



Countryside Jobs Service

Focus on Overcoming Barriers

In association with the Outdoor Recreation Network



14 November 2016

Nature-based interventions for mental health and wellbeing

Mental illness is a large and growing challenge in the UK, often with heart-breaking consequences for countless numbers of individuals and families, and poses a strategic economic and social challenge for 21st Century Britain.

Today in the UK, 1 in 4 people experience a 'significant' mental health problem in any one year, with 1 in 10 of school aged children suffering from a diagnosable mental health disorder - that is around three children in every school class. The annual total cost of mental illness is currently estimated to be £105 billion (The Centre for Mental Health, 2010).

Studies show that simply spending time in or being active in natural environments is associated with positive outcomes for attention, anger, fatigue and sadness^{8,1}, higher levels of positive affect and lower levels of negative affect (mood/emotion)² and physiological stress³.



Keeping active supports good mental health at all ages
©Natural England

Most studies that have considered relationships at a population level find that more greenspace around the home has a protective effect on self-reported mental health and is associated with reduced risk of stress, tendency to psychiatric morbidity, psychological distress, depressive symptoms, clinical anxiety, depression and mood disorders for adults⁴. There is some evidence which suggests that certain types of environment such as coasts, mountains and woodlands and better quality natural environments are associated with better mental health^{5,6}.

The evidence for the impacts of nature-based interventions on mental health and wellbeing is robust and has multiple benefits including reduction in depression, stress and anxiety; increased social contact, inclusion and feeling of belonging; improved self-esteem, confidence and mood; and an increase in personal achievement through meaningful activity. There is also generally positive evidence relating to the impacts of activities in natural environments on children's mental health and their cognitive, emotional and behavioural functioning. Research and reviews undertaken by Natural England and partners show these types of interventions to be cost effective.

Throughout the country there are a growing number of examples of nature based interventions being offered as "green prescriptions". For example, in Cornwall there is a project underway called "A Dose of Nature," which aims to develop "green prescriptions", so that it is easier for doctors to make available a dose of nature. They are not "true" prescriptions, of course. Nonetheless, by forming partnerships with those who manage environmental assets in the county and who are willing and able to receive patients, by providing funding to cover the gap until such services are commissioned, and by ensuring a high quality service that allows a patient whose situation with regard to their health is considered in need of such activity, a doctor is able to direct a patient towards making some potentially important lifestyle changes.

"A Dose of Nature," is a partnership project between academics, GP surgeries, and environmental organisations and is funded by a Knowledge Exchange Fellowship from the Natural Environmental Research Council. The aim of the project is to develop a coherent approach across the county—spanning different sectors—so that questions and issues are addressed reciprocally. The project works with NHS Kernow, the

Health and Wellbeing Board, and the Local Nature Partnership, as well as the University of Exeter Medical School and its biosciences department. So far five pilot schemes are in development, and the intention is to apply the model across Cornwall and beyond in due course. Dose of nature¹.

So with increasingly robust evidence, interest is steadily growing in the use of nature-based interventions for mental health care, however its use is still a long way from mainstream health practice. So, what is stopping this wider use of nature-based interventions for mental health care? The challenge lies in increasing awareness and overcoming the barriers to accessing these interventions. Issues which we need to address include the fragmentation of provision: with many different organisations delivering nature-based care, there are a wide range of delivery models, and differing language used to describe the activity and the benefits to both the user and the health professionals.

To add complexity, some providers offer both public health programmes for the general population as well as the often more structured green care interventions which are designed as a treatment for clients with a defined health need. All of this creates a degree of confusion and uncertainty for people using these services and importantly, barriers for health professionals such as GPs and Clinical Commissioning Groups if referral to nature-based solutions is to become more common place.



The natural environment – a great place for socialising ©Natural England



Making friends' at Sheratt's Wood Care Farm ©Care Farming UK

To explore the challenges, barriers and steps required to enable a greater number of nature-based interventions to be commissioned in mental health care, Natural England funded a number of reports one of which⁷ focused primarily on understanding more about green care interventions. It recommended that the "nature based intervention" sector works together in partnership to help promote clearer messages to policymakers, health commissioners and potential service users using common language to describe activities and outcomes.

The Report highlights the need to distinguish between i) specifically designed and commissioned interventions for individuals with a defined need (green care), and ii) public health programmes for the general population (see Figure 1). This will ensure that nature-based service providers use the appropriate language (and evidence) in order to talk to the right health commissioners – i.e. green care providers should target health and social care commissioners (Clinical Commissioning Groups and Local Authorities (social services)) and more general nature-based programmes should target commissioners of Public Health (PHE and Local Authority public health departments).

