

A YEAR OF COED CARIAD

2022-2023



September started with a lovely community day beating back the growth of summer. Vegetables were harvested and cooked from the garden. Blackberries collected, cooked with and just eaten in a glut. There was lots of play in the river, including dam building and fortifying those dams with the river clay dug from the banks. We made poms poms from all sorts of bits of wool from our collection, so to be used as balls and some to be made into pets.

The children cooked up a storm in the mud kitchen, freshly moved to by the wood shed giving the children more space and freedom to explore away from a now well used path to the climbing tree. They also enjoyed a fresh influx of resources to use in the kitchen, including old cake trays, pans and a variety of cutlery.

The excavations of the slopes by the climbing tree started in earnest and the children built ramps and steps. We met some newly hatched chicks that the Heartwood Community brought to visit us. The children delighted in building them some beautiful and at time elaborate nests made from grasses and other foraged items. We enjoyed some wonderful story time sessions using interactive foraged and made items with the fabulous Janina.

Towards the end of the month the annual mushroom hunting started with the discovery of various fungi on some of the trees and we enjoyed using the hand lenses to look at all the fabulous details the wide variety of mushrooms and fungi hidden in our woodlands had to offer.

October saw us helping to hand raise some rescued baby voles, using a small paint brush and milk. The children were entranced and so very gentle, quiet and careful with the tiny little voles. The mushroom hunting and exploring continued (using our strict no touch policy!) We even found our first stinkhorn, which elicited some rather fabulous describing words from the children.

We picked apples in the orchard to eat and the children chose to make a taste test activity them to see, which tree produced our favourite apples, and thus the one they would be back to visit more often. So apples were sliced and tested liberally that day.

We made clay and playdough leaf imprints and cut outs, clay monsters and faces, with some really imaginative features. We used apples and leaves to make prints on paper with paints. We strung beads and made jewellery with precious crystals and our names. We made cities using every type of construction block available and even the marble runs and filled them with foraged acorns and apples. The children

enjoyed a number of chess tournaments, along with a few other new board games in the box.

We had a wonderful time pressing the apples harvested into our very own juice, thanks to Kate from Coeden Fach and the Orchard Project. The children chopped, used the pommice maker and pressed furiously to each get a glass to drink.

We made baked apples over the fire, coring the apples and stuffing them with a choice of dried fruits, and just a splash of sweet freedom sauce. We whittled sticks for building, in the form of pegs, and for swords, and arrows.

The last weeks of October saw us with the playdough out for more creations using all sorts of tools, both playdough related and natural to make imprints and marks. The children used apples to roll out dough, acorns nuts and leaves to make patterns and imprints. It was fascinating to see their imagination and curiosity at work.

The rope came out for skipping and tugs of war. The older group started to split slates and whittle to make primitive tools to use mining for clay etc in the banks and riverbeds. They learnt how to bind axe heads, tie knots, carefully split branches to insert slate slices and also how to risk assess their work. Whilst the younger group enjoyed sand play opportunities with a multitude of vehicles, water and ramps.

Trains and Harry Potter Cluedo were the favourite activities on rainier days, whilst the Lego remained a stalwart favourite. We looked at butterflies under the microscope, made potions in the mud kitchen and painted pumpkin pictures. We also painted our clay works of art. We cracked hazelnuts to cook, played some Halloween games, for example, using the ninja line to string apples and playing pin the stalk on the pumpkin. The children also started to use the foraged and made story box materials to tell their own fabulous stories, whilst also making and finding some more items to add to the boxes.

November started with a visit from the wonderful Duncan Stirling with his music and enchanting stories. The children continued the musical theme outside for a couple of weeks using pots and pans, sticks and all sorts of finds to make instruments. As well as continuing to use our story box items to make up and enhance and retell all sorts of stories.

We tried our hand at Rangoli designs drawing around our hands onto paper to them decorate them elaborately with flowers and designs of our choosing. For lots of the children construction was high on the to do list using all sorts of types of blocks and usually a combination of them all, including Lego, Duplo, wooden, magnetic etc. We sewed designs using wool onto the plastic cross stitch fabric, wove on the peg looms using wool and even tried some knitting.

After an expression of interest in all things Harry Potter related we whittled wands, selecting and cutting branches from trees especially chosen for their Celtic qualities and tales. Then the children chose rune symbols to mark on them for their names and for decorations, we marked them with pens and pencils and some chose to help use the pyrography tool to mark their symbols. As November drew to a close we started to make wreathes, using willow cut on site and foraging natural materials like

holly and ivy. The mud slide construction began with renewed efforts, including hand and foot holds for easy surmounting the slope for all, and the addition of a rope to swing across the space like Tarzan!

December started with painting wrapping paper for gifts made. Paints, printing pens, nothing was off limits. The children continued making dens inside and outside. We also had a blast making snowflake cut outs to decorate the Welcome shelter and work on our scissor skills.

We cooked a hearty vegetable soup using some things we had grown and a variety of interesting vegetables brought in. The children then enjoyed carving the pumpkin/squash shells into small houses, even making small furnishings from vegetable leftovers.

The last week before Christmas, saw a lot of woodland play on the swing and the net and ropes. We continued using some apples from the trees, peeling them using a fascinating device that really entranced the children. We also enjoyed the company of parents for mulled drinks and Christmas treats in the afternoons.

January started with more playdough smooshing, definitely a favourite activity. As well as lots of mud and water play. We also tried our hands at making Calennig a Welsh New Year's custom to bring good luck and learning the Welsh songs sung at this time as a form of January good luck carolling.

