

GREEN SKILLS MUDDY BOOT CAMP

MONITORING AND EVALUATION



ARNOS VALE

A project delivered by Arnos Vale Cemetery Trust



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Green Skills Muddy Boot Camp is a six-week programme of workshops designed around enhancing the skills of young people between 16 and 20 years old who don't find themselves in education, employment or training, but have shown an interest in pursuing careers in environmental conservation.

The objective of this report is to assess the effectiveness of the initial pilot programme, not just in equipping participants with useful skills to improve their employability, but also in building their confidence through the development of important fusion skills.

The pilot programme took place onsite at Arnos Vale Cemetery, incorporating a visit to Westonbirt Arboretum to take part in their Silk Wood Tree Planting Project.

Starting in mid-February 2025, the pilot programme lasted for six weeks and finished at the end of March 2025.



PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

Green Skills Muddy Boot Camp is intended as an introduction to working in Environmental Conservation. The programme covers a broad range of topics in an informal manner, offering overviews rather than in-depth explanations



Duration

12 sessions over the course of six weeks



Format

Twice-weekly sessions balancing informal study with practical tasks. Content informed by Arnos Vale Cemetery's Landscape Management Plan and the site's key habitats.



Target Group

People living in Bristol aged 16-20 years old not currently in education, employment or training.



Focus Areas

Environmental conservation, land management and practical estate work, key environmental concepts, professional working practices.



Personnel

The course was devised and delivered by Russell Porter, Landscape Volunteering Coordinator at Arnos Vale Cemetery Trust, supported by Sue Ballie, a volunteer with a professional history of working with young people.

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

Content for the twelve sessions was drawn from the Arnos Vale Cemetery's Landscape Management Plan, incorporating work in each of the site's three primary habitats - woodland, grassland and scrub

There were sessions covering site orientation, safe tool use and employment paths into conservation. The final practical session was devised and implemented by the participants

Starting Out	Working Practice	Grassland
• Introduction to Arnos Vale Cemetery • Orientation • Wayfinding Exercises • Plant and Tree Identification	• Management Plans • Risk Assessments • Tool handling • Safety procedures • Good practice • Tool storage • Practical conservation tasks	• Understanding grassland • Online resources inc. Magic Map and What3Words • Conducting a basic survey and recording results
Woodland	Scrub	Self-Planned
• Woodland categories • Silvicultural systems • Ash Dieback and other diseases • Measuring and ageing trees • Westonbirt Arboretum	• Successional habitats • Historic uses of scrubland • Assessing the value of scrub • Practical management • Dead Hedging	• Studying management plans and identifying timely tasks • Creating necessary risk assessments • Planning, delivering and evaluating a practical task



OBJECTIVES

The primary aim of the Green Skills Muddy Boot Camp was to build young people's confidence and prepare them for employment in the land-based sector, populating their CVs with relevant skills and experiences.

- To develop participants' knowledge of key environmental concepts, such as habitat characteristics, woodland composition and challenges to conservation such as invasive species, pests and diseases.
- To increase participants' confidence in pursuing employment opportunities in the conservation field, and to build on fusion skills, such as leadership, teamwork and critical thinking, which are welcomed by all potential employers.
- To instill the importance of good working practices, highlighting safe tool use, and familiarising participants with important industry standards such as writing and observing risk assessments and following management plans.



PRACTICAL TASK: TREE PLANTING



As part of the initial planning and outreach, connections were made with Westonbirt Arboretum, whose Silk Wood Community Planting Project aims to restock 70ha of former ash woodland with 9000 trees, all planted by community groups. The original woodland was felled to prevent the spread of As Dieback with planting beginning in 2023.

Whilst uptake on the project has been positive, organisers had recognised a dip in engagement when it came to the +16 age group, with the majority of planting being undertaken by schools and adult groups.

The Green Skills Muddy Boot Camp cohort were made to feel really welcome, and were recognised for adding important balance to the project's outreach. During a day on site they planted 103 trees, a record amount for a small group working at Silk Wood.

Tree planting in Silk Wood

©Arnos Vale Cemetery Trust

“Working with the Muddy Boot Camp has been really valuable for us here at Westonbirt Arboretum. We had a great time hosting the pilot cohort on our tree planting project. It was an excellent opportunity for us to engage with NEET young people who were being supported brilliantly by the Arnos Vale Team. The staff supported the young people to learn and engage with conservation work in a really constructive and meaningful way.

Lovely group to work with, we hope we can have another cohort visit us again!”

Meg Walder-Hills
Community Woodland Engagement Officer
Westonbirt, The National Arboretum



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KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

01 Attendance Rate

Attendance for the course was 100% with participants arriving early for each of the twice weekly sessions.

03 Skill Development

Of those participants surveyed before and after the programme, 100% said that they felt they had “developed new practical skills which they would be confident in using in other situations

04 Confidence Levels

Since finishing the course, a participant who had found barriers when engaging with formal learning has applied for a skills-based college course.

Another participant, who has experienced challenges when working amongst groups and felt overwhelmed by new experiences, has registered an interest in starting volunteering, both at Arnos Vale and a nearby community farm.

