

# Countryside Taster Day

Macclesfield Riverside Park and Beech Hill School.

**Date:** ongoing, established c.1994

## **Background:**

The Bollin Valley Project had identified reluctance amongst people with special needs to visit the countryside or take part in mainstream countryside events. One reason given was that people didn't feel their needs would be catered for at such events, and therefore they weren't confident about attending. There were no countryside events run specifically for disabled people in the area. The Bollin Valley Partnership wanted to encourage people with disabilities to visit the countryside.

## **The project:**

The Bollin Valley Partnership decided to run a 'taster day' for children and adults with disabilities, enabling them to sample a range of activities and build their confidence in visiting the countryside.

## **How we did it:**

The Bollin Valley Project organises and coordinates the project, which has become an annual event. Local clubs, artists and entertainers to provide a wide range of activities for disabled people on the day. Activities are provided free of charge to participants and include archery; face painting; pony and trap rides; falconry; crafts; circus skills; music and willow weaving. The event is based in and around a large marquee on the school playing fields. Portable toilets and wheelchairs are hired for the event.



Balloon modelling.

500 disabled people and carers attend each year. The carers cater for the individual needs of the participants and workshop providers are experienced in working with people with a wide variety of disabilities. Around 40 volunteers also help out. The event risk assessment is not specialised for working with disabled people.



Circus skills

### **Publicity:**

The taster day is promoted through direct mailings to all local disabled groups and schools. Over the years, the database has grown through word of mouth.

Feedback questionnaires completed by participants show that the event does help build confidence to go on and attend mainstream countryside events. The event is especially valuable as there is nothing else of this type run in the area.

### **Project value and funding sources:**

£6500 (£2500 cash plus £4000 in-kind volunteer hours)

Sponsorship is sought each year from a variety of sources, including grants, local businesses and local charities.

One part-time project officer carries out most of the fundraising and organisation of this event. The planning process begins in the autumn and the event is held in June.

### **Who was involved?**

Beech Hall Preparatory School allows the use of their land and provides pupils and a teacher as volunteers to run some activities.

Volunteers from the Environment Agency, Prospects (youth work), local primary and secondary schools, the local archery club, the Riding for the Disabled Association and the East Cheshire ranger service.

Attendees include primary schools' special needs classes plus specialist organisations and groups such as the David Lewis Centre, Royal school for the deaf and Friends for Leisure.

### **Future care/sustainability:**

This is dependant on funding being secured each year.

### **Lessons Learned:**



Animal experience

- Finding sponsorship for an annual event is very difficult and time consuming.
- The event is extremely popular and there is never any difficulty filling all 500 places.
- Working with local schools is especially rewarding both for organisers and for the individual schools. The pupils are fulfilling curriculum requirements for 'citizenship'. Working with local schools also leads to other projects such as environmental schemes and work placements for the children.
- We have learned that people are more than happy to volunteer their time to a worthwhile event. They get a lot of self satisfaction at assisting in this event and it quite often gets their message/activity out to a different 'untapped' audience.
- Risk assessments and CRB checks for volunteers are a lengthy process and needs to be started months prior to the event.