

**Outdoor &  
Woodland  
Learning**  
SCOTLAND



## **PROJECT REPORT**

### **NATURE FAMILIES 2015**

**A Forest School Project supported by  
Big Lottery Communities & Families Fund and Tayside OWL Group**



***"It was brilliant, mum!"***  
**(child's comment to mother after first session)**

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**All the pictures in this report were taken by the children**

## BACKGROUND

### Project submission:

The project was submitted through the [Tayside Outdoor & Woodland Learning \(OWL\) Group](#) in partnership with [Perthshire Women's Aid](#), and co-delivered by Penny Martin, (Tayside OWL Group), and children and young people's workers from Perthshire Women's Aid.

### Funding

Funding support was received from Big Lottery Fund/ Scottish Government's Communities and Families Fund. In-kind support was provided by Forestry Commission Scotland through free (pre-booked) access to the Education Shed (an outdoor shelter with toilets & running water) located in an area of woodland in Perthshire. The funding application was made by Alice Warren (Tayside OWL Group).

### Project rationale:

This was a partnership project for Tayside Outdoor & Woodland Learning (OWL) Group with community involvement from Perthshire Women's Aid and the families they support.

### The needs of children and families in the local community

This project followed a pilot project 'Nature Time' run in 2014. The Nature Time report will be made available on the Tayside OWL Group [projects](#) webpage.

The 2015 Nature Families project 'community' consisted of young children (8 years and younger) and their mothers who were currently receiving support from Perthshire Women's Aid (PWA). PWA work with vulnerable families who face daily challenges as a result of experiencing domestic abuse as well as often living with poverty, social deprivation, isolation and unemployment.

The planned programme of Forest School sessions aimed to improve health and well-being, enhance PWA services and provide CPD for PWA children's workers. Statistics/research shows families today spend less time in nature whilst health problems (obesity, stress, depression) are increasing. [Forest School](#) is a specialised approach that helps children to develop emotional, physical and cognitive skills, experience adventure, fun, freedom, and learn to assess risk, and engage all their senses. Regular time in nature benefits all families but those experiencing trauma, stress or poverty are most in need.

Throughout 2014, Tayside OWL (formerly known as Tayside Forest Education Initiative or FEI), ran a trial 'Nature Time' Forest School programme with PWA families. Positive results and feedback from this project evidenced an appetite and need for a full programme:

*"I loved when we were sitting there, when we were nae talking or that, and you could hear aw the soonds of nature around awbody, that was relaxing, I never felt like that before"*(Mother, Nature Time project participant, 2014).

However, our taster sessions revealed that mothers struggle to commit regularly due to personal difficulties or work/study commitments. This meant that attendance of the children could be patchy. We therefore felt a revised Nature Families model could maximise benefits and opportunities for the children whilst still ensuring mothers are involved and engaged.

### Nature Families programme aims and ambitions

The new 12 week programme Nature Families aimed to build on the Nature Time programme and refine what had been learned so far, to create a model for future projects. Our first-hand experience, and wider research, demonstrated that Forest School provides opportunities for families experiencing domestic abuse to strengthen relationships, build

emotional resilience and confidence, and reduce stress. The project aimed to address the following issues for families:

- 1) Lack of confidence to try new things without support.
- 2) Need of help to appreciate/understand the benefits of natural play and reverse negative preconceptions around risk, 'dirt', rain, physical activity, and unstructured activities.
- 3) Children need time for free play and opportunities to follow their own interests at their own pace, especially when their early learning/play experiences have been inhibited.
- 4) Women who have experienced abuse can have low self-esteem; learning new skills/crafts helps rebuild confidence and self-esteem which has positive effects on family life.
- 5) To maximise benefits the project would provide regular, repeated Forest School experiences and focus on early intervention with young children (under 8).

### **Planned actions**

- A qualified Forest School leader from Tayside OWL Group would work alongside PWA children and young people's workers to deliver a programme of 12 2-hour forest school sessions for 12-15 children and 5-7 mothers.
- Children would attend all sessions whilst mothers will attend 3-5 sessions at key points throughout. Multi-sensory, active, creative and enriching play and learning experiences in a natural setting would take place within the secure framework of regular repeated sessions. When present, mothers will be encouraged to work alongside their children as well as given the chance to learn crafts and skills whilst their children are supervised nearby.
- Guest artists could work alongside the Forest School leader and provide creative skill-sharing in arts, such as, storytelling, willow weaving, felting and other natural crafts.
- Equipment and clothing would be provided to make the outdoor environment comfortable and safe, showing how the outdoors can be enjoyed in all weathers. Families would be encouraged to step out of their comfort zone in a secure and supportive environment, taking away ideas and inspiration to help them get out into nature in their daily lives.
- Transport would be provided to get participants to and from the woodland where the project took place. This site features open wooded areas as well as a covered space where the group can meet, toilet, get changed and shelter in extreme weather.
- Children would attend during school hours as part of an agreed programme of intervention and support coordinated by PWA children and young people's service.
- One PWA children and young people's worker would undertake Forest School training. This will enable PWA to eventually develop their own in-house programme of Forest School, reducing reliance on external partners and leading to long term, affordable sustainability.
- Throughout the project PWA and Tayside OWL Group staff would explore and measure the impacts of nature play on family relationships and levels of well-being, using evaluation techniques, such as, the Child-Parent Relationship scale, the 'Depression, Anxiety and Stress scales, and the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire. Furthermore, all staff involved will take part in regular debrief sessions to discuss experiences, evaluate, reflect and plan for next steps collaboratively.
- A project report would be circulated among the OWL Scotland network, Women's Aid services and wider family/childcare services. By measuring impacts & outcomes we aimed to add value to the project, to enable and inspire support workers and families to continue and develop effective nature play provision well beyond this project.
- PWA agreed to be responsible for family recruitment, outreach and liaison about the project. PWA staff would attend all sessions in order to engage in all activities and co-lead aspects of the project where appropriate. Staff would attend meetings throughout the duration of the project and contribute to on-going planning and evaluation.

- Tayside OWL Group provided the Forest School leader to deliver the woodland sessions, locate suitable sites, source required materials and equipment, and oversee the monitoring and documentation of activities and session reviews.

## Policy & Procedures

Perthshire Women's Aid Child Protection Policy and Procedure describes Perthshire Women's Aid commitment to the protection of children and the safeguarding and promoting of their interests and wellbeing, as well as the commitment to protect vulnerable children from exploitative relationships.

A Forest School Handbook for Nature Time/ Nature Families Forest School Project provided a guide for Forest School Leaders and helpers including Operating Procedures. This was shared and agreed with PWA prior to the start of the programme and available at each session.



Nature Families woodland base log circle. Note the wood cookies hanging up. The Talking & Thinking book has images beside it to add by the children. One log has been rolled over to look for slugs, ants and other invertebrates.

