



Natural Connections Demonstration Project

Special Edition Final Newsletter

March 2016

Welcome to our final newsletter!

The Natural Connections Demonstrations Project has been an exciting initiative funded by Natural England, DEFRA and Historic England, which Plymouth University were awarded the contract to deliver. It has been one of the largest outdoor learning projects in the UK and operated at a local, school-led level, in seven 'hubs' across the South West. As the project draws to a close at the end of March 2016, we are celebrating our achievements.

We'd like to thank everyone who has been involved with the project – including schools, Hub Leaders, outdoor education providers, volunteers, colleagues and partners. The final report will be released and shared in July 2016. All subscribers to this newsletter will be sent a link to download a copy of the final report when it is published. You can stay connected during 2016 with;

- our blog - articles from Outdoor Learning experts [CLICK HERE](#)
- Twitter - follow us [@ntrlconnections](#) 
- we remain a partner in [Countryside Classroom](#)

Natural Connections - Sustainability & Next Steps

One of the aims of Natural Connections was to test and develop new models for how hub leaders could generate sufficient revenue to cover and sustain their brokerage costs by the end of the project. Here is a roundup of the Hubs plans for the future; the good news is all five hubs plan to continue some outdoor learning activity.

Bristol & North Somerset

The Bristol and North Somerset Hubs have been looking at ways to sustain and build on their strong collaboration and developing network of schools and providers. Through the Bristol Hub team's experience of collaborating on a range of education initiatives, they have identified a common theme: the concept of 'learning everywhere'.

The hub team passionately believe that learning in the right space both enhances experience and deepens understanding; learning, therefore, has a real value that can be felt by everyone. Their experience of connecting people who share this vision has shown that with innovative approaches, real change can occur.

The hub leaders are in the process of launching a wider collaboration encompassing schools, providers and organisations from a range of sector that share their passion.

They are also continuing to develop the [Wild Time for Schools](#) web platform with Project Wildthing, and [thisisaclassroom](#) website. In addition to their collaboration with Bristol the North Somerset Hub have been working with organisations such as the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust to leave a legacy of support for those schools further from Bristol.

Cornwall

The Cornwall hub leaders' approach to sustainability was focused on ensuring that staff in leadership roles fully engaged with LINE:

'There are so many dimensions to sustainability ...but I think the critical thing is ... the pedagogy and getting people in leadership roles (whether it is classroom leadership or school leadership) to take that on and to understand that. If we get the right people who themselves are charged with improving the quality of learning, and developing the curriculum, it's self-sustaining, forever, because that's their job.'

The Hub leaders have worked with the LINE leads in beacon schools to support strong clusters of schools and are holding a meeting in April 2016 for beacon schools to decide how the project goes forward in the future. Schools currently continue to be supported if they are part of the hub leaders' organisational partnerships and they continue to have access to CPD through the WildTribe programme. In addition, the hub leader is working with Plymouth University to develop closer strategic partnerships in Cornwall to further develop outdoor learning. Contact Pete Butts peterbutts2000@yahoo.co.uk to find out more about on-going support for schools.

Plymouth

Hub leaders in Plymouth always aimed to develop a sustainable model and commented at the start of the project that:

'There is no point firing our schools up for a two year project. We are firing them up for life. That's the notion'.

They believe that the networks developed through the Natural Connections can be continued with a relatively small amount of funding, but that they were unlikely to survive without funding of some kind.

Integration of Natural Connections into different areas of the hub leaders' work has enabled a clear, ongoing offer to schools across the city through a paid-for business model for LINE services that was initiated at the end of their Natural Connections contract. Plymouth's LINE offer to schools is now branded *Plymouth's Outdoor Learning Community*, and provides networking opportunities, CPD and events with the aims of sharing experiences and learning, linking schools and providers more closely, brokering volunteer support, and signposting resources for an annual subscription. Feel free to contact them for more information: Chris Avent chris.avent@plymouth.gov.uk

