




Open Spaces

Registered Charities

Green Spaces Learning Places

Year 1 Evaluation Report

The City of London owns and manages green spaces in and around London for public recreation and health including Epping Forest, Hampstead Heath, Burnham Beeches, City Commons, City Gardens, City of London Cemetery and Crematorium and West Ham Park. Our green spaces, most of which are charitable trusts, are provided at little cost to the communities that they serve and are funded by the City of London.

A young man with short dark hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and dark tie, is looking through binoculars. He is standing outdoors in a park-like setting with lush green trees and foliage in the background. A hand holding a red clipboard is visible in the foreground on the right side of the frame.

'The beauty of nature, plants, trees and birds can't be left to chance discovery. Akin to the stars in the sky, they can go largely amiss. We have to actively introduce, engage and connect the child to these wonders - so we need facilitators to actively connect our children to nature so as they can enjoy and appreciate the beauty within our parks. Many a family cannot afford summer holidays abroad - missing out on refreshing and enriching experiences. For these families parks are vital, and we need to unlock these spaces so as we enjoy their full potential.'

- Wild East participant

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Green Spaces Learning Places

Introduction

The Open Spaces Department manages 4,500 hectares of natural open space for public recreation and health. Our green spaces, most of which are charitable trusts, are run at little cost to the communities that they serve.

23 million people visit our spaces in and beyond the City of London each year. Along with managing the conservation of these incredible spaces, we concentrate on making a positive and meaningful impact on the communities who use them. We create engaging opportunities to connect people, particularly from deprived and urban communities, more powerfully to their local green space.

Key Highlights in Year 1

- **13,657 people** have been engaged through our work
- **33 new volunteers** have been recruited from local communities
- **2 interpretation bikes and 4 new kits** have been developed
- **1 vision for volunteering** has been adopted by the department and 34 staff have received volunteer management training
- **15 new school sessions** have been developed and delivered to local schools
- **66 young people** have increased their confidence and employability skills

'I think this is great for the kids, helping them learn about nature in the park, and just learning outdoors itself is so good for them'. Wild East Participant

We are concerned that Londoners are becoming disconnected from the natural world, and we know that people in deprived areas of London face more barriers than most to accessing nature. Our green spaces are often located near areas of high deprivation which makes us uniquely placed to tackle this challenge head on. Our goal is to get people outdoors to experience the good feelings and health benefits that we all know come from spending time in green spaces.

Green Spaces, Learning Places is our innovative new programme of projects and community services aiming to deliver this impact in our local communities. A generous grant from the City Bridge Trust has enabled us to deliver our first year of the programme and will continue to support a further 2 years of our programme.

A photograph of four women standing in a grassy park area with trees and buildings in the background. They are all smiling and holding up cutouts of leaves or small plants. The woman on the far left is wearing a green jacket and a headscarf. The woman next to her is wearing a dark coat and a red scarf. The woman in the center is wearing a black puffer jacket and a black beanie. The woman on the far right is wearing a dark coat and a black scarf, and is holding a light-colored handbag.

Green Spaces Learning Places

Learning in green spaces

In order to tackle this challenge, we design projects and services that deliver impact in our local communities, connecting them more powerfully to their local green spaces. We focus our work on five impact areas we feel are the stepping stones to increasing connection to nature and green spaces. We are committed to being inclusive but we focus our resources on the communities who need us the most.

What we are trying to do

Make a positive impact on communities who use or border our green spaces through learning activities

By positive impact we mean...

Understanding

People understand the value and importance of green space

Confidence

People are confident to use green spaces, as part of our activities or independently

Involvement

People take positive action for, and get involved with, green spaces

Wellbeing

People have restorative and meaningful experiences in green spaces

Connection

People develop a sense of place with green spaces, and pass this down through generations

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*'I love science because it lets me
discover the world around me'.*

Wild Schools Participant



Green Spaces Learning Places

Projects

Our programme is delivered across 4 community projects aiming to engage a wide range of audiences with our green spaces.

