

Green Team

Final Report

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Executive Summary

The aim of the evaluation is to assess whether the environmental opportunities provided by the Green Team change 'hearts and minds' of young people about environmental issues. Objectives include evaluating whether being exposed to environmental education leads to increased knowledge of the environment by the young people; if and whether the young people's increased knowledge of the environment leads to a change in their attitude towards the environment and whether these shifts in attitudes leads to changes in behaviour towards the environment by young people. The research found that the Green Team opportunities impacts positively on the young people's behaviour, attitudes, knowledge and skills. Learning is a by-product of participation. The most apparent change in their knowledge base is around an enhanced understanding of the work that went into maintaining green spaces. In terms of attitudes the young people become aware that individual acts have an accumulative effect and as such they feel this may impact on their own behaviour. Another attitudinal change is around an increase value of team work. In terms of skills, they particularly value the opportunity to handle and use tools and as such their skills in this area increased. There is evidence to suggest that the residential opportunities have a greater impact on the young people. This seems to relate largely to the opportunity to take part in a greater number of and variety of activities. It also seems to relate to the adult volunteers having

more opportunity to be in contact with the young people and a natural by-product of this interaction is an increase in awareness of environmental issues and the ethos of the Green Team.

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Main Findings

- Green Team opportunities impact positively on young people's behaviour, attitudes, knowledge and skills.
- Learning is a by-product of participation.
- There is enhanced understanding and knowledge about the work that goes into maintaining green spaces.
- Attitudinal shifts centre on an increase in awareness of how individual actions have an accumulative effect
- The young people feel that an increase in their awareness of the cumulative effects of individual actions is likely to have the most impact on their own behaviour.
- There is an increase in the value of team work.
- The opportunity and ability to use tools increase the young people's skills.
- There is evidence to suggest that the residential opportunities have a greater impact on the young people.

- There is evidence to suggest that volunteers with environmental education qualifications have more scope to draw on their experience and impart their knowledge in residential settings.

Background

The Green Team runs one-day and residential opportunities to participate in environmental activities for young people between 14-25 years old. These opportunities are run by adult volunteers. The young people carry out environmental tasks for a range of environmental organisations, country parks and land managers. The opportunities also include games and environmental education activities. Although the Green Team opportunities are advertised at low cost to the general public, almost all of the young people who volunteer do so as part of their Duke of Edinburgh Award. The Green Team is also an award provider for the John Muir Award. The cost to participants of a one-day activity is £10 and a residential activity costs £25. Opportunities take place at weekends, between February and November.

Introduction

The Green Team received £1700 funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and an additional £3000 from Scottish Natural Heritage to carry out an evaluation of the Green Team activities. They commissioned Volunteer Development Scotland (VDS) to undertake the evaluation which aims to assess whether the environmental opportunities provided by the Green Team changed 'hearts and minds' of young people about environmental issues.

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The objectives are to assess whether:

- environmental education leads to an increase in knowledge of the environment by the young people
 - an increase in knowledge of the environment leads to a change in attitude towards the environment by young people
- changes in attitudes leads to changes in behaviour towards the environment by young people
- The aim of the study is to look at:
- The capacity of the Green Team adult volunteers to increase the young people's skills and knowledge in environmental issues.
 - interaction between young people and adult volunteers
 - shifting values and behaviour and how these lead to benefits to the environment
- whether environmental education → increased knowledge → understanding → shifting behaviour → changing actions towards the environment

In addition, assess whether:

- there is a difference between the one-day and residential opportunities in terms of meeting the objectives
- young people are getting more out of the residential opportunities although they are less popular

- There is evidence to suggest that adult volunteers should be trained in environmental education?

Methodology

A dual methodology was employed that combined participant observation with focus groups.

Participant Observation:

The research team undertook participant observation at four different events; two residential and two day. This entailed the researchers participating in the day's activities, interacting with both the young people and adult volunteer leaders. This participant observation focussed on interaction and the passing of knowledge from the volunteer leaders to the participants.

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Focus Groups:

The research team also held focus groups at four different events; two residential and two day.

