



Outdoors for All

Case Stories 2012-14

Introduction

The Government's recent Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP) aims to strengthen connections between people and nature. It acknowledges that the opportunities to benefit from spending time in the natural environment are currently not open to everyone, which can contribute to health and other inequalities and its ambition is that everyone should have fair access to a good quality natural environment.

Natural England has a responsibility to promote access to, and recreation in the natural environment for the benefit of today's and future generations and to help Government deliver the ambitions set out in NEWP. Natural England is therefore championing Outdoors for All on behalf of Government and the natural environment, greenspace, volunteering and heritage sectors.

In November 2013, the [National Solutions for Tackling Health Inequalities Conference](#) (hosted by the National Outdoors for All Working Group) provided an opportunity to share current evidence on the links between health problems and lack of access to good quality greenspace close to where people live. The conference report [Natural Solutions to Tackling Health Inequalities - IHE](#) is now available.

The report shows that health and the natural environment are closely linked. Regular use of good quality natural environments improves health and well-being for everyone, including many who are suffering from ill-health. However, there are clear inequalities in access and use of natural environments. People living in the most deprived areas are 10 times less likely to live in the greenest areas (Mitchell and Popham, 2008).

Indeed, the most affluent 20% of wards in England have 5 times the amount of parks or general green space than the most deprived 10% of wards (Office for National Statistics data). So, increasing access to green space and taking action to make public space in deprived areas less threatening, harmful and stressful would mean improvement for those in disadvantaged areas is likely to be proportionately greater than in other areas.

Exposure to green space affects every age range; older people live longer where there is more local green space and children living near green spaces are less likely to experience an increase in their Body Mass Index (BMI), because of higher levels of associated physical activity.

Research examining differences in the frequency of visiting the natural environment between social groups in England found that some groups in the population rarely visit the natural environment (Burt et al., 2013a; Burt et al., 2013b). Groups found to visit the natural environment far less frequently than the average for the English population include black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups, people living in urban deprived areas, people from D and E socio-economic groups, people aged over 65 and people with disabilities. Many of these groups are likely to benefit the most from engaging with the natural environment.

Health inequality in England is estimated to cost up to £70 billion each year. Despite investment in addressing health inequalities, the health divide has continued to widen and the gradient to steepen. (Department of Health (2008) *Health Inequalities: Progress and Next Steps*. London: Department of Health).

There is some research showing that interventions using the natural environment to improve health can deliver costs savings for health and related services (The Marmot Review (2010) *Fair Society, Healthy Lives: Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England post-2010*. London: UCL IHE) and improve physical and mental health outcomes. (Ellaway, A., MacIntyre, S. and Bonnefoy, X. (2005) Graffiti, greenery, and obesity in adults: secondary analysis of European cross sectional survey. *British Medical Journal*, 331 (7514). pp. 611-612), (Clark, P., Mapes, N., Burt, J. and Preston, S. (2013) *Greening Dementia. A literature review of the benefits and barriers facing individuals with dementia in accessing the natural environment and local greenspace*. Natural England and other parties). So, increasing the amount and quality of green space can be part of a low cost package to address health inequalities, improve health outcomes and deliver other benefits.

Natural England has worked very closely with a range of partners over 2012-14 to help deliver projects which aim to ensure that people living in deprived areas, the elderly, those with physical disabilities, learning difficulties, mental health illness, and people from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities all have opportunities to access high quality natural environments.

The case stories within this report reflect these priority groups, with the specific case stories listed below:

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities, lower socio-economic groups and people from deprived urban communities

- Octopus and Rupert's Wood,
- Nature Walks in Hyndburn,
- Natural Triggers,
- Educational Access,
- RSPB in Weymouth and Portland,
- Good from Woods

People who are over 65 and/or living with dementia

- Let Nature Feed Your Senses,
- Dementia research

People living with a disability

- Paths for Communities,
- Countryside Mobility project,
- Care Farms,
- Help for Heroes,
- Ecominds
- Autism and Nature Research

This report captures just some of the wonderful stories from the projects which we hope will provide a valuable source of information and inspiration. Examples are shared from a wide range of partners who are working in this important area of work.

Access to Nature

Access to Nature has been an ambitious grant scheme funded by the Big Lottery Fund, as part of the Changing Spaces Programme, and managed by Natural England. Since it opened for bids in April 2008, Natural England has distributed £28.75 million of funding, through a total of 115 grants, to projects that sought to bring about lasting change in the relationship between people (across England) and the natural environment. The Programme has now closed, and a final evaluation workshop with stakeholders and practitioners was held in July 2014 to share the lessons learnt from this scheme and discuss the legacy the scheme leaves.

