



WONDERING ALLOWED

DEVELOPING AN EARLY YEARS PROGRAMME AT THE EDEN PROJECT
ESPECIALLY FOR UNDER 5s WITH THEIR GRANDPARENTS



INTRODUCTION: DEEP ROOTS, NEW SHOOTS



At the Eden Project, we think big. Visitors are welcomed by a sign which reads, 'We're ordinary people trying to change the world.' It's a grand ambition, but it's founded on a belief that ordinary people are capable of extraordinary things, if they have vision, opportunity, and the support needed.

However, ambition isn't enough. We need to consider how we, as a visitor attraction and destination, can help connect people with each other and the living world. Our attraction is an incredible asset, a canvas for our work, but what we do to make sure the learning opportunities here are accessible to everyone is what matters most. Whilst our peak seasonal programmes attract thousands of people, we remain open 364 days of the year, with opportunities to engage with our local audiences throughout this time.

Experiences in the early years are crucial - they create the foundation of the people that we become, determining our educational, social and health outcomes. Our early years are when transformation is most possible. Reductions in early years services mean that organisations like the Eden Project, which regards education as its key mission, need to consider what we can do to support the visitors and, indeed, citizens of the future. We need to consider and meet the needs of this audience, so they feel they belong here, can learn here, and that our natural collections are meaningful and important to them. At a time when children no longer have the outdoor play opportunities of previous generations, with the myriad of associated benefits, our accessible, usable, safe, outdoor spaces are invaluable to our work and to this audience.

We've been inspired by the work of other organisations in creating playful, meaningful learning experiences for young visitors. These include the Cambridge University Museums and Botanical Garden's Nursery in Residence project, Manchester's Whitworth Art Gallery's programmes for babies and toddlers based on the Reggio Emilia approach and The Museum of London's Early Years programme which supports family adults to engage their children with collections. However, provision across the sector isn't consistent and there are still opportunities.

At the Eden Project, intergenerational groups are a growing part of our audience and grandparents, national statistics showed, are increasingly providing regular childcare. However, previously Eden had no specific provision for under 5s with their grandparents and found very few organisations or services that did. With thanks to funding from Nesta and DCMS, we've developed our 'Deep Roots New Shoots' programme, for under 5s with their grandparents. We've explored different ways of engaging and supporting grandparents in their childcare role, from hand-out tools and self-led trails to drop-in and structured group sessions, exploring how every aspect of our diverse site can best be used for learning for this audience. We're pleased to share our learning with you.

Peter Stewart

INTRODUCING: DEEP ROOTS, NEW SHOOTS



Deep Roots, New Shoots was an exciting project to explore how world class visitor attractions such as Eden could engage with grandparent carers with pre-school children - a hidden audience both within existing visitors and local communities. The project also sought to engage older volunteers, hoping that shared experience with the grandparents might benefit both groups.

Deep Roots was planned in response to research that suggested that grandparents were increasingly providing regular childcare for their young grandchildren to support working families, single-parent families and in special circumstances. Many grandparent carers didn't feel able to access family pre-school programmes and subsequently felt isolated and unsupported. Whilst grandparent carers were doing a great job, research also suggested that they felt less able to go outdoors or do physical activities with children. Whether it's our **Little Eden** programme in our outer estate or **Explore and Play** in the Rainforest Biome, the **Deep Roots** sessions have focused on reconnecting with nature.

"ONE OF THE NICEST THINGS IS THAT IT BRINGS THE CHILDREN IN TOUCH WITH THE COUNTRYSIDE. YOU NOTICE THE BERRIES CHANGING FROM GREEN TO RED. YOU'RE ALLOWED TO GO A BIT WILD WITHOUT BOTHERING ANYONE. YOU CAN SEE THE ACORNS AND WHICH TREE THEY COME FROM. EVEN IN THIS COUNTY, THERE ARE LOTS OF YOUNGSTERS WHO WOULDN'T SEE THIS."

- Eden Grandparent

"THE OUTDOOR ELEMENT IS SOMETHING REALLY IMPORTANT AND MADE IT SPECIAL AND DIFFERENT. WHAT'S LOVELY IS, NOW MY GRANDSON HAS HAD THOSE EXPERIENCES, IF I SUGGEST SOMETHING WE COULD DO OUTSIDE, HE'LL BE MUCH EASIER TO COAX OFF THE SOFA BECAUSE HE KNOWS IT'LL BE FUN."