The focus groups asked the young people about:

- how they had heard of and come to participate
 - what they enjoy most and least
 - whether and in what way they feel they learn through activities
 - whether participation affects their attitudes to the environment
 - what they value about Green Team opportunities
 - what they feel they learn from the adult volunteers and day site experts such as rangers
-
- the difference between the day and residential opportunities

Findings

Adult volunteer leaders

The adult volunteer leaders play a key role in the running of the Green Team projects. They take responsibility for the young people over the activity period and are there to facilitate and/or lead the activities undertaken. The adult volunteer leaders come from a variety of backgrounds and careers, but all have a common interest in the environment. Some are employees of environmental organisations while others feel their Green Team volunteering enhances their skills, such as leadership, working with young people, teaching in their paid employment. Some have previously worked in the environmental field, or are looking to in the future, and therefore see the Green Team as a means of keeping their hand in, or gaining experience and skills. The occasional adult volunteer has trained as an environmental educationalist, whether and in what way this enhances the learning of the young people will be discussed later in the report.

The formal educational role of the adult volunteers varies from site to site as it very much depends on whether there is a local Ranger present or not. When the local Ranger is present, it is they that tend to take on the formal educational role during the activities, with the adult volunteer leaders taking more of a facilitative role. Safety is always a high priority. In addition to the detailed information on what to bring and what to wear sent to the young people before attending, the adult volunteers always make sure the young people have the correct clothing. Prior to each activity a safety talk on the purpose and appropriate use of tools is given. The adult volunteer's role also includes taking care of the young people, from ensuring everyone has something to eat and drink, to the more hands on care of applying first aid. Leading and facilitating tends to be done in a non directional manner which makes the young people feel that the leaders are more their peers than adults telling them what to do. They make sure that the young people take turns at using various tools and participating in as many aspects of each activity as possible. They also ensure that each of the small groups get an opportunity to see what other small groups have done and see the level of achievement.

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If praise is given by a passer by, the leaders tell the group, and take the opportunity to praise the young people on the impact they are having. As well as taking a leading role, some of the adult volunteers are learning alongside the young people. The young people feel that they are treated more as peers and appreciate the leaders 'hands on' approach, this underlying feeling of equality helps set the tone of the group. What is particularly striking is the young people's appreciation for the time and effort that the adult volunteer leaders put in to the days/weekends.

Environmental games play a major part in the Green Team activities. The first activity of the day involves a physically active name game of some kind. This allows the leaders and young people alike to become familiar with one another. Throughout the day, other games are used as a break from activity or as energisers after breaks. These games always have an environmental slant that involves learning about animals and habitats through word or action games or collecting items in the local area.

The residential opportunities offer a greater chance for the young people and the adult volunteers to get to know one another. This is a valuable aspect of residential opportunities.

Rangers

The level of Ranger input is venue and task dependant. If there is a Ranger in attendance, they either lead the conservation activities or give the formal introduction to the tasks. Sometimes the Rangers supervise all tasks and sometimes the Ranger leaves the adult volunteer leaders to lead the tasks after they have gone over issues such as safety, tool use, why the tasks are required and the impact the work will have. If the Ranger remains with the groups they tend to impart further information on issues such as local history, insights in land, tree or park management, they also engage in question and answer sessions with the young people on a more ad hoc basis. If the Ranger is not around during the activities, the adult volunteer leaders take the lead of the small group activities.

The young people

Many of the young people who attend Green Team activities are doing the Duke of Edinburgh or the John Muir Award and attend Green Team as part of those awards. Some have been recommended to take part through friends or relatives who have taken part in previous Green Team opportunities. Most of the young people do not know anyone prior to attending; some know one another from school or through family connections. All seem environmentally aware, motivated to be there through wanting to give/do something constructive, be outdoors and meet new people. Indeed, the social interaction and the outdoor nature of the activities seem to be a key motivator for many.

