

Wild Ways Well Pilot Project Report

Executive Summary



Technological advances have changed the nature of work; increased use of cars, buses and trains have changed the nature of travel and modern conveniences have changed the way we experience our home lives. The ways these lifestyle changes impact our lives are manifold but all tend towards the same effect – less contact with nature and the outdoors, and a decline in daily physical activity.

The link between sedentary lifestyles and serious physical health risks is well established. Moreover, increasing levels of loneliness and social isolation contribute to both physical

and psychological risk-factors, general functional decline and increased mortality. Mental ill-health is on the rise and in Scotland it is estimated that in any one year at least 1 in 4 people will experience a ‘significant’ mental health problem with sometimes devastating effects on individuals, families and communities.

The financial cost of mental health in Scotland is in excess of £10 billion.

*Source Scottish Parliament Information Centre (2014)
Mental Health in Scotland*

Cumbernauld Living Landscape is a landscape scale conservation project with a vision to work with the community to achieve a greener Cumbernauld and aims to enhance, restore and reconnect green areas of the town.

The Scottish Wildlife Trust believes providing clean air, water and retreats from the busyness of everyday life is crucial to the wellbeing of people, wildlife and habitats.

The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) works to achieve happier, healthier communities for everyone through a range of programmes to deliver practical actions that have a lasting impact on people's health, prospects and outdoor places.

Project funders



The Wild Ways Well project trialled a new programme of environmental activities for those at risk of mental ill health. The project is based on the Five Ways to Wellbeing actions created by the New Economics Foundation (NEF). NEF were commissioned by the UK Government to bring together a range of evidence from psychological and economic literature regarding actions people can take that are strongly associated with improved mental health and wellbeing. This framework has been adopted by the NHS and the major mental health charities.

Numerous studies have shown the benefits of exposure to nature for good mental health. For Wild Ways Well, each of the five actions has been adapted to an outdoor, green environment:



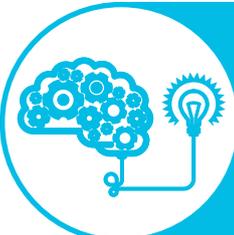
BE ACTIVE – Take part in health walks and practical outdoor activities. Explore your local paths, woods and greenspaces.

CONNECT – Meet new people. Connect with the people, the wildlife and the nature that's all around us.



GIVE – Your time to be in nature. Give something back by sharing experiences and undertaking conservation tasks.

TAKE NOTICE – Note the changing cycles of life. Use your senses. Listen to birds, smell the flowers, live in the moment.

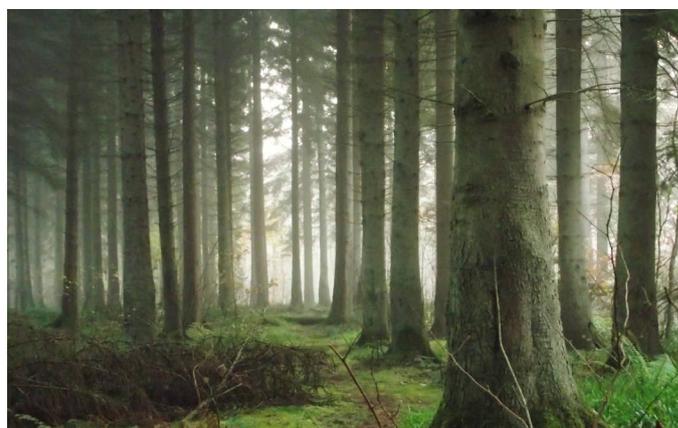


LEARN – Identify plants and wildlife, try new crafts, learn new skills. Discover things about nature and about yourself.

The Pilot Project

The Pilot Project was conducted between April 2016 and June 2017.

For the Pilot the Wild Ways Well approach was trialled with three participant groups, each taking part in a multi-week programme. The pilots aimed to develop the methodology and investigate the strengths and weakness of the Wild Ways Well approach. It explored a range of evaluation options which could be used in future to assess the impact of Wild Ways Well on mental health and wellbeing. Finally it aimed to make clear recommendations of next steps for the approach.



A variety of session outlines, lengths, and locations were trialled over the course of the pilot. The majority of sessions however ran for between 2 and 3 hours, and all took place outdoors, in a natural, green environment. Groups 1 and 2 were led by two members of staff and generally included representatives from the referring organisations. Group 3 was led by a single member of staff on most occasions.



A number of individuals achieved John Muir awards whose requirements fit well with the Wild Ways Well approach.