- Eden Grandparent

The reason for this publication is to share our experience of pioneering this work with grandparent carers and what we discovered about creating wonder-filled learning experiences for, and with them. Whilst we would encourage everyone to think about this audience, many of the insights we gained are equally relevant to working with pre-school children and other family adults.

We hope that you find this publication useful in your own organisation and that it encourages you to have wonder filled visits with young children, no matter who they visit with.



WHAT'S WONDERFUL ABOUT CHILDREN UNDER 5?

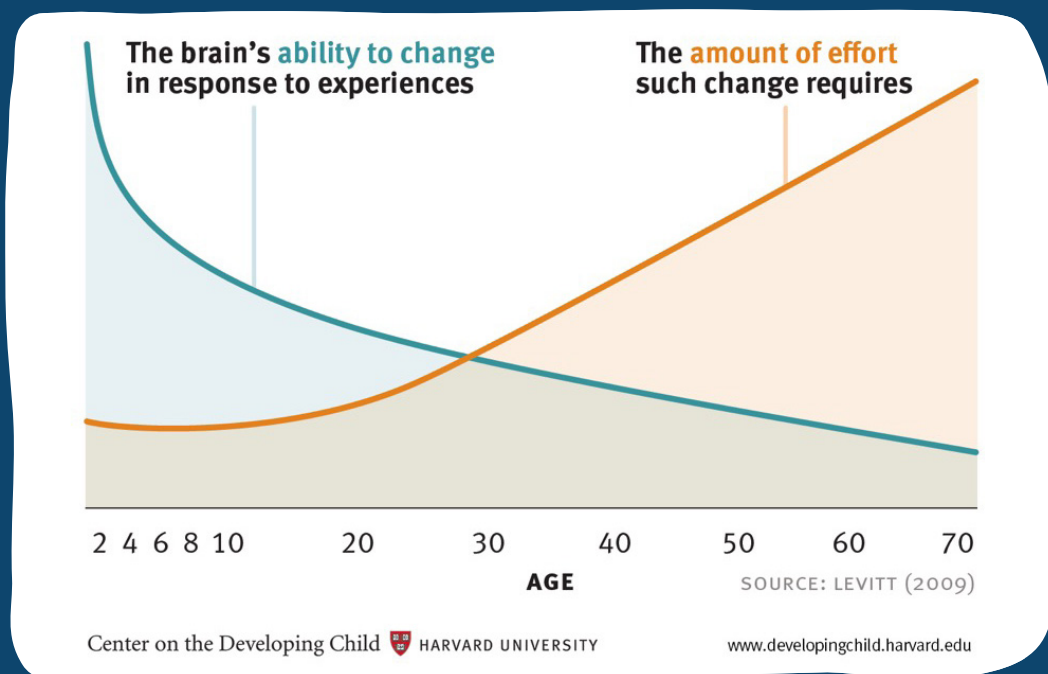
Children in the Early Years are amazing.

We know the first years of life are vital for growing healthy bodies, building loving relationships and language acquisition. Now neuroscience is revealing how crucial these early years are for growing our brains and developing thinking. According to Harvard University in the first few years of life more than one million new neural connections form every second as we experience our world, encounter new things and process our thoughts, feelings and responses.

Where possible, babies are keen to shuffle, to crawl and to stand, toddlers love to run and climb and pre-schoolers are drawn to bikes or scooters and physical play. In the same way, it's healthy for young children to be curious about themselves, their world and the people around them. Research

from Leuven University suggests that children with high levels of well-being and involvement can experience the world at its fullest. They describe these children as open to their environment, confident, expressive, lively, creative, energetic, concentrated and persistent. We can see young children as having a strong appetite for learning, as keen to develop their thinking as they are to stretch their bodies.

The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University's research has shown that our brains remain plastic (flexible) throughout our lives, but it's much easier to develop new thinking the younger we are. Their research also suggests that children who've had experience-filled early lives find it easier to change their thinking as they get older.



Conceptual graph created by Pat Levitt in collaboration with the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2009) and published in *From Best Practices to Breakthrough Impacts: A Science-Based Approach to Building a More Promising Future for Young Children and Families* (2016).

WHAT'S WONDERFUL ABOUT CHILDREN UNDER 5?



