

Case Study

Enable Ability: Family John Muir Award

Background

In October 2019 the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) recruited a Families Outreach Officer. The aim of this two year funded position, was to make links with community organisations working with families who were underserved by the SDNPA. The Officer would then work in partnership with those organisations to support families to access the natural world and the South Downs National Park using the Family John Muir Award as an engagement tool.

The John Muir Award is an environmental award scheme. It is inclusive, accessible and non-competitive and it encourages awareness and responsibility for the natural environment using a series of four challenges.

The four challenges are discovering, exploring and caring for a 'wild' space and then sharing those experiences with others.

[Enable Ability](#) are a Portsmouth based charity who work with disabled children, young people and their families and carers. They immediately saw the potential in this partnership for their disabled young people and their families. Initial discussions took place in late 2019 with the aim to start working together to deliver the John Muir Award from May 2020.



Pollinator friendly vegetable, herb and flowerbeds created by families at Winscombe Care Home in Boarhunt.

The project

The project was due to start in May 2020, but due to the Covid-19 pandemic the start date was delayed. In October 2020, in between lockdowns, the first introductory, socially distanced, session took place in Queen Elizabeth Country Park (QECP), south of Petersfield in Hampshire.

In order to help the participants achieve their John Muir Award, Enable Ability teamed up with a variety of other organisations. This included Winscombe Care Home who had some untended raised beds in their grounds. In the spring of 2021, the young people and their families cleared the raised beds and then grew vegetables from seed. These were then used in the kitchens of the care home to feed the residents. In another 'wild' area of the grounds, they planted wild flowers and created a permanent bug hotel and bird feeding post that will continue to support the local insects and birds. They have also taken some of their learning and experiences back into their own homes, gardens and local green spaces.

Additionally, the young people and their families also carried out an eco 'street' art project with local artist Mandie Molyneux from Artscape, painting the raised beds in bright colours, which the residents really appreciated.

Enable Ability also worked with [Inter Activ](#), a social enterprise based in Portsmouth, and [Autek](#), a community interest company, to create a virtual walk of the climb to the top of Butser Hill, located within the borders of QECP. The young people were involved in all aspects of this including being interviewed for embedded videos, setting up the camera and taking the pictures.

“This project has been a great success, despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our young people with disabilities have really worked hard to achieve their awards.”

James Donougher, Project Leader, Enable Ability Hampshire Youth Project

The outcome

This project culminated in an Awards Ceremony in Portsmouth where the young people and their families were presented with their certificates. Ten awards were achieved in total, with five young people achieving an individual John Muir Award and five young people and their families achieving a Family John Muir Award. This event really celebrated all the amazing work that the young people and their families have put into the project.

After attending SDNPA training and delivering a John Muir Award scheme in partnership with SDNPA, Enable Ability are now able to manage and facilitate their own. This means that they can continue in the future to offer the young people they work with and their families the opportunity to achieve a John Muir Award.

The virtual walk of the walk to the top of Butser Hill, created by young people and their families, will encourage and support people with disabilities or anxiety to experience the climb for themselves.

[Virtual Walks - South Downs National Park Authority](#)

The future

This project has established a positive ongoing relationship between the SDNPA and Enable Ability.

Enable Ability are now connected to our Western Downs Ranger Team, with the young people being supported to participate in volunteering days over the next year.

The relationship Enable Ability have established with Winscombe Care Home and the residents there will continue, as they now have their own plot of land in the grounds to develop.

The virtual Butser Hill walk is on the SDNPA website, and will continue to support and encourage people with anxiety and disabilities to visit Queen Elizabeth Country Park and Butser Hill.

The young people and their families involved in the project have really experienced the benefits, both mentally and physically, of spending time out in nature and they are committed to continuing to engage with the natural world and the South Downs National Park.

For more information, please contact:

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The South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan (PMP)

2020–25 sets out a shared vision for how we all would like the National Park to be in the future. It includes 11 long-term outcomes, and provides a framework for communities, landowners, charities, businesses and public bodies to work together to make this vision and these outcomes a reality.

This project successfully achieved the following PMP outcomes:

Outcome 5.1: To enable everyone to experience the National Park and widen participation for under-represented groups through targeted activities and promotion.

Outcome 6: There is widespread understanding of the special qualities of the National Park and the benefits it provides.

Outcome 7: The South Downs National Park is a well-used and recognized asset for sustaining mental and physical health and wellbeing.

Outcome 8: More responsibility and action is taken by visitors, communities and businesses to conserve and enhance the special qualities and use resources more wisely.

southdowns.gov.uk/partnership-management-plan/