



**September 2017**

## **64 & 66. Family Forest Tots – In partnership with The Cass Foundation**



Starting in late September and running for seven weeks, a Family Forest Tots programme took place at Rice Lane City Farm in partnership with The Cass Foundation. Situated in the heart of busy North Liverpool, Rice Lane City Farm boasts 14 acres of wonderful woodland so secluded that you could be forgiven for mistaking the area for the countryside. The farm is a community led initiative located in an area steeped in local history. This provided the perfect setting to offer a programme with the purpose of engaging the very youngest members of the community.

Demand was so high that the programme was split into two cohorts, Monday morning (11 adults, 13 children) and Wednesday morning (9 adults, 11 children). The sessions were delivered in line with previous Forest School programmes, with a focus on enabling all participants, young and old, the opportunity to experience a freedom to play, and discover nature leading to a range of health and wellbeing benefits. Natural play is recognised as a great way to increase physical activity

levels. Couple that with an immersion in the natural environment which reduces stress and you have a powerful form of therapy that can be accessed at any time, completely free of charge! The self-led sessions included activities such as den building, knot-tying, group games, cooking over fires, and creating seasonal crafts with natural materials. Bringing young children together, who have yet to experience formal education, enabled them a wonderful opportunity to socialise with other children of a similar age. These interactions are critical for the social development of children and will form the basis of how they develop and maintain relationships throughout their lifetime.

### **Feedback**

The seven-week programme was incredibly well received by parents, carers and children alike. Anecdotal feedback really highlighted just how much the participants enjoyed and benefitted from all the activities they experienced during their time in the woods, as well as what aspects of the programme they intended to continue away from the farm. In order to capture the crucial anecdotal feedback about individual experiences of the programme a “Tell us what you think” form was circulated amongst parents and carers. The form comprised a number of questions to be completed at the discretion of the individual. The questions and a selection of responses are outlined below.



### **Q1. What were some of the benefits of the sessions for your family as a whole?**

A lady who cares for three children said:

*“I think just the fact we were outside in the fresh air was beneficial, we would look through photos when we got home which would promote discussion about our day and share our experiences with parents at home time”*

Time in the outdoors was a recurring theme amongst respondents:

*“Got us outdoors... engaged with nature”*

*“We have loved being outdoors”*

*“Being outdoors together – exploring... enjoying and encouraging the wonder of nature”*

## **Q2. What were some of the benefits of the sessions for your children?**

Responses to this question focused on the important social aspect, and exposing the children to new experiences of what nature has to offer:

*“The children loved being outside and with the other children, learning new things and they loved making things with natural ‘products’”*

*“Being around other children around [the] same age”*

*“Harry has loved forest school; he’s loved playing with other children of similar age and all the activities.”*

*“...to mix with children, without toys or devices... [to be] able to explore and do things they don’t normally do... get dirty.”*

*“My little boy loves being outside therefore learning about the outdoors and teaching him new ways to play was really important for me. He enjoyed making new friends with the other children and all the different activities, as well as getting messy.”*



**Q3. What were some of the benefits of the session for you as a parent or carer?**

Responses to this question highlighted just how parents and carers experienced benefits similar to those reported for the children:

*“... I have enjoyed forest school very much, it’s been nice meeting other parents, nans etc., also I have learnt a lot and been given lots of ideas re making things with leaves, sticks, muck etc.”*

*“I have enjoyed being outdoors; I feel more relaxed and have enjoyed meeting new people.”*

*“...get away from the hustle and bustle of everyday”*

*“I enjoyed watching and taking part in the fun, messy activities. It has taught me how to build a fire... [and] that me and my little boy can have fun anywhere without toys i.e. playing ‘can’t catch me Mr Wolf’, making things out of just twigs and string (a witches broom).”*

*“Learning to slow my pace to match my toddlers, to give him the time to explore and have fun without the usual rush!”*



**Q4. What did you enjoy most about the sessions?**

*"I enjoyed meeting new people, some of whom I'd like to stay in touch with and continue a friendship... I also enjoyed learning new things that hopefully I'll remember forever."*

*"Being outdoors"*

*"All the different activities and games... Harry having lots of fun"*

*"Watching the children have fun... the fresh air"*

**Q5. What aspects of the programme will you continue following?**

*"Getting out more, regardless of the weather... walking in the outdoors"*

*"I will use what I have learnt when my son and I go camping – getting a fire started and the outdoor games. I will also spend more time at the park when we go, collecting twigs and leaves to make things at home such as a broom or wand."*

*"More trips out to Rice Lane City Farm – walking around rest of the grounds – normally just visit the farm."*

**Q6. Anything else you would like to tell us?**

*"When is the next one?? We loved it, Kate and Annick were fantastic!"*

*"If you do another Forest School we'd love to come back!"*

*"We have thoroughly enjoyed the programme. It was exciting, fun, interactive and run excellently by the staff, we have fab memories from this adventure, they will last forever. Thank you so much."*

*"I've got so much from this course and the facilitators were so friendly and helpful always putting everyone at ease and making us feel very much part of the group... being able to bring the children I look after was great, they may not have otherwise been able to attend."*