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Knowledge and Skills

Knowledge gained through Green Team activities range from area specific to task specific as well as more generic conservation/environmental knowledge and skills. Knowledge of safe and appropriate use of tools is a key area of learning. Indeed, the opportunity to handle and use tools is particularly valued by the young people largely because they have little or no opportunity to do out with Green Team opportunities. Examples of site specific learning includes learning how to construct steps for public safety; how to install path drainage, how to dismantle and erect fencing, learning about the impact of dropping litter and the effect of removing litter, clearing a path or helping indigenous species to grow by removing invasive species. There was evidence of an increase in knowledge about wider environmental issues such as increased ability to identify plants and trees, an understanding of the local habitat and what factors play a part in habitat loss. As well as the explicit learning described above a more implicit learning also takes place, one that is a by-product of participation. Although aware about learning about tools and learning through the site specific tasks, on prompting the young people could also articulate how they learn about other issues. Examples of this kind of implicit learning were hearing about the 'right to view' and of the history of the sites. Some of the young people have been to some of the sites before either with family or with their school. The Green Team activities gave them an opportunity to learn and

understand more about the local area than these previous trips. They felt that the learning they gain through Green Team activities was different to learning at school, perhaps this was due to the participatory ethos of the opportunities. They also feel it is important to know the history of the local area, how people can contribute to maintaining the local landscape, the work that went on 'behind the scenes' to keep parks and green spaces accessible and correctly managed. The young people also spoke of how they value their recently gained knowledge about how they could help the environment.

The residential events offer a greater opportunity for more informal learning, learning that takes place beyond the time spent in the field. In the evening the adult volunteer leaders facilitate environmental learning through various games and activities. Due to the enhanced opportunity for the young people to interact with the adult volunteers during residential activities, a natural by-product of this interaction is knowledge exchange.

Values and attitudes

The young people who attend Green Team opportunities feel that their attitudes to the environment have changed as a result of being involved with the Green Team. They feel they have a better appreciation of the work that goes on 'behind the scenes' with regard to how much time and effort goes into maintaining green public spaces, to limiting the negative impact that people can have on the environment and to make such spaces 'nice' for people to enjoy. An example of changing attitudes concerned litter dropping.

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Previously dropping litter had been seen in the context of it being an individual action, but after clearing a space covered in litter they saw how each person's action had an accumulative effect which resulted in particular spaces being susceptible to high levels of litter. They saw how this was not only unpleasing to the eye but how it had a negative environmental impact and if not cleared up the area became unsightly, and potentially hazardous to humans and animals.

The values attached to team work are most apparent. The young people clearly value the opportunity to work in small groups. The egalitarian co-operative quality that the adult volunteers promote is appreciated. The young people see how working together, taking turns, sharing the load and communicating with one another is how they get the job done with ease and enjoyment. They particularly enjoy when they have a problem to solve or a task is especially challenging and they as a group solve the problem and or rise to the challenge. The benefits and attractions of teamwork seemed already fairly well established amongst many of the young people, however the Green Team ethos and opportunities seem to further enhance this value.

The ethos of the Green Team is probably more appreciated by and instilled in those who attend the residential opportunities. This is likely to be due to the fact they spend more time engaged in activities and with the adult volunteer leaders.

Behaviours

Behaviour change is difficult to measure; however there are some soft indicators of the impact that participation could potentially have. Many of the young people are already environmentally aware and sympathetic to environmental concerns. Many of the young people feel they will think more about the impact they may have on the environment as a result of an enhanced understanding of the work that goes into preserving the environment. One young person thought they would take their family to the field area to tell them about what they had learnt and show them what they had done. A few young people think they will get outdoors more often rather than spending their leisure time indoors playing computer games for example. Through doing something fun but practical there seems to be an inclination to continue participating in this type of activity.

Day vs. Residential

Those who attend residential events value the extra time to get to know one another better. Socialising, cooking, eating and living together over the weekend affords them the opportunity not only to make friends with other young people but to get to know the adult volunteers better. It

seems the ethos of the Green Team is more pervasive on residential opportunities, they also provide a greater variety of activities and sites. All of these aspects were valued by the young people.

The only apparent disincentive for young people attending the residential opportunities was that it leaves no time to partake in any other leisure or social activities. None of the young people cited being away from home, meeting new people, being with people they didn't know as being disincentives.

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What the young people particularly value about Green Team Opportunities

The young people state that they enjoy being outdoors, working hard, doing something worthwhile, learning new things, problem-solving, meeting new people and completing tasks. They enjoy the team spirit, being allowed to work with the people they had affinity with, having an opportunity to say what were their preferred tasks and the egalitarian relationships they develop with the volunteer leaders. The young people feel a sense of achievement, particularly when there is an element of them solving a problem or making an impact that was clearly visible.