'I love hearing 'I haven't seen one of those in years' when adults are reconnecting with wildlife they used to know as a child'.

Wild East Volunteer

Green Talent

Green Talent aims to work with young people furthest from the job market to support them to achieve positive and productive futures. Working with our partners London Youth's 'Talent Match London' project, we provide opportunities for long term unemployed young people to explore careers in the environmental and green spaces sector.

Wild Schools

Wild Schools delivers impactful education to school children through 2 streams. Firstly, we deliver innovative pre-booked school sessions to a wide range of schools. We also take a full-school approach with a small number of London's inner city schools, aiming to embed outdoor learning in a school's ethos and curriculum through assemblies, school sessions, teacher training and senior leadership support.

The Wild East Project

Wild East aims to connect London's families to nature and the environment through 'bringing nature to families', using bespoke interpretation tricycles. Teams of volunteers from the local community will provide exciting mobile events for family to learn more about the natural environment and build confidence to use their green spaces.

Playing Wild

Playing Wild aims to address barriers to connection with nature through targeting families with under-5s through natural play activities. In particular, we will work with and develop relationships with local community centres, play groups and family centres to promote natural play opportunities to their beneficiaries.



Green Talent

Year 1 Progress

- **43 young people** took part in 1 day taster sessions
- **13 young people** participated in week long work experience placements
- **10 young people** participated in longer term work placements

Green Talent offers young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET opportunities to gain skills in the green sector while improving their confidence and wellbeing at the same time. Working with our partners London Youth and London Ambitions, we offer a range of opportunities to explore green space management careers from conservation to leisure to education.

Young people who participated in the programme have reported gaining confidence, environmental understanding, and a deeper connection to green spaces as well as employability skills.

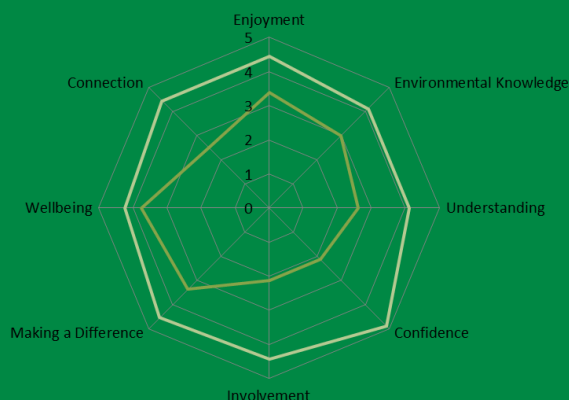
'I don't usually go outside much, but I have found out that I enjoy making a difference to the local park' Green Talent Participant

Case Study – Woodfield School

Our partners, London Ambitions, teamed us up with a special educational needs school for young adults to deliver a longer term programme of work experience placements for 10 young people (picture above). Over 26 weeks, students were given the opportunity to learn about careers in the green sector as well as horticulture skills and hands-on conservation work.

The impact of these sessions was high with all the students learning new skills and gaining confidence (as illustrated in the outcomes star below). In fact, the programme has been widely recognised as successful within the youth work and careers sector. As a result, London Ambitions have teamed us up with 3 Pupil Referral Units to deliver the programme in year 2.

Woodfield School Outcomes





Wild East Project

Year 1 Progress

- **939 participants** at 32 wild east interpretation events
- **4 interpretation kits** developed
- **15 volunteers** recruited
- **1030 additional participants** at RSPB sessions

Working at West Ham Park and Wanstead Flats we want to create a sense of place and ownership of green spaces in the community. Inspiring communities to be involved, engaged and active in championing and shaping green spaces is our aim – after all, the green spaces belong to them.

Often people use green spaces but don't know the stories behind them or how important they are to communities and wildlife. Through the project we bring communities and families using green spaces closer to those stories to inspire a deeper connection. You can learn more about the project by watching this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2NhGxBnsuII&feature=youtu.be>

'To be honest, I just thought it was football pitches. I had no idea all this [nature] was here'.
Wild East Participant

The project has been particularly successful in engaging diverse participants and volunteers and connecting with faith and community groups.

