



Children from Bishop's Primary School in Ashington take part in a beach clean up during a visit to Northumberland Coast National Landscape

January 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 second newsletter of Generation Green 2!

I'm thrilled to report that nine months in, Generation Green 2 has already enabled almost 16,000 young people to take part in experiences across England, with the busiest phase of its delivery well underway.

At its core, Generation Green 2 is about forging connections with nature. However, its wide-ranging programme also encompasses education, wellbeing, self-expression, creativity, insights into rural life and much more.

This newsletter showcases the rich diversity of Generation Green 2 experiences: a residential with a rapper in the Surrey Hills; farm visits in the Yorkshire Dales; a biology field trip in Shropshire; a much-needed break for young carers in the Peak District; and a reflection on how young people on courses in the Lake District have responded to disconnecting from their phones. This diversity reflects the range of expertise and knowledge across the 24 partners that comprise the Access Unlimited (AU) coalition and are delivering Generation Green 2.

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By the end of the project next spring, we will have given more than 25,000 young people a host of fantastic experiences aimed at connecting with nature and rural life

The feedback from participants featured in this newsletter demonstrates the transformative impact these experiences can have. By the end of the project next spring, we will have given more than 25,000 underserved young people living in the country's most socially disadvantaged areas a host of fantastic experiences aimed at connecting with nature and rural life and delivered more than 41,500 days or nights in nature to young people who would otherwise be the least likely demographic in the country to spend time in the nation's most beautiful landscapes.

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

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



Taking a close look at nature as part of a Field Studies Council trip in the Shropshire Hills National Landscape



Seeing is believing: Generation Green 2 work showcased in the Yorkshire Dales

Politicians and policymakers got a vital first-hand glimpse of the work of Generation Green 2 as part of an important anniversary event last year.

The Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority and YHA (England & Wales) joined together last November to mark the 75th anniversary of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act with an event in Malham.

Around 50 guests gathered at YHA Malham youth hostel to witness the unveiling of a blue plaque dedicated to John Dower, who is credited as the 'architect' of the legislation.

The event looked back at past milestones – but the presence of young people on Generation Green 2 courses was a powerful symbol of the future.

Guests included Baroness Hayman, the minister responsible for access at the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), as well as representatives of Natural England, National Parks England, National Landscapes Association, Campaign for National Parks, Field Studies Council and the Open Spaces Society.

Looking to the future

Guests had an opportunity to see Generation Green 2 in action, with pupils from Waterloo Primary School in Liverpool enjoying a two-night residential organised by the YHA. Baroness Hayman took time during her visit to meet with the students and teachers during their fire-lighting activity in the grounds of the hostel.

Bright sparks: fire-lighting in the grounds of YHA Malham, Yorkshire Dales National Park



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Getting into nature when you're young means it becomes part of you. If you don't ever get to experience the outdoors, then you don't know what you are missing.

– Baroness Hayman





Pupils get to grips with livestock during a visit to Hill Top Farm



A Generation Green 2 group from Bradford enjoy the Yorkshire Dales National Park



Baroness Hayman sees Generation Green 2 in action

Reflecting on her visit, Baroness Hayman said: "Increasing access to the outdoors for children from deprived communities is incredibly important. Getting into nature when you're young means it becomes part of you. If you don't ever get to experience the outdoors, then you don't know what you are missing.

"The work YHA are doing, and projects like Generation Green 2, are great initiatives to help enable access to National Parks and protected spaces for young people."



Through innovative initiatives like Generation Green, giving thousands of young people opportunities to connect to nature, the unique relationship between YHA and National Parks is thriving as much today as it was 75 years ago.

– James Blake, Chief Executive of YHA (England & Wales)

'It looks like the Grand Canyon'

Generation Green 2 also made its way on to TV screens via BBC Look North, which featured opportunities organised by the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority's Learning and Engagement Team and volunteers in connection with the anniversary event.

The group from St Columba's Catholic Primary School, Bradford, was shown visiting Hill Top Farm in Malham, where young people had the opportunity to see and touch livestock, look around the farm, and quiz farmers Neil Heseltine (former chair and current member of the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority) and Leigh Weston about what it's like to farm in a National Park.

Pupils on the same residential trip also got to take part in a host of activities in the surrounding landscape, including a visit to Gordale Scar, with one young person remarking: "It looks like the Grand Canyon!"

