



Blackwater Valley  
Countryside Partnership

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## The Story of a Community Bench: Part 1

Put together a local wildlife site managed by Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership and the request for a bench for visitors; add a story teller, an arts worker, the original artwork of local schoolchildren and a wooden bench; now mix them all together with the 'magic wand' of the Fairy Godmother in the guise of the Recreation & Heritage Department of Hampshire County Council and you have all the ingredients of a wonderful community bench story.

But first we need to start at the beginning, when the Recreation & Heritage Department of Hampshire County Council invited bids for money to fund projects that would combine the arts and the countryside...

Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership wanted a bench for visitors to Gerry's Copse, one of their wildlife sites in the Farnborough section of the Blackwater Valley. Inspired by the work of a company called Greenspace Designs, BVCP came up with a community bench project. The idea was to work with a local school, using the services of both a story teller and an arts worker to inspire and guide them to create some unique artwork depicting the Blackwater



Valley. A selection of the designs would be turned into a frieze, that would be carved into the back of the bench. Recreation & Heritage Department of Hampshire County Council liked the idea enough to award a grant to fund the project.

The next step was to find a local school willing to be involved and after a few letters and telephone calls South Farnborough Junior School agreed to join the project. Mike O'Leary, a specialist story teller and artworker Penny Robbins were commissioned to join the project to provide the essential creative arts element; Mike to use his skills to inspire the children and Penny to help create the original designs.

The creative workshops took place during the first week of January and the pictures shown here illustrate 'inspiration, creation and implementation'. A selection of the children's original line drawings created will be used to create a frieze to be carved into the back of the bench. But that's part 2 of the story coming soon....



END

### **For further information**

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### **NOTES**

The Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership (BVCP) is funded by the County, District and Parish Councils along the River Blackwater. It works to promote community action in conservation and recreation and to protect the Valley for the enjoyment and well being of the whole community.

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