



# Family and Parent Woodland Days

CAMHS-LEARNING DISABILITY

## Project Introduction

Under the joint partnership between CAMHS LD Team (SPFT) and Circle of Life Rediscovery (CLR), the Woodland project began in the spring of 2023, with the aim of bringing together groups of young people and their families with moderate to severe learning disabilities to rediscover nature in a supportive woodland setting. This project uses the safe and secure woodland centre at Stanmer park, to provide a natural and alternative space for families to explore new eco-activities, where previously accessibility issues or added stigma has prohibited. Activities have included wood craft and nature skills like fire making, sawing wood or making a fire, nature-based sensory activities. A high level of organisation and planning surrounds this project and allows for individualised support to be designed. This includes carefully tailored schedules which anticipates the needs of each child and a thorough exhaustive risk assessment. To best support and cater for this client group a degree of flexibility, within each day, is maintained.

The Woodland project is structured through a 2 stage process.

### Parent Woodland days:

Parents are invited to a Parent/carer Day preceeding the Family woodland day, in order to familiarise parents with the site and discuss related risk/concerns prior to the family day. These days also provide an opportunity for parents and carers to look after their own wellbeing out in nature away from home or work in a relaxed supportive atmosphere, while additionally meeting other parents. Once parents/Carers have attended a Parent day, they are then invited onto a Family Woodland Day.

### Family Woodland days:

Family days generally run 10am - 2pm for a maximum of 3 families. Each day is different and is designed to suit the specific needs of a child/family. Activities can include:

- Participating in cooking on a fire
- Experience of the safe use of woodland tools such as saws
- Woodland crafts and individually tailored sensory activities
- Swings, Hammocks and climbing ropes
- Walking, foraging and exploring
- Opportunity to meet and talk with other parents and family members
- A space to feedback on the project and on the mental health services

# Evaluation: Five Key Objectives

**1** Enabling children with learning disabilities and associated emotional behavioural and communication difficulties to experience nature, learn new skills and support their emotional wellbeing and sense of self. Using the natural environment to support children and young people with their sensory needs.

**2** A space to implement new strategies and experiences in a neutral and supportive environment

**3** Opportunity for parent/carers to forge friendships with those in similar positions and build a wider community

**4** To provide an enjoyable day for the family, enabling improved connections within the family, by providing a shared positive environment to strengthen connections and overcoming barriers between parents, siblings and young people with complex needs.

**5** Rediscover nature in a supportive, non-judgemental woodland setting

These days offer the opportunity to implement strategies and trial activities in a neutral and supportive environment, therefore enabling better clinical support long-term.

## Assessing these Five Main Objectives

### Evaluation process:

Drawn from a mixture of evaluative information using goal-based measures, questionnaires, parental interviews and staff observations.

Structured interviews with parents to hear their lived experiences of the woodland days.

Quotes from Parents were summarised into the 5 themes, a quote to encapsulate the key and repeated opinion from each theme is selected and displayed below. The appendix includes all of the comments from the parent interviews

## Executive Summary

Through this evaluation process, five key themes were found

**Enjoyment**  
**Exploration**  
**Engagement**

**Community**  
**Peaceful/relaxed environment**

These five themes were found in the interview and survey feedback from Parents. In this report they have been summarised through qualitative quotes and quantitative statistics. For full table of qualitative feedback please see appendix.

# Summary of Evaluation Results

## Enjoyment



**"There was nothing I didn't enjoy, it was all really good" - Parent response**

**100%** of parents expressed that they enjoyed partaking in the day

**100%** of parents expressed that the day was what they expected and hoped for

## Exploration



**"It was nice to try new activities I would never normally try" Parent response**

**50%** Agreed or strongly agreed that the day gave them new opportunities (with the other 50% replying neither agree or disagree)

**50%** Agreed or strongly agree that they were able to learn and try something new with their child/children (with the other 50% replying neither agree or disagree)

## Engagement



**"Nice to see they had alternative activities tailored to my child's needs and niche interests, well catered for and every effort to engage my child"**

**- Parent response**

**100%** of parents *Agreed or Strongly agreed* that they felt supported and welcomed by the CAMHS-LD team

**100%** of parents felt that their views and worries were taken seriously and considered in the planning of the day

## Peaceful Environment



**"It was lovely to be in a supportive peaceful, no judgment environment"**

**-Parent response**

**100%** agreed or strongly agreed that they came away from the day feeling positive and reassured (66% Agree, 33% Strongly agree)

**100%** of parents felt welcomed and supported during the day

## Community



**"Loved meeting other like-minded parents" - Parent response**

**"I made a friendship with another parent who I otherwise wouldn't have met."**

**83%** stated that it was certainly true that they enjoyed meeting other families, with the other 17% responded "partly true"

## Impact

**Parental surprise of their Child's capability-** "I was surprised by my child's willingness to try new activities" My child's willingness to try new foods - huge and totally unexpected"

**Development of social support-** "I made a friendship with another parent who I otherwise wouldn't have met, we have subsequently met up and **created a friendship**" - Parent Responses

# Performance improvement strategy

The pioneering nature to this project allows for experiences to be learnt from and through. By hearing directly from parents regarding their lived experiences of the woodland days, improvements can be addressed and progress can be monitored. It is crucial that within this project, all activities continue to be flexibly tailored to each families' and young person's needs. The following feedback will be considered and addressed as the project continues to develop.