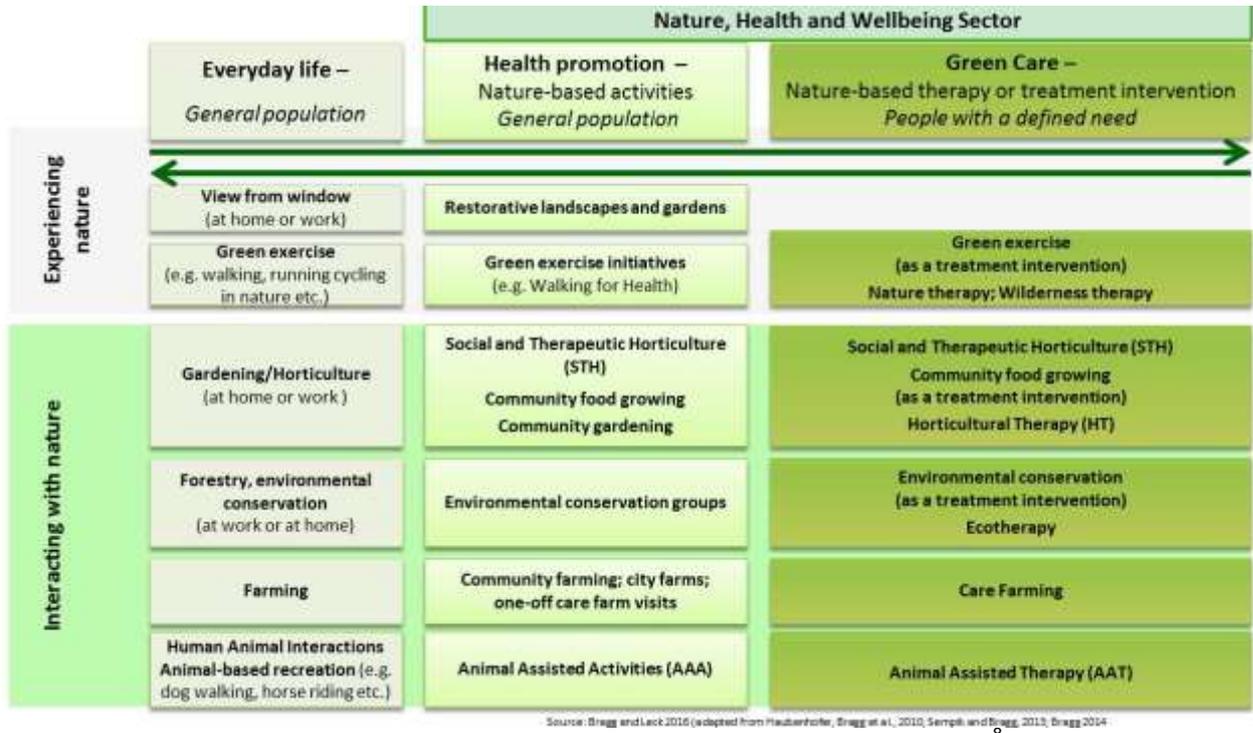


Figure 1 The different contexts in which an individual may engage with nature⁸.

The report has led to a more focused piece of research funded by Natural England and commissioned from Mind and Care Farming UK, soon to be published, which examines how social prescribing is being used to support mental health care using the natural environment through “green prescriptions”. It looks at examples of good practice which could be significantly scaled up and replicated more widely⁸.

It is hoped that this and other research will help to transform the quality and growth of nature-based interventions, thereby enabling the natural environment sector to make a serious contribution to the growing demand for health and care services for people with mental illnesses in the UK.

Natural England’s Outdoors for All Programme

Natural England’s Outdoors for Allⁱⁱ Programme continues to work to improve opportunities for all people in England to enjoy and benefit from the natural environment. Natural England works with and chairs the National Outdoors for All Working Group (NOFAWG), which brings together users and providers of services for the diverse population that would otherwise not have access to the countryside. The purpose of the working group is to commission research and provide evidence to show the benefits of access to the countryside; and to promote and facilitate solutions to mainstream the use of the natural



Feeling energised walking in the fresh air ©Natural England

environment in supporting positive health outcomes. For example Natural England has recently published a series of evidence briefing sheets that set out the evidence linking the benefits of the natural environment to a number of outcomes such as mental healthⁱⁱⁱ and dementia, physical activity^{iv} and obesity^v, physiological health^{vi}, learning^{vii} and connection to nature^{viii}.

