

The Hive October 2020 – September 2021

October 2020

We built a log cabin to use as a classroom and workshop space and an eco-shop working in partnership with Bury Wholefoods, a local refill service:



We ran weekly sessions for home educating families, weekly baby and toddler sessions, art and archaeology sessions and hosted a variety of workshops, including willow weaving with local experts, The Coddiwomplers. We hosted a Level 3 outdoor first aid course, which four of our team took part in, with East of England Training. We hosted a half term family event, which included pumpkin carving, pottery painting and storytelling. A local beekeeper gave us a hive of honeybees and showed us how to care for them.



We received a grant of £2500 from the National Lottery Community Fund Covid response to provide activities outside in a Covid-safe environment.

November 2020

In November, we successfully applied for a free tree pack from the Woodland Trust, and planted nearly 200 saplings on the site, most of which will benefit the wildlife that lives there. These included oak, crab apple, hazel, blackthorn, hawthorn, rowan and birch. All of our various educational groups helped us to plant them, including the children from the Creative Education Centre and Angel Hill College, who we regularly work with. The students from Angel Hill College (part of the SENDAT academy in Bury St Edmunds) came for a six-week skills and development course. We received a grant of £5000 from the Nineveh Trust for Environmental Education supplies and staffing costs, which enabled us to build the log cabin classroom. We also bought a composting toilet and improved the hand washing facilities to meet the Covid guidelines.



December 2020

In December, we dug out a large pond where there had been a scrap heap in the centre of the site. One of our members hired a small digger and volunteered to clear the area for us. The children from the Creative Education Centre helped us to design and landscape the pond, measuring the space so we could order the correct liner etc. We received a grant of £250 from the Linnean Society, which we used to buy educational resources for the children's sessions, including spotter sheets, bug pots, pond dipping equipment and magnifying glasses. As well as our weekly sessions for families, we also hosted several festive days in the run up to Christmas, including a family craft day, wreath making workshop and a Winter Solstice celebration around the fire. Shortly after this last event we went into a second lockdown.



January 2021

As another lockdown was upon us, we stayed in touch with our members by launching The Hive Online – weekly video updates from the site, educational resources, art and craft activities and a weekly zoom catch up. The children particularly enjoyed the zoom “show and tell” each week, to show us what they had been seeing at home and which of the craft activities they had tried.



February 2021

In February we managed to successfully bid for various grants, including £1000 from the West Suffolk Greener Business grant and £1347.50 from the Suffolk County Council Green Suffolk Fund, which enabled us to purchase and install solar panels on the log cabin, allowing us to finally have access to some electricity for lighting, making hot drinks and using electric tools. We were also very lucky to receive a grant for £20,000 to deliver wellbeing sessions for girls (and eventually some boys too) between 10 and 14 years old in local schools. We worked with over 200 young people over the course of the grant period, from a variety of different schools and backgrounds, including Culford School, Westley Middle School, Rattlesden Primary School, the Creative Education Centre and Thurston Brownies. Finally, we also received a grant from the National Lottery Reviving Our Community fund for £5,000 for site maintenance to make the site more accessible for all the SEND and family sessions we run and enabled us to improve the car parking and buy equipment for all the groups to use.

March 2021

Another lockdown meant we had to come up with some more virtual ways to connect with our community, and we organised and hosted the Hive Eco Festival in March. This was a day-long online session on zoom with a variety of guest speakers, workshops and discussions, including some dramatic performances and poetry readings. We had well over 100 people sign up to the event. We were still were unable to open the site properly, so we concentrated on the site, working on the pond especially and continuing to plant trees where possible and painting and varnishing the bird hide and log cabin. We had some help from the children at the Creative Education Centre once they had returned from learning at home. We lined the pond with the children and they helped us to plant wildflower seeds on the banks and put marginal plants in the water as a habitat for amphibians, dragonflies and other invertebrates.



April 2021

April finally felt like a new beginning for us to run "as normal" and we were able to relaunch all of our family sessions. Our Nature Explorers baby and toddler sessions started again, with around twelve regular families attending throughout the year. We also launched a session for home educated children called Hive Eco Kids, which is a forest school-style afternoon focussing on environmental education, conservation skills, citizenship and creativity for children aged five to twelve. We managed to get some media attention when we reopened, with a lovely full page article in the local paper. We invited a variety of guest tutors to come and work with us from April onwards, including first aid sessions with Andy from East of England Training, The Coddwomplers delivering willow weaving and basketry workshops, and Explore Outdoor delivering an archery session for our Eco Kids.