## PROGRAMME PLANNING & EVALUATION

### Baseline assessments with mums

Supporting the mother-child relationship is an important element of PWA's work with their clients. Where possible, mothers were involved in the assessment of their own child/ children and in commenting on any changes observed throughout this programme. The following questionnaires were used to establish baseline measures with the plan to repeat these at the end of the programme. Most of these were carried out during the focus group session with mothers at the start of the programme:

#### NATURE FAMILIES Self-reporting questionnaire – see Appendix 1

This questionnaire aims to give a simple indication of attitudes towards outdoor play, outdoor spaces, how these are used by mother and child. This method had been used in the Nature Time trial programme, devised by Tayside OWL Group leaders.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (adapted by PWA) – see Appendix 2

Each mother is asked to read a series of statements reflecting an aspect of self-esteem, then circle the letter indicating how much she agrees/disagrees with the statement.

Resilience and relationships – the ‘Washing line’ questionnaire – see Appendix 3

Each mother is asked to rate each of the following numbered outcomes belonging to PWA relating to resilience and relationships, on a scale of 1 – 10, where 1 is the worst and 10 is the best.

- *Children and Young People have greater resilience*
  1. My child knows who to go to, to ask for help.
  2. My child believes they can cope with difficult situations.
  3. My child can identify what they can do well.
  4. My child knows what makes a good friend and can say which of their friends are like this.
- *Children and Young People develop a better relationship with their mother/primary female carer.*
  1. I can recognise and understand my child’s individual needs and meet these needs, with support from others, as required.
  2. I have the opportunity to enjoy spending time with my child doing fun things.

Bounce Back PRASE Assessment – see Appendix 4

As a measure of each child’s self-esteem and resilience, mothers are asked to complete this questionnaire by ticking the box that best describes how their child thinks and what their child does across a series of statements.

### **Baseline assessments with children**

PWA carried out baseline assessments with the children to help with session planning, using Project Outcomes and Indicators developed in-house (Scottish Government Children’s Services Fund, April 2015 to March 2016).

**Planning sessions were based on assessments – see sessions below.**

## **PROJECT OUTPUTS**

The backbone of the programme was pre-planned regular sessions to establish routine and a sense of familiarity for the children. Before, during and after, there was regular liaison between the project coordinator and PWA.

## **PROGRAMME PARTICIPANTS**

A total of 10 children (5 girls and 5 boys) took part in this programme, ranging in age from 5 – 8 years. They were receiving support from Women’s Aid Children and Young People’s Service. Seven of the ten children had designated social workers, plus one child was on the child protection register. Some children had additional support needs: One child had English as an additional language. Four children were noted as having challenging behaviour; and four had some history of being physically aggressive to staff and/or other children. One child had brain developmental delay. Three had no known behaviour issues, although one of these children may have had issues with food due to the domestic abuse circumstances. Two children were siblings, the rest were unrelated. Two children were on a part-time timetable at school and one child was in a Nurture Base at school.



## NATURE FAMILIES SESSIONS 2015

An exemplar session planning template is shown in Appendix 5. Each Nature Families session ran from 1330 – 1530. The programme leaders arrived before the start to set up within the wood and Shed, and stayed on after the children/ participants had left, in order to review the session. In total the session ran from around 1200 – 1600 with an active outdoor participant element of 2 hours. This was the maximum time available to Nature Families to fit with the school afternoon timetable. For school term time sessions, the children were picked up from their schools by taxi at lunchtime and collected by taxi to be delivered home. During school holidays, the taxis collected/ delivered the children plus/ minus mums from/to home or another location prearranged with PWA.



Finding mini-beasts



Using keys to identify what we found

Sessions 1 – 3 ran in the school summer term time; sessions 4-8 ran in the school summer holidays; sessions 9 – 11 ran over the winter school term.

Sessions 1 – 8 ran on Fridays. Sessions 9 – 11 were postponed, then switched to a Monday. This break in continuity of sessions across the programme was unfortunate but unavoidable, due to a family/ group safety issue.

Session	Date/ time	Leaders/ staff	Participants	Total no. participants	Notes
<b>Induction</b>	1/6/15	2	3 mums	3	Indoor session at PWA (only 3 mums attended from possible 8 in total)
<b>Session Aims</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce leaders, participant mothers &amp; project</li> <li>• Explore types of play &amp; feelings about being outside</li> <li>• Share evaluation methods and complete baseline assessments</li> <li>• Complete consent forms</li> </ul>				
<b>1</b>	19/6/15	3	9 children	9	Lead by PM
<b>Session Aims</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get to know the site and each other</li> <li>• Explore how we take care of ourselves &amp; each other</li> <li>• Establish routines</li> </ul>				
<b>2</b>	26/6/15	3	7 children	7	Lead by PM
<b>Session Aims</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get to know the site and each other</li> <li>• Establish routines &amp; reinforce boundaries</li> <li>• Introduce activities with responsibilities</li> </ul>				
<b>3</b>	3/7/15	3	7 children	7	Led PWA FS trainee
<b>Session Aims</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinforce golden rules and boundaries.</li> </ul>				

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue getting to know each other.</li> <li>Learn how to move about safely in the woods.</li> </ul>				
<b>4</b>	10/7/15	3	8 children	8	Led PWA FS trainee
<b>Session Aims</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resilience - Children and young people know who to go to, to ask for help.</li> <li>Continue to reinforce golden rules – particularly boundaries.</li> <li>Encourage imaginative play.</li> </ul>				
<b>5</b>	24/7/15	3	8 children	8	Led PWA FS trainee
<b>Session Aims</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resilience - Children and young people believe that they can cope with difficult situations.</li> <li>Promote deep level learning through play.</li> </ul>				
<b>6</b>	7/8/15	3	6 children	6	Led PWA FS trainee
<b>Session Aims</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emotional intelligence - Children and young people can say how they feel.</li> <li>Emotional intelligence - Children and young people can consider other people's feelings.</li> <li>Promote deep level learning through play.</li> </ul>				
<b>7</b>	14/8/15	3	4 children	4	Led PWA FS trainee
<b>Session Aims</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reinforce behaviour expectations and golden rules. Talk about consequences for actions and staying safe at Nature Families.</li> <li>Resilience - Children and young people can identify what they do well.</li> <li>Introduce tool use.</li> </ul>				
<b>8</b>	21/8/15	2	5 children	5	Led PWA FS trainee
<b>Session Aims</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resilience - Children and young people know what makes a good friend, and can say which of their friends are like this.</li> <li>Resilience - Children and young people believe they can cope with difficult situations. – Introduce tool use and spark making.</li> <li>Respected and responsible – Children can choose the activities that they would like at Nature Families today.</li> </ul>				
<b>9</b>	26/10/15	3 (incl. guest male leader)	3 children, 2 mums	5	Lead by PM. Resume after programme break. Start of parent-child sessions.
<b>Session Aims</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resilience - children and young people cope with difficult situations – meeting new people, developing fine motor skills &amp; introduction to fire (kelly kettle).</li> <li>Developing better relationships – provide opportunities to acquire new skills that can be shared with mums &amp; work alongside the new male leader.</li> <li>Respected and responsible – Children can take the lead to share NF routines with mums and additional leader, choose activities &amp; keep within the boundary.</li> </ul>				
<b>10</b>	2/11/15	3	3 children, 1 mum	4	Lead by PM
<b>Session</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resilience - children and young people cope with difficult situations –</li> </ul>				



