



# How does it make a difference?

## Evidencing the impact of Forest School

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Doncaster  
College

University  
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### Acknowledgements

This report is dedicated to the schools who took part in the EXPECT YOUTH Forest School Intervention programme.

A huge thank you goes to the school staff who supported the children who attended the 12 week intervention programme. We are grateful for your commitment, passion and enthusiasm and we are very proud of your achievements. The legacy of this project is in safe hands as you develop your own Forest School offer on your school site.

A special thank you to Expect Youth who believed in our project and sponsored the work we did last year.

Finally to the Forest School team at Doncaster College - Kelly, Joanne, Kirsty and Sam. Thank you for your support and unwavering dedication.

**Janine**





## Introduction

Doncaster Forest School Intervention programme (DFSIP) is an intervention programme designed to support disadvantaged children in Doncaster. It provides a learning experience based on the Scandinavian ethos of Forest School which offers children regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence through hands-on learning in a woodland environment or outdoor area. Forest School programmes are child-centred and are deliberately designed to promote the holistic development of the child.

### The key objectives of the programme were to:

- Raise aspirations of children and provide opportunities to experience learning outdoors
- Develop resilience, perseverance and persistence
- Promote children's health and well-being
- Have a positive impact on attitude and behaviour
- Support the development of communication skills
- Provide opportunities for teamwork and leadership
- Promote curiosity and problem solving
- Inspire and share best practice

During 2018-19 DFSIP was successful in securing funding from the Expect Youth Essential Life Skills programme. This enabled the delivery of Forest School to 24 schools across the most disadvantaged wards in Doncaster.

### Direct Pupil Impact



The success and continued growth of Forest Schools in Doncaster is a result of the strong and thriving network of schools committed to providing children with opportunities to experience Forest School on a regular basis.

## Reflection

Doncaster Forest School was established in 2007 by Kathryn Dixon. The location at High Melton was a perfect site for the development of the provision. The facility was originally planned to provide learning opportunities for young people and enhance the curriculum offer for Further Education and Higher Education students. Over time the Forest School ethos and practice was greatly diluted and was replaced by visits from local primary schools who enjoyed the outdoor learning opportunities provided by a day of activities in the wood. 2017 was a period of significant change for Doncaster Forest School. The Forest School located at High Melton, the campus of Doncaster University Centre, relocated to Squirrel Wood, a scout camp outside of Skellow, on the outskirts of Doncaster. Over the following year there was a significant decline in school interest.

The Expect Youth Essential Life Skills funding allowed the Forest School to recalibrate the offer and so the intervention programme was born. 12 weeks of regular Forest School activities were offered to cohorts of 15 children on school sites. Forest School is committed to a longitudinal approach to supporting children to become independent and resourceful learners who can respond appropriately, reciprocate experiences, and appreciate reflection as a key to learning. The holistic approach develops emotional intelligence through the development of: self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy and social skills. In addition, children develop these attributes through physical and creative opportunities. The Doncaster Forest School Intervention Programme adopted this approach and provided 12 weeks of regular Forest School experience.

The existing team of 2 forest school practitioners could not meet the demands of the interest received locally from the Expect Youth offer. Capacity was maximised by training Higher Education lecturers to be Forest School level 3 practitioners; they already had a wealth of experience of working with children and had the underpinning knowledge of the values and beliefs of the Forest School approach to enable them to deliver high quality provision. In addition, undergraduates from the BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies programme received Forest School training as part of their programme offer and some were able to gain paid employment and experience by supporting the Forest School sessions.

The schools had the opportunity to either hold the intervention programme on their school site or in local woodland nearby. The vast majority chose their own school site as this gave them the opportunity to develop a woodland area with the support of the Forest School team that would ensure the legacy and sustainability of the project long after the Expect Youth programme finished. Each school supplied a member of their school staff team to accompany their pupils on the Forest School intervention programme; a familiar face was key to ensuring the most vulnerable children felt safe and supported. The staff member was able to experience the Forest School intervention programme first hand and in addition they attended the Forest School level 3 training programme to qualify as a forest school practitioner. This has enabled each school to offer their own model of the Forest School intervention programme since the project finished.

