

#TeamWilder Communities in Action

CASE STUDY: Welcome to English, Hull



Tell us a bit about your group/community:

Welcome to English helps newcomers to Hull – mostly refugees and asylum seekers – to learn English, make new friends and find out about living in Hull, through community participation. We offer language lessons throughout the week during term times, some general and some on special topics such as ‘using public transport’ or ‘cooking and recipes’, as well as family-friendly sessions and extra-curricular events during school holiday periods. We work with people from all over the world, and currently have learners from Sudan, Afghanistan, Iran, Ukraine, Hong Kong and many other countries.



How did you get started on your #TeamWilder journey?

A member of staff at Yorkshire Wildlife Trust had previously led some guided walks around a local park for some of our learners and passed on some information about their #TeamWilder initiative starting. We are always keen to look at new partnership opportunities as they often present good opportunities for linguistic and cultural learning for our learners, and so were happy to find out more. Based on previous experiences of some other partnership work I didn't have especially high expectations initially, presuming it would perhaps lead to a few novel sessions for our learners, but actually #TeamWilder has proved to be so much more than this!

What actions have you taken for wildlife in your community and why?

To begin with, we had no real access to outdoor space that we could work on, so a first step was to build relationships with a local landowner; Andy supported us to make contact and negotiate an agreement with [Goodwin Development Trust](#) for us to share stewardship of an underused community garden near to our classrooms, and to gain permission from [Cosmo CIC](#) to use a plot on their Thornton community allotment site. So a key focus of our work has been running regular gardening sessions on the allotment, where our learners have been involved in building raised beds made from upcycled materials, constructing a greenhouse and creating a site development and planting plan which includes lots of areas to help pollinators and other creatures, as well as providing food for humans!



Things they have incorporated into their plan for wildlife include beds with herbs and perennial wildflowers to provide year-round pollen and nectar for insects, a commitment to avoiding herbicides and pesticides and a plan to create a stumpery in a shaded area, to provide habitat for fungi, beetles and foraging small mammals.



Beyond our allotment project, other things we have done include:

- We've planted hedgerow in the community garden to provide food and shelter for birds and insects.
- We held two sessions on the banks of the River Hull and Humber Estuary to learn about birds and fish and how the waterways around the city are important migration routes for many species.
- Students have taken part in several [Community Habitat Creation Days](#) around the city, building bat boxes and sowing a mini-meadow at Timebank's community centre in Marfleet and planting native spring bulbs and making up seagrass seed bags to support the [Wilder Humber](#) programme at the [West Hull Community Hub](#) at West Hull Rugby Club. It has been great for the students to be able to visit Spurn to meet the team there, see the landscape and get a better understanding of how their efforts in creating the seagrass seed bags are contributing to marine habitat restoration on a massive scale!
- We've built an environmental focus into our literacy lessons, encouraging learners to discuss issues such as climate change, plastic pollution, and look at what actions families and individuals can take to reduce their impact on the planet. We've explored topics including marine pollution, flooding, street trees and species migration, and have incorporated practical actions into lessons, such as carrying out a beach clean at Flamborough.
- We went bird watching and helped with willow coppicing at North Cave wetlands – this is helpful as part of the habitat management at the site.
- Working as part of a joint initiative with [Freedom Festival Trust](#) and [We Live Here](#), some of our students have recently taken part in a national project linking art and nature – as part of this they explored green spaces in and around Hull alongside ecologists and artists, and together explored what nature means to them and how it is linked to wellbeing and community;

they created poems, videos and living artworks that symbolised their feelings, memories and concerns and these were displayed on screens and billboards in the centre of the city as part of Hull Freedom Festival.

■ We've designed and built a bench-planter next to the classroom. This came about as students wanted somewhere to sit while watching sports on the nearby pitches, but also wanted to create something that helped wildlife.



■ We have worked on a project to help the Environment Agency to plant 1,000 native saplings on a flood alleviation scheme in north Hull.



What resources or support have you used along the way?

Andy has been our best resource! He brings enthusiasm, expertise and creativity. Andy is also very patient and understanding of the difficulties of working with people who are new to the UK and don't speak any or good English.

Similarly, our students have been an excellent resource. They have contributed skills such as carpentry, gardening, interpreting, and knowledge of wildlife and conservation. This has been particularly interesting, as they come from all corners of the world.

■ We travelled to a local garden centre which specialises in native species to learn about and choose pollinator-friendly plants and used these to create a vibrant pollinator area at the entrance to the garden, using the planter and some tyres that we upcycled.