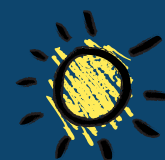
Research into early childhood offers many perspectives on how children interact with the world. Some emphasise physicality, some a sense of place. Some highlight individuality, others stress collaborative meaning making. Recent research on well-being emphasises the need for children to be outdoors and to connect with the natural world. All agree that young children are purposeful in their interactions and that play and active learning are central to their development.

Experiences are at the heart of early learning and where better to have experiences than in visitor attractions? These eager young explorers are the scientists, artists, decision

makers and visitors of the future. Whether we see ourselves as learning organisations, are eager to be inclusive or have a strong commitment to community engagement, our attractions are great places to build the beginnings of young children's cultural capital. Feeling welcomed, included and developing a sense that these young children belong in our visitor attractions is the foundation of this. We have unique sensory environments, full of new play opportunities and things to talk about. Families with pre-school children are actively looking for ways to spend enjoyable, meaningful time together. Pre-school children are a natural audience for our sector.



WHAT'S WONDERFUL ABOUT GRANDPARENT CARERS?



A huge number of grandparents give up time to look after their grandchildren on a regular basis. A 2011 study showed that grandparents were the single most common type of care for working families, accounting for 35% of pre-school child care arrangements. These grandparents usually provide part time care, most often for younger or single mothers. Add in grandparents regularly looking after children after school and Age UK estimate that around 40% of all grandparents regularly care for their grandchildren, whilst other studies put it closer to 60%.

"I WAS WORKING FULL TIME BUT, WHEN MY GRANDDAUGHTERS ARRIVED AND MY DAUGHTER NEEDED TO WORK, I THOUGHT NOW'S THE RIGHT TIME TO CUT DOWN MY HOURS."

- Eden Grandparent



What's lovely is that this is a two-way street. Whilst grandparents undoubtedly make sacrifices in being carers, they also report that they gain a huge amount. It keeps them feeling healthy, younger, purposeful and 'in-touch'. There are well-being benefits to playing throughout life. Grandparents enjoy spending time with their grandchildren, sharing experiences, making memories and seeing them develop.

There seems to have been little research into grandparents who care for pre-school children, but what there is shows grandparents doing an amazing job. They provide flexible childcare enabling parents to work, build close caring relationships with the children and have a wealth of lived experience to share. The Early Years are a critical time for children's development and research has shown the vital role that a loving relationship plays in helping children to be healthy, happy, confident and curious.

"I AM SURE, LIKE MOST PEOPLE, I DON'T DO ENOUGH EXERCISE, SO IT IS GOOD TO GET OUTSIDE AND WALK INTO LITTLE EDEN. LOOKING AFTER THE CHILDREN KEEPS US YOUNG."

- Eden Grandparent



WHAT'S WONDERFUL ABOUT GRANDPARENT CARERS?

Throughout our project we've noticed how seriously grandparents take their responsibility to their grandchild, actively seeking developmental activities and reporting back to their own children about how they've spent their time.

Grandparent carers want to make sure that their grandchildren have a wide range of experiences, but they don't always feel able to join in activities that are badged as parent and child. Few grandparents attended other group activities and, when they did, it was either a professional-led session where they had little active input, i.e. swimming or dancing or a toddler group which they saw primarily as an opportunity for parents to socialise.



"IT'S A SPECIAL TIME WHICH WE LOOK FORWARD TO TOGETHER. IT'S NICE TO DO SOMETHING WITH MY GRANDDAUGHTER WHICH INVOLVES BEING WITH OTHER PEOPLE. I'M HAPPY THAT IT IS GOOD FOR HER TOO AND THAT IT HELPS HER DEVELOPMENT. THERE IS MORE UP THERE FOR HER TO DO THAN I COULD MANAGE IN A WEEK. I FEEL SO MUCH MORE RELAXED, CERTAINLY BETTER THAN I USED TO."

- Eden Grandparent

"I GUESS I COULD PLAN A DAY IN THE GARDEN, BUT THERE IS SOMETHING SPECIAL ABOUT COMING TO A PLACE, HAVING OTHER PEOPLE COME, BEING SET A TASK TO DO TOGETHER, GATHERING WHAT YOU NEED AND THEN COMING AWAY WITH SOMETHING."

- Eden Grandparent

Our grandparents told us they took children to other activities but ours were the only ones where they were actively involved and learning themselves. Labelling our sessions as specifically for grandparents, ensuring that there were activities that grandparent and grandchild needed to complete together and including learning content for both made our sessions stand out. Connecting with older people in this primary carer role offers a different, more playful and inclusive way to engage with this audience.