## Overview

This report provides an analysis of the positive impact outdoor environments can have on children's confidence, social skills, language and communication, motivation and concentration, physical skills, and knowledge and understanding. Further research findings indicate that the Forest School intervention programmes impact on children's resilience. Evidence of improved key resilient indicators, such as self-efficacy, persistence, and problem-solving skills have been documented.

This report will also include several case studies which aim to provide the context behind the data and give insight into the further impact of Doncaster Forest School Intervention Programme on children from the local area.

## Primary participation and performance analysis

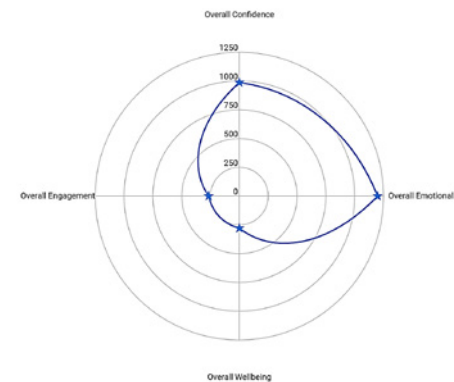


One of the fundamental principles of Forest School is that the sessions take place on a regular basis, over a substantial period. For children to become truly immersed and involved in Forest School, they must be able to revisit opportunities in order to challenge themselves and manage their own risks, which promotes important skills such as independence, confidence in own abilities and self-esteem. Children also need adequate time to develop their own interests, master skills and consolidate their learning.

The Forest School approach supports several key skills needed for young children to thrive, such as the promotion of growth in self-esteem, confidence and motivation. Children need to feel intrinsically motivated in order to try new things and challenge themselves, a key factor in the development of self-confidence and in middle childhood, self - efficiency. These key areas of development also play a significant role in supporting children's emotional literacy, which refers to the ability to recognise one's own and others' emotions, as well as manage and regulate these emotions. It includes several personal competences such as self-awareness, empathy and social skills, which are encouraged in the Forest School principles.

The graphs illustrate comparative data collected in week 1 and week 12 by the Forest School team and compares overall emotional levels, confidence, emotional wellbeing and engagement of the children.

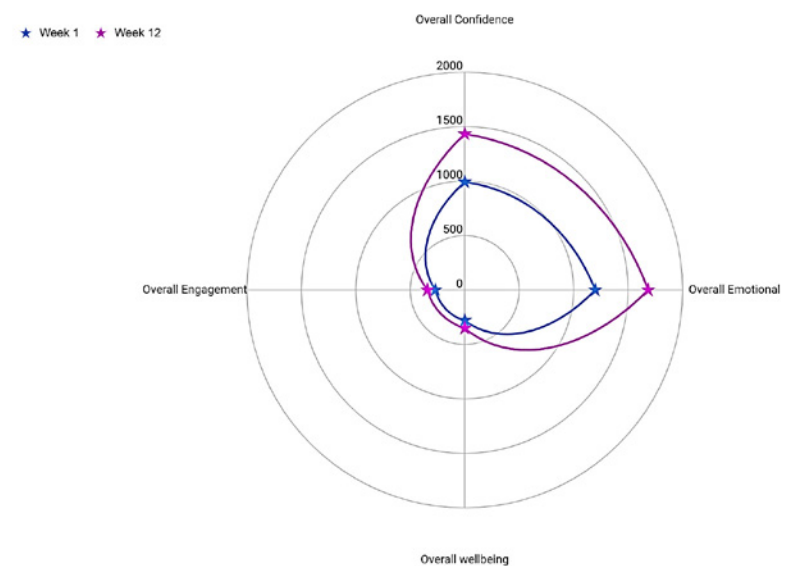
### Combined Child Scores for Week 1



### Combined Child Scores for Week 12



### Comparison of Combined Scores for Week 1 and 12



There were significant increases in children's levels of wellbeing from participating schools, supporting research which suggests that participation in a twelve-week Forest School Intervention programme can improve children's mental wellbeing

