

STOMPING GROUNDS

FOREST SCHOOL

BE WILD,
BELONG TOGETHER

stomping-grounds.org

Impact and monitoring report for Q3: September - November 2021

Published 20/01/2022

1. Introduction

This is the first quarterly monitoring and impact report informed by the new evaluation strategy rolled out by Stomping Grounds from September 2021. For details of our evaluation strategy, see <https://tinyurl.com/Stomping-Grounds>

Our delivery team is working hard to implement this strategy, with the support of the Lead Team. There are some significant gaps in data sets where data has not been collected as we find our evaluation rhythm and iron out issues; despite this Q3 has generated some valuable data which illustrates the impact of our provision, informs our practice moving forward and assesses the effectiveness of this new evaluation strategy.



2. How do we evaluate our provision?

For each provision we deliver, lead practitioners:

- Invite participants to complete online surveys (pre and post session/block)
- Conduct observations of children/young people in their care (mid and end block)
- Collect feedback from children/young people using Blob Tree tools during sessions.

We have established a peer observation scheme where members of the Lead Team visit each lead practitioner to observe them delivering a session and undertake digital storytelling with participants there (a way to collect feedback from children/young people using video). Peer observation encourages practitioners and Lead Team to communicate, ensures consistency and quality across our provision and offers support to our delivery team where appropriate.

At the point of booking onto our sessions, participants complete a form including data on gender, ethnicity and disability. They can opt out of responding to this data request.

Data analysis is conducted by our Operations Manager. Findings are shared via¹ quarterly reports and regular communications with our delivery staff.

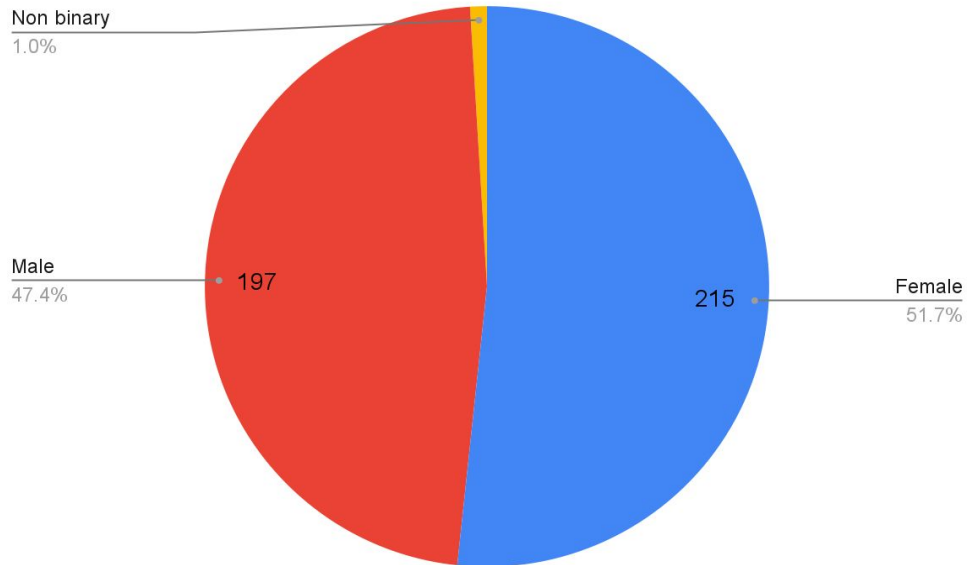


3. Who is accessing our provision?

During Q3 (Sept-Nov 2021), we delivered forest school at 9 sites across the region, reaching 916 people (see table 1 at appendix 1 for data).