<b>Aims</b>	meeting new people (other mums)/ developing new skills & introduction to tools (spark making/ tool use). <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Developing better relationships – provide opportunities to acquire new skills that can be shared with the mums.</li><li>• Respected and responsible – Children can take the lead to share NF routines with mums, choose activities &amp; keep within the boundary.</li></ul>				
<b>11</b>	9/11/15	3 (incl. guest male leader)	3 children, 2 mums	5	Lead by PM. Provided a relaxed unhurried time with opportunities to reflect on Nature Families
<b>Session Aims</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Resilience - children and young people cope with difficult situations – developing new skills &amp; introduction to tools (spark making/ tool use).</li><li>• Developing better relationships – provide opportunities to acquire new skills that can be shared with mums.</li><li>• Emotional intelligence – sharing feelings.</li></ul>				
<b>Focus Group Review</b>	13/ 12/15	2	1 mum	1	Lead by PWA + PM
<b>Session Aims</b>	Obtain general feedback, review baselines (Bounce Back PRASE Assessment, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Self-reporting Questionnaire, Washing-line Activity), review staff and reflect on what Nature Families meant to each family.				
<b>Staff reflection &amp; review</b>	25/1/16	Penny Martin & PWA staff			
<b>Session Aims</b>	Check draft report & evaluation/ feedback.				



Staying within the boundary markers: individual trees were marked, then a wool line set up for those children who found it hard to observe where the boundaries are. During one session the children helped draw a temporary flour boundary. Eventually an obvious boundary is hardly needed.

## ATTENDANCE AT SESSIONS

A registration form was completed at each session, often led by the children themselves, to support their ownership of Nature Families. PWA staff had a good idea of who was expected at each session but due to the chaotic nature of families' lives, there were sometimes last minute cancellations or no-shows.

Child	2015 PROGRAMME DATES											TOTAL %
	19/6	26/6	3/7	10/7	24/7	7/8	14/8	21/8	26/10	2/11	9/11	
Child2	x	x		x	x		x	x	x	x	x	82
Child3	x	x	x	x	x	x		x				64
Child4	x	x		x								27
Child5	x		x	x								27
Child7	x	x	x	x	x	x						54
Child8	x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	82
Child9	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	100
Child10					x		x	x				27
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	

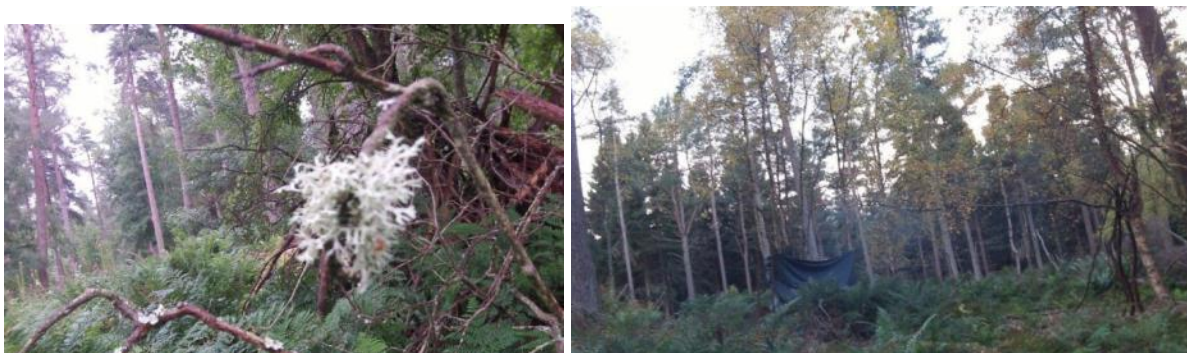
Mother	Child-only sessions						Mother-child sessions					
Mother1												0
Mother2							x	x	x			100
Mother3												0
Mother4												0
Mother5												0
Mother6												0
Mother7							x			x		67
Mother8												0
<b>Total</b>							<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>			

Six out of ten participating children attended more than 50% of the sessions. Only one child attended all 11 sessions. Unfortunately, only 2 mothers attended the 3 parent-child woodland sessions, from a total of 9 participating families, although one mum attended all 3.

The programme induction day was attended by 3 mums; the feedback session at the end of the programme was attended by only 1 mum, although others had said they would attend.

## RESOURCES

The best resources can be those provided by nature. Leaves, sticks, insects, lichen, bark, sun, rain, wind, and puddles, are some of the many natural resources encountered in a woodland that create a dynamic and sensory context for play and learning.



One child developed a fascination for lichen. Spot the 'toilet tarp' – for privacy in the woods.

Additional resources were also brought into the woods to further develop and support the sessions. These included;

- a pull-along trolley to transport equipment
- tarpaulins
- natural clay
- bug viewers and magnifiers
- collecting bags
- laminated i.d. sheets of leaves, invertebrates, fungi, flora etc. including Field Studies Council (FSC) /Woodland Trust Nature Detectives/ Gatekeeper series
- story books
- hand puppet squirrel & 'singing' bird toys
- peelers for whittling sticks
- fire starting kit including fire steels
- water container
- talking & thinking book

A robust digital camera provided by PWA was essential. It was popular with the children to record what they were interested in, and it was also used by session leaders. Images were saved in the Talking & Thinking book for sharing with the children and their mothers, and for reflection activities. A significant proportion of the budget was used to purchase resources. Some of these items were bought to support session activities. The remainder were bought to sustain outdoor play practice for PWA once the Nature Families programme had ended and for the Tayside OWL network.

The full list of items purchased is shown in Appendix 6.



The children often chose to play with clay in the woods

This hand puppet named 'Rosie the Red Squirrel' was a regular feature of each session. Real red squirrels were spotted as well!



