REVIEW OF ENGAGE FOREST SCHOOL PROGRAMME

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RUTLAND GROUP 1: SEPT - DEC 2025

ENGAGE

Engage is a youth-centred, family-focused service that works with young people aged 10-19 years in Melton Mowbray and Coalville.

We provide short and long-term one to one and group work support to address the physical, mental, and emotional well-being needs of young people and their families.

Our goal is to build long-term confidence, strengthen resilience, and upskill families to overcome complex problems now and in the future.

Our work is flexible and adaptable to meet the needs of each individual case. We use a youth and community developmental approach that builds effective trusting relationships and enhances youth engagement through one-on-one and group work sessions.

We believe that every young person deserves the opportunity to reach their full potential.

WELCOME TO MELTON OUTDOOR LEARNING HUB

Melton Outdoor Learning Hub offers a diverse and engaging environment where young people can access a wide range of nature-based and experiential activities designed to support their personal, social, and emotional development.

Key Features of the Site:

- **Outdoor Classroom:** A central base for the day, providing a space to store personal belongings, change into outdoor footwear, and access site resources.
- **Covered Activity Area:** A versatile sheltered space used for practical hands-on sessions such as woodworking and outdoor cooking.
- **Open-Fire Outdoor Kitchen:** An area dedicated to fire-based cooking activities, promoting teamwork, independence, and life skills.
- **Woodland Area:** A calming space for hammock use and sensory-based relaxation, supporting well-being and emotional regulation.
- **Sports Zone:** A flexible activity space for football, badminton, boccia, and other inclusive sports and games that promote physical health and social interaction.
- **Gardening Zones:** Areas for young people to engage in planting and maintaining wildflowers, herbs, and vegetables, encouraging environmental responsibility and mindfulness.
- **Target Range:** Supervised zones for archery and target shooting, helping to build focus, coordination, and confidence.
- **Pond Dipping Area:** A dedicated nature exploration area supporting curiosity, ecological awareness, and hands-on learning.
- In addition, we have access to a large indoor Club House which provides a warm, safe environment for indoor learning, creative projects, and social time, particularly during adverse weather.

RUTLAND GROUP 1

Across 12 sessions, Engage supported six young people from three Rutland schools. With funding from Rutland County Council SEND Department, we created a pilot programme designed to strengthen well-being and offer tailored support within a forest school setting.

Our team reviewed each referral carefully and shaped a plan that responded to both the group's shared needs and each young person's individual goals.

Casterton College Rutland

Casterton College
M.G
H.C

Catmose College

Catmose College
K.G
N.E.W

UCc

Uppingham Community College
M.D
S.K

NEEDS-BASED PROGRAMME

The referrals highlighted key areas of need, primarily revolving around self-esteem, confidence, social skills, resilience, and belonging.

01
SELF-ESTEEM, CONFIDENCE, AND SELF-BELIEF

These areas are explicitly mentioned for MD, HC, MG, and KG.

02
SOCIAL SKILLS, BELONGING, AND RELATIONSHIPS

Concerns about social isolation, friendship formation, and social awkwardness were noted for MD, HC, and SK.

03
RESILIENCE AND COPING MECHANISMS

The need for resilience is a major theme for MD, SK, and KG. NW requires support with self-control, rational thinking, and compliance.

04
HOME/SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AND AGENCY

This is especially relevant for NW (adoptive parents), KG (parental mental health, lack of routine), and to ensure transferable skill for all young people.

FOREST SCHOOL PROGRAMME: AUTUMN TERM SUMMARY REPORT

Overview

Over the past 12 weeks, we have witnessed a fantastic transformation in this cohort of young people. What began as a group establishing basic trust has evolved into a cohesive, resilient, and self-directed team. The students have moved from requiring close instruction to demonstrating autonomy, executive functioning, and a profound sense of ownership over the site.

Over the next few pages is a summary of their activities and, more importantly, the developmental journey they have undertaken.

1. The Learning Journey: Developmental Outcomes

Social & Emotional Growth

Rapid Integration: The group established friendships quickly (Week 2), creating a safe psychological container that allowed them to take risks in their learning later in the term.

Emotional Regulation: We successfully utilised specific tools for regulation. The hammocks became a sanctuary for downtime, while the air rifle sessions introduced breathing techniques for focus under pressure—skills directly transferable to classroom anxiety.