Also the NOFAWG partnership organised a successful conference on Transforming Mental Health and Dementia Provision with the Natural Environment^{ix} on November 10th 2016, in London. The event brought together the health and social care sectors with natural environment sector to stimulate closer working and

improve the mechanisms that can enable "natural solutions" to become a mainstream activity in supporting people with mental ill-health or dementia. It showcased best practice in commissioning and scaling up of nature-based projects and was aimed at commissioners of mental health and dementia services, GPs, social care providers, public health and other relevant departments of local authorities, as well as those working in nature-based projects. Proceedings of the conference will be available.

The Outdoor Recreation Network

The Outdoor Recreation Network (further information below) has organised two well attended conferences which included presentations and discussion on the 'Overcoming Barriers' theme. The first focussed on 'Public Health in Outdoor Recreation'^x in March 2015, and the second looked at 'Outdoor Recreation and Active Lifestyles: understanding behavioural change'^{xi} in October 2016. The presentations for both events are on the Outdoor Recreation Network website and available at the links.

This article has been written by Jane Houghton and Sarah Preston of Natural England on behalf of the Outdoor Recreation Network

For further information about Natural England's work on overcoming barriers to access the natural environment, please contact Sarah Preston sarah.preston@naturalengland.org.uk and Jane Houghton jane.houghton@naturalengland.org.uk

Information about the Outdoor Recreation Network

ORN is a network which is committed to gathering, exchanging, developing and sharing information to develop good policy and practice in outdoor recreation across the UK and Ireland.

This is achieved through:

- networking between member organisations and other interested organisations
- holding seminars, workshops, conferences and organising research meetings a recent example being conference on 'Outdoor recreation and active lifestyles – understanding behavioural change'
- distributing the information to a wider audience through e-zines, a journal, digital media and a library of publications freely available on its website.

Members of the Outdoor Recreation Network are organisations and individuals in the public, private and voluntary sectors and the network reaches thousands of interested people.

ORN is funded through membership fees by a range of government departments, agencies and other bodies who share an interest in outdoor recreation issues.

For further information please see website www.outdoorrecreation.org.uk or contact enquiries@outdoorrecreation.org.uk

References

- 1 Thompson Coon, J., *et al*, Does participating in Physical Activity in Outdoor Natural Environments have a Greater Effect on Physical and Mental Wellbeing than Physical Activity Indoors? A Systematic review. *Environmental Science and Technology*, 2011. 45 (5): p. 1761 - 1772
- 2 McMahan, E.A. and D. Estes, The effect of contact with natural environments on positive and negative affect: A meta-analysis. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 2015. 10(6): p. 507-519.
- 3 Haluza, D., R. Schonbauer, and R. Cervinka, Green Perspectives for Public Health: A Narrative Review on the Physiological Effects of Experiencing Outdoor Nature. *International Journal of environmental Research & Public Health*, 2014. 11(5): p. 5445-5461.
- 4 James, P., *et al.*, A Review of the Health Benefits of Greenness. *Current Epidemiology Reports*, 2015: 2(2) p. 1-12.
- 5 Dean, J., K. van Dooren, and P. Weinstein, Does biodiversity improve mental health in urban settings? *Medical hypotheses*, 2011. 76(6): p. 877-880.
- 6 17. Lovell, R., *et al.*, A systematic review of the health and well-being benefits of biodiverse environments. *J. Toxicol. Environ. Health Part B*, 2014. 17: p. 1-20.
- 7 BRAGG, R., ATKINS, G. 2016. A review of nature-based interventions for mental health care. Natural England Commissioned Reports, Number 20
- 8 BRAGG, R. and LECK, C. Good practice in social prescribing for mental health: The role of nature-based interventions. Natural England Commissioned Reports, Number XXX.2016



Links

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| i | http://c-js.co.uk/2ftpdQB | vii | http://c-js.co.uk/2eGloYC |
| ii | http://c-js.co.uk/2eGyarg | viii | http://c-js.co.uk/2ftrGuA |
| iii | http://c-js.co.uk/2fxjr0Z | ix | http://c-js.co.uk/2fMPTjr |
| iv | http://c-js.co.uk/2ePrswx | x | http://c-js.co.uk/2faULNg |
| v | http://c-js.co.uk/2fi9inY | xi | http://c-js.co.uk/2ftrVpi |
| vi | http://c-js.co.uk/2egpmcR | | |