Helping to pull the equipment trolley from the Shed to the log circle was a popular activity among the children

## PLANNED ACTIONS & OUTCOMES

Qualified Forest School leader to work alongside PWA children's workers	<p>This relationship worked well. Tayside OWL Group provided the Forest School leader to deliver the woodland sessions, locate suitable sites, source required materials and equipment, and oversee the monitoring and documentation of activities and session reviews.</p> <p>PWA was responsible for family recruitment, outreach and liaison and a minimum of one (maximum three) PWA staff attended each session and engaged in all activities/ reviews and co-led aspects of the project. Staff attended meetings throughout the duration of the project and contributed to on-going planning and evaluation.</p> <p>Numbers of participants were less than originally planned.</p>
Children to attend all sessions whilst mothers to attend 3-5 sessions at key points throughout	<p>Children's attendance varied depending on the child, but all children engaged in multi-sensory, active, creative &amp; enriching play &amp; learning experiences. Part way through the programme it was decided that three of the boys could not continue to attend due to safety concerns around behaviour issues. The final 3 planned sessions were mother-child sessions, plus a pre-induction session and post session focus group meeting was open to all mums. Mothers' participation was very low overall.</p>
Guest artists could work alongside the Forest School leader	<p>Only one guest artist was involved and for only 2 sessions (he was unable to make a 3<sup>rd</sup> session due to the postponed sessions). To process PVG requirements for a number of artists</p>

	would prove unwieldy without suitable lead-in time. However this additional leader provided a positive male role model and introduced storytelling to the group.
Equipment and clothing would be provided	A wide range of equipment was used and purchased to make outdoor practice sustainable over the long term for PWA. This type of engagement with the outdoors was a new experience for most of the children and mothers.
Transport would be provided to get participants to and from Kinnoull Hill, Perth	Taxis provide the transport and this worked well between school and home settings and the woodland site. It is an expensive element of the programme however. The site has some features which make it very suitable for Forest School activities including toileting and shelter as well as mature managed woodland.
Children would attend during school hours as part of an agreed programme of intervention and support coordinated by PWA children and young people's service.	Due to delays/ discontinuity in the programme it ran over school and holiday periods, but the bulk of the sessions occurred over school time.
One PWA children and young people's worker would undertake Forest School training.	The PWA member of staff was able to attend 4/5 of her Level 3 FS training over this period with the final training days to be completed in 2016. This enabled her to gain experience by planning and leading 6 of the 11 sessions, as part of FS training requirements. This means she will be able to support an in-house programme of Forest School when fully qualified.
Throughout the project PWA and Tayside OWL Group staff would explore and measure the impacts of nature play on family relationships and levels of well-being.	Evaluation and review took place before, during and after the programme, along with debrief sessions at the end of each session. A range of methodology was used.
A project report would be circulated among the OWL Scotland network and wider family/childcare services.	This report comprises one of two project reports. A summary report was also completed for Big Lottery Fund as part of project monitoring. The aims of this report (uploaded to OWL Scotland) are to reflect on the project, and share practice to support workers and families to continue and develop effective therapeutic nature play provision in the future.

## EVALUATION OUTCOMES

The baseline assessments helped to highlight those indicators which needed to be focussed on across the sessions. Each session was planned to focus on a different outcome where appropriate.

Client confidentiality is paramount for PWA. To protect the identities of those involved, names are anonymised as follows:

Mothers: Mother1, Mother2, etc.  
Children: Child1, Child2, etc.



Child	Age	Mum	Indicators
Child2	7	Mother2	n/a
Child3	5	Mother3	n/a
Child4	7	Mother4	I believe I can cope with difficult situations (identified by child) I have the opportunity to enjoy spending time with my mum doing fun things (identified by mum)
Child5	7	Mother5	I believe I can cope with difficult situations (identified by mum) I can say what I do well (identified by mum) I know what makes a good friend and can say which of my friends are like this (identified by mum) I can talk to my mum about things that are important to me (identified by child) I have the opportunity to enjoy spending time with my mum doing fun things (identified by child)
Child7	8	Mother7	I believe I can cope with difficult situations (identified by mum and child) I can say what I do well (identified by child) I know what makes a good friend and can say which of my friends are like this (identified by child)
Child8	6		I believe I can cope with difficult situations (identified by mum and child) I know what makes a good friend and can say which of my friends are like this (identified by child) I have the opportunity to enjoy spending time with my mum doing fun things (identified by child)
Child9	5	Mother8	I believe I can cope with difficult situations (identified by child) I can say what I do well (identified by child)
Child10	5		I believe I can cope with difficult situations (identified by mum)

Based on the assessment findings, both from mothers and children, it was noted which children to focus on due to low scores around particular indicators:

Sessions were planned to focus on particular indicators as follows:

- *I know who to go to, to ask for help.* (Session 4): No-one
- *I believe I can cope with difficult situations.* (Session 5 and 8): Six children
- *I can say what I do well.* (Session 7): Three children
- *I know what makes a good friend and can say which of my friends are like this.* (Session 8): Three children
- *I can talk to my mum about things that are important to me.* (Session 10, 11, 12): One child
- *I have the opportunity to enjoy spending time with my mum doing fun things:* (Session 10, 11, 12): Three children



- *I can recognise and understand my child's individual needs and meet these needs, with support from others, as required.* (Session 10, 11, 12): No-one

Low score results from the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (score below 3/4) identified those children to focus on. These would be addressed throughout Nature Families through the ethos and staff support of children. Sessions on '*I believe I can cope with difficult situations*' and '*I can say what I do well*' would be relevant for three children in particular.

Low score results from the Resilience, PRASE Quiz (score below 20/30) identified children to focus on. This was addressed throughout Nature Families through the ethos and staff support of the children. Sessions on outcomes 1 – 4 would be particularly relevant for three children.

From all of the assessments, where strengths were identified, these were improved on.

### Evaluating & reviewing with the children

This was on-going throughout the sessions. The Talking & Thinking book was used to collect images and drawings which helped reflection with the children session to session. As general good practice the children were consulted on what they would like to do, and encouraged to reflect back on previous sessions. Session plans were shared and read out by children at the start of most sessions. The Rope circle game helped establish trust at the start of some sessions. Thumbs up/ down or 'so-so' positions were used to get quick and spontaneous feedback to different questions. This included the following feedback from the children as a review of each session:

### 'Thumbs' session reviews

SESSION	Participant							
	Child4	Child4	Child4	Child4	Child4	Child4	Child4	Child4
19/6/15	up	middle	middle	up	up	up	*	Up
26/6/15	middle	up	middle	up	*	up	*	*
4/7/15	*	up	middle	*	up	up	*	Up
10/7/15	up	up	up	up	up	up	*	Up
24/7/15		up	middle	up	up	up	up	*
7/8/15		*	up	up		up	up	*
21/8/15		up	up	up		up	up	*
26/10/15		up	middle	up		up		
2/11/15		*	up	up		up		
9/11/15		*	Up*	Up*		Up*		
% up	67	86	50	100	100	100	100	100

*\*not there / no longer part of the programme; Up\* was followed by a down as the children said they were sad that it was the last session of the programme*



Everyone had the chance to try spark making so we could heat water in the Kelly kettle.