A major aim of Green Spaces, Learning Places is to reach new and diverse audiences, and connect them to their local green spaces. The Wild East Project has done just that with families and volunteers coming from a wide range of backgrounds. 58% of participants and volunteers are BAME while 60% volunteers are under the age of 40.





Wild Schools

Year 1 Progress

- **2451 students** learning in West Ham Park in bespoke sessions
- **2 INSET sessions** delivered in partner schools
- **8 volunteers** recruited
- **10 schools** involved in bespoke sessions

A review of environmental education projects highlighted that many barriers exist to schools using their local green spaces regularly for learning including teacher confidence, lack of resources, health and safety concerns, and lack of understanding of how the natural world can be linked to various curriculum subjects. This project aims to break down these barriers in two different ways.

Firstly, we work with a small number of schools in Newham to embed outdoor learning in their school ethos. Working directly with teachers, senior leadership and students across the entire school to build confidence in outdoor settings.

Secondly, we deliver high quality inspiring booked sessions to a wide range of schools across 12 London boroughs at our Epping Forest and Hampstead Heath education centres.

Bespoke sessions

We have been working closely with 3 schools on learning outside across the curriculum.

A particular success this year has been our 'Maths Trail' sessions developed in conjunction with Elmhurst Primary and rolled out to our other partner schools. 700 students from years 1-6 learned about maths in West Ham Park.

Feedback from teachers before the development of the sessions highlighted that they struggle to connect their maths lesson planning to outdoor, real-life situations. After the sessions, teachers felt energised and excited about the ways in which they could use the natural environment to teach maths. Teachers also reported that students were able to make good progress with their understanding of complex mathematical concepts through learning outdoors and using concrete examples.

"As a teacher, a highlight was seeing the children in my class in a different environment. After experiencing the session first-hand, all of the children felt confident to speak and share their ideas. The learning session allowed for some brilliant follow up work at school"



Wild Schools

Year 1 Progress

- **9804 students** learning at Hampstead Heath and Epping Forest
- **15 new sessions** developed
- **99% of teachers** reported that we met their learning objectives

Booked sessions

Schools across 12 London boroughs have engaged with the natural world and our shared heritage through our booked school sessions at Hampstead Heath and Epping Forest.

Our sessions facilitate learning through active engagement with our unique spaces. We are learner-centred in our approach, and provide fun and inspiring activities which support and enrich the National Curriculum.

A highlight of this year has been the development of brand new programmes at both Hampstead Heath and Epping Forest. Using our principles for school engagement which promote discovery and exploration, the team have developed fantastic sessions which augment the national curriculum.

New sessions at Epping Forest include 'Orienteering through history' and 'Stone Age Survivors' which connect the social and natural history of the forest and highlight the ongoing relationship between humans and nature.

Our new 'Heath beneath our feet' session at Hampstead Heath focuses on connecting learning done on site to the wider world through promoting scientific thinking and enquiry skills.

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*'It was terrific. It was well
organised, all the children were
engaged and all learnt something.'*

Wild Schools participant



Playing Wild

Year 1 Progress

- **441 participants** at 33 playing wild events
- **3 community group events** engaging with 130 participants
- **11 volunteers** recruited and supporting the project delivery

It's the right of every child to experience playing outside and we know so many children are not experiencing this regularly.

On top of this, playing outside has many positive health and wellbeing benefits for young children and builds a lasting relationship with the natural world in adulthood. The societal health benefits include lower rates of obesity, increased physical activity and fitness, and reduction in learning disorders such as ADHD.

Playing Wild has worked with families and community groups to break down the barriers of playing outside through building confidence in both parents and children. The project has been particularly successful in two areas. Firstly, our drop-in sessions at Queen's Park are popular and reaching a wide range of the community.