Resilience & Adaptability: Week 8 was a pivotal moment. Facing extreme cold, the young people didn't disengage; instead, they adapted, focusing on high-energy work and fire maintenance. This demonstrated a significant increase in their "grit" and ability to manage personal discomfort for a shared goal.

Executive Functioning & Responsibility

From Instruction to Independence: Early in the term, staff led routines. By Week 4 and 10, students were independently initiating water collection and bird feeder maintenance. This shift signals the internalisation of self-discipline and community responsibility.

Legacy Thinking: Through the planting of the orchard (fruit trees, hedges, and bulbs), the students engaged with the concept of "legacy"—understanding that their hard work today provides for future groups. This moved their thinking from immediate gratification to long-term altruism.

Risk Management & Safety

Calculated Risk: Through fire lighting, tool work (bowsaw, loppers), and coppicing, students learned to assess risk rather than avoid it. They took the lead on fire safety protocols, demonstrating a maturity that allows us to trust them with increasingly complex tasks.

FOREST SCHOOL PROGRAMME: AUTUMN TERM SUMMARY REPORT

2. Activity Highlights

Site Development & Stewardship

Horticulture: Siting and planting a future orchard (fruit trees, native hedges), and planting snowdrops/bluebells.

Construction: Building a "Slackline Ninja Course," constructing Mr. Scarecrow, large-scale den building, and engineering windbreakers for the Fire Base Camp.

Maintenance: Coppicing dead wood, managing woodland health, and routine water collection.

Skills & Crafts

Bushcraft: Fire lays, flint and steel usage, whittling, and wood processing.

Creative Arts: Painting fairy houses, mosaic panels, sand art, and creating a natural Christmas tree.

Project Work: Building bird feeders and making fat balls to support local wildlife.

Physical & Active Play

Sports: Football coaching (improving negotiation and conflict resolution), team games, and air rifle target shooting.

Unstructured Play: Essential "downtime" using swings and hammocks to process the day's learning.

Food & Nutrition

Outdoor Cooking: Progression from toasting marshmallows to preparing full meals (sausage/bacon cobs, chicken kebabs) over an open fire, covering hygiene and food preparation skills.

FOREST SCHOOL PROGRAMME: AUTUMN TERM SUMMARY REPORT

3. Impact Spotlight: Attendance & Engagement

One of the most significant indicators of success this term came from a student reflection in Week 4. A young person, previously struggling with 52% school attendance, noted that since starting Forest School, she had only missed two days.

"I think I would have been off more."

This highlights that the programme is not just a "break" from school, but a catalyst for re-engaging with education and building the confidence to show up.

4. Summary

The Autumn term has been defined by purposeful labour and community building. The young people have transitioned from visitors in the woods to caretakers of it. They finish this term not only with new practical skills but with evidence of their ability to work hard, solve problems, and care for one another.

We are incredibly proud of the progress they have made.

FEEDBACK FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

It is important to us for young people to tell us how this programme has helped them. Whether personal or academic, at home or at school, for young people to self-acknowledge change and growth provides us with confirmation that the programme has had some benefit to their lives. Here are some snippits from over the last few weeks.

"My attendance at school last year was about 52%. Since doing this, my attendance is now at least 85%.

KG

"Can we keep doing this"

NEB

"Whilst being part of forest school, I have had less anxiety attacks at school"

MD

"I've been sleeping so much easier"

MG

FEEDBACK FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

QUESTIONS ABOUT CONFIDENCE AND SELF-BELIEF

I feel more confident in myself now than I did before the program

MG	STRONGLY AGREE
HC	NEUTRAL
KG	NEUTRAL
NEB	NEUTRAL
MD	NEUTRAL
SK	AGREE

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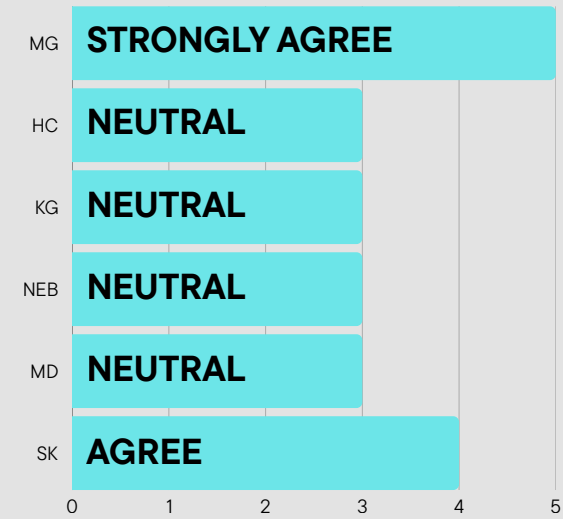
I feel proud of something I achieved or created during the activities