## **PWA STAFF ONE to ONE CONVERSATIONS WITH INDIVIDUAL CHILDREN - snippets**

*What did you think of Nature Families?*

"Loved everything!" (CHILD2) "good". (CHILD9) "good" (CHILD3)

*what were best bits?*

"everything". (CHILD9); "pretty much everything" and then added "finding a moth" and "hot chocolate". (CHILD2); "hiding" (CHILD3)

*What was your favourite activity?*

"all of it" (CHILD9)

*What did you learn?*

"foxgloves are a bit poisonous" (CHILD2)

*Any not so good bits?*

"when I hurt myself".(CHILD9); "nothing" (CHILD3)

Wider discussion with individual children:

### CHILD2

Her key worker asked CHILD2 if Nature Families had helped her to be able to talk to her mum and CHILD2 said "a little bit".

Her key worker asked CHILD2 if there had been anything that she had found difficult at Nature Families. CHILD2 said that she'd found touching the clay difficult because she was scared that she would get it on her good jacket. Her key worker asked CHILD2 how she had overcome this and CHILD2 said that her mum and one of the PWA children and young people's workers helped to get the clay out.

Her key worker asked CHILD2 if she had made any friends at Nature Families and CHILD2 gave the names of three of the other girls. CHILD2 said that it was fun to meet new people.



We learned that foxgloves were beautiful but poisonous to touch – and bees loved them!

## DEVELOPMENT OF RESILIENCE

This approach has developed by Nature Nurture™ [www.naturenurture.org.uk](http://www.naturenurture.org.uk)

The Nature Nurture approach has identified 7 **Areas of Resilience** to record:

- **Mental & emotional health & wellbeing** - confidence, self-esteem, emotional regulation
- **Physical health & wellbeing** - Exercise, stamina development, motor skill & motor control, coordination
- **Social competencies** - Awareness of others' needs & wishes, respect for others, turn taking, communication
- **Talents & interests** - Practising to improve skills, developing new interests, self-esteem
- **Positive values** - Developing empathy, care & compassion for others, connection with the natural world, showing responsibility for nature
- **Creativity & imagination** - Being creative & flexible in actions and thinking, problem solving, imagination through play scenarios
- **Knowledge & understanding** - Experiential learning through investigation, exploration & experiment. Developing knowledge through direct experience and through asking questions of adults or peers

The Forest School Leader attended a workshop run by Nature Nurture held by the Tayside OWL Group, on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2015, towards the end of the Nature Families programme. It was felt that taking the above approach could add value to a programme like Nature Families. Using records taken from each session review, behaviour shown by each participant in Nature Families was recorded retrospectively against these areas of resilience.

CHILD/ Resilience Area	SUMMARY/ Observations
CHILD2	<b>SUMMARY: Girl aged 7 attended 9 sessions. No indicators identified. She engaged well with activities and the group, particularly the other girls. Thumbs feedback was 100% up for all sessions attended.</b>
<b>Mental &amp; emotional health &amp; wellbeing</b>	Stays within circle; consistently cheery; quieter than usual when mum unable to attend session; appears distracted, upset and whiney when mum attends session
<b>Physical health &amp; wellbeing</b>	Does spontaneous cartwheels; plays on root plate; energetic with rope trust game; playing with sticks on trolley
<b>Social competencies</b>	Contributes ideas for circle time game; talks readily with leaders, plays with CHILD8 with squirrel toy, talkative, humorous, talked about her sister; shared pulling trolley with CHILD4; active play with CHILD8 & CHILD9; helpful with others
<b>Talents &amp; interests</b>	Engages with wood cookie activity, Draws in floor book; bug hunting; tool use; clay making; took part in spark making; peeled stick competently
<b>Positive values</b>	Helped with boundary marking
<b>Creativity &amp; imagination</b>	Keen to try building log seat; makes wand; suggests wink murder game to play; making sounds with sticks on trolley
<b>Knowledge &amp; understanding</b>	Excited about finding hidden bird toys; curious about moth

<b>CHILD4</b>	<b>SUMMARY: Girl aged 7. Attended 3 sessions. Indicators to focus on were: I believe I can cope with difficult situations (identified by child); I have the opportunity to enjoy spending time with my mum doing fun things (identified by mum). Minimal attendance made any progress hard to ascertain, but initially very quiet, she appeared to be gaining confidence, and engaging with the other girls, before she disengaged due to family circumstances. She gave thumbs up for 2 out of 3 sessions attended, and one 'so-so'.</b>
<b>Mental &amp; emotional health &amp; wellbeing</b>	Quiet, stays within circle
<b>Physical health &amp; wellbeing</b>	Tries cartwheels (with CHILD2); runs with CHILD8 up and down bank
<b>Social competencies</b>	Helps take register; reluctant to share thoughts with group; plays with CHILD2 and CHILD8; shared pulling trolley with CHILD2 & CHILD8
<b>Talents &amp; interests</b>	Engages with wood cookie activity, draws in floor book; draws slug, draws foxglove
<b>Positive values</b>	Helped with boundary marking
<b>Creativity &amp; imagination</b>	Made a leaf crown
<b>Knowledge &amp; understanding</b>	Interested in & identifies slug, looking at i.d. keys with adult
<b>CHILD8</b>	<b>SUMMARY: Girl aged 6. Attended 9 sessions. Indicators to focus on were: I believe I can cope with difficult situations (identified by mum and child) I know what makes a good friend and can say which of my friends are like this (identified by child). I have the opportunity to enjoy spending time with my mum doing fun things (identified by child). A strong character and physically active, often doing things her own way. Forceful in relationships with others forming bonds with other girls but developing a cooperative approach, and engaging positively with most activities. Thumbs feedback was 100% up for all sessions attended.</b>
<b>Mental &amp; emotional health &amp; wellbeing</b>	Attaches to squirrel hand puppet; wandering beyond boundaries occasionally, resistant to wearing wood cookie, and jacket, runs ahead, slow to put on outdoor clothes/ get ready; persistent in trying spark making
<b>Physical health &amp; wellbeing</b>	Runs down bank energetically; snacking a lot; plays on root plate; energetic with rope trust game; playing with sticks on trolley; physically bold (lacks caution)
<b>Social competencies</b>	Not always compliant with 'rules'; remembers ideas for session, plays with CHILD2 with squirrel toy forcefully; chatty & talkative; teams up with CHILD10 and takes care of her; takes register; reads aloud to group; controls activities with other girls; collected sticks with mum; negotiates taking turns reading register with other girls; active play with CHILD2 & CHILD9; ignores instructions for peeling stick
<b>Talents &amp; interests</b>	Engages with wood cookie activity, makes wood cookie for toy squirrel, joined flour boundary activity, playing with squirrel toy, bug magnifiers & bug collection; pulling trolley with others, starts but doesn't finish activities; takes photos; wink murder game; making clay objects; spark making; peeled stick with difficulty
<b>Positive values</b>	Spotted wild raspberries
<b>Creativity &amp; imagination</b>	Plays with squirrel hand puppet; made wand; makes bug hotel; participates in clay face making & focussed; plays wink murder; made spiky clay hedgehog; making sounds with sticks on trolley