Pre and post intervention questionnaires were completed by all participating children. It was noted that children increased in their levels of confidence with both peers and leaders, evaluation forms also recorded a significant increase in children's levels of self-awareness. Self-awareness is a fundamental aspect of children's personal, social and emotional development; this area of development can be significant in supporting children's emotional literacy. Increases in self-esteem were recorded. It is evident from the data that child led learning outdoors is of benefit to children's cognitive development. There is a clear link between children doing what they enjoy, demonstrating increased levels of concentration and motivation.

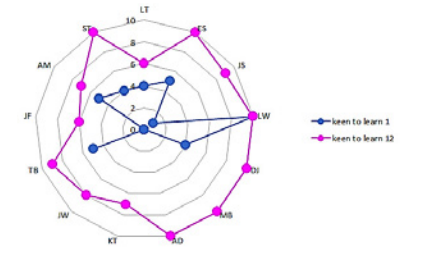
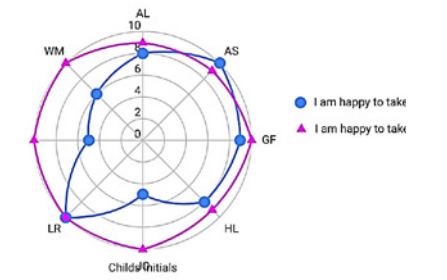
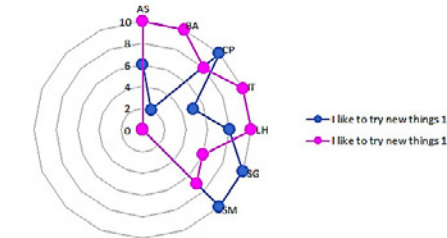
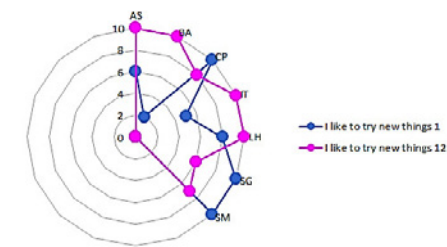


The notable impacts of long-term Forest School intervention programmes on children's confidence are: heightened levels of self-belief, positive attitude, independence and an increased tendency to take initiative. In relation to children's well-being, long term Forest School intervention programmes are found to have a positive impact on children's physical and mental health in addition to improving their social relationships and cognitive competence. Promoting wellbeing in children enhances their confidence and resilience. It is evident from the data that children's own perceptions of their well-being have increased; the ability to control feelings, and settle arguments without getting cross, demonstrating key skills such as self-regulation and emotional literacy. 92% of children increased their levels of social development.

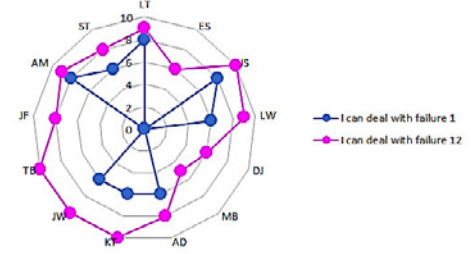
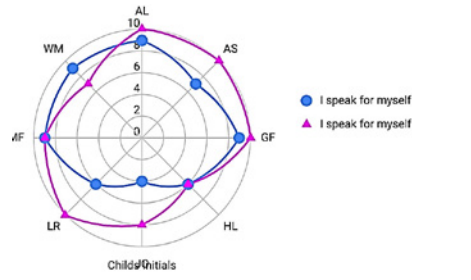
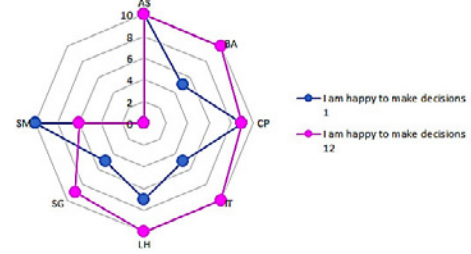
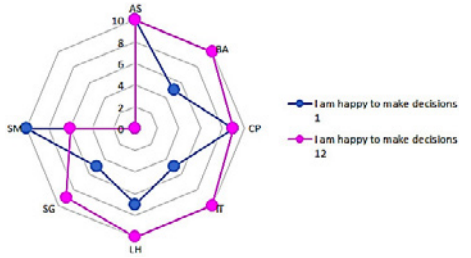


