



Planting Hope  
Growing Pride

# Final Project Report



**FROGlife**



Project Part-Financed  
by the European Union

European Regional  
Development Fund

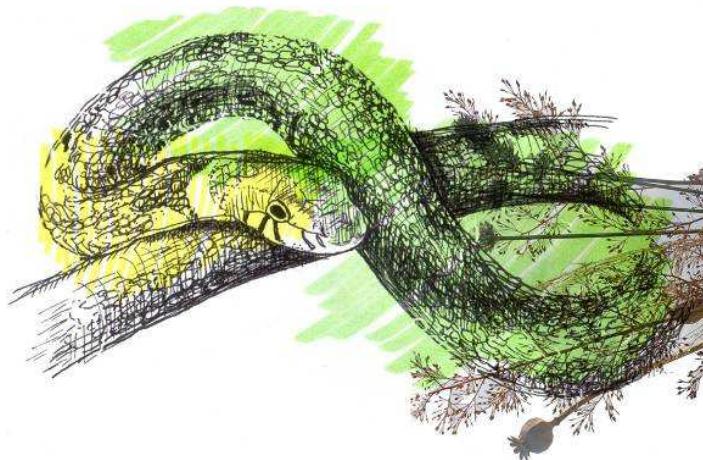
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## Introduction

Froglife is a UK based wildlife charity concerned with the conservation of native amphibians and reptiles. As well as managing a nature reserve in Peterborough and being involved in practical conservation projects, Froglife seeks to work with hard to reach groups and help them foster a concern for their environment and wildlife.



This report summarises the activities undertaken in Froglife's Grass Roots Green Shoots Project. The project involved environmental education sessions with a strong social inclusion element. It aimed to not only help young people improve their local environment for themselves and the local community, but also for wildlife. The project has been able to include many young people having difficulties in other areas of their lives, and helped them to develop their self esteem and outlook through nurturing a passion for the natural world.

This report looks at each group worked with during the project, describes the activities the young people were involved in, and evaluates the impact of the work. This is considered both in terms of how it affected the young people themselves, and the difference they were able to make to their surroundings.

The report also looks at information from other projects, research and reports into urban green spaces and engaging communities, particularly hard to reach young people, in conserving and developing them. This is currently a pressing issue and there is a large amount of work and consideration invested into this area. This report seeks to highlight some considerations for future conservation work with young people and in improving biodiversity in urban environments. Some of the projects raised a number of areas for discussion.

## Executive Summary

Green Shoots ran from July 2006-December 2007. It was funded by Urban II and operated in the central area of Peterborough. The area has a very high crime rate with 81% of crime committed by young offenders under the age of 21. There is often a poor physical environment with graffiti, litter and vandalism. Young people in the area are subject to numerous risk factors for becoming involved in crime or disillusioned with education. The project worked with young people aged 10-13 at risk of offending or of exclusion from school, as well as supporting Froglife's existing work with young offenders.

### ***Information on schools involved in the project<sup>1</sup>***

At the end of primary school, Level 4 is the level expected of most 11-year-olds. At the end of Key Stage 3 in Secondary school, most 14 year olds are expected to reach level 5 or 6 in National Curriculum tests. The table below shows how the schools involved in Green Shoots compare to the national average, with high levels of pupils with special educational needs, and lower than average academic achievement.

Primary School	Number of pupils	Number of year 6 pupils	Percentage of those with SEN	Attaining level 4 or above at the end of year 6		
				English	Maths	Science
2007 Average in England			23.4%	80%	77%	88%
Fulbridge Primary School 2007	661	79	30.6%	67%	56%	68%
Dogsthorpe Junior School 2007	320	64	39.7%	70%	63%	86%
Parnwell Primary School 2007	195	27	45.8%	67%	58%	71%
Secondary School	Total number of pupils	Number of year 9 pupils	Percentage of whole school with SEN	Attaining Level 5 or above at the end of Key Stage 3		
				English	Maths	Science
2006 Average in England			20%	73%	77%	72%
John Mansfield 2006	769	142	32.7%	62%	61%	64%

### ***Working with School Groups***

Small groups of young people were referred by the schools, and projects with a varying number of environmental education sessions were delivered. These sessions had a strong practical element, and involved the young people in improving their local area. This may have been on the school grounds or somewhere in the neighbourhood such as a park. Ideas were based on their own assessments of what was needed, as well as from other members of the community. This was also supported by environmental audits undertaken throughout the Urban II area.

The school sessions covered similar themes, such as amphibian lifecycles and habitats, wildlife gardening, biodegradable materials and recycling.

<sup>1</sup> Performance Tables from the Department for Children, Schools and Families

However, work was very much tailored to the needs and ideas of each group, so each project had different outcomes. These included making a model to show ideas to improve a local park, restoring two school ponds, and creating a school wildlife area. There were also a number of creative activities such as making animal masks and sculptures. Tasks had embedded numeracy and literacy elements, to help boost the basic skills of the young people whilst they were learning about green issues.

### **Youth Groups and other Organisations**

The project also worked with other organisations, including a partnership of organisations in Parnwell, Young Carers and a summer transition project. Working with these groups was less structured, again with an emphasis on practical and creative outcomes.

### **Working with Young Offenders**

Froglife currently works with young offenders given varying hours of reparation to the local community through court orders. Green Shoots supported this work with extra materials, ideas and mini projects. Practical and creative projects also had numeracy and literacy elements, and included making bird boxes, working on an allotment and on Hampton Nature Reserve. There were also sessions on the effects of criminal damage and graffiti.

### **Information on Youth Offending Rates during the Project<sup>2</sup>**

Quarter	Number of offenders receiving a pre-court or court disposal in the quarter
Apr-Jun 2006	203
Jul-Sep 2006	168
Oct-Dec 2006	188
Jan-Mar 2007	222
Apr-Jun 2007	200
Jul-Sep 2007	175

The project was linked to initiatives to bring down crime and offending results in the area, which was also coupled with a need to increase the reporting of crime.

This makes it very difficult to measure the results, but the project was a valuable part of creating physical improvements in areas in need of this, and in involving young people in positive work in their local community. As is often the case in youth work, the real benefits and effects are not quantitative. Analysing statistics does not provide an adequate evaluation, as seen in the table above, figures may change but the wider picture needs to be considered.

### **Summary of Recommendations and Results**

It was found that environmental projects involving young people, particularly the vulnerable groups targeted by the project, can be beneficial both for them and for conservation. However, longer term engagement in a project is recommended to offer them the chance to

<sup>2</sup> From Peterborough Youth Offending Service 2007

build relationships and see a genuine change in their environment. Despite being a potentially challenging group to work with, the majority of young people involved in the project were incredibly enthusiastic and passionate about their work, showing a genuine concern for the environment and wildlife.

Involving young people in environmental activities in a compulsory way, such as through the youth offending service, can be more challenging but such young people can contribute valuable people power to conservation tasks. Activities can be structured within the length of the session, but structuring them over time is more difficult. The sessions can help with embedding basic skills, but long term consistent work with the young people needs to be done to have a long term impact on the young person. There are various ways to secure funding to begin green projects in the community, but there seems to be a lack of resources for funding or support for the ongoing maintenance of these spaces. This is apparent in school grounds with conservation areas and in parks and recreation grounds.

Public green spaces do need changes in maintenance and features to increase not only their biodiversity, but also their appeal to users. Bland, over-maintained areas do not offer many opportunities either for wildlife or for creative play and enjoyment. By considering the whole, larger landscape of a city as a habitat, for us and other animals, features to provide positive opportunities for us all could be planned.



## Project Methodology

10-13 year olds were referred to the project through schools and other groups including Positive Activities for Young People at the Council, youth groups, Peterborough Racial Equality Council, and Young Carers.

Young people were assessed by the organisations as having problems with mainstream education, being at risk of exclusion

from school or of offending, and were offered involvement in the project. A number of young people who were interested in being involved but did not meet the criteria were turned away, and a number of groups were disappointed when the project reached capacity and could take no more referrals.

As much as possible, trained volunteers from Better Together supported the groups set up by the project. They added a valuable contribution, not just in increasing the ratio of adults to young people, but acting as role models and bringing their own skills and talents to projects.

There was a cross over with Froglife's reparation of young offenders working with the Peterborough Youth Offending Service (YOS). A number of young people on referral orders were involved in Green Shoots activities.

Environmental audits were undertaken throughout the project, to support and facilitate the development of green spaces in the Urban II area of Peterborough. Where possible, these were used as a starting point for environmental regeneration by the young people in the project. Ideas for improvements came from the young people and the local community.

