

Sustainability in the early years

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Part 1

As part of my John Muir Award experience, I visited Machynlleth in Wales with my family. During the visit, we stayed in a cottage surrounded by forests and countryside, explored woodland trails and spent time appreciating the natural environment. This portfolio records my experience and reflects on how it developed my understanding of sustainability and my appreciation of nature

Before this visit, I thought sustainability was mainly about recycling and reducing waste. However, after spending several days in the countryside, I realised that sustainability also means protecting wildlife, respecting natural habitats, reducing our impact on the environment, and encouraging future generations to care for nature.



Discover





When I arrived in Machynlleth, I was impressed by the natural beauty of the surrounding environment. The area is made up of forests, hills, rivers, and wide greenspaces, creating a calm and peaceful atmosphere. The fresh air and low levels of pollution were very noticeable compared with larger towns and cities. As I explored the area, I observed a variety of trees, plants, birds, and insects. Walking through the forest helped me understand how different living organisms are connected and how each one contributes to maintaining biodiversity.



This experience increased my appreciation of the importance of protecting natural habitats and the environment.

This experience helped me appreciate how important natural environments are for both people and wildlife. I realised that healthy ecosystems depend on people protecting them from pollution and unnecessary damage.

Exploring



One of the most memorable parts of the experience was staying in a countryside cottage. It was very different from everyday life in a town because it was surrounded by nature rather than buildings and traffic. Each day we explored different walking routes through the forest. I enjoyed listening to birds singing, watching the movement of trees in the wind, and observing different plants growing naturally. Walking outdoors helped me slow down and notice details that I would normally ignore. I also enjoyed spending quality time with my family. Exploring nature together made the experience more meaningful and encouraged us to appreciate the environment as a shared responsibility.

Reflection: exploring nature increased my confidence in outdoor environments and made me realise that learning does not only happen inside classrooms.



Nature provides many opportunities for observation, investigation, creativity, and problem-solving.

*Observing Wild
Rabbits, Chickens,
and Ducks in Their
Environment*

On the second day of my trip, we visited Portmeirion in North Wales with my family. Although it is best known for its colourful Italian-style architecture, I also noticed how the village is carefully designed to work in harmony with its natural surroundings. Walking through the gardens, woodland paths, and coastal areas helped me appreciate the importance of protecting both the built and natural environment.

This visit extended my understanding of sustainability. I realised that sustainability is not only about forests and wildlife but also about creating places where people can enjoy nature while respecting and protecting it. The visit showed how tourism and conservation can work together when natural landscapes are well cared for.



Exploring Portmeirion Village



Impact on My Future Practice

As a future early childhood practitioner, this experience has influenced how I think about children's learning.

I now believe that children should have regular opportunities to:

- Explore forests and parks.*
- Observe wildlife.*
- Ask questions about nature.*
- Develop respect for living things.*
- Learn sustainable behaviours through real experiences.*

Outdoor learning helps children become confident, curious, and environmentally responsible citizens.

Both places helped me develop my understanding of sustainability in different ways. Machynlleth gave me the opportunity to experience forests, wildlife and the peaceful natural environment. In contrast, Portmeirion showed how people can design and manage places that respect the surrounding landscape while allowing visitors to enjoy them responsibly.



Together, these experiences helped me understand that sustainability is not only about protecting nature but also about creating a balance between people, communities and the environment. Both visits encouraged me to think more carefully about how everyday choices can help protect the natural world for future generations.





Flowers I've encountered along the way

Exploring nature together made the experience more meaningful and encouraged us to appreciate the environment as a shared responsibility



Explore: One of the most memorable parts of the experience was staying in a countryside cottage. It was very different from everyday life in a town because it was surrounded by nature rather than buildings and traffic. Each day we explored different walking routes through the forest. I enjoyed listening to birds singing, watching the movement of trees in the wind, and observing different plants growing naturally. Walking outdoors helped me slow down and notice details that I would normally ignore. I also enjoyed spending quality time with my family.

Exploring: Forest around our cottage



This experience taught me that sustainability includes:

Protecting wildlife and their habitats.

reducing pollution.

Respecting nature.

Using natural resources responsibly.

Helping future generations enjoy healthy environments.

I now understand that sustainability is part of everyday life rather than something that only governments or environmental organisations are responsible for.

What I learned about sustainability



This part of the experience showed me that conservation is not only about large environmental projects. Every day, responsible behaviour also helps protect natural environments for future generations.





Overall, my visit to Machynlleth was an enjoyable and valuable learning experience. Spending time with my family in a cottage surrounded by forests allowed me to experience nature in a meaningful way. I developed a deeper understanding of sustainability and recognised that protecting the environment begins with small everyday actions.

Reflection



This experience has strengthened my commitment to promoting sustainability in my future work with young children by encouraging outdoor learning, environmental responsibility, and respect for nature.



After returning home, I shared my photographs and experiences with friends and family. I explained what I had learned about biodiversity, conservation, and sustainability.



I also reflected on how similar outdoor experiences could be organised for young children in early childhood settings. Activities such as nature walks, collecting leaves, observing birds, and exploring woodland areas can help children develop curiosity, confidence, and respect for the natural world.

