



## Life Skills with Tees Valley Wildlife Trust

Life Skills is a project funded by the Big Lottery Reaching Communities which has so far received six years worth of support. The project delivers nature-based activities, conservation volunteering, crafts and skills workshops until 2021 in Middlesbrough, Redcar and Stockton-on-Tees. People can take part for up to 12 sessions subsidised by the funding, and continue to take part after this through their own health or social care funding. Programmes are flexible; delivered for anyone facing barriers in their everyday lives due to their health and/or wellbeing. The

project is based around diversity – we aim to work with as many different groups with different needs as possible, and the programme offers a variety of different experiences and skills for everyone.



Blacksmithing



Dry Stone Walling



Land Management



Wildlife Gardening

## Life Skills participants will:

- ✓ Become **more engaged in their communities, less isolated, make new friends and work as part of a team**
- ✓ Have **lower stress and anxiety levels, better moods and get fitter** – all natural benefits of being outdoors in green spaces
- ✓ **Gain confidence, independence and increase self-esteem** from their achievements and our supportive environment
- ✓ **Gain new and transferable skills and knowledge, achieving awards** and practical work experience

## Key Aspects of the Programme

Life Skills is based upon two ideas:

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### The Five Ways to Wellbeing (New Economics Foundation 2008)



After 4 years of research (please have a look at our 2012 report on our webpage – [www.teeswildlife/frombluetogreen.org](http://www.teeswildlife/frombluetogreen.org)) Tees Valley Wildlife Trust have tried and tested different workshops and activities that involve and engage people in their local natural environments and green spaces in particular, based around achieving the five ways to wellbeing above. The Life Skills programme combines the very best of these – the ones we have found achieve maximum impact and the ones people enjoyed most!

## **How the five ways to wellbeing is incorporated into Life Skills:**

### **Connect – Working in groups as a team, connecting with your local environment through hands-on activities**

This is as much about physically connecting with the land by maintaining and developing it, as it is emotionally connecting with others through group work, communication and cooperation.

### **Be Active – Walks and conservation involve mild-moderate aerobic activities which build strength and stamina**

It has been proven that exercise outdoors is more effective as it burns more calories and is more likely to become part of a person's long-term routine, and people notice less that they are doing it.

### **Take Notice – Surveys of butterflies and birds, tree identification, photography, drawing objects and scenery**

We encourage everyone to take time to look at the small details as well as the big landscapes surrounding us that we often don't pay attention to.

### **Keep Learning – Introductory workshops to specialist, technical skills and transferable skills like communication**

A real chance to learn a lot of new things that will not only improve your confidence but also your chances of employment and further educations, as well as the chance to improve and pass on what you already know in a supportive environment.

### **Give – Make green spaces more enjoyable and accessible, and give wildlife homes through volunteering**

It has been proven that giving has unique health benefits and that it can even extend life expectancy. Volunteering is at the heart of this programme and all the other aspects feed into this.

## What's the Evidence?

So far, we have delivered this programme with people who have a history of offending, young adults with Autism, people suffering from substance misuse and people poor mental health. We use our own 'Nature and Wellbeing Scale and Star' assessment to measure people's progress in terms of their connection to nature, to others, their general fitness, emotional health and transferable skills (personal and professional). The results so far show that of our regular project participants:

- **81% reported being able to make decisions independently**
- **100% felt able to deal with problems well**
- **72% felt relaxed 'all of the time' (recognised impact of green spaces)**
- **90% reported clear thought processes**

Baseline data found that after one 12-week nature-based activity programme (one day per week), 10 participants reported **better general fitness, increased life satisfaction, improved confidence and independence, greater local community and environment connections.**

There was an average 7% increase in wellbeing across all of these areas, and 7 out of 10 people had an increase in their overall wellbeing and their connection to nature. The most significant increases were in **feeling important, emotional stability, making independent decisions, feeling part of their communities and feeling understood by others (Hagan 2015).**



Key quotes from participants include **“my positive outlook on life has without a shadow of a doubt come from the Trust”**, **“The future's bright”** and **“it got me living again”**.



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Wild Places  
discover - explore  
conserve - share

## The John Muir Explorer Award

The John Muir Award is free, available to anyone of any age or ability and is nationally recognised. It has three levels, from four days to complete to six months, and is based upon four stages:



