



About our speakers and their workshops

Jon Cree

Keynote speaker

The theme of Jon's keynote will be all about ensuring the ethos of Forest School is fully reflected in Forest School programmes.

Workshop

For the workshop I would like to cover what we mean by 'challenging behaviour'? What needs the outdoors meets and how the outdoors affects challenging behaviour? Empathic dialogue and approaches to working with challenging behaviour in the outdoors. This workshop will take place outdoors.

About Jon

Jon Cree has had a lifelong passion for nature connection, which started when crawling through the beech woods of Berkshire! He started his 'career' in ecology and nature conservation and soon realised he loved working with children, connecting them to the natural world. He ended up working for the Peak National Park as Education Officer for almost 10 years. He then moved into training teachers and environmental educators in conservation and environmental education. Jon has been one of the international trainers for the Institute for Earth Education for almost 27 years.

For the past 17 years, Jon has worked at Bishops Wood Centre (now managed by the Field Studies Council), one of the first local authorities to embrace Forest School. He is the training co-ordinator at the centre and manages the teenage provision, which is run along Forest School lines.

In 2008, Jon joined the national network of trainers for Forest School and was instrumental in establishing the UK Forest School Association in 2012, when he was elected Chair of the association. Jon has trained educators and spoken about Forest School in a number of locations around the UK, Canada and South Korea.

Storytelling and the role of story in education is of special interest to Jon and he was a key contributor to the book: *Storytelling for a Greener World*. He also has a passion for working with learners who are challenged by our education system and society. He has a special interest in emotional literacy and how nature connection can support our emotional wellbeing — and importantly how we can all sustain the planet and ourselves.

What Jon most enjoys — when not playing in the woods with people and whittling — is paddling the rivers of the world with his family of three grown-up daughters and partner!

Brian Poots

Workshop

The workshop will tell of a journey. From the initial struggles and frustrations to encourage local Government and environmental organisations to begin a Forest School programme in Northern Ireland, through to the establishment of the Northern Ireland Forest School Association (NIFSA):

- (a) Looking specifically at the Forest School Leader Award Level 3 qualification and what is involved.
- (b) The Forest School Awards — local Councils supporting Forest School training in their parks.
- (c) NIFSA's latest development — the Distance Learning Forest School Programme.
- (d) NIFSA Annual Membership package.

The workshop will be of interest to anybody interested in Forest Schools, but of special interest to representatives of local Councils, parks services, administrators, and school and early years' leaders. This workshop will take place indoors.

About Brian

Brian was educated in London, completing a Degree in Ecology in the 80s. Since then, Brian has worked as an Ecologist for Landlife, Environmental Consultant for an internationally based Environmental Consultancy, Senior Manager for TCV — managing 4 rural offices and implementing accredited training programmes, and finally as Senior Woodland Manager for the Woodland Trust in Northern Ireland — managing all the Trust's estate in Northern Ireland and developing and delivering education and volunteering programmes.

Brian set up the Northern Ireland Forest School Association in 2008 to develop and deliver Forest School programmes in Northern Ireland. Since then, Brian has supported over 20,000 children to enjoy the outdoors and developed a nationally recognised Level 3 Forest School Leader Award. He was awarded National Operator status in Northern Ireland for Learning About Forests, and most recently has developed the Forest School Awards.

Marina Robb

Workshop

“Experience the outdoors through play, games and activities”. This workshop will draw together core routines in nature, games, and inspiring nature-centric approaches that foster well-being in children, where they learn by doing. There will be a particular focus on plants. This workshop will take place outdoors, whatever the weather — so come prepared!

About Marina

Marina Robb is founder and Managing Director of Circle of Life Rediscovery CIC, a leading outdoor learning organisation. She is author of *Learning with Nature*, a much loved Forest School must-have resources.

Marina has been the recipient of funding from Natural England, Mind, and The National Lottery, amongst other grant makers for her outdoor work with teenagers, families, and young people with mental health issues. She provides

residential camps in Sussex woodlands, Forest School and nature-based training for adults, outdoor learning days and youth training programmes.

Marina is a qualified teacher (PGCE), who has studied Environmental Education (MA), Environmental Management (BSc) and Social Research (MSc) since 1990. She is a leading Forest School trainer and practitioner (UK and International) and shares her knowledge and experience through training teachers and individuals in the UK and abroad who want to work outside the classroom.

Marina has spent her lifetime supporting young people and adults to find new and old ways of connecting people with nature and reap the benefits of facilitated outdoor experiences. As a parent and workshop facilitator, she encourages young people to find their real voice, experience a sense of belonging, and discover healthy pathways to adulthood.

Website: www.circleofliferediscovery.com

Carol Middleton

Workshop

“FS is run by qualified Forest School practitioners who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice”

This interactive workshop gives you space to reflect on your leadership journey so far, and inspiration for future development. Starting with a revision of principles, we will consider the role of the FS leader and the aspects of your practice which support a connection to nature, learner centred processes and the growth community within your forest school.