3.1 Gender

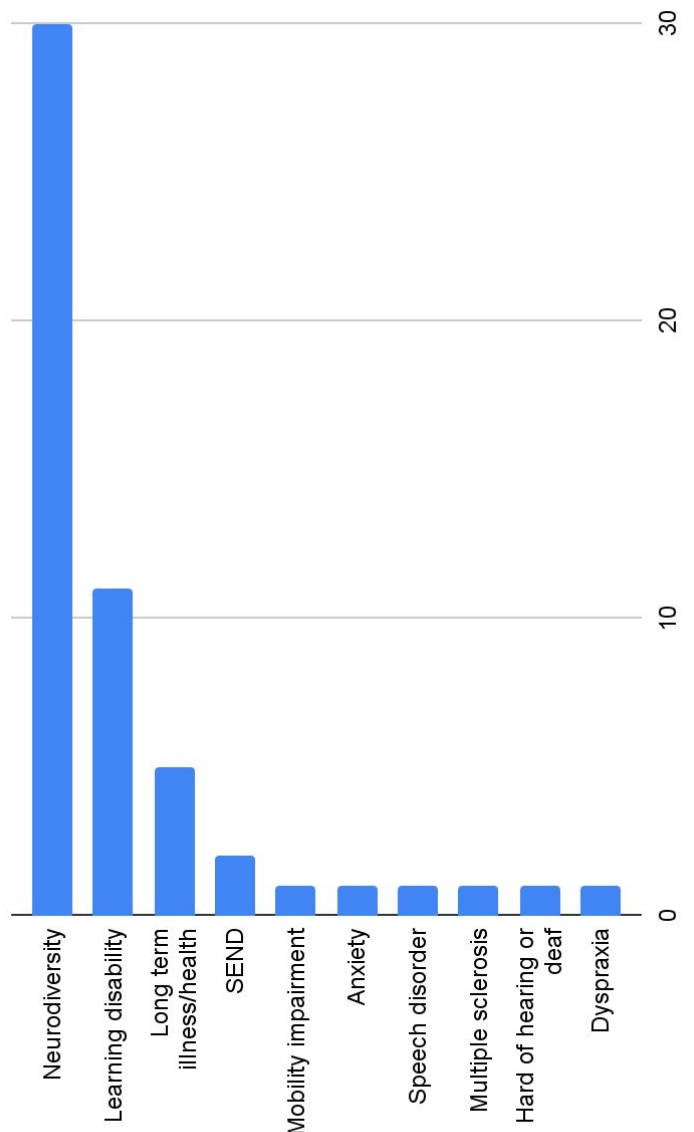
Of the 21 groups (431 participants) where data on gender was collected, there were 416 responses to gender.



3.2 Disability

Of the 19 groups (403 participants) where data was collected, 76 respondents identified as having a disability:

Neurodiversity	30
Learning disability	11
Long term illness/health condition	5
SEND	2
Mobility impairment	1
Anxiety	1
Speech disorder	1
Multiple sclerosis	1
Hard of hearing or deaf	1
Dyspraxia	1



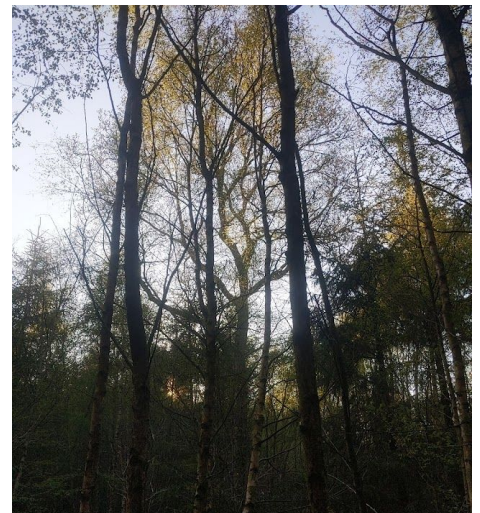
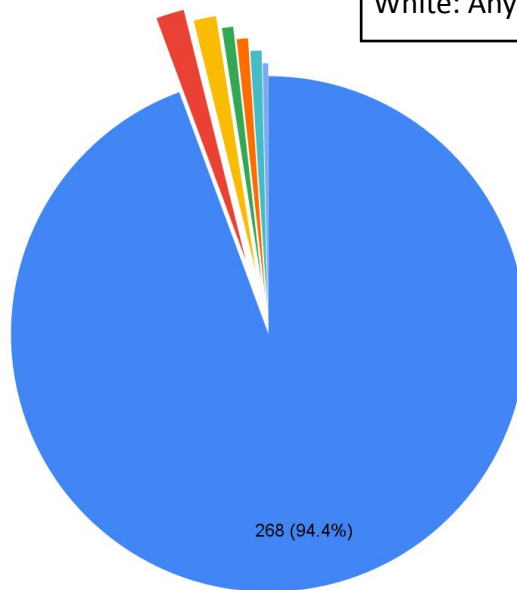
3.3 Ethnicity

Of the 18 groups (384 participants) where data was collected, 284 respondents recorded their ethnicity - the majority of our forest school participants are White British (94.4%).