MG	STRONGLY AGREE
HC	AGREE
KG	AGREE
NEB	AGREE
MD	STRONGLY DISAGREE
SK	STRONGLY AGREE

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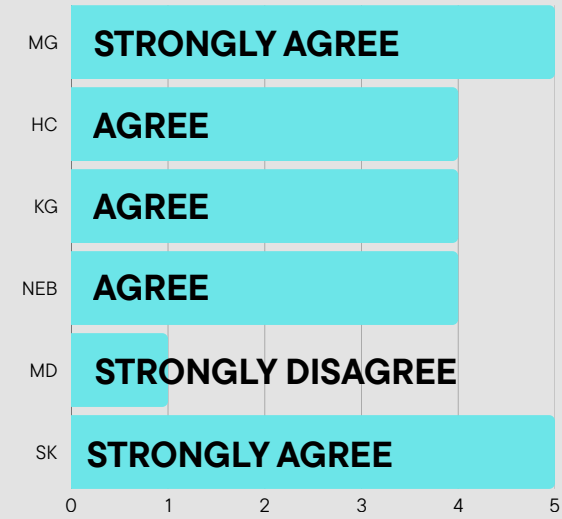
I am more willing to try things that look difficult or challenging

MG	STRONGLY AGREE
HC	NEUTRAL
KG	NEUTRAL
NEB	NEUTRAL
MD	AGREE
SK	STRONGLY AGREE

0 1 2 3 4 5
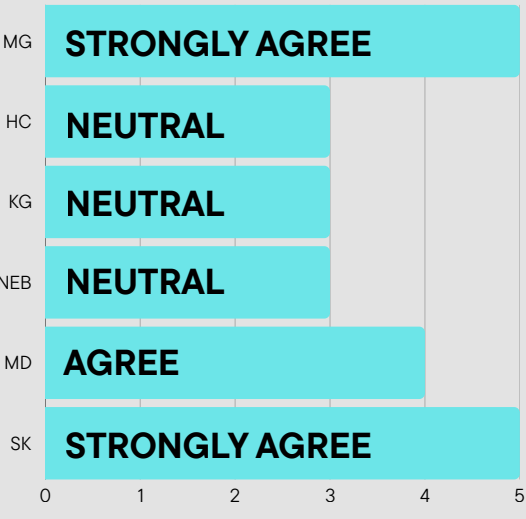
The cohort demonstrated a high baseline of confidence, allowing for rapid group cohesion and immediate engagement with the programme material. While the team settled quickly, evaluation data indicated a degree of neutrality regarding personal change. We interpret this not as indifference, but as a potential gap in the participants' ability to articulate their own "distance travelled" or internal shifts during the session. However, observational evidence highlighted significant interpersonal growth, with several key individuals building visible trust and rapport with the wider group.

There was a strong correlation between tangible creation and self-worth; the majority of the group reported feeling a sense of pride in their specific achievements. Conversely, we identified that for young people navigating complex internal conflicts, acknowledging success remains a barrier. One participant notably struggled to identify any source of pride, highlighting the need for continued support in building self-worth.
The group was evenly split regarding future resilience. Fifty percent (50%) expressed a clear willingness to embrace new challenges and calculated risks, signaling an increase in growth mindset. The remaining 50% remained unsure, suggesting that further intervention is required to solidify their confidence in transferring these skills to real-world scenarios.

Recommendations for Future Delivery (ENGAGE): To address the neutrality in participant feedback and the divide in future confidence, we will implement the following:
- **Structured Reflection:** We will integrate dedicated reflective practice into every session to help young people recognise and verbalise their growth in real-time.
- **Scaffolded Self-Evaluation:** Recognising that self-critique is a learned skill, we will utilise specific activities designed to guide young people through the process of setting and recognising personal goals.

FEEDBACK FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

A notable analysis of the 12-week programme reveals a dichotomy between the participants' self-reported data and the staff's qualitative observations. While the quantitative feedback regarding social skills and sense of belonging appeared neutral, our direct observations painted a significantly more positive picture of youth development.