Torbay

The Hub Leader in Torbay has worked hard to strengthen links with the Torbay schools' curriculum network, Public Health Torbay, and with CPD and LINE providers. For example, discussions are on-going with Oldway Primary and the Curriculum Network to sustain the Natural Connections network model and also with Public Health to build outdoor learning into the new healthy schools programme. The hub leader is also currently undertaking succession planning, applying for grant funding and keeping the project *'simmering in a way that other schools have an opportunity to join'*. To be involved as the project enters its next phase in Torbay, contact Mel Easter mellew60@hotmail.com



Reflections on the Natural Connections Project from across the South West

'People can see now that LINE does improve learning, it improves attitudes to learning, it improves the experience of learning and is effecting pedagogy - that is internalised among staff and that won't dissipate so I think it has real value and it sustain itself.' Cornwall

'Over time confidence has improved in most of the schools that have engaged, (there) is definitely a desire within the schools for sustaining outdoor learning.' Bristol

'The idea - outdoor learning - has won hearts and minds and that's sustained a project with very modest funds'. Cornwall

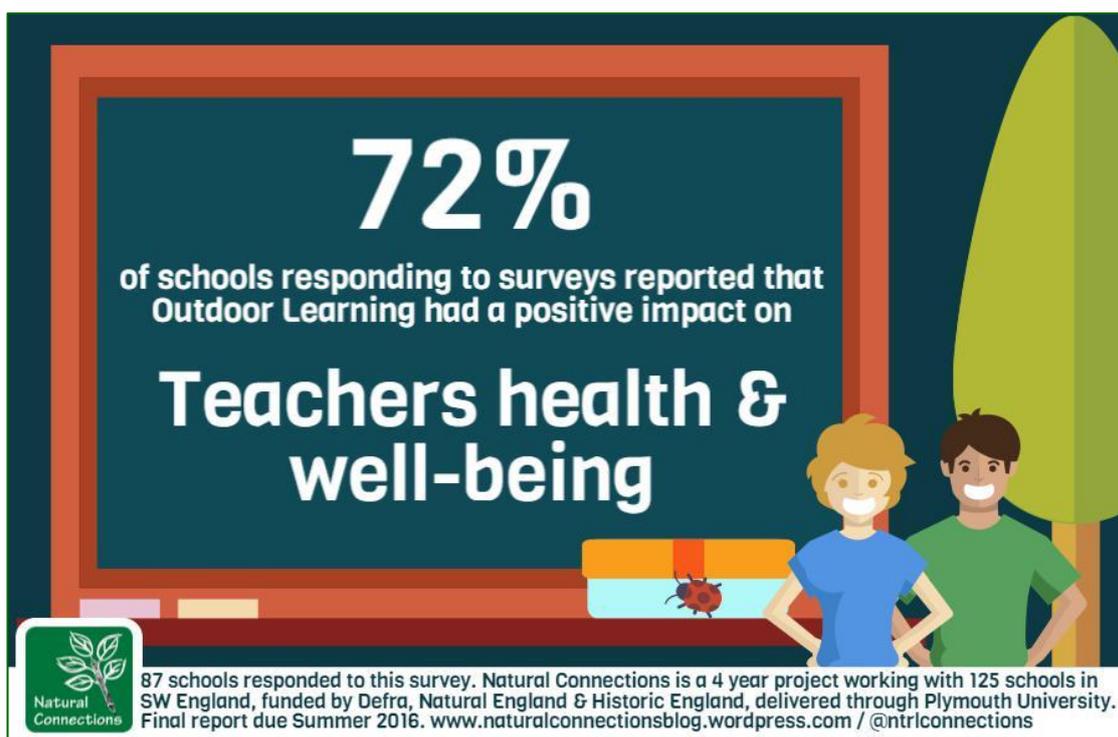
'When this project started, I thought what a wonderful opportunity to use a model of schools supporting schools ... I've really enjoyed giving something back.' Torbay

The project '...has had the effect of creating enthusiasm amongst staff and moved them forward from where they had been. The schools have actually got people they can talk to who are also passionate about the outdoors'. North Somerset

Next Steps

On Thursday 14th July we will be officially publishing the project's final report. We will be sharing the key findings and learning points from the evaluation (many of you will have been a big part of making this happen – thanks!). We intend to have a high profile event in Bristol on that day. Details will be finalised in the coming months and we will be doing lots of communications work in the lead up in order to let people know about the valuable findings that have come from the project. In the meantime, watch this space, keep following us on Twitter @ntrlconnections, or via the blog www.naturalconnectionsblog.wordpress.com

Here is a little infographic taster of what to expect in the lead up to the release of the final report in July, we have some exciting and valuable findings so keep in touch to be the first to hear about them!