With a focus on the engagement of people with little or no previous contact with nature, the programme funded a diverse pool of projects from local community based schemes to large-scale national initiatives. Project activities have been wide ranging and have included volunteering and educational opportunities, site improvements and the provision of new facilities or equipment to enable improved access to the natural environment.

Five programme outcomes were addressed, including increasing the number and diversity of people accessing and learning about the natural environment, improving natural places, and creating a sense of ownership of those places by establishing strong partnerships that will be sustainable beyond the life of the funding.

A key part of Access to Nature has been formative evaluation, which focuses on qualitative feedback as a measure of success, rather than just looking at output data (i.e. number of participants). This was included from the inception of the scheme and has provided a wealth of information about the benefits of accessing the natural environment, and a set of [Learning Papers](#) to share with our partners and inform future work.

The ongoing formative evaluation has been an important tool; it has provided the opportunity for the programme to adjust its management and practice at regular and timely intervals and it has allowed Natural England to be a funder that enables projects to deliver with a degree of flexibility as ongoing evaluation has provided the evidence needed to make changes. There is also a richer understanding of the positive benefits associated with engaging people with the natural environment, including skills development, health and wellbeing benefits, community cohesion, ambition and employability, learning about and appreciation of the natural environment.

In total, over 900,000 people directly benefitted from the scheme, over 475, 000 people received a training opportunity, and nearly 36,000 people regularly volunteered in environmental activities through the life of the Programme. Another 5 million people

benefitted indirectly in a variety of ways including improvements to their local environment, support for family members through activities or training, or school visits. In all cases, Access to Nature projects worked to increase the communities' sense of ownership of local natural places, by establishing strong partnerships between communities, voluntary organisations, local authorities and others.

Below are several Access to Nature success stories, which demonstrate the variety of projects delivered and show the impact they have made on so many people's lives.

Let Nature Feed Your Senses

Most of us these days have little experience of farming, and this is especially true for people who have difficulty getting out to the countryside. Let Nature Feed Your Senses (a partnership between Linking Environment and Farming (LEAF) and the Sensory Trust) has given over 14,000 people with disabilities, of all ages, and people who live in some of the most disadvantaged areas of England, the chance to experience food production first-hand.

Farms, city farms and nature reserves across England have come together to offer sensory-rich visits that help make the connections between food, farming and nature. Groups who have been welcomed include those from inner city schools, groups with learning disabilities and sensory impairments, and older people with dementia, to experience the plants and animals that help to feed us. Of particular success, and the focus of this case study, have been the noticeable physical and mental well-being benefits for people living with dementia; a key target group for the Outdoors for All programme.

There's no substitute for hands-on experience, and sensory-rich visits allow visitors to touch, smell, hear and taste food production as it happens, in a safe, accessible environment, guided by friendly farmers and nature experts. The structure of the project, with regional co-ordinators, training for host farmers and peer mentors will ensure that these visits continue beyond the life of the Access to Nature funding.

Tracey Hannam, Activities Coordinator at Ferfoot Care Home, Chippenham took two groups of care home residents with dementia to Fosse Farm and Larkrise Farm in the South West. Ferfoot Care Home is based in Chippenham and provides specialist dementia residential care for up to 52 elderly people.

During the Let Nature Feed Your Senses visits, the residents had the opportunity to explore the farm, help feed the animals and cook using farm ingredients.



Tracey said "The farm visits had an extremely calming and therapeutic effect on the residents. People with dementia can often be withdrawn, distressed or confused, but you really notice the difference it makes when you visit a farm. The huge variety of things to see, touch, smell and hear really helped engage the residents. For many it helped evoke childhood memories.

“Visiting a farm might sound like just a nice day out, which it certainly is, but for our residents the benefit to their physical and mental wellbeing was huge. When residents have visited a farm we’ve seen a huge transformation with people laughing, smiling and talking. Even after the visits we’ve noticed that the residents seem calmer, happier and will sleep better at night.

“The visits really help improve the confidence of the residents. On one of the visits we all had a go at butter making which involved shaking a jar of cream vigorously. The rest of us gave up apart from one of our residents who is a very determined lady, seeing the look on her face when it finally turned into butter was a joy to see.

“Finding activities that are both accessible and able to meet the needs of dementia patients can be difficult, but the staff, activities and farms facilities were really tailored to meet the needs of our residents. I cannot recommend a farm visit enough.”

The care home staff and residents have built a really good relationship with the host farmer, Sue Padfield, who has since been into the care home to run interactive workshops on nature, food and farming for all of the residents. More information about Let Nature Feed Your Senses can be found in the [Access to Nature: Learning Papers](#) about the project.