<b>Knowledge &amp; understanding</b>	Excited about finding hidden bird toys
<b>CHILD9</b>	<b>SUMMARY: Girl aged 5. Attended 10 sessions. Indicators to focus on were: I believe I can cope with difficult situations (identified by child) I can say what I do well (identified by child). In the early sessions lacking confidence, quiet and withdrawn. Focussed on adults rather than other children. Gained confidence both in relationships, communication, and activities. She was the most equivocal of all children in her feedback of sessions, with 50% thumbs so-so and 50% thumbs up (more of the latter later on in the programme),</b>
<b>Mental &amp; emotional health &amp; wellbeing</b>	Stays within circle; reluctant to lean back in rope trust game, holds adult's hand frequently; asks for help from adults; engages with other children more; concerned by messy activities and cleans hands; said she was frightened by boys' behaviour in session 6; tearful; not keen to toilet in woods; initially upset when she hurts herself playing but recovers quickly; still clings to adults
<b>Physical health &amp; wellbeing</b>	Comments about wetting clothing when toileting outdoors, pulled heavy trolley consistently across sessions, moves around more confidently; climbs on roots; more physical during rope trust game; physically more confident moving in open spaces; hides in same area consistently for Vanish game; avoids eating and drinking
<b>Social competencies</b>	Carefully observing others, reluctant to eat in group, more talkative with adults than other children; limited interaction with others but focuses on other girls; plays with CHILD8 & hugs her; talks about bad language; joining in play with others; looked after CHILD10; asks to read register – reminds adult; talks about tool chest with group; active play with CHILD2 & CHILD8; more chatty; writes in adult note book her wishes for next session
<b>Talents &amp; interests</b>	Engages with wood cookie activity, draws in floor book, asks for story, keen to pull trolley (apreciates being called 'strong'); looks at bugs; playing with clay; interested in parts of tool chest; took charge of making drinks; reading storybook; peeled stick with difficulty
<b>Positive values</b>	Interest in bugs but won't handle them; spots red squirrels and tells everyone
<b>Creativity &amp; imagination</b>	Participates in clay face making
<b>Knowledge &amp; understanding</b>	Needs encouragement to explore
<b>CHILD10</b>	<b>SUMMARY: Girl aged 5. Attended 3 sessions. Introduced to programme at session 5 – session 8 only. Indicators to focus on were: I believe I can cope with difficult situations (identified by mum). Initially quiet gained confidence and communicative over the limited number of sessions she participated in. Withdrawn from programme due to family safety issues. Thumbs feedback was 100% up for all sessions attended.</b>
<b>Mental &amp; emotional health &amp; wellbeing</b>	Reluctant to put on waterproof trousers over several sessions; clingy with case worker, getting dressed more readily; recovered quickly after being bitten by ant
<b>Physical health &amp; wellbeing</b>	Moves with confidence in woodland
<b>Social competencies</b>	Greets new adult

<b>Talents &amp; interests</b>	Pulls trolley; taking part in activities; looking for bugs; i.d keys; spotting lichens
<b>Positive values</b>	Keen to look for lichens; spotting bird boxes and puddles
<b>Creativity &amp; imagination</b>	Makes bug den
<b>Knowledge &amp; understanding</b>	Curious about lichens – asks questions
<b>CHILD3</b>	<b>SUMMARY: Boy aged 5. Attended 7 sessions. No indicators. Communication issues due to language barrier but became more competent as a communicator over sessions and an enthusiastic active participant in activities. Interactive with the environment rather than other children so more solitary than group play. Play, initially with a forceful edge, became a bit more moderate. He gave 6 out of 7 sessions attended thumbs up, with one 'so-so'.</b>
<b>Mental &amp; emotional health &amp; wellbeing</b>	Testing boundaries; reluctant to lean back in rope trust game, running ahead but stopping, running hard at adult to be caught, more careful on repetition, observing site boundaries; apparently proud to arrive ready dressed for outdoors; runs ahead with CHILD1; screamed loudly when other boys noisy and challenging
<b>Physical health &amp; wellbeing</b>	Runs down bank cautiously, climbing on logs, hanging off branches, bashing things with sticks
<b>Social competencies</b>	Slow to come back when called, running beyond boundary with other boys, disengaged with communication, reluctant to sit still in log circle, increasingly chatty
<b>Talents &amp; interests</b>	minibeasts; throws mud copying other boys & tussles with CHILD5; repeating words (limited language); actively contributes in circle time; parallel play with boys; interacting with CHILD10; pushes toys into adults' faces; repetitive use of words; engages in rough/ physical play with adult male helper; communication & language developing; engages with wood cookie activity, engaged by minibeasts; toy birds
<b>Positive values</b>	Interested/fearful of spiders; keen to be helpful; stamps on minibeasts; spotted wild raspberries
<b>Creativity &amp; imagination</b>	Participates in clay face making including decorating with leaves; animated by story-telling session
<b>Knowledge &amp; understanding</b>	Keen to spot all tree boundary markers, collect markers
<b>CHILD7</b>	<b>SUMMARY: Boy aged 8, attended 6 sessions. Part way through the programme it was decided that he could not continue to attend due to safety concerns around behaviour issues. Indicators to focus on: I believe I can cope with difficult situations (identified by mum and child); I can say what I do well (identified by child); I know what makes a good friend and can say which of my friends are like this (identified by child). Other than his antisocial behaviour in session 6, he had been a positive and communicative group member, initially wary but gaining confidence and participating in activities, although lacking focus in some. Formed alliances with other boys. Thumbs feedback was 100% up for all sessions attended.</b>
<b>Mental &amp; emotional health &amp; wellbeing</b>	Appeared confident in trust game
<b>Physical health &amp; wellbeing</b>	Climbs with care; plays on root plate; bashing things with sticks, throwing stones



