

We spent a day in Sydenham Hill Wood, south London, where theories about wellbeing are guiding young people's interactions with our wild places.

London Wildlife Trust’s Keeping it Wild programme helps young people aged 11-25 gain skills for life while conserving the city's wild spaces.

Trainees undertake three-month paid internships at a London Wildlife Trust site. They have the chance to join the Youth Forum, which advises the Trust’s board on how to really embed youth engagement. It plays a vital role in planning, managing and evaluating the project so that it meets the needs of young people.



Volunteer Olga gets involved

We visited Sydenham Hill Wood, south London, on a Wild Action Day. Despite heavy rain, the dedicated trainees showed their passion for conservation by sticking out the day until its waterlogged end.

Trainee Jess said she thought the programme was about: “increasing opportunities for young people who may not have had the chance to experience the natural sector. It’s not the most diverse and many people think it’s not for them.”

Using nature for wellbeing

The day was guided by The Wheel of Wellbeing. Developed by the South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust, The Wheel of Wellbeing offers practical tips to improve your wellbeing by considering Body, Mind, Spirit, People, Place and Planet.

Find out more on the Wheel of Wellbeing website.

Body

"Be active... Your body is designed to move. Physical activities can positively influence the way you think, feel and function."



Lee sawing branches

We met Lee as he sawed through fallen branches to be used as path edges. He told us: "I never had the breaks, I left school with few qualifications. But this has really been a great opportunity, it is great what they are doing across London."

Mind

"Keep learning... Studies are showing that life-long learners are some of the healthiest, happiest people around."



While removing duckweed from the pond, we scooped up a discarded dragonfly nymph shell . We learned that both dragonfly nymphs and dragonflies are carnivorous - the nymph's prey-crunching jaw was the inspiration for the Alien films!

Spirit

"Give... Practicing random acts of kindness, volunteering time, or simply saying ‘thank you’ all work wonders for your wellbeing."



Chantelle at work

Here's Chantelle laying new path edges using fallen branches, fastening them with axe-whittled stakes and wire. We found out that following on from her time with Keeping it Wild, she is about to start a new job as project officer for the Great North Wood Project at London Wildlife Trust.

People

"Connect... Close relationships with friends and family can add up to seven years to our lives. So plan a get-together to connect more with the people around you."



The trainees tuck into homemade pizza

A crackling camp fire had two benefits: cooking homemade calzone pizzas and drying everyone off! The team gathered around for a chat over a much-needed hot drink.

Planet

"Care... Keeping our planet in tip-top shape is the best recipe for world wellbeing. Small positive changes can make a big difference."



Calum clearing the pond

We met Calum clearing duckweed from the wood's Dewy Pond so that oxygen can reach the life below. The release of sulphuric acid generated a questionable odour, but Calum said: "I'd rather be here in the rain with a funky smell than be on my sofa at home." The traineeship solidified his passion for nature, and he'll soon be studying British Wildlife Conservation at Gloucester University.

Place

"Take notice... Noticing nature helps us press the pause button. It reduces the stress of our 21st-century 'hurry-worry' lives."



A moment for mindfulness

Ishmael’s interest in mindfulness lead the team to ask if he could lead an exercise to finish off the day. He told us that mindfulness can combat “unnecessary rumination and unhelpful thoughts, so you can stay more in the present. The sounds and sensations can be more nuanced in nature."

He encouraged fellow trainees to “shut your eyes, distinguish five sounds: this could be the rain coming down, the birds, the breeze occasionally rolling past."

We're feeling better already...

About the project

Keeping It Wild is part of the National Lottery-funded Kick the Dust programme, a series of 12 projects across the UK which are putting young people at the heart of heritage.

London Wildlife Trust is leading on the programme with support and expertise from:

- London Youth
- Headliners (UK)
- John Muir Trust

Funding for natural heritage and projects that involve a wider range of people are both priorities for The National Lottery Heritage Fund. Find out more about what we want your project to achieve.