



*ACEWild; using outdoor learning to raise aspirations and attainment for vulnerable young people at Aylsham High School- a model for further dissemination (Sept 2014 - Oct 2016)*



**Background:** The outdoors and other sustainable development contexts are often far more engaging for vulnerable learners and those that present more challenging behaviour than the traditional 14-19 curriculum. In partnership with Dutch and German colleagues and schools, Aylsham High School (AHS), Goldcrest Outdoor Education and the Environmental and Outdoor Learning Team (EOLT) are piloting ACEWild – an Alternative Curriculum for Education in the Wild. ACEWild is an outdoor learning option, based in school, for more vulnerable young people at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and for those who have a passion to get into the outdoor and environmental industry... but need a little help to achieve their potential.

**What we wanted to achieve:** The Erasmus+, EU funded, NCC led, "ACEWild" project (€124,512) has been developing a package of learning experiences, evaluation methodologies and partnerships approaches that will result in a toolkit and Open Educational Resource (OER) for a school-based (including outreach) alternative curriculum that will be transferable, valuable and accessible to other schools in Norfolk and beyond.

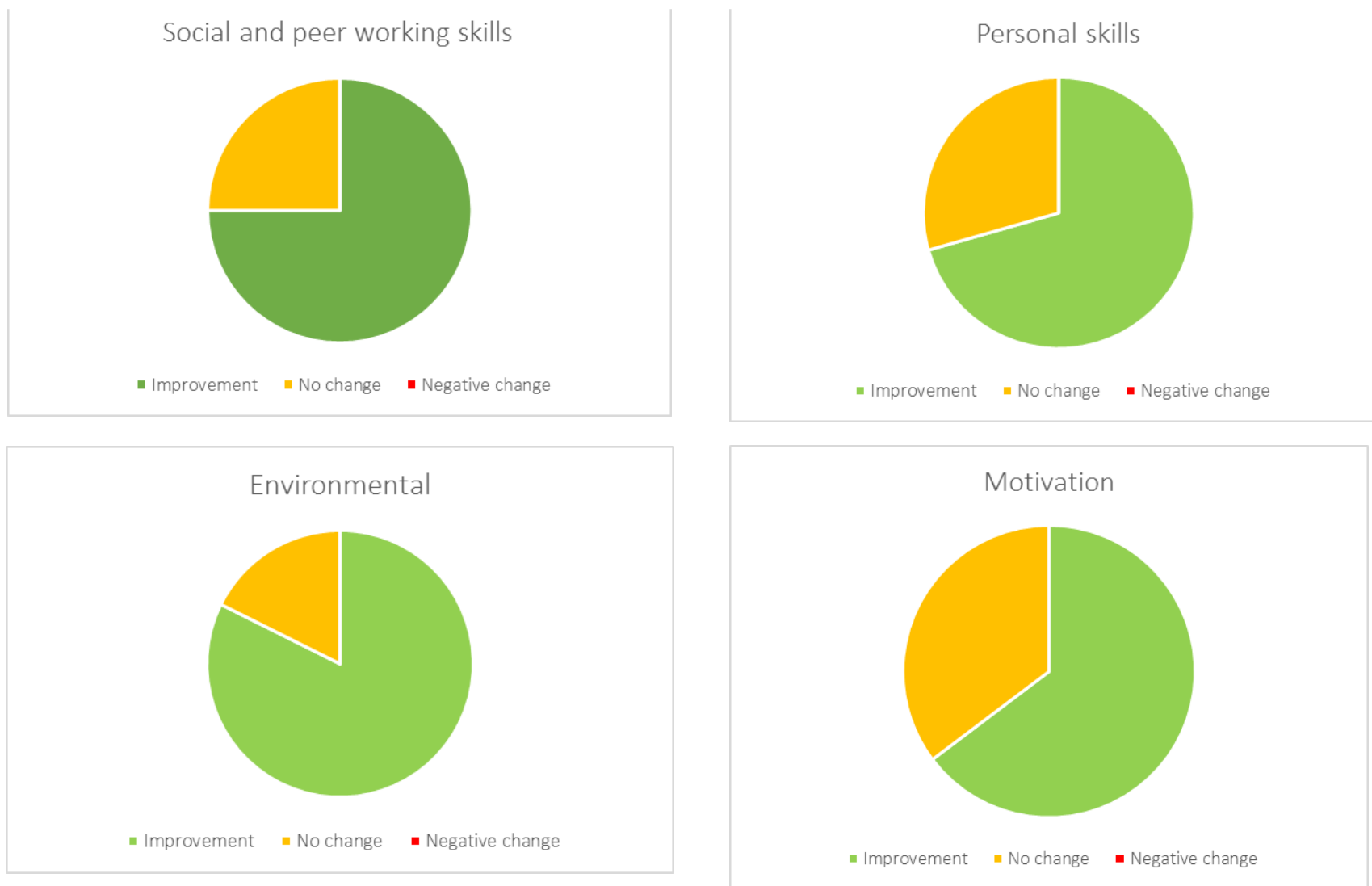
**How we identified the issue:** Through rigorous pupil profiling (involving SDQ analysis, tracking of pupil progress and close interactions with parents and teachers) Aylsham High School (AHS) had identified, at an early stage, those pupils that were at risk of becoming NEET. Traditional classroom interventions had not historically worked for these students, and as Forest School type programmes seemed to improve attendance and behaviour, Senior Leaders agreed to build on the research and pilots to engage in a formal, joint, EU-funded project. Partners are focused on how well-planned and targeted environmental and outdoor learning programmes can improve self-confidence, motivation and well-being. To this end we are exploring how outdoor learning options for year 7 and year 9/10 students can **demonstrably** improve outcomes and thus for the programme to be relevant to schools beyond Aylsham.

