

FOREST KINDERGARTEN CASE STUDY

CASSILTOUN STABLES NURSERY, GLASGOW CITY

Key points: Early years, external FS Leaders & nursery staff, parental input, urban & community regeneration

When? This Forest Kindergarten programme started 28th January 2014, as part of a Forestry Commission Scotland / Cassiltoun Housing Association supported project. Each session runs one morning a week as part planned programme of 12 sessions. The Central Scotland Outreach Ranger for Forestry Commission Scotland ran 4 introductory workshops at the beginning of the programme, 2 for parents and 2 for staff. The snapshot below describes the session that took place on 25th March 2014.

Forest Kindergarten Leader: Nathalie Moriarty (Central Scotland Outreach Ranger, Forestry Commission Scotland), has undertaken Forest Kindergarten training. She was supported by Richard Bolton (Community Woodland Officer, Castlemilk Park), 2 members of staff from Cassiltoun Stables Nursery, and one parent helper.

Context: [Cassiltoun Stables Nursery](#) is part of the Cassiltoun Group and a subsidiary of Cassiltoun Housing Association. It is based within Castlemilk Stables, a historic building owned and renovated by [Cassiltoun Trust](#). The Nursery was registered in March 2013 and provides care for 6 weeks to 5 years of age 51 weeks of the year and has a current role of 30 children. The Cassiltoun Group are involved in various projects which form part of the regeneration of Castlemilk, an area of economic and social deprivation on the periphery of Glasgow.

Forest School session: Seven young children aged 2-3 years took part, supported by 5 adults, including the Forest Kindergarten Leader. The session ran from 0945 – 1130, with the group gathering first at the nursery, before walking out to the site.

Forest School Site: The Nursery is situated beside [Castlemilk Park](#), part of a network of 14 Commonwealth Woods across Glasgow, and managed by the local authority. Although this has been a park for 20 years with a rich history, the father of one of the Forest Kindergarten children described when he was a boy it was a no-go area with graffiti, vandalism and a reputation for violence. This has changed with recent regeneration, with the Castlemilk Park Partnership formed in 2010 and improvements under the Forestry Commission Scotland's [WIAT](#) project. It has mixed mature woodland and an upgraded path network, making it ideal for Forest Kindergarten use.

Programme costs: There has been no funding for this programme, although support in kind is provided by the Central Scotland Outreach Ranger, and protective clothing for the children has been provided by the Forestry Commission. The post of the Community Woodland Officer, Castlemilk Park is supported by the Housing Association and part funded by FCS Central Scotland. It is hoped that the Nursery will seek funding in the future to sustain their Forest Kindergarten beyond the end of the current programme.

Issues/ constraints: Occasional litter and glass on site poses a hazard that has to be cleared or avoided on a day-to-day basis. Parental input is limited - few had time to attend



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the introductory workshops, and working parents cannot attend weekday sessions. The needs of very young children present their own challenges, and require a very loosely structured approach with opportunities for open ended play. FCS Central Scotland staff and resources are spread thin with a waiting list of nurseries to be supported with Forest Kindergarten programmes. Nathalie Moriarty is moving on to a role to support Branching Out, the FCS mental health programme. There is a demand for further Forest Kindergarten training and this will be provided by the Forestry Commission in due course. Training nursery staff in Forest Kindergarten ethos and good practice is essential; otherwise nursery staff may not understand health & safety issues and the benefits of risky play and as a result may restrict child-led free play opportunities. The Central Scotland Outreach Ranger has provided the nursery with a guideline on how to record session activities, but child progression may be missed if nursery staff do not formally evaluate this, or actively seek parental input and support. Lack of continuity through occasional use of temporary agency staff by the nursery means there may be new adults at sessions unfamiliar with the Forest Kindergarten approach. Overall, a lack of staff trained in Forest Kindergarten may threaten the long term sustainability of the programme.

Further opportunities: It is hoped more parents will attend the Forest Kindergarten 'graduation day' at the end of the programme. Richard Bolton (Community Woodland Officer, Castlemilk Park) can offer support for future programmes, particularly if the new Head of the Nursery adopts the programme. Nursery staff attended a workshop run by Nathalie Moriarty FCS and Marian Cairns (Forest Kindergarten trainer) held at [Urban Roots](#) on the 1st March 2014. One member of staff at the nursery has undertaken Outdoor First Aid training.

