



Pupils from Harris Westminster Sixth Form take part in a GG2-funded trip to the Quantock Hills National Landscape

March 2025

Generation Green 2 is a 12-month project that aims to connect more than 25,000 underserved young people living in England to nature and rural life by taking them on inspiring experiences in beautiful protected places.



Alison Stevens,
Programme Director

Welcome

Welcome to the third and final newsletter of Generation Green 2!

It is with great pride that I share we are on track to reach our target of connecting over 25,000 young people with nature in beautiful protected landscapes as Generation Green 2 nears its conclusion. In the closing month of delivery, young people are experiencing the beauty of these landscapes across England every day, and we look forward to sharing the final results soon.

The success of this programme is a reflection of the immense effort and commitment of all 24 partners in the Access Unlimited coalition. At the heart of Generation Green 2 is the belief that outdoor learning is a right, not a privilege, and should be accessible to everyone, regardless of background, circumstances, or location. This conviction has been evident in the dedication of everyone involved in the project.

Continued on next page



Of course, numbers are just one way to measure success. Ultimately, the goal is to make a transformative impact on participants by helping them feel more connected to nature. The evaluation work gathered by partners (to be featured in the upcoming celebration report and further explored in the comprehensive evaluation by the University of Derby) will provide a deeper understanding of the project's success in this area. And of course, there is still some work to be done before we reach the finish line but we are almost there!

In the meantime, this newsletter highlights the diverse and dynamic activities of the project in recent months, including dark sky visits in the Yorkshire Dales, engaging young Muslims, supporting young carers, building skills through outdoor adventure, and tackling the complex challenges of overcoming barriers to outdoor learning. You'll also find some wonderful feedback from participants themselves.

Thank you to all the teams across the partnership for their outstanding work!

Alison Stevens, Programme Director, Generation Green 2, YHA (England & Wales)

Newsletter editor: Carey Davies, Senior Media and Communications Officer, National Parks England

— “ ” —

At the heart of Generation Green 2 is the belief that outdoor learning is a right, not a privilege, and should be accessible to everyone



A group from Westfield Community School in Wigan in the Lake District on a YHA-led residential as part of Generation Green 2



The moon and stars: bringing the dark skies of the Yorkshire Dales to light

Generation Green 2 was inspired by the idea of giving every young person the opportunity to spend a night under the stars - and participants in the Yorkshire Dales National Park have had a thrilling glimpse of the cosmos.

The 10th Yorkshire Dales Dark Skies Festival in February was a wonderful opportunity to host the final Generation Green 2 'evening under the stars' visits.

And what better way to explore the universe than a mobile observatory and art installation in a truly dark skies setting, which is how and why 'Moon Palace' came to the Yorkshire Dales National Park – a designated Dark Sky Reserve, the largest in the UK.

With the festival timed to coincide with half term, our audience shifted from schools to community groups. We invited established groups from underserved communities in urban areas such as Leeds, Wakefield, Bradford and Keighley and more rural areas such as Bentham, Settle, Skipton and Catterick to join us.



“ ”

Light pollution means people living in densely urban areas such as Leeds will never experience a truly dark night sky

**– Ruth McBain,
Access and Engagement
Project Officer, Yorkshire Dales
National Park Authority**

Gazing into the cosmos on the Moon Palace observatory bus



Some even arrived by train, with one young person telling us "It's a lot closer to Leeds than I thought it was on the train."

Light pollution means people living in densely urban areas such as Leeds will never experience a truly dark night sky compared to Ribbleshead. Even on a cloudy day, the experience of being away from city lights and possibly seeing the stars – or even the Milky Way – on a clear night is a new life experience for most.

Moon Palace, which came to Ribbleshead for two days (and nights), is an amazing observatory bus that helps bring the awe and wonder of dark skies to light. Each group of 11- to 18-year olds enjoyed a 45-minute workshop on board the cosmically converted, accessible school bus which houses an observatory, computers, stellar soft furnishings and gadgets galore. And all hosted by an astronomer, an artist and an event coordinator serving cosmic tea.