**What we did and how we did it:** Based on our previous work together, AHS employed a part-time tutor who designed and lead an outdoor learning course, with a view to linking the opportunities to appropriate, accredited qualifications. Whilst offered to all students, those most vulnerable students (potential NEETs) were actively encouraged to participate. Two groups were formed (with approx. 8 students in each), each with a dedicated learning support assistant. For 5 hours each week, students participated in a range of practical horticultural, environmental and bushcraft activities, plus animal husbandry. This was mainly within school grounds, but with lots of opportunity to work alongside potential employers and outdoor/environmental specialists, both on and off-site. For 12 weeks of this course, from January to March 2015, research partners piloted a variety of tools to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of this type of learning on pupils' well-being and their Personal, Environmental, Motivational and Social (PEMS) skills and attitudes.

**What has the impact been?** a) Figure 1 shows that **75% of the group improved their personal and social skills** and their environmental awareness during the 12 week period; b) Figure 2 shows that the **group's self-esteem rose dramatically** throughout the period from low to high, accompanied by **improvements in resilience, emotional well-being and life satisfaction**; c) Looking at pupil case studies (Figure 3) we notice the positive impact the outdoor learning course had on individuals; d) we have some key learning outcomes ourselves (project team) when reflecting on the process of evaluation and how the different methods work to both inform and focus our work in order to maximise the impact for individual students to improve their life chances. Finally; e) that research partnerships and formal collaboration between schools and other organisations can enable significant development in practice for all.

**What we want to do next:** Currently there is a second phase of piloting the approach with both the Aylsham Nurture group (Eagles) and year 9 students. Building on this, partners will **consolidate learning** (across UK, Dutch and German schools and the specialist organisations involved), **finalise the tool-kit** (which will include: process flow diagram; trialled and tested evaluation techniques; activity ideas with learning outcomes; safety, quality and sustainability guidance for both schools and the local specialist organisations that they link with to provide experiences; curriculum maps of the most relevant qualifications; cohort and individual student case studies; an economic model that shares the social return on financial investment / cost-benefit) and finally; **disseminate what we have learnt**. The package, which will be fully accessible on a website, will be launched with a conference at **Aylsham High on the 19th April '16**. Beyond this the partnership will support the transference of the model into 1 other school before offering the training programmes more widely. The new website will be; [www.acewild.eu](http://www.acewild.eu) For more information please contact; Susan Falch-Lovesey (NCC) [susan.falch-lovesey@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:susan.falch-lovesey@norfolk.gov.uk) or Steve Askew (Aylsham) [saskew@aylshamhigh.norfolk.sch.uk](mailto:saskew@aylshamhigh.norfolk.sch.uk)




