time-out in the world of eco-builds

For those looking to learn new green skills, POOShing may be right up your ‘eco’ street. Step out of your daily lives and spend some time helping build a brighter future.

From humble beginnings at off-grid Camp Alamo in Oregon, USA, to a worldwide self-build phenomenon that is changing the face of sustainable projects, thePOOSH.org has been active in the eco-networking sphere since its inception in 2011.

Assisting project builders and volunteers to create eco-friendly, sustainable ventures, thePOOSH.org (People's Organisation on Sustainable Housing) acts as a digital link transcending mere geographical borders. Co-founder James Self, and a host of similarly minded eco-warriors first developed the website upon the realisation that, to create their woodland utopia in the Beaver State, they would need more capable hands. "We decided to use our own initiative, taking the working model of WWOOF (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms) and adapting it for sustainable building," says James, and henceforth, thePOOSH.org was born.

The website itself acts as a gateway to the sustainable project world, a totally free-to-use portal linking volunteers or POOSHers with project builders. Upon joining the site, volunteers are encouraged to create a profile similar to a Facebook page to guide the right person to the right eco-build. "The profile allows POOSHers to say who they are, what they're into and why they want to be involved," explains James. Images can be uploaded and members can access a database of worldwide projects plotted on a world map for all to see. Simply clicking on the plot will provide information about the project, detail the stage of its progress and give contacts. It couldn't be easier! "What we need is to get people to realise that they really do have something to share," says James. "Those passing through will take on new skills, carrying them forward. We believe it definitely has potential for global growth."

Connecting people through a mutual love of sustainable building is the foremost task at hand for the multi-platform website, which utilises Facebook and Twitter as part of its eco-arsenal. One feature on the website allows POOSHers to rate their project builders which brings insight for those wanting to get involved. By James' own admission, the criterion for sustainable building is an elaborate question, one that is open for discussion. Preferring to use the term ‘sustainable structures’ over ‘sustainable housing’, ensures the inclusion of smaller set-ups around the globe, providing the same communal effort. James insists that POOSHing is for anyone that is wanting to build sustainably. "POOSHers are involved in both big, elaborate projects such as hotels as well as smaller scale projects such as retrofitting," clarifies James, alluding to projects where POOSHers make sustainable additions to otherwise standard homes.

The exchange is rich in its rewards. POOSHers offer their time and energy in return for new knowledge and experiences. Many projects share food duties on site, building on the community vibe that James and his eco-comrades first fell for in 2011. Although the prerequisite of food is not always certain, thePOOSH.org encourages project builders to make some provisions for its volunteers where possible. With their primary focus on an inclusive communal environment, those involved can learn how to improve their sustainability, make new friendships and learn by way of on-the-job experience.

POOShers don't need a vast array of skills; project hosts don't need five tier eco-house builds – all that is required is a can-do attitude, a love of the outdoors and a passion for sustainability.