**Natural Connections Demonstration Project:
Benefits of outdoor learning for children:**



95% of children said...

I enjoyed lessons more!

Natural Connections

448 pupils completed surveys. Natural Connections is a 4 year project working with 125 schools in SW England, funded by Defra, Natural England & Historic England, delivered through Plymouth University. Final report due Summer 2016. Visit [@ntrconnections](http://www.naturalconnectionsblog.wordpress.com)

Natural Connections follow-up survey, summer 2016

As you will have seen in this newsletter, the final report for the project is due soon, and we know from speaking to many participating schools that the end of the project will not be the end of their learning outdoors. We have learned so much from the data you have sent in, and are keen to continue this understanding of how schools learn outdoors and how to support them. We are planning a short survey for those who have been involved in the Natural Connections project during June and July this year, and it would be fantastic if you could continue with your support for the research by submitting your experiences and views. We will be getting in touch at the beginning of June with a link to the survey, and will send all participants a summary of the findings as soon as possible. Thank you very much!

Naturally Healthy Devon Schools News

CPRE Devon has generously contributed funding to the *Naturally Healthy Devon Schools Project* to enable the Natural Connections model for outdoor learning to be rolled out to schools in North and East Devon into 2017.



CPRE Devon is an environmental charity, run by volunteers. They campaign for a beautiful and living countryside, working to protect, promote and enhance our towns and countryside to make them better places to live, work and enjoy, and to ensure the countryside is protected for now and future generations. They rely solely on membership, donations and legacies. By becoming a member, you make a crucial contribution to their work. Membership includes the *Countryside Voice* magazine, sent three times a year, half-price entry to over 200 houses and gardens across England, *Fieldwork*, a quarterly newsletter to help you campaign, membership of the local branch and access to their Planning Hotline for advice from CPRE staff. For more information see their website www.cpredevon.org.uk

Competition – win some fantastic prizes by discovering your local environment.

CPRE Devon are supporting outdoor learning with their 'My Outdoors' competition. This new competition runs from 1st March to 17th June 2016, and is open to all children of primary school age and to all primary schools in Devon.

CPRE Devon hope to encourage children to appreciate their local countryside by asking them to draw, paint or create a visual representation of their local environment or favourite outdoor space. Pupils might like to use part of their school grounds, their local town or village, their garden, a park, playground, green space nearby, or even a school trip destination. The entry can link with existing outdoor learning plans and visits already in the school diary, or it could be an opportunity to go somewhere entirely new. 'My Outdoors' has links to many areas of the curriculum, including Geography, Maths, English, Science and History.

Prizes will be awarded in two age categories – Reception + Key Stages 1 and 2, and a top prize will be awarded to an individual in each key stage, as well as to their local school. As well as prizes for individual winners, winning schools will receive a plaque and £200 to spend on further outdoor learning. The competition is free to enter.

<http://www.cpredevon.org.uk/our-new-competition-launches-today-cpre-devon-our-outdoors-2016/>

Naturally Healthy Devon Schools – North Devon

This winter, NHDSchools in North Devon and Torridge have been taking part in the RSPB Big School Birdwatch and including maths data handling tasks, celebrating Pancake Day, recording trees through the seasons, and challenging pupils to measure trees. They met to focus on KS2 maths and English outdoors, sharing ideas for activities that lend themselves to utilising the outdoor environment whilst covering KS2 maths curriculum including number, measure, scale and proportion and fractions. They measured the height of trees and shared some English, maths and topic related outdoor activities to try out across KS2.

At another session, ideas were shared for recording and assessment of outdoor learning. They made twig books to use for ID recording and as field notebooks, tried some active self-assessment with the rainbow rope, looked at using graphs, drawings and photographs in a range of ways, and looked at an example of a teacher assessment chart to record learner's skills.

