involved use of maps and compasses working towards the young navigators award, hill safety and emergency procedure, and how to cook using camping stoves. As part of the preparation the group had to divide themselves into teams of two or three and plan a lunch menu working to budget. On the way home we called at a supermarket so they could purchase supplies.

The incident hike was a great success with minimal input and support given. In small groups they each took turns in navigating and leading the group. The highlight of the day for everyone was cooking lunch on the side of a hill, one young participant even managed to cook a rather delicious looking steak!

The Canoe journey proved to be the most challenging of all our sessions. We had introduced a water element in raft building earlier in the programme but this did little to alleviate the fears and anxiety of many of the members of the group. One young person L. was still unsure whether he would come at 11pm the night before. For this reason we used three tutors on the day which allowed us to paddle tandem with the most anxious people. The group had asked if they could take camping stores and stop to cook lunch again which they did with no help or input. The day was a great success and the young people who were very anxious at the start, by the end were standing up in the canoes; an amazing increase in confidence. At the end of the day we were again very pleased to see the way the group worked to pack away all the equipment and load the canoe trailer.

A bonfire night party was the theme for the second Family Day and the young people were set the challenge of organising everything. They achieved this by first discussing the different jobs that needed to be done and then assigning roles to individuals. Some took charge of collecting wood, building a bonfire and making a Guy while others cooked snacks, prepared the meeting room and cordoned off safe areas to be used during the fireworks display.

When the parents arrived the group did everything. They introduced the evening including a fire safety brief, served food and drinks, conducted the fireworks display and were responsible for safety and lighting the bonfire. Every parent



that we spoke to told us that the young people were more outgoing and were much happier to be trying new things. Another running theme was their surprise at how much the young folks enjoyed being outdoors.

For the final session, we revisited the exploration walk which started the whole project off. This evoked a lot of memories and conversations about the activities, how their attitude towards the outdoors had changed and the way that things seemed to be scary at the beginning but no longer were. Part of our final review was to create some natural sculpture that depicted an activity or the way they felt about the project.

In the sculpture (left) the two sticks represented the way they felt at the start of the project, being far apart. As the project continued they became closer together as a team.

The young participants were asked to give written feedback on flipcharts under the following two headings, evaluating the programme as follows

#### **How I feel about the outdoors?**

- The endless potential.
- I like it better.
- I have got used to the love of fresh weather.
- It's relaxing.
- It's fascinating.
- It is adventurous, relaxing/therapeutic ever since taking in the activities I feel I have adapted much better to certain outdoor conditions.

#### **Work skills I have developed.**

- Working together and getting along.
- Communication and being a lot kinder and supporting people.
- Teamwork and communication
- Social skills
- Leadership and checking on the team
- Trying out new things I've never tried in my life.
- Overcoming feelings of uncertainty, doubts and any worries I have. And sharing this with other people.



## Activity Sessions Undertaken by the Group

Archery Pole climb  
 Raft building  
 Ecology survey Bonfire Shelter building  
 River dipping Zip wire Campfire River walk  
 River rescue Crate climb  
 Climbing Bushcraft cooking  
 Canoe journey BBQ Nightline Hill walking  
 Problem solving sessions  
 Woodland Exploration  
 Nature Sculpture Bushcraft  
 Leap of faith



# THE OUTDOORS – A NATURAL PLACE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH AUTISM

## Interim Report

A group of young people with autism spectrum diagnoses are engaged in an innovative **Transition to Work programme**. Its' twin objectives are: to explore the therapeutic value of the outdoors and to develop the qualities and skills to enhance employability.

The young participants had for many years enjoyed the play scheme and other events run by **Lothian Autistic Society**. However by December 2015 as they were approaching school leaving age, the level of support was due to reduce. There was little available service for **Transition to Work** for young people with autism that would stimulate their involvement in a group environment with their peers, where they could feel more included and safe. Many mainstream services do not take a step back and consider the need for support before embarking on transition work but 'one size does not fit all,' especially for young people with autism. For some it means independence and full, active participation; others require on-going support to varying degrees and different timescales.

SOEC and LAS collaborated closely to develop an innovative new programme with clear learning outcomes as well as extending the opportunities for the group to get together regularly. They are part way through a programme of 22 activity days and 2 Family Days over a 10 month period to the end of 2016. This pilot project has been funded by **Scottish Natural Heritage**.