The learning and engagement team and volunteers from the National Park Authority hosted a total of eight Generation Green 2 groups and led activities which also included a walk to the Ribbleshead viaduct. The spectacular



The stargazing bus at Ribbleshead

backdrop of the Yorkshire Three Peaks was also appreciated by the groups after the mist rose. One of the group commented: "I liked the scenery, the photo opportunities were massive."

Sunset through the viaduct or playing headtorch tag amongst its giant arches were quoted as highlights for later groups.

A hot chocolate and homemade cakes from the Station Inn topped the trip off nicely.

— “ ” —
**Even on a cloudy day,
the experience of
being away from city
lights and possibly
seeing the stars...
is a new life
experience for most**



A GG2-sponsored group disembarks at Ribbleshead in the Yorkshire Dales



Awe and wonder: why dark skies are so important

Why is seeing the night sky so important in fostering a connection to nature? Research undertaken at the University of Derby, a key Generation Green 2 partner, is offering some insights...

“““

Children who spend a night under the stars – as part of a multi-night residential – demonstrate an increased connection to nature and improved mental health

The impact of Generation Green 2 was recognised more widely recently as Dr. Chris Barnes spoke at the Royal Astronomical Society's public event, *Light Pollution and Its Impacts*, which took place at Burlington House in London in January.

During his talk Dr Barnes highlighted initial findings from Generation Green 2, which shows that children who spend a night under the stars - as part of a multi-night residential - demonstrate an increased connection to nature and improved mental health in the short term. These benefits appear to be maintained for at least three months after their residential experience.

The changes observed in children's connection to nature and wellbeing are likely influenced by several factors. Firstly, experiencing the vastness of the night sky, seeing stars clearly and encountering nocturnal wildlife, which can inspire feelings of awe and wonder.

Secondly, residential visits remove children from their usual environments and offer opportunities for mental restoration. Children may have strong emotional experiences which might inspire lasting interests such as stargazing or spending time outdoors, helping children feel more at ease in nature and contributing to long-term improvements in wellbeing through enhanced emotion regulation, mindfulness, and resilience.

Finally, multi-night residentials allow children to fully engage with their surroundings enabling them to form a more meaningful connection with nature through sensory experiences, emotional responses, and the personal meaning they make.

*Dr Caroline Harvey, Senior Lecturer in Psychology,
University of Derby*

“
**Experiencing
the vastness of
the night sky...
can inspire
feelings of awe
and wonder.**

Huge effort: A thank you from the University of Derby

Researchers from the University of Derby Nature Connectedness Research Group – Doctors Caroline Harvey, Fiona Holland and Chris Barnes – are conducting an evaluation of the impact of Generation Green 2 for the young people attending.

Dr Caroline Harvey, Project Lead, is really pleased with the way that partners have supported the data collection and the target of achieving 900 completed surveys to measure the initial impact of the project has been exceeded. She acknowledges the effort this has taken: “A huge thank you to all our partners who have worked hard to build in time for the young people to participate in the evaluation. Initial data analysis shows very promising findings regarding the positive impact of the Generation Green 2 short courses, and we are excited to see the full results from this work in the near future”.

The activity sessions with young people designed to explore their experiences of the day and residential courses in more depth is also progressing well and Dr Fiona Holland is very pleased with the detailed information being submitted by partners.

The research team would like to thank all of those involved in supporting the data collection and are really pleased with the ongoing ‘time 3’ data collection, which is now in the final stages and will feature in the final evaluation report due later this year.



From urban streets to natural retreats: Transforming outdoor access for Muslim Youth

Generation Green 2 is helping to break down barriers by supporting access and engagement for Muslim young people, exemplified by recent courses run by YHA in conjunction with the Muslim Youth Alliance.

Nisbah Hussain, founder of the Muslim Youth Alliance, has provided outdoor experiences for over 800 young people since 2021. Recently, more than 50 young Muslims participated in funded residential stays at YHA Ravenstor in the Peak District and YHA Truleigh Hill in the South Downs.