<b>Social competencies</b>	Carefully observing others; engaged with group activities; shouted for help from leaders when lost beyond boundary; helps others climbing; helps adult to get coat, negotiates boundaries, talking and listening in circle time; throwing sticks and stones; bad language
<b>Talents &amp; interests</b>	Engages with wood cookie activity, takes register, makes wood cookie for toy squirrel, pulling trolley; keen to find tree to climb
<b>Positive values</b>	Showed care/support for sister & others within group on occasions
<b>Creativity &amp; imagination</b>	Takes photos during group activities; attempts to make den; limited engagement in making clay face
<b>Knowledge &amp; understanding</b>	No comments
<b>CHILD5</b>	<b>SUMMARY: Boy aged 7. Attended 3 sessions. Drops out from session 5. Indicators to focus on: I believe I can cope with difficult situations (identified by mum); I can say what I do well (identified by mum); I know what makes a good friend and can say which of my friends are like this (identified by mum); I can talk to my mum about things that are important to me (identified by child); I have the opportunity to enjoy spending time with my mum doing fun things (identified by child). Given his low attendance rate it was hard to note any progress made. After his first session he told his mum 'it was brilliant', but he later chose to withdraw from the programme. Over 3 sessions he was initially disengaged, but started forming alliances with other boys and communicating on a limited one to one basis with adults. Thumbs feedback was 100% up for all sessions attended.</b>
<b>Mental &amp; emotional health &amp; wellbeing</b>	Testing boundaries, walks ahead of leaders, didn't take part in boundary drawing; negotiates boundary with adult for extra space to play.
<b>Physical health &amp; wellbeing</b>	Removed himself from group when bitten by ants, played active games; very active, not risk averse
<b>Social competencies</b>	Slow to come back when called, running beyond boundary with other boys, disengaged from group, didn't listen to advice to take care with ants; forms smaller group with Child6 and Child1; does not speak out in group; shares words only with prompting by adult; uses bad language
<b>Talents &amp; interests</b>	Engages with wood cookie activity, observant with minibeasts and ants
<b>Positive values</b>	No comments
<b>Creativity &amp; imagination</b>	No comments
<b>Knowledge &amp; understanding</b>	Moves confidently away from group



Reflections: rainy days and water create a great resource for play

## **ANALYSIS OF BASELINE AND REVIEW ASSESSMENTS**

Perthshire Women's Aid led this work with their service users outside the Nature Family sessions:

Data from the mother's group was lacking because unfortunately only one mother attended the focus group to evaluate the project. Review baseline assessments and feedback questionnaires were posted out to all of the mothers who did not attend the focus group, however none of these were returned. This has implications in future for how feedback is gathered and how monitoring and evaluation of future projects is conducted.

### **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale**

For 7 of the children there was not enough data to make an assessment as they did not complete the assessments. This was due to a variety of reasons, including children disengaging from the service and some children not coping with sitting down to complete this structured activity due to their behavioural difficulties.

For two of the children, their self-esteem score went down and for one child the score went up. It was noted that for many of the children, they struggled to complete the questionnaire and appeared to be choosing their answers somewhat randomly. This brings into question whether this monitoring and evaluation method is suitable to use with children of this age. Only one mother attended the focus group to review the project. She rated her son's self-esteem as having increased over the course of the project.

### **Bounce Back PRASE Resilience Assessment**

For 7 of the children there was not enough data to make an assessment as they did not complete the assessments. This was due to a variety of reasons, including children disengaging from the service and some children not coping with sitting down to complete this structured activity due to their behavioural difficulties.

For two of the children, their resilience score increased and for one child it decreased.

Only one mother attended the focus group to review the project. She rated her son's resilience as having increased over the course of the project.

#### *Outcome Ratings – Children and Young People Have Greater Resilience*

*I know who to go to, to ask for help.*

- Two children rated this outcome with an increased score.
- One child rated this outcome with a decreased score.
- Three children rated this outcome as unchanged.
- Three children provided no data.

*I can say what I do well.*

- Two children rated this outcome with an increased score.
- Two children rated this outcome with a decreased score.
- Two children rated this outcome as unchanged.
- Three children provided no data.

*I believe I can cope with difficult situations.*

- Three children rated this outcome with an increased score.
- No children rated this outcome with a decreased score.
- Three children rated this outcome as unchanged.
- Three children provided no data.

*I know what makes a good friend and can say which of my friends are like this.*

- Two children rated this outcome with an increased score.
- One child rated this outcome with a decreased score.
- Three children rated this outcome as unchanged.
- Three children provided no data.

#### *Outcome Ratings – Children and Young People Develop a Better Relationship with their Mother/Primary Female Carer*

*I can talk to my mum about things that are important to me.*

- Two children rated this outcome with an increased score.
- One child rated this outcome with a decreased score.
- Three children rated this outcome as unchanged.
- Three children provided no data.

*I have the opportunity to enjoy spending time with my mum doing fun things.*

- One child rated this outcome with an increased score.
- No children rated this outcome with a decreased score.
- Four children rated this outcome as unchanged.
- Four children provided no data.

Mother's feedback to Review question:

*What have been the positive benefits for you and your child from attending Nature Families?*

For child:

- Many. He's nicer, nice to go out (happy he is doing things in Forest with others).
- Learns more quickly via new people, listening skills improved.
- More attentive and follows instructions better, accepting help and is more patient.

For Mum:

- Relief from everything on (her) head, other people take the weight off (her) shoulders.
- Gives example of child learning how to use scissors.
- (for her child to see that ) other people do the same things but in different ways.

## CONCLUSIONS

The qualitative data gathered is inconclusive as to whether the project succeeded in increasing children's resilience and promoting their relationships with their mothers. However, from staff observations of the children, it was clear to see how much the children who attended got out of the sessions, particularly those who attended the majority of sessions. It was unfortunate that the average engagement was only around 50% at this meant that children did not get as much out of the project as they could have. Also engagement from the mothers was very poor and this meant that for the majority of children whose mothers did not attend, they did not have the opportunity to develop their relationship with their mothers.

The best evidence of the success of the project comes from staff observations of the children recorded in case notes and weekly reviews. Here we can see how children have grown in confidence, resilience and self-esteem throughout the project.

For the future we will need to carefully consider the monitoring and evaluation methods that we use and how this data is gathered in order to better evidence the success of the project.

Mother's feedback to Review question:

*What could be improved about Nature Families?*

- "Nothing. It was great – no further suggestions".
- (Photos shared with mum) These show there's been lots happening.
- (Reflecting what she does with her child now) In this weather we play with leaves in the park, watching chestnuts on the tree, collecting them, and make little animals and dens from leaves and animals collected.
- Happy to have sessions in winter as well, and see seasonal changes.

## DISCUSSION

For participants to get the most out of the progressive nature of Forest School sessions, and to build confidence, skills, and relationships with others in the group, it is important to have continuity. That is why a Forest School programme is typically run for 10 or more sessions at frequent and regular intervals.

Numbers of participants engaging with the programme were lower than predicted. The client base for PWA varies and ranges across Perthshire. Geography, family circumstances and session worker casework dictates which clients are able to engage with a Forest School programme like this and will vary from year to year.

However, as noted in the 'Conclusions' section above, some children did not attend on a regular and consistent basis so this remained an issue. Child-only participation did seem to alleviate some of the issues of poor attendance experienced in Nature Time (mum-child attendance), but remained poor or erratic for some children. The average attendance rate was 56% of sessions, although one child attended all sessions, and one child came into the programme a bit later than the others (thus lowering this attendance average). Inevitably, progress by children attending erratically will be poorer than those attending every session.