Visitor attractions can be a great place for this audience to spend quality time together doing something 'a bit different'.



CREATING WONDER FILLED LEARNING EXPERIENCES FOR GRANDPARENTS & THEIR PRE-SCHOOL GRANDCHILDREN

OUR TEN TOP TIPS

- 1 Plan it well
- 2 Frame the experience
- 3 Time it right
- 4 Meet their needs
- 5 Tell them it's for them
- 6 Let them lead
- 7 Make it playful
- 8 Make it conversational
- 9 Make it meaningful
- 10 Listen to what they say



"BEING WITH GRANDCHILDREN WHEN THEY'RE DOING SOMETHING THAT THEY ENJOY IS A LOVELY EXPERIENCE."

- Eden Grandparent

"THERE ARE FRESH NEW IDEAS AND YOU ALWAYS GO AWAY WITH SOMETHING. IT IS JUST A MAGICAL EXPERIENCE."

- Eden Grandparent

"I FIRST CAME AT THE END OF JULY. I BROUGHT ALONG MY GRANDDAUGHTER WHO IS 3 YEARS AND JUST THOUGHT I COULD STAY FOREVER."

- Eden Grandparent

PLAN IT WELL

Strong planning is the bedrock of any successful project. As Deep Roots was such an experimental project, we adopted an in-depth planning approach that supported us to continually check back against our desired outcomes and adjust what we were doing to achieve them.

We began with a clear **Theory of Change** model that identified our **three big outcomes** and helped us think about what would need to happen if we were to achieve them.

GRANDPARENTS

Provide good developmental activities in the natural environment for their grandchildren

GRANDPARENTS

Are physically and mentally able to care for young children in the outdoors

GRANDCHILDREN

have good quality interactions with other children

To develop a robust Theory of Change you need a clear understanding of your audience, your site and, in our case, your volunteers.

For us, there were three types of grandparent carers:

- **Local grandparents** who have regular and sole responsibility for their pre-schooler
- **Day trip grandparents** who often come along with their children as well as grandchildren
- **School holiday grandparents** who often bring school and pre-school aged children



In planning we needed to be clear about the distinction and the needs of each group.

Our site has great opportunities but also limitations. We have wonderful outdoor spaces, but many are a long walk from the entrance. Our biomes are fantastic sensory environments but they are protected spaces so we are limited on resources we can take inside. We have family visitors, with pre-schoolers but without grandparents, who may want to take part and we have defined visit patterns that change with the season and between term time and holidays. We needed to be clear in planning exactly what we could offer.

As part of **Deep Roots** we recruited a new team of older volunteers. Recruitment, volunteer management and training took time. However training gave us the opportunity to focus on our outcomes and to explore how volunteers could support grandparents rather than just working with the children.

We also developed an **observational framework** to give us a way to assess our sessions. We distilled eight more specific outcomes from our big three and we created indicators for each of these - things we might be able to observe happening if the outcomes were being achieved.

FRAME THE EXPERIENCE



Framing is a term coined by a PHD student at the University of Pittsburgh. They argued that by framing experiences in certain ways family interaction can be encouraged, which in turn enables families to build 'togetherness'. We thought this was an excellent way to organise our planning: not devising and leading learning experiences but thinking how to 'frame' them so that ownership stayed with the grandparents and their young ones. We saw it as a way to empower both children and their grandparent carers, respecting their special relationship.

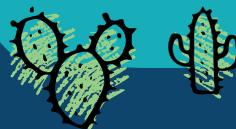
So what does framing planning look like?

- Start with the big idea or concept you want people to explore
- Think about which object, artwork, plants or space would give people the chance to think, talk and 'do' in relation to that idea
- Think about how people are likely to act with that thing or in that space – what do they already know about it? How does that vary across the 0-5 age range? What type of props, prompts or support would make that a richer learning experience?
- Consider how interaction between people can be encouraged
- Choose your activities, spaces, resources and play props to give the widest range of playful opportunities to all ages for exploring the big idea
- Observe what happens, so you're even better next time at predicting what people will need

Taking this approach meant that our session plans were more about what the grandparents and children would be doing than they were about what we or the volunteers might do. It meant more resources than normal, more setting up, more tidying away and offering a lot of open-ended activities where everyone might be doing the same thing but thinking and talking about different things. It meant volunteers and staff being facilitators and co-players rather than leaders and helpers. But that meant grandparents and children being more actively involved.

