



WITNEY
TOWN COUNCIL



WTC-Nature NOW Autumn 2023 Draft evaluation/proposal - Summary of impact

Total number of sessions held	6
Total number of adults attending	26
Total number of children attending	49
Average number of children attending a session	17
Number of adults attending from: Witney Town (12x parents), Carterton (5x childminders) Standlake (1x childminder) Stonesfield (1x childminder) Burford (1x childminder) Witney - Oxford Witney Hotel residents (3x parents, accompanied by Sally Heath)	
Sessions were held at: Mill Meadow x2 Ducklington Lake x4	
Participants found the Nature NOW sessions through the following channels: Homestart (x1) WTC website (x1) Previous contact with NatureNOW/Where the Fruit Is training (x5) Walked past one day on a walk (x2) Shared by a local friend/childminder (x3) Local childminder Facebook (x3)	

Summary of sessions

- Carl Whitehead supported the sessions with information about and access to the sites, dynamic risk assessments, sourcing and availability of natural materials, etc.
- Sessions were staffed by two qualified Forest School and Forest Kindergarten Leaders-Trainers at each session, who had previously worked on the OCC-Nature NOW projects 2020-2022.
- Due to weather and parking difficulties at Mill Meadow, Ducklington became the more popular location. Parking and ease of accessibility were frequently mentioned as essential to adults, given that most need to attend with buggies and small children walking.
- Both sites offer a variety of pop-up local nature play opportunities and experiences; we were able to respond to the weather and the interests of the children in each session. Nature play resources were provided on seasonal themes; these were kept simple to inspire the children's imaginations to engage with the natural resources around them and not to give the impression to adults that you need lots of equipment to go outdoors in nature. Outdoor clothing was provided for children and adults where necessary.



Feedback from participants

Feedback was collected through an online survey and a paper questionnaire during sessions. The following is a summary of the responses from 17 respondents. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive and all wanted further sessions to take place, including during the winter months. The following are common areas of feedback that we have grouped together.

What did the children enjoy most? What do you think they got out of the sessions?

1. **Personal development:** They gained confidence week by week. It was lovely seeing my daughter just being out in nature and getting messy despite the weather. Being outdoors, exploring and activities. He's autistic and loves being outside exploring and being less restricted than in indoor spaces. The children were building resilience out in all weathers.
2. **Nature connection:** A little bucket and a puddle! My daughter is 23 months and she enjoyed mixing with the other children and watching them playing with sticks, leaves and mud and being able to join in and do whatever she wanted, being child led is lovely. Loose parts, ducks! Spotting coloured discs in trees. The guttering with conkers and cones etc, Flags with fabric and sticks. Hammocks and swings, leaves, mud and puddles.
3. **Building community:** The children benefit as I am less likely to go out in wet/cold weather on my own, but having someone to meet up with adult conversation while the children explore. It's social for the children too. Splashing in muddy puddles with new friends. Mixed ages playing together.



What did the adults personally find most useful/valuable/ enjoyable?

1. **Adult education and wellbeing:** Getting out into the fresh air. Ideas to take home to do at different times. We enjoy spending time outdoors, but it's lovely to do it with trained forest school leaders who know how to adapt it and make it attractive and engaging for toddlers. Finding new places, gaining new ideas. These sessions are so beneficial for getting small children out and into nature with guidance and also helps parents to have ideas on how they can continue to enjoy outdoor time with their children all year round
2. **Motivation:** Something to head out for. It's good to have something to look forward to and do despite the weather. Having something to encourage me to keep getting outside when the weather often puts me off. Having something to look forward to and do, even on cold, wet days. I've loved that I've had a reason to get out, somewhere to go so I'm not doing it alone and the leaders are fantastic at what they do.
3. **Building community:** Community and connections, as children and adults are able to socialise. Meeting people. Seeing familiar and new faces, new ideas, sharing our day with the parents of the children I look after. A mix of locations is great for variety and helped us get to know our local area. I had never been to Ducklington Lake before and I've lived in Witney for a long time.

Additional Benefits of the Nature NOW sessions

Beyond the direct benefits to participants, as summarised from the feedback survey, we believe that there have been additional or indirect impacts from the Nature NOW sessions, including but not limited to:

- Connections with and visibility across and between local communities within and around Witney, e.g. Ducklington Warm space, Witney Town Council, Asylum seekers hotel residents, local residents, etc.
- Maintaining professional links and extending CPD opportunities for local childminders,
- Increased use of Witney local amenities (in the warmer months, some childminders and carers stayed on in central Witney for refreshments, picnics, etc.)
- Embedding the original Nature NOW project in a local community, creating a trusted, professional "brand" for parents and carers through Witney Town Council-Where the Fruit Is partnership.

Where next?

- Consider other accessible locations.
- Encourage more Witney-based families, carers and childminders to attend.
- Build on initial links with Homestart and Green prescribing.
- WTC may wish to consider (part) funding 2 places on the Forest Kindergarten course (March-May 2024)



Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, prompting us to consider another round of funding from WTC. We propose a block of 8 sessions covering the Spring and Summer terms, dates to be confirmed (rather than two separate 6-week blocks in Spring and Summer term). 8 sessions x £400 = £3,200 +VAT