

Summary Report from Good from Woods Partners

The project: Well Being in Nature- Nature Workshops Mental Health project

The organisation: Nature Workshops

The project researcher lead: Jane Acton

Participant group: adults with severe and enduring mental health problems

Number taking part: 6: 2 women and 4 men

Activity features: At total of 25 hours in local woodlands over 5 days in autumn 2012. Sensory, educational, physical and social activities focussing on individual needs and learning styles. Included games, tool use, bushcraft, arts, cooking, talking, thinking, silence.

Top 4 messages:

1. 5 of the 6 participants scores improved using the Warwick and Edinburgh Well Being Scale.
2. All passed Level 1 Forest School training, for all but one this was their first accredited qualification.

3. Top 3 most referenced well being indicators were 'developing oneself', 'feelings of closeness to the natural world', 'optimistic about the future'.

4. One woman was able to come off her anti psychotic drugs.

Background (c.150 words)

People with long term serious mental health problems were targeted for this project for various reasons, one of which was to provide evidence of the impact of the natural world on mental health issues and help people reduce pharmaceutical medications in favour of less invasive and cheaper options. Also we wanted test the methods which could be used to prove the impact of the natural world on mental health issues. We reached people via the agencies which support, namely West Cornwall MIND, Richmond House Day Centre in Penzance, Community Psychiatric Nurses and Community Health Support staff.

The site is managed by Cornwall Wildlife Trust for wildlife. It is therefore only lightly managed. It is not heavily visited by local people as it has not marketed in this way. Natural succession takes place making it necessary to be extra vigilant for loose branches or even whole trees after high winds. It is a bluebell wood in spring when we cannot access the space for our activities. There is no obvious coppicing or other management in the areas we

generally use. One large chestnut tree dominates the space we use with many sycamore and beech and the growth is of medium density.

Research focus (50 words)

Specifically we wanted to try quantitative methods and empirical qualitative methods. Advised by the EU Centre for Environment and Human Health we chose the Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Well Being (WEMWBS) scale to measure pre and post intervention outcomes. We used various other observational qualitative outcomes.

Context (150 words)

The group was made up of 4 men and 2 women. They had all self selected encouraged by their referrers. Their personal backgrounds were varied all but one having had no formal qualifications previously and all but the same one living in social housing on benefits. One had suffered the loss of many family members in quick succession and was severely overweight at aged 22. One was sexually abused from being a child and now in her 40's finds meeting new people very stressful. The diagnosed illnesses among the group included paranoid schizophrenia, post traumatic stress, anxiety, self harming, depression, talking difficulties, sight problems.

For most getting to the first session was the biggest hurdle of all. Taxis were provided for all but one of the participants as the site is remote for most people. The activities people engaged with during the sessions were designed iteratively based on what worked for individual participants from one week to the next. In general they were sensory, educational, physical and social activities focussing on individual needs and learning styles. They included games, tool use, bushcraft, arts, cooking, talking, thinking and being silent or noisy with plenty of reflection.

Staff and Tutor details: 4 staff members All from our agency: 1 researcher ethnobotanist, 1 Forest School Session Leader and bushcraft expert, 1 Assistant Session Leader with youth work experience and skills in special needs.

Volunteers: On site time 30 hours x 2 people plus pre and post research time, set up arrangements for venues, families, transport and schools approx 60 hours.

Expectations (c.100 words)

Generally speaking we were all thinking positively about what the outcomes might be. The delivery group anticipated their skills might be tested to the limit and they were. The participants underestimated the positive effects and the stakeholders had their expectations met.

Methods used (150 words)

1. WEMWB scale pre and post intervention with the participants
 2. All the participants underwent the Level 1 Forest school training which provided evidence of learning during the programme.
 3. the registration process included the preparation of a personalized learning plan which was revisited during the programme and at the end.
 4. Using a hand held digital recorder: We used this method with a set of questions which were used to aid discussions and explore relevant issues with the participants, referrers and staff before, during and after the activities took place. This allowed us to revisit baselines, hopes and expectations in relation to the participants. Transcripts of all this material were then coded using the GfW well being indicators. Each member of staff had a note book which was used during the sessions and immediately after each session.