One school's data is shown below illustrating the children's pre and post intervention evaluation:

Comparison of student self evaluation Week 1 and Week 12



Comparison of student self evaluation Week 1 and Week 12



## Conclusion

The experiences children engaged with included: den building, setting up shelters, fire lighting, cooking, using tools, investigating natural woodland, making mud pies, and a range of other experiences. Children were issued with a Children's University passport, which recorded learning hours through the Forest School programme and culminated in a Children's University graduation and celebration event.



## Case Studies

### New Logo

Francheska Tembey Swainston from Hatfield Travis Primary School created the new logo for the re-launch of Doncaster Forest School. She received a plaque with her design and a personalised hoodie for her efforts.



## Park Primary Little Leaders

Emily Wilson from Park Primary was part of the pilot group of schools that enjoyed the Forest School programme. Following this and her subsequent training to become a qualified level 3 Forest School practitioner Emily ran her own Forest School programme and invited 4 children from the initial programme to join as Little Leaders.



They each were responsible for an aspect of the session e.g. fire lighting. These children have continued to return to the Forest School Programme in a leadership role each time it is offered. They have moved from Little Leaders to Little Masters to Grand Masters!



**Grange Lane Infant Academy** reported that throughout the 12 weeks of the intervention, there was a buzz surrounding the forest school. It had all the teachers, children and parents talking. The impact it made on the school was incredible. The children who accessed

the intervention were selected specifically by members of staff as they felt that the forest school could benefit them the most. Throughout the forest school intervention, these children excelled. They set themselves personal challenges and overcame them independently. They developed new listening skills, they worked well as a team, they developed the skills to use their own initiative and their communication skills improved.

Parents/carers of the children noticed huge differences in their children at home too. One parent could not speak highly enough of the impact that forest school had made on his daughter. He said that she had become really confident, happy and engaged. He thanked all the members of staff involved in the forest school and said that as soon as the school set up their own forest school sessions, his children would be first on the list. He expressed that all children should get the opportunity to access the forest school because it could benefit them all in different ways.

Teachers also noticed the positive effects that the forest school was having on the children too. The children's concentration and the way they applied themselves in class improved significantly and they also noticed how the children started working well with their peers, in the classroom and at playtime.

Most importantly, the children who accessed forest school enjoyed themselves. They would look forward to it all week and some of the children even asked if we could camp out at the forest school! Forest school gave the children the chance to express themselves with no boundaries and the sky was their limit. This developed their confidence and self-esteem and also gave them the chance to be creative and free.

The intervention worked so well in the school, that now we are setting up our own. We felt the impact on the school was so beneficial, that we are embedding it into the school day so all children will get the opportunity to access forest school.

## The Future

The legacy is evident in the work that schools in Doncaster are continuing to do in offering Forest School experiences for their children. The Forest School team have a vision to embed the Forest School Intervention Programme across all services and in doing so meet our social responsibility to work with: disengaged pupils, vulnerable families and children with additional needs.

The Forest School Network has been set up to provide opportunities for like-minded individuals to meet, share ideas and resources and practise and develop their skills. In addition, the Forest School team are committed in supporting schools develop their outdoor sites so that the great work of 2019 can be continued.

