**Outdoor Woodland & learning North East Group Meeting**

**Meeting via Zoom**

**7th December 2020 at 1pm – 2.30pm**

**Minutes**

**1. Welcome & Apologies**

**Present:** Joanne Evans, Ian Talboys (Aberdeen City Council Ranger

Service), Julia MacKay (acting Chair), Jill Birch, Lindsey Duncan, Claire Livingstone (Treasurer),

Stephen Reeves (Dorenell Ranger Service), John Malster, Vanessa Prichard, Alex Stuart, Doug Gooday, Eric Baird (Glen Tanar Ranger Service), Aileen Salway, Joan Anderson, Roddy Hamilton (North East Ranger Service, NTS Crathes)

**Apologies:** Elaine Crawford, Juliet Robertson.

**2. Minutes of previous meeting 28th September 2020, matters arising**

* Julia made contact with Aberdeen City Council regarding outdoor learning CPD for teaching staff in secondary schools. She contacted Eleanor Shepperd and was then passed onto Gael Simpson and Erin McGowan. They sent her dates and times for a meeting and Julia chased up last week. Phone meeting scheduled with Gael for Wednesday 9th December at 12.30pm. Julia will then contact sub group to progress this project.
* No other matters arising. Approved Doug Gooday, seconded John Malster.

**3. Branching Out South Aberdeenshire (BOSA)**

* JB updated the meeting on BOSA.
* Thanks to Roddy Hamilton for supporting the group’s return at Crathes. A small group has been good during the current situation. Last session is on 8th December where there will be an awards ceremony.
* Bryan Duncan, ADA has done a great job of selecting referrals for this group.
* Evaluations will take place this week. Qualitative observation was first done as the evaluation process with quotes from the clients. Quantitative measurements have had their drawbacks as it is difficult for some clients to reflect over past sessions. A questionnaire is done at the start of the run of sessions and again at the end. JB/JM are developing a second method of quantitative evaluation which should be more BOSA friendly.
* Seeking extra funding for BOSA plus as many clients are based in Stonehaven and the Mearns.
* JM has to complete and submit a report for the Budge Foundation by January 2021.
* ADA funding – ADAP fund the sessions but will only do this retrospectively once the quarterly report is submitted meaning that JB/JM are paid once funding is received from ADAP. ADA pay for Bryan Duncan’s time on BOSA.
* Next cohort will start in March 2021. Bryan Duncan is promoting and getting referrals.

**4. Willow workshop**

* Willow workshop was run at Muirfield School in Aberdeen on Saturday 7th November.
* 9 participants split into 3 groups each with a tutor (John Malster, Duncan McNeill and John’s 2 sons)
* JM received a thank you email from head teacher, Mrs Davidson.
* Lots of willow material was available and some was taken to other schools and also by participants.
* More demand for a future course (see 6).
* It would also be useful to do an event with what to do with willow as well as children’s involvement when COVID restrictions allow.
* Eventbrite worked well for this event. 2 booked outwith Eventbrite.
* Julia has now set up OWLNEG on Aberdeen City Council’s supplier list.

**5. First Aid Course**

* CH organised a 2-day Outdoor First Aid Course on 14th / 21st Nov at Mucky Boots, Maryculter Woods.
* Duncan McNeill (Aberdeen City Ranger) delivered it as he is a partner in the First Aid Coop.
* CH reported that it was an excellent course allowing attendees more time to practice their first aid course and more realistic scenarios.
* It was completely outside so it was cold and 18 hours over 2 days was the required contact time with the trainer in order to meet the requirements.
* Duncan has proposed that a refresher course should be run annually as well as a renewal course once a year.
* A well organised course.
* Head torches/lighting needed if holding the course in the wintertime next time.
* CH passed on her tanks to Duncan through Ian Talboys.