Anna Melton for YHA and Ruth Mc Bain, Access & Engagement Project Officer, Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority



Unplugging to connect: can young people go without their phones?

Going on Generation Green 2 experiences often means spending less time on phones. On courses run by the Outward Bound Trust, young people have been asked to hand them in altogether to participate in activities. James Ferguson reflects on the results.

Young people from Leigh Academy take the plunge during an Outward Bound Trust GG2-funded residential on the shores of Ullswater

What happens when you take phones away from a group of young people?

This autumn, as part of Generation Green 2, we did exactly that at Outward Bound here in the Lake District. The results were as surprising as they were inspiring.

I'll admit, we were nervous. Phones are such a key part of life for young people and for schools too, whether it's documenting field trips or keeping track of groups. Would there be resistance? Rebellion?

Our team debated the decision heavily with teachers. One perspective was that phones could be helpful tools for content creation, capturing memories, and even connecting with families back home. But our instructors stood firm: "We mustn't compromise the adventure."

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Most students handed over their phones without hesitation. Some even seemed relieved





So we decided to trust the process.

When groups arrived, many visiting staff found themselves on the frontlines, helping collect phones. We anticipated grumbling, maybe even tears. After all, this is a generation deeply connected to their screens and we were asking them to let that go, even temporarily, in an unfamiliar environment.

But something unexpected happened.

Most students handed over their phones without hesitation. Some even seemed relieved. A few held onto theirs initially but later joined in when they noticed how much fun their peers were having - talking, laughing, connecting face-to-face. The icebreaker wasn't some planned activity; it was simply stepping away from screens.

For the duration of their stay, we controlled phone access during downtime, ensuring fairness so there were no 'haves' and 'have-nots.' Phones stayed off during Outward Bound challenges and wild adventures. Without screens, students rediscovered the joy of the moment: exploring nature, building friendships, and tackling new challenges head-on.

The results were striking. Teachers told us how transformative the experience was for their students, many of whom returned to school with newfound confidence, resilience, and connections that extended well beyond the trip.

When we consider the raft of challenges young people face today, whether managing screen time or helping them engage with the natural world, it can feel overwhelming. But this experience showed us that unplugging is not only possible but beneficial.

By creating environments where young people can reconnect with each other and themselves, we can help them thrive in ways technology sometimes hinders. Of course, this decision is subject to each school. But for many who are joining us through Generation Green, our advice is clear: unplugging from your phones and reconnecting with your friends and the natural world can have a wealth of benefits.

James Ferguson, PR and communications manager, Outward Bound Trust



Nature's classroom: teaching the conservationists of the future

Generation Green 2 courses delivered by the Field Studies Council, like this one in Shropshire, have seen biology students – tomorrow's ecologists and conservationists – given an opportunity to deepen their knowledge with hands-on time in the natural world.

In October 2024, a group of 22 students from Aldersley Sixth Form in Wolverhampton visited Field Studies Council Preston Montford, Shropshire. They undertook a three-day Biology A Level residential, funded by Defra through Generation Green 2.

Despite the journey from the school being less than an hour it was a completely different environment for many of the students.

The group's visit began with a short classroom introduction followed by an afternoon out in the extensive grounds of Preston Montford. They spent time considering sampling, identification and data analysis, and forming hypotheses with the support of tutors. There was a chance to explore some of the site, including our SSSI riverbank area, and then to map the plant life in the grassland near the centre.

The students spotted pond life, picked apples from the trees in the grounds and simply got comfortable in the new surroundings.

Aldersley Sixth Form students explore the Shropshire Hills



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We can give our students the absolute best experience in the classroom, but what we can't give them is real life, the outdoors

**– Ms Leah McClure,
Director of Science,
Aldersley Sixth Form**

On the second day, the students explored The Stiperstones National Nature Reserve in the Shropshire Hills AONB. The day could not have been better with mild temperatures and a stunning blue sky providing a backdrop to the spectacular panoramic views of the countryside of Shropshire and Wales. Students worked in groups to investigate the biodiversity of the area using a variety of equipment and methods.

On their final day, Aldersley students visited Carding Mill Valley, a very different site also within the Shropshire Hills AONB. They sampled the abundance of invertebrate species and looked at the river ecosystem.