Myself and some of our amazing volunteer tutors have created worksheets on several topics, at three levels of difficulty to suit people at different stages of learning. Some have been used to enhance sessions led by Andy (such as making a seat-planter), others have been used by our teachers and volunteers as part of running their own sessions in the classroom. The worksheets introduce important vocabulary, instructions and evaluation and can be re-used annually as we engage new cohorts of learners.

We have also used some resources published by other organisations, such as [Yorkshire Wildlife Trust](#) and [World Wildlife Foundation](#). Materials aimed at engaging children in wildlife topics tend to offer a good level of English for most of our students.





Nextdoor Nature

We bought a class set of RHS [‘Let’s Get Gardening’](#) books, which we use in class and at the allotment. We chose tools to buy and keep in at the allotment, which we can use for years to come. We bought a set of waterproof coats and warm socks with funding from the project, to use on our outdoor lessons and trips – these are useful as not all students have this kind of clothing, and many don’t have the means to buy their own.

Has your group empowered or involved others as part of your journey?

We always involve our students in all stages of our projects. For example, when we secured access to the land near to our classrooms we held regular discussion groups where students, staff and volunteers worked together to plan what we would like to achieve. We have also pursued learning visits and partnership projects based on the interests and concerns expressed by students – the big tree planting scheme at Castle Hill was something we joined forces with the Environment Agency to get involved in as a response to students telling us about their fears around climate change and their desire to plant trees to



help make an impact in alleviating this. Listening and being responsive in this way not only gives them more ownership of our activities, but also provides an opportunity for them to have purposeful discussions in English.

What differences for wildlife have you noticed as a result of your actions?

Many of the things we have done may not seem all that remarkable at the time. However, over time, they will certainly be of great benefit to wildlife and the environment. The saplings we planted will grow and help to protect the city from floods; the bat boxes and bird boxes will help birds and bats to survive; the allotment we helped to develop with planters and a greenhouse will produce crops every year and provide food for pollinators as well as people – we are already seeing more butterflies, spiders and other insects since we have made changes to the plot with nature in mind; the thousands of tiny seagrass seed bags we have made over the last year will contribute to seascape scale restoration of our estuary.

What differences for people have you noticed as a result of your actions?

The beauty of learning English is that it can be done doing just about anything! As part of our partnership with Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, we are using this opportunity to give people the chance to explore nature, engage with environmental issues and be more active and social, whilst improving their language skills. Students are keen to teach others about nature and climate change in their home countries and find out more about wildlife in the UK. Many of our students are from farming backgrounds



Nextdoor Nature

and are now living in deprived inner-city locations. Many are suffering from poor mental health. Our sessions enable them to be aware of, enjoy and take action for nature on their doorstep, and further afield when opportunities arise. The bench planter will help people to enjoy sitting outdoors as part of our lessons, instead of always having to learn in the classroom; birdwatching for the first time has given people a lasting interest in protecting birds, and discussions we have had in the classroom and trips into nature have alerted people to the plight of wildlife and taught them things they can do to make a difference.

Have your #TeamWilder actions left you or members of your community feeling physically or mentally healthier?

Most of our students live in hotels for asylum seekers, flats or shared houses with small gardens. Most do not have money to spare for trips outside of the city. We have had great feedback and many positive messages and photos sent to us from students whilst they have been working outdoors or out and about on learning visits as part of our #TeamWilder partnership programme. The majority of our students are not allowed, or able to work, because of their asylum status. Doing something with a clear benefit and working as part of a team, both with other students and with staff and volunteers from partner organisations around the city that we have forged links with via our #TeamWilder work, gives our students a sense of purpose.



Habitat creation session

Have you faced any challenges or barriers in taking your action for wildlife? If so, what were these and how have you tried to overcome them?

Outdoor activities in the British winter don't appeal to all of our students, who have mostly come from hot countries! During the colder months we tend to focus more on classroom-based sessions about nature and the environment.

Because the vast majority of our students can't communicate well (or at all!) in English, we have to get creative to ensure this isn't a barrier for participating in classroom sessions or outdoor activities. We try to do this by:

- Making sure there are students present who can act as an informal interpreters for other students.
- Designing worksheets, with pictures and simple explanations.
- Advertising sessions (via WhatsApp) with posters with pictures and very simple English, accompanied by text which can be put into a translator.