**6. Ideas for 2021/2022 events from March 2021**

* DG suggested a tool use CPD as we have had a few enquiries
  + Introduction to tools (like NESOLG FOLA training)
  + Early Years – bench tools/woodwork in early years. Possible partnership with Karen Clements, Poppies Nursery
  + IT reported that he was looking at something similar for Aberdeen City Council Early Years and primary school children as a twilight session for teaching staff (locally endorsed course)
  + JE suggested involving Justin Dearsley, Camphill
  + John Malster happy to be involved
  + **Action:** DG to put a post on the OWLNEG Facebook group asking people what they would like
  + **Action:** DG to put together a proposal based on the above.
* Willow Course re-run
  + JM to follow up with Muirfield School after March 2021.
* Outdoor Learning linked with Curriculum for Excellence
  + SR suggested the above as Cairnie School had asked him
  + JA said that there was a Doric poem linked to Cairnie which could be used as a theme.
  + DG said that this was on Juliet’s Creative Star website
  + CH suggested speaking to Oyne School
  + JB suggested running an event for head teachers so that this was covered.
* Fresh water workshop
  + JB suggested the above covering access, activities and risk assessment
  + EB suggested Glen Tanar as a possible location for South Aberdeenshire
* CPD from summer 2020 to be run in South Aberdeenshire (JE)
* Dry stone dyking course (JM)
  + Possible locations Crathes or other NTS properties
  + **Action:** Roddy to check about Crathes as a location
  + **Action:** LD to ask Steve for costings for a 2 day course
* Hedge laying course (JM)
  + SR has a 200 metre long hedge which could be used as a location
  + John M said that he has delivered a similar course
  + DG said there might be a site in Banff and Buchan. **Action:** DG to check with Jodie
  + IT has done hedge laying commercially
  + John M suggested the entrance to Haddo
* Seed collection (John M)
  + Seed collection in late summer/early autumn
  + **Action:** Roddy to contact John re seed collection sites
  + EB said that there were resources on the Woodland Trust website about how to set up a nursery.
* **Action:** Julia to put together a draft plan for the AGM in March 2021

**7. W4L grants (JE)**

* 3 grants awarded to Flowerpots Childcare and Dunecht School and Alford ASN.
* **Action:** JE to publicise more widely on NESOLG/OWLNEG facebook page and group.
* **Action:** CH to send JE contacts for grant applications.

**9. OWLNEG Finance/Accounts (statement from CH)**

* £30,445.23 is current balance as of 7th December. All payments and outgoings have cleared.
* £12K to be paid out to BOSA once quarterly report has been confirmed.
* OWLNEG approximately balance £18K.
* Currently making back 50% of outgoings on CPD events.
* There will be no funding from Scottish Funding in 2021/2022.
* CH reported that she is finding it increasingly more difficult to manage the accounts as funding sources have become more complex.
* CH would like to step down as treasurer and suggests employing someone to manage the accounts professionally. This company would also take on the audit work for the AGM too.
* Julia is for this proposal as were many others at the meeting
* JB thanked CH for all of her hard work as treasurer.
* **Action:** CH to get quotes for work to be transferred as soon as possible to an accountant so that accounts can be sorted out before the AGM in March 2021.
* LD suggested Bridgeton Bookkeeping, Alford. **Action:** LD to send CH contact details
* **Action:** CH to talk to her accounting contact.
* Decision to be made on backfilling BOSA payments to JB and JM once accountant has been appointed.

1. **AOCB**

* **Action:** John M to send JE contact details to be added OWLNEG distribution list.
* IT said that Grace has produced some videos about the Rivers Don and Dee from schools projects in Aberdeen. These have been shared on the OWLNEG page and also on Grace’s page Silverhaar. Follow up videos on outdoor learning activities on rivers are possible if funding is available.

**11. Date for next meeting**

Next meeting is the AGM on Monday 15th March 2021 at 2pm via Zoom.

