

Machanhill Primary School

– Larkhall Cluster –

The Polli:Nation project at Machanhill Primary School is a great example of the benefits of networking and partnering with local community groups to enhance outdoor learning and improve pollinators habitat.



Figure 1. Pupils planting a meadow

“There are lots of people 'out there' who have a wealth of knowledge and experience and I have found them more than willing to support our projects”.

Lead Teacher

Machanhill Primary School, one of the schools led by Larkhall Academy, has approached the Polli:Nation project involving different local community groups of supporting them to undertake a range of activities that enhance and improve the presence of pollinators in its playground.

The project has led to a big change in children’s attitudes about what they can actually do to help achieving positive changes in their local environment. Having been involved this far, they are very motivated by practical activities outdoors. However, working with local volunteers, community groups and visitors has also had a great impact on their enthusiasm, confidence and commitment.



“The Polli:Nation project makes me want to go into the woods when I’m older, or even now, with my friends or family, and go out camping, and explore the wildlife”.

P6 Pupil

How have they encouraged pollinators?

The creation of habitats through new areas on the school grounds has been the main thrust for creating a more natural environment for pollinators.

The school grounds has been improved by: building four large planters filled with bulbs, planting over twenty mini planters with bedding plants around the school and carrying out some vertical planting on the school’s wall.

The whole school has been involved in developing the school grounds and some teachers have taken their classes outdoors to undertake different activities such as planting flowers in the flowering tubs or helping to fill the large raised beds/planters with soil and compost.

The help and advice from the local Community Growers have played a relevant role in the development of the project, particularly in the creation of an orchard for the school. Some classes visited the local orchard in the Clyde Valley and the Community Growers allotment to learn about soil and planting; both visits were really helpful in advising how to plant and look after the new orchard.



Figure 2. Large planters filled with bulbs

As a result of the success getting additional funds, the school has built a polytunnel with the help of the volunteers from Community Growers. This polytunnel is now completed and ready for sowing, growing and harvesting a variety of plants that exist within and outwith the school grounds.



Figure 3. P1s planting up the mini planters

Machanhill Primary School project was also supported by South Lanarkshire Council through a visit by the co-ordinator for the planting of wild flower corridors in the area. This visit provided the school with good advice about planting wildflowers in school and in the park next to the school, and also on how and when to collect wild flower seeds and grow them in the polytunnel.



Benefits to the school

The implementation of the project and the development of its activities have had an important impact on the wider school. However, the biggest changes have been observed in individuals who belonged to the Polli:Nation team. This team was made up of pupils who have some learning or emotional difficulties, in order to work with them on relationship building, positive behavioural choices and teamwork and also to meet the needs of learners who find classroom settings difficult. Related to these pupils, the main benefits that have been observed are improved attendance, commitment and enhanced resilience.

As a consequence of the project's success, the school is now leading a working party to develop and introduce a programme of study for outdoor education.

“Indoor maths is challenging but out of doors they did not appreciate that they were actually still doing maths and accomplishing it very well”.
Lead Teacher

“When I was a little kid, I used to go round and hurt a lot of insects, but now I understand how important bees and other insects are”

P6 Pupil

Challenges

Leading the pollination project in Machanhill Primary School has proved challenging in terms of time. School life can be incredibly busy and day-to-day responsibilities hinder the development of new projects or activities, especially those that imply researching new fields or methodologies.

The networking and partnering with local community groups such as Clyde and Avon Valley Landscape

Partnership, Larkhall Community Growers, Clyde Valley Orchards, South Lanarkshire Council and last but not least Learning through Landscape/Grounds for Learning have helped to implement the project successfully and also to encourage the school staff to looking for ways to extend what the children can do into the community and work with others to improve the prospects for pollinators.



Figure 4. Pupils building a wood structure for climbing plants.

The future

Machanhill Primary School is looking forward to extending their planting down at Larkhall train station by planting wildflowers on an empty patch. This project will be supported by Keep Scotland Beautiful, ScotRail and their biodiversity fund.

Starting in August 2017, the project 'Adopt a path' will allow the school to plant beyond the school boundaries. They have already made contact with Keep Scotland Beautiful who has advised them on how to take this initiative forward and also with Beautiful Bothwell, who has shared their success at reducing dog fouling with their 'bag it and bin it' dog poo bag dispensers.

“After doing this project, I would like to plant loads of flowers in my garden, and get a greenhouse for growing vegetables...”
P7 Pupil



Figure 5. Volunteers from Community Gardens building polytunnel