The session will be practical, with time built in for nature connection activities to underpin your practice. It is particularly suited to experienced Forest School practitioners.

Bring your stories and songs, your listening skills and an open heart as we share our practice and support each other on the next step of our Forest school leadership. This workshop will be mostly outdoors.

About Carol

Carol Middleton is a qualified teacher, Early Years Professional and Forest School Leader, with over twenty

years of experience working with people of all ages. She understands international best practice and pedagogy having been involved in education study trips to Reggio Emilia in Italy, Forest schools in Denmark, and working with colleagues from traditional cultures in America. Her inspiration comes from the wide skies and mud flats of Essex where she lives in a small coastal town with her family. Being outside is as vital as breathing!

She co-founded her own company — Huathe — and as well as continuing to run family camps and Forest school sessions with all ages, has become a Forest School Trainer to empower others to take children outdoors. She has been involved with her local FSA group in Essex for a number of years promoting forest school in her county and developing and running training courses. Carol headed the group that organised the FSA National Conference in 2014.

Carol was part of the team delivering the first Forest School training in Wicklow and has continued to support the Irish Forest School movement with training in Galway. Her latest training programmes have been innovative co-operations between Huathe and Hooson preschool in Guang Xi, China. Alongside all this, Carol lectures part-time at UCC Essex, enjoys speaking at conferences, and is up to her ears in research, developing a scale to help the sceptics understand why children learn better outdoors.

Jenny Dungan

The workshop is suitable for primary teachers, forest school leaders, parents of children in primary school, or those who are interested in the above.

About Jenny

Jenny is a primary teacher, forest school leader, forager, cook, and group facilitator. She is passionate about connective ways to educate herself and others. She

co-creates local community projects to enable people to share and learn together to reconnect to nature and to flourish. She introduced Forest School sessions for each child in her school, co-facilitated a 2-year project on Leadership for Sustainability in Wicklow, and is actively involved in Common Ground in Bray which is a members-based group dedicated to promoting a co-operative, mindful and ecological lifestyle. She runs summer courses for adults in bringing the curriculum outdoors, and foraging walks on a seasonal basis.

Ciara Hinksmann

Ciara will lead our opening and closing circles during the conference.

About Ciara

Ciara Hinksmann formed her outdoor learning company, Earth Force Education, in 2009 after living off-grid in Co Kerry for three months, in order to immerse herself in bushcraft, sustainable living and nature connection practices.

She is a Heritage in Schools specialist for nature connection, biodiversity and sustainability, and offers a range of Heritage in Schools workshops.

She runs both childrens and family forest camps during the school holidays in Co Wicklow and the Irish National Heritage Park, see www.earthforceeducation.com. Ciara coordinates, and is one of the trainers for the Certificate in Forest School Programme Leadership trainings in Co Wicklow, with UK trainers Circle of Life Training, and has been awarded Local Agenda 21 funding to run the first fully funded Forest School programmes in Ireland. She is the founding chair of the Irish Forest School Association (IFSA) which aims to develop and support the growth and development of forest schools in Ireland.

Earth Force Education forest camps were featured as part of the RTE Goes Wild series on Nationwide: <http://www.vimeo.com/65611610>.

Skills sharing

An integral part of Forest School training is the opportunity for leaders to share skills. On Sunday we will offer some such sessions by experienced leaders.

Shane Furlong

Shane will be offering a tutorial on fundamental knife skills, including basic cuts. This is suitable as a refresher for Forest School Leaders or as an introduction for first-time knife users. We will apply our skills to make a basic pot hanger, time permitting.

About Shane

Shane is owner and operator of Wild Places, a new Wexford based business delivering Nature Connection and Nature-Based Learning to young people in the South East. He is co-originator of the Wexford Forest School Project, hosted

at the Irish National Heritage Park. In 2016, this initiative delivered an innovative six week, in-school Forest School Program in partnership with Crossabeg National School and Wexford County Council, and is looking forward to expanding its offerings in 2017.

Since finishing his Forest School training in 2016, Shane has broadened his skills base through an ongoing bushcraft assistantship, with leading Irish bushcraft outfit Living Wilderness Bushcraft School. He has developed his own Nature Connection practice based around a daily sit spot. He is a lover of the little things. When he is not swinging in his hammock, he can be found face-first in the nearest bush or flower, always with hand-lens at the ready.

Caroline Carroll Percival

Workshop

Forest School is often described as child-led and sometimes people think there is no structure to a session — but there is! Caroline will explore the structure that she uses, and her approach to planning and assessment, including the risk assessments and health and safety issues. This is particularly aimed at those getting started and while it applies mostly to those working in the primary school context; it will be of interest to all beginning practitioners. There will be lots of time for discussion and chat as well as some practical activities. We will be outside!