White British	268
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: White and Asian	5
White Irish	4
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: White and Black African	2
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: Any other	2
Other ethnic group: Arab	2
White: Any other	1

Ethnicity of attendees

- White British
- Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: White and Asian
- White Irish
- Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: White and Black African
- Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: Any other
- Other ethnic group: Arab
- White: Any other



Our provision serves 4 Local Authorities, within which the majority of the population is White British (%) - Northumberland (98.4%), County Durham (98.2%), Gateshead (96.3%) and Newcastle (85.5%) (Census 2011, England and Wales). For context, Census 2011 data shows out of all regions, the North East had the highest percentage of White British people, at 93.6% ([Regional ethnic diversity - GOV.UK Ethnicity facts and figures](#)) .

When discussing our provision and who engages with it, it is important to consider access to rural spaces and how this is influenced by ethnicity. In every region of England and Wales, people from White ethnic groups were *least likely* to live in an urban location compared with other ethnic groups, and people from the Asian and Black ethnic groups were *most likely* to live in an urban location. 81.5% of the general population live in an urban location, and 18.5% live in a rural location – the ethnic groups most likely to live in an urban location were Pakistani (99.1%), Bangladeshi (98.7%), and Black African (98.2%). On reflection, we can suggest that people from White ethnic groups would feel more comfortable accessing rural spaces than those from Asian and Black ethnic groups.

Our vision at Stomping Grounds is to encourage people from under-represented groups to access rural spaces via our forest school provision and increase the diversity of ethnic groups attending our provision. We set up a positive action programme to work towards this, ensuring our trading profits benefit the community directly by offering free and subsidised spaces to children and young people who are historically excluded from outdoor provision. During quarter 3, we offered 7 positive action spaces to children and young people this quarter. 2 attended our Under 5s provision. 1 attended an after school club. 4 attended Forest Kindergarten at Gibside.



4. Survey responses - pre and post attendance

All our participants (parents/carers) who booked onto forest school sessions were asked to complete a short survey via email before and after attending. We gathered 51 responses before attending a session and 18 responses after attending.

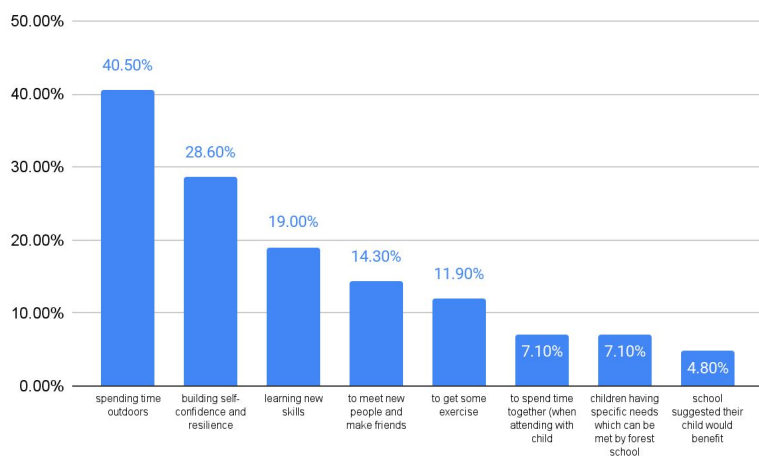
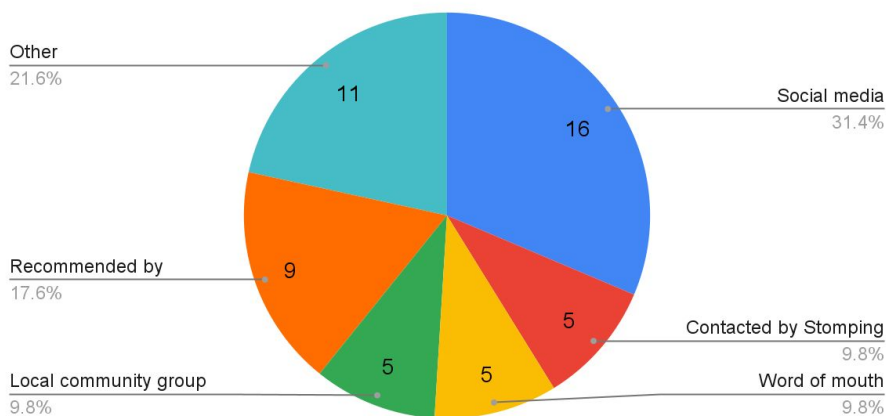
Those respondents had attended or had children who had attended 9 different groups including:

- Thornley after school club
- Prudhoe West after school club
- St Agnes after school club
- Karbon after school club
- Under 5s
- RISE youth club
- Saturday Club
- Prudhoe Town Council half term holiday club
- Family Fun.