Upcoming events at Tamar Lakes are:

- 14th April, Introduction to Outdoor Learning 'Shelters'
- 23rd June, Introduction to Outdoor Learning 'Bees'
- 8th July, Forest School Skills: 'Fire and Tool Use'
- 9th July, Forest School Skills: Creative, Holistic Learning

[click here for all details](#)

Please get in touch with louise@naturallearning.org.uk if you would like any more information

Naturally Healthy Devon Schools – East Devon

Schools in Exmouth have had a couple of great training sessions this term. Marpool Primary School hosted a well-attended 'Growing' session with teachers planning their growing spaces with cooking in mind. At Withycombe Raleigh Primary School, participants spent a productive afternoon finding out about funding and focusing their ideas into realistic action plans. Their next events are:

- **Learning outside your school grounds, 19th April** 4.00 – 5.30, Littleham primary School, Exmouth. Kate Ponting, Countryside Learning Officer at Clinton Devon Estates will be joining us to discuss how the Estate and the Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust are providing opportunities for primary schools to learn about the countryside at local farms, heathland, woodlands and by the River Otter.
- **Teach on the beach, 4th May** 9.30 – 3.30, Exmouth beach. Back by popular demand! Gain the confidence and skills to take your class to the beach. A day of workshops with teachers and outdoor facilitators, which link to the curriculum, with the aim to inspire your outdoor learning experiences.
- **Maths and science in the outdoors**, – a day of activities and ideas to promote curriculum learning in school grounds



or outdoor spaces **8th June** 9.30 – 3.30, venue to be confirmed.

- Taking books outside – exploring **teaching English in school grounds** and other outdoor spaces. **23rd June** 4.00 – 5.30, venue to be confirmed.

For more information and booking, contact Alex Turner aturner@eastdevon.gov.uk

Plymouth CPD events

April 14th 2016. 1.30 - 4.30pm. Teaching & learning with **music & stories** with Chris Holland from www.wholelandorg.uk at Marine Academy Primary.

June 9th – all day. **Cob oven construction** with Andy from www.smallholdertraining.co.uk at Beechwood Primary. We are looking to set up a group of representatives from different schools who will work together to help build cob ovens at each other's schools with support.

Plymouth Network Gatherings: Network Gatherings are a chance to visit other schools outdoor spaces and learn about what resources they have invested in and how they are using them as well as presenting an opportunity to share your experiences. Outdoor learning providers from across the city are also invited to attend to share resources and opportunities for engagement. The next one is **Wed 25th May** 4 - 6pm at Marine Academy, Plymouth. A tour of the newly developed facilities including a story circle, veg beds and chickens. Also **Teaching & Learning Literacy Outdoors** with Growing Sustainable Futures. Why not come along to one of these sessions for FREE and find out more about our Natural Connections subscription? This offers ongoing support to help you access the nearest natural spaces and develop your outdoor learning facilities on school grounds.

For more info about any of these events, please contact Bex 07983 693798 or bex@earthjump.org

Other CPD & Events

Devon Naturally Healthy Month May 2016. Natural Devon (Devon Local Nature Partnership) is encouraging everyone to get outside, get active and be Naturally Healthy. A wide range of events and activities are being held across the county from health walks and cycle rides to forest schools and nutrition workshops [click here for more info](#)

The International Festival of Childhood 2017 is the concept for a new and globally significant bi-annual event, with the first one taking place in Bath in 2017. The Festival will be the first of its kind to both celebrate what's great about childhood, but to also highlight the very real dangers that children are being exposed to. Combining the most exciting and innovative children's projects and organisations with the latest thinking on brain science and early development, it will bring together a unique and multi-disciplinary team of experts to share their own thoughts about the situation together with many of the solutions that are currently being explored. In particular it will aim to look at the nature of inequality, the importance of families and local communities and how we can help every child to fulfil his or her potential. <http://www.festivalofchildhood.com/>

"...everyone's benefited, the Hub Leaders have benefited, teachers have benefited, children have benefited... LINE is for the whole child, it's not just for performance you know attainment, it's impacting on every aspect of childhood..."

We hope you have enjoyed reading these newsletters. The project team would like to thank Laura Moore for coordinating this newsletter as part of her invaluable role as project Administrator, and wish her well for the future.

