



How to Become a Forest School

Part of the Learning Without Walls initiative

A FREE one-day event that will get you started on your Forest School journey

Date: 24th September 2019

Venue: Clondeboye Estate, Bangor

Time: 9.30am – 1.30pm

Description:

The Northern Ireland Forest School Association (NIFSA) is the recognised body for the development and delivery of Forest School Programmes in Northern Ireland.

There has been a huge growth in the interest in Forest Schools over the last three years. NIFSA are working with nearly 200 schools across Northern Ireland. With another 400 schools and organisations wanting to get involved. Consequently, NIFSA have been developing innovative and imaginative Programmes to satisfy this huge demand. Getting involved will also not cost the earth and may even be free. Find out which option is best for you and register on the day.

9.00am -9.30am – Registration – and tea and coffee on arrival

9.30am - 9.45am – Introduction and about the day

9.45am - 10.15am – What is a Forest School and why get involved?

10.15am - 11.00am – The Forest School Awards explained

11.00am-11.20am – Tea and coffee

11.20am – How to get involved

a) Six-week Forest School Leader Programme

b) Forest School Awards Programme

b) Champion Forest School Programme

c) Shared Education Forest School Programme

12.20pm – 12.30pm - NIFSA Membership

12.30pm – Questions

1.00pm – 1.30pm – Soup and sandwiches

Places are limited so please register your interest now by clicking on the button below:

Book Your Free Place Now

Background material:

The Northern Ireland Forest School Association (NIFSA) has been developing Forest School programmes in Northern Ireland since 2008.

NIFSA is a registered charity and is a company limited by guarantee.

NIFSA is recognised as the foremost authority on Forest Schools in Northern Ireland and is hugely respected internationally.



Since 2008 NIFSA has developed its own Government recognised Forest School Leader qualification. This insures that training and accreditation are to the very highest standard. Teachers that attain the qualification are confident and competent at delivering top quality environmental education programmes with their pupils and train other teachers, within their school, to become involved.

NIFSA is working with hundreds of schools and nurseries throughout Northern Ireland through a variety of different programmes. Every year it trains and accredits dozens of teachers and youth leaders to achieve their Forest School Leader Level 3 qualification. NIFSA engages tens of thousands of children in outdoor learning annually.

NIFSA is a membership organisation and also secures its finances through service contracts with local authorities and central Government in Northern Ireland. Finally, local businesses also support NIFSA to work with local schools.

Lady Dufferin, from Clondeboye Estate, has been patron of the Northern Ireland Forest School Association since 2016.

Clondeboye Estate nestles in 2,000 acres of land in North Down. It has a working dairy farm and Yoghurt Company. There are over 1,000 acres of broadleaved woodland, making it one of the largest native woodlands in Ireland.



Lady Dufferin has always been passionate about education, the environment and the arts and has been a huge supporter of them all over the years. She supports all of these worthy causes through her charitable Trust - The Dufferin Foundation.

TCV or Conservation Volunteers have an established tree nursery on the Estate. Here they have staff and volunteers growing over 100,000 native trees every year.

Lady Dufferin was also instrumental in getting the Woodland Trust to operate in Northern Ireland. Now the Woodland Trust have over 53 publically accessible native woodlands covering over 1,000 acres.

Lady Dufferin's vision is to see Clondeboye Estate being used as a vibrant and inspirational centre of excellence for learning. Children, students, teachers, academics will be able to use Clondeboye Estate to become inspired and reconnected again to our natural world. Particular emphasis will also be placed on Shared Education. Communities from different backgrounds will learn and play together at Clondeboye. This experience will breakdown any preconceptions or prejudices children may have of others from different cultural backgrounds and help to forge a more tolerant and respectful society in Northern Ireland.

All of this activity comes under the umbrella of the "Learning Without Walls" initiative.

Forest School Awards Summary

Academic Year	Number of Councils involved	Number of children engaged in outdoor learning	Number of schools/organisations involved	Schools/organisations requesting training
2016/17	3	6,200	50	30
2017/18	4	10,000	80	150
2018/19 (as of April 2019)	5	20,000+	170	400

Key website links

Learning Without Walls – <https://www.forestschoolorawards.org/cgi-bin/lww.cgi>

Forest School Awards –

Website - <https://www.forestschoolorawards.org/cgi-bin/main.cgi?page=Home;vat=1555571283>

Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/Northern-Ireland-Forest-School-Association-527218757325407/>

Clandeboyne Nature Rangers –

Website - https://www.forestschoolorawards.org/cgi-bin/lww.cgi?page=Nature_Rangers

Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/ClandeboyneNatureRangers/>

Forest School Families

Website - <https://www.forestschoolorawards.org/cgi-bin/main.cgi?page=Family%20Zone;vat=1544009467>

Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/NIFSA-Forest-School-Family-307581329759766/>

Evaluation after undertaking the Forest School Awards 6-week training and accreditation programme supported by the Public Health Agency

Emma Quinn - Principal – Rathcoole Primary School

Being a TOPS award school for “Taking Outdoor Play Seriously” when we heard of Forest School last year through the council, I diligently applied but unfortunately our school was not successful in gaining the training. I put this to one side and our school directed all of our attention in developing our outdoor play area even further. Part of this was developing a gardening area, planting more trees and using natural and recycled resources whenever we could. The staff were fully on board with the outdoor play but as a leader, I knew that we needed to be thinking of how this could become fully embedded in learning and teaching within Rathcoole Primary School.