**Figure 1: Vulnerable young people at Aylsham High School - how the group's skills and behaviours changed during 12 weeks of outdoor learning (ACE Wild Action Research Period, Jan – Mar 2015)**



Results derived from analysis of three evaluation tools: PEMS, SDQ questionnaires & teacher observations: Jan 2015 – Mar 2015

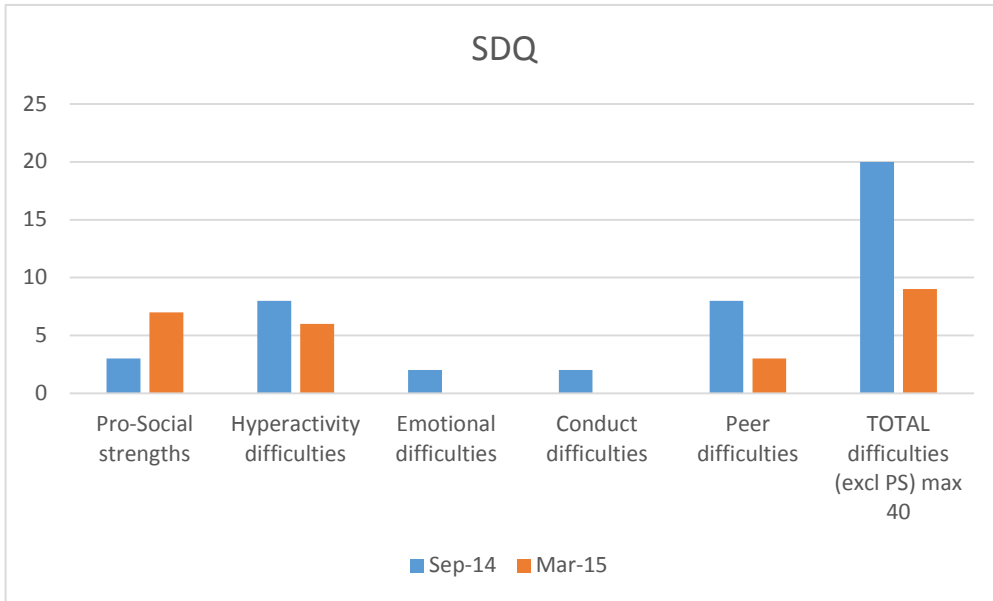


Figure 2: Vulnerable young people at Aylsham High School - how the group's Well-Being changed during 12 weeks of outdoor learning (ACE Wild Action Research Period, Jan – Mar 2015)

Level compared to national average	January 2015	March 2015
	<b>High</b> Community satisfaction	<b>High</b> self-esteem; emotional well-being; community and life satisfaction
	<b>Medium</b> Emotional well-being; satisfaction with friends, school and life	<b>Medium</b> resilience; satisfaction with friends and school
	<b>Low</b> resilience, self-esteem	

Using the New Philanthropy Capital measure of Well-Being [www.well-beingmeasure.com](http://www.well-beingmeasure.com)

**Figure 3: Case Study – Child A, Year 9**



A's Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) indicated that his overall **difficulties** - emotional, conduct, hyperactivity and working with peers - were **very high** at the start of the outdoor learning course. Six months later, these difficulties were greatly reduced to bring A's score **close to normal** for his age group. His **pro-social strengths had more than doubled**. These changes were observed during normal school lessons in addition to the outdoor learning sessions, indicating that the skills developed had been **transferred back to the classroom**.



"A has been increasingly more willing to share his opinions with others and voice his concerns to me. This is a massive improvement from last year, when he would cry if unhappy and not inform anyone of why he was upset. His confidence and self-esteem have definitely improved."

*Form tutor comments (Mar 15)*



"A has definitely shown an improvement in his social skills and confidence- a combination of support, being allowed to get on with tasks, being trusted and being given space to develop. Just taking care not to step in too early to support him - gave him space to make some mistakes and learn from them."

*Outdoor Learning tutor (Mar 15)*