



Cedar House School
Part of the Witherslack Group of Schools Ltd

Cedar House School Progress through the John Muir Award: Case Study

Students at Cedar House School, a residential school for children with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties based in Kirkby Lonsdale, Cumbria began using the John Muir Award in 2006 to offer students a nationally recognised certificate whilst gaining valuable work experience.

With the help of their dedicated teacher, and Mark Birchall of the Forestry Commission, current students Shane and Megan have achieved Discovery and Explorer Awards and are presently working towards their Conserver Awards. Since Shane and Megan began their John Muir Award activity their commitment, knowledge and enthusiasm has noticeably developed throughout each of the Award levels.

Beginning at the Discovery Level, the introductory level of the John Muir Award, Shane and Megan explored a network of paths and mountain bike trails throughout Grizedale Forest, and helped maintain way-markers and footpaths, including step renewal tasks. This gave Shane and Megan the opportunity to get their hands dirty whilst talking about the feelings they had while immersed in nature. Visiting the site each week throughout the seasons, they experienced the forest in all weather conditions. Having spent a substantial time in the forest Shane now seems to have an affinity with it, commenting;

'The forest talks a lot, I like to listen to what it says.'

Progressing onto their Explorer Award, they have focused on a specific area of forest which had previously been set aside to monitor the impact of deer grazing. The students were handed this area in order to learn about woodland management, identifying tree species and learning how to thin and space trees in order to encourage a more natural woodland ecosystem.

Having learned how to maintain and use appropriate woodland tools, Megan commented;

'I like using tools...
Pens I struggle with.'

Teacher Fritz has noticed that his group "really gets to grips with the hands on work, digging, hammering, cutting and planting, as it gives immediate results, is long lasting and something tangible that they can put their names on. It is something that will last".





Self confidence within Shane and Megan appears to have increased since the beginning of their John Muir Award journey.

In November 2008, Shane answered questions in front of a large audience at Cumbria's John Muir Award Gathering, and more recently, both Shane and Megan visited a local old people's home in order to share their experiences further. Their contact here has led to an opportunity to create a wildlife garden for residents as part of their Conserver Award, the highest Award level.

Influencing Others

John Muir Award participants have taken a lot from their experiences, but others have benefited too. The newest member of the Grizedale team, Holly, has been introduced to the site via a guided walk with Shane and Megan, and has received valuable advice from them in the build up to her recent 'Share' challenge. Having been working towards her Discovery Award for the past six months, Holly recently completed her Award by leading a group of adults to Grizedale, sharing her expanding knowledge of woodland habitats and management techniques with a captivated audience.

Since getting involved with the John Muir Award group, Holly has noticed a substantial change in the way she looks at herself and the natural environment: "Now that I've started coming out here I've taken a shine to it...my mum's got a garden back home and I love to help her with it now... If someone six months ago had asked me if I wanted to come out to Grizedale I'd have said no way but now if you ask me I say yeah definitely!"



Looking to the Future

Holly plans to continue through the John Muir Award levels and has firmly told mentors Fritz and Mark that she would like to continue to set time aside to

'Stop and see how beautiful nature can be sometimes'

There are also plans for Holly to fulfil the role of mentor for future groups visiting Grizedale Forest to take part in their John Muir Award, ensuring that as each John Muir Award participant progresses, others benefit.



The John Muir Award in Cumbria is hosted by Cumbria Youth Alliance, an umbrella organisation for voluntary youth sector groups in Cumbria. For more information visit www.cya.org.uk

The John Muir Award is an environmental award scheme focused on wild places. It encourages awareness and responsibility for the natural environment, in a spirit of fun, adventure and exploration. For more information visit www.johnmuiraward.org.