Evaluation

A range of techniques were used as part of the evaluation process; Each individual filled in a questionnaire based on the short Warwick-Edinburgh mental wellbeing scale before and after the course, covering their mental health on a quantitative scale. In addition staff conducted group interviews with the participants and kept diaries detailing session content, impressions and participant feedback.

Wild Ways Well is also part of a broader inquiry called Measuring Humanity, involving Dr Marissa de Andrade from The University of Edinburgh's School of Health in Social Science.

This inquiry is changing the way health and inequalities in community settings is understood and “measured”.



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Early Results

The pilots established a clear methodology, a range of activities, session plans and resources for the delivery of Wild Ways Well with a variety of participants. Early results, particularly those from face to face discussions with participants and partner organisations, showed considerable potential for Wild Ways Well.

The pilots were successful in breaking down some of the barriers participants experience in accessing greenspace, and showed a positive impact on:

- Connecting with others
- Increasing confidence and independence
- Becoming more active and feeling better
- Gaining pleasure associated with learning
- Reducing anxiety

Activities

Participants tried a variety of outdoor nature based activities designed to reflect the Five Ways Well.



Citizen Science tasks—like taking part in the Ancient Tree Hunt, The Dead Good Deadwood Survey and the Big Butterfly Count—got the groups active exploring; connecting with each other and nature; learning about science and history; taking notice of the changes sites and species go through in their lifecycles; and giving their results back to the scientific community.



The social aspect surrounding enjoying a hot drink brewed outdoors on a Kelly Kettle became a big part of Group 3's sessions. Participants connected over their cuppa but also learned how to safely set, light, sustain and extinguish a fire. For some, the chance to sit and chat and reflect on life and nature in a beautiful outdoor space became a highlight of their week.



walks connects us with a new vision of nature to take inspiration from and to create natural art.



Opportunities for reflection are built into the sessions wherever possible. Everyone is encouraged to understand how the Five Ways apply to the activities they are engaging with and how they can be used in their daily lives outwith the sessions. Where possible session content and goals are participant led, giving people a sense of control and allowing them to demonstrate their own skills. Some individuals felt empowered enough to talk about their experience in front of an audience at a natural health forum in Cumbernauld and a Sharing Good Practice event in Battleby.

Participants learned that when they walked into Cumbernauld's parks and woodlands they were surrounded by life. Learning to identify a plant, a tree, or a bird call helps people to connect with that organism, and take notice of the intricate and delicate ecosystem we are all a part of. We also used this newfound knowledge to unleash our creativity. Taking notice of patterns, colours and shapes on our

Results and Recommendations

Overall we believe the pilots were very successful in developing the Wild Ways Well approach.

- We were able to develop a bank of resources and session ideas and successfully trial them with a variety of participants.
- By bringing people together to engage with and enjoy nature the pilot project contributed to building positive social relationships.
- By encouraging people to be active whilst on sessions and to learn about their local environment Wild Ways Well contributed to increasing individual's physical health and building their psychological strength and resilience.
- Wild Ways Well gave participants new knowledge and skills related to nature and their local environment. The chance to share this new knowledge with others built confidence and self-esteem.
- Wild Ways Well successfully gave participants a purpose and increased motivation and confidence to participate in local greenspaces. Integrating physical health improvement – through walking – along with the mental health objectives was a big part of this achievement, particularly for those who were reluctant or unsure of increasing their activity levels.
- The qualitative evidence provides strong suggestions that participants found this approach extremely helpful. They found the activities enjoyable, they built up their confidence about accessing greenspaces and described benefits in terms of connecting with others, in lessening anxiety, and increasing their physical health and wellbeing
- We are satisfied that Wild Ways Well can complement other natural therapy courses – in particular the Forestry Commission's Branching Out – rather than duplicate or compete with them. By focussing on the Five Ways Well as its core, alongside the natural elements which are at its heart, Wild Ways Well forges a new and different path. In addition, Wild Ways Well has a more relaxed approach to admission criteria and a more flexible approach to time commitments, opening it up to new audiences. Wild Ways Well aspires towards a pathway, whereby participants can repeat sessions, move between different groups or be signposted on to other opportunities with partner organisations, allowing it to work as part of a unified whole as well as stand on its own.
- Whilst the pilot project has made a good start, we recommend that this programme of activities now be developed and trialled on a more long term basis with more participants and on a rolling basis to allow long term impacts to be experienced.
- We would also recommend that this longer term roll out be delivered alongside a more long term and structured evaluation framework. It is important that this evaluation framework is developed to reflect the range of benefits experienced, from reduction of social isolation through to increased levels of physical exercise.
- We recommend a more structured partnership with the University of Edinburgh be developed around the evaluation process. We are grateful to The University and in particular Dr Marisa de Andrade for her guidance with this work.