CREATING A PLACE TO BELONG

The Lodge Provision Case Study

How The Lodge Provision uses outdoor learning to support children and young people with additional needs



THE OUTDOOR TEACHER

THE LODGE PROVISION

FROM AN IDEA TO AN OUTDOOR LEARNING PROVISION

When Kelly Butler set up The Lodge Provision on her own land, she wanted to create an outdoor environment where children and young people could learn in ways that responded to their individual needs.

Her aim was to create a learner-led environment that gave young people opportunities to take appropriate risks, connect with nature and develop confidence, while providing the safety and structure they needed.

Kelly wanted a strong professional framework to underpin what she was creating, together with the knowledge and confidence to deliver outdoor sessions safely and effectively.

That led her to The Outdoor Teacher's Advanced Certificate. The programme provided the theoretical grounding and practical skills Kelly needed to develop The Lodge and put her approach into action.

> The programme gave me the solid theoretical backing and practical toolset I needed to turn my land into a thriving educational space
> *Kelly Butler, Founder and Director, The Lodge Provision*





WHAT INCLUSION REALLY LOOKS LIKE

At The Lodge, Kelly works with children and young people with complex or additional needs.

Her experience has shaped a simple but powerful view of inclusion: it begins with helping a young person feel safe, understood and able to belong.

That does not always mean joining an activity in the way originally planned.
A young person may need to walk a dog, care for an animal or simply watch what is happening before they feel ready to take part.

For Kelly, those moments can be an important part of participation. They help build the trust that makes engagement and learning possible.

Rather than judging participation by whether a young person follows the original plan, the approach at The Lodge starts with a different question:

> Inclusion begins with feeling safe, understood and able to belong.

CHOICE WITHIN SAFE BOUNDARIES

Giving young people genuine choice is an important part of the approach at The Lodge, but that choice sits within clear and consistent safety boundaries.

Around a campfire, for example, one young person might help prepare food, another might choose a task further away from the fire, while someone else may need to observe before deciding whether to join in.

Kelly will often offer two clear options so that choice itself does not become overwhelming. Taking a break or choosing to try something later can also be valid. The boundaries remain consistent. What changes is the route each young person takes into participation.

This creates space for individual needs and preferences while maintaining the structure and safety young people need.

> The boundaries stay consistent; the route into participation is flexible.



CHANGING THE ENVIRONMENT, NOT THE CHILD

One young person at The Lodge found it particularly difficult to move out of the games room when other children needed to use the space.

Rather than expecting the young person to manage a transition they were finding difficult, the team adapted their approach.

They prepared the young person more carefully, created another space with sensory materials and activities linked to their interests, used woodland walks as breaks and offered clearer choices.

The experience illustrates an important principle within Kelly's work: sometimes it is the preparation, activity or environment that needs to change.

> We can change the preparation, our approach or the environment rather than expecting the learner to manage a difficult transition on their own.



BUILDING CONNECTION

The outdoor environment — and particularly working alongside animals — can create opportunities for connection that may be much harder to establish through direct conversation.

Kelly has found that a young person who finds direct conversation difficult may talk freely while walking a dog or feeding the goats.

Allowing time to observe before participating can also make an important difference. Animal care and outdoor activities can provide a shared focus, taking the pressure away from direct interaction and allowing relationships to develop more naturally.

For Kelly, these apparently small moments can be an important part of helping a young person feel comfortable, build trust and become ready to engage.

> A young person who finds direct conversation difficult may talk freely while walking a dog or feeding the goats.



LEARNING TO ADAPT

Kelly is clear that not every approach works for every child. An activity that has been successful with one young person may not suit another. Equally, simply explaining a change does not necessarily make a difficult transition easier.

Her approach is therefore to prepare changes carefully, offer clear choices and remain ready to adapt the activity, environment or level of participation in response to the individual.

The Advanced Certificate has encouraged Kelly to reflect more deeply on her own work — how she offers choice, when to step back and how the outdoor environment itself can help a young person feel included.

Kelly has observed significant changes in the children and young people attending The Lodge, including greater resilience, independence and social skills. Having a dedicated outdoor space has also enabled them to build an ongoing connection with the natural world.

> “The transformation in the children and young people who attend has been brilliant. I’ve seen huge boosts in their resilience, independence and social skills.”



A PLACE TO BELONG

For Kelly, outdoor learning is not simply about taking activities outside.
It is about creating an environment where children and young people can participate in ways that work for them, develop independence, build relationships and experience a genuine sense of belonging.

The Advanced Certificate gave Kelly the framework, practical skills and confidence she needed to establish The Lodge.

The principles she developed through the programme continue to inform her work: offering meaningful choice, balancing flexibility with clear boundaries, reflecting on what the individual learner needs and using the outdoor environment to create opportunities for connection.

> It completely shifted my confidence levels, giving me the professional credibility to facilitate these sessions successfully.

SUPPORTING CONFIDENT OUTDOOR LEARNING

The Outdoor Teacher supports schools and educators to build confidence in outdoor learning through practical training, online courses and nature-based educational approaches.

Designed for real educational settings, the training helps schools create meaningful outdoor experiences that support wellbeing, resilience, creativity and engagement.

Find out more at: www.theoutdoorteacher.com