Contextual Factors: It is imperative to contextualise the participant feedback against the environmental conditions at the time of evaluation. The severe weather (heavy rain and low temperatures) likely impacted the immediate mood and physiological comfort of the young people while completing the evaluation activity. When basic physiological needs (warmth and dryness) are compromised, higher-level reflection often suffers.

Despite the environmental challenges, the programme was highly successful in fostering social capital. A primary highlight was the observation of six participants—previously strangers to one another—forming a distinct and supportive peer group. This rapid development of group cohesion is attributed to the intentional scaffolding of early team-building activities and the "storming and norming" phases of group development facilitated in the early weeks.

For the wider cohort, we observed marked improvements in interpersonal communication and collaborative effort. Experiential activities—specifically water collection, horticultural projects (planting), and den construction—served as vital catalysts. These tasks provided a shared purpose, requiring young people to negotiate, delegate, and communicate effectively to achieve a tangible goal.

Strategic Recommendations for Future Delivery (ENGAGE)

To bridge the gap between participant perception and actual growth, and to solidify the skills learned, we propose the following strategic adjustments:
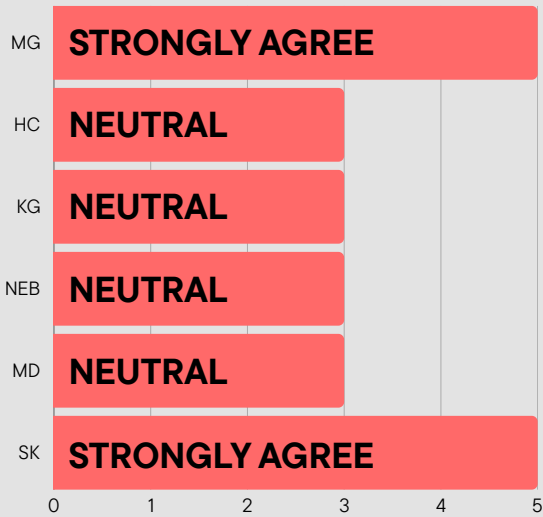
I. Making Communication a Clear Priority

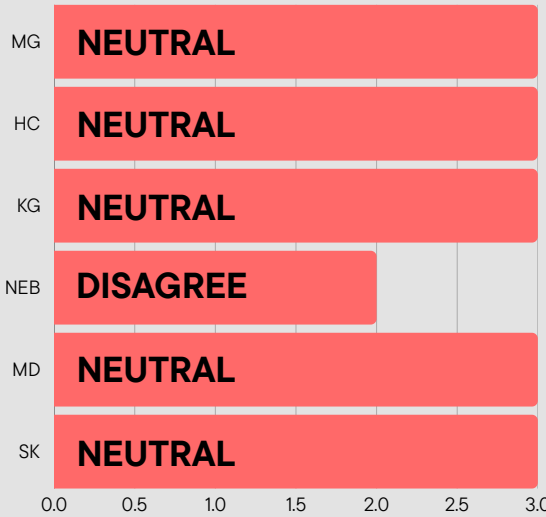We must move communication from an implicit outcome to an explicit learning goal.
- **Structured Debriefs**: Implement "Review and Reflect" circles immediately after high-intensity activities (like den building). Ask specific questions: "How did you decide who carried the logs?" or "What happened when you disagreed on the design?"
- **Vocabulary Building**: Provide young people with the language to describe their interactions (e.g., negotiation, active listening, constructive compromise).
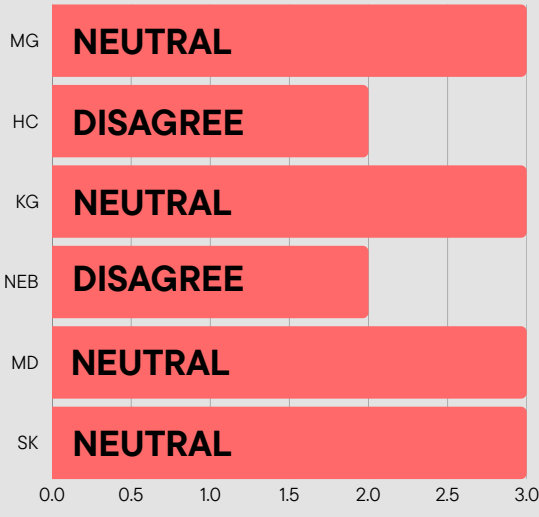
QUESTIONS ABOUT SOCIAL SKILLS AND BELONGING

