



Learning Without Walls Newsletter



January Edition 2020

Editorial

In the current mental health crisis in Northern Ireland, NIFSA wants to do its bit to help. This year we will launch our “Learning Without Walls” Campaign – “An hour a week is what we seek”. NIFSA and our partners are looking to influence policy makers to help us support schools and nursery groups that want to get their pupils out in to the natural world. We want to get our children addicted to nature and not mobile phones.

Please help us make this campaign a success by signing our on-line petition. This will be used to lobby our locally and nationally elected politicians to help support getting children outside. It will also be used to encourage Stormont to enshrine it in law so that all our school children have to spend at least one hour a week outside the classroom.



Click on the image to sign our on-line petition and find out why our children need to spend at least one hour a week outside in the natural environment.

New Forest School Leaders



Joan McNeill from Jordanstown School receiving her Level 3 and Dr Scully, Principal receiving the official Forest School Plaque.



Pupils from Victoria College Prep receive their Nature Ranger Awards and Rachel McGlinchey is presented with the official Forest School Plaque.

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Victoria Spence is presented with her Forest School Level 3 outside Knockbreda Nursery School.



Emily Sharratt is presented with her Forest School Level 3 in Annahilt Primary School.



Beverley McBride receives her Level 3 award at Moira Primary School.

Forest School Accreditation



We have been busy writing accreditation reports over the last month. All our qualified Forest Schools should receive their accreditation report in February. Check your MIS for details.

Call for help

Dear friends,

My name is Joan Whelan. I am Chairperson of the Irish Forest School Association at present and a retired primary school principal. We are based in the Republic of Ireland and we have close links with Brian Poots and NIFSA. I am completing a PhD in DCU about how Forest School is understood by those interested in this approach to learning outdoors. Here is the link:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf89u6nirJqv6FAM86GPD0VG7RPvJS3kzgMAKGNuYz_cwApFw/viewform?usp=sf_link

It will take about 15 minutes. I really do appreciate your help.

Best wishes, and thanks in anticipation,

Joan

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TCV Competition

Would you like to win the opportunity to work on a Forest in a box and approximately 150 Oak trees for your school?



TCV Tree Nursery has been situated on the idyllic Clondeboy Estate for over 35 years, during this time our work has been to grow native trees from seed collected province wide as well as promoting TCV's wider work in connecting people with their green spaces. To celebrate our 60th Birthday we're promoting our Forest in a Box.

The system mimics the natural forest floor of leaf litter to start the trees off. The sides create shade to encourage the trees to reach for the light with fine mesh across the bottom and the top lid to protect the seeds from being eaten which increases their chances of survival by 90% or more. Each one metre by one metre seed box can provide approximately 200 healthy native trees for planting out every two years TCV Tree Nursery are looking for a Forest School to come to the nursery and work on our Forest in a box. It currently has the beginnings of an Oak forest, two-year old Oak saplings which are ready to come out and move to their new home. Your class would be invited along to TCV Tree Nursery for a

free Forest in a Box Workshop which will be an informative practical session. You will:

1. Learn about Native trees and the life that they sustain.
2. Dig out the current inhabitants – an Oak forest in the making. Your school would be able to take these saplings with you to plant on your own site or give out within your school for pupils and their families to enjoy.
3. Replant the Forest in a Box with mixed woodland species seed.
4. Your forest school will feature in our promotional material for Forest in a Box

If you would like to enter to win this prize email: Kausalya.gibson@tcv.org.uk with a short statement explaining why Forest School is important for you. Entries close 21st Feb 2020 and we'll announce a winner on the 22nd February.

Applicants must be available to attend the workshop before the end of March and provide their own transport.



Research

To back up our national "Learning Without Walls" campaign here is a recent article bestowing the many benefits of being outside in nature from an early age can bring.

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“Children living close to nature develop better mental and physical health”

Source - [Devdiscourse News Desk](#)

- Updated: 22-05-2019 19:02 IST

Did you remember the last time you played in nature as a child? If no, then chances are that your mental health could be affected. In a recent study, it has been found that adults who had close contact with the environment during childhood have better mental health. The study was published in the journal, 'International Journal of Environmental Health Research'

Exposure to natural outdoor environments has been associated with several health benefits, including better cognitive development and better mental and physical health. However, few studies have explored the impact of childhood exposure to natural environments on mental health and vitality in adulthood.

Furthermore, studies have more frequently considered green spaces (gardens, forests, urban parks) than [blue spaces](#) (canals, ponds, creeks, rivers, lakes, beaches, etc.). This study was conducted within the framework of the PHENOTYPE project with data from almost 3,600 adults from [Barcelona](#) (Spain), Doetinchem (Netherlands), Kaunas (Lithuania) and Stoke-on-Trent (United Kingdom).

Adult participants answered a questionnaire on frequency of use of natural spaces during childhood, including purposeful hiking in natural parks- and non-purposeful playing in the backyard- visits. They were also asked about their current amount, use and satisfaction with residential natural spaces, as well as the importance they give to such spaces.

The mental health of the participants in terms of nervousness and feelings of depression in the past four weeks, as well as their vitality - energy and fatigue levels- were assessed through a psychological test. The residential surrounding greenness during adulthood was determined through satellite images. The

results show that adults who were less exposed to natural spaces during their childhood had lower problems related to mental health as compared to those with higher exposure.