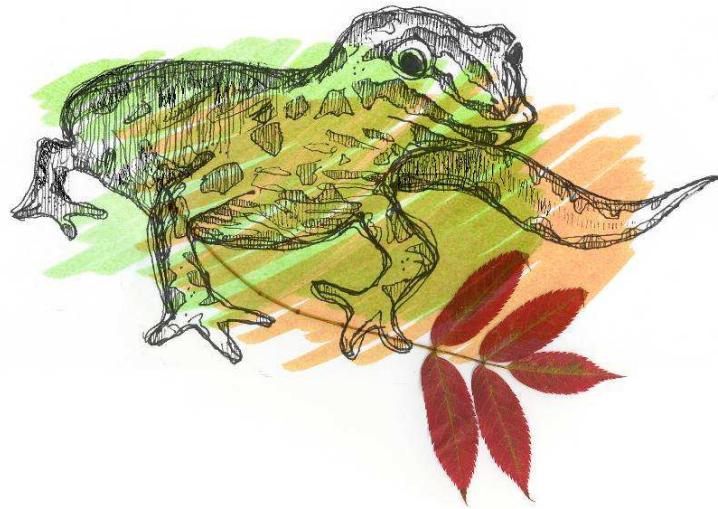
Educational materials were developed for each project, pulling together information from Froglife's existing resources, and creating templates that could be personalised for each group. Topics covered included amphibian lifecycles, wildlife friendly gardening strategies, wildlife education, recording and measuring different factors outside, biodegradable materials and recycling. The number of sessions depended on the other activities going on in the school and how much time could be committed. Numeracy and literacy elements were embedded into activities but were not the focus of them. This enabled the young people to engage in tasks that were relevant, fun and interesting, and learn new skills along the way, without pressure. This was important given the target group of the project, and a common reluctance to engage in typical school-style activities. There were also opportunities for using ICT, including digital photography. Sessions were positive and interactive, working with small groups of up to 8 young people.



*"...through balancing freedom and discipline, the arts can offer young people at risk of offending an important means through which to address their own behaviour and to play a positive part in the world."*<sup>3</sup>

There was a strong creative element to each project, with young people making things such as masks, sculptures, and animal habitats such as bird boxes. These were designed to enable the young people to build their own interests and ideas into activities as much as possible.

The project worked with 98 young people at risk of offending or exclusion, 112 young offenders and via one off events in parks and green spaces the project reached over 2000 people. Peterborough is an increasingly diverse city, and the project has worked with a mix of young people from different backgrounds including British, Portuguese, Afro Caribbean, Asian and Travellers. The 10-13 year old school groups were generally mixed gender, but there was a higher percentage of male young offenders than female.



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<sup>3</sup> Arts Council England 2005 "The Arts and Young People at Risk of Offending" pages 4-5

## FULBRIDGE SCHOOL



*The large pond in the school's conservation area*

are not using the space as much as they could be. Green Shoots aimed to support the team of volunteers and help provide a link between them and the staff, as well as providing opportunities for pupils to make use of, learn about and maintain the area. Two groups were involved in the project, the first for 9 sessions from November to February and the second for 5 sessions from June to July.

### Outcomes



*Restoring the smaller pond in an activity day*

organised in which the volunteers, young people from the school, young offenders and support staff helped to reline it. The young people also added an insect hotel, some sculptures, and a hedgehog or frog house. Young people in the first group gave themselves animal names, which they used for each other during the course of the project. This was developed with the second group, who were given a choice of native animal masks to choose from. They then researched into their animal and designed ideas for the wildlife area based on their new knowledge. Games were also used to teach about food chains, and the concept of predators and prey.

Each group was enthusiastic and positive, learning new words and concepts and contributing their own ideas for the development of the school.

### Project Objectives

The school has a very well designed conservation area, created by a small team of parents with wildlife gardening expertise. However, this group is struggling to maintain the area without more support from the school. Staff have found it hard to get involved and take on responsibility for the area, and young people

The two groups worked with at the school were delighted simply to be able to make use of the wildlife area, and had numerous ideas for improving and looking after it. Time was spent in one of the early sessions simply quietly listening and watching, and both groups were enthralled by the wildlife activity in this small space compared to the rest of their school site.

There was a leak in the smaller of the two ponds and an activity day was

The head teacher has far reaching plans for the site and the school hopes to go for Eco School status. Since finishing working with groups at the school, Froglife has made an effort to build bridges between the staff and the volunteers, and Learning Mentors at the school now hope to run sessions in the area regularly. There is also a plan to spread the wildlife friendly management of the area out into a patch of the school playing field, which Green Shoots has supported through an environmental audit. The young people were exposed to new vocabulary and concepts, and generally were positive about the numeracy and literacy work undertaken in project folders, as well as the more practical and creative tasks. The members of the group did not always get on and sessions were lively, but any issues were generally resolved quickly.

## Discussion



*The hidey-hole for frogs or hedgehogs created by the second group at the school*

### ***Reaching the 'Hard to Reach' with Environmental Education***

*“...one of the broader benefits of biodiversity lies in what it offers for education and lifelong learning – the outdoor classroom provides myriad opportunities for learning especially for those who do not respond well to formal education.”<sup>4</sup>*

Despite being referred to Green Shoots due to behavioural or academic problems, the young people involved in the project demonstrated a passion for the opportunities offered by work in a wildlife friendly area. Hands on, outdoor activities were found to be really successful for engaging the young people, and drawing them in to more academic tasks. The high level of attention the project was able to offer each young person through small group size and volunteer support meant that they could all be kept on task as much as possible. There may also have been a benefit of outsiders coming into the school to work with these potentially difficult groups – there were no assumptions made about the abilities or attitude of the young people, and they were all treated as positive contributors to the group. There were some occasional behaviour issues, with individuals perhaps becoming over excited or pushing the boundaries of the project. These were resolved, but there was a lack of support from the school staff on that front. Although the school was very excited and positive about the project, sometimes they were apparently unable to back that up with action.

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<sup>4</sup> Natural England and Wildlife Trust London “London’s Life-Force – how to bring natural values to community strategies” page 8

### **Who's Going to Look After the School Wildlife Area?**

The maintenance problems experienced at Fulbridge School highlight this as an issue for school wildlife areas. The whole school needs to be involved from the beginning, and staff may need extra training to feel comfortable and realise the potential of an outdoor classroom area. The information pack available from Learning Through Landscapes about setting up a school conservation area highlights the importance of involving as many people as possible from the start, and of having volunteers with relevant skills to undertake particular responsibilities. It is more difficult to engender this approach if the area has already been completed. The second group were keen to find a way to carry on running their own after school eco club and it is hoped that the school can find a way to maximise their enthusiasm.



A juvenile frog spotted in the wildlife area



*Before & after pictures of the school pond*



## DOGSTHORPE SCHOOL

### Project Objectives

The work undertaken with this school directly followed on from Froglife's SPACE project, and was focussed around improving the pond in the school's green classroom area. The concrete lined pond had a leak and was choked with reeds. A liner had been purchased through SPACE and the school needed help with the restoration. The school was also keen to be involved in other environmental projects in the area. Two groups at the school were involved in Green Shoots, the first for 7 sessions from January to May and the second for 5 sessions from May to July.

### Outcomes

The first group were involved in restoring the pond and creating a small bog garden next to it. There was again cross over with the PEEP project as young offenders, support staff and volunteers helped school staff and volunteers on an activity day. The pond was emptied, the liner replaced, and everyone worked together to collect frogs and refill the pond. The bog garden area was then created, with additional funding from the Greater Dogsthorpe Partnership for plants.

The first group were very positive and enthusiastic about the project, and concluded by producing materials for a display on amphibian life cycles and the development of the pond for the rest of the school. The staff at the school were very positive and helpful, and set out the behaviour agreement at the beginning of each project. At least one Learning Mentor from the school was present in every session, and controlled behaviour, keeping young people on task. The first group again responded well to working on the project folder and learning new vocabulary and concepts. Like most of the young people involved in the project, they had a degree of prior knowledge of amphibian life cycles for example, and were keen to develop their understanding.

After the success of the first group, the second group was involved in the Park It Project (see below), and were less enthusiastic. This in part was because it came right at the end of their time in Year 6 and they found it very hard to concentrate, and also simply because of some of the temperaments in the group. They did come up with some ideas for the park, making miniature gardens with ideas for the park for different members of the community and designing sculptures and signs. Some of the enthusiastic members of the group were involved in a party in the park to involve the local community.

Froglife supported the school through a successful Breathing Spaces bid, and will continue to offer help when needed through the environmental reparation programme project.



*Hard at work on an activity day*

## Discussion

### ***Staff Support and Enthusiasm for Going Green***

The work at this school felt significantly different to that at Fulbridge. There was such a high level of genuine support and enthusiasm from the staff and the presence of the Learning Mentor(s) in each session

transformed them. Sessions were able to be more structured and focussed on more traditional class work, as well as the experiences outdoors. In some ways, the sessions were less fun and energetic, and this group may not have benefitted quite as much from the experience of meeting new people. At the same time, there were benefits of having a member of staff present who knew the strengths and foibles of the young people, so it is difficult to conclude what approach was better.

Somewhere between the two experiences is possibly the ideal – with young people about to engage independently with a project that is backed up and supported tightly by school staff when necessary.

The difficulty in engaging the second group highlights the necessity of careful planning in projects around what the young people are doing in school. Sessions were planned for after the Year 6 SATs, which may have added to the young people finding it hard to concentrate. There were also personality clashes within that group, and if the project had been longer, changes may have been made to the group composition. There was also the issue that in the first session, the group had to leave a rounders PE session early, and resented being singled out to stop playing. They never really got over the feeling that the Green Shoots work was not fun.



*The bog garden created by school pupils and young offenders*

The school is embracing the potential of outdoor and environmental activities, and our work with them has been well supported. Walking past the green classroom area visitors will see a buzz of activity, with lots of young people making the most of the area, pond dipping, bird feeding, gardening and just enjoying the space. The area is physically at the centre of the school and seems to be valued by everyone. This school-wide philosophy has not

been lost despite a key member of staff leaving the school. There are still a number of staff dedicated to the environmental aspect of the school, who regularly give up free time for it as well as making it part of their lessons.