Horticultural Therapy Trust. Charity No. 1147927. Plymouth. Supports recoveries unique and meaningful to individuals with mental health disability; In a safe, nurturing and empowering environment; Focuses on abilities, while recognising needs, towards developing skills and personal potentials; Values each person; Gardening for Growth.
www.horticultural-therapy-trust.org

St Nicks is York's centre for nature and green living. Our ecotherapy programme promotes good mental and physical wellbeing through outdoor activity in the natural environment. We offer group activities such as gardening, conservation and wildlife activities. Learn more on our website and download a referral form to apply: <http://stnicks.org.uk/?p=5760>

We are the UK's leading charity providing and promoting Social and Therapeutic Horticulture from our four regional sites in London, Reading, Birmingham and Gateshead. We also deliver a range of training days and courses, some in conjunction with Coventry University. We are at thrive.org.uk or contact us on 0118 9885688.

The Good Wood and Fruitful Woods projects, Edinburgh aim to promote mental health recovery through woodland based activities. We offer participants the opportunity to spend time outdoors in the fresh air, amongst the trees working with natural materials alongside supportive and friendly staff and volunteers. Visit www.newcaledonianwoodlands.org or contact megan.mackie@newcaledonianwoodlands.org

FarmBuddies assist self-referrals and groups, from all sectors in the South East, find the right farm that provides a Social Care Farming service suited to their individual needs. For more details see: <http://c-js.co.uk/2ftkeQd>

City Farms and many community gardens have suitable facilities and staff to provide supportive activities for people with mental illness in their local community, and with more severe illness in partnership with professional support workers. See many locations on our map or email Ian on ian@farmgarden.org.uk for a discussion. <https://www.farmgarden.org.uk/your-area>

Sixty percent of rural and urban care farms provide activities for people with mental illness; see map on www.carefarminguk.org/map for details or speak with the Care Farming UK Co-ordinator on coordinator@carefarminguk.org

Practical Mental Health Techniques – 23/1/17. This course will give you a solid knowledge of what to expect when working with people with mental health conditions and emotional support needs. Learn how to see situations from various perspectives, how to help people to relax and how to maintain a safe, comfortable environment for everyone. Contact scotland-training@tcv.org.uk www.tcv.org.uk



A Welcome in our Green Spaces

Judy Ling Wong CBE
President Black Environment Network



Many members of the BAME (Black and Minority Ethnic) communities do aspire to access green spaces and the countryside as a result of the work of the Black Environment Network (BEN) in partnership with the environmental sector over the years. However, BAME communities, as a whole, are a moving target. The people we need to work with now are not the same people we served years ago. Newcomers arrive for all sorts of reasons from civil unrest to simply looking for a better life. One main characteristic is that most BAME communities live in urban areas where most of the job opportunities are. Those in low-paid urban jobs find it hard to afford the cost of transport to visit different places. The lack of a tube fare across London, for example, stops many from ever having the pleasure of seeing the deer in Richmond Park. Those with nice green spaces within walking distance are very lucky indeed, but it is still a deprivation to be unable to enjoy the full range of beautiful places. So finding money for the journey remains a core issue.



Credit: BEN

For green spaces within walking distance, site managers need to be savvy about who are new to the locality, and which BAME groups may have been historically neglected. The most important and basic move to make is to allocate time to consistently develop relationships with local BAME community groups. Welcoming them into the spaces, and approaching community leaders to hear

directly about their needs over a cup of tea, introducing them to key staff and explaining what is on offer lays

down the long term development of building the enjoyment of green spaces into the lives of BAME groups. Cafes in green spaces need to offer a range of food and drink that reflect cultural needs. Seeing green spaces, from small parks to open countryside as multiuse spaces with a programme of activities, from festivals to yoga outdoors, and providing points of interest such as trails, helps to bring more people in, not just BAME groups.

People love having a choice of things to do besides relaxing and walking. Groups are often shy of asking to use a green space unless there is a friendly relationship. When they built up courage to finally ask, one BAME group was delighted to find that they were welcome to celebrate Congo Independence Day with a BBQ in Hainault Forest.



Credit: BEN

Some years ago, Brixworth Country Park in Northamptonshire worked with local BAME groups to put together a multicultural festival that completely broke the ice for everyone. The annual festival expanded from year to year until in the end it grew too large to manage!