**Phase 1** – the 'lift off' phase – was completed by early March 2016. The team had come together on 4 occasions (approximately alternate Saturdays) and participated in a range of activities including: adventure activities (crate climb, pole climb, archery, team building) and other outdoor activities: woodland walks, bush craft and shelter building, natural sculpture and problem solving.

This phase is vitally important. It takes great care to initiate and retain the enthusiasm and motivation of the group exploring new places and engaged in sometimes challenging activities. Outcomes included some young people giving the SOEC tutors hugs (a big thing among young people who shun physical contact) and feedback such as, **"I didn't think I would like being in the outdoors but I do."** Parents too saw changes in the early stages



of the project. One mum e-mailed to say that her son enjoyed his day out and “was even still in a good mood on Sunday! Thank you.” Another emailed – “R enjoyed himself – a result!” The second phase saw consolidation in activities and skills development. For example, by this stage young participants were confidently putting on their own safety harnesses and were increasingly aware of health and safety requirements. These were the early stages of improved self-management and risk awareness that will continue to develop throughout the programme through continuity and progression.

This phase culminated in the first Family Day. In this, the parents saw and had a go at the activities their children had been involved in. Another parent said;

“I would just like to say that it has been a fantastic experience for L. – albeit challenging at times!!! I hoped that by attending these sessions it would simply encourage L. to go out of the house & to try new adventures – he may not like everything he tries but he’ll never know until he tries. That seems to be working as L is keen to attend on a Saturday. He has even attended a College in Edinburgh for study time over the Easter Holidays. That would just have been unheard of prior to attending these sessions. He has also paired up with a business mentor through school & L. took the initiative to email him & arranged to meet him for a coffee in town during the holidays. Again, this is all new territory but he did it all on his own because he feels comfortable about trying new things..... long may it last ..... I do hope to build on this and with the continuation of the sessions from Sept that will help L. to grow in confidence prior to him leaving school. Many thanks to you and your team for helping L. I cannot stress how grateful we are.”



There have been other, emergent outcomes. The level of **teamwork** between SOEC tutors and LAS staff and volunteers has been fantastic. Volunteers in particular look forward to engaging with the young participants in novel activities and new settings.

The young people have played a big part in the design of the programme and are looking forward to the next 2 phases. On offer are more adventure activities with canoe expedition in Edinburgh, and climbing walls and possibly an overnight expedition. We're also looking to utilise their new found skills while undertaking some fun, rescue scenarios. Perhaps more prosaic but non-the-less essential, we'll be looking at how these skills can be conveyed in their CVs. Toward the end of the programme, this year's participants will be involved in mentoring and supporting SOEC tutors with new groups; in short, putting their skills to the test through work experience.

"I hope that the group can continue as it is really fabulous – staff have a great rapport with the kids. Hope that the kids will continue to enjoy this wonderful way of socialising and learning new skills at same time."

## Opportunities for Other Young People – A New Programme

SOEC has refined this programme and is now able to offer it to many other organisations that support young people with autism spectrum diagnose or other specific needs. From October 2016, groups will be able to attend all three SOEC Centres for between 10 – 20 days.

There is a great deal of **flexibility** in this programme and SOEC is looking to work in **partnership** with support groups and networks to ensure that the potential of outcomes are shared and that specific needs are effectively met.

However, the outcomes are clear. In all **SOEC Transition to Work programmes**, our aim is to enable school leavers and young people who are looking for work to develop the qualities, skills, knowledge and experiences identified by business leaders as those young people will need in the world of work. We aim to develop in young people their:

- Confidence;
- Communication skills;
- Decision making;
- Teamwork, cooperative working;
- Leadership and the ability to delegate;
- Creativity and innovation;
- Appreciation for a healthier and more active lifestyle;
- Resilience, tenacity and determination as well as adaptability;
- Understanding risk & risk management;
- Ability to reflect on their own potential and contribution to society/group;
- Appreciation of others, their place, and contribution;
- Personal management (e.g. time);
- Positive attitude toward problem solving;
- Enhanced motivation; and
- “Can-do” growth mind set.

“My 18-year-old daughter went on the bus by herself for the first time two weeks ago, I'm sure she wouldn't have done this without the confidence she has gained from the transition to work project.”



