

Practical Work for Practical Kids



For the last five years the Forest of Mercia has been working closely with the 'Children and Life Long Learning Department' of Staffordshire County Council to provide alternative provision of pupils excluded from main stream education.

The Forest Team runs two teams made up of 10 placements initially selected via the LEA. Each participant is provided with a personal development plan, produced in conjunction with them and the educational workers from the LEA. As well as receiving tuition in the core curriculum areas of numeracy and literacy, participants are encouraged to undertake a National Vocational Qualification in Land Management at a level appropriate to their educational capabilities.

Each team is provided with a Supervisor and Project Officer and works on a range of sites within the Forest. At the moment, one team is focusing on work in urban parks and the other on countryside sites. The Project Officers are not teachers. They generally come from environmental or training backgrounds, and the placements are managed in similar ways to those provided under employment training initiatives such as the New Deal Scheme. In addition to these skills, team leaders are trained in child welfare and protection procedures.

Participants come from schools in Southern Staffordshire. At the start of the day, all participants are responsible for getting themselves to a central collection point where they are



picked up as part of a bus run provided by the Forest. They also have the responsibility to be properly prepared for a days work. This is obviously important from a health and safety point of view, but contributes to a wider process of encouraging each participant to take responsibility for their own welfare and actions.

Attendance rates are high and there have been very few occasions of unacceptable behaviour requiring a participant to be taken off the programme.

The programme has proved to be so successful that the LEA has now asked the Forest to provide a third team, based in the historic parkland at Beaudesert. This third team will start in September and the Forest is in the process of recruiting two new Project

Officers. The Forest's current business plan makes provision for a final extension to the programme in Walsall. The programme will then consist of four teams, employing ten people and making provision for forty pupils.

The cost of the programme, which is lower than the previous provision, is met entirely by the LEA. The programme is accessible, cost effective and is engaging for pupils who need this type of educational experience. A detailed account of the programme is provided in an urban forestry practice case study to be released by the National Urban Forestry Unit in the future.

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