



**Sylva Foundation's education programme is bold and impactful, extending the legacy of unique work delivered over the last nine years, with the aim of building significant affiliation between people and the natural world. We believe that only by developing deeper understanding and meaningful experiences between people and the natural world will society move towards living more sustainably. Under this programme our *Young People Education Strategy* focusses on a specific target audience over a defined three-year period.**

Our *Young People Education Strategy* focusses on young people aged 3-11 years at national, regional and local levels. Over the next three years we will build upon Sylva's existing projects which train and support teachers, Forest School Leaders and Environmental Educators to help young people learn about trees and manage woodlands. To achieve significant impact across Britain we will work closely with a broad variety of strategic partners.



### **Sylva Foundation's education programme**

Educating young people and the adults that teach them has been a core programme of Sylva Foundation since it became a charity in 2009. We have worked nationally to increase understanding amongst adults and young people about the value of British trees, woodland management, and timber through our OneOak and TIMBER! projects. A variation of our well-respected *myForest* service, known as *myForest for Education*, has helped hundreds of educators learn more about tree and woodland management, and how to care for their woodland sites. Since 2014, we have employed a dedicated Education Manager with expertise in working with young people, teachers and Forest School Leaders to support this programme, funded entirely by external grants. Some highlights of our young people's education programme:

- Delivered the **OneOak** project, following the life story of a single oak tree. Culminated in a national touring exhibition, collaboration with 60 craftspeople and artists, and involving 350 primary school children.
- Supported the publication of **The New Sylva** book (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014) aiming to make concepts of sustainable forestry more widely understood among the general public including teachers and Forest School Leaders.
- Developed and launched **myForest for Education** – the UK's only online woodland management tool designed for educators. Currently supporting more than 1,000 Forest School Leaders in managing almost the same number of woodland education sites across Britain.
- Developed and launched the national **TIMBER!** web platform to share free resources for schools on the topics of trees and wood .
- Developed forest fieldwork techniques and training for Secondary School Geography PGCE teachers in Oxfordshire.
- Co-founded and ran the Oxfordshire FSA Network for Forest School Leaders sustaining Forest Schools across the county.
- Worked strategically with the Forest School Association and other national organisations to promote forest schools and outdoor learning in woodlands across Britain.

# The need for our work

## Globally

- In 2008, the World Congress of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature recognised the new legal concept of the child's right to connect with nature, passing resolution M132 titled "The Child's Right to Connect with Nature and to a Healthy Environment"<sup>i</sup>.
- Some countries of the world have gone as far as making outdoor education a statutory entitlement in their national school curriculum, such as Slovenia. No such statutory requirements exist in the UK despite a wealth of outdoor education provision and environmental organisations.

## United Kingdom

- **Evidence that young people have reduced contact with nature in England:** A recent Natural England 2016 report<sup>ii</sup> revealed that 12% of children had not visited the natural environment within the last month, especially those from ethnic minorities and lower income households, while the majority of visits to the natural environment occurred when there was easy local access.
- **Evidence of lack of knowledge of nature amongst children:** Researchers from University of Cambridge sought to quantify children's knowledge of nature by surveying 4-11 year olds in Britain<sup>iii</sup>. They tested the children's knowledge of common British animal species versus Pokemon (a cartoon animal) 'species'. The results showed greater accuracy of the Pokemon characters and little knowledge of the British animal species. The researchers identified that young children have a significant capacity for learning about animals at a young age and that increased contact with nature will ensure they learn about real animals, plants and trees, rather than synthetic ones. This and other pieces of research show clearly that young people do have the capacity and interest to learn about British nature but lack the opportunities to do so. For young children these opportunities can often only be created, provided and encouraged by adults.
- **Evidence of lack of knowledge amongst adults that care for children:** Recent research by national conservation charities have shown a concerning lack of knowledge about British nature amongst the adults that care for them at home and school. A RSPB Birdwatch survey<sup>iv</sup> of 2000 adults in 2017 revealed only half the adults could identify house sparrows, a quarter did not know a blue tit or starling, and a fifth thought a red kite wasn't a bird. In contrast, nine of out ten of these adults said they wanted children to learn about common British wildlife. Another study<sup>v</sup> found that 69% of adults questioned felt they were losing touch with nature, with 37% of parents confessing their knowledge was insufficient to teach their children.
- **Forest School increases contact with, and knowledge of, nature:** Forest School is a unique and powerful process of connecting young people with the natural world. Since 1995, Forest Schools have become part of the mainstream timetable in thousands of schools across the UK and they are very popular with parents, teachers and children. Research shows that participating in Forest School has a positive impact on the holistic development of a child, as well as their academic learning, because Forest School practice involves regular, long term contact with the natural world in a woodland environment providing children time to learn at their own pace<sup>vi</sup>. Researchers are beginning to identify the transformational process that Forest School training and practice has on the adults that care for the

children. Parents and teachers involved in Forest Schools increase their own confidence in the outdoors, skills in species identification and knowledge of nature<sup>vii</sup>. Currently the Forest School Association has more than 1,500 Forest School Leader members and growing to be a well-recognised and respected professional body.