A selection of videos showing some of the work of the Let Nature Feed Your Senses scheme can be found at: <http://letnaturefeedyoursenses.org/home/why-sensory-rich/films/>

Student Community Action Newcastle: Rupert’s Wood and Green Guerrilla Gardeners

Student Community Action Newcastle (SCAN) manages an exciting project with two distinct strands of work. The first of these, The Rupert’s Wood Project, is based in Redesdale, Northumberland and aims to inspire people’s interest in and love for the natural environment. SCAN volunteers run practical conservation tasks, educational and recreational visits for youth & community groups and schools. Efforts are focussed on the most disadvantaged communities of Newcastle and the North East, particularly BAME groups and socially and financially excluded groups.

Experiences at Rupert’s Wood involve getting up close and personal with nature, helping to conserve wildlife, learning wild-camping skills, cooking on the campfire and sleeping out under the stars. Project volunteers and staff work in close partnership with well-respected community groups across the city to ensure the most disadvantaged groups are being reached and giving them the opportunity to access the wilds of Northumberland.

The project works with schools that have catchment areas incorporating one of 20 housing estates nationwide that have very high levels of deprivation. Kenton High School is one of the schools that benefits from the project, and students from the special educational needs class wrote positively of their experiences with SCAN, which has provided the project with some useful feedback to form part of the formative evaluation of the project.

SCAN is also the only Access to Nature project (through the ‘Green Guerrilla Gardeners’ element of their work) that has specifically focussed on University students living within a community and working towards developing a sense of cohesion between them and local people, in particular those living in deprived communities and the elderly.

This project enables University student volunteers to work alongside Newcastle residents to revamp disused areas of green space in the city, grow vegetables at the SCAN allotment for community benefit, and make large scale environmental improvements. This element of the

project has a particular focus on improving the gardens and green spaces close to elderly populations, leading to an improvement in inter-generational relationships but also improved physical and mental well-being for those people living close to the improved green space; evidence shows that even being able to see green space is beneficial for health.

Both projects have gained a positive reputation amongst the student community for bringing people of all nationalities together in meaningful conservation and gardening activities, and providing the chance for people from all around the world to work alongside British volunteers and share experiences. The project will continue beyond the life of Access to Nature funding to deliver activities for local people and students and has several innovative plans for long-term financial sustainability, including the creation of a micro-brewery and market garden to fund the other elements of the project.



Countryside Mobility Project, Devon

Living Options Devon Countryside Mobility Project is leading the way in the South West by enabling people with limited mobility to adventure and explore outdoors, regardless of how far they can walk, through the use of 'Tramper' all-terrain mobility scooters and wheelchair accessible 'Wheelyboats'.



The scheme is proving popular with people of all ages who want to get out and enjoy the countryside, but previously were unable.

For Rebecca, the scheme has been life-changing. *“At the age of 35 I did not expect to suddenly find myself needing a wheelchair and my life became extremely restricted. On holiday in Devon my husband and I came across the Trumper scheme purely by chance. It's impossible describing the feeling of suddenly having the ability and freedom to go into the countryside again. Both Trumper trips were without doubt one of the best days of my life...to suddenly have independence again to explore and enjoy the countryside was truly amazing.”*

The Trampers can go up and down slopes, over bumps and tree roots, through shallow puddles, mud and soft ground and are for use by anyone aged 14 or over who has a permanent or temporary condition that affects their ability to walk. Wheelyboats can take up to 5 wheelchair passengers and are popular with anglers and groups wishing to get closer to nature out on the water.



“The Trumper service at Siblyback and Wimbleball Lake is for use of customers who want to enjoy the great scenery available at these sites. Previously we often saw families with older relatives remain in cars or sit and wait for the rest of the family to come back from walks but the Trumper enables them to participate.” South West Lakes Trust April 2012

The project plans to continue to work closely with health care providers and the regional tourist industry to ensure that the Countryside Mobility Project Trumper service is communicated to as many people as possible. Living Options Devon plan to expand the scheme into other areas, initially within a one day travel time to provide more opportunities for people to access the natural environment and remain committed to funding the scheme to ensure its sustainability beyond their Access to Nature funding.

Full details about Countryside Mobility can be found at: <http://www.countrysidemobility.org/> or on You Tube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/CMSW2010>

Octopus Communities



The Wild Places project, delivered by Octopus Communities, is based in Islington, London, an area with high levels of deprivation and relatively low levels of good quality accessible green space. It works with BAME groups who face greatest disadvantage, including families with children, young people and isolated older people living in areas of high deprivation. All have connections with four participating community centres who are partners in the project (Caxton House, Holloway Neighbourhood Group, Whittington Park Community Association and Hilldrop Community Centre). In addition, the project successfully engages with numerous specialist agencies which target people from specific ethnic groups or needing specialist support.