I felt like I was truly part of a team or group in the Forest School

MG	STRONGLY AGREE
HC	NEUTRAL
KG	NEUTRAL
NEB	NEUTRAL
MD	NEUTRAL
SK	STRONGLY AGREE

(x-axis: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)

I found it easier to talk to and work with people I didn't know well

MG	NEUTRAL
HC	NEUTRAL
KG	NEUTRAL
NEB	DISAGREE
MD	NEUTRAL
SK	NEUTRAL

(x-axis: 0.0, 0.5, 1.0, 1.5, 2.0, 2.5, 3.0)

I feel a greater sense of belonging at school or with my friends now

MG	NEUTRAL
HC	DISAGREE
KG	NEUTRAL
NEB	DISAGREE
MD	NEUTRAL
SK	NEUTRAL

(x-axis: 0.0, 0.5, 1.0, 1.5, 2.0, 2.5, 3.0)

II. Scaffolding Transferable Social Skills

We need to help young people recognise that the fun they are having is actually skill-building.
"Friendship Audits": Run short workshops where young people identify the traits they value in the friendships they formed during the programme (trust, reliability, shared humor) and discuss how to apply these to other areas of their lives (school, home).
Visual Mapping: Create a visual map of the group's journey to show them visually how far they have come, reinforcing their sense of belonging.

III. Optimising the Evaluation Environment (New Addition)

To ensure feedback accurately reflects the 12-week experience rather than the immediate weather conditions:
Comfort First: Ensure evaluations take place in a warm, dry, and comfortable environment, potentially accompanied by hot food or drink to meet physiological needs before asking for cognitive reflection.
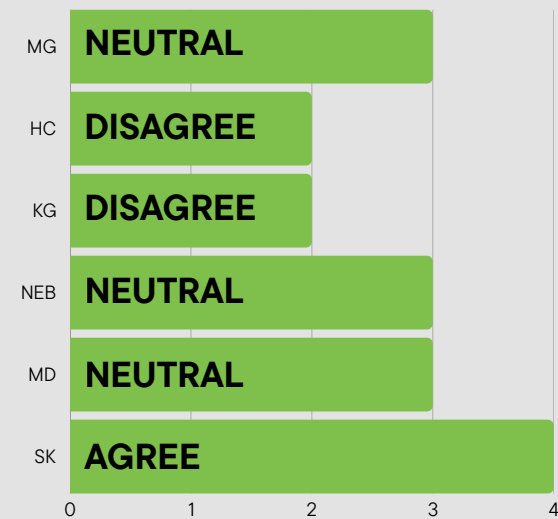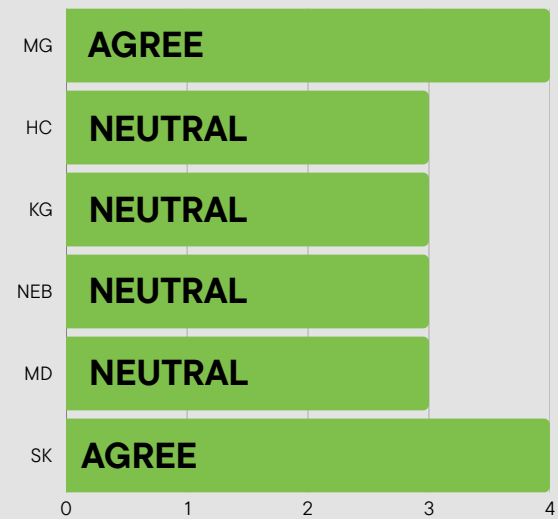
FEEDBACK FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

QUESTIONS ABOUT RESILIENCE AND COPING

When something goes wrong, I know how to keep trying instead of giving up

MG	NEUTRAL
HC	DISAGREE
KG	DISAGREE
NEB	NEUTRAL
MD	NEUTRAL
SK	AGREE

(scale 0–4)

If I feel frustrated or overwhelmed, I can manage my feelings better now

MG	AGREE
HC	NEUTRAL
KG	NEUTRAL
NEB	NEUTRAL
MD	NEUTRAL
SK	AGREE

(scale 0–4)

