



By All Means, Kent

'By All Means' was a three year Action Research Project commissioned as part of Defra's Diversity Review in 2004. It was led at various stages by Kent County Council in partnership with Kent Information Federation (KIF), the Council for Voluntary Services and then the Forestry Commission. The project investigated ways of increasing numbers of disabled people visiting the countryside by engaging them in the planning, development and delivery of countryside recreational activities.

Key activities

This project was split into eight sub projects with 350 activities on offer, including cycling, camping, environmental art and sailing. During the project a total of 3,554 participants took part. The total number of disabled people participating was 1,538.

One of the most popular activities, established at Shorne Woods Country Park, was the introduction of an all terrain personal mobility vehicle – the 'Tramper'. This enabled people with restricted mobility to access more paths and wooded areas.

"It was a brilliant experience which made the routes (paths and wooded areas) fully accessible...I think having such a vehicle is essential not only to access the park but to add to quality of life."

Project participant

Key findings

'By All Means' impacted positively on partner organisations in Kent, largely due to the efforts of the project officer engaging with the community and raising diversity and equality awareness.

"Often, it was the staff that cared for and helped people that were less keen on attending...I tried to break down that barrier, and talk to them about the benefits that some of the participants experienced."

Belinda Davis, By All Means Project Officer

Through 'By All Means' came the introduction of the Disabled Access Forum at Shorne Woods Country Park, giving disabled people the opportunity to get involved in planning and implementing changes to improve access.

"The Disabled Access Forum was responsible for all the changes we've made in the last two years. We've doubled the length of our easy access paths and we've got two of the Trampers."

Tim Bell, Shorne Woods Country Park

'By All Means' increased the number of visits to the countryside by disabled people; one sub project named 'Meeting up getting out' began with only 16 disabled participants in the first year, increasing to 399 in the final year.

Conclusions

By All Means has led to a sustainable increase in countryside use by disabled people. Through improved self esteem and confidence many participants have been empowered to visit the countryside independently.

"It inspired me to get my own hand cycle, so I could do more cycling in my own time rather than just as part of a club."

Paraplegic project participant

Another example of this sustainability is the introduction of an all ability walking group 'Branching Out' which carried on after the project ended.

"Branching Out is now a permanent fixture and they come back to Bedgbury on a regular basis."

David Hiscock, Forestry Commission

More information

For details on this and all the Action Research Projects visit www.naturalengland.org.uk

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Accessibility

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