

Action in Rural Sussex - Lost of the Low Weald and Downs Woods Project – Development Phase NHLF

Pilot Engagement Activity. Case Study: Plumpton College

BACKGROUND:

AirS made contact and developed a relationship with the Foundation Learning department at Plumpton College.

Initial conversations sparked interest in the Lost Woods project and the tutors believed that working with Lost Woods would be an excellent venture for their Level 1 group (“Level 1 – Stepping into College or Work”).

ABOUT THE GROUP:

The Level 1 group consisted of approximately 10-14 Further Education students (aged 16-18). Most have learning difficulties and Educational Healthcare Plans, with 2 accompanying support staff.

WHAT WE DID WITH THE GROUP:

With the tutor we planned four consecutive sessions every Tuesday afternoon for 4 weeks during their first term September / October 2021. The Village Agents liaised with rangers and private woodland owners to find suitable and accessible tasks for the students to complete. Giving them a variety of different sites to work on which enabled the students to develop skills, build confidence, work as a team and enhance their wellbeing.

- Ditchling Common Country Park - Path clearance from car park and around pond (bramble and scrub)
- Pondtail's Wood - Path clearance around fire circle and along path
- Anna's Wood, Ditchling - Path clearance (bramble and tree)
- Chailey Common Local Nature Reserve - Birch removal in a marsh gentian area

We also spent a morning at Sussex Prairie Gardens in November walking around the gardens learning from the landowners on how they manage the site, the range of plants and new plans for a designed woodland.

We also did a wellbeing check in before and after each session. Students scoring themselves between 1 – 10 (1 being the lowest).

LEARNING:

Wellbeing: All students scores went up significantly after each session, with many commenting that they felt happier, more energised, relaxed and enjoyed being outside.

The sessions proved to be a good example of working with private landowners. The landowners being able to see how much work a group can get done within a few hours and the students experiencing different types of woodlands and management. It also has led to other potential new leads and more conservation work that Plumpton students can get involved in.

Access: Two of the sites proved difficult to access with a minibus, busy roads and limited parking. Sites had to be limited to a half an hour drive from Plumpton due to limited time in the students' timetables.

QUOTES:

"Definitely a good experience, I was pleased to have everyone on site and get stuck in. The site was left as requested and an improvement was made.

Looking ahead I would be enthusiastic to have the group out again to continue the work."

Andy East Sussex County Council Ranger

"They did a brilliant job. We were really impressed with what you all achieved. It was very worthwhile from our point of view and the site was definitely improved by the visit from the Plumpton students, who would be very welcome back."

Rebecca Pondtail Wood

"Parents have commented on improved mood and sleep of the students after Tuesday afternoons. Thanks again for everything you have arranged for us this past month or so. It has been brilliant, and the students definitely enjoyed it! " Simon McGill Plumpton Tutor.

Student's feedback:

List any benefits you gained from taking part in the project:

- Exercise
- Teamwork
- Learning good knowledge of the places we went to
- Helping out with community work with the council
- Being outdoors
- Being out in the woods
- Gardening Skills
- An enlightened appreciation for nature

DATE: 01/12/2021

AUTHOR: Fran Corney