**Discover – Find a wild place**  
**Explore – Find out more about it**



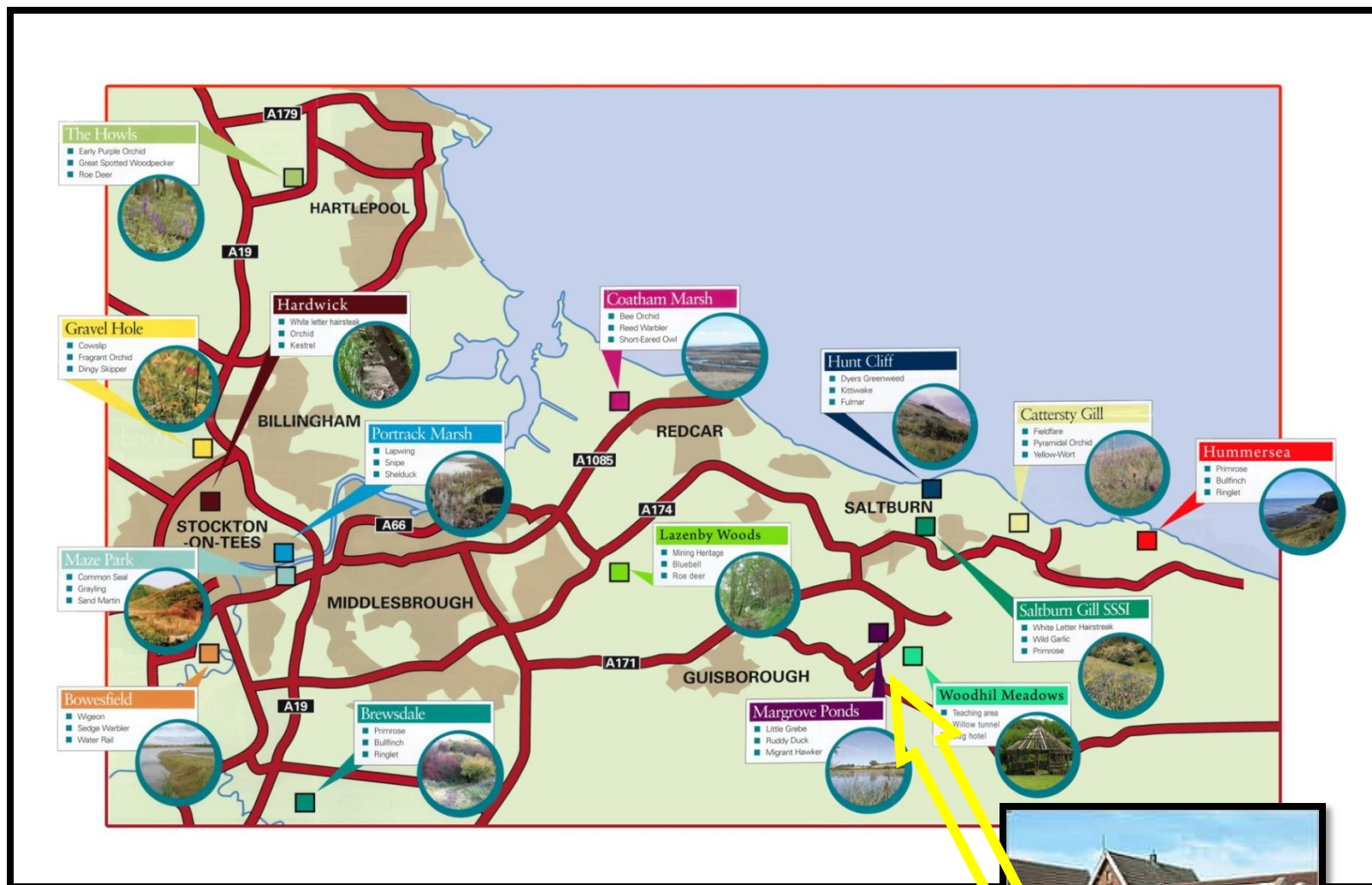
**Conserve – Do something to help conserve it**  
**Share – Share your experiences with others**



**Every participant will have the opportunity to achieve a level two John Muir Award**, as well as our own Wildlife Trust volunteering awards. Participants will also be able to **design and deliver their own John Muir project on their own chosen site**. The award **do not involve any written work**, and we celebrate achievement with a **celebration and presentation** at the end of each year.

We also support this with our own **Tees Valley Wildlife Trust volunteering certificates** and awards which **recognise hours of contribution, personal development and commitment to helping local communities**.

Volunteering takes place across our 15 nature reserves ...



Workshops take place here at Margrove Heritage Centre...



## **Practicalities...**

**Transport** – Sessions will take place in different locations each week but we do encourage people to attend using public transport, car sharing, cycling or walking (we can refund transport expenses). We can provide a minibus for those who find it difficult to access other forms of transport, organising pickups and drop offs from central locations.

**Staffing and Supervision** – One/two staff members for 10 people on volunteering days, two staff for workshops (first aid trained). Additional staff available for personal development/journal sessions and evaluation. Wildlife Trust staff will be responsible for completing paperwork relating to awards.

**Health and Safety / Risk Assessments** - We can provide full risk assessments for tasks, tools and sites of work (samples enclosed) and will take responsibility for the health and safety of participants on site – but ask the individuals take responsibility for being aware of others, their surroundings and not engaging in any activity which may risk anyone's safety.

**Clothing/Safety Wear/Equipment** - Participants need to ensure they dress appropriately for the weather and the task – sensible footwear in particular. We provide all personal protective equipment and any safety wear necessary for work e.g. high visibility clothing, but our waterproofs and safety shoes are worn by many volunteers so people may prefer to bring their own.

**Lunches and Breaks** – Participants need to bring a packed lunch and a drink unless otherwise agreed. Volunteering and workshop sites are not always near shops (this also means there may not be toilets available!). Workshop days are likely to be held at Margrove Centre where we have a kettle, microwave, toilets etc. Participants must not smoke while on the minibus, near machinery or while using tools.

**Conduct** – All participants need to represent the Wildlife Trust in a professional manner at all times during sessions, being mindful and respectful of others' wishes and needs. Members of the public use our nature reserves and we would ask participants to be mindful of language and any behaviour that may be considered anti-social.

**If you work with a group or an individual you think could benefit from this programme or for more details please contact Jenny Hagan (Development Manager): [jhagan@teeswildlife.org](mailto:jhagan@teeswildlife.org) / 01287 636 382**