3rd Annual Conference & AGM
'Forest School: Rooted in Sustainability'
25th & 26th May, 2019
Fota Education Centre, Carrigtwohill, Co. Cork.
## Conference Day 1

- **9.00** Registration
- **9.30** Opening Circle
  - led by Arran Towers, Niamh Geoghegan, and Tara de las Casas.
- **9.45** Welcoming words
  - Joan Whelan, Chairperson, IFSA.
- **10.00 - 11.00** Keynote: 'Sustainability: discovering the world and your strong, positive place in it through immersive experiences'.
  - Sara Knight
- **11.00 - 11.30** Tea, Coffee and Chats
- **11.30 - 1pm** Concurrent Workshops - Session 1
  - **Workshop 1** - Niamh Geoghegan and Peter Haferkamp
    - 'The Do's, Don'ts...and Maybe Knots!'
  - **Workshop 2** - Shane Furlong
    - Deep Nature Connection For a Sustainable Practice
  - **Workshop 3** - Sean O'Laoghaire
    - Telling Stories in the Forest
  - **Workshop 4** - Lucy Bell
    - Working with your Woodland - Sustainable Management & Biodiversity
- **1.00 - 2pm** Lunch
- **2.00 - 3.30** Concurrent Workshops - Session 2
  - Workshops 5, 6, 7, 8 of choice, repeated as above

## Conference Day 2

- **3.30** Tea & Coffee
- **4.00 - 5pm** IFSA Annual AGM
- **5.15 - 5.30** Closing Circle
  - led by Arran Towers, Niamh Geoghegan, and Tara de las Casas.
- **9.30** Opening Circle
  - led by Arran Towers, Niamh Geoghegan, and Tara de las Casas.
- **9.45 - 10.45** Panel Discussion: Perspectives on sustainability - Challenges for FS practice
  - Eoin MacCuirc, Lynda McSweeney and Jessica Mason
- **11.15 - 12.15** Concurrent Skillshare Session 1
  - **Skillshare 1** - Ciara Hinksman
    - 'Sustainable Leadership - The Acorn Model and Nature-Centric Forest School Programme design'
  - **Skillshare 2** - Tara de las Casas
    - Natural Art in Forest School
  - **Skillshare 3** - Shane Furlong
    - Knifecraft - Fun With Knives
  - **Skillshare 4** - Joan Whelan
    - Sustainable FS practice – How do we know we have achieved what we set out to achieve?
- **12.15** Tea, Coffee and Chats
- **12.45 - 1.45** Concurrent Skillshare Session 2
  - Sessions repeated as above
- **1.45pm** Closing Circle
  - led by Arran Towers, Niamh Geoghegan, and Tara de las Casas.
Dear friends,

I am delighted to welcome you all to our 3rd Annual Conference and AGM in Co Cork. Particular thanks to the ‘local’ Forest School community here in the South West who have been so enthusiastic and supportive as we planned this event. Thanks as well to Lynda McSweeney and the staff of the Education Centre here in Fota, and to the OPW for access to the arboretum.

For many of us, the writing of Sara Knight was our introduction to Forest School and her scholarship, as well as her practice, remain an inspiration. We are so pleased that she is delivering the keynote address on the theme of FS being rooted in sustainability.

In choosing that theme, the Acorn had in mind two things. Firstly, making FS sustainable for practitioners through practical advice, skillsharing and networking. Secondly, we believe that Forest School can contribute to our world becoming a more just and connected place. Our mission is to bring Forest School practitioners together to inspire inclusive, playful learning for all, in nature. We want to build resilience and relationships, through our connection with each other, and the natural world, while inspiring creativity and supporting wellbeing.

This gathering is a chance to catch up and to share our successes and to support each other with the challenges as we reflect on the past year and look ahead to the next. I look forward to meeting you all over our two days together and of course, to having some fun!

Best wishes,

Joan Whelan

Chairperson
About our speakers

Sara Knight - Keynote Speaker

Sara Knight is a retired academic and a Forest School leader. She has contributed to the development Forest School in the UK for over twenty years and has published academic papers and chapters as well as books on the subject which are widely used as text books and are translated into both Korean and Chinese.

Sara is a keynote speaker at conferences worldwide and advises councils and schools in England about their Forest School programmes. Since retiring as a University lecturer, she continues to play in the woods and write about it.