- **Schools need help to set up Forest School sites and find woodland sites:** The Sylva Foundation receives up to 10 enquiries a month from schools in Oxfordshire and around the UK. Schools need assistance in how to create and manage a Forest School site on their school grounds, or they seeking a local woodland owner who can provide an accessible area for Forest School. Sylva Foundation has a unique and important role to play in the UK acting as a trusted broker between schools and woodland owners. Some woodland owners would like to offer their woodlands to schools but don't know how to. Some local woodland owners may be unaware that schools are seeking sites to set up Forest Schools. Sylva Foundation works with over 3000 woodland owners across the UK and can be the catalyst for increasing young people's contact with nature.
- **Forest School Leaders and educators need support in woodland management:** Forest School Leaders are required to produce 'mini' woodland management plans for their Forest School sites. For most Forest School Leaders tree and woodland management is a new concept and they require support and training. Until the launch of *myForest for Education* in 2014, there was no woodland management tool specifically designed for the needs of Forest Leaders and educators in Britain. The Sylva Foundation is unique in the UK for having expertise, skills and online tools to support both woodland owners and educators in managing their woodland areas sustainably.
- **Teachers need knowledge and resources on British woodlands, their management and wood:** Teachers and other educators currently use resources on trees and nature which support teaching curriculum science topics such as tree identification, wildlife and habitats. However, research by the Sylva Foundation in 2013 (for our first strategy) identified a lack of resources on the topics of British woodland management, timber and the value of wood in society. To address this, the materials generated by the OneOak project were used by a working group of teachers to create accessible teaching resources that are now uploaded onto 'TIMBER!' (a free national resources platform for teachers). The working group teachers confirmed they needed better resources to inspire interest and understanding among young people about British trees, woodlands and timber which are not specifically included in the national curricula. In contrast, topics related to tropical rainforests are taught to young people, on average, twice in full-time education<sup>viii</sup>. Hence, young people often know more about tropical deforestation than they do about sustainable forest management of British woodlands or the impact of timber imports to Britain's global environmental commitments.

**Being in nature brings young people significant health and well-being benefits:** Government, schools, charities and parents all recognise the increasing trends in numbers of children in the UK who fail to achieve academically at school, who are becoming more obese, and who are experiencing mental health and

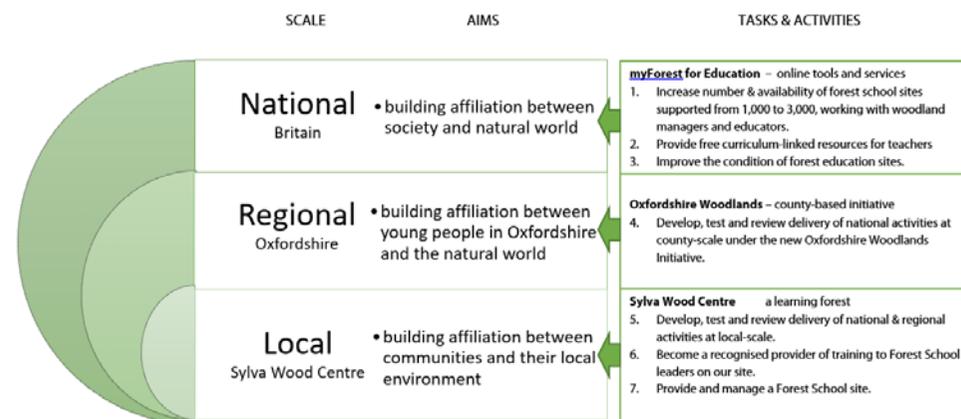
anxiety problems. A plethora of recent research shows that being in nature, learning outdoors and being physically active can reverse these trends:

- Natural England funded England's largest outdoor learning research project in 2016 showing strong evidence that being outdoors increases academic achievement. When outdoors 92% of children became more engaged in learning and teachers said 85% of children showed behaviour that is more positive. In addition, 79% of teachers said they also felt being outdoors had a positive impact on their teaching<sup>ix</sup>.
- In the UK nearly a third of our young people aged 2-15 years old are overweight or obese<sup>x</sup>. To tackle this the Government has proposed a comprehensive 10-year plan working with the food industry, schools, agencies working for young people and families. In particular, there is a commitment to "help more children enjoy an hour of physical activity a day" and "improving the co-ordination of quality sport and physical activity programmes for schools". Many schools are seeing this as an opportunity to develop regular Forest School sessions that involve children in 1.5 – 2 hours of physical activity per week.
- In the UK we are just becoming aware of a mental health crisis amongst our young people. Young Minds<sup>xi</sup> has collated the following statistics: in March 2017, the NHS reported in the last year that 240,020 under 19's had contact with mental health services, a rise of 7.3% on the previous year. Eating disorders have risen threefold and the office for national statistics reported that 10% of 5-16 year olds had a mental health problem and almost half of these were linked to anxiety. The number of under 12's who are self-harming has increased 4 times in the last 5 years. 50% of the UK's mental health problems are established by 14 years of age, and 74% by 24 years of age, which is when the brain matures. Shockingly 70% of these cases occurred due to no intervention.
- Research across disciplines of psychology, child development and neuroscience shows that time spent in natural environments can improve mental health and if experienced before the age of 14 time outdoors could prevent the development of mental health conditions later in life<sup>xii</sup>. Forest School has been proven to increase young people's emotional wellbeing, self-esteem and resilience by encouraging risk taking and problem solving.
- **The Government expects schools to increase managed risks for young people:** Taking children outdoors is now high on the political agenda. In England Ofsted Inspectors recognise the importance of risk for young people and mark schools down for "Trying to insulate ... pupils from every bump, germ or bruise". The OFSTED Chief Inspector of Schools is currently training Inspectors to reward schools for trips and outdoor learning. Mrs Spielman has said that "[without risks children are deprived] of rewarding experiences, of the opportunity to develop resilience and grit," without which children cannot cope with normal everyday risk<sup>xiii</sup>. Forest School approaches provide children with a challenging and stimulating environment full of risk benefits.