## Why will groups wish to undertake this programme?

- ✓ It's a great, fun programme integrating motivating activities and challenging experiences yet simultaneously developing the qualities and skills these young people will need in their futures.
- ✓ It's a high quality programme with first group rating it at 8.5 out of 10.
- ✓ Parents also value the respite opportunities, knowing their children are learning with people they can trust.
- ✓ Timing, duration, the activities involved are all highly flexible in order to meet your specific needs.

"This really has encouraged my daughter to enjoy the outdoors... long may it continue."



## A final word from Ann Brown, CEO of Lothian Autistic Society;

“I knew that we were forming a great partnership even from our first meeting with SOEC. Our relationship grew from there and working with the team at SOEC has become an incredibly positive experience, greatly enhanced by their approachability and friendliness. This has been so important to the young people we work with and also our staff, parents and carers. All of this and much, much more has contributed to the overwhelming success of our project.”



## THE OUTDOORS – A NATURAL PLACE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH AUTISM

### Parent Feedback

#### Parents Survey Responses

In collaboration with Lothian Autistic Society, SOEC devised a Transition to Work programme for young people with Autistic Spectrum Diagnosis. The Pilot programme, funded by Scottish Natural Heritage, is producing great outcomes for the young participants. We have now asked parents for their view on the programme.

#### Do you believe the programme to date has been helpful in delivering the objective of developing skills and qualities for the world of work?

For the first time in a very long time, M has looked forward to outdoor activity. She enjoyed it on so many levels and benefitted in so many ways. She grew in confidence, learned and practices social skills; learned that active lifestyles can be fun, realised her part in team building. It has been a brilliant success for M.

Yes – L has recently been working on independent topic at school and I think that attending the project has definitely given him more confidence, motivation and can do mind set. He is also been praised for his team work, problem solving and cooperative working – all valuable skills for transition to working life.

#### Do you think the young participants have benefitted from being in nature and undertaking activities outdoors?

Hugely – not only does it get M. out experiencing ‘the great outdoors’, it gets her mingling with others, learning in a safe environment with people she feels safe and reassured by. It’s shown her how fun it can be and how important being active, interested and co-operative can be.

Absolutely. It can be virtually impossible to persuade my son to go out – to have a project that he is motivated to go to attend, that gets him out in the fresh air, doing worthwhile activities while socialising, is really fantastic. Great for his health and well-being and social skills.

#### We would be very grateful to hear your opinion of the programme in general – do you think it is of value?

It has been a ‘turn around’ point for us and for M. She looks forward to going. It has been monumentally important in Ms’ confidence building and friendships.

Most definitely – L has learned so many new skills and has been praised for his teamwork and leadership. His confidence has risen and he has a more positive attitude.

## Would it be a valuable experience for others?

I would encourage any child or young person to participate. It's fun, constructive, physically challenging, mentally challenging and so important in improving sharing, co-operation skills, and team building.

Yes – would be fantastic if other young people could experience what L. has – it has been a brilliant opportunity for him.

## Did you have any concerns about the programme?

M. has always had difficulty with certain activities so it was a challenge for her and us to get going. But it has proved SO worthwhile and massively helpful in showing M. how the outdoors can be fun.

Just thought we would not be able to get L motivated to go but he absolutely loves the project and it has never been a problem getting him to go.

## Do you think there should be more opportunities such as this?

YES! Certainly any such programme that allows this level of companionship, learning, social interaction while pairing it with physical activity would be VERY welcome. Everyone can benefit from this!

Yes – this is exactly what young autistic people need as they spend so much of their time inside and isolated.

## Should it be more widely available?

Everyone can benefit from this!

Yes – I think it would be beneficial for other groups of young people who tend to be socially isolated.

## Have there been any benefits other than those intended in the programme?

It has shown M. outdoor activity can be fun. But committing to it and following it through is a very important responsibility to herself and to others – creating and keeping social contact is equally important.

Feeling of being valued, included, being part of a group where you fit in and belong and can contribute and your opinions do matter. Increase in self-esteem.

## We would welcome comments or suggestions on how the programme might be improved.

Perhaps pairing different people to work on short projects so they have to communicate and co-operate with each other in a series of pairings etc.

Don't know as it can because it is brilliant!!

## Any Other Comments?

WONDERFUL, GREAT, BENEFICIAL, MORE PLEASE!

Just a massive thanks – L has really had an amazing time – the staff are superb and really tuned into the young people and have got to know them on an individual basis which is lovely – it makes the young people feel valued.



This project is supported by Scottish Natural Heritage



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