Octopus Communities has a track record of working with disadvantaged communities and the multi-faith approach of this project has been very successful and greatly enhanced through long-standing links with community networks including Islington Faiths Forum, Islington Refugee Network, Kurdish and Middle Eastern Women's Network and groups based in specific ethnic communities.

Of particular relevance to the Outdoors for All programme is the recognition that many members from BAME communities referred to their outdoor experiences in their countries of origin rather than the UK, as few had ventured outside of their local area in England. Many had not visited their local park and had no knowledge of local nature reserves. The project has helped to break down those barriers to accessing the natural environment close to where people now live.

Andrew McKnight of Holloway Neighbourhood Group said: *“Wild Places overall has been a fantastic new way of engaging both new users of the natural environment and existing participants. A long-standing ambition to get children back into the centre has been realised through the Wild Places after school club. The project has helped position the centre as a valuable neighbourhood resource with more things on offer that are relevant to local people”.*

Visit <http://www.octopuscommunities.org.uk/> for further information.

Nature Walks in Hyndburn

The Nature Walks Project, run by Prospects Foundation in Hyndburn, helps disadvantaged people engage positively with nature through a stepped approach. Firstly they are invited to participate in the Nature Walks programme and then encouraged to progress to active volunteering, training and community management. By introducing smaller-scale activities close to where people live, the barriers to inclusion are tackled early on, developing people's confidence to get more involved, and go from walk participant to active member of a volunteering group.

A partnership has been put together involving the Prospects Foundation, Lancashire Wildlife Trust, Hyndburn Borough Council, Lancashire County Council, East Lancashire Teaching

Primary Care Trust, Leisure in Hyndburn, Hyndburn Community Network and at least 20 other community groups. The partnership works with the target beneficiaries from disadvantaged groups and with individuals living in highly deprived areas within Hyndburn and encourages them to participate in expert-led 'Nature Walks', including an annual Nature Walks festival.

These walks introduce people to footpaths starting near their home and taking them through green corridors to visit heritage sites, Local Nature Reserves, and other areas of natural interest. Disadvantaged groups were involved from the start in designing these walks to meet their needs and interests.



The Nature Walks offer something for all interests, including bat walks, fungi walks, ancient tree hunts, dawn chorus walks, hedgerow wild food walks, mini-beasts, moth nights, sensory walks for visually impaired people, insect hunts and pond-dipping for children. To ensure everyone can get involved, Tramper walks, buggy walks, and varied timing between daytime, evening and weekend are all included as part of the series of walks.

Having been 'hooked' by their Nature Walk experiences, volunteers are encouraged to progress to deeper levels of involvement with nature, including taking part in regular conservation volunteering work, leading walks, and undertaking training in areas such as habitat management, tool use, and first aid. All of these activities increased skills and confidence in the participants, leading to longer term life changes, and the community management of several sites including Local Nature Reserves, green spaces and nature trails.

Visit <http://www.prospectsfoundation.org.uk/projects/access-to-nature.html> for further information.

Paths for Communities

Paths for Communities (P4C) was a two year funding programme run by Natural England , operating from April 2012 to 2014 with a £2 million budget from the European Union's Rural Development Programme for England fund. It was created to develop and enhance the network of Public Rights of Way (PRoW) in England to benefit rural areas and their local economy in particular, through more use of and better support for local services and businesses. Forty four projects have been supported through this programme.

P4C aimed to encourage and support local communities to work with landowners, though the formation of Local Community Partnerships, to make improvements to the network of Public Rights of Way. In all cases P4C projects included the creation of a new Public Right of Way. In most cases projects included an element of new Bridleway creation but projects that included Footpath creation alone were considered where community and economic benefit was demonstrated.

Alongside this, grants also secured improvements to existing Public Rights of Way to enable use by a wider range of people with different needs. These included improved accessibility for wheelchairs and pushchairs, benches for people needing regular opportunities to rest, and enhancing the appeal of the area for visitors and local residents. Also improved integration with public transport, and links to popular destinations was supported, enabling those without cars to make better use of the PRoW network. One such project is shared below:



The Cyclists' Touring Club (CTC) in partnership with the Thornton Le Dale Parish Council and with support from the Forestry Commission, who own the land, have delivered a [Paths for Communities project in Dalby Forest](#), responding to ideas raised by two community groups, Ryedale Special Families and Whitby Disablement Action Group, many years ago.

By working closely with Ryedale Special Families, the CTC have developed two circular routes; footpaths with permissive access for disability bikes, mobility scooters and children's bikes. This trail has created opportunity for many more people to access Dalby Forest, which is located on the southern slopes of the North York Moors National Park.

