



PRESS RELEASE

October 2021

New scheme helps children head outdoors to beat Covid fallout

A project born out of the Covid crisis, aimed at helping schoolchildren through the experience of the pandemic by getting them outside, has been launched.

Devised by national educational charity The Ernest Cook Trust, The OWL Collaboration (Outdoor Week of Learning) gives pupils the chance to spend an immersive week in nature at an outdoor learning centre.

The Ernest Cook Trust is partnering with outdoor learning centres across the UK and now the first school residentials have taken place at Ufton Court Educational Trust, in Berkshire, two Jamie's Farm outdoor learning locations, in Hereford and Lewes, and Magdalen Farm, in Somerset.

Dr Victoria Edwards OBE, Chief Executive of The Ernest Cook Trust, said:

“We devised The OWL Collaboration as a response to the trauma experienced by young people during COVID-19, including mental health issues, domestic abuse, and adverse effects to their social development, school achievement and future job prospects.

“Our ambition is to help in the recovery process, providing an opportunity for vulnerable and disadvantaged young people to experience the recognised benefits of an Outdoor Week of Learning, enabling them to appreciate the natural environment while reconnecting with nature.”

The Ernest Cook Trust, based in Gloucestershire, is a UK-wide educational charity, creating outdoor experiences for children, young people and their families. A landowner in six counties, it runs outdoor education programmes on its own estates, as well as with partners' estates, and offers grants for outdoor learning activities.

The Trust is the primary funder for The OWL Collaboration, with initial support from grant-making charity, The Dulverton Trust. The funding covers the cost of the residentials, transport for the schools, and membership for each school to the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom, which helps teachers and educators develop their skills for teaching beyond the classroom.

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Jamie Feilden, Chief Executive Officer of Jamie's Farm, said he was delighted to be partnering with The Ernest Cook Trust on The OWL Collaboration.

"We are proud to be part of The OWL Collaboration, enabling hundreds more children to experience the outdoors through programmes like Jamie's Farm, which are more important than ever following a period of huge uncertainty and anxiety for young people.

"By sharing best practice with other providers, we hope to move the outdoor education sector forward and ultimately give more children lifelong memories of being in nature and a sense of hope for their future."

Toni Mason, Headteacher of St John the Baptist School in Hackney, one of the first schools to enjoy an Outdoor Week of Learning, at Ufton Court, said: "Now in class, children are communicating more effectively with their peers with higher levels of concentration and resilience. Without the support of Ufton Court and The Ernest Cook Trust, important life experiences like these would just not be as possible for our children."

So far, seven outdoor learning centres have teamed up with The Ernest Cook Trust, and the plan is to offer places to more than 30 schools and 700 pupils in the first year. Schools are coming from all over the UK.

The outdoor learning centres selected for The OWL Collaboration all have a particular focus on working with small groups of children who would benefit from therapeutic support. All centres are farming and environment based.

The seven include:

- Bore Place, The Commonwork Trust, Edenbridge, Kent
- Countryside Education Trust, Beaulieu, Hampshire
- Jamie's Farm, with locations in Bath, Hereford, Lewes and Monmouth
- Lambourne End Centre, Lambourne End, Essex
- Magdalen Farm, Chard, Somerset
- Ufton Court, Englefield, Berkshire
- The Shallowford Trust, Newton Abbot, Devon

Each OWL week is bespoke to the school children taking part, but activities can include everything from feeding and mucking out farm animals, to walks in the countryside, music or art workshops.

Each residential has an element of support and therapy, to help children deal with the impact that Covid has had on their lives, so the benefits carry on once they have returned home and are back in the classrooms.

Victoria added: "We are offering much more than just a week away to have fun. We will be measuring the impact on the children, to ensure it has long-lasting effects. For example, we will look at nature connectedness, which is how much more the children feel connected to nature as a result. We'll also look at how they are feeling in themselves afterwards and how they engage in education."

An Outdoor Week of Learning is available to eligible primary, secondary and special schools.

Additional information:

<https://ernestcooktrust.org.uk/what-we-do/the-owl-collaboration/>
<https://ernestcooktrust.org.uk/news/2021/10/owl-takes-off/>