I think more carefully now before I make a quick choice or reaction

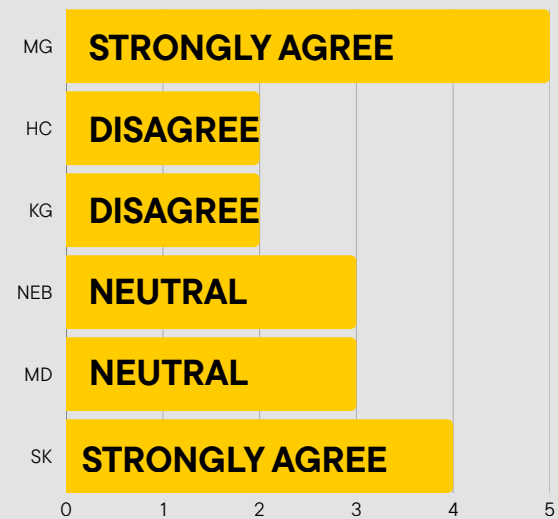|	
MG	AGREE
HC	NEUTRAL
KG	NEUTRAL
NEB	AGREE
MD	NEUTRAL
SK	STRONGLY AGREE

(scale 0–5)
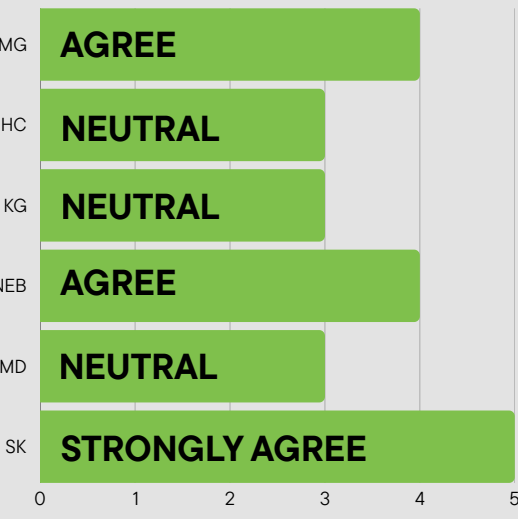
QUESTIONS ABOUT SKILL TRANSFER TO SCHOOL AND HOME

I am more engaged or focused in my lessons or school activities now

|	
MG	STRONGLY AGREE
HC	NEUTRAL
KG	NEUTRAL
NEB	NEUTRAL
MD	NEUTRAL
SK	STRONGLY AGREE

(scale 0–5)
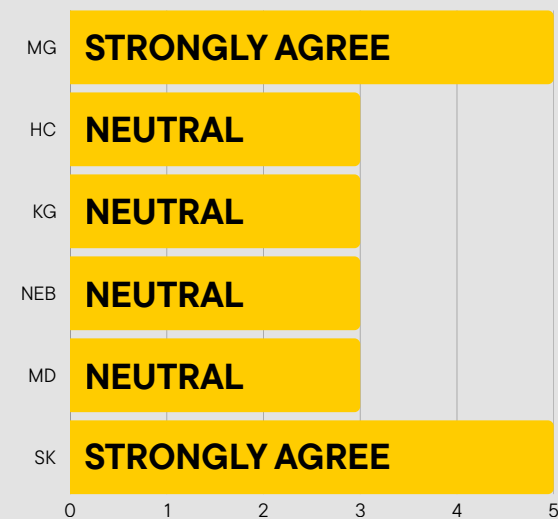
I find it easier to follow rules or routines at home and school

MG	STRONGLY AGREE
HC	DISAGREE
KG	DISAGREE
NEB	NEUTRAL
MD	NEUTRAL
SK	STRONGLY AGREE

(scale 0–5)

