

Neroche Woodlanders Report for Natural England

Jenny Archard, March 30, 2023

1. Aims

The aim of these two late winter sessions was twofold; for those working in the NHS and VCSFE to experience the benefits of a wellbeing in nature session and to inform them of the sessions available to local people in mental health distress. It is a pilot for directly engaging NHS and VCSFE in a green social prescribing activity which provides learning for similar delivery in other places. It gave attendees an awareness that NE are focused on inclusion and wellbeing in natural spaces. We aimed to engage with 30 people across two sessions. Specifically, the funding was to target:

- More people connected with and acting for the natural environment.
- More people spending time in nature.
- More people benefiting from the natural environment.
- Better quality accessible nature-rich places close to where people live.
- Expand the role that Green Social Prescribing plays in addressing health inequalities.
- Join up health planning and nature recovery planning at a strategic level.

2. What took place:

Two nature-wellbeing sessions - 16th and 22nd March. These were advertised through NHS channels and local VCSFE contacts. Food was provided (soup, bread, salad, fruit, biscuits, hot drinks) and transport was organised from Taunton. Sessions were led by three staff – Jenny Archard, Sarah Holdway and Tiff Lovedale.

Session one Thursday 16th March: 13.00-16.30 – 16 people booked, 10 people attended and completed feedback.

Roles booked and those attending in bold: Community mental health nurse, CPN Older Adults Community Mental Health Team, **Dual Diagnosis Recovery Worker**, Support Practitioner, **Nurse**, Senior Support Worker, **Family Therapy clinical lead**, **Manager partner**, **Clinical Psychologist**, **Community Mental Health Nurse**, Community Mental Health Nurse, **Assistant Practitioner**, **Occupational Therapist**, Support Practitioner, **Psychiatrist -Dual diagnosis locality lead**.

Four people were booked onto transport. Three of these did not attend and the other did not use the transport.

Session two Wednesday 22nd March: 10.30-15.00 – 16 people booked, 10 people attended and completed feedback.

Roles booked and those attending in bold: **PAUSE Practitioner**, **Support Worker (retraining as an Occupational Therapist)**, **Health & Wellbeing Coach x3**, RA, mental Health forensic link worker x2, **Specialist Nurse (Pain Management)**, **Forensic Link Worker**, CPN, Mental health social worker, **Relational Recovery Lead**, Peer Support Worker, **Senior Health & Wellbeing Coach**.

Three people were booked onto transport, only two attended.

3. Feedback from participants

At the end of the sessions a short survey with seven questions was used to evaluate people's perceptions of the impact. We will also note referrals or other work that grows from the connections. The feedback comments below are loosely grouped into themes identified as this report was written.

Q1. What made you want to come to this session?

- **WORK STRESS** -A break from the stress of work; To take some time out And busy job; Taking a break from day to day life; Decompress from work; I was on annual leave!
- **PERSONAL NEEDS** - Personal wellbeing; I know that spending time in nature is good for my mental health and wellbeing; Recommendations / filling my own cup / Needing to receive; wellbeing for myself.
- **DESIRE TO EXPERIENCE NATURE** - Love nature /learning what's on offer; I love nature and was curious about what you offer; The words - Nature Wellbeing; Haven't been offered this type of opportunity before; The appeal of looking after my wellbeing outdoors!!; Suggested by manager and keen on nature and the benefits for wellbeing; A love of nature; I love nature, To learn about nature from experienced people
- **PREVIOUS KNOWLEDGE OF WOODLANDERS** - Previously attended to accompany a client in 2018 and loved what goes on here; Contact with Jenny - really keen to be part of the opportunity.
- **WANTING TO SUPPORT OTHERS** - To understand ways to support clients to connect with nature; Interest in social prescribing and wish to encourage more people to engage with nature to help their mental health; To learn more so I can signpost to people; I may refer clients for one of your programmes; a wish to help people I work with enjoy nature.
- **TO EXPERIENCE SOMETHING NEW**
- **TEAM BONDING**
- **NETWORK AND DRAW INSPIRATION.**

Q2: Were you already aware of green social prescribing? Yes: 14 No: 6

Q3: What are the main things you have enjoyed, experienced, or learned?