It will enable all visitors regardless of mobility or disability to achieve better and easier access to the forest and provides a safe, accessible venue that allows children and disabled cyclists to learn and develop their cycling skills. It also gives confidence for all families to spend time in the natural environment together and experience all the positive benefits for mental and physical health that brings. The new sensory planting along the routes will enhance the experience for visitors, and ongoing community group involvement will ensure the sustainability of the routes beyond this initial capital investment.

Currently 7% of annual visitors to Dalby Forest, approx. 31,500 people, experience some form of mobility issue or disability, and this project will not only improve their experience, it is hoped that it will encourage many more people to visit. The prediction of the Forestry Commission is that the number will increase to 10% per year, giving many more people the chance to experience time spent outdoors.

Ongoing evaluation work being undertaken by the Forestry Commission will provide more evidence in the future about the impact that this project has had.

Educational Access

A Government ambition in the Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP) is 'to see every child in England given the chance to experience and learn about the natural environment'.

Specifically, the Government set out four key reforms in NEWP for reconnecting people and nature and one of these reforms is 'action to get more children learning outdoors, removing barriers and increasing schools abilities to teach outdoors'. In relation to outdoor learning, Government made four specific commitments for action:

1. Reform Health & Safety regulations to remove barriers for schools delivering learning in the natural environment
2. Promote the use of the Pupil Premium funds for learning in the natural environment
3. Deliver the Natural Connections Project
4. Fund visits to Care Farms and Educational Access visits for school children up to 16 years old

During 2013-14 310,059 children participated in educational activities on nearly 1,200 farms, enabled through the Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) Educational Access Scheme. The numbers of school aged children participating in this programme has more than doubled in the past 4 years.

The number of farmers and landowners now benefiting from educational access payments, has increased by almost 30% over the last three years, making this the largest single outdoor learning service in the UK, providing around 25% of all formal outdoor learning opportunities.

Under Educational Access there are options to improve facilities on the farm that would benefit those with disabilities and therefore accessibility. The Educational Access options for HLS target investment where it is needed most and will improve access onto farms.

Funding has been used for creating farm classrooms, trailers for transporting school groups around the farm, and providing access furniture such as kissing gates and benches. Around 500 kissing gates have been funded across England with the help of HLS grants. The kissing gates can be made large enough to accommodate pushchairs and wheelchairs and are typically more accessible than traditional stiles. This benefits farms wanting to host high quality educational visits for school children or care farming clients. [Environmental Stewardship: educational access visits on your land - Detailed guidance - GOV.UK](#)

Educational Access options through HLS also support care farming, which is discussed further below.

Diversity on National Nature Reserves (NNR)

National Nature Reserves (NNRs) are designated as some of the most important areas for biodiversity and geodiversity in England and many are close to local communities or in popular and attractive recreational areas. A range of dedicated volunteering groups work on NNRs, carrying out conservation work and learning more about the natural environment. Some of these volunteer groups specifically support more disadvantaged sectors of society.

Help for Heroes at Langley Wood NNR

Natural England's NNR Team recently worked with Help for Heroes to explore opportunities for injured veterans on recovery courses to spend a day on an NNR undertaking practical tasks.

The Pathfinder Experience, which runs at the Help for Heroes Recovery Centres in Colchester, Catterick, Plymouth and Tidworth, is a programme designed to support wounded, injured and sick veterans with their transition from the familiar world of the armed forces into a meaningful vocation in 'civvy street'.

Projects such as this pilot are a valuable opportunity for allowing veterans to try something new, build confidence and self-awareness, interact with individuals from different walks of life and give something back to the local community. In addition, working outdoors can have a really positive therapeutic impact on the veterans.

The pilot event took place in March at Langley Wood NNR in Wiltshire and its success has opened the door for our NNRs to host similar events around the country. Helped along by some early spring sunshine, the group met at Langley Wood and, armed with bow saws and hard hats, headed into the woods for a day of coppicing; felling some of the larger trees and clearing rhododendron.

Help for Heroes arranged for some staff from British Telecom to join the event, to help with some of the heavier tasks, if needed, and provide an opportunity for the ex-servicemen to talk to a range of people in employment.

Sarah Tomlinson from Help for Heroes said, *"The feedback from the guys was fantastic. They all really enjoyed the day, and commented on how the range of tasks enabled everyone to find something they were able to do. One lad, a double amputee, really enjoyed cutting back the shrubbery which he was able to do seated, whilst other helpers carried the wood he had cleared away over to the fire."*



At lunchtime everyone downed tools to enjoy some soup and excellent sausages provided by Help for Heroes, cooked over the fire, and talked about tree surgery as a future line of work that several of the veterans were interested in.