About Caroline

My background is as a manager of a school-aged childcare service, operating within a primary school. We also offer afterschool and summer camps. I am also a trained Forest School Leader. I completed my forest school training in 2013 with Archimedes training in Belfast.

I work with children from Ranelagh Multi-Denominational School, the first Irish primary school to introduce a forest school programme in 2011. Check out their videos on: www.rmds.ie. The programme is now very much a part of what the school offers, and I work closely with the class teachers to ensure there are close links to the curriculum in what we offer. We take children from Senior Infants in Spring/Summer, 2nd class in Winter/Spring, and 3rd Class in Autumn/Winter, in 8 week blocks. This way, by the end of third class, the children have been out all through the seasons. We also offer Forest taster days in the after-school service.

For me, personally, I feel lucky and privileged to see how children interact and play in the natural environment. It is interesting to see how children seem able to solve minor issues (big to them) more easily outdoors. It is especially good for those children who just might have difficulties in a classroom or indoor environment and somehow seem to be able to express themselves more freely outside.

Orla Gallagher and Trisha McLoughlin

Workshop: Grounding Early Years Practice in Nature Pedagogy

This will be an interactive discussion based workshop exploring and reflecting on practice. It is suitable for practitioners working in Early Years or anyone who has an interest in nature based learning with under 6's. The first part will be indoors and the remainder of the session will be outside (hopefully in the sun!)

Workshop Description/Objectives:

- To introduce the concept of nature pedagogy in outdoor learning.
- Create a space for the participants to share their practice
- Reflecting on our own comfort zones and current practice position within outdoor learning.
- Considering the Nature Pedagogy Continuum in the context of factors: Time, Space, Resources and the Role of the Adult.
- The influence of Culture, Climate, Curriculum, and Community on our practice.
- Our vision for the experience of the child in outdoor learning.

About Orla

Orla Gallagher is a Forest School Leader and Early Childhood Professional, who has been working with in practice with children aged 0–12 years since 2011. A graduate of the BA (Hons) in Early Childhood Care and Education at the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown, Orla developed an interest in outdoor and risky play experiences, and undertook the OCN Level 3 in Forest School Leadership in 2015.

Orla was selected to present at the Early Childhood Ireland Research and Practice Seminar 2016, based on her undergraduate research into unstructured outdoor play habits of children aged 3–6 years.

Orla is currently a candidate of the MA in Child, Youth and Family Studies at IT Carlow where she currently is undertaking a research project exploring the engagement of families with school-aged children in woodland environments in Ireland. Orla is a committee member of the Irish Forest School Association, and works with a number of forest schools, including the Phoenix Forest School and Wexford Forest School Project, at the INHP. Orla has a particular interest in supporting practitioners to facilitate child-led learning in wild outdoor spaces. She lives in Wexford with her partner and daughter.

About Trisha

Trisha has worked in both Early Childhood Care Education and Community Development sectors for over 10 years as a practitioner, researcher, consultant and lecturer. I hold a Masters Research in the field of Early Childhood Care and Education and qualified at Level 3 (UK) Certificate in Forest School Programme Leadership in May 2016. My key area of research is outdoor risky play.

Trisha is currently delivering her Forest Friday Educational Programme. This provides a range of outdoor educational sessions to children aged 3–12 years through existing childcare services. The philosophy of the outdoor educational programme is to approach learning in a holistic and experiential way. It allows children to engage in outdoor and wild natural spaces in an investigative, sensory, and physical way. The children participate in a range of activities, such as nature watching, sensory embodiment, and 'bushcraft'.

Joan Whelan

Workshop: Research on Forest Schools

This will be an opportunity to talk about the theory and the philosophy behind forest schools and to share any work that you are doing in the area, as well as to discuss key papers that have marked the development of FS in the UK and Ireland. Please get in touch with Joan at joanwhelan3@gmail.com if you would like to share your research at the session. Bring along any posters or material on the day. Depending on the weather we may work outside!

About Joan

Joan Whelan is Chair of the IFSA. In November 2016, she retired after 24 years as principal of an Educate Together primary school. She has recently started a PhD

on Forest School pedagogy. She is a qualified educational psychologist and has always been interested in ensuring that schools are caring, holistic places, for both staff and students. She introduced FS education to her primary school in 2011, the first primary school in Ireland to offer this provision and it is now an embedded part of the school's offering. She believes strongly in schools being local hubs in their communities, and has pioneered initiatives including the introduction of a school age childcare service, community use of the school building, and, most recently, chaired a committee to renovate a local park, where the voices of the local children were to the fore. In her spare time, she loves walking and being outdoors in Co Antrim, and has recently taken up vegetable gardening! She lives in Dublin with her husband and has two adult children.



**Irish Forest
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