**ReadME File WP 3.5**

**The Language of Trees**

**Introduction**

This project was a sub-work-package within WP3 of the UKRI-NERC funded ‘Voices of the Future: Collaborating with Young People to reimagine Treescapes’ [NE/V021370/1].

The **aim** of this particular sub-project is to explore how treescapes were experienced by families with young children, creating a broad and inclusive answer to the question ‘what can happen between children and trees?’. The focus was on the opportunities treescapes offer, and on how treescapes might underpin early childhood curriculum and support wellbeing and communication for young children. This work involved a move away from spoken language in favour of embodied, and place-situated forms of knowing and experiencing treescapes together.

There will be a digital / physical resource aimed at early years educators to convey key findings from the project and their implications for working with young children in this area, together with a series of academic publications.

**Fieldwork**

The field work was carried out during a 14 month period, between July 2022 and September 2023, in an urban community in northern England. Ethical approval was received from Manchester Metropolitan University.

**Methods**

Figure 1 below summarises the range of methods and approaches we took to create open ended opportunities for families to playfully be in the vicinity of trees. We worked with community partners to set up invitational sessions involving art, walking and play in the vicinity of trees. We employed participatory observation as a methodological approach, collecting a dataset of fieldnotes and visual data as outlined below.

Overall, the sub workpackage worked with 19 children over the course of 14 months. This involved 13 field visits. The resultant data set included 16 sets of written fieldnotes (created by four different members of the research team) and a small collection of still photographs and video footage. Our aim was for the photographs and video footage to capture the activities, places, art works created and the general action during the sessions, rather than to show identifiable children Visual data was intended as an accompaniment to the fieldnotes, rather than a standalone dataset to be analysed in its own right.

Overall, the dataset illustrated the wide range of predominantly embodied ways in which children encountered, played with, and created relations with trees and other aspects of the natural environment. Time and an invitational stance, with the aim of creating space for child-led encounters, were identified as key to facilitating these kinds of rich encounters.

**Summary of the files in WP 3.5 fieldwork folder:**

This folder contains the following 3 image files.

Wp3.5 image 1. Young child making marks of leaves using posco pens.

Wp3.5 image 2 Young child mark making and adding leaves and twigs to a tray of clay.

Wp3.5 image 3 Ribbons decorated with felt tips and tied into the trees during the final fieldwork session.

All images were taken by Steve Pool during the Summer 2023 (see figure 1 for details) portion of the fieldwork.

Figure 1: summary of the fieldwork that underpinned this sub work package.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Small woodland and park space with a playground** | **Large urban park near the centre of town** | **Wider engagement** |
|  | *In partnership with a local authority run playgroup* | *In partnership with a local authority run playgroup* | *In partnership with a range of community organisations, community run playgroup and the wildlife trust.* |
| Spring / Summer 2022 | A summer picnic, scavenger hunt and and walk in the woodland local to the playgroup venue. |  | A range of pop up events where children were invited to gather ‘autumn treasure’ (fallen leaves, twigs, seeds) and craft with them. Various locations including an indoor playgroup, local parks and greenspaces. |
| Autumn 2022 | Returned to the same woodland for an autumn ‘lamplit’ walk where families made small lanterns and carried them through the woods. |
| Winter 2022 | At the same woodland, we ran a Winter Wonderland walk, including a treasure trail, hot chocolate and a gift for every child. |  | |
| Spring 2023 | Spring woodland walk in the same woods. |
| Summer 2023 | Final summer walk and celebration picnic in the wood. | 4 regular sessions in the park over the summer holidays. These were arts sessions, culminating in a celebration event with outdoor exhibition of the work the families produced.  Activities included clay, mark making with crayons and charcoal, scavenger hunt, music and gathering natural materials. |  |