*The school building with the small wildlife area to the left*

## PARNWELL SCHOOL

### Project Objectives

Green Shoots was initially to work in partnership with the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, parents, teachers and other volunteers to create a community wildlife area in the school. However, a few weeks into the project the plan altered, as it was decided an area in the public space of

Parnwell would be more beneficial to the local community. BTCV continued to support the project on a smaller scale wildlife area in the school grounds. There were a number of boys in year 6 with behavioural and academic problems, and the school offered it to those they thought would benefit the most and could contribute positively to the project. One group was involved in Green Shoots for 8 sessions from May to July.



*The sign created by the group with everyone's initials*

### Outcomes

The involvement of Green Shoots in Parnwell School was an especially positive one. This was due to the involvement of Better Together and St Ivo School, where a group of 6<sup>th</sup> form volunteers were trained and offered participation in community projects. Coincidentally, all the Parnwell pupils were male and all the 6<sup>th</sup> formers were female. The girls did perhaps require more support than an average adult volunteer, but they were able to engage

with the Parnwell group and act as positive role models much more directly as a result of being closer to their age. Martin Webb from Better Together, who had trained and worked with the girls at the school, was present in every session and transported the volunteers to and from Parnwell. He also followed up on any issues regarding the girls and how they were getting on with the project. The boys' behaviour was sometimes difficult to manage, but the girls did a good job of diverting them and keeping them on track. The one to one attention allowed the boys to focus on what they were doing and develop their work in a very personal way.

Developing on the ideas from the Fulbridge project, each young person picked a native animal for the duration of the project. They then did research and written work about the animal, and created a mask and a sculpture based on their animal. Following the research and learning about the habitat requirements of different animals, the young people created a small wildlife area at the front of the school. The sessions in which this was done were supported by Jo Stradling from the BTCV, based in Parnwell and a parent volunteer.

Despite the fact that there were some changes in plan from the beginning of the project in terms of what we could achieve on the school grounds,

the project moved along well and resulted in both groups of young people improving their knowledge of wildlife as well as their self esteem and skills. The wildlife area at the school is small, but a valuable contribution to the biodiversity on the site including a variety of native wildflowers. It contains ideas that could be spread across the site. The school will need further support to achieve this. All the young people increased their knowledge of native animals, biodiversity, food chains, wildlife gardening and construction.



'Reptile Slasher' the Fox by Francisco

instead. However, the 6<sup>th</sup> formers came to every session at Parnwell School. Only 4 of them could attend a session, as they had to be driven from St Ivo, and the 6 volunteers took it in turns to come when they could, around their personal and school commitments. The Parnwell pupils worked almost consistently with the same volunteer, meaning that they could get to know one another and develop the project together. These relationships were one of the successes of the project, and helped the young people on both sides see things from a new point of view. The girls were very positive role models, committed to attending college, calm and patient with the pupils and friendly to everyone involved in the project. From the first session, they contributed invaluable to the boys' experiences.

*"...rather than identifying young people with their current or past behaviour, artists and arts organisations address their potential as creative people and learners. They challenge young people's sense of themselves, their limits and their potential in a very different way to that of youth justice practitioners, providing a new environment for them to explore their identity, skills and resilience."<sup>5</sup>*

The project had a strong arts element which the Parnwell pupils thrived on. The young volunteers followed this positive approach described above, seeing the potentially difficult boys as individuals with a lot to offer. With this group, these energetic and often quite needy young men were taken out of normal lessons to participate at the end of the school day. There was a clear benefit to them in having outsiders in to offer an alternative learning experience after a day in the classroom. Having removed these young people from the class is also of potential benefit to those remaining in the normal lesson. The young men were always

## Discussion

### ***The Benefits of Working with 6<sup>th</sup> Form Volunteers***

With the other school groups it proved difficult for Better Together volunteers to attend sessions, as they were generally during school time. This meant that sessions weren't always supported by more than one member of staff, or that Froglife volunteers were involved

<sup>5</sup> Arts Council England 2005 "The Arts and Young People at Risk of Offending" page 17

positive about coming into the sessions, and there was a friendly and supportive atmosphere throughout the project. This part of Green Shoots provided the young people involved with a valuable experience, both for the volunteers and the school pupils. This was a pilot for the YMCA. They are hoping to develop a project based on the success. It was a shame that Parnwell primary school was not a feeder school for St Ivo. If the relationships developed had continued into the year 6's new school the long term affects of the project could have been increased. There were moments when the 6<sup>th</sup> formers struggled with their role. This was highlighted when one particular young lady needed supporting more than she was supportive of the sessions. Despite some initial difficulties, it was to her credit that she did take this on board and succeeded in becoming an excellent champion for the project. There was an issue with who should be responsible for looking after the needs of these younger volunteers and the best way to offer them support and direction during such a project. More training without the Parnwell pupils present may have been beneficial. One session was cancelled by the school at the last minute, and the girls were taken to look at the Dogsthorpe Road allotments instead. Further experiences like this, adding to the volunteers' knowledge and building the relationship between them and the Green Shoots staff could have been beneficial all round.

There were some behavioural issues with the boys, and similar to the situation at Fulbridge, there was concern how much this was followed up by staff as the group was left without staff contact during sessions.

Again, there were positives to come from this situation, in that the young people were free to be themselves and the atmosphere was under the control of the Green Shoots team. However, when issues did arise, closer communication with the school was needed. This was particularly evident



'Chubby Brown' the Frog by Jordan

in a session where the young men were very hard to control and quite aggressive towards one another. Teaching staff informed the team after the session that the boys had been internally excluded all day for fighting. Briefing the Green Shoots team before hand would have allowed more preparation and it was also not clear whether specific behaviour issues mentioned to staff were followed up.

### **Think like an Animal - Learning about Biodiversity**

The structure of the project worked particularly well, with the young people using their choice of animal as a starting point for developing a wildlife friendly area. Through identifying with and understanding the needs of different wildlife, and how they fit together in an eco system the young people were much better placed to appreciate wildlife friendly management of the school grounds. This structure and the materials from this group are likely to be built on in future Froglife projects.

Again, using practical and creative tasks worked well with the target group, and provided a useful indoor activity when the weather was not suitable to go outdoors. The young people's creations were genuinely spectacular and the young people and the volunteers were proud of the results.



*Chestnut and Sycamore Park in Dogsthorpe*

area surrounding the park, especially involving young people hanging around at night and anti social behaviour. Young people gathering on Central Avenue in Dogsthorpe have been moved onto the park by the police, and play equipment for young children has been damaged. The project aimed to involve as much as possible the young people who potentially might misuse the current equipment, and help design improvements for the park for them and other members of the community. One group was involved with Green Shoots for 16 sessions from October to July. Other young people were involved in a more informal way, through activity days, youth group events and holiday activities. The plan was to bring in as many young people from the local area as possible to start to take ownership for the park.



*Miniature garden with ideas for the development of the park*

the wing of the Greater Dogsthorpe Environmental Forum. This involved the young people going out and assessing the local area, making models for their ideal park, learning about wildlife and gardening, and developing a specific plan for Sycamore and Chestnut Park. Young people were also involved in interviewing older members of the community about their memories of the local area as well as World War II as part of a Remembrance Event. This helped the young people appreciate the history of the area, as well as the needs of other

## **JOHN MANSFIELD SCHOOL, THE SPARKS YOUTH GROUP AND THE PARK IT PROJECT**

### **Project Objectives**

Working with the Sparks Youth Project based in Christ the Carpenter Church and with the support of the Greater Dogsthorpe Partnership, plans were developed for a community garden in Sycamore and Chestnut Park. There are a number of community safety issues in the

### **Outcomes**

The Sparks Project runs an evening youth group, and also worked with groups referred from John Mansfield School (now closed) as part of an ASDAN programme. Working with a group of year 9 pupils, a plan was developed for the park involving planting, furniture and sculptures. This was closely based on the young people's own assessments of what was needed in the park. The project now has a working group under

generations. Moving from being based in the school to the church's community hall created a number of occasions for the young people to mingle with other age groups, with the goal of widening their perspective of the local community.

This was a more difficult age group to work with than the primary school pupils, they were harder to engage and more time was needed to gradually build relationships and trust.



*Model created by the young people with ideas for the local park*

Delays occurred to the plan to start creating the community garden in the summer of 2007 for a number of reasons. As the design depended on the young people themselves to develop the design, the project had to move at their pace and allow time to develop relationships and come up with ideas. There were also some communication problems with the school, and a number of sessions missed due to exams and other activities. There were a number of issues in working with the school,

as it was due to close at the end of the academic year and many of the young people were to start at a new academy. There were also issues in negotiations with the council, who own the park about working together and maintaining any improvements.

Once the plans were finalised by the young people, and two models were developed, an open meeting was held for the local community to discuss the plans. However, another set back came as local residents became very concerned at the idea of building a youth shelter on the site, and presented very negative ideas about the project. It was felt that this was due to the recently introduced policing strategy to move young people on to the park, where they were perceived as causing anti social behaviour. Feedback was not given on the specific design for the park instead it was focussed on the youth shelter, known to be a potentially controversial issue.