Credit: BEN

Further afield, the cost of bringing people into the countryside means funded developmental work and organised trips, and therefore consistent fundraising. Many BAME groups do not have suitable clothing or footwear and the countryside remains an unknown quantity. Urban newcomers often do not know where to go and are wary of getting lost or being in a strange place, unaccompanied, and subject to being stared at as curiosities, although the locals in the countryside are also having their own moment of strangeness to see BAME groups present. It takes time for both sides to get used to BAME presence in the countryside and shrug it off as normality.

Organised trips, targeting suitable first places to visit with a range of interesting activities, set the scene. On our organised trips, BEN always had a set of waterproofs and wellingtons of various sizes on board our minibuses.

The work of BEN in partnership with the environmental sector over the years has enthused enough ethnic minority groups to love the countryside so that working together with the Campaign for National Parks, through the Mosaic Project, over 200 BAME individuals were identified and trained as National Park Champions to do in-reach into their own communities. They were introduced to every aspect of their nearest National Park, health and safety, fundraising, the range of activities available and the key staff to work with, so that they can confidently organise trips with programmes of activities for their community members to enjoy our great National Parks. This idea of training knowledgeable experienced champions can be extended to more local places and the city fringe, so that BAME members can lead on accessing a range of green spaces and advocate for what they need and wish to do.

Access to green spaces and the countryside by BAME communities remains an issue, but the context in which it takes place is evolving, demanding new kinds of partnerships with new opportunities for action.

judy@ben-network.org.uk
www.ben-network.org.uk
www.judylingwong.co.uk



Credit: BEN

Using the Come Outside! model to overcome multiple barriers



What barriers?

A review of 57 studies¹ identified 13 constraints or barriers to participation in outdoor recreation which fell into 3 groups:

- The things that occur within people's mind, for example: fear for personal safety and security; lack of knowledge; lack of time; poor health or fitness; lack of confidence; finding the weather disagreeable; and being a lone person. These are the intrapersonal constraints:
"I can't walk that far!"
- The things that occur as a result of interactions between people, for example: feeling unwelcome; concern about anti-social behaviour; and being put off by a bad experience. These are known as interpersonal constraints:
"Those places aren't for us"
- External factors, usually outside people's direct control, for example: poor provision of facilities and poor management; lack of transport; and costs too high are structural constraints:
"We want to go but I can't afford to pay for the whole family"

A survey of Come Outside! participants and stakeholders showed that the five most significant barriers to getting involved in outdoor activities were 'intrapersonal' – lack of knowledge; confidence; experience; skills; and motivation.

The next 5 most significant were all structural – lack of affordable transport; group leader lacking the necessary skills and lacking experience; cost; and lack of appropriate clothing/equipment.

How we supported people to overcome multiple barriers

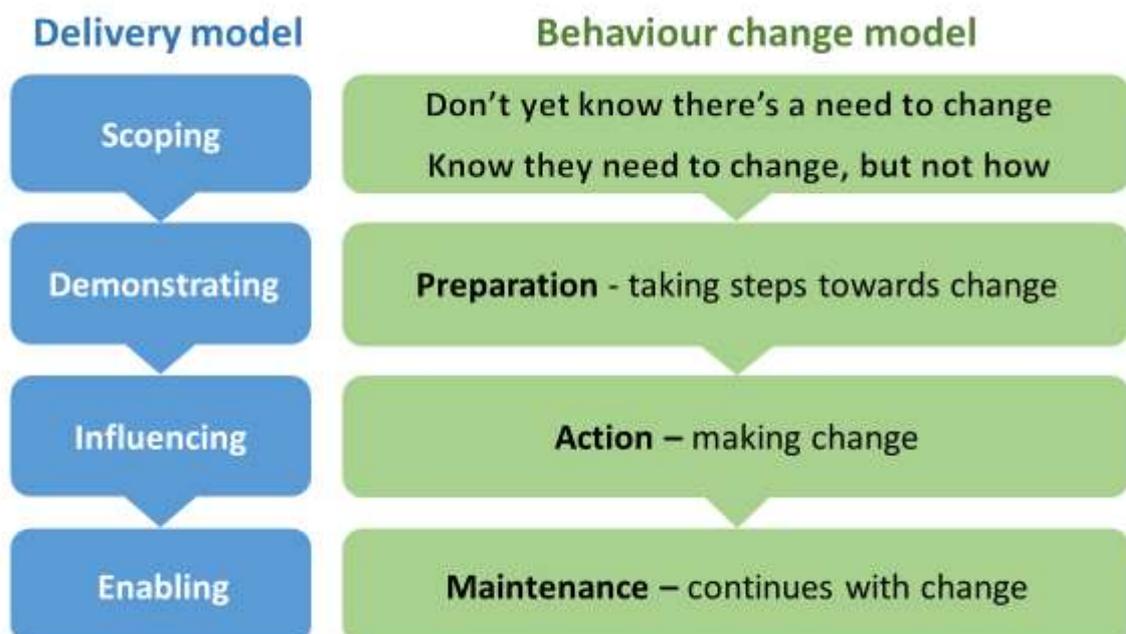
The programme aimed to support participants to overcome barriers, get involved in outdoor activities and sustain their involvement.