Our students are mostly refugees and asylum seekers, and this means that they are often transient. Frequently a student has become very involved with a project only to suddenly be moved to another city by the Home Office. We have kept in touch with some of these students and advised them on similar opportunities in their local area, but it does present a challenge in terms of creating consistent, long-term projects.

Many students are from cultures where timing is not important. This has meant that where timing has been important for activities to run smoothly, for example partnership working on other people's sites, we have had to choose students for trips who we knew would be on time.

Also, there never seems to be enough time to carry out all of our ideas! This is partly because we are supporting students with so many types of learning and social needs – and the things we have not done yet we will find opportunities to do in the future.

Since being involved in #TeamWilder, have you felt differently about your local area for the better or worse? If so, why?

When students arrive in Hull, they often don't see more than a few inner-city streets. Participating in our sessions has enabled them to discover new places, which they can easily walk to. We have had guided walks, with quizzes around some areas, such as the Marina and Pearson Park. Walks around these areas have given them a better understanding of nature in the area, but also places that they can go where they can feel safe, enjoy some fresh air and appreciate some of the prettier parts of the city! Many of our students are very stressed and pre-occupied with their asylum claim. Whilst conserving nature is not something they would expect to be concerned with, many have found it is a welcome diversion from their worries.



Finding out more about Hull



Nextdoor Nature

Has your group formed any new connections or relationships?

We have made many new connections during our #Team Wilder journey so far.

- Goodwin Development Trust has become a key partner as part of our shared allotment and community garden projects.
- Through the Community Habitat Creation days that students have contributed to, we have developed relationships with host organisations [Hull and East Riding Timebank](#) and West Hull Community Hub and look forward to working on more joint sessions with them both in the future. Our partnership with West Hull Community Hub is one that has been especially beneficial to students who have enjoyed the social interactions, bingo and free hot meal that is on offer as part of their weekly sessions. We have also given something back to them, as students have helped with practical tasks to improve areas of their site for nature, and we were able to use the willow cuttings we took from our learning visit to North Cave Wetlands to help make festive decorations for them.
- Working in partnership with [Hull Truck Theatre](#), we have been part of an initiative where over 100 students planted tomato or strawberry seedlings to take home for their gardens or windowsills, as part of a series of English classes about gardening.



- More recently, we have built relationships with [Pickering Road Community Orchard](#) and the [Friends of Alderman Kneeshaw Park](#) through visits to their sites to learn from them about how they manage their spaces and the successes and challenges they have experienced as part of creating proactive community groups. In recent weeks we have enjoyed harvesting and juicing apples, planting spring bulbs and eating homemade baking, and are excited at the prospect of building on these new partnerships through monthly visits next year, to enable our students to enjoy experiencing new green spaces, take action for nature in other parts of the city, learn new skills and build new social connections.

What have been your favourite nature moments or encounters with wildlife as part of your journey so far?

When we first started the project, I envisaged only people interested in wildlife participating in the partnership. However, there has been something for everyone! We found that students wanted to join in activities, without having a particular interest in wildlife. For example, students helped with making the seat planter because they are good at design, interpreting, serving snacks, organising, physical work, making worksheets or gardening. Everyone made a meaningful contribution in their own way. Someone was good at each of: designing; carpentry; making a worksheet; interpreting; leading; tidying providing refreshments and even keeping a good conversation going! And through participation, many students developed an interest in wildlife. We have seen people finding frogs on site visits, delighting in photographing butterflies, and just enjoying walking through meadows and feeling free of their troubles for a short while. Nature provides us with so much!





Nextdoor Nature

What do you plan to do next?

Many of the things we have done in the past two years, can be repeated annually, such as growing different plants for people and pollinators on our allotment, and supporting local tree planting schemes.

We also have a list of things we didn't haven't yet had time to do, such as collecting seeds from trees in the park and trying to grow saplings. Next year we plan to help our friends at Pickering Road Community Orchard- in exchange for apples – and work more closely with West Hull Community Hub and Friends of Alderman Kneeshaw Park to help them improve their sites for nature, and support them to improve the accessibility of their provision for people from different cultural backgrounds.

We have been collaborating with MakerSpace, based in Hull Central library, and are looking forward to working with them to allow learners to access the technology and skills-building support there; we have recently worked with them to enable families to design and build herb planters and have another session planned soon where adults will learn woodworking skills as part of a project to create hedgehog homes to go in gardens around the city. Really, we have done so much in some ways, but then again we are just getting started!



Contact us or find out more:



www.welcometoenglish.org



facebook.com/EnglishinHull

