

Open Spaces, Open Minds



True Buddies participants get a closer look at earth worms with two volunteers during their day at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, in West London.

PHOTO COURTESY OF GREEN CORRIDOR

In 1804, the poet William Blake wrote about England's "green and pleasant land." Now more than 200 years later, some London schoolchildren are learning how to keep it that way, thanks to a partnership between Boeing United Kingdom and a nonprofit organization called Green Corridor.

Green Corridor is based in West London, where some of the busiest transport networks converge. The planes, cars, trucks, buses and trains using the routes through the area have a significant impact on the local communities and their environment. As a result, these areas are in great need of social, economic and physical regeneration. Green Corridor works to redress the balance and break down the barriers between local people and their green and open spaces.

Aimed at the area's middle school-aged students, Green Corridor's innovative new project called "Tree Bud-

dies" has two core objectives—to help children from immigrant families recently arrived in the UK to integrate into their schools and communities and to raise environmental awareness. The young people are paired up with "buddies" in their classes to begin learning about their local environment, specifically its trees.

The program includes an art workshop where the students produce larger-than-life models of butterflies, using willow tree branches and paper. In a second workshop, the children describe a tree's life cycle and act it out.

To build on the lessons learned in class, the young people then spend a day at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, in West London, one of the world's most important and stunning botanical gardens, where they learn about the different plant and tree habitats around the world—deserts, rain forests, and tropical and temperate zones. In preparation for this outdoor activity, the students are

asked to find a picture on the Internet of a tree or plant from their home country or research a tree they find interesting and bring the information with them on the trip.

During the morning, the students work in small groups to paint pictures of these different habitats. Then each group puts on a short drama sketch to portray the environment of their particular habitat—and while it's not easy to mime a tree growing or a wind whipping up a hurricane, the children usually manage it with ease and humor.

In the afternoon, the groups walk around the gardens to conduct tree surveys of the species they have been painting, taking bark rubbings using wax crayons and charcoal, and estimating the height and age of the trees. For some of the children, Tree Buddies gives them their first experience of a green open space, and a chance to visit one of the country's most celebrated tourist attractions.

Fiona Sim, executive director of Green Corridor, said, "We are delighted to have had Boeing's support for our Tree Buddies program in 2007. The program has been a great success, and without their involvement we would not have been able to provide this important experience to so many young people in the West London area. We also are pleased to have been able to involve the excellent educa-



Students participated in an art workshop where they created larger-than-life models of butterflies out of willow tree branches and paper as seen here.

PHOTO COURTESY OF GREEN CORRIDOR

tion team at Kew and look forward to working with them again in the autumn term."

Commenting on the experience, Ruth Cousins, one of the teachers who led the sessions at Kew Gardens, said, "Some of the young people we taught couldn't believe how much space there was here. The Tree Buddies Project has opened their minds to a new aspect of life in a large city, and I hope they go on to bring their children here and teach them about the importance of looking after our precious green spaces."

In the first year, 100 children from five schools took part in Green Corridor's Tree Buddies Project, allowing them to make new friends, get closer to nature and learn more about conserving the environment.

Sir Roger Bone, president of Boeing UK, said, "The importance of young people learning about their environment from a young age cannot be underestimated. With this grant, we hope to help vulnerable young people improve their place in the community through increasing their self-esteem and social skills as well as their knowledge and sense of care for the environment."

In addition to raising environmental awareness, Tree Buddies' goal is to help children from immigrant families integrate into their schools and communities.

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