It is hoped that with the support of the GDEF, continued outreach work with young people by Sparks and other community projects that improvements in the park could be in place by summer 2008. There would then be an ongoing involvement in using and maintaining the facilities by these groups and the local community.

There are a number of groups now supporting and interested in being involved in the project, and there have been a number of successful activity and planning days in the park involving local residents, Parents United and Dogsthorpe Library. It is also hoped to make contact with the John Mansfield Pupils involved in the project who now attend the Thomas Deacons Academy.

Other groups were also involved in project, in activity days and in workshops with the Sparks youth group in their evening sessions. The project hopes to develop further opportunities for young people in the evening youth group to be involved in more structured activities alongside

the current drop-in style, recreational sessions. It is hoped that these young people would also be involved in the future of the park.

## **Discussion**

### ***Issues with Different Generations and Perceptions***

This project raised a number of issues in the development of community green spaces. Firstly that “*...all to often, young people are blamed for just about everything that is seen to be wrong in an area, be it litter, graffiti vandalism or noise. To make matters worse, those doing the blaming are often the older people within the community, which encourages social divisions.*”<sup>6</sup>

There was concern among those running the meeting to discuss ideas for the park that when asked what an acceptable cut off time for noise in the park would be, the answer was almost that any noise was unacceptable. There is evidently a lot of work still to be done in this area to build relationships between the young people, who may well be involved in anti social behaviour, and older residents. Opportunities for these people to meet positively and work together can be created through projects such as this, and it is hoped this can be further developed as the improvements to the park plan to start in spring 2008.

The park represents one of a number of community spaces in this residential area that is not meeting its potential, either as a space for people or for wildlife. They struggle with anti social behaviour, misuse at night, and uninspired management, meaning that they are often problem areas rather than positive places.

### ***Creating Places for Young People Public Green Spaces***

*“Playing and learning in a really natural environment can be far more inspiring than the bleak backdrop provided by the acres of unrelieved, manicured turf of most municipal parks.”<sup>7</sup>*

However, these spaces provide almost blank canvases for inspired and positive projects, and the presence of the Greater Dogsthorpe Partnership, and its newly developed Environmental Forum shows signs of tackling the issues with vision and commitment.

Again, experiences in this project raised the issue of maintenance in environmental projects, this time involving working in public spaces. It seems that councils are stretched when it comes to managing a green space, unless going for Green Flag status for that area. Resources for improvement are tight and there can be problems with maintenance costs and with fitting new items in to the work schedule. They can be reluctant for things to change for the understandable fear of increasing costs. In some ways, working in school grounds can be easier – permission can be granted almost instantly and, provided staff and pupils are involved from the beginning with clear responsibilities, maintenance can be free.

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<sup>6</sup> BTCV “Environments for All - 2.4 Everyone Means Everyone!”

<sup>7</sup> Natural England and Wildlife Trust London “London’s Life-Force – how to bring natural values to community strategies” page 8

However, after changes at the City Council, they have approved and are supporting the project, and it is hoped it can become something of a flagship for other green areas in the city.

*"The sad truth is that too many authorities, and indeed play providers across settings, participate in what amounts to a masquerade, one that purports to offer children and young people rich, stimulating and enjoyable play opportunities, but in fact offer dull, identikit, could-be-anywhere sites containing contorted metal perched upon surfaces designated 'safe'."*<sup>8</sup>

The issue of imaginative outdoor play and what facilities can be provided for teenagers also need to be considered, both areas of increasing research and evolving best practice. Peterborough has a play strategy recognising this, and is developing plans to improve the facilities available. This will have to involve partnership working, consultation and innovative ways to engage the city's young people in order to genuinely provide interesting places about which they feel ownership and pride.



Local young people got into character for the pirate themed activity day in the park

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<sup>8</sup> Bernard Spiegel 2007

## PARNWELL POSITIVE ACTIVITIES GROUP



*Landscaping and multi-use games area in Parnwell Centre*

Equality Council are working with the Travellers, and BTCV are working on environmental improvements. Green Shoots became involved in a partnership with these organisations to support the involvement of young people in positive activities in their neighbourhood.

### Outcomes

The group offered a number of activity days to kick start work in the area and help the young people take ownership of the community spaces. This included evening and holiday sessions surveying opinions of the local area, taking photographs and recording interviews with residents. There were also art, wildlife, and multimedia opportunities for the young people to try with some spectacular results.

The project started with a plan to develop an area of planting with a burnt-out mini to be painted and re used as a planter.

Unfortunately despite beginning to develop funding bids, due to staff changes and other priorities within the members of the partnership the plan did not materialise. The focus changed to surveying and developing ideas for the area.

In Christmas 2006, the project was part of a Christmas activity with PREC and PAYP on the Oxney Road Travellers' site. There are plans to develop the warden's hut there, where community and young people's activities are currently offered. Young Travellers were involved in decorating mini Christmas trees to take home and look after. In activity days in Parnwell Centre, planters were created with young people around the patio area in Community House where the BTCV are based, and young offenders were involved in planting native bulbs around Parnwell Centre. The media based day at Community House was particularly successful, and the group funded extra support from a local media company, who brought laptops and voice recording equipment. The young people learnt macro photography techniques, with some of the young travellers particularly

### Project Objectives

Parnwell has been targeted as an area in need of community development and regeneration and has been awarded FairShare money to improve opportunities for all members of the community and integrate the local Traveller population on Oxney Road. Young Lives are doing outreach youth work in the area, Peterborough Racial



*Macro photograph by Brandon from the Oxney Road Travellers' Site*

embracing this, as well as digital DJ-ing and going out in the community to record interviews. Peterborough in Bloom were also involved, and each young person planted a sunflower seed to take home.

## Discussion

### ***Planting Seeds for Urban Regeneration***



*Planters created by young people at Community House in Parnwell*

On the surface, Parnwell has some well designed landscaping features, and has some attractive areas. However, there are a number of deeper community issues that create problems for local residents of all ages. Positive projects working in this area are beginning to deal with these, along with the active residents group, and local people are involved in ideas to tackle

community safety, cohesion and environmental improvements. The partnership working sessions between the members of the group were very positive, enabling people with different goals to come together and work with a group of young people in need of varied and exciting activities. Unfortunately, it was hard to sustain or structure working together beyond a few occasions, partly due to uncertainties within the group about future employment and short term funding. This was frustrating as the positive outcomes from the activities undertaken were obvious, and the young people were keen to be involved.

It was very exciting to be part of the youth work in the area as it was just beginning. This was in contrast to working with other youth groups, where it was sometimes difficult to introduce new and structured activities when they were used to casual, drop-in sessions. The young people in Parnwell had few expectations, and were welcoming to new ideas and activities.

Froglife has kept in touch with the agencies in Parnwell and hopes to continue to be involved. The activities for young people are continuing to develop, with the group of young people brought together in the Young Lives youth group going for their own funding to further their opportunities. The BTCV is hoping to secure funding for a number of future environmental improvement projects for the community, and Froglife hopes to continue to support the developments in the continued sessions with young offenders. The new member of staff working with the Oxney Road community is continuing to develop plans for the warden's hut on site, including holding workshops in a variety of subjects for the residents.



## PETERBOROUGH YOUNG CARERS

### Project Objectives

*"Young carers are at risk of social isolation and bullying, under-achievement, absenteeism from school, and physical and mental ill health."<sup>9</sup>*

#### *Out pond dipping on Hampton Nature Reserve*

Young Carers offer activities, particularly in the school holidays, for young people

involved in caring for someone in their family. It is recognised that these young people may have issues with school attendance, and there are a number of strategies and projects working to support them.<sup>10</sup> As part of a project in Peterborough, some of the group became involved in Green Shoots.

### Outcomes

Young people worked at the Dogsthorpe Road Allotment site to create a flower bed – planting a selection of shrubs and small plants in an old bed frame. They also worked with the Eco Arts project on recycled and willow sculpture. They came onto Hampton Nature Reserve for a pond dipping, wildlife spotting and other environmental education activities. As part of the consultation Froglife has undertaken for the Peterborough Green Grid the Young Carers group were also involved in thinking about what they would like in a park. This was a good cross over and gave these young people the chance to think about their environment.

The group prepared plum jam at the allotment, and also helped restore a large fibre glass frog.



*Meeting a slow worm*

The group really seemed to enjoy these activities and the opportunity to let off steam outdoors. They came with volunteers and staff from the project, and there was always a positive and energetic atmosphere in the sessions, as the young people took the opportunity to have fun, interact with each other and they really engaged with all the activities on offer.

<sup>9</sup> [www.youngcarers.net](http://www.youngcarers.net)

<sup>10</sup> [www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/atoz/y/youngcarers](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/atoz/y/youngcarers)

## Discussion

### ***Considering Potential Causes of Behaviour Problems***

Work with this group was less structured than the school sessions, with an emphasis on learning through doing and exploring and fun. One of the young people who came as part of the young carers group had also been involved in Green Shoots at Fulbridge School. He had been particularly enthusiastic and creative in the

school sessions, and shown a genuine concern for wildlife and the environment. He had also built up a positive relationship with project staff, and seemed to benefit from renewing and building this connection. His sister and father came with him to the final celebration evening, and he was delighted when he won the quiz. This young man is another perfect example of one of the positive and supportive relationships built up in Green Shoots, and a potential candidate to be involved in future projects. Working with this group also provides a good example of the fact that young people who are having difficulty at school may be



*The 'flower bed' at the Dogsthorpe Road Allotment*

struggling with all sorts of issues at home. The school had not informed the project that this young man was a young carer. It highlights the need for sensitivity when dealing with such young people, as behavioural or academic problems can be a symptom of a wide range of issues in a young person's life. This was born out throughout the project and with Froglife's work with Young Offenders.