"ONE OF THE FIRST SESSIONS WE CAME TO IN THE SPIRAL GARDEN WAS ABOUT SPIRALS. WE LOOKED FOR THE SHAPE AND PRESSED CLAY INTO THE AMMONITES ON THE PATIO. EVEN MY 11 MONTH-OLD GRANDDAUGHTER COULD DO THAT. THEN THEY MADE SPIRAL PATTERNS AND LOOKED AT THE SPIRAL IN SNAIL SHELLS. MY ELDEST GRANDDAUGHTER CONNECTED WITH IT SO WELL, I REMEMBER HER LOOKING FOR SPIRALS ON THE WAY BACK TO THE CAR AND USING THE WORD AND ASKING, "IS THIS A SPIRAL?" IT WAS LIKE THE THEME WAS INTRODUCED AND THEN THERE WAS ALMOST FOLLOW UP WORK. THE WHOLE THING WAS JUST A VERY WELL ROUNDED EXPERIENCE."

- Eden Grandparent



"THE SESSIONS HAD A LOVELY STRUCTURE TO THEM, WHICH ALLOWED THAT FREEDOM, SO YOU COULD CHOOSE."

- Eden Grandparent



TIME IT RIGHT

All public programmes need to be timed to suit the availability of their audiences, but with grandparents and pre-school children there are extra subtleties. Museums and galleries often run pre-school programmes on Mondays, when their venues are quieter, but we found that grandparent carers are more likely to look after pre-school children mid-week, so Wednesday or Thursday in term time is a better option. In common with other pre-school families, regularity is important so that grandparents can rely on the programme and plan it in.

“PEOPLE NEED A VARIATION OF ACTIVITIES TO MEET THEIR NEEDS. THEY NEED A VARIATION OF PROGRAMME. THEY NEED IT TO BE FUN AND ENJOYABLE. THEY NEED THE OPPORTUNITY TO TALK AND DO THINGS WITH THEIR GRANDCHILD BUT ALSO TALK TO OTHER PEOPLE. THAT’S WHAT WAS NICE ABOUT YOUR SESSION; THERE WAS ALWAYS THAT CHOICE AND A BIT OF INDEPENDENCE AND INDIVIDUALITY.”

- Eden Grandparent

MEET THEIR NEEDS

Our grandparents varied a lot in age and health. We found they appreciated it if we:

- Had outdoor as well as indoor things to do, bearing access in mind
- Included physical activity, but not too much
- Integrated seats into our activities as working at floor level was difficult for many
- Chose enclosed spaces with good sight lines
- Used resources they could copy at home
- Offered messy activities, which we cleared up!



Other timing issues we discovered were:

- Different ages of children tended to come at different times, for example lots of toddlers were still having an early afternoon nap
- Different types of grandparents needed different lengths of session. Local grandparent carers wanted long enough sessions to justify travelling to Eden, whilst day visitors already on site wanted shorter, more flexible sessions that didn’t take up too much of their visit

Grandparents coming in school holidays often bring older children as well. We moved away from programmed sessions and offered drop in activities or hand-out resources. The most successful of these were our ‘Curious Eyes’ which encouraged child-led looking.

“I STRUGGLED TO SIT ON THE SEATS AROUND THE FIRE BUT A BENCH WAS PROVIDED. MY PROBLEM NOW IS MOBILITY AND IT IS DIFFICULT ON UNEVEN SURFACES AND ALSO BENDING IS DIFFICULT FOR SOME OF THE ACTIVITIES.”

- Eden Grandparent

TELL THEM IT'S FOR THEM

"I THINK IT'S REALLY IMPORTANT THAT PEOPLE KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT. I THINK KNOWING IT'S FOR GRANDPARENTS MAKES A BIG DIFFERENCE. YOU KNOW WHEN YOU GO TO A GRANDPARENTS' GROUP THAT YOU'RE NOT GOING TO BE THE OLDEST PEOPLE AND THERE WILL BE OTHER OLDER PEOPLE."

- Eden Grandparent

Whether you decide to go for dedicated grandparent programming or just want to be sure that grandparents feel confident to come to family under 5s sessions, it's important that any advertising makes it clear that grandparents are welcome. Grandparents carers told us they rarely went to toddler groups, as they felt they wouldn't fit in.

