



Early Reading Connects

Creep and Crawl to the Ugly Bug Ball

The 'Ugly Bug Ball', a free outdoor event for 0 to 5 year olds, was organised by Sue Westmore, Early Years Consultant and Lynsey Weston, Every Child a Talker (ECaT) Consultant. The aim of the day was to support language and communication development through the ECaT programme and promote the benefits of outdoor learning. Lynsey Weston explains all.

The Ugly Bug Ball took place in a local park and saw around 1,000 children coming along. During the day, the children had the opportunity to experiment, investigate and thoroughly enjoy themselves getting up close and personal with insects, sticks and mud!

The fun day included a great variety of play based entertainment, including shelter building, making bug biscuits, singing and story telling, craft activities and first hand investigations of live insects – in fact something for everyone. Despite blizzard conditions and freezing temperatures, the children certainly had a ball.



Girls having fun painting



The children loved looking for insects in the mud

Early Language Lead Practitioners (ELLPs), who are all participating in the ECaT programme, supported the day by planning, preparing and providing a range of exciting and engaging bug-themed activities. The children were given the opportunity to talk to each other within small groups.

We did not want activities that were too adult directed and wanted to allow the children the freedom to express themselves as they implemented their activities. The ELLPs were particularly discouraged from bombarding the children with questions during

the activity and to instead build on what the children said and rephrase any words they mispronounced.

The digging activity was awarded the best activity for promoting the children's communication skills by our ICAN representative. This was so successful as the activity could be interpreted by the children in a variety of ways giving them the freedom to dig, make mud pies, search for insects and discuss and compare the insects found. Some children simply enjoyed jumping in the mud! Later in the day, Diana Bateman, from Southend's Early Years and Childhood team, presented certificates to the ELLPs, who had all completed a 10 week accredited course in speech and language.

The event was also well supported by other local organisations including the library service, Southend Museum, The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), Southend Borough Council park rangers and Metal, an organisation that provides residency space for artists.



Let's make some ugly bugs!

The feedback from the many schools, pre-schools, nurseries, childminders and parents was fantastic and despite the freezing weather, there were plenty of sunny smiles all round. Eileen McLoughlin, a local childminder who attended the event said, "Congratulations! What a great success. My children had a great time joining in the events – especially the mucky play". Jane Theadom, Head of Southend's School Support & Preventative Services wrote that the day showed "brilliant examples of outdoor learning with communication right at the heart". James Lock, Community and Events Fundraiser from the charity I CAN, which supports the development of speech, language and communication skills wrote, "All of the stalls and stands that Southend's Early Language Lead Practitioners had organised were absolutely fantastic. Each created an activity encouraging rich communication."

Following this great success, there have been many requests for future fun in the park. Watch this space!