*Painting the recycled palette fences on the allotment*



## **ECOSPACE PROJECT**

### **Project Objectives**

*"Maintaining children's achievements from primary school to secondary school can be difficult. Many who do well at Key Stage Two are unable to maintain their progress when they arrive at secondary school and slow down or even stall completely."<sup>11</sup>*

Bearing in mind there is concern about students who have not been coping well academically at primary school, it seemed only natural that Green Shoots run a transition project for the target group over the summer. This was even more of an issue for young people at a number of primary schools in Peterborough in 2006, as they were going to be starting at a new city academy in September. This project was set up for young people from primary schools or living in the Dogsthorpe area going on to the new Thomas Deacons Academy. It aimed to provide an opportunity for young people to do something positive and enjoyable with their time over the summer period, to keep in touch with learning activities and also build new relationships with each other before the start of the new school. Extra funding was obtained from the Greater Dogsthorpe Partnership, Cross Keys Homes and the Norwich and Peterborough Building Society. This was used to pay for extra materials and for the involvement of the Eco Arts Project. The project's theme was the green spaces in Peterborough, and it was intended that the young people would explore a number of them and take an increased interest and pride in their environment.

### **Outcomes**



*Keelan with his clay Rabbit in Central Park*

6 young people were involved in the group, 4 from Dogsthorpe, 1 from Fulbridge and 1 from Parnwell. The group was smaller than originally hoped. This was in part due to organisational problems with the schools approached to refer young people at the end of the academic year – other schools were approached and were enthusiastic about the project, but referrals were not forthcoming. The smaller group did mean that there was not much of a mix of young people to build new relationships, but the group size was also beneficial, giving them each more time with the adults in the group, and with each other. Flag Fen were involved in the project and provided their education officer Mike Webber

as well as volunteers and facilities of their site. Karin Odain, Learning Mentor Coordinator based at Dogsthorpe School also supported sessions,

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<sup>11</sup> Basic Skills Council "Strategies to Support Students in the Primary to Secondary School Transition"

as part of the Extended Schools Programme. Renny Antonelli of Eco Arts facilitated the artistic element of the sessions and hosted a number of them on the beautiful allotment at Dogsthorpe Road. The project also crossed over with the consultation on green spaces, with Zoe Ashton working with the young people and discussing their needs and thoughts around park facilities. The sessions were also supported by Better Together and Froglife volunteers.



*Blackberry picking in Woodfield Park*

Activities included visiting Flag Fen, the Dogsthorpe Road Allotments, Woodfield Park and Central Park. At each site they were encouraged to think about how the area made them feel, what they liked and disliked about it. Each young person had a camera to take pictures and a folder with various activity sheets to complete. Art activities were also undertaken at each site, using natural and found materials, clay, stone mosaics and painting.

At the end of the project the young people created a painted crocodile for the Eco Arts Allotment, a mosaic for the Froglife allotment, and an insect hotel and wicker man for Flag Fen. The project ended with a celebration evening at Flag Fen to which the young people's families were invited.

## **Discussion**

### ***Working in the Holidays***

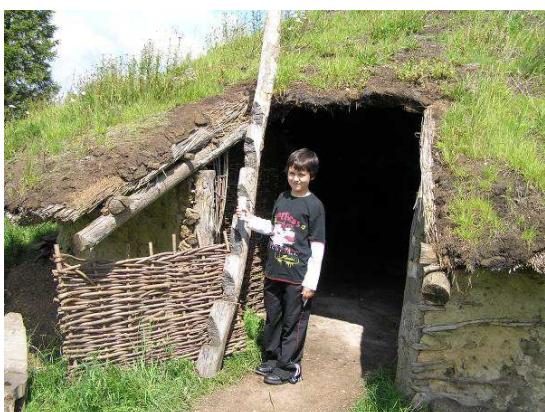


*Kyle meets a worm at the Eco Arts Dogsthorpe Road Allotment*

The fact that the young people were on holiday changed the atmosphere of the sessions compared to school based activities. It soon became apparent that there needed to be a fun element to the programme, or the group would resist and resent it. There were moments with behavioural problems, particularly 5 hours per day proved too long for the young people to sustain concentration, despite breaks and different activities offered throughout the day. It was a real

asset to have Karin present, as she took on the more traditional teacher role, tackling behaviour problems and pushing the young people to take part when activities required reading or writing. All the parents were supportive of the project, and concerns about behaviour were reported to them after each session and followed up. One young lady was particularly disruptive in the beginning, but did calm down remarkably thanks to her parents tackling her behaviour and encouraging her to apologise to Karin. This was an important aspect to the success of the project, particularly given the target group. That said, the sessions were generally very positive, with the young people making obvious progress in their

awareness of and appreciation for the environment throughout. In the first session at the Allotment, they were all reluctant to taste things, but were involved in picking and cooking with various ingredients and were much more comfortable with natural food at the end of the project. The young people were at a really interesting stage to work with, not just in terms of their upcoming academic transition, but also the social and emotional one. There were moments when a member of the group would resist anything that seemed 'babyish', and then act or play quite childishly. Even though the group were all close in age, they were all at very different stages in development, both physically and emotionally. It felt like an important time in these young people's lives to be offering them a positive project, particularly one that exposed them to so many adults with differing backgrounds and experiences.



*Sam and one of the roundhouses at Flag Fen*

The celebration evening and barbecue at Flag Fen was a really lovely and important way to end the project. It not only celebrated what we had done and the relationships developed, it also enabled families to be involved and see what the young people had been up to. Photographs, folders, artwork was on display, and each young person was awarded a certificate. There was a lot of positive feedback from parents, highlighting the value of having something consistent to be

involved in over the holiday. It had been difficult for all young people to attend every session, due to summer holidays, but one young man's family had not been able to get away due to a death in the family and they were particularly pleased that he had been involved in the project. The need for activities to be available for young people in the holidays, at weekends and after school was recognised by the government in the creation of the Positive Activities for Young People scheme in 2003. As well as the Ecospace project, Green Shoots has been involved in a number of holiday activities, and it seems an area where youth groups and other organisations are crying out for practitioners to help them offer varied and positive activities to young people. Despite an increase in provision, there is still a need for a lot more opportunities and facilities for young people, as well as incentives and sign posting to encourage them to participate.

*"Froglife's advice throughout this year, particularly regarding habitat creation, has been invaluable. I would like to thank you for including Flag Fen in the Eco-Space project. The change in attitude of the participants during this project, particularly in their confidence and communication skills, was impressive and some of the artworks produced were fantastic. I must admit I had as much fun as the kids throughout the project!"*

*Mike Webber, Education Officer Flag Fen*

## **PETERBOROUGH YOUTH OFFENDING SYSTEM (YOS)**

### **Project Objectives**

*"It's clear that over the last ten years we have made huge progress in improving the curriculum, raising standards in schools and improving the quality of teaching. Yet young offenders have yet to see the full benefit of these improvements."<sup>12</sup>*

The Green Shoots project was designed to support and develop the work Froglife was already doing with young offenders. Young offenders who have to do reparation (community service) as part of their court order in Peterborough and the surrounding area come to Froglife to undertake a certain number of reparation hours not only benefiting the community but also aiming to help rehabilitate the young person. The sessions are normally done in blocks of 4 hours, how many hours the young person does and over what period of time depends on the court order and the seriousness of the offence. Green Shoots aimed to offer opportunities for young offenders to engage in the positive environmental activities it was offering to the other groups. Embedded basic skills elements were again to be built into the tasks, with a view to improving the educational and career skills and aspirations of the young people.

### **Outcomes**



*Froglife's allotment with wildlife garden and constructions by young people*

The partnership between this project and reparation often worked well, with both sides benefiting. Young people on reparation came to help at activity days at both Dogsthorpe and Fulbridge Schools. They provided valuable extra hands for the sessions, and this meant that a quick and impressive impact on an area could be completed. These sessions were also some of the most positive for the young offenders to be involved in, having a busy productive atmosphere with high impact visible results. The fact that these projects were of obvious benefit not just to the environment but to the school pupils added an element of contributing to others in the community that the young people responded positively to.

Working with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Amphibian and Reptile Group

(CPARG) young offenders were involved in restoration work in the Stanground newt pond. Although this was outside the Urban II area of the city, it provided a positive session with valuable lessons learnt about the contribution young people can make to such projects, and also how they can benefit from interaction with conservation volunteers.

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<sup>12</sup> Ed Balls, Children's Secretary 2007 "Education Shake Up for Young Offenders"

Working in partnership with Cross Keys Homes and the Greater Dogsthorpe Partnership, workshops were held over two Saturday sessions on graffiti, criminal damage and vandalism and the consequences. These sessions were facilitated by Muddy Promotions, a community project run by volunteers, some of whom had experience of youth justice themselves.