- A couple of parents suggested that there could be more variation in exploring outside of the site, e.g. in the form of a guided circular walk
- There was also mention of more flexibility around duration and length of the day,
- Transitions between group activities remains a natural challenge with this particular client group, and therefore this continues to be modified according to the individual's needs
- 33% of parents disliked/ really disliked singing around the campfire, feedback regarding specific activities is helpful when organising upcoming woodland day.
- One parents commented that they would like to have more information of what is involved, and what is to be expected, including simple information like the expectation to bring lunch.

Further evaluation needs to be collected regarding:

- Beneficial elements of ecotherapy on mood, concentration, sleep, fatigue
- Longer-term impacts of the woodland days on developed community and family life
- Impact of this project on anxiety levels and behaviour changes in the young person
- Develop individualised evaluation for the young person, which fits with their level of cognition and communication

## Conclusion

Overall, the Parent and Family woodland days were well-received by all the families which attended. Considering the aforementioned feedback, the woodland days provided the opportunity to combine exploration with enjoyment, allowing families to develop together and experience new activities in a peaceful and supportive environment. This project allows space for community to be built between families, breaking down the issues of isolation and stigma for this client group.

We will continue to develop a model which ensures that all parents/carers attend the parent woodland days before the family day, enabling parents to be involved in the individualised and tailored plan prior to the family day. This is with the hope that families would be offered 4 family woodland day sessions, to produce and aid a sustained long-term positive effect. Issues surrounding funding remain an ongoing challenge and we hope to secure financial support which is sustainable longer term. To enable the funding bid process, members of the team are trained in nature based therapy which has enabled the reduction overall costs and additional overheads

The feedback presents encapsulates the positive impact these sessions have had, and we look forward to seeing long-term improvements overtime.

***"Thank you for bringing us all together amongst others in a completely different, safe, non-judgment environment" - Parent Response***

# Appendix

1. Enjoyment	2. Engagement/good support for my child	3. Something new	4. Peaceful/relaxing setting	5. Community
My son really liked the swing and he likes being in the woods	Way that everyone was with my child and how they connected with him despite the tricker start	It was nice to try something new at the weekend.	Being in a lovely peaceful setting	Meeting other like minded parents
The swing and the bubbles. Bird spotting.	Have support staff who understand your child's needs which takes the pressure off the parents	Being given the opportunity to try out things you wouldn't normally do	Being outside in nature.	Everyone there was so nice
Sand,swing, pancakes and my child talking about his special interest with a clinican	Support and welcome, inclusion	Meeting new people.	The relaxed nature of the day	Meeting new parents
My child enjoyed the day	One clinician engaged well with my child through his love of Starwars and interest, this was lovely to see despite my initial apprehensions.	Trying new foods (eggy bread cooked on the fire!)	Was restorative being outside for the day	I made a friendship with another parent who I otherwise wouldn't have met.
Would be happy to come to another day in the future.	I was nice for professionals working with my son	My expectations of what my child would tolerate were also exceeded	It was nice for the clinicians to see us in a different context	Subsequently we have met up a few times and created a friendship
Enjoyed every aspect (Parent woodland day)	The staff were being helpful and supportive	Was nice to try new activities I would never normally try with my child (thinking mainly of the bonfire) in a supported environment.	Discovering a new place in a safe way	Thank you for bringing us all together amongst others in a completely different, safe, non judgment environment
Yes, I would like to see them happen regularly	The concern for myself from others too	I was surprised by m child's willingness to try new activities	In a supportive, no judgment environment	
I enjoyed the people and activities	The attention my child received	My child's willingness to try new foods - huge and totally unexpected	Being in an environment without children meant we could have conversations we wouldn't normally be able to have (Parent woodland day)	<b>6. No improvements needed</b>
There was nothing I didn't enjoy, it was all really good	Encouragement given by Marina was lovely to see	To see my child listening and engaging in new things	Nice to have time to sit back and observe and not do anything	Nothing to add or change to the day
My child definitely enjoyed the day	Nice to see they had alternative activities tailored to my child's needs and niche interests, well catered for and evey effort to engage my child	My child was trying out activities and happy to be involved		3 parents said yes to the day was what they had hoped for
We quite enjoyed it so it would be nice to do more	My child was interacting with other adults	Doing activities we don't normally do		It exceeded my expectations
A really positive day	Chat with professionals outside of the clinic/office environment was really nice			It was very positive and good day.
My child really enjoyed it	One clinician engaged well with my child through his love of Starwars and interest, this was lovely to see despite my initial apprehensions.			So organised, Nice to be offered and invited to
There wasn't anything I didn't like				I can't think of any improvement that I could suggest
No doubt they enjoyed them self				Thankful for being invited would love to come to another day
When we left my child asked to go back - sign of a good time being had				Keep doing what you're doing!