Overall, the Forest School Programme was helpful for my personal development

MG	STRONGLY AGREE
HC	AGREE
KG	AGREE
NEB	STRONGLY AGREE
MD	NEUTRAL
SK	STRONGLY AGREE

(scale 0–5)
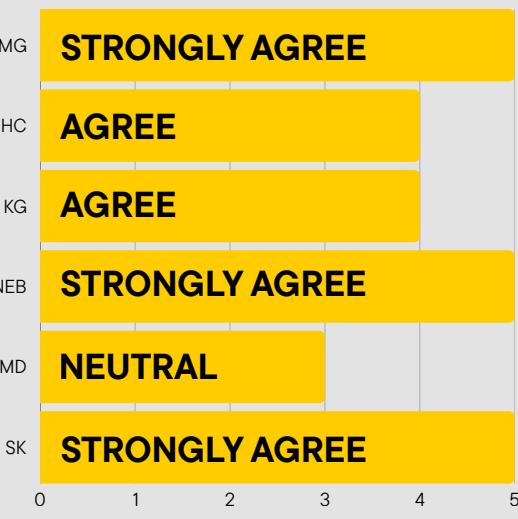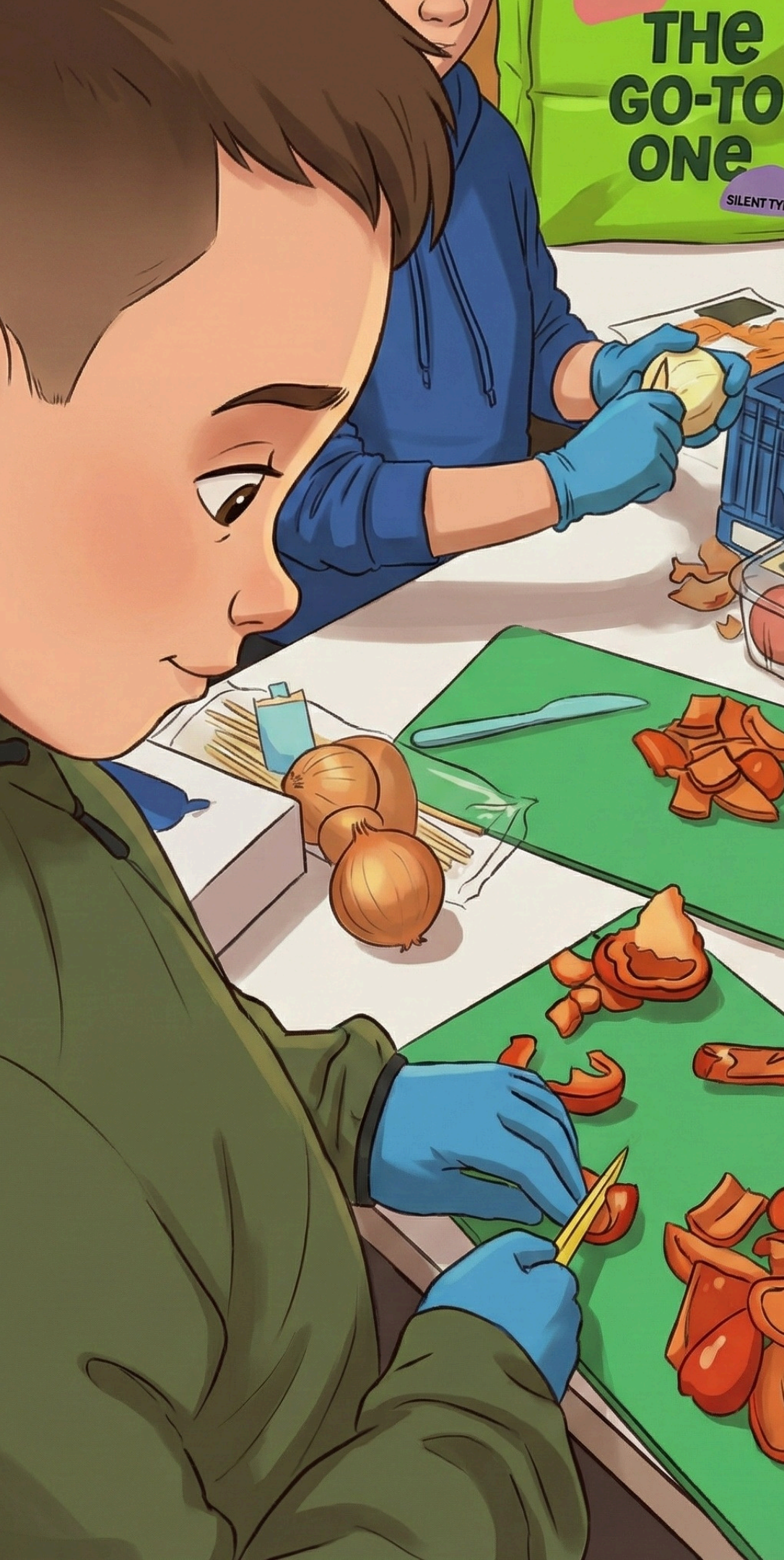
FEEDBACK FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

Resilience & Skill Transfer

Divergence Between Satisfaction and Self-Efficacy:
A critical analysis of the pupils' feedback reveals a distinct contrast between overall programme satisfaction and specific self-reported skill acquisition. While the "Overall Helpfulness" of the Forest School Programme received overwhelmingly positive ratings—with 50% of participants (MG, NEB, SK) selecting "Strongly Agree" and 33% (HC, KG) selecting "Agree"—the data indicates a gap in the participants' ability to recognise the specific mechanics of their own growth, particularly regarding resilience.