Nisbah, a strong advocate for diversifying the outdoors, highlights a disconnect between the Muslim community and nature, despite its significance in their faith. Many Muslims live in urban areas, limiting their exposure to nature.

— “ ” —

You know something's really good when the young people are not just chatting amongst themselves or on their phones; they're actually engaged

—



A trip to the South Downs supported by GG2 and run by the Muslim Youth Alliance



With Generation Green 2 funding, Nisbah has organised residential trips for two groups of young people, including 24 girls from an all-female high school. For the girls, it was their first-ever residential experience. To respect cultural sensitivities, YHA arranged private hostel hire, allowing them to remove their hijabs in comfort. This female-only space reassured parents about their daughters' safety.

"Creating access to the outdoors and systemic change for overlooked communities starts with changing the narrative for women and girls," Nisbah explained.

Nisbah's transition from a corporate career to an advocate for outdoor engagement stems from her own formative experience with nature at 15. Before founding the Muslim Youth Alliance in 2023, she worked at Deloitte and later qualified as a local authority solicitor. However, her first school outdoor adventure planted a lifelong passion for nature.

The British Muslim community is young—48% are under 24—yet their outdoor experiences are limited. Through funding from Generation Green 2, Nisbah's work with Equalinks and the Muslim Youth Alliance seeks to bridge this gap by partnering with outdoor providers like YHA.

— “ ” —

Creating access to the outdoors and systemic change for overlooked communities starts with changing the narrative for women and girls



For young participants, these residential trips were more than getaways—they built confidence, developed skills, and formed lasting connections with nature. Nisbah emphasized that even adults accompanying the trips learned how to engage with outdoor adventures.

From stargazing to beachcombing, Generation Green 2 funding has opened new worlds for young Muslims. "You know something's really good when the young people are not just chatting amongst themselves or on their phones; they're actually engaged," Nisbah said.

"It's not just a moment; it becomes a movement," Nisbah added. With continued support, initiatives like these can inspire the next generation of environmental custodians.

"The time is now for real empowerment, systemic change, and equitable outdoor access," she concluded.

Anna Melton, on behalf of YHA (England & Wales)



Hidden obstacles: Overcoming the barriers to outdoor learning

Photo: © Carol Decker. The group heads out into the Quantocks. Experiences through GG2 can broaden horizons in every sense



Taking young people on meaningful outdoor learning experiences is not as easy as it sounds. Reporting on a trip in the Quantocks, Carol Decker from the Fields Studies Council reflects on the many (not always obvious) barriers that can complicate the process – and how they can be overcome.

On a brisk spring morning, students from Harris Westminster Sixth Form gathered at Dead Woman's Ditch, the starting point for their day-long exploration of a river that flows through the picturesque Quantock Hills in Somerset.

Harris Westminster is one of the highest-performing sixth forms in the UK, with priority places allocated to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The leadership ethos at Harris Westminster is one of inclusivity, and there is a strong commitment to providing enriching experiences that extend beyond the classroom, even if, as is often the case with many schools, funding for residential trips and extracurricular activities is limited.

The first thing that struck me about this particular group of students was the incredible diversity they represented. Roughly 15 different nationalities were

represented among the students, with many of them being second-generation immigrants. This level of cultural diversity brings its own set of challenges when it comes to inclusivity and participation in outdoor learning experiences.

“““

Overcoming the barriers to outdoor learning is not just about the money. It involves addressing the physical, cultural, and logistical challenges that students and schools face.



One teacher, for example, pointed out that some students had missed the trip due to cultural reasons, particularly among female students for whom overnight trips away from the family were considered taboo. Another challenge that can arise is religious practice. Among this group, twelve students were fasting for Ramadan, and two were observing Lent. The catering team at Nettlecombe Court worked hard in accommodating various dietary requirements and timing considerations to ensure that all students could observe their religious practices while still participating fully in the activities. In other instances, this has been seen as too great a barrier to overcome, and students miss out on these valuable experiences.