Of those respondents completing the pre-session survey (total: 51), 32 had attended Stomping Grounds forest school before, whilst 19 respondents had not accessed any provision with us until this quarter.

4.1 How did you find out about our sessions?

The main ways we reach our audience are through our social media activity and recommendations by existing customers. During the next round of evaluation, our survey will request more information about the response 'Other' when finding out about sessions we deliver.



4.2 Why did you sign up to these sessions?

Spending time outdoors (40.5%), building self-confidence and resilience (28.6%) and learning new skills (19%) were the most common reasons for parents/carers signing their children up for our forest school sessions. Other reasons included: to meet new people and make friends, to get some exercise, to spend time together (when attending with child), children having specific needs which can be met by forest school and school suggested their child would benefit.

5. How did forest school affect our participants?

Qualitative data analysis offered some emergent themes regarding the impact of our forest school provision on the children and young people accessing it in Q3. The following themes reflect the views of parents/carers whose child(ren) are accessing our forest school provision, which suggested attendance at our provision:

- Improved mental health,
- Provided opportunities to spend time together,
- Increased self-confidence,
- Offered a sense of belonging to a community,
- Delivered a unique service which was otherwise unavailable.

There was a range of positive feedback focused on the content and structure of our sessions, delivery by our team of practitioners and what their child(ren) enjoys about forest school. We also asked for feedback on what parents/carers felt could be improved.

5.1 Improved mental health

Parents/carers shared their feedback via survey, describing the positive impact on mental health for this children and for themselves where they attended with their child(ren):



Helps me feel more freedom and more at peace with myself! (PTC Holiday Club)

They have helped [my daughter] so much with her mental health and gave her so much independence and courage to try and do different things there and learnt how to help each other in activities. (Karbon After School)

I love this. This is mine forever. This is awesome, I really enjoy this. (Benwell Family)

Every time I arrive at Dukes Hagg I breathe a deep sigh and relax. (Under 5s)

It's definitely good for his mental health. (Saturday club)

They came away happy and feeling grounded. (PTC Holiday Club)

Our Forest school sessions have a big impact on us. Both my daughter and I always feel happier being in the woods and we love the opportunity to be still with nature, or to play and chat to others as we wish. (Under 5s)

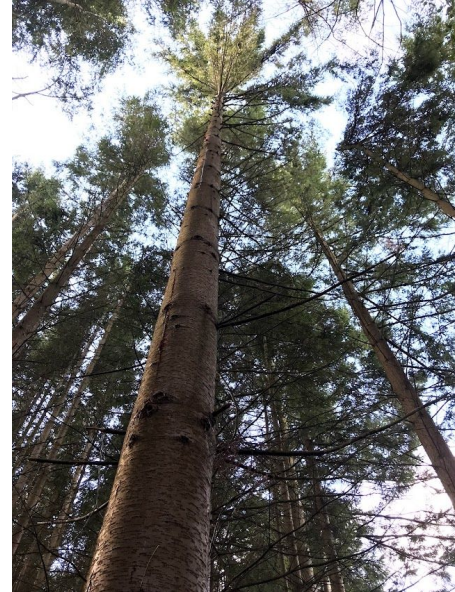
The kids socialised with new people making friends, it's so good for their mental health and well-being, and they learnt new skills in the woods. (PTC Holiday Club)

The sessions are great for his health and wellbeing, great for screen down time WITHOUT any arguments. (PTC Holiday club)



5.2 Provided opportunities to spend time together and a sense of belonging to a community

We offer a range and breadth of provision at different times and settings to suit the needs of children, young people and families. This in combination with the long term nature of forest school supports a sense of belonging within our forest school community.



I only get one day a week with [child] and I wanted to make sure we had some quality time together. [Child] is feeling pretty frustrated with lack of autonomy at the moment and I love how Stomping Grounds isn't prescriptive or limited. He just loves being outside in the woods. (Family Fun)

I really liked the group of people we are with. I do find parent and baby groups quite cliquey, whereas this is really lovely and relaxed - and I feel like I got something out of it for me, not just [child], which is quite rare to be honest. (Benwell Family)

[Child] loved making friends with children he doesn't go to school with and learning new skills. I enjoyed watching his ideas flow with the shadow puppets. (Thornley After School)

I feel like I bond with him a lot more here than I do at other places. (Benwell Family)

Socialising with others great and met from a different school. She has learned new techniques when doing her arts and crafts and made her think of the outdoors as different and appreciate it. (Thornley After School Club)