Myriam Preuss, the lead author of the study, explains that "in general, participants with lower childhood exposure to nature gave lower importance to natural environments". No association was found between childhood exposure and vitality, or the use of or satisfaction with these spaces in adulthood.

[Wilma Zijlema](#), one of the researchers, underlines that the conclusions "show the importance of childhood exposure to natural spaces for the development of a nature-appreciating attitude and a healthy psychological state in adulthood".



Currently, 73 per cent of Europe's population lives in urban areas with often limited access to green space and these numbers are expected to increase to over 80 per cent by 2050. "Therefore, it is important to recognize the implications of growing in up in environments with limited opportunities for exposure to nature", she adds.

"Many children in Europe lead an indoors lifestyle, so it would be desirable to make natural outdoor environments available, attractive and safe for them to play in", explains [Mark Nieuwenhuijsen](#), one of the researchers. In most countries, activities in nature are not a regular part of the school's curriculum. "We make a call on policymakers to improve the availability of natural spaces for children and green schoolyards", he adds.



Learning Without Walls Conference

Keep Friday 2nd October free for our Annual Learning Without Walls conference. It will be held in Clondeboye Estate and thanks as ever go to our Patron, Lady Dufferin.

Learning Without Walls statistics

At the end of January 2020, we have 54 qualified Forest Schools, 179 registered schools and nurseries actively engaged and working towards their Forest School recognition. NIFSA has supported an incredible 51333 children learning outside since September 2016. Thank you to everyone involved. Our Forest School Family scheme has 194 registered families involved.

Forest School Families

Keep up to date with our Forest School Family Facebook site - [NIFSA Forest School Family Facebook Page](#)

Here you will find information on the latest Forest School Family events that are happening. Ideas for outdoor activities with your family. Training videos – How to dress for Forest School and links to other family friendly events happening around Northern Ireland.

Forest School Awards

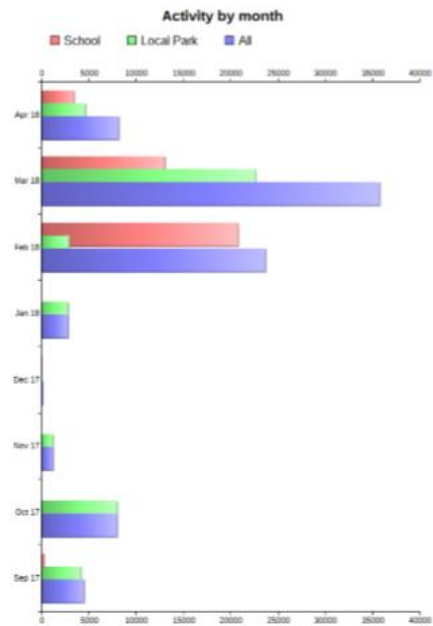
Thank you to all the Councils involved in supporting the Forest School Awards – Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council, Ards and North Down Borough Council, Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council and Mid Ulster District Council.

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We are also optimistic that Fermanagh and Omagh District Council will come on board in September.

We will be sending Council reports to each of our supporting Councils over the next month or two. The reports contain information on schools and nurseries involved in Forest School delivery, number of pupils and hours spent outside.



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As part of our “Learning Without Walls” campaign we are looking, initially, to see how we can support every school and nursery in those Council areas that support us.

Lobby your local Councillor

NIFSA rely almost entirely on Council financial support. Can we ask schools and nurseries already involved in forest schools to contact their local Councillor or Council member of

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staff and thank them for getting their Council area on board.

If your Council is not on board yet, please contact your local Councillor and encourage them to get involved. If they would like to meet a representative from NIFSA to explain the benefits of getting involved this can be arranged. Ask them to contact Brian Poots on brian.poots@gmail.com

NIFSA Membership

Annual membership is £100 and we believe offers good value for money.

Follow the link to subscribe now!

[Sign up for membership now](#)

What do you get for your membership?

- a) Access to Member's Section of the Forest School Awards website which gives information on outdoor lessons, research and much more.
- b) A section on the website exclusively for your own organisation.
- c) Area to record Forest School activities and produce Eco-Schools Reports.
- d) Free attendance for 2 members to the annual NIFSA conference.
- e) Monthly Learning Without Walls Newsletter.
- f) Entry into the Nature Rangers programme to encourage you to do 6 Forest School sessions every year.
- g) Opportunity to train and mentor other staff within your organisation as Forest School Leaders for only £30 Open College Network registration fee.
- h) An entry in the Forest School Awards Directory to showcase what you are doing.

- i) Reduced rates for pupils visiting the Clandeboye Nature Ranger Forest School site.
- j) Discounts at selected shops – 15% off GoOutdoors using special promotional code.
- k)

Clandeboye Estate visits

When you become a NIFSA member you can visit the wonderful Clandeboye Estate for only £3 per pupil. Richard McMeekin, Clandeboye Nature Ranger Manager organises the event with you to establish what exactly it is you need from your visit.

A short clip of what Rathmore Nursery Unit got up to on their visit to Clandeboye Nature Rangers.

[Rathmore Nursery Unit](#)



Contact Richard for more information:
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