Clothing can also present challenges. The group wore an eclectic mix of waterproofs and wellies, all borrowed from Nettlecombe Court. On our hike through the river valley, some sections became especially muddy, and one student was struggling to keep up with the rest of the group. When asked if she was okay, she replied that she was trying to avoid the mud. Her teacher responded with a simple, "You've got wellies on, you can just walk through it." Later, I saw this same student, smiling and laughing, standing ankle-deep in the river.

Transport can also present challenges. The Quantock Hills, while only a short journey from Nettlecombe Court, have limited access by public transport and the cost of this can be a barrier for families with limited financial resources. Thankfully, part of the funding of Generation Green 2 helped to cover transportation expenses, ensuring that all students could participate.



“““

With strong leadership, creative solutions, and a commitment to inclusivity, outdoor learning opportunities can be transformative.

One of the more invisible barriers to outdoor learning is the time and effort required from teachers to arrange and facilitate such trips. Additionally, school cover must be arranged for teachers who are away with the students. For many schools, this time investment can be a significant barrier to offering such experiences. But the fact that Field Studies Council, and all the providers of the Generation Green 2 project, do everything they can to make the process as easy as possible, ensures successful delivery of these experiences.

Overcoming the barriers to outdoor learning is not just about the money. It involves addressing the physical, cultural, and logistical challenges that students and schools face. With strong leadership, creative solutions, and a commitment to inclusivity, outdoor learning opportunities can be transformative. Harris Westminster's day in the Quantock Hills serves as a model of how to break down these barriers and allow students to engage with learning in new, meaningful ways.

Through funding like that offered by Generation Green 2, schools can offer enriching experiences that broaden students' horizons—both in the natural world and in themselves.

Carol Decker, Business Development & Marketing Manager, Field Studies Council



Support through nature: Helping young carers in the Blackdown Hills



Several initiatives to support young carers to experience the outdoors have been enabled by Generation Green 2. In the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, a group made new friendships, connected with nature and learned new skills.

Young carers often experience high levels of isolation and miss out on mainstream funding and activity opportunities. Many come from low-income households without paid caregiving resources and often live in single-parent homes with limited support. They frequently care for family members and, as a result, face mental health challenges themselves. Their caregiving duties can disrupt their education and social opportunities, affecting attendance and academic performance. There is also a slightly higher prevalence of young carers among girls and some ethnic minority groups due to cultural caregiving norms.

Here in the Blackdown Hills National Landscape, we organised three Generation Green 2-supported sessions for young carers at

Wildside, an outdoor activity space in Madford. Two of these sessions were specifically for homeschooled young carers during term time to avoid them missing school, while the third session was held during half-term for young carers who attend school, ensuring they did not miss out on learning.

Each session began around a campfire, creating a welcoming environment where children could settle in, get to know each other, and become familiar with the space. They engaged in activities such as roasting marshmallows and participating in science demonstrations using red cabbage water as a pH indicator. This structured yet relaxed start helped ease any initial apprehension.

In the woodland, participants took part in sensory challenges such as blindfolded tree identification, scavenger hunts, and traditional games like hide-and-seek and tree climbing. One of the most popular activities was the zip wire, which provided both excitement and a sense of achievement. While some children explored freely, others engaged through drawing and observation, allowing them to interact with nature at their own pace.



After a morning of outdoor activities, the group gathered for a freshly prepared lunch made with locally sourced ingredients. The afternoon was dedicated to hands-on farm tasks, including grooming Shetland ponies, feeding livestock, handling rabbits, and moving hay bales. Each activity was carefully tailored to the children's needs, fostering confidence, social connection, and a sense of accomplishment.

Delivering the sessions presented challenges, particularly in ensuring that children and their families had the necessary support, clothing, and transport to attend. However, thanks to the collaboration between Devon Young Carers, Wildside, and Heritage Arts & People, these obstacles were successfully addressed.

The impact of the sessions was evident in the overwhelmingly positive feedback received. Many children expressed their joy at making new friends, feeling calm and engaged in nature, and learning new skills. One young

carer shared, "I made a friend today. I haven't had a friend in a very long time."