As well as completing a lot of practical work, the opportunity for veterans to learn about new skills and opportunities and help them plan for their future was invaluable. Both Natural England and Help for Heroes have learnt a lot about how this partnership can work through the delivery of this pilot and now Help for Heroes are looking forward to developing the relationship with Langley Wood NNR over the coming months.

‘Natural Triggers’ project at Peak District NNR

In the summer of 2013, The Farming Life Centre at Buxton in Derbyshire, in partnership with Natural England, The Great Escape project and the Black Environment Network, delivered ‘Natural Triggers’ a project that recognised the importance of using different ways in which to engage people with the natural environment.

Working with community mental health teams across the Peak District, community environmental artist Sue Mulroy and environmental trainer Christine Wilson provided an opportunity for everyone involved to look at how environmental, personal and cultural issues around mental health can be explored through contact with the natural environment. The project focused on particular groups of people who are under-represented in the countryside and in particular on the Derbyshire Dales NNR, as outlined below.

The project in part focused on ‘Improving Mental Health through the Natural Environment’ by providing 7 workshops, with a main theme of exploring the parallel between caring for the natural environment and caring for the self. Participants were drawn from the Derbyshire rural

community experiencing social disadvantage, social isolation, or long term health conditions such as diabetes, arthritis and heart disease, long term mental ill-health and dementia.

The project also delivered five workshops, focusing on 'Breaking Down Barriers to Accessing the Countryside', which focused on reconnecting individuals from BAME communities living on the urban fringes of the Peak District with their rural heritage and roots through engagement with the Derbyshire Dales NNR. Participants were drawn from minority communities in Sheffield.

In all of the workshops, participants explored the natural environment of the NNR and then used this experience to inspire and inform a creative activity with clay. The first series of workshops supported participants to explore how the natural environment can contribute to improving their sense of well-being, and improve their general mental health. For the second series of workshops, participants were encouraged to experience and enjoy the countryside, to share their rural heritage and experiences of living in the countryside in their own countries and to think about how the barriers they experience in their current lives could be broken down to allow them to have more frequent access to rural areas.



Diversity in Partner Projects

Natural England works with a wide range of partners through the National Outdoors for All Working Group. The case stories below demonstrate some of the community engagement and diversity-focused projects that are being delivered by partner organisations.

RSPB: Wild about Weymouth and Portland

A wide variety of partners (including the Dorset Wildlife Trust, RSPB, Dorset Countryside, and the Weymouth and Portland Borough Councils) were involved in delivering the 'Wild about Weymouth and Portland' project, funded by Natural England through Access to Nature, as part of the Big Lottery Fund's Changing Spaces programme. This has resulted in better cohesion in delivery and a single point of contact, meaning that people no longer need to contact five different organisations to find out what is happening in their local area.

The profile of the nature reserves in the area has been raised significantly by bringing together a group of organisations and has resulted in more people from a wider range of backgrounds, including those with disabilities, travelling further across the boroughs to make use of the nature reserves, and their facilities e.g. Trampers. To empower communities to self-lead activities, the project has delivered outreach work, improved physical access and created a 16km long Legacy Trail, which links key wildlife sites and art installations along the route.

The final evaluation of the three year project, which ended in 2013, showed that the local population of Weymouth and Portland now have a different perception of their local natural environment; that it is for everyone; an important change that has positive implications for the future.

Forest of Avon Trust: Good from Woods

In order to increase understanding and raise awareness of the impact that nature-based activities have on the physical, emotional, social and psychological well-being of people, the collection of evidence through research is essential, and Good from Woods (GfW) is an example of a research based partnership project that is doing exactly that, and it is also developing a toolkit so that other practitioners can benefit from their experiences.

Good from Woods is a Big Lottery funded research project, led by The Silvanus Trust with Plymouth University, in partnership with the Neroche Scheme, The Woodland Trust and Forest Research. GfW works in partnership with organisations providing woodland activities to research, identify and collate data on the factors that contribute to feelings of good health and happiness during time spent in woodland.

The project aims to explore how people are benefiting personally and socially from woodland based activity across South West England. Initiatives that deliver nature based activities have been recording how people's experiences in woodland lead to immediate and longer-term feelings of enhanced individual and collective well-being. The project supports staff at each of the organisations delivering woodland-based projects to act as practitioner-researchers, exploring the outcomes for people participating in the woodland activities they run or support.

Findings have been collected using a variety of research methods (from interviews to creative art and play), from a diverse range of people (families learning together to people seeking respite from long-term mental health challenges).

Practitioner-researchers have worked hard to identify methods and approaches that can capture evidence of well-being accrued from woodland activity in ways that:

- complement the setting and focus of woodland based activity;
- suit the varied skills of staff running such activities;
- capture less tangible aspects of our interactions with nature.

