

# Nature Works CIC

Connecting schools and communities to nature



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Nature Works CIC is a social enterprise aiming to connect people with nature to support learning and well-being. It is well documented that learning outside the classroom holds enormous benefits to children and adults regarding learning and well-being and that spending time in and engaging with the natural environment is beneficial to our mental as well as our physical health; this premise is at the heart of all the work we deliver.

## Barriers to accessing nature

Although the Isle of Wight is rich in natural resources, we are aware that many local people do not visit those places. Economic deprivation is one of the reasons, particularly in the incidence of school visits where often neither the schools nor the parents can afford a nominal fee per child to cover the costs of a qualified leader, even when the site is within walking distance of the school. (We are happy to share examples). Transport costs and classroom cover are also cited as barriers to taking school groups off site. Many families home educating their children also have economic barriers to accessing outdoor learning groups. This has led to some families accessing land unofficially for woodland activities, including lighting campfires and using natural resources without landowner consent. Through talking to families at our events we are aware that for some people, access to nature has skipped a generation and they have no childhood experience of playing outdoors in nature to share with their own children. Nature disconnection and anxieties over health and safety also prevail.

## Biosphere status

Nature Works CIC is very proud of the Island's Biosphere status and grateful for all the hard work that the AONB team has put in to gaining this endorsement for the Isle of Wight. We are hopeful that this will help fund projects that will enable local people to access these extraordinary places in a sustainable way and feel able to call them their own. Studies show that when people are given opportunities to enjoy these places when young, they are more likely to care for them as they get older and share them with their own children. We have devised three programmes to help achieve sustainable access for local people to the natural spaces within our county:

## **Biosphere Schools**

- Day visits to different habitats, including woodlands and the coast, which support all areas of the curriculum including Science, History, Literacy and STEM subjects.
- Forest School awareness days, six week Forest School introduction programmes and twelve week Forest School programmes, in woodlands and at the coast.
- A training programme for teachers, pre-school leaders and support staff to provide a range of skills, ideas, techniques, information on low cost resources, risk management and the confidence to take learning outside the classroom, access nature to enhance learning experiences and give children memories to treasure.

## **Biosphere Families**

- Day visits and Forest School programmes for home educated children, eg “Explore the Shore” sessions at Fort Victoria beach.
- Outdoor parent and toddler groups in school grounds, local green spaces, woodland and the coast, eg “Mill Copse Tots”.
- Opportunities for families to engage in nature through outdoor play and learning events, including rock pooling, pond dipping, night walks, wildlife watching, earth walks and more.

## **Biosphere Well-being**

- Using the Forest School approach to engage adult groups with the natural environment with regular visits to support mental and physical health and well-being, eg “The Really Wild Cuppa” sessions which take place on a weekly basis where adults enjoy cooking and sharing a healthy campfire meal together, engage in gardening and green woodworking projects and learn a range of practical skills. The group supports other groups by helping to make resources and cut coppice materials for den building and green woodwork.
- Combining our experience of running woodland toddler groups and adult mental health groups to offer outdoor mother and toddler groups aimed at women with young children (or who are pregnant) living with isolation, low self-confidence or have perinatal or other mental health issues.
- Women’s woodland well-being groups, particularly supporting teenagers and women with low self-confidence and low self-esteem.
- Woodland and coastal sessions for mental health professionals to demonstrate the potential of using the natural environment to support clients’ mental health and well-being.

## *Local Partnerships*

We have strong relationships with local schools and pre-schools, the home education community, mental health professionals, the Perinatal Mental Health Service and local landowners. We work in partnership with Wight Nature Fund for access to Mill Copse at Yarmouth, with the IW Council for use of the woods and beach at Fort Victoria Country Park, Brading Roman Villa for access to the villa grounds and with the AONB Unit for access to the allotment area at Branstone Farm.

## *Staff and Volunteers*

Staff all hold Level 3 Forest School, Safeguarding, Outdoor First Aid and Outdoor Food Hygiene qualifications. Further training and qualifications cover Water Safety, SEND Awareness and Education, Makaton, installing large woodland play structures, leading Earth Walks, Marine Champions training, story-telling and a range of craft, countryside and

rural skills. All volunteers are DBS checked and follow our Safeguarding, Confidentiality and Sustainability policies and procedures. All staff and volunteers have access to our Forest School Handbook, which includes our site risk assessments, activity risk / benefit analyses, policies and procedures, of which they are all made aware as part of our induction process. We are covered by Public Liability insurance to £10,000,000.

<https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/news/englands-largest-outdoor-learning-project-reveals-children-more-motivated-to-learn-when-outside>

[http://ww2.rspb.org.uk/Images/naturalthinking\\_tcm9-161856.pdf](http://ww2.rspb.org.uk/Images/naturalthinking_tcm9-161856.pdf)

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/trevornace/2017/08/21/children-play-outdoors-more-likely-protect-nature-adults/#5dda1f016641>

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