



Walker Challenge Adult Group's Flotsam & Jetsam Tour



Life changing art experiences

In summer 2011, Walker Challenge adult group began working towards their Discovery John Muir Award, supported by Mobex North East. Through the medium of photography and using litter collected from Northumberland's beautiful coastline, the group's work culminated in an inspiring exhibition entitled 'The Flotsam and Jetsam Tour'. The exhibition was seen by over 30,000 people and the group hoped it would inspire others to enjoy and look after their local environment.



Feeling better outdoors

Throughout the project the team engaged in activities that they would not normally do like hiking and bird watching. This helped them to appreciate the outdoors and get to know each other better. Through spending time in the natural world, they felt the benefits to their physical and mental health. ***"Being outside makes us relax, just by being in the middle of nowhere. I don't feel so lazy and I'm keen to go out more now"*** William, participant



The group walked an impressive forty miles in total; taking more exercise than they had ever done before. An afternoon with a marine biologist from Natural England taught the group about the creatures they found when rock pooling and how easily this delicate eco system could be destroyed by litter. Working with the National Trust added to the wider impact of the group's work. The National Trust ranger taught them how to protect native plants. They removed nineteen bags of Red Hot Pokers and Oriental Poppies.



Confidence to make a difference

Enjoying and taking responsibility for the coastline built up new confidences within the team. ***"Conserving nature, learning the damage that the red hot pokers do because they're an alien species, we had to hunt them down...we've been up close to nature and now I want to get more involved in protecting the environment"***. Craig, participant

Craig was inspired by the tour to research more. He spent time online and went to his local library in his own time, where he discovered the disturbing effects of pollution at sea. He put together a presentation to focus on this problem. For the first time in his life Craig stood up in front of over thirty people and presented his findings as part of the exhibition opening.



'Litterally' sharing

Whilst walking along the coast, the group imagined how their exhibition would look. ***"I was walking along the hills in view of Dunstanburgh Castle and I was picking up rubbish everywhere, I was looking for some big pieces to use in my artwork. I couldn't believe we even found a freezer and a cooker on the beach!"*** reflected Brian. They discussed how their creations could raise awareness of pollution by inviting members of the public to see what they had found. Teachers, students, outdoor leaders and members of the public attended their event in the Holy Biscuit Factory, a community art space in a converted church. Exhibition highlights included:

- a beautiful giant sea turtle made from multicoloured plastic collected from the beach
- an old fishing rod up-cycled as a mobile
- bird's nests using fishing net found tangled in seaweed
- a 'for sale' stall of waste material, including pieces from as far away as Spain!
- a map of the route walked with 'memories of Northumberland seaside visits' posted



Local MP for Newcastle East, Nick Brown came along to see the group's brilliant sculptures and thought provoking displays. He presented the team with their John Muir Award certificates. When addressing the group, Nick said ***"It's wonderful to see art that has real meaning and is so thought provoking. Through your work you've highlighted pollution in our oceans, a very important issue – all power to you."*** MP, Nick Brown

Danny Gilchrist, Project Director for Mobex North East, points out how the John Muir Award benefits people with mental health difficulties, ***"The John Muir Award helps to give them focus; it provides them with confidence to talk about the environment and improves their communication skills. This exhibition shows how the group have come on hugely since they began in June"***.

What next?

Since the Holy Biscuit exhibit in September 2011, the group secured space in Newcastle City Library where over 30,000 people visited the display. Inspired by the project, the group have become volunteers themselves within the Newcastle community to build on their new found confidence. Walker Adult group is now sourcing funding in 2012 to enable more adults in inner city Newcastle to experience wild places, this time in Northumberland National Park.