To achieve this, the following delivery model was developed. It is designed to take people through the recognised stages of behaviour change:

Come Outside! Programme 2012 - 16 Aims:

- To engage less physically active people from deprived areas
- To increase their involvement in outdoor activities
- To work with support workers who work with disadvantaged groups
- To embed outdoor activity into the support worker's provision
- To influence activity providers to deliver greater benefits
- To monitor impact and gain learning

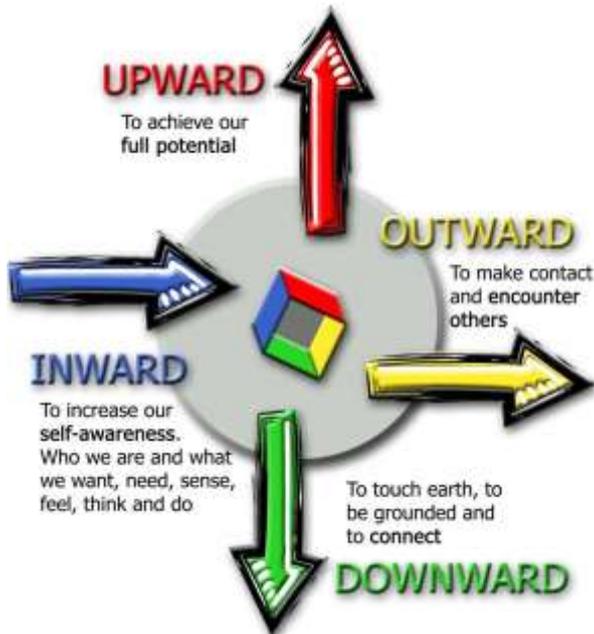
Funded by Big Lottery, Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales



The first stage of delivery was scoping. This meant finding our target audience, the people who would have the most to gain from outdoor activity.

- We looked for existing groups (not currently involved in outdoor activity) because group members build each other's confidence and motivate each other. In time, we encouraged them to draw in friends and family from their community, which they could do more effectively than we ever could.
- We went to see the groups where they met, we didn't expect them to come to us, because at this stage they weren't planning to change.
- Initially, we didn't talk to them specifically about getting outdoors. Instead we asked them about their interests, what they were up to, their aspirations and concerns. We then suggested outdoor activities that met their needs but which might also spark their interest.

The next stage was to support the group to take steps towards becoming more active by demonstrating to them the benefits of getting involved in outdoor activity. This was done through bespoke taster sessions.



The 4 components of 'memorable experience'

- With them, we designed taster sessions which were planned on the day/times that suited them, at a place they could get to and doing what they thought they might enjoy and were interested to try out.
- The outdoor providers, who delivered the tasters, were briefed so the sessions were designed to meet the groups' needs and deliver the benefits they wanted.
- The outdoor providers also incorporated the 4 components of 'memorable experience' into the activity design to maximise the opportunities for the groups to have sessions which they were inspired to repeat.
- The groups were encouraged to think about a series of taster sessions and their continued input and feedback ensured each taster continued to meet their needs.

With each taster the groups became more knowledgeable about the outdoor opportunities available. They became more confident about doing outdoor activities as their experience and skills developed. This in turn led to increasing motivation to

do more. Fundamental barriers were slowly disappearing.

"We didn't know we could do this stuff."

"Now that I've done some exercise I feel like I want to do more. I must have lost a stone!"

The third stage was to influence the way the groups viewed the outdoors so they started to value the activities for the benefits they gained (eg. social contact, improved fitness and mental well-being, transferable skills, volunteering opportunities, personal development, etc). As a result they became more motivated to independently take action themselves, which followed-on naturally from their involvement in developing the tasters.

"It's been really good to develop our skills."

"Walking is relaxing, stress free, you enjoy the fresh air. It gets people out of the house and socialising which makes you feel better."