May 2021

In May, we welcomed another SEND cohort of students to the site for another set of skills and development sessions. We invited the education team from Suffolk Owl Sanctuary to visit both our SEND group and our Eco Kids group with some owl pellets to dissect. We also welcomed back the children from the Creative Education Centre, who spent two days at the site enjoying a "stone-age" experience, flint knapping, cooking on the fire, foraging, shelter building and creating "Stonehenge" from mattresses.



Our Nature Explorers and Eco Kids sessions continued, several fabulous volunteers helped with gardening, and we also hosted an art workshop near the end of the month.



June 2021

The Summer was well and truly with us in June, and we were very busy. We hosted a flower arranging workshop for adults and children with local florist, Taran Vernon. We helped our local church of Bradfield St George with a biodiversity survey as part of the Churches Count on Nature. Our Nature Explorers and Eco Kids helped to plant pumpkins and sunflowers, did a pond survey for us and helped us with watering. We attended the first sustainable market in Bury and raised awareness of pesticide use around the town.



July 2021

We were finally able to host the Green Fair again in July at The Apex in Bury St Edmunds. It was one of the first indoor events held there since the start of the pandemic. As well as a large selection of stalls from local businesses and charities, we also provided space for a variety of talks and presentations about various issues, including energy, water and pesticide use.



At the site, we did our own biodiversity survey, with the help of Jillian Macready, from Bury Water Meadows Group. We harvested and shared our first vegetables and spent the summer looking after the site, watering, weeding and welcoming our visitors and volunteers.



August 2021

In August, Steph did some training through Bury Water Meadows Group to learn how to use an Austrian Scythe. This will enable her to manage several areas of the site in a wildlife-friendly way. We continued to welcome our members to the site on the days we were there over the summer holidays.



September 2021

September saw the start of a new term at The Hive. Our Eco Kids and Nature Explorers sessions resumed each week and we welcomed some new families. We were invited to attend another local Green Fair in the village of Risby.



Summary

By the end of this financial year, we had forty-three families signed up as members and six organisations as associate members. Our geographical reach for families who use the site covers a wide area of Suffolk and stretches into Norfolk and Essex, with members coming from as far as Stowmarket, Needham Market, Newmarket, Eye, Diss, Barnham, Sudbury and Chelmsford. We ran sessions on site and off site for a variety of participants, including baby and toddler sessions, home education sessions for twenty children age five to twelve, SEND sessions for thirty children from two different schools in Bury St Edmunds, workshops and seasonal event days for families and adults, and wellbeing sessions reaching two hundred children from five different settings.

About ten regular volunteers helped us to manage the site and help at our educational sessions. They played a crucial role in erecting the log cabin, bird hide and the pergola shelter, creating the pond, maintaining the fruit and vegetable growing areas and paths, and planting two hundred saplings. We have contracted about seven regular tutors and practitioners to help us deliver our sessions and have welcomed half a dozen guest tutors for one off events. We have worked in partnership with several local organisations and charities including Bury Water Meadows Group, The River Lark Catchment Partnership, East of England Training, Explore Outdoor, Bury Wholefoods, Centred in Nature, Our Bury St Edmunds BID, Freedom Church Gt Barton, SENDAT Academy and the Creative Education Centre Suffolk.

The intermittent lockdowns and changing restrictions due to COVID-19 meant we had to be adaptable to suit the needs at the time and, as an outdoor setting, we provided a welcome setting for parents who had lost all their regular social and support groups. In July 2021, we relaunched our indoor parenting support sessions at The Apex in Bury St Edmunds. Working in partnership with Awe and Wonder, Bury Breastfeeding Support, Better Birth and Baby, Natal Nurturing and the Positive Birth Group, we ran weekly support sessions with volunteers for pregnant women and parents.

Next year we hope to broaden even further by adding a teenage home education session and a stay and play session for SEND families at the site. We also hope to relaunch the regular Home Education and St Edmundsbaby Pregnancy and Parenting Fairs at the Apex, as well as moving the Green Fair out into the main market square and holding it more frequently. We have had a very successful year receiving grant funding, and we are very grateful for the support from both our district and county councils.

Steph Holland

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