

Ieuenctid Torfaen (Torfaen Youth Service)

Social action supports transition to secondary school – Autumn 2017

Proudly supporting youth social action



The Torfaen Transition Project, led by Torfaen Youth Service, works with pupils identified by their primary school as being at risk of struggling with the transition to secondary school.

Transitioning to secondary school can be a challenging phase at the best of times, let alone if you aren't feeling confident, find it hard to communicate with others, or suffer some form of disadvantage. Now in its 6th year, youth workers and teachers from Torfaen County Council team up with pupils from each primary cluster, involving them in a variety of outdoor learning opportunities as a way to make new friends and feel more confident.

Social action in south Wales

Youth social action is an increasing feature of schools' activity, as part of curriculum outcomes, community relations and work experience. Using the John Muir Award gave a context for pupils to take care of the places they got to know.

"Despite Torfaen having a variety of parks and countryside and being only a few miles from the sea, many of these guys had little or no access to the fantastic wild places of South Wales" said youth worker Jess Pullin.

"Seeing them enjoy new and exciting environments was incredible – their passion for caring for them and how they each took responsibility for them was very special."

Trees were planted, water quality, hedgerow and wildlife surveys were carried out, and litter

collected from local parks, beaches and nature reserves.

Finding out more about the local area inspired a particular interest in the local species and their homes, with feeding stations for birds, butterflies and other pollinators created, as well as wildlife habitats designed including bird boxes, hedgehog houses and bug hotels.

Wild places revisited

Visiting the south Wales coastline and wilds of Torfaen – a small county with the urban towns of Cwmbran and Pontypool to the south and larger expanses of open countryside to the north brought back memories for some, and new perspectives for all. *"Pupils had spent time in these locations throughout their lives, but perhaps not recently"* notes Helen Keeble of Torfaen Youth Service. *"Framing a wide range of activities – beachcombing, rock pooling, even skimming stones, around the John Muir Award really helped pupils reconnect with these wild places, and to see them in a completely different way."*

Each site was selected for its natural character, but also, importantly, for its accessibility - part of a deliberate approach to minimise barriers to participation. All were within walking distance of schools or easy to access via public transport.

Improved transitions

Importantly, a strong sense of enjoyment and motivation was evident throughout the project, confirmed by the Garnteg Primary School ALENCO/Family Partnership co-ordinator:

"The boys looked forward to getting involved in the session every week, and made sure that they found me when they came back to school to tell me what they had done in their local area! It really helped their confidence and they were pleased to have been able to make a difference."

Indicators such as improved attendance and reduced behaviour issues have been noted, demonstrating positive shifts once in the Secondary school environment. Recognising individual achievement through the John Muir Discovery Award has given an opportunity to reward the efforts of participants and a welcome boost to self-esteem and confidence, moving into the next phase of their education.



Credit: Torfaen YS

#iwill campaign

The efforts of the Torfaen groups contribute to a national youth social action initiative, the #iwill campaign, which promotes the value of social action to young people and communities.

It aims to ensure that all young people can access social action opportunities, wherever they live and whatever their background - including activities such as campaigning, fundraising and volunteering.

The John Muir Trust has teamed up with the [#iwill campaign](#) to promote youth social action through the John Muir Award. We have pledged to work with our partners to help 100,000 young people over 4 years [2016-2020] achieve their John Muir Award, engaging in practical conservation activities that make a difference to wild places in their own community and further afield - inspiring youth social action by encouraging young people to connect with, enjoy, and care for wild places.

Find out more about the John Muir Award at johnmuirtrust.org/award