Namechecking grandparents on publicity is good but even stronger is a photo featuring grandparents with their grandchildren. It's also helpful to give an idea about the nature of the activities, especially if these are designed to meet their needs.

As a largely 'invisible' group, it's not always easy to know where to advertise to get your message across. Grandparents are usually part-time carers and their circumstances, ages and experiences vary.

Many of our grandparents heard about Deep Roots from their own children through digital marketing via Eden's website and social media. However they also suggested to us to advertise in leisure centres, libraries, GP surgeries, nurseries, pre-schools, schools and community centres.

For first time local grandparents and day visitors, onsite signage also needed to carry the grandparent friendly message. Here our volunteers were brilliant, offering a warm welcome and striking up conversations.

"I WOULDN'T HAVE THOUGHT TO GO TO ANYTHING ELSE BUT THIS WAS SOMETHING ESPECIALLY FOR GRANDPARENTS."

- Eden Grandparent



LET THEM LEAD

Our philosophy has been that the most satisfying playful learning happens when you're in a great environment, with all the right resources, surrounded by people you feel comfortable with, just the right amount of support and the freedom to go at your own pace and follow your own interests. Sometimes that meant we led at the beginning and end of sessions to provide structure. Mostly we have seen the value in letting our families lead.

Offering just the right level of support to enable families to lead their own learning is an art. We found these things helpful:

- Having a repeating format that is predictable, thus building confidence
- Giving space and time for child-initiated and grandparent-initiated interactions – learning to wait for responses, to step back and signal to families that it's their choice, to model interactions and support grandparents as their children's prime educators
- Training our volunteers to support family interactions, rather than interacting directly just with the children
- Valuing agency – feeling we've achieved most when grandparents or children feel they can initiate things

“THERE WAS A LOT OF STRUCTURE TO THOSE SESSIONS BUT WITHIN THAT STRUCTURE WAS CHOICE. SOMETIMES, IF THE CHILDREN DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO, THEY COULD BE GUIDED TO MAKE THEIR DECISION, BUT THERE WAS STILL A LOT OF CHOICE.”

- Eden Grandparent

“YOU KNOW, FROM THE MOMENT YOU ARRIVE AND DO THE TRAIL THAT THE EXPECTATION IS THAT YOU'RE DOING THIS TOGETHER. IT ISN'T A CHORE BUT A PURE PLEASURE AND A JOY.”

- Eden Grandparent



“IT'S AN ASSISTED APPROACH. YOU BEGIN BY HELPING THEM OR SUGGESTING SOMETHING AND THEN THEY START TO INITIATE IT. THEN THEY COME AND SHOW YOU WHAT THEY'VE DONE, NOT TO SEEK APPROVAL BUT JUST TO SHOW YOU WHAT THEY HAVE ACHIEVED AND THAT'S DELIGHTFUL TO SEE”

- Volunteer

MAKE IT PLAYFUL



Play is not just central to pre-school children's lives, it's a right enshrined in international law. We looked at the different types of play and thought about playing indoors and outdoors. We wanted to give children the space to play independently but also to encourage grandparents to play too. Families need 'permission to play'. They need to see it's an acceptable behaviour in our venues. By including playful experiences throughout our Deep Roots programme we wanted to establish that permission.

To embrace play however, we needed to embrace some mess. The Theory of Loose Parts, first proposed by architect Simon Nicholson in the 1970's, suggests that in an effective play- environment children need to be able to move, carry, combine, redesign, line up, take apart and put back together materials in multiple ways. Having loose parts enables children to take control of the space and the play within it. It also works right across the 0 – 5 age range. We needed to work closely with our horticultural colleagues to find spaces that could support this kind of play.