Under our Young People Education Strategy our aspiration is that every child in Britain, aged between 3 - 11 years, will have regular access to nature, particularly woodlands, as part of their school curriculum. Contact with woodlands at a young age will help build deeper understanding and compassion about the natural world in future society. Our three-year strategy will establish a number of activities to support this aspiration operating at national, regional and local scales.

## NATIONAL ACTIVITIES—Britain—building affiliation between society and the natural world

1. Increase the number and availability of Forest School sites for children aged 3-11 as part of their school curriculum from 1,000 to 3,000 by 2020.
  - a. develop and launch a Forest School site online directory (myForest for Education) with support from partners: user target 1000 by 2020.
  - b. develop an online decision-making tool to provide Forest School leaders guidance in establishing and managing a site (myForest for Education) target 1000 by 2020;
  - c. encourage woodland owners to offer sites for regular Forest School sessions with local schools or other groups, and an online tool to promote availability, while providing supporting guidance for owners (myForest) target 1000 by 2020;
  - d. develop and maintain a site-matching service to help connect schools with local woodland owners and *vice versa* (myForest suite) 1000 by 2020.
2. Provide free curriculum-linked resources for teachers via the TIMBER! website to promote learning about British woodlands among young people:
  - a. provide 100 new free learning resources, uploaded by partner organisations and educational professionals;
  - b. work collaboratively with partners to promote learning about the natural world in primary schools.
3. Improve the environmental condition of sites used for forest school and outdoor education by providing tools to support Environmental Impact Assessments.
  - a. Support sustainable management of 2,000 more (total 3,000) outdoor learning sites across Britain (*myForest for Education*);
  - b. Provide essential woodland management learning resources and woodland site development tools for 2,000 Forest School Leaders undertaking Level-3 training in partnership with the Forest School Association and others (myForest for Education).



## REGIONAL ACTIVITIES—Oxfordshire—building affiliation between young people in Oxfordshire and the natural world

4. Develop, test and review the delivery of our national activities at county-scale, working in partnership with others under the new *Oxfordshire Woodlands* initiative.
  - a. Develop and pilot Activity 1 (a-d) in Oxfordshire target 200 schools, 200 woodland owners by 2020.
  - b. Work with other regional initiatives to assist in testing and rollout of national activities.
  - c. Establish grants specifically for Forest Schools in Oxfordshire by 2020.

## LOCAL ACTIVITIES—Sylva Wood Centre—building affiliation between local communities and their local natural environment on the Sylva Foundation’s land

5. Develop, test and review the delivery of our national and regional activities at local-scale.
  - a. Develop, test and review new learning resources (2a).
6. Become a recognised provider of training (Forest School Association) training 20 Forest School Leaders per year in partnership with other Forest School training providers.
7. Provide and manage a Forest School site at the Future Forest, Sylva Wood Centre:
  - a. enable use of the site by qualified third-party Forest School providers;
  - b. continue support to 2 local primary schools a year to run Forest School sessions
  - c. use the site to demonstrate best practice to other practitioners: 4 CPD training events per year to 40 Forest School Leaders, teachers and educators a year.

## Further information

### About Forest School

The Forest School Association (FSA) is a charity and the professional body representing Forest School Leaders. It advocates six key principles of practice for forest school (FS) delivery:

- I. FS is a long-term process of regular sessions, rather than a one-off or infrequent visits; the cycle of planning, observation, adaptation and review links each session.
- II. FS takes place in a woodland or natural environment to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world.
- III. FS uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for being, development and learning.
- IV. FS aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners.
- V. FS offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.
- VI. FS is run by qualified Forest School practitioners who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice.

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## References

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- The Guardian: <sup>iii</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/sep/30/robert-macfarlane-lost-words-children-nature>
- <sup>iv</sup> RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch, 2017, <https://ww2.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/birdwatch/results/watch>
- <sup>v</sup> Study by the Jordans Farm Partnership & The Wildlife Trusts, reported in Daily Telegraph: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/07/23/public-losing-touch-nature-poll-suggests>



# SYLVA

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- <sup>xiii</sup> Daily Telegraph, 5th August 2017: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/08/05/children-denied-chance-develop-resilience-strict-health-safety>