Natural Connections
Demonstration Project
Newsletter – issue 14, March 2015

About Natural Connections

The Natural Connections Demonstration Project is an exciting initiative funded by Natural England, DEFRA and English Heritage, which Plymouth University were awarded the contract to deliver. It is one of the largest outdoor learning projects in the UK and will involve around 200 schools and between 200-500 volunteers. This innovative project operates at a local, school-led level, in ‘hubs’ across the South West. Natural Connections runs until March 2016.

- To find out more about the project, view past copies of the newsletter, and access resources, case studies and support – click here or go to Natural Connections Blog.
- Follow us on Twitter - @ntrfconnections
- Providers of outdoor Learning In Natural Environments (LINE) can register with the project by emailing naturalconnections@plymouth.ac.uk

Quote of the month

“Students become more confident, better communicators, it’s that ability to try something. If they have tried something they can’t do outside, they are more likely to try it indoors if they have built those skills outdoors.”

Member of teaching staff in a Natural Connections school

News from the Hubs  Ian Blackwell & Jo Lewis

Cornwall, Plymouth, Torbay & South Devon - Focus on CPD. Continuing Professional Development is one of the keys to successful teaching. As Dylan Wiliam, speaking at an event at Plymouth University on 4th March, remarked: 'Teaching is such a complex craft that one lifetime is not enough to master it, but by rigorously focusing on practice, teachers can continue to improve throughout their career… we need a career-long commitment to the continuous improvement practice, and an agreement to develop teaching practice in ways that are likely to improve outcomes for their students'.

Natural Connections has been focused on CPD from the outset as we recognise that teachers’ confidence and teachers’ skills need to be in place for outdoor learning to flourish. Since the beginning of 2013, we have worked with 100s of secondary, primary and special school teachers [and many providers too] to offer engaging, meaningful and creative ways to develop curriculum lessons that make the best use of local green spaces.
The confidence of teachers has been boosted through workshops, via school-school sharing, new partnerships, local conferences, case studies, advice from peers, research support, accredited courses and in many more ways. CPD helps change the culture of schools, embedding outdoor learning into the everyday of school life.

The Hub Leaders across the region have been instrumental in supporting teachers. In Plymouth, for example, the Good from Woods event on 19 March at Mayflower Academy and in Ham Woods gave attendees the chance to discover more about the research and wellbeing benefits from doing activities in the woods, to network with providers, to learn new skills, and to share experiences of working, playing and curriculum-based learning in woods. In Cornwall, the Wild Tribe Outdoor Learning Conference on Wed 25th March near Liskeard will be a full day of fantastic opportunities to explore the contribution of outdoor learning to all aspects on the curriculum, drawing on experts from the region. For more information, contact Julie Ponting 01579 386120 info@arena-schools.co.uk. In Torbay and South Devon, the Hub Leader recently welcomed Sam Goddard of Cambium Sustainable, who ran a great course at Brixham C of E Primary for 14 participants, all looking at gaining a Level 2 Qualification in Outdoor Learning. There will be dozens of professional development opportunities this year. Stay in touch with us to find out more about what’s happening near you.

**North & East Devon**

Building on the success of Natural Connections to date, a further expansion into North and East Devon is now underway. This new Naturally Healthy Devon Schools project will be extending the work of Natural Connections, with an additional focus on the health benefits learning in the natural environment can provide, both for physical health and mental well-being. The project will run for two years thanks to support from DESWG [Devon Education for Sustainability Working Group], CPRE Devon, Devon County Council, Natural England and the Devon Local Nature Partnership.

Our two new hub leaders, East Devon District Council Countryside Team and Louise Graham, Natural Learning are just beginning to recruit schools to take part. They will initially be seeking schools in and around Exmouth in East Devon, in the Barnstaple and South Molton area of North Devon and around Holsworthy in Torridge. If you know of a school which might be interested in joining the project please let us know.

**Somerset & Wiltshire**

Based on learning through their work to date and following discussions with schools and feedback from CPD, the Forest of Avon Trust is providing a more focused intervention based approach this year. This will support schools in their journey in developing more opportunities outdoors, and in exploring both the breadth and depth of activity they can provide in natural spaces. More details of this to follow next time. The hub will continue to work as part of the wider South West Collaboration with Bristol working together on CPD, meetings and conference provision and online resource development.

**Bristol**

Collaboration meetings are being held regularly, more details can be found here: SW Collaboration as the project continues to grow in Bristol and South Gloucestershire.
Other Project News

Natural Connections Online
Here at Natural Connections we are looking at how we can make better use of digital media, so over the next few months you will see more updates like these. We do hope you will log on and view, share and interact with what we have to show you.

NEW BLOG! We have launched a new collaborative blog – it is now live at https://naturalconnectionsblog.wordpress.com/! we invite you to take part and become a regular guest blogger. Follow our blog to find out what it’s all about, and contact jenny.hanwell@naturalengland.org.uk for information about how to get involved. Thank you to those who have already made contributions, these will keep being added over the next few weeks so watch this space…

Twitter – @ntrlconnections now has over 1,280 followers, are you following us yet? Ever wondered what’s the point of getting involved with social media? Take a look at this clip for some eye-opening stats.