He has really enjoyed meeting new people and facing new challenges in a different environment. (Family Fun)

I don't fit in at baby groups, at all. So I always found it quite difficult going to stuff, this is the one place I go to. (Benwell Family)

There are very few activities [child] enjoys quite as much. He hops, skips and jumps out of the door when he knows it's time to go to Stomping Grounds. It's somewhere he feels he fits in, and that's not always the case. (Saturday club)

5.2 Increased self-confidence

Data analysis revealed that some of the impact of forest school is inferred, particularly where data was collected via survey rather than face to face interview. Respondents referred to the positive influences of forest school but were not necessarily explicit in stating this had influenced their confidence and emotional resilience, for example. The data below offers examples where this was stated as having a direct impact.



[Young person] has absolutely loved all her sessions at forest school and it has definitely boosted her confidence. (Saturday Club)

Confidence. Teamworking. Socialising. Developing skills and independence. All of these have been improved through his sessions. (Saturday club)

She also really benefits from some independent time away from her younger brother where she can explore, play and spend time making crafts. (PTC Holiday Club)

5.2 Delivered a unique service

In some instances, our offer filled a gap in local provision, or provided an opportunity for children and young people that was unlike any other on offer

We need him to be in a structured setting with others his age whilst adults are around to help him and keep him under a gentle watchful eye. He used to be a scout but is too old for that and there isn't an option for him to continue as the next stage is full, Stomping Grounds seemed like the perfect opportunity for [child] to carry on in an outdoor, practical and sociable group with adult guidance. (RISE)

Nothing engages our son like your forest school. (PTC Holiday Club)



5.5 Benefits of woodland, session content and structure

Our survey data illustrated the wealth of benefits respondents reported about attending forest school with us, focused on the woodland settings, and the structure and content of our provision. The data demonstrated that this positive impact occurred across the range of provision we offer, by our team of practitioners at different sites.

Excellent range of activities-craft, exploring, finding objects, fire and amazing snacks, music and songs. Great that the child gets to choose what to do after being shown what's available and can do it in their own way. (Under 5s)

The site is incredible, so many features to explore, and I love that it's encouraged to go off-path and into the undergrowth. The man-built structures are distributed in a way that invites you further out into the forest. (Family Fun)

The group spirit was great and all got on really well. [Child] loved the arts and crafts and the outdoor environment. (Thornley After School Club)

Absolutely loved learning to make objects and generally have the opportunity to be in water and mud! (Saturday Club)

I really, really loved that there was nothing to put the kids on the spot - the activities are there and they can participate as much as they feel comfortable. This works particularly well for my son because it avoids him having to claim his space or turn for things (which he finds difficult) and gives him time to process everything at his own speed. (Family Fun)

Loved listening to [child] tell me all about the fun he had. (Thornley After School Club)

Your sessions hit the absolute perfect middle ground by having everyone come together at the start for intro and story time, and by having a bit of a theme and optional activity, and obviously the campfire to round off. I feel that it's definitely not just my child who benefits from a bit of scaffolding. (Family Fun)

[Child] loves attending his forest school sessions and is always so excited to go. (Prudhoe West After School)

[Child] loved every session and we just hope that this could be brought back in the new year. (Thornley After School)

[Child] attending forest school gave her freedom and adventure and gave me time to focus on my younger two. (Saturday club)

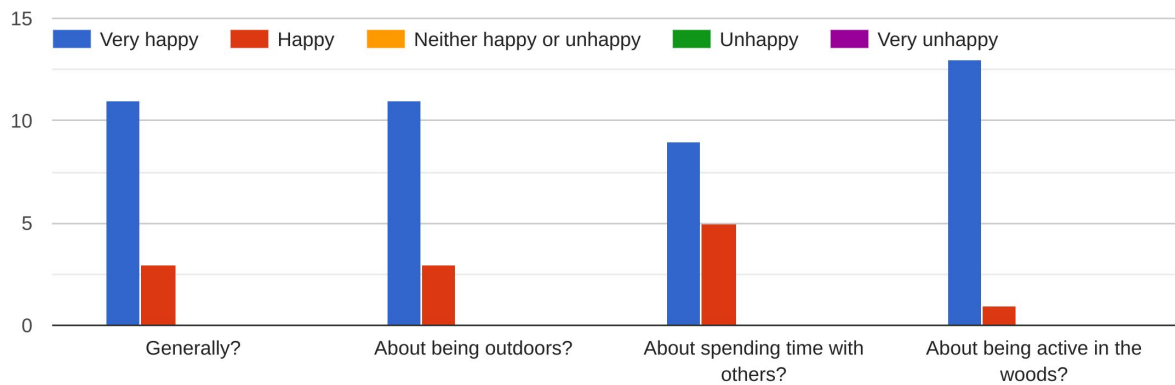
Helps foster a love of the outdoors and develop child led play. (Under 5s)