Finally, the groups were enabled to become completely independent. This involved the groups identifying barriers, such as lack of affordable transport; the group leader lacking the necessary skills and experience; cost; and lack of appropriate clothing/equipment.

Depending on the group, we linked them with community transport schemes; showed them how to access places by public transport; provided low level activity leader training; and bought waterproofs and basic outdoor equipment for group members to share. We showed groups the walking/cycling routes to their local outdoor spaces and linked them to local schemes which could provide free activities. For some groups, we helped them set up members' subs to fund special trips and to become constituted, so they could apply for funding.

"That place today – its really close to where we live. I never knew it was there – they do so many things [child's name] would love it."

"We will carry on 100% once Come Outside! finishes – we are looking for a volunteer to oversee the running of the garden."

Whilst Come Outside! Co-ordinators initiated this work, they collaborated closely with the support workers (who worked with many of the groups), and local outdoor providers, enabling them to share or take over delivery. Support workers started to see how outdoor activities helped them deliver their work with their service users and outdoor providers were now able to engage previously hard-to-reach groups. This meant that with 5 Co-ordinators the Programme could support 82 groups to be involved in over 1,000 sessions.

How successful was the Come Outside! approach?

In participant and stakeholder surveys:

- 80% of respondents reported that the programme had reduced the most significant barriers (lack of knowledge, confidence and experience).
- 84% reported improved physical and mental health, confidence, self-esteem and/or skills.
- 45% of groups became self-organising and another 25% only needed limited support.
- 68% of support workers changed their service provision
- 75% of outdoor providers changed delivery to meet group's needs

The programme was successful at engaging very vulnerable groups, many of whom had chaotic lives and multiple barriers to participation. However, this often lead to long lead-in times before the first taster session, higher drop-out rates and unpredictable and fluctuating participation levels. But the positive impact on those who remained was significant.

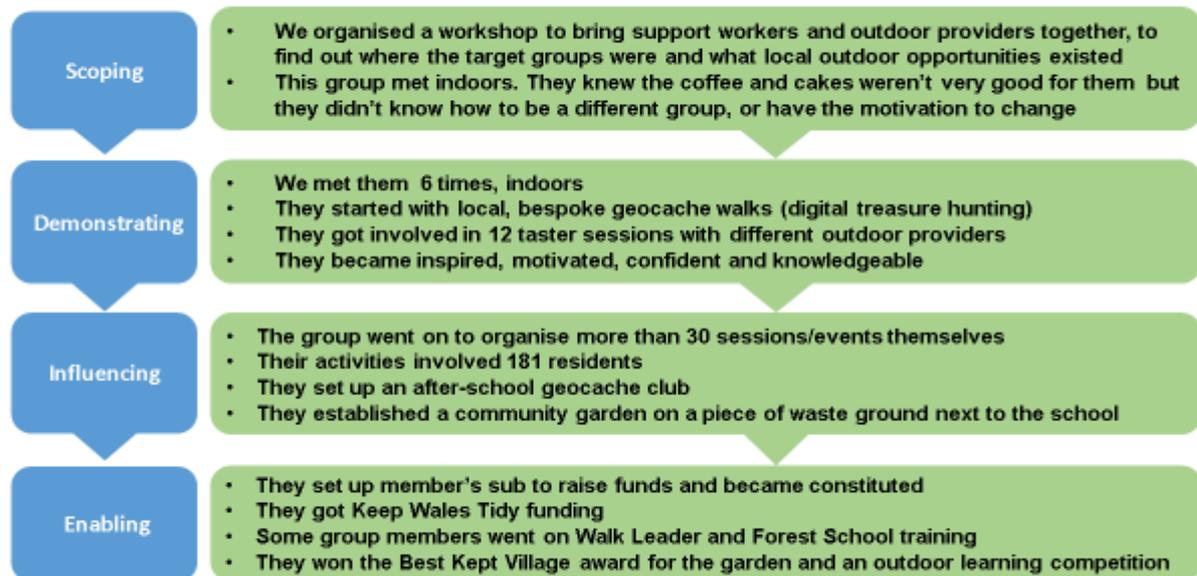
"I would like to thank Come Outside!, I can now see a light at the end of the tunnel."

Come Outside! Programme Outcomes:

- Nearly 3,500 people engaged
- 89% living in a deprived area
- 260 organisations involved

It reached people with multiple barriers: mental and physical disabilities, including armed forces veterans suffering Post Traumatic Stress Disorder; those tackling addiction and homelessness; NEET young people (not in education, employment or training) many with multiple issues; black and minority ethnic inner city groups; and long-term unemployed.