- **THE CAMPFIRE** -fire, chatting around the fire, Fire, Sitting around the fire
- eating outside.
- **LEARNING ABOUT/WITH NATURE** - birds, Species identification; seeing the badger sets; Learning and sharing in the natural world; How everything in nature can be used; it was also lovely to learn from Jenny about our surroundings.
- **IMPORTANCE OF SIMPLICITY** - peace; How simple it can be; Sitting and just being; Simplicity is powerful.
- **QUIET TIME & GROUNDING** -5-minute peaceful time; 5 mins meditation; 5 minute silence in the woods; Standing still and noticing; Quiet times to engage 1-1 with nature; The grounding; mindfulness.
- **WALKING** - Walk and noticing nature; Walking around the woods; The walk in the woods; Exploring woodland; walks.
- **THE WHOLE EXPERIENCE** - The freedom; The process is as important as the result; the gentleness of the afternoon; Laughing; Fresh air, All of it ; I've enjoyed everything! Everything
- **NATURE-WELLEBEING RESEARCH** - learning about research and projects related to nature; learning about the micro dose from trees; Inspiration re getting pocket nature books; learning about approaches that make such an impact.

- **CONNECTING WITH NATURE** -Connecting with nature and learning more about nature; Enjoyed slowing down and being able to get outside and enjoy nature; Reconnecting with nature; Experiencing first-hand the benefit of making time for nature.
- **SENSORY EXPERIENCE** - Tasting the wild garlic; Peripheral vision! sensory connection to mother earth and nature; engaging my senses.
- **WOODLANDERS** - Connecting with the Woodlander's team; knowledge of the team; facilitators really lovely; facilitators; Soup was amazing.
- **BEING WITH OTHERS** - Making connections with like-minded people; Being outside with people who also connect with nature; Networking /meeting others.
- **ATTENDING TO SELF** - I need to empty my cup before I can re-fill it; Being with myself; Helped me remember I enjoy being by myself.
- **PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES** - wood carving; Whittling; Crafts were great.

Q4: What from today can you use to help manage stress at work?

- **TAKE SMALL ACTIONS**- Taking time to be quiet and outside - have to take a break; Take 5 mins to just sit; Taking 5 mins to look at nature; Even the smallest notion of nature helps; Learning that short connections with nature can be beneficial, not just long ones; Taking time out and having a lunch break and going for a walk.
- **ATTEND TO SELF**- make a space for myself; Work/life balance; Make more time for nature wellbeing
- **REGULAR AND MORE TIME IN NATURE** - get outdoors more; Keep coming back to the woods walking my dog; Keep going outside more often; Importance of being in nature regularly.
- **BRING NATURE INTO WORK** - Develop a nature window, encourage outdoor working; Finding ways to bring more nature stuff to work ; by growing more plants for the workplace; Identify areas in work place to connect
- **DO SOMETHING IN NATURE AS A TEAM** - I'll think about having our away day here.
- **DO SOMETHING IN THE ORGANISATION** -Thinking with managers how could re connect with nature more as an organisation.
- **RESPOND TO STRESS WITH TIME IN NATURE** - Knowing that if I feel stressed, I can go and immerse myself in the natural environment; Allow myself time away from my desk when feeling stressed.
- **'BE' IN NATURE**- Take time out to stop, listen, see, smell ; Encourage others to do the same ; Going out and just being in nature; going out doesn't mean I have to be "doing" something I love the outdoors but don't stop to ask why or truly appreciate the experience in the moment; It's made me remember the benefits of outdoor meditation and will try harder to make time for it; Grounding/Stepping outside and connecting; I loved "pausing" and being grateful for what was around me; Mindfulness and re-connection with my senses in green places.

Q5: How do you think this session may impact on your practice?

- **TAKE A FIRST STEP** – Will help me think of ways, even if minimally, to help others engage in nature; ; I'm still reflecting on that but I do feel that at least starting a conversation with patients about their relationship with nature and the outdoors might be a good starting point; encourage patients to slow down; Advocating to others who may benefit; Signposting to patients.
- **FOCUS ON NATURE WITH CLIENTS/PATIENTS** I will refer patients for nature to help with anxiety and social interaction; Learning opportunities for clients; I think it will help me encourage my clients to use nature to nurture themselves; More focus on nature as an options to explore with clients; Further encouraging the women I support to connect with nature. Introducing quiet sit time and sensory skills.

