

River keepers and Junior River keepers.

Our Cray River has never looked so good! This is all due to two very successful groups who have taken responsibility for improving our environment around the river area. For the last year Thames 21 have been employed by Bromley council to run a local volunteer river keeper group every Monday. Our new riverkeeper Luke Damerum, has engaged with people from the Cray Valley to teach river keeping skills, habitat building, and yes the very important clear up programme. They are working alongside the Environment agency to improve the water quality and enjoyment for all and anyone walking along the river will have noticed the big difference. If anyone would like to join the Riverkeepers then they should contact Luke on 07824491166 or at luke.damerum@thames21.org.uk or check out the Thames 21 web page.

Junior river keepers has been running for two years and enables 11 children to engage with the river and help the environment.

This is run on a 'Voucher scheme' basis that was trialled in Tower Hamlets with amazing success in an inner city area, so for us to take the concept and use it in a country environment was new and innovative.

With our partners, Affinity Sutton, we piloted the scheme with 8 local children with encouraging results and then moved the project forward to enable the 11 children to become genuine river keepers. The children learn all skills from river clearing to flora and fauna management along with helping to put together a survey of the river. They also work in Riverside gardens on projects linked to the area, such as clearing an over grown path or raising tree crowns. The children have to put together their own risk assessments and learn to use tools and protective equipment safely.

After working for 3 hours which includes a question and answer session about the day, the children are given a £5.00 gift voucher from a local shop such as HMV, Game or Argos. We believe this provides two things, one the children learn the importance of work and reward, it is what we all strive for, a good days work for payment and also if the children have vouchers to spend in the local shops then they build up a respect for the shops and how rewarding it is to buy something with the money you have earned.

I know that this has changed the perspective of the children involved as many of them now save up their vouchers for something they really want, and also they are reporting things to me that are wrong, eg dumped rubbish or graffiti, not just in the river but around the Cray Valley so they are taking ownership of their area.

Caroll Long, Health Lifestyles officer LBB