Keynote: ‘Sustainability: discovering the world and your strong, positive place in it through immersive experiences’

Lucy Bell - Growing Wild

Lucy Bell is an organic horticulturist, a horticulture tutor, environmental educator and a trained Forest School Leader, with years of experience facilitating in a variety of outdoor skills. Lucy is co-author of ‘The Year-Round School Organic Garden’ and is a Heritage Specialist for the ‘Heritage in Schools’ scheme. She is also co-founder of Growing Wild, a Kildare based environmental education company which creates local projects based around practical promotion of biodiversity & native habitats, and providing time in nature through Forest School for children and adults. Lucy facilitates ways for people, both young and old, to connect to nature through school organic gardens and native habitat development, wilderness survival skills, wild foraging, woodland trips, living willow work and Bushcraft skills. Website: www.growingwild.ie

Workshop: Working with your Woodland - Sustainable Management & Biodiversity

Learn more about your forest school woodland space and how you can manage it sustainably for the future, including looking at increasing its biodiversity, through learning about various native woodland trees & plants and their uses, including those you need to be careful of, so you can feel safe and empowered as an earth steward in your woodland. We will also look at the practicalities of setting up various native habitats such as wildlife ponds and wildflower meadows and how to plant a tree.

Sean O’Laoghaire

As a teacher, storyteller, puppeteer, artist, writer, but most of all, an igniter of the imagination, Seán is always coming up with new ideas for engaging people in the creative process. His main interest is in stories, mythology and folklore, giving audiences of adults and children alike, an introduction to an older culture as well as using these stories and myths as educational tools for making sense of today’s world and our place within it. Having Worked with Tallaght Art-squad, Irish Museum Of Modern Art Educational Team, National Youth Council of Ireland, Cill Rialaig project, Cork County Council as Artist in Residence on the Beara Peninsula and touring the length and breadth of Ireland (Europe and America as well) telling stories and performing his Glitternaggig puppet show. O’Laoghaire is delighted to return home and streamline his creative force into an accessible entity.

Workshop - Telling Stories in the Forest

Over the years, I’ve carved and sculpted not only stories, but methods to create stories and get participants in that “creating zone”. Working with adults and children alike, makes my workshops universal and great fun for all involved.

I’m always weary of talking about the procedure, as it takes from the magic, but each participant will have a definite insight into their own individual storyteller and a way to inspire others to get in touch with theirs. Using Nature and the cycle of the seasons as our guide, we will work together, in the forest, to create a symphony of story.
Niamh Geoghegan - Humanature

Niamh Geoghegan brings 20 years of experience in youth and community education and wellbeing to her role as founder, programme and lead facilitator at Humanature. A graduate of the UCD Innovation Academy (2019), her practice draws on a commitment to connection for contemporary communities. Niamh's ability to forge creative collaborations with inter-disciplinary practitioners is what makes Humanature programmes so popular. In her roles as a forest school educator, she coordinates and co-facilitates Mucky Boots Forest School Programme with whom she is currently developing forest school content for the mainstream primary curriculum. She has developed programmes for children and families for Green Spiral in Spain (2015-2019) and Outdoor Play Matters Conference in LIT Thurles (2018). Niamh also facilitates regular forest school programmes for 3-7 year olds in Timoleague.

Peter Haferkamp

Peter Haferkamp's love of nature and the outdoors originated from his childhood in Germany, where he was a member of a nature scout group. He then went on to become a landscape gardener and tree surgeon which he still practices. With a desire to work with children in the outdoors, Peter undertook a FETAC training course in Childcare and started his own venture Little Explorers. He was invited to facilitate outdoor activities with the Farmyard Kindergarten in Cork City and the Homeschooling Hub soon after. He met Niamh and Aaron on the Forest School Leader training course. Mucky Boots Forest School has really brought his skills and nature knowledge to the right platform.

Workshop: The Do's and Don'ts...and Maybe Knots!
led by Niamh Geoghegan and Peter Haferkamp

Creating a safe environment for fun learning through play is imperative for every forest school. Supported by Peter Haferkamp, participants in this workshop will work in teams to build natural play structures using rope. Drawing on their well-established partnership, Niamh Geoghegan will use this hands-on experience to demonstrate strategies for quality, collaborative workshop design including the development and testing of tools for creative boundary setting. The experience will wrap up with some group reflection so that participants can share what they have learned with each other.

Shane Furlong - Wild Places

Shane started WildPlaces in the storied landscape of North Wexford when he moved back to Ireland a number of years ago. He now has an established year-round after-school and seasonal camp programs at his woodland base in Gorey and he also designs and delivers various woodland-based programs with schools across the SouthEast, drawing on training and experience as a Forest School leader and certified Advanced Bushcraft Practitioner as well as his more recent training as a Forest Therapy Guide. Participating in a year-long adult Nature Immersion course last year, held with the 8-shields approach, and delivered by Cultivating Curiosity in Sussex, Shane maintains a strong connection with this rich node of Nature Connection. 2019 sees him immersing in the 8-shields approach through returning on a monthly basis to Sussex to complete an apprenticeship working with young people on Cultivating Curiosities Monthly Mentoring Program. He’s also working towards an Animal Tracking Certification. His vision for 2020 is to activate the parents and adults in his own community so the learning and inspiration can continue at home and to initiate a Monthly Mentoring Program for the young people of Gorey.