- **CONSIDER ORGANISING GROUPS OR ACTIVITIES** - I may think how/whether we could organise some groups for people with mental health difficulties that encourage nature connection and help with stabilization/feelings; Incorporating nature within my health coaching practice; I will think how to implement nature activities with clients; Re-inspired me to create a nature connection offering.
- **DO SOMETHING FOR OUR TEAM** – Team type of afternoon (arrange more) outdoor space for working.
- **HAVE A PERSONAL PRACTICE** - I will continue connecting with nature; It's a reminder to slow down; Taking time to connect to nature on regular basis; Attending more to my wellbeing; Becoming more aware of how often we are in nature and what impact that may have. Continued priority of Nature and connection; Being in the moment and sharing the impact of nature to wellbeing both physically and emotionally.
- **FEEL MORE CONFIDENT** - Reinforce my belief about healing nature; ; More likely to recommend outdoor time interventions in its own right; Re-inspired me to create a nature connection offering; Will help me with those I work with to help them stop and engage; Being more mindful of how today has benefited myself and how it may help others; How accessible nature can be.
- **FIND OUT MORE** - Look at green and blue social prescribing; I will look into similar experiences in my area of work as it will benefit people I work with.

Q6: How do you think this may impact on those you work with?

FOR CLIENTS/PATIENTS:

- **MENTAL HEALTH & MOOD** – Improve mood; to help with anxiety and mood; Help mental health; Reduce anxiety /Fear / Feel mentally renewed / Gain different perspective; Leaving chaos behind for a little while and grounding with return.
- **NATURE** - enjoying nature; Sharing my experiences of healing power of nature; I hope it will encourage them to consider nature as therapeutic as vital.
- **SOCIAL SKILLS** - Getting used to going to groups.
- **GENERAL POSITIVES** – Positively; I think it will help them; For some this will a drip feed process to accept the concept. Some are already onboard. Whenever one person is happier - the ripple spread.

COLLEAGUES & TEAM:

- **SHARE WITH COLLEAGUES** - Encourage my colleagues to attend a similar afternoon; I will be sharing my experience today - let them know about the fantastic work in the community; Will encourage others to go out in nature. Awareness of the importance of connecting with nature as part of our workday.
- **OUR PRACTICE TO INCLUDE NATURE** - may offer a session visiting local area as a team; We all present hope today as a Team so I would like to talk to them about what they learned and what would like to take forward; Increase wellbeing and knowledge about green activities - suggest this place for our away day; By bringing a new angle to our holistic approach and being able to share stories from today; suggesting ideas for mindfulness.
- **NATURAL ENGLAND** - new awareness.

Q7: What else would like to find out about, linked to this session?

- **TRAINING** - Accessing courses; how to develop skills; What other training is available; How can we think about groups and training; More training; Look at confer course or Wild Psychotherapy course; Training in facilitating outdoor sessions; I am very interested in the training to build my confidence in supporting others to make more meaningful connections with nature.
- **RESOURCES** – Books; links to Literature

Woodland Wellbeing for NHS staff, VCSFE staff and Social Prescribers

- **PLACES TO BE** - Locations we can access; Local walks and opportunities that I can enjoy in my spare time; Walks surrounding Taunton/ Somerset; General nature experience days for anyone.
- **SHARING THE EXPERIENCE**- mainly how to share this experience more
- **GROUPS WE CAN REFER CLIENTS TO** - How to refer; groups we can link in with or refer to; what else is around; Is there anything like this in the Mendip area? Similar opportunities closer to my practice; Other locations; Green and Blue Social Prescribing; A wellbeing experience.
- **OTHER EXPERIENCES** - Structured /Guided Mindfulness Practice in a forest setting

Meeting the Aims

1. More people connected with and acting for the natural environment. The feedback demonstrates renewed and better nature-connection and the intention to share with colleagues and clients.
2. More people spending time in nature and more people benefiting from the natural environment. The 20 who came spent more time in nature and benefitted from their time; they engaged with plants, birds and woodlands around them.
3. Better quality accessible nature-rich places close to where people live. These sessions enabled people to access one quality place that most did not know about before and has helped them to think about other places they may access nearby work or home.
4. Expand the role that Green Social Prescribing plays in addressing health inequalities. Most want to find ways to refer people to local green/blue social prescribing projects or help create something new where they are.
5. Join up health planning and nature recovery planning at a strategic level. At least three senior staff who attended have asked to be involved in training and connections so that more nature-connection can happen within their teams.

Comments for further projects

Attendance - Most of those who didn't attend had let us know, but several did not. It could be worth asking for payments for non-attendance for future sessions, or some other way to encourage people to come.

Transport - The bus transport had very poor take-up. If transport is to be offered a better understanding of the needs of those coming would help e.g., would a pickup from a park and ride be better than from town locations?