With the cold weather the children used a knitting machine to knit their own hats and then they made pom poms for them. They explored ice in a multitude of formations and they explored the river in its deeper winter form. We whittled sticks for all sorts of things and the younger groups now started their making of primitive tools, using the little bench with a few tools carefully chosen.

We explored parts of a removed hornets nest and felled the tree that it had been housed in. This tree had been standing deadwood for a while so it was full of all sorts of bugs and fungi to explore. It also fell nicely onto a bank making a fabulous climbing structure and balance beam which the children enjoyed for a number of weeks.

We cooked cakes inside oranges around the fire and drank hot chocolate to keep warm whilst they were cooking. We made Mari Llwyd masks and wassailed the orchard at the end of January, with songs and music, using both made musical instruments and some that we have at Coed Cariad. We warmed apple juice to drink over the stove. We built swamp bridges and used blackthorn thorns to try to make our own sewing needles as they used to many years ago.

February started frosty and we explored ice some more, the flow of water, generally with the children making small rivers and rivulets across the yard or on the banks and the children made a teepee tent on the yard with some foraged hazel rods and a some tarps. We harvested a little willow and wove willow trays, played in the woods a lot and used the knitting machine some more to make toys.

The older group also chose to walk back from the woods via the river route, which was a real feat of exploration and endurance!

Valentines week saw lots of crafts with hearts using cut outs stampers stickers and more. Den building continued, and we brought out the tuff tray to the deck for some kinetic sand play.

As February drew to a close, we started to sit and whittle spoons and spatulas, using our straight blades and hook knives, with some impressive results from the children. Board games and hopscotch also made a resurgence.

March started with painting outside in the sun, before a snow day. Amazing how different the weather can be between two days at this time of year! A potions laboratory was built and the children foraged all sorts of items to make potions, medicines and poisons. They mashed, bashed, squashed and soaked all sorts of vegetation and mud in order to add colours and different properties.

There was lots more woodland play and explorations and river splashing. There was more sewing, including finger puppets and lots of paper crafts.

We planted more apple and pear trees in the garden, mulching them thoroughly and watering them in. We made our own board game in the style of snakes and ladders which was played and tweaked and played some more. On the wetter days the mud slide really came into its own, with the children working out how to make the mud slide even more slippery and fast! We made nettle soup with the first shoots and had a VERY wet Easter egg hunt.

April started off wet, but with a real interest in fossils. We used jewellers' loops and magnifying lenses to really look at the details of the rocks, crystal formations and fossils within. We tried our hands at being medics, using the out of date first aid items to bandage ourselves, dolls and teddies.

We spotted all sorts of spring time favourites and even found lots of baby trees in the woodlands and learned the differences between them so we could see what they would grow up to be. As the weather dried out, the painting moved from indoors to out again and the mud kitchen had a facelift.

The pond explorations began with the discovery of frog spawn and through this pond the children built not long ago they have looked at the whole life cycle of a frog.

Telephone systems were made with Hoover pipes and the children decided height was the name of the game with climbing trees and swinging the swing as high as they could.

A new game was invented throwing a frisbee across the swamp with a points system and rules. I was impressed with the mental maths of the older children and by the rules negotiations they conducted.

May gave us the gift of beautiful weather and a wonderful community day in the garden and around the Welcome shelter. We tried some maypole dancing and a number of songs both folk and Welsh in origin. We found lizards and tadpoles in the garden and pond respectively. We also found a newt in the pond!

Leaf crowns and elven fun with the older children in the woods. Lots of splashing in the river and cooking bread over the fire twice! Fishing fever grabbed a group and

they used sticks and string to make rods and spent many an hour attempting to fish in the stream.

We attached the hammock to the ninja line under the shade of the trees and also to the climbing tree at times to make some shady rest spots. The children mined red clay from the soil, then green and yellow and dammed the river numerous times making large splashing pools.

June saw our tadpoles growing legs and gave us the chance to meet a large frog in the river. The patient creature was held and recaptured a number of times before being allowed to retreat to a hole in the bank.

The younger children used some poles in the woodland to make their own seesaw. Den building in the woods continued with armaments of leaves being created and thrown to much hilarious effect.

The children went all out on their bug hunts and started to make some habitat creations, using a variety of tubs and jars to create elaborate mini habitats for worms, woodlice, ants and any other bugs they found.

The children have dug a bunker den, or underground den, using bread crates for a lid, camouflaging it perfectly with leaves soil and branches. This creation was repurposed into a fabulous dinosaur swamp later after the bunker was extended for two people.

We made fruit smoothies, and 'chocolate' banana oat milk shake and tried our hands at using a 30ft parachute (not to be attempted with just three adults!) We used our bird books to try to identify feathers we found around the site, used nets to catch bugs and butterflies and our tadpoles by the end of the month had become teeny tiny frogs!

July brought the clay back out and the children made all sorts of creations including additions to the dinosaur swamp from clay and natural materials, mermaids, animals and food.

The children had a day making herbal infusions and balms, learning about the properties of locally found plants with Anita. They have started to use their sketchbooks to draw some wonderful pictures.

Finally we have made fairy fire using cotton wool and lighting them using the flint and steel, which all the children can now make sparks independently with, but getting the sparks to light the cotton wool is challenging for some still. We have toasted marshmallows, done some needle felting and even more clay and playdough creations.