Reflecting on the benefits of a trips such as this, accompanying teacher Ms Leah McClure, Director of Science said: “We can give our students the absolute best experience in the classroom, but what we can't give them is real life, the outdoors. Today we've looked at an example of a diseased leaf in nature and we've talked about a lichen on a tree and using it as an ecological indicator.”

She continued to say that, like a lot of schools, a paid for experience is not accessible to everyone but it's important for their school to be able to provide this opportunity for every student. “It's about going out into nature and just being able to see the world as it really is, and for them to realise that an hour away from their doorstep is something this beautiful.”

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

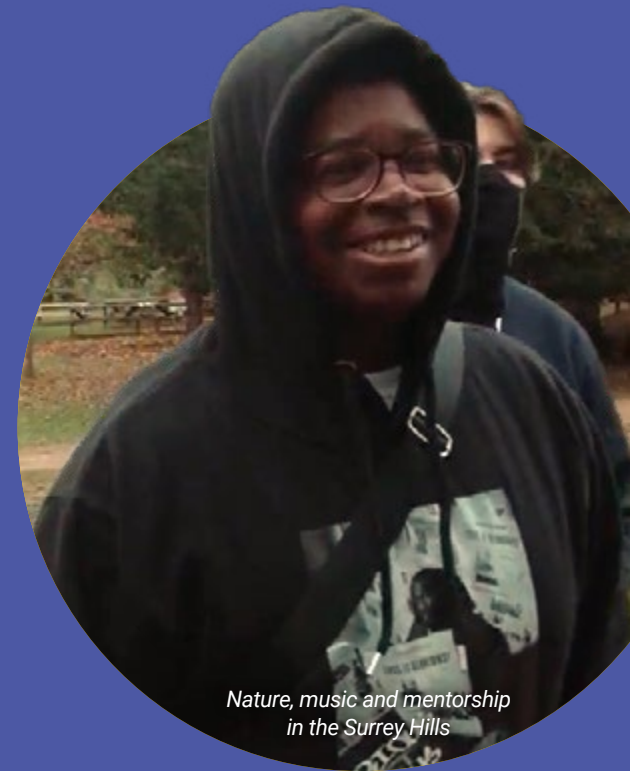


Hip Hop in the hills: music meets nature through Generation Green 2

Encouraging self-expression and creativity is often a feature of Generation Green 2. A great example of this was when young people with behavioural and emotional challenges from London joined MOBO Award-winning rapper Still Shadey for an inspiring residential in the Surrey Hills National Landscape.

Over the course of this two-day trip, the group explored the local wildlife and landscape, participated in skill-building activities, and even crafted their own kazoos!

The young people were brought together by Ment4, an organisation founded by Still Shadey, which provides mentorship to young people in and around Croydon, London, who face emotional and behavioural challenges. Residentials like this give participants a valuable opportunity to step away from home, learn new skills, forge connections, and build confidence.



Nature, music and mentorship in the Surrey Hills

On the first day, the group settled into log cabins at Surrey Outdoor Learning and Development. They then attended a knife skills workshop, where they used locally sourced hazel to craft kazoos. Preparations for exploring nature followed, with a walk that introduced them to the rich wildlife of the Surrey Hills, including nightingales, butterflies and the hazel dormouse. The day concluded with a reflective session around a fire pit.

The second day included confidence and communication-building activities like climbing and archery. Wrapping up the experience, the group rehearsed a musical piece that Still Shadey had been preparing for an upcoming show.

This memorable experience highlighted the power of nature, music, and mentorship in helping young people grow and thrive. One of the participants said: "I really enjoyed it, because it was a break from busy Croydon and it's very calm and peaceful here."

Another said: "I feel like I don't need to be inside Croydon or London. I can do new things outside of my area. And because here, there's not much internet I can do more things, I don't always have to be using my phone, I can find new things to do."

Over 400 young people from Croydon, Dorking, Guildford and Woking will spend time in Surrey Hills National Landscape as part of the Generation Green project on residentials, days visits and farm visits.

Sabina Eberle for National Landscapes Association



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Because there's not much internet I can do more things, I don't always have to be using my phone, I can find new things to do.

