

FOREST OF MERCIA: EDUCATION INCLUSION PROJECT



Introduction & Location

The Forest of Mercia Education Inclusion Project was set up in January 2004, funded through Staffordshire County Council's Children and Lifelong Learning Department.

The project initially had two full time members of staff and the capacity for up to 10 trainees, by November 2005 the project had increased to six full time staff and an additional full time coordinator instructing in forestry and land based training and conservation awareness.

Due to changes within the County Council, the project ended in 2009.

Objectives:

- To provide positive alternative activities, experiences and qualifications for excluded young people, or those at risk of exclusion.
- To encourage young people to take an interest in their local and global environment, with a view to exploring this further through training or employment on leaving the project.
- To positively contribute to the creation, development and management of the Forest of Mercia, through physical improvement projects and site based work.

Actions:

- A programme of site based training, leading to City & Guilds NVQ Level 1 in Land Based Management and Youth Awards Scheme Qualifications.
- Practical development for individuals through skills in Forestry, Horticulture and Carpentry, leading to the development of the Forest of Mercia area.
- Development of social and emotional behavioural attributes through team work, sports and games activities.

Achievements:

Approximately 90 trainees have attended the project since it began in 2004. Following their progress, nine have gone onto work within land based jobs e.g. landscape gardening, farm hand and tree surgery. 35 progressed into further education, studying forestry, horticulture or agriculture. Many other trainees have gone onto successfully obtain qualifications in carpentry, plumbing, painting and decorating and vehicle maintenance. According to our records, since 2007 approximately 76% of trainees overall have been successful in finding employment/training.

Evidence was gathered and collated in portfolios for NVQ assessments to enable trainees who completed the project to leave with a nationally recognised qualification.

The team worked to a target of 90% attendance rate for the young people and a 90% educational / vocational attainment, based on the percentage of trainees achieving units towards qualifications and awards.

Working together with the young people and representatives from Staffordshire County Council's Children and Lifelong Learning Directorate, the project evolved into a flexible and innovative initiative. Issues around suitability of individuals, numbers catered for and types of work undertaken were adapted, with the result being an effective, quality service which was integral to the development of those young people involved.

GROWING OUR FUTURE

WEST MIDLANDS
FORESTRY FRAMEWORK

Background:

The project was considered to be very successful during the five years it ran. It is clear from the information provided in this report that the project had a positive impact upon the lives of the young people involved, both during their time with the project and after.

Overall the project produced some very good results and has a legacy which the team involved can be proud of. Some valuable lessons were also learnt along the way with running alternative education provision.

The Forest of Mercia will continue to deliver environmental education, however this will take on a very different format. Education provision will be a lot broader, focusing on children, young people and adults from different areas and backgrounds. It is hoped that the Education Inclusion Project will provide a basis on which to build further provision in the future for excluded or hard to reach groups.

Quotes:

- *“He (the trainee) really enjoyed his time on the project he loved the outdoor work, he stuck at the project and his attendance was much improved” - Parent*
- *“The project gave me peace of mind that he (the trainee) was doing something that showed him a skill, as school was not working for him. The project seemed to be a good thing for him” - Trainee*
- *“I thought the project was a godsend. He (the trainee) really enjoyed attending and didn't get into half as much trouble as he did at school. It gave him a better outlook on life” - Parent*
- *“I loved the project. The best part was the outdoor work and the staff treated me really well. I wish I could have stayed on the project longer. I learned a lot of things but it was not like being at school, it was like being at work” - Trainee*
- *“The project was the best thing I ever have ever done. I learnt a lot of skills and found it was the sort of thing I would like to do when I finished the project. I went straight into working as a trainee tree surgeon with the help of the staff, and now work in forestry with the council. I also learned to respect myself and others. Being on the project really helped me turn my life around” - Trainee*

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

- Trees, Woods & Forestry Industry
- Fostering Social Inclusion

Contact Details:

Steve Morris, Forest of Mercia, Chasewater Innovation Centre, Pool Road, Brownhills, Staffordshire
Tel: 01543 370737
Email: steve.morris@staffordshire.gov.uk