Woodland Games at Upham Road

Green Exercise in the South West

Natural England has funded eight Green Exercise projects with local partnerships around the country. Green Exercise connects people to nature and their local green spaces, and is one of the most cost effective ways of improving the nation’s physical and mental well being. Green spaces can encourage us to be more active by providing facilities to walk, cycle and play, but being in nature also helps to reduce stress and generally improve mental health.

The 3G Woodland Games project targets three generations of residents living within the Great Western Community Forest boundaries. It aims to increase participation in informal physical activity through accessing local green spaces, parks and woodlands. The project focuses on more alternative sports as a means of keeping active – including Ultimate Frisbee, Disc Golf, Rock-it-ball and Kite flying.

The Upham Road Centre in Swindon helps people with learning disabilities, providing day care and activities for 135 service users. Within the centre are two units for people with special needs, and these currently support:

- 13 people in QUEST (for people with challenging behaviour)
- 13 people in Steps (for people with severe physical needs)
The South West Woodland Games project has enabled people from the Upham Road Centre to become more physically active and to explore the natural environment in Swindon. The group meets at the centre every week to walk to a local green space or woodland – usually Queen’s Park or the Lawns. Lots of different games are offered, concentrating on fun and varied activities to be inclusive for all abilities.

The project works closely with the Disability Sports Officer from Swindon Borough Council’s Leisure Services team, to constantly come up with new and fresh ideas to cater for all needs.

So far, 28 people, at the Upham Road Centre, have benefited from the Woodland Games project. The group members have really enjoyed the experience of getting out and about in the local parks and being active every week.

“It’s great to be outside, the games we play are fun, I like getting out of the centre”
Stuart Roberts, user of Upham Road Centre

Centre Manager Angie Smith has also embraced the scheme:
“The most important outcome of this group is the integration with the community. The parks are often busy, particularly in the summer, and it is great to see this group interacting with the general public and getting a positive response back”

Daniel Morgan has a learning difficulty and a severe physical impairment that affects his ability to walk freely and was wheelchair bound when the scheme started. Over the 11 months he has attended the scheme, he has made major progress physically and now runs to the park and is always moving for the whole hour – the transformation has been remarkable.

“The camaraderie of this group is fantastic, they are always willing to help each other out and there is a great spirit within the group. This is typified by the habitual ‘speeches’ at the end of each session whereby people take it in turn to tell a joke or say something – one of the group even plays the harmonica which everyone loves! It is clear that the fresh air and being out in the green space has a positive effect on this group”
Simon Pitman, Project Officer, Woodland Games

The project plans to continue working with this group until it can become self-sustaining. Volunteers from the centre will be trained to lead the group to enable the project to continue beyond its initial lifespan. New users are taking part and it is estimated that another 10 new members will join in the remaining months.

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