He is generally very curious but forest school encourages him to play really freely. He enjoys exploring, noticing bugs, connecting with other kids, splashing in the stream, balancing on things, and cutting and making independently in the forest. (Family fun)

The boys love the freedom of forest school. (PTC Holiday Club)

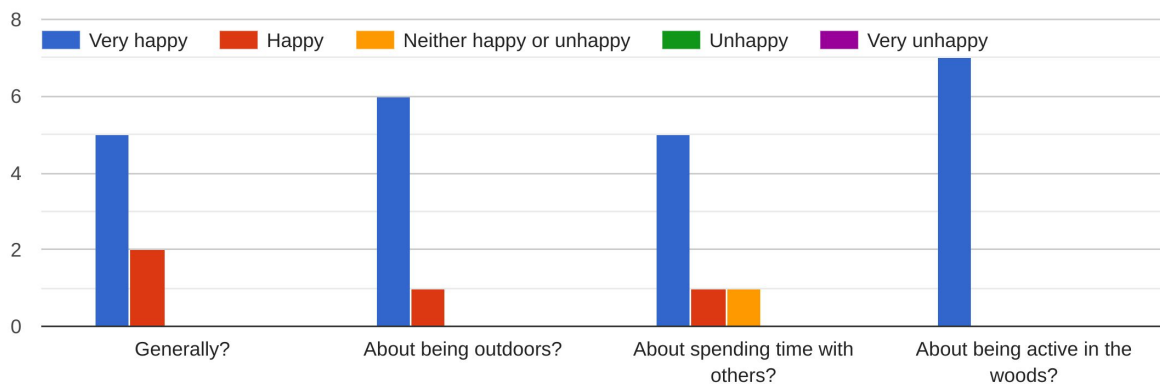
Our post-session survey respondents (14) rated their child as happy or very happy generally, about being outdoors, spending time with others and being active in the woods following their forest school experience. This data would be most valuable if we were able to cross reference with pre-survey responses from the same respondent; however it is useful to note the positive responses to all outcomes.

Thinking about your child at the end of our time at forest school together, how do they feel...?
(Please rate 1-5)



7 parents/carers attending sessions with children also shared how they felt at the end of forest school:

Only respond if you attended forest school with your child: Thinking about yourself at the end of our time at forest school together, how do you feel...?



5.6 Delivery by practitioners

Survey respondents identified the impact of the practitioners delivering the session on their experience of it as being significant:

[Child] loves forest school. She also talks very positively about the leaders and her time with them. (Prudhoe West After school)

You guys are really good, thank you for interacting with them - they run off, my kids are their own beings and they like to have the freedom to run around, and there's always someone looking out for them. It gives me a little bit of a pause on my brain, which is really good. (Benwell Family)

Susan has such a lovely calm and gentle manner with the kids. My son loves her. The sessions are structured really well with a great mix of free play and activities. The songs, stories, fire cooking and in particular the art activities are brilliant, really imaginative and linked so well with the seasons. (Under 5s)

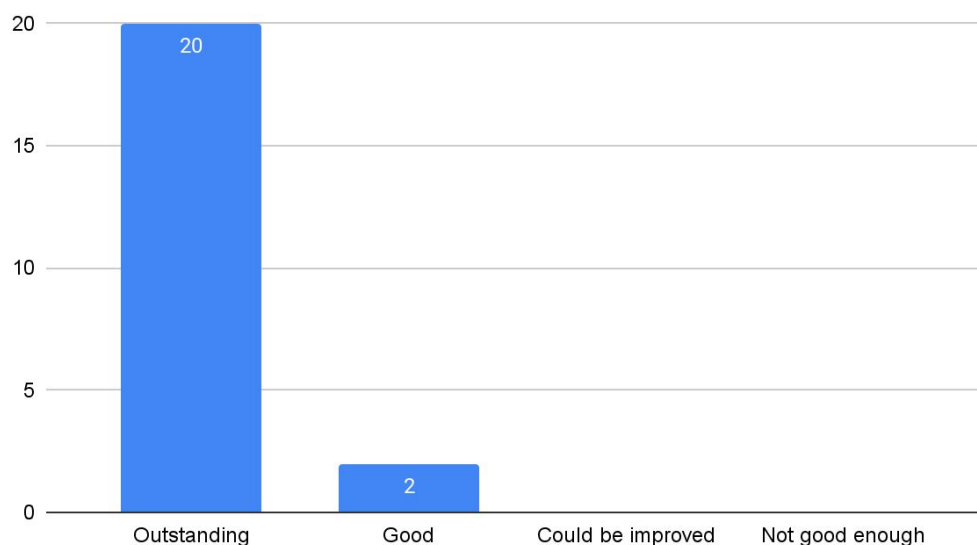
Both Mel and Emma are warm and approachable, and strike a great balance of letting you get on with it but being visibly 'around' if you want to ask anything or chat. They both speak to children as competent people rather than doing kiddie talk, which I guess is in keeping with forest school ethos but also shows their respect for the kids. (Family Fun)

