



PRESS RELEASE

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Programme giving children the chance to connect with nature expands

“Unforgettable”, “brilliant” and “changed my view of nature” are just some of the comments from children and young people who have taken part in a pioneering initiative to help get them outdoors and into the countryside, which is now being extended into Gloucestershire.

Through The OWL Collaboration, launched in 2021, a number of Outdoor Learning Centres across England and Wales have been providing a week’s residential visit to targeted groups of children and young people.

The OWL Collaboration is run by national educational charity The Ernest Cook Trust which, together with The Dulverton Trust, provides funding for each ‘Outdoor Week of Learning’ or OWL residential. This includes the cost of the visit and transporting children to and from their schools, many of which are in inner cities.

The OWL Collaboration is now being extended into Gloucestershire for the first time, thanks to a new partnership between The Ernest Cook Trust and Farms for City Children at Wick Court, Arlingham.

“The OWL Collaboration is proving to be a great success, reaching children and young people who might not otherwise have an opportunity to spend time on a residential in the countryside,” said Suzie Paton, Head of Grants & Partnerships at The Ernest Cook Trust.

“However, OWL is far more than just a nice week away. Our ongoing evaluation indicates that participants become more connected with nature and that many experience positive improvements in their wellbeing. The schools also tell us they see significant changes in some children in terms of their engagement in learning.

“It’s great news that Farms for City Children Wick Court has joined The OWL Collaboration, enabling us to extend this tremendous programme. We are looking forward to a successful partnership, and we are also looking forward to growing the programme, with further funding for other collaborators.”

(continues...)

Stevie Edge-McKee, Farm School Manager at Farms for City Children, Wick Court, said: "I am so delighted that we have been able to extend the partnership between The Ernest Cook Trust and Farms for City Children to bring children and teachers of Gloucester to Wick Court.

"It has long been our ambition to support those living on our doorstep in inner city Gloucester to benefit from what our programmes offer and thanks to The OWL Collaboration, we are starting relationships with three local schools."

The OWL Collaboration's Outdoor Learning Centre partners are:

- Bore Place, The Commonwork Trust, Edenbridge, Kent
- Countryside Education Trust, Beaulieu, Hampshire
- Farms for City Children, Lower Treginnis, Pembrokeshire, Wales and Wick Court, Gloucestershire
- Jamie's Farm, with locations in Bath, Hereford, Lewes and Monmouth
- Lambourne End Centre, Lambourne End, Essex
- Magdalen Farm, Chard, Somerset
- Ringsfield Hall, Beckles, Norfolk
- Shallowford Farm, Newton Abbot, Devon
- Ufton Court, Englefield, Berkshire

Each OWL residential is bespoke to the school pupils taking part, but there is an emphasis across the partnership on activities which develop nature connection, including sensory walks, nature's arts and crafts, the field to fork learning journey, foraging and eco-cooking and farm animal care.

The Ernest Cook Trust is a UK educational charity committed to helping young people and their communities develop a lifelong journey of learning, appreciation and respect for the countryside through a range of outdoor learning experiences.

The Trust delivers programmes on its own estates and with partner estates. Through grant-giving, it supports other organisations in the field of Outdoor Learning and awards some £2m in a range of grants programmes each year.

An Outdoor Week of Learning is available to eligible primary, secondary and special schools. There is more information about its impact here: <https://ernestcooktrust.org.uk/what-we-do/the-owl-collaboration/>