



Green Gown
Awards 2016



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Finalist's case study

Kingston University

Community

Changing Views: Re-naturalising the Hogsmill with a little help from our friends

About the project

Summary

This long term project seeks to change how communities perceive and treat the Hogsmill River; an integral part of the Knights Park campus and of the student experience at Kingston University. This was achieved through engaging communities with external project partners and various initiatives such as eel monitoring, habitat creation, litter picks, water quality monitoring and pollution monitoring.

All of these elements have combined over time to create an engaged community of volunteers who help enhance, protect and conserve an important ecological feature for future generations and connected habitats.

Project partners

South East Rivers Trust, The Zoological Society of London, Kingston Biodiversity Network and volunteers from around Kingston (University students, staff, local residents and volunteers from other local charities).

The problem

The Hogsmill River has largely been used as a dumping ground over the years; a situation not helped by 80% of the inflow into the river coming from the local sewage works adding high levels of nutrients to the river alongside non-biodegradable refuse which people flush down toilets every day! Current treatment systems (based on infrastructure put in place during the Victorian times) are not designed to deal with these issues. The project therefore aimed to change how communities perceive the undervalued Hogsmill River and the pressures it faces and attempt to alleviate these pressures.

The results

The approach

Kingston University took ownership of the stretch of river by our Knights Park Campus to transform it with the help of local community members. Our approach is to create a community focused on the Hogsmill River made up of local volunteers from different walks of life. This engaged community acts as a perpetuating force, working to improve the river, while educating and engaging previously disengaged audiences on issues of pollution, wildlife conservation and how others can get involved.

This combination of community projects, education and citizen science projects, looking to find local solutions to issues faced by the Hogsmill River, may be the only way to achieve long term improvements. Especially

Kingston
University
London

Profile

- Higher Education
- Approximately 17000 (July 2016) students
- 2111 staff (FTE Sept 2016)
- Five urban campus sites, plus residences



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relevant in a climate of underfunded government environmental departments being unable to do proper long term monitoring and enforcement.

Our goals

To engage with as many people as possible to change the views of the Hogsmill River, get communities to appreciate the river as a wildlife and recreational asset that everyone can use.

Obstacles	Solutions and messages
Creating a community	This takes time , you have to keep persevering, exploring new avenues of communication and new engagement activities to reach as many people as possible – Don't give up, as the efforts are worth it in the long run.
Maintaining interest	You need more than one initiative to get long term sustained community involvement in environmental change at the local level. More partnerships created between different organisations and community groups create more opportunities for individuals to find events and like-minded people , making it easier to keep them engaged and participating for longer.
Funding	Funding can be tricky , while available for new initiatives or unique ideas, repeat funding for existing projects can be limited. We have tried to ensure that equipment can be pooled across different initiatives to minimize overheads. As the community created is largely a community of volunteers, some staff costs are reduced, however funds to provide training for existing projects can still be problematic. We try to overcome this by working with partners to provide free venues and training for different initiatives.

Performance and results

The outcome of the project is, among other things, the transformation of a 120 meter stretch of the Hogsmill. This was completed in 2014 with partners the South East Rivers Trust and different community groups from around Kingston (Kingston Biodiversity Network, University students, staff, local residents and volunteers from local charities).

Over 680 volunteer hours were donated to the Hogsmill by community volunteers during the initial project and afterwards; creating, planting and maintaining a new embankment and river habitat.

This stretch of river is now enjoyed by all in the community with continued opportunities for new groups to get involved.

The future

Lessons learned

We have learnt that you can never rest on your laurels, you have to continuously communicate the aims, goals and environmental messages of your project, even if you think that it's been done to death! You have to remember that you are always aiming to engage new people who may not have any experience in the subject, so you want to make it as easy as possible to get them involved and engaged with the community.



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We have also learnt that to create a cohesive community, you need to cater for different interests and abilities, and also being supportive of new initiatives that will spring up in an organic manner from different community members. Ideally for long term change to remain sustainable, a project and community will end up taking on a life of its own beyond any one organisation.

Sharing your project

Various projects, issues, training and outcomes are communicated by group emails, local postal mail-outs, biodiversity newsletters and blog entries. Examples include the following articles and newsletters for different projects:

Kingston University led communications:

- <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/the-2016-citizen-science-eel-forum-tickets-26963712189>
- <http://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/the-2016-hogsmill-river-forum-tickets-20805796698>
- <http://us5.campaign-archive2.com/?u=b76ea3d0ea0648743c3da1a02&id=1abba7ddf>
- <http://us5.campaign-archive2.com/?u=b76ea3d0ea0648743c3da1a02&id=e1a6293a7c>
- <http://us5.campaign-archive2.com/?u=b76ea3d0ea0648743c3da1a02&id=443c75e8d0>
- <http://kubiodiversity.blogspot.co.uk/>
- <http://kubiodiversity.blogspot.co.uk/2016/05/20-05-2016-water-water-everywhere.html>
- <http://kubiodiversity.blogspot.co.uk/2016/06/15-06-2016-help-needed-this-summer.html>
- <http://kubiodiversity.blogspot.co.uk/2016/03/10-03-2016-battle-of-sexes-lost-in-river.html>

Communications from other partner organisations:

- <http://us9.campaign-archive2.com/?u=1bbd0d3d34668bf5c920120bd&id=103265824b&e=650e5faf0d>

What has it meant to your institution to be a Green Gown Award finalist?

Being a finalist for a Green Gown award is a great achievement for Kingston University, demonstrating that sustainability is a living reality for our staff, students and local community, with tangible outcomes that benefit everyone. It's also provided another platform to continue communicating what we are doing and what others can do to get similar outcomes.

Further information

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