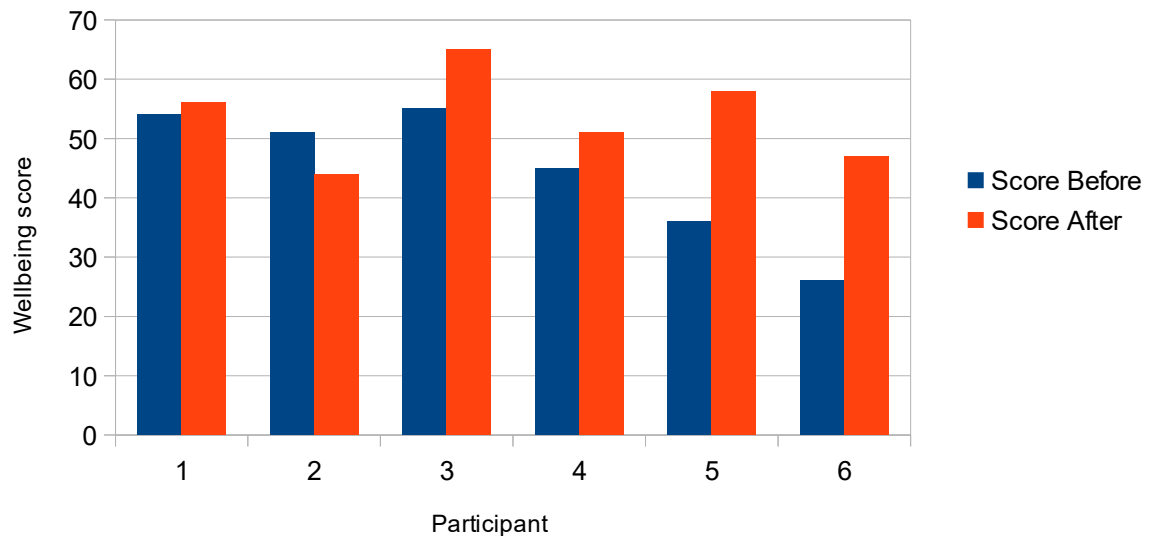
Results (1000 words)

1.

Graph 1

Nature Workshops Good from Wood Project

Well Being in Nature - Warwick and Edinburgh Well Being Scale



2. All the participants passed their Level 1 Forest School training

3. Top 3 most referenced well being indicators were 'developing oneself', 'feelings of closeness to the natural world', 'optimistic about the future'.

4. Top 3 answers in overall total with quotes from the participants

Developing oneself - quotes from different respondents

'Yeah, it really has helped, it really has. Usually I would have trouble speaking, you know talking to people and even looking them in the eyes, it has actually really helped with that.'

'I've learnt so much as well it's just and a different way of teaching us things'

'I think I like the wood carving. It's like communicating with nature when you get in tune to it, you know when you're carving, making things is like you're in your own little world. It's a pleasurable thing to be doing wood carving, it's just like gets you in tune to the woods surrounding you, you know and helps you to be more of a nature person yourself you know.'

And sharing and seeing other people express themselves in different ways, I really find it really important that when other people come together like this, and kind of sharing what we're doing – really means a lot to me.

Yeah I was the same, I was looking forward, I was telling everybody at home, I'm... Yeah I was just telling everybody I met last night and yesterday how I was going – doing the wood craft, bushcraft tomorrow, yeah I couldn't wait

Feelings of closeness to the natural world

Yeah, definitely, definitely fulfilled. You know cos I've always been the one for outdoors - camping and that, but day to day stresses and you know, what life throws at us day to day I think everybody needs to break away and just to be in a different environment - it can just make you feel different, you know, you go back home with that and you feel fulfilled do you know? Each day you know that – it's like a food you know, being satisfied with a food but you know.

What do I enjoy most? Just spending the whole day, spending the whole day here, just spending the whole day here in the woods and just learning new skills and just working with a group again you know?

It's helped me see things in a different light...The reflections of the sun shining in through the trees leaves, and how the wind blew in a peaceful manner and peaceful way and it felt like being in a different world...And it made you feel like I'd like to kind of live in that situation...

Optimistic about the future

I really couldn't wait, saw my CPN yesterday and I was like "I can't wait, I'm going tomorrow".

But hopefully I will continue doing some sort of thing even if it's going to walks in woods or something. It's like inspired me for that as well.

'I kind of energise - I remember once when I – the week before last when I came, I went back and I said to my partner, like you know, the difference between like, cos I have isolated myself so much in the few years, you know, I said to him I've realised that you know, when you go out and do stuff and be with other people you do – there is a risk but like, things might go wrong you're also opening yourself up to really positive experiences as well.'

'A good experience for everybody and people have learnt valuable skills, you know that they might have not know before they came here, but they came here and learnt a lot of skills from the teachers here, and I just hope that everyone will carry that skills within themselves and be able to teach others'

'I think it will probably last me all my life quite frankly.'

Reflections (c.250 words)

The fact that one of arguably the most mentally unwell participants gained the most in terms of her well being by being able to come off her anti psychotic drugs on the advise of her doctor. This was an unexpected result but one which all agreed was as a direct consequence of this intervention.

One reflection we have having used the GfW coding system twice now, once with young vulnerable teenagers and again here with vulnerable adults, is that the adults we think are much more likely to try and second guess what it is we want to hear.

Action points (c.200 words)

Bullet point messages for practice, prioritisation, targeting etc. This summarises recommendations etc from what you found out. Choose the most important 3 to go in the box at the top too.

Top 3 messages:

1. 5 of the 6 participants scores improved using the Warwick and Edinburgh Well Being Scale.
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Contact details

Jane Acton jane@natureworkshops.co.uk 01209 832075