



Toy library teams up with Nottingham Contemporary to encourage the art of play

The Bulwell Community Toy Library has teamed up with Nottingham Contemporary to help families make the most of their local woods at Bulwell Hall Park - as part of the toy library's Play on the Wildside project.

Artists Sian Watson and Gillian Brent will work with the toy library and families living in Bulwell to create free resources, designed to help other families explore and enjoy playing in the woods.

Resources will include a storybook based on families experiences of playing in the woods, together with hands-on play activities for children of different ages and creative maps designed by children to give other young people a 'child's eye view' of the woods.

For example, the maps will include children's favourite trees, great spots for hide and seek and lots of ideas for making up your own stories.

The toy library launched its Play on the Wildside project in April this year to help reverse the worrying decline in the numbers of children playing outside. According to Play England, only 21% of children play outdoors in their local neighbourhood, compared to 71% of the last generation.

The toy library found that although Bulwell is home to Bulwell Hall Park, which includes ancient woodlands and a nature reserve, many families weren't using the space, either because they weren't familiar with it, or because they didn't know what they could do there.

To encourage families to use Bulwell Hall Park, the toy library runs regular sessions in the woods there, including sessions for children aged under 5 and their parents and carers; sessions for children aged 5 to 14; and monthly sessions for families.

Sessions give children the chance to enjoy adventurous play activities such as hide and seek and laying and following trails in the woods; whilst finding out more about nature and the environment and learning 'bushcraft' style skills like making campfires, building dens and cooking outdoors.

Steve Parkinson from the toy library hopes that the resources being created with the Nottingham Contemporary will help even more families to enjoy nature on their doorstep.



Bulwell Community toy library

“The aim of Play on the Wildside is to encourage more local children and families to get outside and play in their local woodland.

This kind of natural play has loads of benefits, for example, it improves children’s health but also their confidence, wellbeing, development, behaviour, social skills, respect for nature and concentration levels.

The sessions are reaching a lot of families but to help more people, and to help children and parents to enjoy the woods for themselves, now and in the future, we wanted to create a permanent bank of resources.

By teaming up with Nottingham Contemporary, we’ll be able to produce some really imaginative, fun, useful resources. Best of all, the resources will be absolutely relevant to local people, because they’ll be designed by local families.

We want to show children and parents that the woods are just as exciting and entertaining as playing computer games or watching TV. In fact, they’re a much bigger adrenalin rush!”

Saima Kaur, Community Programmer at the Nottingham Contemporary says:

“We’re really excited to be working in partnership with the toy library. We greatly value the importance of play as a medium for family learning and engaging with the world around us. This project is a brilliant opportunity for the Contemporary to work in Bulwell and to share each other’s skills, ideas and experiences.

We’ll also be using some of the ideas gathered in Bulwell for our own family trail at the Contemporary, which will proudly state ‘created by children and families from Bulwell Toy Library’.

In the long term, we hope projects like this will encourage more people to visit Nottingham Contemporary to play and learn with us.”

The resources are due to be completed in October and will be available for families to borrow from the toy library free of charge.

**To find out more about the toy library please call Steve Parkinson
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