*Out and about looking at the consequences of graffiti and vandalism*

The sessions were exceptionally positive, with the young people developing from being withdrawn and not interacting at the beginning of the first session, to each of the 14 young people having something to share with the group about what they had learnt at the end of the second. The activities included a walk about in Welland, which involved taking photos of graffiti and other evidence of anti social behaviour and discussing anti social behaviour incidents, and workshops looking at the causes as well as possible ways to help prevent

them occurring. The most important factor in the success of these sessions was the lack of blame directed at young people and the emphasis on the whole community to do their bit to look after their neighbourhood. As well as sessions on the Dogsthorpe Road Allotment, young offenders were also involved in maintaining other community spaces such as Woodfield Park Wetland. Sessions have also been held undertaking habitat management on Hampton Nature Reserve. A recent addition has been the use of a warehouse belonging to Cross Keys Homes with an indoor workshop for wood work and construction.

Compared to the activities with school groups, the work with young offenders involved even more “*experiential, concrete, consequential and problem solving tasks*”<sup>13</sup>. This was to capitalise on the enjoyment of this group of young people of physical outdoor activities. There was an emphasis on making things and environmental restoration, and a difficulty with longer term projects that the young people may not have seen the end result of, such as planting seeds or bulbs. Activities like this were undertaken, but had to be balanced with ones that had a more instant impact.

## Discussion

### ***Issues with Structuring Projects for Young Offenders***

“*Wherever possible, young offenders should be encouraged to work towards nationally accredited qualifications. Structured courses will increase learners’ confidence and raise their self esteem.*”<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> James Neill 2007 “Factors Which Influence Effects of Outdoor Education Programmes”

<sup>14</sup> DFES “Raising Standards – A Contextual Guide to Support in Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL Provision”

Although this is the ideal scenario, anyone with experience of working with young offenders will recognise that involving them in structured activities, especially those with a literacy or numeracy element can be a challenge in a lot of cases. One of the most difficult issues with any programme over a period of time is not only the "fractured lives" of a lot of young offenders, but also the varying amount of hours for reparation when young people are subject to court orders, often with not enough hours to offer a meaningful programme. As observed in other projects of this nature, this has implications for the likelihood of young people being able to complete a structured programme of educational sessions.<sup>15</sup> When young people do attend sessions, they sometimes struggle to engage with activities on offer, and with listening to the staff and volunteers demonstrating on occasion that "*Most young offenders do not expect to be treated with respect and consequently may not show respect to others.*"<sup>16</sup> This lead to a more young person centred approach in Froglife sessions.



*One of the signs created by young people for the allotment*

A variety of activities were on offer in a session, and attempts made to start with interests or skills the young person may have, such as art or construction. This proved to be a more positive and successful way to engage the young people, and enabled relationships with staff and volunteers to be more informal and rehabilitative, as well as maintaining authority.

There were also issues during the project with staff and structural changes at Froglife, meaning the Green Shoots was at one point the only provider of reparation for young people, also having to administrate and organise the service for a number of weeks. This did mean that the programme was operating at a reduced capacity for more structured activities.

Looking at the skills developed through the programme on a wider scale, the project did involve the young people taking part in activities exposing them to new challenges and encouraging them to develop skills for life. The positive and creative activities enabled positive skills to develop, although perhaps not in the structured way initially intended, as "*allowing learners to try new things and take the opportunity to broaden their experience has a positive effect on the motivation they feel in relation to their future self esteem and possible employment.*"<sup>17</sup>

This may be through simply having to listen to and follow instructions, with the legal element of the situation potentially being of benefit in giving a genuine necessity to the young person turning up and behaving as positively as possible in order to complete the court order and avoid going back to court for re-sentencing. It is perhaps more appropriate for Froglife to focus on these aspects, as discussed in more detail below.

<sup>15</sup> Julie Nelson, Sarah Blekinsop and David Kerr "NFER Citizenship and Basic/Key Skills Programme for Young Offenders"

<sup>16</sup> Julie Nelson et al, as above

<sup>17</sup> DFES "Raising Standards – A Contextual Guide to Support in Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL Provision"

An unexpected and very exciting outcome was that a number of young people expressed a desire to carry on working with Froglife after their compulsory time had finished, and this is something Froglife hopes to maximise in future projects.

### ***Structuring Sessions Rather than Projects***

After the experiences in the project, there are a number of ideas to improve the reparation service for the young people involved. One idea would be to develop at least 8 different structured activity ideas for the 4 hour sessions, to run on a rotating basis, and even simultaneously within a session. The activities would need to build on each other, but at the same time not depend on a young person having participated in the tasks. Literacy tasks would have to be deeply embedded, so that writing was done only as a necessary part of the practical work, e.g. on a health and safety sign or an information display. Numeracy tasks are easily embedded in a similar way, through measuring to make a bird box for example. In each session, the young people could learn informally new vocabulary and concepts.

It would still be difficult to assess to what extent the young person had taken on the information, other than by informal assessment during the session. But perhaps the testing and long-term building of basic skills to the extent that young people are able to return to education or training should be a long term project better undertaken by the YOS itself and not best served through reparation. The Shark mentoring project at the Peterborough YOS is a very positive example of this, and demonstrates the long term commitment and relationship necessary to genuinely support young offenders.

Young people who had more reparation hours would benefit from the concepts and words being re-used and developed in each session. More structured projects create for young people on particularly long orders, especially those requiring one-to-one support, would not have to be differentiated to fit in other people's needs. Green Shoots has been supporting the development of this way of working with environmental reparation, and support will continue into 2008.

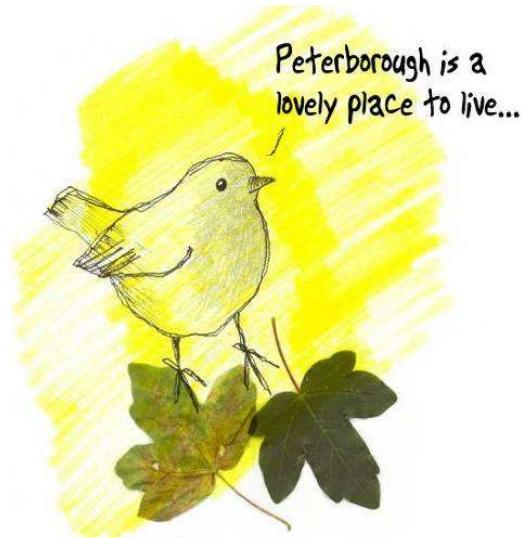
*"For the past couple years, Froglife has provided an opportunity for young offenders to 'pay back' the community through unpaid work on various conservation projects across Peterborough. At first, most young offenders are resistant to the notion of volunteer work, but many quickly find that they enjoy the work. It's often their first meaningful experience in working close to nature - being involved with nurturing, building and growing. When their order ends they want to know, 'can't I keep going back to Froglife?' It's nice to know that these young offenders not only paid the consequences for their crimes, but also learned that life can offer some really positive experiences."*

*Ann Hickey, Peterborough Youth Offending Service*

## ENVIRONMENTAL AUDITS

### Project Objectives

*“...wildlife can be a key indicator of the quality of the local environment and people’s quality of life. The ability of a neighbourhood to support a wide range of wildlife is not only an expression of the amount of ‘natural’ habitat locally... but also of the care and sympathy applied to the management and use of parks, green spaces, gardens and community spaces.”<sup>18</sup>*



Spaces to audit came through organisations such as Peterborough in Bloom, the Greater Dogsthorpe Partnership, schools and through networking with other positive or environmental projects in the Urban II area. As part of this process, the project became closely involved in setting up the Greater Dogsthorpe Environmental Forum, under the leadership of the Greater Dogsthorpe Partnership Neighbourhood Management project. As well as setting out the environmental objectives for the practical work undertaken by the young people in the project, Green Shoots undertook a number of audits simply leaving recommendations to be picked up in future projects or funding applications.

### Outcomes

The initial target for environmental audits was 50. However, as the project evolved, it became apparent that it would better serve the receivers of the audits to do more in depth analysis of some site. This included a reptile survey on an allotment site, a detailed plan to help a park go for Green Flag status and several audits of the different habitat areas in Flag Fen. The project therefore undertook fewer audits than anticipated, but offered better value and greater information to the partners, giving site specific and useful environmental advice. Other spaces surveyed included a number of parks of different sizes, small green spaces in residential areas and school grounds.

Spaces were analysed on the wildlife and plants present, any threats or problems with the site, recycling and composting facilities, connectivity to other green spaces and recommendations for improvement. Action plans were put together with ideas and feedback from the young people working on a project as well as other members of the community and any concerns they may have had about a space. To achieve this, a number of events in the city’s green spaces were attended.

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<sup>18</sup> Natural England and Wildlife Trust London “London’s Life-Force – how to bring natural values to community strategies” page 3

## Discussion

### **Boosting Biodiversity in Public Spaces**

*"As well as being key places where people can interact with nature, urban green spaces provide key habitats for local wildlife and these can be as important for biodiversity as those in rural areas. When managing green spaces, it is essential that you keep these two key elements in mind and try to create a balance between people and wildlife."<sup>19</sup>*

In the Cambridgeshire Biodiversity Action Plan it is recommended that public spaces are managed with biodiversity in mind, and this would not necessarily always involve extra expense but instead a change of tactics. Natural England has recently launched a Wildlife Gardening Manifesto to promote environmentally friendly practices in private gardens<sup>20</sup>. It seems that a similar approach may be needed to support and inspire councils to change their thinking in their land management. Improvements are not only needed from a wildlife perspective, but often also from a community safety angle, with issues such as lighting, pathways, litter and misuse of public spaces.