Room for improvement?

Largely, the young people hear about the Green Team through taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh awards. They wondered how or if the Green Team could do more to promote themselves amongst more young people, those not already engaged in community service of some kind.

There are mixed views on games. Although there is consensus about games giving them a break from hands on work, some feel there are too many games and others feel there is not enough variety of games. Some young people feel they would be better at choosing the games, some feel the adult volunteers aren't always comfortable with the games and awkwardness about the games from both young people and adult volunteers was observed on occasion. That said, any awkwardness soon dissipated once things got going and every one got into the swing of things.

At the end of a particularly rainy day of fieldwork, the young people did make comment that the only thing that the Green Team could do better was provide good weather! That said, the weather wasn't really an issue for the young people, it was all part of being outdoors.

Conclusion

It was clear that Green Team opportunities impact positively on the young people's behaviour, attitudes, knowledge and skills. Learning is a by-product of participation. The young people are often not overtly aware of learning however when prompted it becomes very clear to both them and the research team they had learnt a lot through participation. The most apparent change in their knowledge base is around an enhanced understanding of the work that goes into maintaining green spaces. This includes an increase in their ability to identify plants and trees, an understanding of the local habitat and what factors play a part in habitat loss. In terms of attitudes the young people have become more aware that individual acts have an accumulative effect and as such they feel that this may impact on their own behaviour. Another attitudinal change in evidence is around the young people having an increase value of team work. In terms of skills, they particularly value the opportunity to handle and use tools and as such their skills in this area increased.

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It was striking how much the young people enjoy their time with the Green Team, they value the opportunity to meet new people, to participate in activities and to use tools they would otherwise have little chance of doing. They clearly value being outdoors, doing something that 'made a difference' and seeing the impact of their efforts. They clearly appreciated the time and effort put in by the adult volunteers, they particularly appreciated their egalitarian and caring attitude which fostered a reciprocal congenial and generous atmosphere.

There is some evidence to suggest that the residential opportunities have a greater impact on the young people. This seems largely related to the opportunity to take part in a greater number and

variety of activities. It also seems related to the adult volunteers having more opportunity to be in contact with the young people and a natural by-product of this interaction was an increased awareness of environmental issues and the Green Team ethos. The young people particularly liked the residential opportunities because they afforded them more opportunity to get to know one another, to socialise as well as take part in a greater number and variety of activities.

Whether there was any evidence to suggest that volunteers should be trained in environmental education is less convincing. The level and delivery of environmental education varies, it depends on the site, on the activity, on the adult volunteer, whether there is a ranger and whether it is a day or residential opportunity. The young people seem to learn as much when they are with environmental educationalist adult volunteers as when they are not. In other words whether adult volunteers were trained as environmental educationalists or not did not seem to impact on what the young people gained from their experience. Perhaps the question is not whether volunteers should be trained in environmental education but rather how the Green Team use adult volunteers that are environmental educationalists to maximise the opportunities to make best use of their knowledge and skills. The residential activities, due to the greater variety of tasks, sites and amount of time spent with the young people seem to offer more scope for adult volunteers who are trained in environmental education to use their skills and impart their knowledge than the day activities.

Recommendations

- To promote Green Team opportunities to young people it may be useful to draw on what young people state they enjoy most - being outdoors; using tools; doing something worthwhile; learning new things; problem-solving; meeting new people; completing tasks and feeling a sense of achievement.
 - To maximise using the knowledge and skills of volunteers with environmental education qualifications the Green Team may want to use such volunteers strategically for residential opportunities.
- Due to the additional scope of residential opportunities being settings for providing a more in-depth environmental experience and education continuing them would be worthwhile.

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- To increase attendance at residential opportunities it may be useful for the Green Team to draw on the aspects found to be the most enjoyable by the young people - meeting and getting to know new people, socialising through outdoor activities 'the camping out' feel, doing something different from the norm and emphasising that it is only one weekend out of many.
 - A greater variety of games and more opportunity for the young people to choose and lead the games.
- To consider ways of promoting Green Team opportunities to young people not already involved in community service.