PLAY IN OUR PROGRAMMES

LITTLE EDEN

Six weeks of outdoor 'forest-based' play

- Mud kitchens • Ramp building
- Den making • Hide and seek • Mini worlds

GARDEN EXPLORERS

A summer holiday outdoor programme

- Mud pies • Leaf play • Water play
- Pretend gardening • Ribbon play
- Snail races

EXPLORE AND PLAY

A cold weather programme using the biomes

- Pretend play café and fruit market
- Sensory play with coffee beans, spices, seeds and leaves • Spice painting • Boat building • Perfume and potion making

LOOK CLOSELY

An exploratory drop in session using microscopes

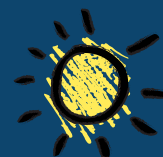
- Sensory play with seed heads, leaves and petals • Mini world play • Water play

WILDWALKS

Playful tours of areas of Eden's site

- Bear hunt • Swishing through plants
- Leaf pictures • Treasure hunt
- Scavenger game

MAKE IT CONVERSATIONAL



“IT WAS WARM AND WELCOMING, SUCH A LOVELY ATMOSPHERE. THE SESSION ENABLED US TO HAVE SOME BONDING TIME TOGETHER. WE COULD PLAY AND TALK TOGETHER AND MAKE TIME TO DO THIS PROPERLY AND I FOUND MY GRANDDAUGHTER GOT BETTER AT BEING ON HER OWN WITH US AND TELLING US HER CHOICES AND WHAT SHE NEEDED OR WANTED TO DO.”

- Eden Grandparent

Conversations build relationships. Whether these are between children, grandparents, grandparents and their children or staff, volunteers and the families, Deep Roots thrives on conversations.

Vygotsky said language was at the heart of learning and that everything we learn, we learn with and from each other. Lynn Dierking used this idea when thinking about families learning in museums and talked about families building ‘the family narrative’ - an understanding about who they are as a group, how they interact with each other and how they understand the world. Grandparents also need to build this family narrative with their grandchildren and spending ‘quality time’ doing things together is a key part of that process.

One of Deep Roots aims was to support grandparent carers’ well-being - helping them to feel less isolated and publicly valuing their carer role. So, our sessions built in opportunities for children to talk and for meaningful conversations within families, but also time for grandparents to talk to each other and to the volunteers.

“I LOOKED AFTER MY GRANDDAUGHTER FROM WHEN SHE WAS 9 MONTHS OLD... BUT SHE WAS NOTHING LIKE MY DAUGHTER. AND I REALISED I WAS SO MUCH OLDER AND I FELT OLD AND I SUPPOSE IT WAS ISOLATING. THIS HAS BEEN A NEW LEASE OF LIFE.”

- Eden Grandparent

“SHE IS AN ONLY CHILD WITH AN OLDER MUM, AND SHE IS A VERY QUIET CHILD. AS SOON AS WE ARRIVED AND SAT DOWN IN THE CIRCLE AND WE STARTED TO MAKE OUR INTRODUCTIONS, I JUST THOUGHT, THIS IS GOING TO BE GREAT FOR MY GRANDDAUGHTER.”

- Eden Grandparent

“THEY’VE LEARNT TO BE CONFIDENT WITH ADULTS OUTSIDE OF THE FAMILY GROUP.”

- Eden Grandparent

“IT’S GOOD THAT YOU CAN MEET PEOPLE IN THE SAME SITUATION, MORE THAN JUST EXCHANGING PLEASANTRIES AROUND THE SOFT PLAY. I REMEMBER ONCE MEETING THIS REALLY INTERESTING GUY AND I JUST DON’T KNOW WHERE I WOULD HAVE MET HIM OTHERWISE OR TALKED TO HIM.”

- Eden Grandparent



MAKE IT MEANINGFUL



If giving grandparents and their grandchildren agency over their own learning experiences is powerful, then making sure those experiences are meaningful is what makes them satisfying and memorable. At Eden we are blessed with inherently relatable collections and spaces. Everyone has some knowledge of nature that we can link to and everyone has the opportunity to explore elements of nature on their own doorstep. Other visitor attractions may have more challenging subjects or collections, but it is always important to find the content within them that is relevant, connects to visitor experience and can spark meaningful conversations.

“WHEN WE ARE OUT WALKING OR VISIT SOMEWHERE, MY GRANDDAUGHTER IS MORE OBSERVANT AND CONNECTED TO THINGS. I THINK WE BOTH ARE.”

- Eden Grandparent

In Deep Roots we actively looked for those connections, focused on areas in which we felt grandparents might have expertise to share and used frames for sessions that seemed to have plenty of potential for further exploration. This has the added advantage of being something that can be shared with the wider family.

“THEY’VE LEARNT HOW TO INVESTIGATE AND THE THRILL OF IT. IT’S GREAT TO HEAR THEM COMING BACK AND TELLING THEIR GROWNUPS AT HOME ALL ABOUT WHAT THEY’VE DONE. IT’S LOVELY, SHARING IN THEIR EXCITEMENT AND LEARNING TOGETHER. IT MEANS THEY ASK MORE QUESTIONS AND STOP AND LOOK AT MORE THINGS.”