*"Implementing a community strategy should include wildlife organisations, especially partnerships that have been brought together to develop and implement Local Biodiversity Action Plans..."<sup>21</sup>*

It was interesting that in a number of cases the same recommendations were made, for example a change of mowing regime to improve biodiversity, or reduction of use of pesticides. It seems that although these management ideas are recognised as valuable for conservation, they are still not being used by the majority of people maintaining green spaces.

Being able to offer an in depth, site specific survey for a site was a good ice-breaker for developing partnerships within the community. People maintaining and/or developing community green spaces are often in need of extra support and information. In a lot of cases, paying for this service would be impossible.

The establishment of the Environmental Forum in Dogsthorpe is a pioneering strategy to bring together all green projects in the area, to share support, information and resources. The group hopes to set up as an independent charity and go for funding for the projects. Working groups were set up to move priority projects forward, and contacts are being developed between organisations and residents in the area to coordinate environmental improvements.

<sup>19</sup> The Wildlife Trusts 2007 "Connecting Communities, Neighbourhoods and Nature: A Toolkit" page 55

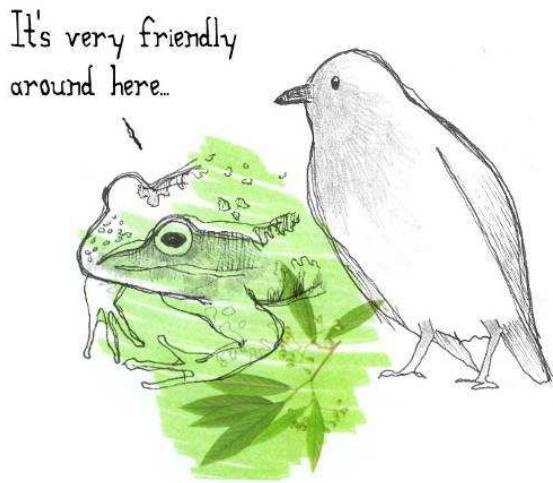
<sup>20</sup> <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/campaigns/breathingplaces/manifesto.htm>

<sup>21</sup> Natural England and Wildlife Trust London "London's Life-Force – how to bring natural values to community strategies" page 2

## **LINKS TO COMMUNITY SAFETY AND SATISFACTION**

### **Project Objectives**

The project's most ambitious targets were regarding measurable improvements in reducing fear of crime and improving community satisfaction in the Urban II area. This was not least because "when it comes to fear of crime, it can be difficult to set targets which can be measured, because there are a variety of different questions to ask, and fear of crime can often be confused with other personal safety issues."<sup>22</sup> The project worked closely with a number of projects in the city working towards the same goals, and was able to share information with them and deliver practical projects to improve problem areas, as well as leave ideas in environmental audits. This fitted in well with the city's *Community Safety Strategy* and *Fear of Crime Action Plan* by the Community Safety Partnership. The project was also working towards improving people's satisfaction with their neighbourhood, and be part of efforts to regenerate and restore neglected areas within the Urban II region of the city.



### **Outcomes**

The Community Safety Partnership has identified a number of reasons for fear of crime, and sets out strategies to deal with them. These include Living in areas of high crime, feeling vulnerable, being poorly informed, feeling powerless and isolated and subjected to persistent anti social behaviour. Green Shoots has been involved in a number of strategies in the city to work towards helping to resolving these issues.

The project developed a very positive relationship with the Greater Dogsthorpe Partnership, and through a number of working groups on the GDEF was involved in pushing forward positive projects improving community safety. The project was also very involved in the early stages of the Olive Road community allotment project, where developments have included improved fencing around the perimeter of the site. As in many cases, resolving the safety issues has not been simple, and there was an increase in crime in between the brambles on the site being removed and the new security fencing going in.

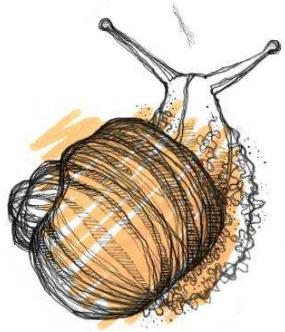
As previously described, Central Avenue in Dogsthorpe has issues with anti social behaviour with young people being moved on to Sycamore and Chestnut Park. The project has been part of the Police neighbourhood tasking group, and helped develop ideas for the area.

<sup>22</sup> The Home Office "Crime Reduction Toolkits – Fear of Crime"

Parnwell is an area that has been suffering with numerous community safety issues, including the environmental conditions in Parnwell centre and the lack of provision for young people in the area. The Positive Action Group in the area was set up to work on these issues, and they are improving as young people go for funding to provide projects and activities.

The graffiti, criminal damage and vandalism workshop run with young offenders with Cross Keys Homes provided a targeted educational programme for young people at risk of involvement in these activities, and valuable lessons were learned from this project for future workshops. This was not least about how to engage the young people involved in a positive way and not lecture or preach to them. The involvement of Muddy Productions and their ability to offer a community space for the young people in the immediate future was an important factor in the long term success of the sessions.

I WANT TO FEEL SAFE  
WHEN I GO OUT...



## Discussion

### ***Issues in Measuring Fear of Crime***

*"Being surveyed can, in itself, exaggerate people's feelings about crime."*<sup>23</sup>

Reducing fear of crime is ongoing issue for the police and councils across the country, and not an easy problem to solve partly because it is so difficult to measure. Green Shoots developed partnerships with a number of positive strategies and projects in Peterborough, working towards a

safer and more attractive environment. Various organisations have targets to tackle fear of crime and residents' feelings of safety and the project was able to offer front line, practical improvements to local people. This active element is sometimes lacking in targets and strategies in this area, and more projects such as this are needed to help improve the city's landscape and relationships within the community. The project strived to involve local people as much as possible in the ideas and improvements, to increase ownership and pride in the local area. Publicity was also important to help residents see what activities were happening and that young people, often blamed for causing problems, were working to benefit the community. It is hoped that a number of the projects will continue beyond the life of Green Shoots, and that new initiatives will grow out of the work started, for example on Central Avenue in Dogsthorpe and in Parnwell Centre.

The community safety projects worked with often highlighted the need for residents to increase their reporting of crime to ensure that police have a genuine picture of problems and have evidence to tackle them appropriately. Using crime figures to measure problems in an area could be misleading, as increased reporting crime is possibly a sign of a community with an improved relationship with the local police. Obviously, the figures of reported crime don't necessarily reflect the actual amount crime occurring in an area. To develop a true picture of what life is like in

<sup>23</sup> Economic and Social Research Council

an area requires a high level of engagement and consultation with local residents, and opportunities for them to express their concerns and opinions in an informal and honest way. Information provided may be difficult to quantify, but it would seem that residents often have a list of ongoing issues that different organisations would need to work together to solve. This could involve different departments within the council, housing associations and other service providers joining forces to resolve problems highlighted by residents, and finding a way to make things happen quickly and efficiently.

Peterborough has had a number of Weeks of Action in which a variety of organisations help deliver the targets of the Community Safety Partnership in different areas of the city. This involves information given to the community, events such as litter picking and graffiti clearing and community meetings, and Froglife will continue to be involved in these and other positive community schemes.



An Environment Carnival in the city in summer 2007, designed to foster community cohesion between different generations and cultures around a local park

## CONCLUSIONS



### ***Engaging Young People in Green Activities***

*"Green Is Cool."*<sup>24</sup>

Green Shoots was an ambitious project, with a number of different elements to cover. The work with the 10 to 11 year old primary school pupils was perhaps the most positive and satisfying, with these

young people generally enthusiastic and positive to take up the opportunities offered by the project.

*"Youth work in the environment can vary enormously, not least because of age differences. ...while young children are often keen to get involved in this work, interest in the environment tends to drop off at around the age of 12-14 as other concerns become more important."*<sup>25</sup>

It was unfortunate that the activities offered by the project were not open to more young people who would have liked to have been involved, and that they were not over a longer period. This could have enabled more positive relationships to develop within the group, as they did in the Parnwell group with the older St Ivo volunteers. Longer term engagement may also have made a longer lasting difference to the young people's self esteem and development.

*"Longer programmes tend to be more effective. ...the trend towards shorter outdoor education programmes is in contrast with the effectiveness research."*<sup>26</sup>

The older age group was harder to engage, and again would have benefitted from longer term activities. This was particularly evidenced with the John Mansfield Pupils, where time was needed for sessions involving fun and relationship building before the pupils felt comfortable enough to engage enthusiastically in activities.

### ***The Potential Benefits, for Everyone!***

The young people involved in the project benefitted in a number of ways, including and beyond those laid out in the initial plans for the project. As well as learning about the environment, and new vocabulary and concepts associated with it, young people also potentially benefitted in social and emotional ways. Although the project worked through referrals, there was still an element of choice for young people whether they wanted to be involved. This meant that the majority were enthusiastic and interested, and perhaps felt special to be given the chance to join in when others

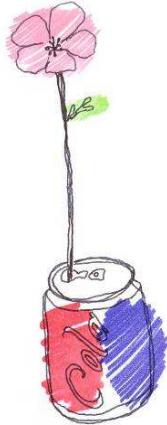
<sup>24</sup> Francisco aged 11 from Parnwell School

<sup>25</sup> BTCV "Environments for All – 2.4 Everyone Means Everyone!"