The practitioner–researchers have passed on their research skills, knowledge and learning to new practitioners joining the project. Building on these first–hand research experiences, GfW is developing a research toolkit aimed at guiding other practitioners who would like to conduct research into the wellbeing impacts of woodland based experiences. This will add to the increasing understanding of what’s good from woods and growing the evidence base that could help the sector sustain and enhance its provision of well-being services.

The methods developed are resulting in a wealth of feedback collected from each delivery project which has built into an evidence base supporting the benefits to a wide range of people of engagement with the natural environment. This includes parents, teenagers and young adults, and students with learning difficulties. Of particular interest is that there are immediate gains, such as respite from peer pressure in young people but also there appear to be longer term beneficial effects; the self-confidence and feelings of competency that arise during activities in nature are taken back to the classroom. With the ongoing peer mentoring, together with the toolkit, this evidence base will continue to grow.

More about the toolkit and the other research findings emerging from GfW can be found at <http://goodfromwoods.wordpress.com/>

MIND: Ecominds

Mind’s Ecominds scheme, part of the Big Lottery Fund’s Changing Spaces programme, has funded environmental projects across England that used ecotherapy approaches to improve mental and physical health. The £7.5m Ecominds scheme comprises 130 projects reaching over 12,000 people who have chosen ecotherapy to help them manage their mental health.

Projects range from working in allotments to practical conservation, from therapeutic horticulture to walks and green exercise. The scheme has been independently evaluated by the University of Essex which showed that participants in Ecominds projects recorded increases in wellbeing of 17% and of self-esteem of 11% throughout their time with the scheme, with 76% of all participants experiencing mood improvements.

One project within the wider scheme is the Stroud Valleys Project (SVP), a dynamic community-based and volunteer-focused charity working to protect the local environment and increase biodiversity. SVP’s volunteer groups ‘The Green Team: Open to All’ and ‘Women Outside Working’ (WOW!) are designed to help improve the mental health outcomes of participants and enable people to acquire new skills during practical conservation sessions. Both groups are open and socially inclusive, for people from all walks of life who enjoy working outdoors and learning new things.

Volunteers meet weekly to carry out nature conservation activities at green spaces around Stroud district, including planting and laying hedges, planting wildflowers and bulbs, meadow management, creating bog gardens, ponds and orchards, clearing streams, managing scrub, making bird, bat and insect boxes, running community events such as Apple Day and growing food.

Care Farming

Care Farming is the therapeutic use of farming practices and supervised, structured programmes of activities to provide health, social and educational care for a range of vulnerable groups of people. There are nearly 200 care farms in England, providing services to over 3,000 people each week, and Natural England have recently commissioned Care

Farming UK to review the sector to better understand the scale and quality of these services; this is discussed in more detail later in this report.

Environmental Stewardship options support Care Farming and one farm using Environmental Stewardship in this way is the award-winning Pennyhooks Farm in Oxfordshire.

In 2013, Lydia Otter and Richard Hurford from Pennyhooks Farm won the Bayer-Farming And Countryside Education 'Access Award' because of their outstanding commitment to providing a range of different opportunities in order to develop the social and life skills of young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder as well as creating visits for children with special needs in their local area.

The farm has built two purpose-designed buildings for care farming visits, which provide excellent indoor facilities including disabled toilets, a kitchen, and workshop area. There is also a small farm shop selling products made by the students. A third building is currently underway and the construction of the new classroom - which is being supported through Environmental Stewardship - will enable Lydia and her team to host more educational visits to the farm by local groups and provide more children with the opportunity to benefit from contact with the outdoors.

National Diversity Initiatives

The National Outdoors for All Working Group

The National Outdoors for All Working Group (NOfAWG) is an advisory group, facilitated by Natural England that brings together public sector, environmental and voluntary organisations, including, but not limited to, the Woodland Trust, National Trust, MIND, Black Environment Network, RSPB, the Campaign for National Parks, the Sensory Trust, the Conservation Volunteers and the Wildlife Trusts.

NOfAWG supports co-ordination between the natural environment and diversity sectors working to secure funding for research programmes or delivery pilots to strengthen the evidence around barriers to accessing the natural environment. Innovative new projects enable the group to improve existing access, test new ways of working, increase awareness and use of the natural environment to support physical and mental well-being and help build new delivery partnerships. Overall the group helps improve the impact, reach and quality of access services for the diversity sector across the England, shares good practice, promotes the joint Outdoors for All programme and celebrates success.

In 2013, the priority areas of work for this group resulted in research and pilot projects in partnership with Care Farming UK, Dementia Adventure, Autism and Nature and University College London. These are outlined below.