– Generation Green 2 participant from Croydon



Goat-getters: students connect with rural life in the Yorkshire Dales National Park

Building life-long connections to nature

Connecting with rural life and communities is a vital part of the Generation Green 2 programme. As a trip in the Yorkshire Dales National Park showed, young people with backgrounds from across the world can find resonances in the English landscape.

“We’re going up Mount Fuji!” exclaimed Anaya on our short (but wet) uphill trudge to Gam Farm. The narrow, drystone-walled lane reminded one pupil of the scenery in Pakistan.

For eight-year-old Emma from Leeds, the waterfall was her best bit - “It was like calm music”. But for most of the 58 Year 4 students visiting Grassington in the Yorkshire Dales National Park in October, the “cute” and “friendly” animals definitely won the day.

Suela was excited to see the hens, telling me: “My dad was a chicken farmer in Nigeria”. And there was a loud chorus of back-and-forth ‘baas’ in response to the Swaledale sheep lining the fields.





Connecting with the countryside in the Yorkshire Dales National Park

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Not only is it good for our wellbeing, but also for developing our pro-environmental behaviours



Thanks to Generation Green 2, the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority is helping young people aged 7 - 18 to visit the National Park, working with those living in some of the most underserved communities in the UK. We hope it will build new and life-long connections with nature through residential stays, evenings under the stars, farm and day visits.

Over 400 have already taken part, with many coming from schools and community groups in urban areas such as Bradford, Darlington, Colne and Leeds.

A farm visit is always an amazing experience for anyone, and local farmer Helen Wray gave us a warm welcome, delighted to share her passion. Seeing, feeding and stroking the animals was a favourite for many. A talk about wool processing from Helen's neighbour, rare breed sheep farmer Nina - with fleeces to touch - gave real depth to the experience.

"I was scared to go into the field at first, but then actually the animals were friendly", reflected Aliyah. "And the staff were helpful which made me feel happy."

The National Park's Learning and Engagement team then took the group on a nature walk down to the River Wharfe, where we got goosebumps listening to the water pouring over Linton Falls.

This time spent noticing nature - or 'nature connection' - is one of the most powerful aspects of Generation Green 2. As the visit organiser, Access and Engagement Project Officer Ruth Mc Bain, said: "Not only is it good for our wellbeing, but also for developing our pro environmental behaviours."

"Given that we're experiencing climate and biodiversity crises, such opportunities to share simple, cheap, fun and repeatable activities, using our senses and noticing tiny details, are critical, especially for primary-aged children. And being able to do all this whilst appreciating the special qualities of the Yorkshire Dales National Park is an amazing, often life-changing, experience for these young people."

*Sarah Nicholson, Communications Officer,
Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority*



A break in nature: young carers enjoy a day out in Dovedale

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I was in awe
at the resilience
and positivity
from the group

Taking it step-by-step in the Peak District National Park

Generation Green 2 is largely focused on schools, but a YHA-led trip in the Peak District saw young people with caring responsibilities get some much-needed respite in nature.

While YHA's main focus for Generation Green has been school residentials, we have also offered a handful of places to non-educational partners who work closely with YHA, to deliver trips to young people most in need of a break.

October half-term provided an opportunity for Generation Green 2 to provide a well-earned rest for a group of young carers from Bolton Lads and Girls club (BLGC), in Greater Manchester.

For two nights YHA Ilam Hall provided our 'Connecting to Nature' package to 19 young carers aged 8 - 16, allowing them time away from their busy lives, explore the landscape and really immerse themselves in nature.

I was lucky enough to visit the group on their second day, and join them on a guided walk around Ashbourne and Dovedale stepping stones. While the weather was kind, the ground was not and it quickly became clear that this would be one of the muddier walks of our lives!

But, not for the first time being involved with this project, I was in awe at the resilience and positivity from the group. Feedback afterwards proves how important these breaks can be.

Katherine, the BLGC Young Carer's co-ordinator, said: "It was honestly such a fabulous few days – It was an opportunity for a reset, for young people to find some peace and just turn down the dial for a couple of days. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for this opportunity – the positive impact of these experiences can't be underestimated."

YHA have now delivered funded residentials to nearly 3,000 young people and is set to welcome another 1,000 young people in early 2025, with plenty more adventures and memories being made.

Charlie Giddins, Generation Green Project Officer, YHA

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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