<sup>26</sup> James Neill 2007 "Factors Which Influence Effects of Outdoor Education Programmes"

couldn't. When working with young offenders on reparation, this element of choice is obviously missing, which could make it more difficult to engage the young people in activities. In spite of this, there have been a number of young people who expressed an interest in continuing to work with Froglife after their reparation had finished. Froglife hopes to create a project in the future enabling such young people to become conservation volunteers.

At a Neighbourhoods Green<sup>27</sup> event in the summer of 2007, Dr Marcus Roberts, head of policy at the mental health charity Mind was discussing their new paper<sup>28</sup> recognising the psychological benefits of access to green space. According to Dr Roberts, 1 in 6 people are diagnosed with depression or anxiety based illness at some point. There is scientific evidence that being outside, or even being able to see a tree from a hospital window, have a positive impact on mental health. Dr Roberts stressed that inequality of access to green space is a rights, social justice and discrimination issue, and that design for mental well being should be recognised as good practice for planning. He also mentioned that the UK's young people are increasingly vulnerable to mental health issues. It would seem that involvement in projects such as Green Shoots could have far reaching benefits, especially with the target young people involved in the project. Struggling academically or behaviourally can often be a symptom of wider issues in their lives. It would be hard to quantify these effects, but they deserve recognition when considering the potential of environmental projects.



### ***Pushing for a Greener City***

Targeting and supporting green spaces, particularly with the goal of involving the community in ideas and improvements also appears to be a key issue in the development of urban areas. Matthew Frith, Landscape Regeneration Manager of London housing association the Peabody Trust, urges us to think about the function of green space. Areas are not or have not been well designed or considered in terms of their function to the local community. Issues highlighted by him include conflicts of interest in use of the space, with dumbed down, irrelevant, or fragmented spaces. This was certainly born out by the experiences of Green Shoots and the factors picked up on in environmental audits. In the cases of many parks, the way the spaces are used has changed considerably, with no consequent up-dating or improvement of the spaces and the facilities available. There are too many neglected green areas attracting negative behaviour and encouraging problems and divisions with the local community. This includes the provision of outdated and sterile play equipment with a lack of resources for creative play, and no facilities for teenagers. The Peterborough Play Strategy highlights these issues and has an action plan in place, but there is still difficulty in providing the community engagement and exciting equipment needed into

<sup>27</sup> Neighbourhoods Green is a London based project with events and publications to do with improving green space for social housing. It involves the Peabody Trust and Notting Hill Housing, as well as CABE, Natural England and Groundworks.

<sup>28</sup> Mind 2007 "Eco therapy – the green agenda for mental health"

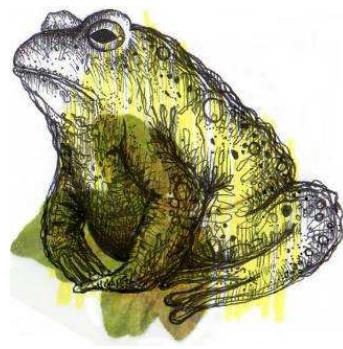
parks. Hopefully, as projects such as the Greater Dogsthorpe Environmental Forum continue to develop, involve more residents as well as organisations and go for funding, the city's provision for young people will improve.

Peterborough's Central Park has Green Flag status and well manicured green areas with a variety of activities available, such as sand and water play. It seems a shame to settle for only having one such space available in a city, and if this status could be pushed for in other parks, even making steps to meet the criteria would improve facilities and maintenance.

### **Targets for People and Targets for Wildlife**

Froglife's primary goals are to conserve native amphibians and reptiles. The main aims of the Green Shoots were broader than this, and it needs to be considered whether such a project has a conservation benefit, as well as an educational one. Educational sessions around amphibians and reptiles were built in to the programme, and the most effective instances of learning about these species was when they were near to hand, in a school pond or on the nature reserve. It was more difficult to create the same enthusiasm and understanding without that first hand experience, and it could have been beneficial to take wildlife to sessions. The young people who already had a concern and excitement about the natural world may have benefitted the most from learning more about it, and building confidence in practical conservation and gardening techniques. In the case of the less enthusiastic learners, exposure to new concepts, ideas and experiences will still have added to their knowledge and understanding. It is possible that these ideas may resurface when they get older and the 'other concerns' mentioned above are resolved. As the project was very much tied to urban spaces, the direct benefits for the priority species may not have been great, although two ponds were restored with known populations of frogs and newts. The difficulty of creating new water features in public spaces, due to health and safety and maintenance concerns made it difficult to do the most beneficial things for amphibians. Other recommendations, such as the creation of hibernacula and refugia, were made through the environmental audits. The reptile survey on the Olive Road allotment brought added value to the project, and links were made with important great crested newt ponds, which Froglife will carry on being involved in protecting.

The young people involved in the project have an increased understanding and appreciation for the wildlife and the environment, and their part to play in protecting it. This effect of the project will hopefully stay with the individuals, and encourage them to make positive choices in their lives, and perhaps lead to careers in the field. Developing this passion and understanding in young people is certainly one of the ways to help conserve our wildlife.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

Further environmental projects involving young people, particularly the vulnerable groups targeted by the project, can be beneficial both for them and for conservation.

Young people need long term engagement in a project to offer them the chance to build relationships and see a genuine change in their environment and to continue being involved in it. Projects such as this could therefore benefit from focussing on engaging a few young people in a programme over a number of months, rather than shorter engagement of more

young people. Further work with the young people involved in Green Shoots would be beneficial, and a number of them would be very keen to carry on working with Froglife, including some young offenders.

Engaging the target group of the project in environmental activities may have far reaching benefits and consequences for them and hopefully for conservation. Careful planning is needed to make the most of the young people's ideas and preferences, and make the work as centred around them as possible. From this starting point, almost any subject matter can be tackled, and once a relationship with the young people is established they are more open to new experiences and concepts.

Involving young people in environmental activities in a compulsory way can be difficult, but they can contribute valuable people power to conservation tasks. Activities need to be varied and differentiated for different levels of experience and interests. They can be structured within the length of the session, but structuring them over time is more difficult. Basic skills can be embedded, but long term consistent work with the young people needs to be done to have a long term impact on the young person.

There can be an issue with balancing fun activities and behaviour management in sessions and in the best case scenario the school or organisation the young people belong to should take responsibility for this. If staff can set up the standards for behaviour and help back it up, then the sessions are more likely to be productive. In holiday projects, contact with the parents and feedback about behaviour is vital.

Certification would have added value to the learning and achievements of the project, and this could be added to future projects through the Youth Achievement Awards. This is a flexible and recognised programme with different levels of certificate based on hours attended.

There are various ways to secure funding to begin green projects in the community, and although sustainability is mentioned, there is a lack of resources for funding or support for the ongoing maintenance of these spaces. This is apparent in school grounds with conservation areas and in parks and recreation grounds. Being able to offer support to the volunteers and staff responsible for these spaces is important to ensure

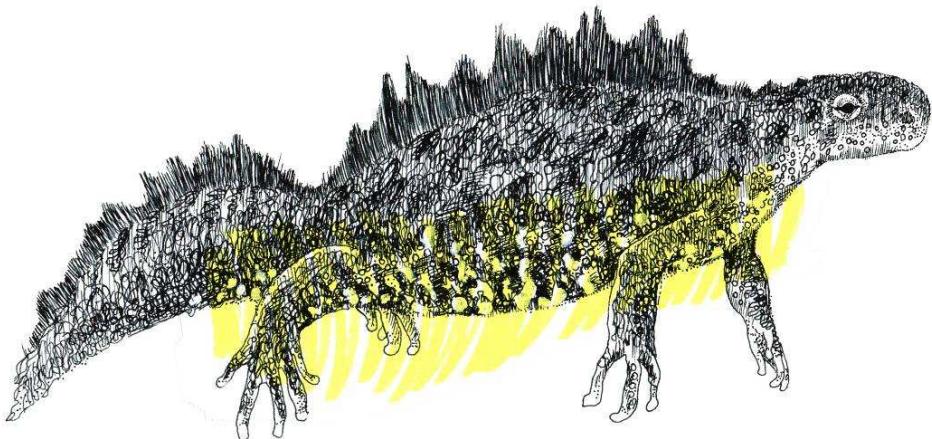
This is  
my patch...



their survival, and continue their benefits for the community and biodiversity.

Public green spaces do need changes in maintenance and features to increase not only their biodiversity, but also their appeal to users. Bland, over-maintained areas do not offer many opportunities either for wildlife or for creative play and enjoyment.

A lot of these spaces are fragmented and isolated, meaning their benefits for wildlife are minimal. By considering the whole, larger landscape of a city as a habitat, for us and other animals, features to provide positive opportunities for us all could be planned. This could also involve local residents, and the creation of 'Wildlife Zones', where a street or a neighbourhood are encouraged to adopt wildlife friendly gardening practices, and help link the parks and other spaces into larger landscapes of habitats.



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