Natural Connections Festival of LINE Fri 26th June – Friday 3rd July 2015
Your chance to showcase your outdoor learning this summer… Natural Connections are offering to help you promote your outdoor learning activities during this week long festival of LINE across the South West. We will be devising a Festival Calendar to promote events. The Festival of LINE starts with a conference on 26th June at Ashton Court near Bristol click here for more info and closes with a Health & Learning Conference at the University of East London on Fri 3rd July [more info to follow]. The Natural Connections team would love to help you by highlighting events you are organising, such as training events or workshops, as well as outdoor activities you are involved in with schools, families and the general public. This is a free service. We have the support of the Press teams at the University and Natural England who can help maximise your exposure in the run up to and during this week. Can we ask you to:
- let us know of any events you already have planned for the period Fri 26th June – Friday 3rd July
- why not organise some events for this week and let us know
- let us know how we can help promote you and your fantastic work, for instance if you want help with social media activity or with circulating press releases

Please contact Ian Blackwell if you have any questions or have events you want to feature on the Festival Calendar ian.blackwell@plymouth.ac.uk

Evaluation Update  Martin Gilchrist

Pupil and Parent views of Learning in the Natural Environment
The Natural Connections project is keen to understand pupil and parent / carer views of LINE in project schools. If you are a parent (or a pupil) we would be really interested in your views. If you are a teacher in a project school we would really like you to promote the survey to your pupils and parents. If you wanted to get your pupils to fill in the surveys during school time we can produce a summary of responses for your school. The surveys will take 5 minutes to complete and the results used to contribute to the project evaluation. The results will be anonymised and no individual or school will be identified.
Pupil Survey
https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/ncpupils

Parents / Carers Survey
https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/ncparentscarers

For more details about evaluation please contact Martin Gilchrist martin.gilchrist@plymouth.ac.uk

Getting the word out
The project has been sharing some of the evaluation evidence from the project more widely, presenting at a number of conferences over the last couple of months. These have included the Learning Outside the Classroom Annual Conference, the Nature Connections conference at Derby University and a Children and Young People conference in Northampton.

Everyone has been really interested in the what has been happening and results have been received really positively by both teachers and providers of outdoor education services, all of whom are all keen to learn from our (and your experiences). Interest has been expressed in adopting the Natural Connections model from several areas across England

CPD & Events

Outdoor Learning Practitioner and Coordinator training
Bristol 23rd April, 24th April & 11th June – click here for details & dates. These courses, delivered by Cambium, are nationally recognised, accredited short courses designed for providers and education/ teaching staff who would like to improve their skills and confidence in delivering the curriculum outside using school grounds or local environments. The courses give expert advice and ideas on how to improve your grounds for learning as well as ways to use your local natural and built environments for creative and engaging ways to deliver the curriculum. The courses are available at Level 2 and Level 3. For further information please visit the outdoor schools website or contact Anney at cambium@btinternet.com tel. 01981 580471/ 07974 828605.

Fundraising for Outdoor Learning
Following the successful events that we held last year, we will be running the Fundraising for Outdoor Learning workshops again this spring and summer. The workshop provides practical assistance on how to fundraise, which can be applied to outdoor learning or any educational project.

In their feedback from 2014, 100% of participants say they'd recommend this workshop to others and 100% said it was value for money. ‘Excellent. Didn’t really know what to expect and had no prior knowledge. Fascinating and have loads of ideas to take away’

We intend to run half day workshops in Plymouth, Torbay, Exeter, Bristol and Roche, Cornwall. Dates to be confirmed - please email Laura Moore to register your interest.

Naturally Healthy Week 23-31 May 2015
Natural Devon is encouraging everyone to get out into nature and try doing something different. Devon’s fabulous Natural Health Service is waiting to be explored, you don’t have to go far. It’s great for our health, and it doesn’t have to cost a thing. If you have events planned during May half term, or have an idea or activity that will encourage people near you to get out and make more of Devon’s nature, then they would love to hear from you.
Some of the suggestions they will be making include climbing a tree, getting muddy playing a new sport, flying a kite, paddling in a river or the sea, playing hide and seek or going for a picnic; or simply stopping to enjoy the birdsong. They will be listing some of your events and activities to inspire people to get out into nature. They also have some free tools to help you get started too – a website and e-posters to promote your events or activities, a press release template and suggested tweets for you to use. Share your fun during Naturally Healthy Week by tweeting them using #nathealthydevon to find out more visit naturaldevon.org.uk or email Mabel.Harris@devon.gov.uk

Don’t miss out on this year’s great CPD events at The Eden Project, as well as lots of opportunities to inspire children: Eden Project events - click here

Beach Schools South West is offering up to 750 free places for schoolchildren in Devon this summer. All you have to do to be in with a chance is to apply and they will let the winning schools know by the end of term. The application form and more information can be found here: www.beachschoolssouthwest.co.uk or www.teachonthebeach.co.uk if you need any more information then please contact them on info@beachschoolssouthwest.co.uk

6th May - Project Wild Thing film screening, Kingsbridge Community College, 6th May 6.30 pm. Contact Laura Hetherington, Heritage, Countryside and Creative Learning and Troubadour Theatre, laura@jakalory.org.uk

Empty Classroom Day 2015 is 19th June
Sign up your school for Empty Classroom Day 2015. The goal is to have empty classrooms all over the globe, with pupils learning outside. Any school can participate, just pledge to spend at least one lesson outside on the day. What you do is up to you but activities could tie in with your Natural Connections plans – maybe a school ground natural make-over with parent volunteers?

Easyfundraising & Easysearch
Do you shop online? You can help raise money for Natural Connections with no extra cost to you with easyfundraising. Natural Connections earns a % of your purchase from the retailer, so no extra cost to you at all. All the big on-line retailers are there, including supermarkets, high street chains, Amazon, travel agents, the TrainLine etc. Here’s how it works:

1. Go to the easyfundraising site and support Natural Connections click here .
2. Register your details
3. Choose from 2700+ retailers and start buying on-line as you would normally
4. That’s it!

This bi-monthly newsletter has been sent to you because you have expressed an interest in Natural Connections. To contact the project or to unsubscribe please email our Administrator, Laura Moore at naturalconnections@plymouth.ac.uk we welcome your feedback on this newsletter, and invite advertiser and ideas for contributions.