Despite an induction session and contact via PWA, engagement by mothers was very low. Sadly this is typical when working with families suffering domestic abuse, as the 2011 Families in the Forest project exemplified. Only 2 out of 8 mothers attended the mother-child

sessions, and only one mum attended all 3 sessions. This is not surprising for those who work with families leading chaotic or disrupted lives through domestic abuse, but it is important to review this issue at the end of the programme and explore how participation by mothers could be improved. Interestingly, in the review session with the mums which only one mother attended, she made the point that she would not have been comfortable in any case talking within a group, and in this more private scenario she was much more forthcoming. She said she would have been happy just to attend one session in the woods at most 'just to see where the children have been'.

Inevitably, the difficult circumstances of many of the families had an impact. Domestic abuse within one family in particular had an impact on the overall programme plan. Due to a potential security issue with the father, session 9 had to be cancelled, with the final sessions delayed and rescheduled to a different day of the week. This was to keep the family and the wider group participants safe. The child and mother of this family could no longer take part. This was a loss for the child as she had been showing apparent improvement in her confidence and play after just a couple of sessions.

Child behaviour and management was also an issue. Even though some children arrived on the programme with a history of 'bad' behaviour, they were not pre-judged, although of course leaders had to be aware of any particular issues that needed to be managed sensitively.

There were challenges with some children not observing the site boundaries initially, or not engaging with the group, but in general there was good progress with increased group cohesion, cooperation and participation. This can be seen in the individual child resilience reviews above. The children responded well to the opportunities provided for child and group-led choices within established routines and structure, and the freedom being outdoors in a woodland setting provides. Sometimes some children would arrive anxious or stressed. Sometimes anxieties could be aroused by things they encountered in the wood – biting ants for example, or mud making clothes messy. Children need the experience of dealing with anxieties so they are better prepared to handle challenging and unsettling experiences (Mukherji, 2001). The woodland provided a safe and supportive space to do this.

Each Nature Families session aimed to allow for free play within a structured framework. This approach has been reinforced by Go Play, a programme run by [Inspiring Scotland](#) on behalf of Scottish Government to grow the play sector in Scotland, offering more chances for children aged 5 to 13 years to participate in free play. The Go Play Outcome and Evaluation Framework notes that '*every child should have the opportunity to play free play, regardless of their situation*' and lists the benefits of free play for children (p6 of the Framework report). One of the noted outcomes for families is reduced family stress and improved relationships – one of the aims of Nature Families.

Finding the best evaluation methods for programmes like this continues to be an issue, and the Go Play Framework provides some good ideas, such as the Reflection Tree (p29 of the report) which could be picked up by Tayside OWL Group and PWA in future. Outcomes and indicators are also included for outside play and family outcomes. The Nature Nurture Family Support Project (p30 of the report) resilience measures were used retrospectively for the Nature Families programme. As the 'conclusions' section mentions, it is the staff observations of the children that are the most sensitive in recording the changes in behaviour, attitudes and well-being of the children involved in the programme, so much of this evaluation remains qualitative.

It is well understood that the family environment can have a major effect on children's behaviour. The quality of a child's attachments will be influenced by stressful domestic circumstances for example, or mothers who are depressed (Mukherji, 2001). It is not

surprising that some children showed challenging behaviour during Nature Families. In most cases these were managed successfully, but in the following situation less so.

Nature Families operated within a framework of 8 'Golden Rules', agreed and reinforced each session with the children. However, in session 6 some lively and imaginative play among 3 of the boys escalated into challenging behaviour that quickly became risky for those involved. After the session ended PWA immediately contacted the mothers of the children involved, as the boys may still have been distressed upon arriving home. Individually all 3 boys had been doing well in the programme, 2 in particular, but the group dynamics probably contributed to this escalation. As a result, PWA took the decision that these three boys could not continue to attend due to safety concerns resulting from their negative behaviour. The safety of all participants; children, mothers and staff, had to be taken into consideration. Some of the other children who witnessed this behaviour had clearly been upset or worried by it. PWA were aware that witnessing this aggressive behaviour could have triggered memories of their experience of domestic abuse for some of the children. The next session plan built in the opportunity to discuss this with the remaining children to allay any fears and share feelings.

As Rogers (2004) notes for situations like this, it is important to '*repair and rebuild with the child*'. PWA staff attempted to follow up with each child and their mother outside the Nature Families sessions, in order to do this. PWA staff were able to meet with all three of the boys individually to reflect with them on what had happened. All three mothers were offered the opportunity to meet with their child's key worker from PWA to discuss what had happened and the decisions made, however they did not all make use of this opportunity.

Removing three boys from the programme reduced the group size dramatically. However, the remaining children did form a harmonious and cohesive group.

This situation creates a learning opportunity for future programmes. There were behavioural procedures within the Nature Families policy handbook, but contingency planning for scenarios like this should be built in more robustly in future. PWA had completed individual risk assessments for all of the children who came to the project with known additional support needs or behavioural difficulties however this event was unforeseen. When reflecting on this incident PWA identified that further training on behaviour management in addition to the training already completed by staff could be valuable in helping staff to manage a similar situation in the future. Consideration has also been given to whether training on physical restraint, such as CALM training, would be beneficial. A positive outcome of the project is that one member of PWA is on the way to becoming a qualified Forest School leader which shows the commitment of PWA to running similar projects in the future.

Using the Nature Nurture areas of resilience measures may be worth adopting for future programmes. This has been done retrospectively for Nature Families but would have most value if it took place during a programme, helping leaders to assess a child's progress and identify areas where s/he may need more support more systematically. This was done as part of session reviews, but in a less structured way.

The Nature Families attempt to encourage and enable participation by mothers in this child centred programme is a step towards taking a more holistic approach to children and mothers coping with domestic abuse. Cathy Humphries *et al* point out that '*recovery for both women and children is promoted by joint work rather through individual work alone*'. They cite examples of joint work such as the Talking to My Mum project and the Scottish initiative Cedar (Children Experiencing Domestic Abuse Recovery) (Chapter 8, Stanley & Humphreys 2015). The latter is a project provided by PWA. As Humphreys *et al* infer, domestic abuse is



an attack on the mother-child relationship, and there should be more focus and support on interventions to support this relationship, and nurture resilience, now and for the future.

Perthshire Women's Aid offers a range of services to women, children and young people affected by domestic abuse. The Nature Families project provides a therapeutic intervention that complements other support that addresses the impact of domestic abuse in a more direct manner, promotes the mother-child relationship, increases resilience, and improves emotional intelligence.

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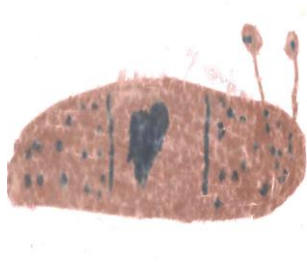
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*A leopard slug by CHILD4*

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