



Greetings and Merry Christmas from Wild Sparks! We hope this, our second edition of Leaf Litter, finds you well. It's been a while since we wrote and lots has been going on, not least a busy summer and Autumn of long days in the woods, recruitment of new staff and lots of projects out and about. Read on for more details of all this and some simple activity ideas for the festive holidays.

News from the Office: staff reshuffle

This winter there will be a few changes in the Wild Sparks staff team as Alice Warren prepares to take time out to embark on motherhood. Alice will be stepping down from her role on 1st March 2015 but will continue as treasurer in a voluntary capacity. "Huge thanks to everyone who has helped make this such a successful first year, I'll miss you lots but will definitely be back for more before long!"

Stepping up to take the reins will be existing Wild Sparks play leader Sarah Hutcheon. For those of you who haven't had the pleasure of meeting Sarah yet here's a wee introduction:



Sarah has been with the Wild Sparks crew since Spring so she knows the ropes and has met many of our regulars. Sarah is best known for her animal tracking and wildlife spotting skills that she learned in a previous job as education manager at Aigas Field

Centre, Inverness-shire. Sarah recently completed an MSc in Outdoor Environmental and Sustainability Education and also helps out regularly at the Secret Garden outdoor nursery in Fife. When she's not out in the Wild Sparks woods Sarah can be found baking something sweet or walking in the hills with her dog, Griffin.

We're delighted to have snapped Sarah up to take on Alice's maternity cover with Wild Sparks and wish her lots of luck with the challenge!

What Sparks?

Wild Sparks was set up in 2013 to help children in the Blairgowrie area to get back to nature, learn new skills and have lots of fun. Children of all ages and abilities come together to dig holes, swing from branches, make wild and wonderful creations, adventure into never never land and get back in time for a marshmallow around the campfire. Ours is the home of risk, adventure, creativity, discovery and very grubby knees.

Wild Sparks run holiday activities in Alyth and Dunkeld, as well as other projects and events throughout Perthshire, Angus and beyond.

Visit www.wildsparks.co.uk to find out more.

Introducing.... The rest of the Wild Sparks crew:

Throughout 2014 we've been building up our team of talented and enthusiastic play leaders; each brings something special to the team.



Tilly has worked in ecology and outdoor education for over 10 years but also holds secret talents for storytelling and music. When not working Tilly loves to go on climbing and mountaineering adventures around the world, he's also pretty good at tree climbing and pushing the Wild Sparks on the swing!



Camila is a graduate of fine art who makes work based on play, art and working with children in different educational settings. She loves how wild sparks gives kids the opportunity to explore their imagination to create weird and wonderful art and can usually be found in the crafts area up to her elbows in clay surrounded by other creative minds.



Patrick lives in Edinburgh but loves coming up to Wild Sparks for action packed days. He has a masters in education and has worked in a range of different educational settings but believes up a tree or down a muddy hole is the best place for it!



Nicky always comes to Wild Sparks full of smiles, patience, artistic flair and sporty energy. She loves a good game of Capture the Flag and is responsible for establishing the Wild Sparks art gallery. Nicky is well travelled and like to share tales, crafts and wisdom from Central America and other far away places.



Jo loves all aspects of her work at Wild Sparks but is particularly fond of pretend play and experimental campfire cookery. When not in the woods she is busy raising her own pair of wild things and teaching in a primary school.



Dylan is an experienced primary school teacher with a background in working with Additional Support Needs. He loves his time at Wild Sparks and finds that it inspires outdoor learning experiences for his P3 class and the two wee wild things he shares with Jo.

We're recruiting... Wild Sparks is an evolving team, requiring both volunteers and staff on a sessional basis, mostly during school holidays. If you think you've got what it takes to spend 8 hours out in the woods, in all weathers, amidst organised chaos and a troop of diverse, energetic and adventurous 5 - 12 year olds then please get in touch!

Wild Spark of the Season “Martha”

Nine year old Martha is what we call a seasoned Wild Sparker, she’s been coming to us for over a year now. She’s written this lovely article to share her experiences and thoughts:



I really enjoy going to Wild Sparks. When Mum tells us that we are going then I get really excited. It is great fun as I love to climb trees. I like when you get to go a couple of days in a row because if you make a new friend one day and then they are there another day then you can play with them again. My favourite things to do are climb trees, build dens, go in the treehouse and play dinosaurs. I have been involved in lots of cool art projects too.

The instructors are awesome. They always have lots of time and good ideas of games to play - they also push us on the swing.

I have been to Wild Sparks in the Spring, Summer, Autumn & the Winter. We wrap up warm in the winter and if we get wet then there are always spare clothes. I love when we make a fire and cook bread and marshmallows or cake. We also made chips, they were yummy.