Outdoors for All Strategic Research Group

The work of the National Outdoors for All Working Group is supported by the Outdoors for All Strategic Research Group which has a membership of researchers from the leading universities and academic institutes working in the field including the Universities of Exeter, York, Sheffield, Edinburgh, Essex, Sheffield, East Anglia, University College, London and Forest Research. The group peer reviews commissioned evidence and is working to build a strong evidence base to ensure programmes are evidence-led.

Diversity Research

The National Outdoors for All Working Group and the Outdoors for All Strategic Research Group, led by Natural England, has commissioned several pieces of research to help inform demonstration projects to test new services or approaches to the delivery of existing services aimed at securing better access to and enjoyment of the natural environment for different user groups.

- (A) We commissioned **Dementia Adventure** to undertake 'Greening Dementia', a research project focused on the use of natural environments as a stimulating and enjoyable experience for people living with dementia. Dementia directly affects around 800,000 people and a further 670,000 carers and with an ageing population this is set to rise. Evidence suggests that access to the natural environment may slow down the process of dementia, and as the 'Let Nature Feed Your Senses' project above demonstrates, time spent in the natural environment can have immediate positive benefits.

Research to bring together all the existing evidence of the benefits of engagement with the natural environment for those living with dementia is published as '[Greening Dementia - a literature review of the benefits and barriers facing individuals living with dementia in accessing the natural environment and local greenspace - NECR137](#)'. This work has been shared with other organisations with an interest in better servicing the needs of people living with dementia and is now informing the next phase of scoping a pilot project which involves extensive consultation with people living with dementia and their carers to ensure any interventions are user-led.

- (B) Care farms, defined as the therapeutic use of landscapes and agricultural practices, represent an excellent opportunity to engage a wide range of people with the natural environment in a beneficial way. Natural England commissioned **Care Farming UK** to undertake a review of the care farming sector to better define the full range of health and education services provided by the sector, for example support for people with learning difficulties, autism, mental illness and dementia as well as skills training and support for disaffected young people and offenders.

This collaborative project with Care Farming UK, the University of Essex and the University of Leeds, will be used to inform work underway to drive up standards and to increase the scale and coherence of service provision, thereby improving the 'offer' care farming can make to the relevant health, probation and education commissioning bodies. [Care farming: Defining the 'offer' in England - NECR155](#)

- (C) Natural England commissioned **Autism and Nature**, together with Kings College, London, to undertake a Teacher Insight Study and Evidence Review of the benefits of engaging with the natural environment for children on the autistic spectrum. The resulting study, '[Engaging Children on the Autistic Spectrum with the Natural Environment](#)' found that although children with autism have few opportunities to engage with nature, when visits were undertaken, positive outcomes are recorded after only one or two visits. The evidence gathered within this report has been used to inform a pilot proposal in South East England.
- (D) Natural England, in partnership with Pennine Prospects, commissioned a study on behalf of the **South Pennines Local Nature Partnership**, which used 2009-12 data from the Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) survey to better understand the profile of visits taken in the Southern Pennines, a distinct area of uplands surrounded by Greater Manchester, West Yorkshire and Pennine Lancashire. The study identified the demographics of people visiting the area, the levels of visits, the motivation and the

barriers to access amongst people living within the South Pennines compared to those people living in the adjacent 'catchment' area.

The findings of the study will help shape the future public engagement programme for the South Pennines Local Nature Partnership, to enable new partners to be identified and public outreach work designed to reach people from the former industrial towns around the South Pennines, who have been identified as being low in visit numbers. Better targeted outreach will help to ensure that the benefits of spending time in the natural environment are there for all.

[South Pennines MENE](#)

Conclusion

The National Outdoors for All Working Group continues to champion on behalf of Government and the natural environment, greenspace, heritage and volunteering sectors.

The projects commissioned by the NOfAWG are shaped by six defining principles:

- Valuing diversity and enhancing equality.
- User led – meaningful participation and involvement of service users in the project design and delivery.
- Evidence led – Robust evidence must underpin the project design, targeting and evaluation of the delivery process and its impact.
- Adding value and resilience – enhancing and facilitating more integrated use of existing infrastructure and resources to add resilience to organisations and delivery.
- Replication/amplification – testing delivery in a way that can inform scaling up future work.
- Ensuring a legacy – testing and embedding innovative income generation schemes to ensure the long term financial independence of the project.

We know that people who have regular access to good quality natural spaces have longer, healthier lives and that inequalities in access opportunities exist for a variety of reasons. Our current research and demonstration pilot projects remain key to our understanding of the best ways of tackling health inequalities through use of and connection to the natural environment and our partnerships remain at the heart of a strong programme of delivery of Outdoors for All work across England.

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