Parents also expressed gratitude, with one saying, "My child felt safe, happy, and engaged—a rare experience." Staff from Devon Young Carers emphasized the importance of these experiences, noting that they provided essential social interactions for young carers who might otherwise be isolated. Due to the success of the initiative, Devon Young Carers hopes to make this an annual event.

This initiative has been deeply rewarding for all involved. With demonstrated demand and success, we hope to secure future funding to expand Generation Green 2 projects and continue to support disadvantaged groups within the Blackdown Hills and beyond.

Llyr Jones, National Landscapes Association



“““
**One young carer
shared: "I made
a friend today.
I haven't had a
friend in a very
long time."**



Transforming lives: building skills and forming bonds



Pupils from Sprites Academy enjoy a sunny residential at Scouts HQ Gilwell Park in the Epping Forest

Generation Green 2 has supported more than 3,700 young people to experience the outdoors through Scouts – with results that can be life-changing.

Scouts is incredibly proud to be part of the Generation Green 2 project, which is opening the door to adventure for young people from disadvantaged communities at our Scout Adventures centres. Through this initiative, young people from schools, Scouts, and Guide groups have been able to experience the magic of a two-night residential – often for the very first time.

“““

One of our selective mute pupils found her voice and couldn't stop chatting; two socially withdrawn pupils formed the closest of bonds.



Since September 2024, over 3,700 young people, teachers and leaders, have set off on an unforgettable journey into the great outdoors at one of our adventure centres. For many, this was their first time away from home – a chance to build essential life skills like confidence, leadership, teamwork and resilience.

Feedback from a recent trip at Gilwell Park said: “Residentials are the making of young people, genuinely transforming lives in 'unseen' and immeasurable ways. A few highlights included one of our selective mute pupils finding her voice and not being able to stop chatting, and two socially withdrawn pupils pairing together to form the closest of bonds. We also debated at length whether to take three pupils due to considerations of safety, behaviour and home situation. In the end we took them all and what a great decision that proved to be.

“The venue and activities were, as expected, superb. But the unplanned moments were equally unforgettable. The 'DJ chef' blasting out his music with the kids spontaneously dancing; three huge, majestic, white stags roaming the site at night; the awe and wonder of city kids in the 'country'.”

From ziplining and climbing to team building challenges and bushcraft (and even singalongs by the campfire) every experience has been designed to push comfort zones in the best way – within a safe and supportive environment.

*Dean Constant, Marketing Manager,
Scout Adventures*

“““

With over 7,400 nights away (and counting!), the impact of this initiative has been huge – and the feedback has been nothing short of inspiring.



Photo: © Motiur Rahman, Headteacher, Sprites Primary Academy. More than 2,300 young people, teachers and leaders have participated in GG2-sponsored trips through Scout Adventures



"Best trip ever"

The voices of young people

Feedback from young people on their Generation Green 2 experiences has been overwhelmingly positive. Here is a flavour of some of their comments.

"Can we come again tomorrow?"

"I had the most amazing time of my life"

"I'd come again if I could knee-slide down the mountains"

"You can walk around and listen to the birds; you can get deeper into nature than staying inside and watching electronics"

"I love nature and wildlife and I'd definitely recommend it to other children"

"It's a lot closer to Leeds than I thought it was on the train"

"I have never even seen a real sheep before"

"Didn't realise there was so many stars here. Why are there more stars at Danby than at home?"

Join the conversation

Follow us on Twitter using
#GenerationGreen

Share your Generation Green project stories through
generationgreen@yha.org.uk

Funding for Generation Green 2 has been provided by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) as part of its ongoing support of access to nature.

The project supports key recommendations in the 2019 Landscapes Review, addressing the need for a wider range of first-time visitors to engage with protected landscapes in order to help make them fit for the future.

Generation Green 2 is the second project to be delivered by the Access Unlimited coalition. The project capitalises on the coalition partners' combined reach of more than two million young people. Learn more at www.yha.org.uk/generationgreen

