

FOREST OF MERCIA: TWIGLETS



Introduction & Location

Twiglets is a themed education initiative created to engage children aged two to five years old and their parents and carers. Activities are based around nature and the environment, encouraging families to appreciate value, use and enjoy their local green space. Each session involves indoor and outdoor activities where possible. Twiglets illustrates how the natural environment can be a wonderful and stimulating backdrop in which to learn, play and develop, no matter what the weather!

Objectives:

- To include fun, art and craft based activities to encourage children to develop their understanding and instil respect and familiarity with the natural environment
- To increase parental confidence to become risk aware but not risk averse to support their children to engage in outdoor play, promoting using the outdoors for health and well-being for recreation and education.
- To encourage family learning, enabling and instructing parents to join in and understand the importance of play
- Positive role modelling of parenting skills.
- To increase social skills and interaction through sharing in play.
- To adhere to Health & Safety Regulations and impart this information to Parents/Carers.
- To provide family support and ensure signposting to other professional services is undertaken, with an emphasis on promotion of Children's Centre services
- To liaise with Adult & Community Learning Service to support prolonged family learning.
- To promote literacy and numeracy skills across the district through encouragement of reading to children by parents/carers.
- To promote parental confidence and skills for child development through creative learning.
- To instil durable passion for the natural environment for both children and parents/carers.
- To provide opportunity for Parents/Carers and children to be active through music and movement.

Actions:

Initially a series of ten Twiglets sessions were run at Norton Canes Children's Centre between March and September 2009, with an additional 'taster session' being run at the start of the programme to encourage initial interest. Around one week before the taster Twiglets session, a leaflet and poster drop was undertaken. A well designed, eye catching poster was developed and circulated. The sessions were run on a Wednesday morning from 9.30am – 11.00am in the Crèche Room at the Norton Canes Children's Centre and the adjacent school grounds were used. Resources were purchased where necessary but a strong emphasis was put on utilising natural and recycled materials where possible.

Achievements:

- Engaged with over 50 parents and children.
- Provided opportunity to explore and investigate the natural environment.
- Created a stimulus for similar experiences within families.
- Received positive feedback from all of the parents and children involved.
- Developed a package of activities which can be repeated in other areas of the Forest of Mercia, as is evident through the summer Twiglets programme being delivered at Chasewater Innovation Centre.
- Involved 15 days of volunteer support, equating to an approximate monetary value of £500 gift in kind.
- Made purposeful use of the local Children's Centres and school grounds.
- Has been considered a project of 'best practice' by Local Authority Partners.
- Built positive working relationships with school and nursery staff.

GROWING OUR FUTURE

WEST MIDLANDS
FORESTRY FRAMEWORK

Background:

This project was developed as a result of a successful pilot scheme delivered in National Tree Week 2008 to seven libraries within the local area. The pilot scheme engaged with over 80 adults and children.

Each session of Twiglets was given a theme, to structure the project and provide opportunity to reiterate and reinforce messages throughout the ten weeks. Themes such as the weather, mini beasts, wildlife and 'growing your own' were introduced each week. It was decided that each session would have a similar structure, involving a story, song or poem, an arts and crafts activity, a game and an out door activity.

Each session was run by one paid member of the Forest of Mercia team and a highly experienced volunteer (a retired Primary School Assistant Head Teacher).

Quotes:

- "We will shortly have Children's centres being built onto Perton and Brewood Libraries and I would be extremely interested in running sessions of "Twiglets" from them in the near future." - **Yvonne Priest - Perton Library**
- "This sounds excellent. Any chance it may spread to South Staffs district this year please?" - **Sam Stayt – South Staffordsire Community Voluntary Action**
- "This looks brilliant, would love to know how it gets on, maybe we could do something similar in other areas of the County" - **Stephanie Wickison Principal Forestry Officer for Staffordshire County Council**
- "I am very interested in this project. Churchfield has large grounds with a garden and an area of woodland. We also have a newly open Children's Centre. One of our aims is to make better use of our grounds. With parents we have recently cleared the woodland and last Monday held our first Forest School. Please let me know how we can get involved." - **Linda Hack – Headteacher at Churchfield Junior School in Rugeley**
- "How very interesting. It's a marvellous age to get youngsters involved in the 'Green World'." - **Councillor Maureen Humphreys (Lichfield)**

Partners:

- Staffordshire County Council
- Cannock Chase District Council
- Lichfield District Council
- South Staffordshire District Council
- Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

Funding:

- Forest of Mercia
- Staffordshire County Council

WMRFF Objectives: Main Theme & Others

- Fostering Social Inclusion: To increase public knowledge of woodland and forestry by education and raising awareness
- Fostering Social Inclusion: To promote examples and inspire people about the benefits of trees and woodlands
- Fostering Social Inclusion: Develop a programme of specific initiatives for hard-to-reach groups

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