Resilience and Coping Mechanisms

The data regarding resilience (keeping trying instead of giving up) presents the most significant challenge. Notably, participants HC and KG reported "Disagree" when asked if they know how to keep trying when things go wrong. This suggests that while these young people enjoyed the programme, they have not yet internalised the "Growth Mindset" required to apply these experiences to adversity. Conversely, participant SK consistently self-reports high self-efficacy across all resilience metrics, suggesting a readiness for more advanced leadership roles.

The "Neutrality" Trend in Emotional Regulation

There is a prevailing trend of "Neutral" responses regarding emotional management and impulse control, particularly from participants HC, KG, and MD. In a youth work context, "Neutral" responses often do not indicate a lack of impact, but rather a lack of emotional vocabulary or self-awareness. These young people may be experiencing changes in their behaviour (as observed by staff) but lack the metacognitive tools to identify and articulate these shifts themselves.

Transferability to School and Home

The feedback highlights a polarisation in skill transferability. Participants MG and SK demonstrate a strong ability to bridge the gap between the programme and external environments, scoring "Strongly Agree" on engagement in lessons and following routines. However, participants HC and KG expressed disagreement regarding their ability to follow rules at home/school. This indicates that for some learners, the "Forest School" environment is seen as a separate reality, and they require explicit scaffolding to understand how the rules of the forest (safety, cooperation) translate to the rules of the classroom.

Strategic Recommendations for Future Delivery (ENGAGE)

To address the disparity between high enjoyment and lower self-efficacy scores, we propose the following interventions:

I. Explicit Skill Mapping (Bridging the Transfer Gap)
We must dismantle the "silo" effect where participants see Forest School as separate from real life.
The "Bridge" Debrief: At the end of sessions, we will explicitly link a forest school activity to a school scenario. Example: "You showed patience when the fire wouldn't start. How is that the same as when a math problem is difficult?"

II. From Neutral to Nuanced (Emotional Literacy)
To move participants away from "Neutral" default answers:
Differentiated Evaluation Tools: We will replace standard Likert scales (1-5) with pictorial or scenario-based evaluations for participants who struggle with abstract self-reflection.
"Stop-Start-Continue": Instead of asking if they can manage feelings, we will ask what they would stop doing, start doing, or continue doing when frustrated. This lowers the barrier to entry for self-reflection.

WHAT NEXT?

ENJOY NATURE

Receive referrals for Group 2 cohort. Assess referral criteria and develop tailored programme of learning and fun.

Start-point questionnaire for each young person to establish developmental baseline of personal development.

Develop and run 12-week programme.
Weekly updates written and sent to each school and Rutland SEND.

End of term report written and sent to each school and Rutland SEND.

Review of programme alongside schools and Rutland SEND.

Encourage schools to visit site.

Receive referrals for Group 3 cohort.

End-point questionnaire to determine developmental change and feedback from young people to shape the programme further.

All pictures in this report have been reproduced as a true likeness to the original photos taken during this programme. Some photos have not been included in order to adhere to our GDPR and safeguarding policies.

If your school would like a copy of these photos, please contact joe.engageproject@gmail.com to make further arrangements.

Thank you.

ENGAGE
Youth & Family Support Service

KEEP CONNECTED WITH US

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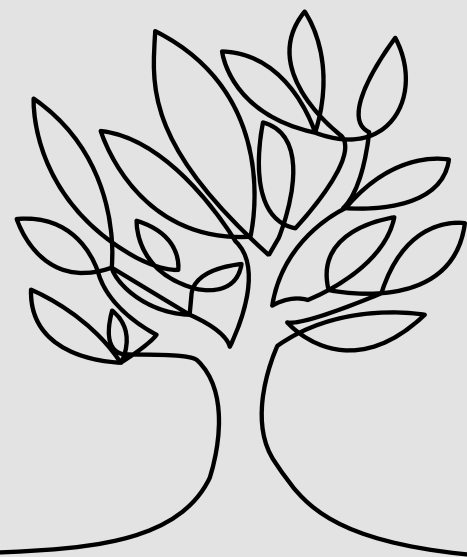
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