

Growing among Trees – Project Summary

“Our barriers are expertise, time, and money. I believe you can help us overcome all of these”

Primary school teacher



“When they are learning outdoors it is so engaging for them. It gives them a sense of belonging in the natural world. This is for everybody. Nature promotes equality”

Primary school teacher



Connecting children with nature in urban schools

A childhood rich in nature has huge benefits for physical, mental, social, and emotional health. Time spent playing and learning outdoors helps to enhance children’s wellbeing, creativity, attention capacity and the ability to connect with others.

Despite overwhelming evidence of these benefits, children are spending less time playing or learning through nature either at home or at school; particularly in urban areas where school grounds are often small and heavily tarmacked. By developing a better understanding of the challenges that schools face, we hope to address these barriers and support schools to implement nature-based learning more widely.

About the Project

The Growing among Trees project was a 12-month pilot, which sought to create a model for efficient, effective, transformational change in urban schools, giving pupils the opportunity for everyday connection with trees and woods.

The project engaged nine schools in Islington, Greenwich, and Reading: six primary, one secondary, and two special schools. The project was delivered by a consortium of five practitioners: Trees for Cities, Nature Nurture CIC, The Garden Classroom, Sensory Trust and Green Schools Project.

Growing among Trees set out to achieve the following:

1. Deliver Community Forest and Woodland Outreach (CFWO) with nine urban schools, testing what works well and identifying common barriers.
2. Create an evidenced package of Community Forest and Woodland Outreach interventions that support transformational change within one academic year, which is sustainable and replicable at scale for urban schools across the UK.
3. Develop the knowledge, skills, and capacity of schools and project partners to continue delivering (CFWO).



“I now feel confident to lead outdoor learning sessions with groups of young people. My new understanding of nature connection theories and ideas has equipped me to deliver a much broader range of outdoor learning opportunities.”

Secondary school teacher



“The teacher commented how much they talked about it following last week’s session and also that several parents had also commented about how much their children had loved it; with many asking if they could do more of this sort of thing”

Growing among Trees practitioner



Key findings

Growing among Trees collected a wealth of data and generated valuable evidence to inform future delivery of (CFWO) in urban schools. The key findings were:

Improved confidence – A phased approach of delivery, co-delivery and supported delivery, alongside bespoke teaching resources, helped to effectively overcome lack of teacher confidence during the academic year.

A hyper-local approach – Interventions that are delivered as local as possible to the school can help reduce key barriers such as staff time and resources. Projects should start with basic mapping of the school grounds and hyper-local area (within 5 minutes walking distance).

Time and resources – An investment of 11 days of school staff time produced a breadth of outcomes and influenced teaching practices.

Whole school engagement – The following processes all help to maximise the benefits of nature-based outdoor learning interventions:

- Engage whole classes in pupil interventions
- Deliver in collaboration with practitioners where this brings added value and builds confidence
- Undertake regular monitoring of delivery with in-situ observations and note-taking to enable an ongoing process of learning
- Engage the senior leadership team early on through clear messaging about the benefits to physical and mental health and well-being, school learning objectives and visions, and pupil development
- Enable pupils to share their experiences with children across the school, for example, a whole school assembly.

Practical – For some schools, a starter pack of equipment (e.g. tools, gloves, waterproofs, and wellies) for staff and pupils can help minimise costs.



For more information please read the full report at www.treesforcities.org/our-work/schools-programme

Growing among Trees is part of the Children and Nature programme funded by the Department of Education and administered by Natural England. Children and Nature comprises the Nature Friendly Schools project, the Care Farming project and five Community Forest and Woodland Outreach projects, of which Growing among Trees is one.

Funded by



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