Resources created: The FCS Central Scotland Outreach Ranger created a *Forest Kindergarten Notes for Parents* handout which included a summary of the *forest kindergarten workshops, important things to remember* (clothing etc.) and *notes for helpers* (based on handout developed by The Secret Garden). Cassiltoun Stables Nursery recently commissioned a film crew to record a Forest Kindergarten session. The nursery foyer and screen shows images of children's activity including outdoor activities and there is a Forest Kindergarten display board for parents and visitors. The Nursery staff keep a record of each session and Richard Bolton is keeping a photographic journal.

SNAPSHOT OF A FOREST KINDERGARTEN SESSION CASSILTOUN STABLES NURSERY, GLASGOW

The Forest Kindergarten Leader was Nathalie Moriarty (Central Scotland Outreach Ranger, Forestry Commission Scotland), supported by Richard Bolton (Community Woodland Officer, Castlemilk Park). This is their 6th session with this group which took place on 25th March 2014.



Getting ready Richard uses the squirrel glove puppet to greet the children. Everyone gets on protective boots, gloves hats and waterproofs.



Setting off It's a short walk to the woods, as the park is on the doorstep. .



A curious journey

It's worth taking time over the journey. The adult helpers are patient as the children stop and explore interesting things *en route*. Natural and man-made landmarks can help to reinforce their familiarity with the route.

A long journey!

One little girl is walking all the way there for the first time.

Last time, she had to be carried most of the way.





Taking it slowly

The little girl's dad is a volunteer helper. He shows lots of patience supporting her walking by herself.

The others wait for them to catch up.



What do we do when a dog comes along?

A dog walker has just passed by with a large dog on a lead. Everyone is learning the safe procedure - step aside from the path and let it pass safely.



Look out – jaggy plants!

Brambles grow by the route to the Forest Kindergarten site. Nathalie reminds the children how to look out and take care. Richard shares information through the squirrel glove puppet



Reaching our Forest Kindergarten site

This is a sheltered secluded spot with open ground a short distance from the main path that everyone is becoming familiar with.

It's important to make sure everyone is accounted for in the group, and stays within safe boundaries

Checking in – everyone hangs up their name wood cookies



Snack time – on the snack log, with a tarp to keep a dry seat.



Beware the rabbit!
Marking the boundaries

Inspired by the puppet stories, laminated bunnies pictures are placed by the children with adult support to set the safe boundaries. No one can wander past a bunny!

Free play time

Now it's time to explore, re-discover old favourites and find new things.

Ideally, adults provide subtle support without blocking the flow of experiential play.



The children spread out confidently.



A favourite mossy stump



This little girl has found the magic puddle in the fallen log. Every week it is a little different depending on how much rain there has been.



She's soon joined by others, although it looks like she prefers playing by herself.



Practising drumming with sticks



This little boy practises climbing the old stump. With Nathialie's support, he experiments with different methods to find a secure way up.



Success! This is a big confidence boost. Suddenly, there's a lot to talk about. He has a lot to say about what he can see from this height and has an animated conversation with the adult helpers.



Then he moves on to different ways to get past this log. First under.....then over!



A slippery sloping log provides the challenge of climbing up it then jumping off.

Should the adult help? If the child finds the jump too high, he or she works out a different way to get back down.

Leaf litter provides a soft landing.

Finishing time



Everyone else helps to find and gather in the boundary signs



Collecting name cookies



Gathering the group and getting all the equipment



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The journey back

The group walk home by a different route, with lots of points of interest on the way – bridges, steps, wild garlic to smell, and waymarkers.



Arrival back at nursery!

The group must hurry to get back in time to meet those parents who are waiting to collect their children. Its time to change out of waterproofs and boots.

Richard Bolton is keeping a photographic journal of each session so progress can be recorded.



With thanks to Nathalie Moriarty, Richard Bolton, and Cassiltoun Stables Nursery staff, children and helpers.

For other Forest School case studies see www.foresteducation.org resources