

## Learning Outside of the Classroom

How outdoor learning and adventures can benefit and inspire students with special needs.

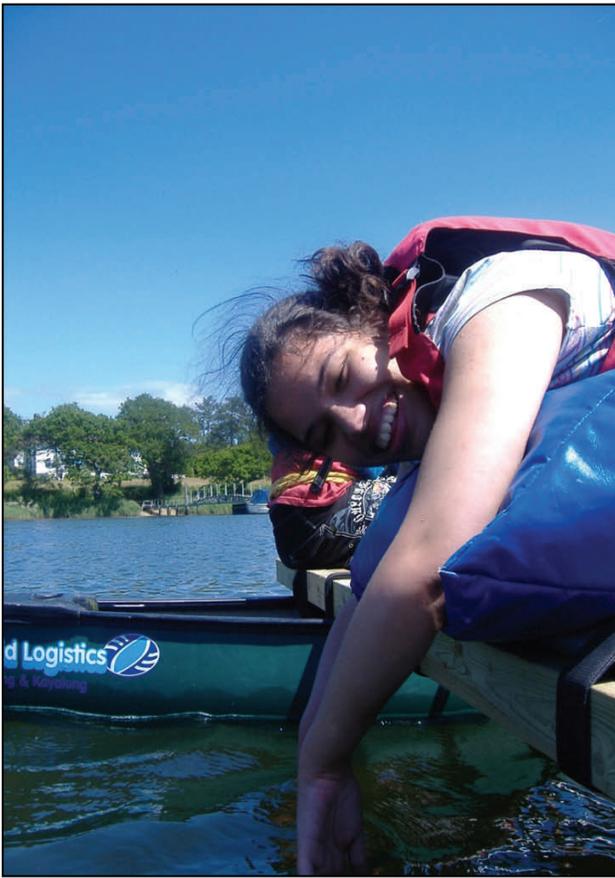
This summer Russell Walker took a group of students for a residential field-trip. Here he shares his experience and stresses the benefits of learning outside the classroom.

Pitching tents, catching Jelly fish, cycling 5 miles, singing songs around the camp fire and swimming in the sea are not the things that students from special schools generally get to experience. Yet these are just some of the things that a group of ten intrepid students from Linden Lodge School (Multi Disability Visually Impaired) got up to when they visited the New Forest for a field trip in June this

year. Despite being away from their normal lives and out of their comfort zones, the students rose to the challenge and flourished in the outdoor environment. By the end of the week the student's showed increased confidence, greater understanding of nature and a keener awareness of their surroundings, while all the time having fun.

Although for mainstream schools the use of field studies has been widespread, it appears that this has not been the case with our special schools. It couldn't be a better time to realise the potential benefits, an objective shared by the DfES:

"We believe that every young person should experience the



were brave enough to catch the Moon Jelly fish in their hands.

“The Jelly fish were really slimey”

(Sarah – aged 16)

Whilst away, group leader Tim Richmond (AST & SSCO) observed that

“The students were staying focussed for longer compared to being in the classroom”.

Not only this, but you could see their self confidence growing with each new task undertaken.

sea. Allowing Sarah to access all aspects of the trip.

“I must admit I felt nervous about the hoisting for Sarah but once I had seen it, it was no different to being back at school”.

(Anne O’Shea - Support staff).

Canoeing presented us with a huge challenge. How do we make Sarah as comfortable as possible yet make sure she is in the best position to fully participate? We rigged a trampoline between the rafted canoes and Sarah was positioned on a bean bag. This allowed her to stretch out in various positions and fully experience the environment she was travelling through rather than being wedged into, and low down in a canoe.

world beyond the classroom as an essential part of learning and personal development, whatever their age, **ability** or circumstances”.

With this in mind, the group journeyed to Brockenhurst and spent the afternoon pitching their tents and settling into their camp for the week. After dinner, which included the strawberries handpicked en route, the group huddled around the camp fire singing songs, keeping the other campers awake.

Throughout the week two teams were in competition to find and identify as many different types of flora and fauna as possible. For Tuesday’s River Study Day we travelled along the river Beaulieu in Canadian canoes and team members won points if they

During the Forest Study Day the group cycled a 5 mile loop, stopping frequently to study what was around them. Photos were taken, samples collected where appropriate, to study back in the Laboratory during the evening’s journal time. Other challenges for the teams included climbing a tree as a group so that each member was off ground and Mark won the ‘King of the Mountains’ following his heroic push on the ‘Col de Brockenhurst’.

Getting our student’s out and participating in regular outdoor learning is not without its difficulties. For this trip a fold-away hoist enabled us to safely transfer Sarah from her wheelchair into her tent, onto the canoe, bike and into the

Russell Walker  
 (B.Ed Hons/ PG Dip)  
 Experienced special needs teacher.  
 Russell continues to teach in special schools across the PMLD, SLD, ASD (VI & MSI) range.  
 Russell holds a B.Ed Hons degree in Outdoor & Science Education; other relevant outdoor qualifications.  
 Russell’s previous roles: Educational Visits Coordinator, PE Coordinator. Head of the PE & Swimming department.



"It was great to work with Russell to develop innovative ways of gaining access to the water for wheelchair users".

(Richard Pearsall – Director of Liquid Logistics – AALA licensed provider).

The Shoreline Study Day at Lepe Country Park involved a close up examination of 'life' found on the beach at low tide and the plants found higher up on the cliff. Team Beaulieu were relentless in their commitment to the competition, all of their team members earning points for fully submerging in the sea whilst collecting different species of seaweed.

Friday was all about completing the journals, breaking camp, celebration time and begrudgingly heading back to school. On departure the student's were asked what was best about the week, here are some of their responses:

Interested in a Senmove Outdoors trip?

Contact: Russell Walker

info@senmove.org  
07739174949

www.senmove.org (under construction)

Senmove includes:  
Senmove Trampoline; Senmove Practitioner; and Senmove Outdoors.



"Finding things in the woods" (Mark - aged 15)

"Marshmallows" (Dave- aged 13)

"Touching the Jellyfish" (Kate - aged 13)

"Food" (Doug - aged 14)

"Swimming in the sea" (Paul - aged 13)

"Climbing the tree" (Francesca – aged 14)

This week away has confirmed something that I always suspected, that teaching outdoors is perfectly natural. The students are motivated because it is experiential, enjoyable and 'hands on'. Their learning is not something that has to be 'endured', as they often feel is the case in the classroom.

Perhaps it is time to begin using the outdoor classroom on a regular basis?

Senmove Outdoors™ will:

Research a suitable location and venue anywhere in the UK appropriate to your group.

Plan, arrange and lead your trip.

Prepare all paperwork, including: risk assessment, approval forms, consent forms and 'to do' lists.

"This was my first time leading a residential trip, having Russell guide me through the paperwork was invaluable".  
Tim Richmond (Group Leader).