

## **Schools without Walls (title subject to confirmation)**

This proposed project will help SEND young people and families in Birmingham: to access and enjoy the local natural environment, so as to enhance health and wellbeing; and to use local green spaces for learning (including Forest School type activities; food education; environmental arts and conservation).

### **Proposed funders**

We propose to use funding from three sources:

- WMCA Environment Fund
- Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) funding
- Locally raised resources, donations and volunteer time etc.

The project aims match those of the WMCA Environment Fund because the project will:

1. provide better access to and community use of green and blue space for health and wellbeing
2. improve knowledge of environment issues and support behaviour change.

The aims match those of Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) fund because the project will:

3. provide healthy meals and activities for 500 school age children who are disabled or vulnerable and eligible for Free School Meals during the school summer holiday.

The aims support those of local partners who include:

Groups that manage and improve local green spaces and environmental assets

Community providers of youth services, play, arts and adventure activities to young people including those who are disabled and vulnerable.

### **Outline of activities**

Schools Without Walls will, during 2024 summer school holidays, enable up to 500 disabled and vulnerable young people to engage positively with learning through community-based environmental activities, including Forest School, allotment growing, community gardening etc. The project will also support families with disabled and vulnerable young people to enjoy the natural environment in years to come by working with groups that manage local environmental assets to make a set of 'social stories' describing accessible local places and spaces.

From late July to the end of August 2024, the project would help local groups work together to provide 50 sessions (involving at least ten young people in each session) based at several local environmental assets and involving groups of young people and adult staff,

parents/carers and volunteers. Each session would last 3-4 hours, include a healthy lunch or equivalent meal and promote healthy eating and lifestyle. Sessions could be delivered as a block of five sessions during one week, or spread over several weeks of the holidays. They could include Forest School type activities, nature conservation work, environmental arts and drama and be shaped by the interests of the participants. Most of whom will be in the 12-16 age group, although we would include younger children and SEND young people up to a 'fuzzy' upper age limit of 18 years old.

The project is shaped by research which shows the most significant barriers to families with disabled and vulnerable young people enjoying the environment are not issues of physical access, but are to do with perceptions, social factors and uncertainty about what to expect. For this reason, the project will use the activity sessions above as the basis for looking at how young people can actually use each of the environmental assets that acts as a base for them. Working with groups that manage green space, we would create a set of 'social stories' about them. That is: effective descriptions from the point of view of site users with specific information about what to expect (and why) when they visit. These social stories will be used by the groups and will be publicised by Children's Quarter and through the Local Offer etc as part of a campaign to get more social stories produced across the region.

We would involve artists and other specialist workers in working with young participants to record their views, feeling and experiences of the project and of the natural environment. These would be collated – together with a more formal evaluation and the social stories – in the form of a web report by the end of November 2024.

### **Project benefits**

The project will benefit:

**the environment** - because it gains new young champions: autistic, vulnerable and disabled young people who - as things stand - aren't getting access to the world on their doorstep

**young people** - by linking inclusive youth groups with welcoming local environmental assets and enabling young people to spend time in, learn from and enjoy their local environment

**families** - by leaving a legacy of social stories describing the practicalities of getting enjoying, learning from and protecting local environmental assets.

### **Outline budget**

We would aim to use up to £15,000 from HAF to contribute to the costs of staff and volunteers providing more than 500 places at the sessions. In addition, we have requested £25,000 from WMCA Environment Fund to cover the costs of:

- 1) five or more bases like Martineau Gardens, Ackers Adventure, Woodgate Valley Urban Farm and community and therapeutic gardens and allotments in various parts of the city.
- 2) involving young people in writing social stories for each of the bases – includes cost of specialist staff, training and young people's expenses
- 3) transport - where help is needed - for young people for bus travel, the hire of small specialist vehicles and taxis
- 4) working with young people and others to put together the story of the project; the lessons learnt; what the participants felt about it and an assessment of its sustainable development impact including through environmental artists working alongside young people to produce artwork reflecting their experiences and project management.

### **Potential partners and staffing**

Groups including Martineau Gardens; Seven Up Charity; Parks for Play; Square Peg Activities; Balsall Heath CATS; Shining Stars Association for the Chinese Community; Woodgate Valley Urban Farm; the GLUE Collective; and Hamstead Hall Academy have helped to shape the proposal. Other groups have expressed interest including: Thrive, ROAM; Friction Arts; Ackers Adventure; Meriden Adventure Playground Association; and Youth Pathways.

Collectively, these groups represent: extensive connections within the communities of SEND young people and families; a group of valuable local and community-led environmental initiatives; groups with expertise in innovative ways of working with young people and the environment. The project would be led by qualified staff at Children's Quarter with experience and qualifications in environmental management and project management; and evaluation and working with disabled young people respectively.

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