Secondly, in conjunction with a local community centre near Hampstead Heath, we have developed a 6 week playing wild course which works with both parents and children to play outdoors with confidence. Participants are provided with playing wild kits to ensure that they can continue to play wild after the course has finished. We have plans to roll this course out more widely in year 2 of the project.

'We've really enjoyed exploring the Heath and seeing all the plants and bugs.' Playing Wild participant

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A photograph of four people, three women and one man, standing outdoors in a park-like setting. They are dressed in winter clothing, including coats and scarves. To their right is a large, colorful recycling bin with blue, yellow, and red sections. In the background, there are trees and a fence.

Volunteering

Year 1 Progress

- **1 vision for volunteering developed** with associated framework and training
- **33 volunteers recruited**
- **100% volunteer satisfaction** with recruitment process and welcome

Our volunteering development work positions volunteers as a key beneficiary of the programmes we run in green spaces.

A new departmental vision guides our approach to recruiting and managing volunteers, insuring that policies and procedures are relevant and up-to-date.

Staff are supported to deliver the aims of the vision by a new programme of training and regular support and guidance on issues ranging from duty of care to DBS checks.

The results of this development work are already being felt by volunteers, with 100% strongly agreeing or agreeing that they felt welcome by the Open Spaces team.

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At a volunteer impact event in March, volunteers said that they enjoy the social aspect of volunteering, doing something worthwhile and being energised by the physical outdoor experience at the same time.

They also recognised the valuable advocacy role they play. One volunteer wrote that it was: 'A real joy to engage with a diverse range of the community, especially when that enthusiasm is reciprocated.'

Our learning team volunteers relish the feeling of helping young people and families to explore and learn about the natural world. In the words of Mahfuz, a Wild Schools volunteer: "I look forward to taking part each week and helping children explore the park. You can see the extra benefits they gain from being outside. It's very rewarding."

'There are so many reasons to volunteer, from making new friends to learning about myself in different situations. Everyone is very welcoming which makes me want to keep coming back again and again.' Wild East volunteer



Our learning so far

Year 1 Progress

Through the first year of our project, we have learnt so many valuable things about our projects and our communities. Some of these lessons have been small, such as under-5s struggle with glitter glue. And some of these lessons have been big like the importance of putting the time in to really understand your community at the beginning of a project.

As a team, we are committed to reflecting on our work at all times to ensure we are making the most impact in our communities. We capture this learning on a monthly basis to chronicle the growth of our programme. We have highlighted 4 of the themes that regularly recur when we reflect on the challenges and successes of our projects.

We are particularly excited to have developed a partnership with the University of Derby for the second year of our project to help us learn more about the impact we are making.

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- **Having time to think:** At the beginning of the programme it was tempting to start delivering straight away as we were all keen to make an impact. However, we took the time to think, in depth, about our projects and the impact we wanted to achieve before we jumped into delivering. As a result, our projects are stronger and making a deeper impact.
- **Integrating a new team and new approach:** It's always hard to be the new kids on the block. On top of that, we were delivering an entirely new approach to learning. Naturally we faced resistance and scepticism. We found that strong internal communication, being passionate about what we do and demonstrating our value was key to embedding ourselves.
- **Understanding our communities:** It sounds like a no-brainer but in order to work with a community, you need to understand that community. We spent the time (and it takes time) at the beginning of each project getting to know our communities. This has led to a sense of ownership over our projects in the communities we are working with.
- **Evaluating our impact robustly:** We still feel we have a lot to learn about evaluating our impact. We struggled to get an evaluation consultant who we felt would be able to take our evaluation to the next level. So this year, we focused on qualitative data in the form of stories and will be working closely with the University of Derby over the next 2 years.

'We can connect to nature in many different ways including feeling emotionally connected to nature, feeling a part of a green space, seeing ourselves as intertwined and mutually dependent on nature, and taking positive action for green spaces. In our programmes, we see this as a culmination of what we do - the end point we are ultimately trying to achieve. All our other impacts help us to connect people more powerfully to their local green spaces.' - Head of Learning



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