



# Finding Common Ground, Plymouth

'Finding Common Ground' was a three year Action Research Project, commissioned as part of Defra's Diversity Review in 2004. Hosted by Groundwork, the project investigated methods for improving and sustaining access to the countryside by people living in inner-city Plymouth. The aim of 'Finding Common Ground' was to establish sustainable relationships through the development of "common ground" between urban and rural women. The project tested whether this would lead to an increase in confidence and information about the countryside, and therefore a sustained increase in visits by women and their families.

## Key activities

'Finding Common Ground' introduced activities for participants in partnership with other rural service providers, including Dartmoor National Park Authority, Tamar Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnerships. Activities included farm and coastal visits and participation in the Walking for Health programme. Over 1,000 participants took part in the project.

"My children really enjoyed being in the countryside. I thought they would get bored easily but they really enjoyed travelling on the train and running free."

**Project participant**

## Key findings

Establishing sustainable friendships between urban and rural women was more difficult than originally hoped. Both the socio-economic and lifestyle differences between them meant that it was difficult for them to build friendships.

**“When the urban and rural women met they didn’t click, they were different people and I remember thinking that you can’t force friendship on people.”**

**Jocella Peck, Groundwork Devon & Cornwall**

Despite this, ‘Finding Common Ground’ did positively engage a number of women and their families in outdoor activities, in which they would not have otherwise participated.

Information and access to transport proved a significant barrier to visiting the countryside for many participants. The project worked with participants and local partners to identify action to address this barrier, e.g. producing information packs to participants.

**“We did very simple cartoon-type drawings of how you stop a train, pictures of people getting onboard with a buggy and smiling so you know you’re not going to be rushed.”**

**Rebecca Catterall, Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership**

## Conclusions

The main focus of this project, for women to develop sustainable relationships was challenging. Although most participants enjoyed their experiences in the outdoors, the differences in the lifestyles of many meant that some friendships would take a longer time to form.

Despite its difficulties, positive and significant changes to the host organisation and some rural service providers were made, making participation in the natural environment easier for people. Groundwork staff gave input into shortening walking routes and making them more accessible by public transport, and were involved in the design of the flyers to publicise these routes. These changes were taken on by Devon County Council, South Hams District Council and the Dartmoor Park Authority. Additionally, Groundwork improved its links to the local community in Plymouth through its hosting of ‘Finding Common Ground’.

Sustained visits to the countryside after the project were facilitated by partner organisations, such as Community Heath in Keyham (CHIK). Urban mothers and their children who participated in ‘Finding Common Ground’ still access the countryside on daytrips organised by CHIK.

**“Since the end of the project our family has gone swimming and walking on the moors and at Plymbridge.”**

**Project Participant**

## More information

For details on this and all the Action Research Projects visit [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)

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