I know this was the first set of under 5s sessions Sandra has run independently, just wanted to say they've been fab! (under 5s)

5.7 Ways in which we can improve

22 parents/carers rated the quality of the service they had received from Stomping Grounds - 20 considered it to be outstanding.

How would you rate the quality of our service?



Survey data also identified areas for consideration and development. One parent shared some valuable feedback about areas for improvement in our practice and highlighted how our team of practitioners respond efficiently to incidents arising in sessions. They describe their child trying to repeat activities they had enjoyed at forest school at home without supervision.



I think it needs to be explained to children like my son by the Forest school instructors at the beginning of the sessions that the stuff the instructors allow them to do supervised in the woods must not be attempted at home. (Saturday Club)

This was raised with the lead practitioner at the time, who then responded efficiently and appropriately by discussing with the child why this was not safe practice, that it was inappropriate and illegal to carry a knife in public. This was also communicated to the rest of the group, then revisited on numerous occasions in that block to ensure all children understood tool use and fire lighting should only occur under adult supervision.

The Lead Team considered this useful to share with all of our delivery team, highlighting the importance of practitioners sharing safe practice standards with children/young people and being explicit that activities deemed risky e.g. tool use, fire lighting, should always be supervised by an adult. Practitioners should be aware that the language and style of instruction they use should be appropriate to the understanding of the children in their care.

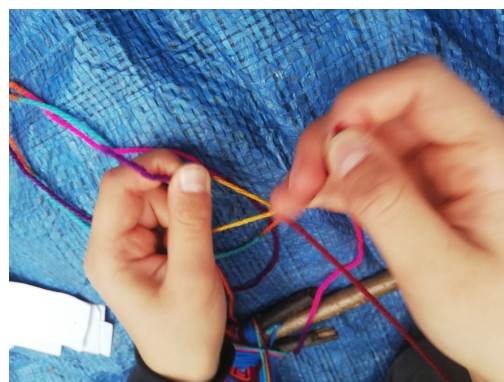
One parent/carer who attends forest school with their child suggested the following:

Maybe (particularly in smaller groups when it wouldn't take long) the adults could be introduced in the welcome song too? Parenting can be very lonely (it was especially in 2020!) and that might make the parent feel more welcome too, without losing the child focus which I agree is very important. (Under 5s)

We received this feedback from a different parent/carer:

Not much to bring the group together, lots of regulars getting on with their familiar routines. (Under 5s)

We find feedback about our sessions valuable as it informs our practice and supports us to implement change across our provision. In response to the comments above, the Team Leads are organising a skills share to open up discussion amongst practitioners about how they welcome new attendees, how their sessions develop across numerous blocks of delivery and how they encourage a sense of community in their groups.



Another parent took the opportunity when we asked about what we didn't do well to comment:

Nothing. These are actually the perfect forest school sessions. Don't change a thing! (Family Fun)



6 What do children and young people think of our provision?

This quarter we began to collect data from the children and young people who access our forest school provision. We wanted to capture the essence of their experience by using a digital storytelling approach, where they had control of the recording device, were given some prompts to focus their attention and then invited to share their own perspective.

A forest school practitioner at Thornley After School Club uses prompts to ask a child about their forest school experience.



What does forest school mean to you?

Having adventures and doing different activities

Why do you come to forest school?

It's really cool actually, even though like at first i was the only one at a different school but as times gone on I started knowing people and it seemed pretty fun.

Is there anything you don't like while you're here?

There's nothing really that I don't like - I like everything.

Our youngest participants were also asked to share their thoughts on forest school. With their parent/carers' support (italicised), children from our Under 5s sessions offered the following feedback:



What's your favourite thing to do here?

