



Centre for Living
Sustainability

Ionad
Seasmhachd Bheò

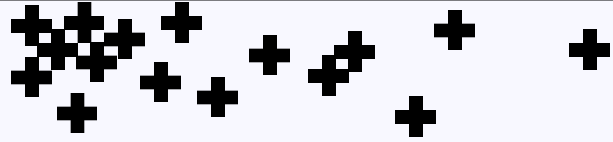


Community Woodlands as springboard for youth employability and entrepreneurship

Sharing learning from a case study with Abriachan Forest Trust

Dr Lalith Welamedage, Centre for Living Sustainability

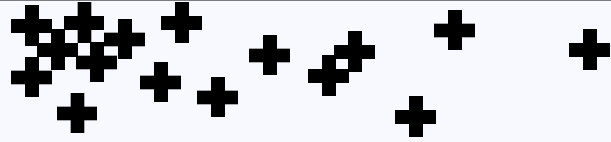
Suzann Barr, Abriachan Forest Trust



Introduction

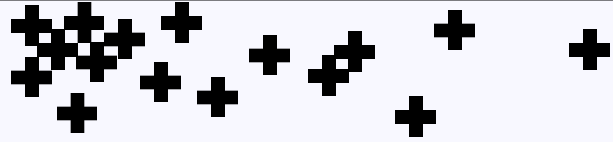
- Funded by UHI Knowledge Exchange Programme, this research was undertaken by UHI CLS in collaboration with Abriachan Forest Trust (AFT) between November 2022 to August 2023.
- Focused on the participants of young learners' programme, aiming to document their learning journeys and the support they received for employability and entrepreneurship skill development.
- Explored how young people can contribute to achieving global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), emphasising the broader societal importance and impact.
- AFT trainers/instructors acted as researchers, working closely with young learners to highlight their skills development and support experiences.





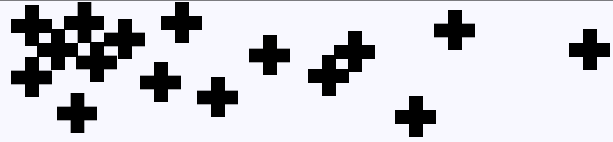
About the Programme

- The programme emphasises practical life skills crucial for employment and entrepreneurship.
- Students improve woodworking skills, craft tools and structures, and learn campfire cooking.
- They also acquire skills such as tool usage, woodworking, and documentation, transferrable to diverse work environments.
- The programme inculcates discipline, ensuring proper tool storage, and encourages documentation with words and pictures, often using ICT.



About the Programme

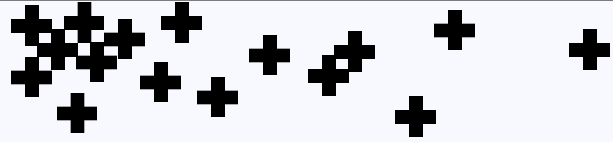
- Over the past 20 years, more than 70 pupils from local schools have taken part in the FOLA or Rural Skills outdoor learning programmes.
- The majority of these pupils have successfully completed the course modules, proven to be highly beneficial for developing life and employability skills.
- More than 20 of these young people are now working in land-based employment in the local area as fencers, stalkers, a fish farm, drystone dykers, on wind farms and working in forestry – a couple as consultants and others in harvesting and as tree planters.



Research Highlights

- AFT young learners programme demonstrates how local and marginalised youth could be empowered through a meaningful engagement.
- Exploring how youth entrepreneurship in land-based enterprises can benefit community projects at both regional and global levels.
- Aligned with SDGs it showcased the broader impact on sustainable development.
- Qualitative and quantitative data was collected from AFT personnel, young learners and key informants from support services.
- Research study offers some valuable lessons for the broader implementation by the woodland communities.





Here are some of the thoughts shared by young learners...

"I have learned to work on my own to finish tasks."

"We now know which types of wood are good for different jobs."

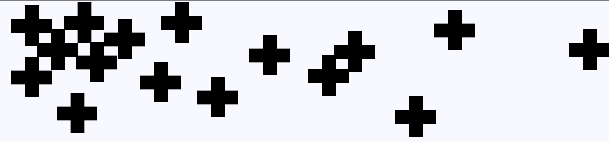
"I even got a job offer at a local pub, and my confidence has gone up".

"We learned a good variety of tasks and jobs."

"I earned FOLA and John Muir Awards."

"We have become better at working together as a team."





Here are some of the thoughts shared by stakeholders.....

The programme positively impacts students' mental health, well-being, confidence, communication, and self-esteem.

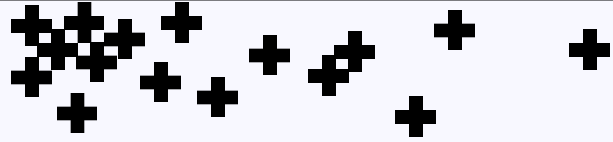
The programme effectively nurtured social and technical skills among the participants.

The programme boosts confidence and provides a platform for students to thrive in their areas of interest.

It enhances employability and entrepreneurial skills, nurturing a love for the environment and sustainability.

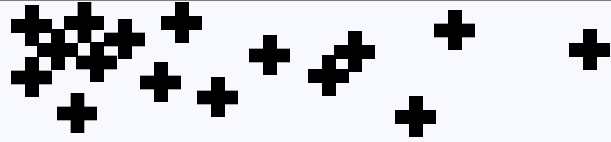
Stakeholders praise the dedication and expertise of the AFT team, which makes the programme effective.





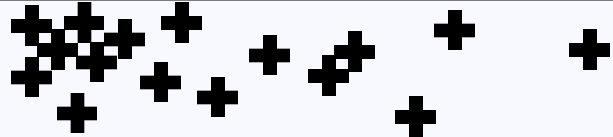
Challenges

- Challenges in engaging all youth due to diverse needs and interests. This variability makes consistent engagement a challenge, with latecomers, dropouts, and distractions hindering participation.
- Not having enough data to see how well the programme is doing and making sure it is accessible to everyone.
- Accessibility of outdoor education facilities, often in rural areas, poses issues for parents and youth.
- Getting funding and transportation can be difficult, but AFT and stakeholders are working on finding solutions.



Opportunities and future direction

- While the programme does not directly address mental health, it can indirectly benefit mental well-being by connecting children with nature and the outdoors.
- Effective programme evaluation is essential to gauge impact and effectiveness.
- Providing outdoor learning opportunities for children and young people in the Highlands is promising.
- Collaboration across urban and rural areas is vital for the effectiveness of programme of this nature, along with flexibility in decision-making.
- Collaboration between AFT and educational institutions ensures smooth programme integration.
- Refining the programme model, securing funding, and expanding its reach demonstrate commitment.
- Addressing concerns of academically ambitious students and maintaining programme growth are priorities.



Discussion & Feedback

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**Thank you
Tapadh leibh**