02 Participant Engagement

“I’ve lived near Arnos Vale all of my life but had no idea about how important the site was, I’ve learned so much whilst on the course”

“I thought the course would just be practical tasks, but I’ve really enjoyed learning about all the nature and the history of the site.”



FINDINGS

Outcomes:

- The pilot has highlighted the viability of Arnos Vale Cemetery as a place of learning. Mosaic habitats and multiple uses offers a broad range of session subjects, whilst its proximity to central Bristol make it easy to access for young people across the city
- In the original pitch, the pilot looked to engage with a group of 6 – 8 young people, and during initial outreach over a dozen young people registered an interest through outreach with various Bristol-based organisations.
- Bristol City Council's Post 16 Team advised that a wide range of life experiences could prove an obstacle to delivery, and as such the cohort was pared down to 4, of whom 2 started and completed the course. This enabled 1:1 delivery of sessions, increasing engagement and improving outcomes for participants.
- The initial outreach work leaves future opportunities to repeat the programme with other groups, such as those experiencing homelessness through Bristol's 1625 Independent People and those seeking status and/or asylum through Bristol Refugee Festival.

Challenges:

- One of the most apparent challenges in establishing the cohort was communication, keeping in contact with young people and maintaining motivation ahead of the course starting. Whilst attendance was 100%, the size of the cohort could have been doubled had all potential participants stayed connected.
- Increased connection with other organisations would offer a solution here. Bristol City Council's Post 16 team is keen to use future iterations of the programme as an official outcome for the NEET young people they work with, increasing contact.
- Another likely obstacle for future participants could be transport. In the pilot, participants either lived locally or had either their own means of transport or access to lifts. With funding, it would be possible to take advantage of Arnos Vale Cemetery's central location in terms of public transport and significantly widen the catchment area.
- Less tangible but perhaps more obstructive are the barriers young people can face when considering their own place amongst green space. Many studies have found that racialised communities are vastly underrepresented when it comes to accessing nature and open spaces.
- As Central Bristol's largest area of wild habitat, Arnos Vale Cemetery could prove an incredible resource for young people in nearby Barton Hill and Lawrence Hill. Future programmes would do well to consider this, and work towards creating relationships with organisations working in these communities.

Rooted In Nature

The Green Skills Muddy Boot Camp was made possible in part by funding sourced through Arnos Vale Cemetery Trust's Rooted in Nature project and the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The programme sought to reflect RiN's aims with its own objectives

"Groups which are traditionally underrepresented in the environmental heritage workforce have been hardest hit by the impacts of Covid-19. Young people have been hugely affected, with both education and employment opportunities significantly impacted."

The programme was specifically designed to highlight pathways into conservation work and the wider green jobs market, and equip young people with a range of relatable experiences to both populate their CVs and improve their confidence.

"Arnos Vale Cemetery Trust will develop long term, sustainable relationships with other groups and organisations to continue to diversify volunteers and staff better representing the people of Bristol"

During the planning and implementation stages, contact was made with a wide range of Bristol-based organisations. From there, meaningful and productive relationships have been forged with **Bristol Refugee Festival**, **ACH**, **St. Paul's Carnival**, **Post 16**, **Caring In Bristol** and **Young Bristol**, all of whom have either provided referrals, showed an interest in future programmes, or are collaborating on new projects with Arnos Vale

"Research throughout the pandemic has identified the importance of green spaces and environmental work directly connecting to wellbeing and community cohesion. Research from the National Institute of Health Research shows that spending two hours each week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing"

Following advice from various educational practitioners and professionals with experience of working with young people, the programme was delivered in twice weekly two-hour sessions, with breaks every twenty minutes and less than 20% of each session spent inside.

"We will diversify our volunteers... and work towards a more diverse mix. Young people will be targeted with volunteering opportunities, giving excellent options for intergenerational work"

Half of those young people surveyed after taking part in Green Skills Muddy Boot Camp showed a strong interest to continue working within the Arnos Vale volunteering cohort.



In conclusion, the pilot for the Green Skills Muddy Boot Camp has proven to be successful, achieving everything that was set out in its objectives and satisfying the expectations of all stakeholders.

Implementation took six months from the initial pitch to the start of delivery, and aside from the staff hours spent on planning (approx. half a day per week) and a limited amount of office resources, costs were minimal.

Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with everything in place to repeat the programme later on in the year if funding and resources can be secured.

Thank you for your confidence in letting me create this project, for sharing resources and insights, and for providing the platform on which to build.

Russell Porter

Landscape Volunteering Coordinator
Arnos Vale Cemetery Trust





ARNOS VALE CEMETERY

Arnos Vale Cemetery is a 45-acre Grade II* Listed Park and Garden in Bristol, home to historic buildings, monuments, and a thriving wildlife sanctuary. Recognised as a Site of Nature Conservation Interest, it serves as both a cultural landmark and a green community space.

Managed by Arnos Vale Cemetery Trust, we receive no regular government or council funding.

Instead, we rely on donations, grants, and income from our café, shop, venue hire and cemetery services.

Registered Charity Commission: 1120210
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