“Play is the highest form of research.” We understand what Albert Einstein was saying here. Play is learning. Play is research. ¹

I attended an information session with Brian Poots, at Earlview Primary, where the first video clip alone, had me engrossed. I left feeling positive that at least one of my staff would be able to work with me to complete the leadership training and even if we had to pay it ourselves it was worth it.

We work closely with five local primary schools and one high school within our local area. Part of this also involves liaising with the Public Health Agency. I was delighted when Brian contacted me to say that he had received funding for training from the PHA and would we be interested. Yes!!! Then came the task of recruiting the right members of staff. I knew that I wanted to do this, as a leader and teacher, but I also needed another member of staff to work alongside me. The email that was sent out was frank and to the point. This was just not a few days outside having fun, but involved research, assignments, leading CPD for other staff and disseminating the good practice and sharing the enthusiasm for forest school. I was slightly dismayed when only one teacher took on the challenge but delighted by the never-ending enthusiasm that she brought with her and knew that together we would soon have all the staff loving forest school.

We worked together with Brian then ourselves to review the work that was needed and planned out our sessions for the following few months. There soon developed a file with resources and the online Google Classroom became the one stop shop for all staff, with ideas, videos and printable ideas for all ages from nursery to Primary 7.

“The teaching life is the life of the explorer, the creator, constructing the classroom for free exploration. It is about engagement. It takes courage. It is about ruthlessly excising what is flawed, what no longer fits, no matter how difficult it was to achieve. It is about recognizing teaching as a medium that can do some things exquisitely but cannot do everything.”

– Christa L. Walck, “A Teaching Life,” *Journal of Management Education*, November, 1997, p. 481 ²

We are fortunate to have great grounds in our school and also we are within walking distance of many other local amenities. I felt though that we needed to stay within school so that parents, teachers and pupils could see that you did not need to travel outside of our community to take part in a forest school session. We already had a willow dome, a gardening space and had recently planted 200 trees and shrubs from the Woodland Trust. It seemed natural that we developed the space that already existed. P6/7 were the class that were going to be our “guinea pigs.” The first session with Brian was fantastic and I think the two teachers and two assistants were the most “giddy” of all, with the session really bringing out the competitive side in them!

It was the way that the sessions flowed so simply. There were no magic tricks, no big resources that had to be bought or carried out (barr the ruc-sac), there were no big right or wrong answers. The children led the sessions and group accordingly and each group had a chance to share and explain their learning and this was celebrated by all. The quieter children, who were typically less “academic” and did not enjoy written work, were the ones who surprised us most. These children were leading, asking questions, offering solutions, problem solving, taking the lead in den building and organising the group. Several of the statistically “intelligent” children found it difficult to have the freedom and the creativity. They were stuck by the fact that there was no one right answer for things and that it was better getting on with the group and getting things done, rather than standing discussing whose ideas were the best.

With two teachers training it allowed us to work together but equally stand back over alternate weeks and take in what the group were doing, how the sessions were going, what worked well and what didn't work well – in other words it allowed us to be observers or participants – rather than just the teacher or leader. This is an invaluable life lesson and something that teachers do not get to do that often. As Benjamin Franklin said, “Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn.”³ Nothing is more true of forest schools.

Perhaps one of the things I enjoyed best about forest school was coming to school ready for the session. Wearing the old clothes and outdoor boots, cap in hand and warm coat on. Not worrying about our style and hair and being allowed to be who we are naturally meant to be. Some of the children were not so prepared, so we kept some footwear and clothes ready for them on a Tuesday morning. Some parents complained at the beginning about the muck and the cold but once we sent home more information and shared photographs on our school system with us they loved hearing about what the children were doing from week to week. The life lessons also about cleaning your boots and changing wet socks and clothes were also invaluable to many of our children and young people.

In conclusion, one of the best sessions my colleague and I led was a twilight session with all staff from nursery to Primary 7 via Forest School. Seeing 22 women competing for the best den and completing the tree art the quickest, is a sight to behold. The energy that was created that day was unforgettable. My job now, following the submission of assignments,

is not to sit back and relax – instead it's to begin the new term and reignite the fire that WB Yeats or Plutarch so eloquently spoke of:

“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.” —William Butler Yeats ⁴

In 5 to 10 years I see our school forest genuinely as a forest, I see a huge portion of lesson being outdoors because they enhance the learning and teaching, I see the children being more independent risk-takers in life in general and become great team players and communicators. In fact, I think that this is really what the Northern Ireland Skills based curriculum is all about. Our role now is to share that with the Education Inspectorate, Department of Education, parents, other schools and leaders, learning communities so that children do not simply become a number in the box or the data in the report – they grow to become who they are born to be.

“Children are not things to be moulded, but are people to be unfolded.” ~ Jess Lair ⁵

References:

- 1 <http://www.mycubby.com.au/blog/our-favourite-outdoor-play-quotes/>
- 2 <https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-professor-blog/timeless-quotes-teaching-learning-inspiration/>
- 3 <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/21262-tell-me-and-i-forget-teach-me-and-i-may>
- 4 <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2013/03/28/mind-fire/>
- 5 <https://www.vincegowmon.com/inspiring-quotes-on-child-learning-and-development/>