



## Glantawe Outdoor Education Academy

Innovative Communities

### CONNECTING NATURE WITH THE COMMUNITY

While most young people follow a conventional education, some individuals become disengaged with school and need encouragement.

In 2020, registered charity Pontardawe Arena saw the opportunity to create and develop a programme to help disengaged young persons in the local area build self-confidence in a favourable environment that was beyond the classroom and beyond the curriculum.

The Glantawe Outdoor Education Academy programme, which aimed to develop interdisciplinary skills through direct experience, would encourage young people to think creatively, while celebrating their unique skills and talents and giving them the opportunity to re-connect with the natural world.

Based outdoors on the 25-acre Glantawe Riverside Park, Pontardawe, and with a wide range of subjects, the programme's courses would help develop pupils' interests in many areas not covered by conventional education. Working with entire year groups, disengaged secondary school pupils would take part in the programme, while primary school children would also receive help to develop resilience and reduce disengagement.

Catering for all abilities and all ages, the programme would help raise awareness of individual and collective responsibilities, building lasting relationships, and celebrate the uniqueness of every individual.

### BENEFITS OF THE FUNDING

In 2021, under LEADER's Innovative Communities theme, the Glantawe Outdoor Education Academy project received £72,059 of funding through the Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020, which is funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Welsh Government.

With the funding the academy was able to fund lead practitioners to deliver key school programmes for all ages. The project has reported great success with the primary school programmes, having piloted natural environmental contact for entire year groups over the academic year. Children have exhibited a positive change compared to other year groups in terms of behaviour, attendance and classroom achievement.

Also benefiting from the programme are secondary schools pupils. Since participating in the programme, pupils have achieved national Level 2 qualifications, when initially the expectation for them to succeed was low. Appropriate Agored Cymru qualifications are also now successfully embedded in future programmes.

As part of the programme activities, young people have also engaged in enterprise projects, which involved researching and completing building and manufacturing projects using recycled materials.



The natural environment has also benefited from the programme. In an ever-expanding team, volunteers contribute to the park upkeep. In 2019, the final phase in land clearance took place to allow natural grassland and plants to grow. Developing a mixed habitat in the parkland has been an essential element of the project, to encourage visitor numbers and wildlife. A plant identification programme has started, to identify and protect rare species such as Spotted, Marsh and Gymnadenia orchids.

With the end to Covid-19 lockdowns, a community garden project was also established with an edible garden and polytunnel. Volunteers from the surrounding area work twice a week maintaining and nurturing the plants that the children and young people can enjoy and learn where food comes from.

**"I am delighted to watch the unique partnership between the industrial and ecological aspects of this area strengthen day by day. While a business needs a sound foundation to grow, so does an ecosystem."**

Sarah, Glantawe gardening volunteer



## THE FUTURE'S BRIGHT...

Glantawe Riverside Park is now a beautiful parkland area and a source of pride and pleasure to the local community. The project has contributed positively to the wellbeing and education of many children and young people in the Neath Port Talbot area.

Since the project began, the Glantawe Outdoor Education Academy project has exceeded its expectations regarding its initial objectives and is now a centre of excellence.

**"Having been involved with the project since the beginning, over 12 years ago, I have seen it evolve and develop into something truly amazing. We are delighted with the success of the outdoor education programme and even more so seeing the site develop into what it is today.**

**"Initially, the programme had a slow start, but it gave us time to gain a deeper insight into how we could strengthen it and make it as effective as possible. Now the demand for our programme has become even greater than we had ever hoped.**

**"While our activities take place outdoors, it's heart-warming to see the positive results appear in the classroom. We believe that re-connecting to the natural world not only enhances a sense of well-being, but by spending time outside and being physically active, it makes learning more engaging and interesting.**

**"I think the most encouraging aspect we've seen as a result of the programme is that previous participants have returned and are passing the skills they have learned on to others. Our volunteers also gain valuable transferable personal skills while maintaining the parkland. It shows that given the opportunity and with gentle encouragement, young people do care about making a difference to their lives, the environment and the wider community."**

Robert Clapham, founder and past chairman