- Eden Grandparent

Learning throughout life is important, and impacts on mental health and well-being, raising self-esteem, giving people a sense of purpose and encouraging connection and interaction with others. We planned appropriate content for children 0 – 5 and integrated leaning opportunities for grandparents. We found that a playful approach to learning was inclusive. Grandparents saw things afresh, made connections with their prior knowledge, felt more confident to ask questions and didn’t feel intimidated by weighty information.

Our desired outcomes meant that, for us, skills and attitudes were just as important as new knowledge. Deep Roots meaningful experiences included times for modelling, chatting about and celebrating good quality early learning.

“I THINK IT IS ABOUT UNDERSTANDING NATURE. THEY DON’T JUST SEE IT BUT THEY ARE ENCOURAGED TO TALK ABOUT IT, SO IF THEY ARE LOOKING FOR SOMETHING, LIKE FUNGI, THEY SEE IT AND USE THE WORD AND TALK ABOUT WHAT IT IS. IT’S A SHARING EXPERIENCE.”

- Eden Grandparent



LISTEN TO WHAT THEY SAY

And the final top tip from Deep Roots is to listen to what grandparent carers say. We gained interesting insights into their needs, what worked for them and how they benefitted from the programmes just by listening.

“IT’S QUITE A FULL DAY ... I WANT TO HELP WITH ANYTHING I CAN SO I COOK, DO WASHING AND IRONING. AT THE END OF TWO DAYS I AM ABSOLUTELY WORN OUT. IT’S A LOVELY WORN OUT BUT I’M THIRTY YEARS OLDER THAN WHEN I HAD MY OWN CHILDREN AND YOU NEED YOUR EYES TO WATCH THEM ALL THE TIME.”

- Eden Grandparent

“IT’S A BIT DIFFERENT WHEN THEY’RE NOT YOUR OWN. I DIDN’T USE TO WORRY SO MUCH ABOUT MINE; I AM CERTAINLY MORE WORRIED ABOUT MY GRANDCHILDREN’S WELFARE.”

- Eden Grandparent

“I THINK IT MADE ME REALISE HOW POPULAR THAT OUTDOOR PLAY, WILDERNESS PLAY, IS AND HOW IMPORTANT IT IS FOR CHILDREN AND HOW THOSE CHILDREN WHO DON’T HAVE A WILD OUTDOOR SPACE ARE MISSING OUT.”

- Eden Grandparent

“WE ONLY WENT TO THE BEACH BEFORE BUT NOW WE’LL OFTEN COME BACK TO EDEN AND REDO THE WALK OR ACTIVITY WE DID. NOW I KNOW ALL THOSE SMALLER AREAS WHERE YOU CAN GO AND PLAY, LIKE THE SAND PIT AND THAT AREA UNDER THE TREES. THERE IS SO MUCH TO DO; YOU COULD SPEND HOURS UP THERE.”

- Eden Grandparent



GOING FORWARDS



And the final top tip from Deep Roots is to listen to what grandparent carers say. We gained interesting insights into their needs, what worked for them and how they benefitted from the programmes just by listening.

Deep Roots has been so successful we know that we want to continue. The questions for us are:

- Would we reach a wider range of local people if we went to them and helped them to find 'The Eden on their doorstep'?
- Should we continue grandparent only programmes or grandparent friendly programmes on site?

There are arguments for dedicated grandparent sessions, but on balance we are seeing these as stepping stones into overtly grandparent friendly provision. On occasion we have had parents join our sessions and have found that framing meaningful content, being playful and giving high levels of ownership over activities works just as well with them as it does grandparents. We hope that maintaining accessible timings, involving our older volunteers and ensuring marketing features grandparents will enable both parents and grandparents to take part with their pre-school children.



"I THINK AS SOON AS SOMETHING SAYS IT IS FOR PARENTS, I WOULD THINK IT IS MORE FOR PARENTS. BECAUSE THIS SAID IT WAS 'FOR GRANDPARENTS,' I FELT IT WAS FOR ME."

- Eden Grandparent

"WE DO COME HERE MORE BECAUSE OF THE GRANDPARENT GROUPS."

- Eden Grandparent