This year at the Conference he is delighted to present on the topic of developing a personal Nature Connection practice as an anchor of belonging and source of inspiration for working outdoors with kids and adults and to share some creative projects for working with knives and wood.
Ciara Hinksman - Earth Force Education

Passionate to share her love for the outdoors, Ciara founded Earth Force Education in 2009 and is delighted to work as a Forest School Leader and trainer. She collaborates with Circle of Life Training to offer accredited Forest School Leader trainings in Ireland. As well as trainings for adults, she coordinates and delivers long-term Forest School children’s programmes in association with Local Authorities and groups throughout the country. She is a Heritage in Schools expert through The Heritage Council and was featured in RTE Nationwide’s ‘RTE Goes Wild’ series www.vimeo.com/65611610. Ciara is the founding chair of the Irish Forest School Association and is very grateful for all the incredible people and quality projects arising out of this growing movement.

Skillshare: 'Sustainable Leadership - The Acorn Model and Nature-Centric Forest School Programme design'

Drawing from her experiences at the Art of Mentoring internationally, Ciara is offering a workshop based on the ‘8 Shields’ model that has been the foundation of her Forest School and nature connection programme design and staffing. We will look at a holistic leadership model - ‘The Acorn’ and elements to be aware of in programme design and delivery. We will explore the 8 Shields adapted version of Joseph Cornell’s ‘Flow Learning’ cycle and examine the attributes we can look for in the learners we work with. There'll be group-sharing practices, a song or two, games and some movement.

Tara de las Casas - Wild Inspired Education

Tara is the founder of Wild Inspired Education and is based in County Cork. She has been working in Environmental Education for the last 12 years, focusing on creating school gardens for biodiversity and growing food. For the last 5 years her journey has taken her into the woods, where she offers a variety of forest school programs. Tara is also a visual artist, her creative passion is working with natural materials such as willow and community based projects. To connect with nature through creative play is an important part of her forest school sessions, natural arts and crafts giving many opportunities for learning and growing. She is the co-founder of the Earth Spirit Arts Collective, which aims to bring art, permaculture, and traditions of story, song and ceremony together to create nourishing spaces for community interactions.

Skillshare: Natural Art in Forest School

Being outdoors in a woodland setting can spark our imaginations and inspire our creative potential. Come and explore the wonders of nature and the possibilities that can unfurl from within your creative being. Using found and natural materials, we will be playing and making some land based art and sharing some simple ideas that can be used in a forest school setting.

Joan Whelan

Joan Whelan is Chair of the IFSA. She is currently completing a PhD in DCU on Forest School pedagogy in the primary school. In 2016, she retired after 24 years as principal of an Educate Together primary school. She is a qualified educational psychologist and has always been interested in ensuring that schools are caring, holistic places. She introduced FS education in 2011, the first Irish primary school to offer this provision, and it is now an embedded part of the school’s offering. She believes strongly in schools being local hubs in their communities and has pioneered initiatives including the introduction of a school age childcare service, community use of the school building and most recently chaired a committee to renovate a local park, where the voice of the local children were to the fore. She lives in Dublin with her husband and has two adult children.

Skillshare: Sustainable FS practice – How do we know we have achieved what we set out to achieve?

Based outdoors, this skill-share is about how we assess our practice, so that it deepens and so becomes more sustainable over time? How do we know when we have achieved what we set out to achieve? Are we always clear about what we want to achieve for ourselves and others participating in the session? How do we discuss these issues with settings and schools? What kinds of ways are we using at the moment and how can we improve them, in line with the ethos of FS?
### Jessica Mason

**Jessica Mason** is an Advanced Trainer with Leave No Trace Ireland, she has a degree in Environmental Science and is currently studying for her MSc Learning for Sustainability. Jessica has worked for organisations such as the Coomhola Salmon Trust, ENFO and Cork Environmental Forum. Jessica is also involved with the Heritage in Schools Project. She has ten years’ experience working with children and adults in Environmental Education, both in and outside of formal education settings.

### Lynda McSweeney

**Lynda McSweeney** established Fota Wildlife Park's education department in 1995. The education department provides formal education modules to the primary, secondary and tertiary education sectors in the field of both wildlife biology and biodiversity conservation. In excess of 16,500 students participated in its education programme during the 2018 season. The park’s Education team comprising of qualified experts in ensuring that programme content is both accessible and fun for students of all ages and abilities to learn and explore the natural world. Learning materials and content can be adapted to suit any requirements, and the exciting habitats and environments within the Park are perfectly suited to a practical exploration of these themes.

### Eoin MacCuirc

**Eoin MacCuirc** works for the Central Statistics Office (collecting data on Ireland's baseline and progress towards the Global Goals). He also represents the Cork Food Policy Council and the Cork Environmental Forum, as well as being part of the hugely successful FoodCloud (online platform that has saved over 10 million meals from Irish landfill).