Going to Cheechab's house (the large treehouse at DH)

You really like to climb up here - and this is Cheechab's house? That's part of your imaginative game and you like to climb up there.

Can you tell Suzanne your favourite thing about forest school?

The ladder. And the big ladder over there. And I like the hammock.

You love the hammock don't you? What about the hot milk?

Um, I'm not a baby any more.

(laughs)

We like the fire because it keeps us warm and warms up oat milk.

What else do we like about forest school?

Everything!

We also encourage our practitioners to record and share feedback offered directly to them by children and young people in their care. These young people comment on the opportunity to meet new people and make friends. Skills development, being yourself and improved mental health are also significant here.

RISE is extraordinary - since I started, I have made new friends and met new people. This is a place where you can express your feelings and relax and have fun. (RISE)

I really enjoyed forest school. It has made me feel more confident learning the new skills we learned whilst there. I enjoyed meeting new people and getting involved in the different activities. It has helped my mental health as I was struggling a little bit due to lockdown and being limited to what I could do. The staff were really nice - Alice made me feel really comfortable being new there and was always nice and kind and caring to me. Lizzie and Pickle were also kind and helpful. I hope I can come again soon - it has been a fun couple of weeks and given me something to look forward to on a Wednesday. (Active Youth: young leaders)



I enjoyed taking part in Active Youth... I hope we can do more projects like this in the future. I really like being able to be out in the forest after lockdown and to meet up with other people I didn't know (Active Youth: young leaders)

I learnt that with speaking in front of groups, the easiest thing is to just go ahead and do it and not sweat it. The build up is always worse than the actual outcome. I feel like since the project I'm much more able to speak to many more people and it feels like it would be easier in future be able to just stand up and do it in stead of just stressing about it. (Active Youth: young leaders)

I found taking part quite fun and I like how open it was to let you meet so many faces and have a better experiences and an open opportunity. I liked coming back into forest because we haven't been there in so long, and that was getting me down but then we came back which was great. (Active Youth: young leaders)

I feel like the way I have changed most because of the project is that I've gained more confidence in cooking and I've gained important life skills. (Active Youth: young leaders)



7. Considerations for Q4 and the year ahead

This was our first rollout of evaluation across our entire forest school provision. It has highlighted our positive impact upon those accessing forest school and identified opportunities for development through Quarter 4 and the year ahead.

7.1 Improvements to evaluation

Much of what the team has learned during this initial rollout has focused on streamlining methods of data collection and developing evaluation processes to ensure we gather data from all stakeholders. In Q4, we will:

- Request a post-attendance survey only
- Ask Team Leads to prompt their practitioners to send email and survey links to attendees
- Set up a database to track where data collection has occurred by provision
- Undertake peer observation on an annual basis, unless issues arise which require earlier intervention
- Embed Blob Tree evaluation within every provision to amplify the beneficiary voice e.g. children and young people
- Include data from practitioner observations of attendees at their provision
- Invite practitioners to use reflection time at the end of their sessions as an aspect of digital storytelling - record this with appropriate consent
- Encourage Team Leads to attend their allocated provisions to support digital storytelling on a termly basis
- Consider requesting feedback from children and young people via online survey, via their parent/carer
- Collect data on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion from our staff team
- Consider the views of our staff team in terms of their role and how it impacts their own wellbeing



7.2 Improvements to our provision, delivery, administration and organisation

We will share this report with our staff team and other key stakeholders. Evaluation of Q3 will shape Q4 by focusing on two areas:



- Developing and delivering CPD in the form of skills shares for specific provision e.g. Under 5s and family provision, youth provision, adult wellbeing. This will be an invitation to attend a 3 hour session with fellow practitioners to share good practice, discuss challenges, and identify areas for development, with the purpose of delivering a core model of forest school delivery which is consistent across all of our provision.
- Increasing the uptake of positive action spaces. How can we reach the audience who would most benefit from positive action spaces and how can we appeal to this audience to use our service?



Appendix 1

Table 1: number of people accessing Stomping Grounds Forest School by provision. (viewable internally only)
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1dBJfdQoyw-MH5KUjqJIRPQod16ojNWT02g41r5sfWvw/edit?usp=sharing>

Table 2: Ethnic group, local authorities in England and Wales: Tyne and Wear local authorities, North East Region, England and England and Wales
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1bj3onhFw0RrM901R_x65pn3DxPJQLSyx-F9CpcSB4PE/edit?usp=sharing