**12. Update from constituent organisations**

**Joan Anderson, journalist and storyteller**

I've advertised a "return to activities from Spring 2021", offering free walks, talks and storytelling. All bookings will be subject to Coronavirus status and restrictions and - where walks are organised by myself - will depend upon getting First Aid cert renewed and obtaining insurance. Still waiting to interview subjects in their 80s and 90s for Highland Games magazines. If the snow doesn't come soon, I'm going to take a look at my 5 local heritage walks (4 of them wooded) with a view to doing some litter picking. I think I finally found out the story behind the councillor credited and honoured locally with getting public access to Craigendarroch hill and woodland walks early in the 20th century and that is being prepared now to coincide with the opening of the new hub at the Halls, where the old library used to be. Watched a beautiful film made by storyteller Grace Banks (with 4 primary schools) about the Dee and the Don and recently took part in a highly entertaining toilets-for-all event run by Alford Heritage Museum and conducted by storyteller Jackie Ross.

**Ian Talboys**

**Aberdeen City Council Countryside Ranger Service Update December 2020**

We are still operating a restricted service at the moment with very little outdoor learning work going on.

We have now completed the Branching Out programme that was started before lockdown. We tried a new awayday activity with minimal travel and relatively easy social distancing, which went down very well, kayaking in the Rubislaw Quarry. This is something that Adventure Aberdeen are offering for groups and they run public sessions too. All the kit is provided!

We are now planning the next Branching Out programme which is due to start in January, with taster sessions before Christmas. We have funding to run two programmes starting before the end of March.

The teachers and early years practitioners who started our safe use of fires training before lockdown, have now all completed the course and passed the assessment. We had to complete the training in smaller groups to be able to maintain social distancing and to avoid participants sharing kit but it all worked out ok. We have made some minor tweaks to the assessments based on the feedback from this cohort. We will now be rolling out the course more widely in the spring when daylight allows for twilight sessions.

John Malster organised a willow structures maintenance course for teachers, assisted by our Ranger Duncan McNeill. It was held at Muirfield School in Aberdeen on Saturday 7th November. Due to the Covid restrictions the numbers were limited to 8 places which were filled. Participants seem to enjoy the course and hopefully were able to develop their own skills enough to have the confidence to take on managing their own willow structures and involve the students with the work as appropriate. There were people left on a waiting list for this so a repeat of the course might be worthwhile.

Dyce Primary have invited us along to be part of their Winter Wonderland celebrations which are a series of outdoor learning sessions for the whole school during December. The sessions are only 20 minutes with small groups so it is quick fire activities. We are doing a version of meet a tree but without blindfolds to keep it Covid secure. Other outside organisations are also delivering some activities.

We were honoured to receive the RSPB Nature of Scotland Award for 2020 the Nature and Climate Action Category. The nomination was called Working Wetlands, working with wildlife and nature. It was about the work we have been involved with over the last five years or so developing wetlands and restoring watercourses to help manage surface water sustainably and reduce flood risks at St Fitticks Park, Seaton Wetland and Den of Maidencraig. The award was announced at an online ceremony hosted by Steve Backshall and Euan McIlwraith in 25 November. We were also finalists in the Forest and Woodland category for the Return of Red Squirrels to Aberdeen but we didn’t win that one.

We were sad to see one of our Rangers leave the team in mid-November, Jen has gone on to work at the Foyer in their employability team, helping people back into employment or training when they are recovering from mental health or addiction issues. We wish her well in her role there and her future career. We hope to be able to advertise for a replacement soon.

**Joanne Evans**

* Gardening4Kids 2020 has not been running this year due to COVID current restrictions.
* Working 1 to 1 on learning pathways plus with a pupil at Turriff School.
* Working 1 to 1 on learning pathways plus with a pupil at Elrick School
* Gerbera Designs – garden design has been very busy with lots of projects.
* Working with NESOLG and Julia to plan for the next cohort for FOLA 8 training in 2021.
* Writing outdoor learning factsheets for Trellis (therapeutic gardening charity)