Wild Sparks has taught me to use tools safely, how to climb trees without falling down, how to make a fire and how to build a shelter. I have also learnt a lot about trees - what types they are and about wildlife. These are all really useful skills. I love Wild Sparks and would recommend it to other boys and girls.

Written by Martha, December 2014

Upcoming Wild Sparks dates

February mid term break

Scottish Woodland Skills Centre, Bamff Estate, Alyth

9am - 5pm Wednesday 18 - Friday 20 February 2015

£25 per day / £21 per sibling*

Coming soon.... dates for Easter activity days in Dunkeld and Alyth

Book early to avoid disappointment at www.wildsparks.co.uk

* Bursaries and help with travel are available for families experiencing hardship, get in touch for details.

Winter Wonders!

Don't let the cold weather get you down, wrap up warm, pull on your boots and head out to enjoy some frosty winter magic. Have you ever noticed how beautiful leaves look when they're all covered in frost? Winter beauty is all around so get out and enjoy it!

Collect some treasures on your adventures and have a go at making these fabulous festive ice crafts:

Ice medallions

You will need:

A round shallow plastic tub

String

Leaves and other natural bits

Water



Arrange your natural finds in the plastic tub and pour on water until it is about 3cm deep.

Lay the string around the edge of the pot, beneath the water, with a large loop coming off to one side (like it is in the picture). Leave your creation outdoors over night or on a chilly day until it is frozen. Remove it from the tub and hang on a tree to see the sunlight shining through. Gorgeous!

Ice lanterns

You will need:

Two plastic containers (soup or big yoghurt pots work well)

A collection of leaves and other natural bits
water

Some small stones

Fill one pot about 1/2 full of water. Place stones into the next pot and then place this inside the other one. Make sure the pots are not quite touching at the bottom or the sides, add or remove stones until it sits right. Place leaves and other natural bits into the water in the gap between the two pots. Use a pencil to poke them down and spread them about a bit. Leave your creation outdoors over night or on a chilly day until it is frozen. Wiggle the pots or place in some warm water for a few seconds to loosen the tubs and release your beautiful ice creation. Add a candle and watch the light flicker through the ice. Beautiful!



Wild Sparks projects and partnerships

Wild Sparks works with different partners out and about throughout Perthshire, Angus and beyond. Since Spring we've been involved in all sorts of exciting projects, here are a few snippets and highlights:

Dunkeld play days

This summer we launched a holiday programme in Dunkeld with huge success. We returned for more fun in Autumn and hope to be back again in Spring. All in all 37 children and 9 volunteers took part; we explored the beautiful and ancient Atholl woods and had fun whittling sticks, toasting marshmallows, creating with clay, building dens, rafts, animal homes and perfecting our hiding and camouflage skills amidst the undergrowth.



Kirriemuir After School club

Each Tuesday from May - October children from Northmuir and Airlie primary schools have been venturing into the muddy Caddam woods in Kirriemuir for after school adventures with Alice and Jo. We especially enjoyed being out in the dark this autumn, with torch lit treasure hunts, spooky fire side stories and glowing leaf lanterns.



Training the Woodcraft Folk

Wild Sparks are delighted to have been asked by Woodcraft Folk Scotland to run outdoor training days for their leaders in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Stirling and Dunblane. We believe adults need to play and create in nature too and have had a great time showing these guys how it's done... Wild Sparks picked up lots of tips and enjoyed meeting like minded grown ups; we look forward to more sessions in 2015.



Perthshire Autism Support

This summer and autumn groups from Perthshire Autism Support (PAS) made visits to Wild Sparks Alyth to see how children and young people with autism would find the experience. Without exception the newcomers settled in quickly and were soon busy making swings, using tools, climbing trees, collecting bugs and generally getting stuck into the Wild Sparks way. We look forward to more visits and are excited to have a few of their members now coming along independently, some making the most of 1:1 support* from the Wild Sparks leaders.

"Had the most amazing day at Wild Sparks today. The kids got to touch pick up. collect what ever they could find, the place was theirs to explore, Thank you to all staff for an amazing time" - PAS volunteer

*inclusion at Wild Sparks

At Wild Sparks we believe children learn best amongst a diverse friendship group. We celebrate difference and diversity by creating an environment in which children of all ages and abilities play together. If you know a child that would benefit from attending our services but might need additional support, such as free transport, bursaries or a 1:1 worker then get in touch and we'll see what we can do.

Keep in touch!

We are always happy to receive comments (good and bad), suggestions, news and ideas. Pick up the phone, write a letter, find us on facebook or send an email:

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That's all from us for now,
Many Thanks and a very Merry Christmas from the Wild Sparks crew.