Case Study: Cadoxton Parents Group



From indoors ... to walking up Pen y Fan, South Wales' highest mountain, with friends and family! (NRW)

Juliet Michael, Come Outside! Programme Manager (2012 - 2016)

For more information visit <https://naturalresources.wales/about-us/our-projects/come-outside> where you can view and download evaluation reports and case studies.

Or contact Juliet Michael on juliet.michael@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk

References

- 1 OPENSspace Participation in Outdoor Recreation by WAG Priority Groups 2008



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government



Walk Unlimited have years of experience helping countryside managers with improving accessibility. Our services include access audits, training for staff on accessibility issues, presenting access information and inspiring people of all abilities to explore the countryside.

We've worked with health professionals on a variety of projects and have a good understanding of the barriers people experience.

We're friendly and easy to work with - whatever you want help with give us a call on 07779 582 446, email anne.clark@walk.co.uk or visit www.walk.co.uk



Heeley City Farm in Sheffield encourages physical and mental well-being and self-help opportunities within its mini farm and satellite food growing spaces. Offering easily accessible green space across the city maximises peoples opportunity to access them, and having a trusted network encourages people to try new things. For more details on Heeley City Farm go to: www.heeleyfarm.org.uk

Heeley City Farm also co-ordinates the 'Sheffield Safe Places' scheme. Venues across the city, including community allotments and city farms display a Safe Places sticker. This sticker indicates that staff on site are ready and willing to assist should anyone, for any reason, need support.' Find out more about Sheffield Safe Places at: www.sheffieldsafeplaces.org.uk

Come and enjoy cycling at one of our inclusive cycling session in South London. Find out more at www.wheelsforwellbeing.org.uk; email info@wheelsforwellbeing.org.uk or 0207 3468482

Pennine Lancashire Community Farm is a registered charity which uses the medium of outdoor space to bring people together. Its central aims are to promote social inclusion, sustainability (of a community) and education. www.penninelancashirecommunityfarm.org

Walk Unlimited are proud to be behind a new website www.benefitfromactivity.org.uk The website is based on published medical research into how physical activity helps people with a range of health conditions. It's free, written for the public and provides easy to understand advice for everyone.

The Woodland Trust wants to help woodland owners with public access through their wood explain their complexity and value and has created a free new toolkit with suggestions on the best ways to do so. Find out how you can best engage with visitors to your ancient wood and download the toolkit at <http://bit.ly/2dvnJnq>

Older people are less likely to participate in outdoor recreation than other age groups, yet little is known about the barriers that discourage them. A recent report from The James Hutton Institute written for the Scottish Government; "Barriers to older people's outdoor recreation in Scotland" (<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/06/8917>) highlighted a number of barriers impeding older people's use of the outdoors (e.g. health, feeling fragile, isolation, access to outdoor spaces) and recognised that many people report experiencing multiple and interrelated barriers. Findings suggest that interventions and recommendations from health professionals (green prescriptions) may be valuable in promoting greater outdoor use in older adults.



The James
Hutton
Institute

Surrey Choices Growth Team Successfully Overcomes Barriers to Help Transform County



The Surrey Choices Growth team, which currently has 22 members, teaches and supports people with learning disabilities, termed 'customers' by the team, to carry out practical tasks, helping to maintain the Surrey countryside and its public spaces.



Gaining valuable work experience with local Landscapers (Surrey Choices)

Surrey Choices provides support services in the community for people with learning, mental, physical or sensory disability. The social care provider offers a range of day and community support services, supported employment, enhanced home living and support, as well as providing training and skills.

Customers are referred to the team through their social care practitioners, working with people who have a range of different needs within a specific part of the county. There is a fixed fee to attend the group, which covers the cost of transport and enables Surrey Choices to help and support customers to achieve their goals.

The growth team has been established for over 20 years, and has a wealth of experience in the specialist role between health and social care and countryside management.

The growth team has been established for over

Each customer involved in the project has an allocated growth team key worker and an employment support worker from the Surrey Choices EmployAbility team. The EmployAbility scheme helps customers find paid work, training and volunteering opportunities, as well as helping to assist in setting up businesses.

The Growth Team's countryside management is carried out from three of Surrey Choices Hubs, based in Redhill, Woking and Frimley.

The team has worked closely with Woking Borough Council for a number of years, managing two of the council's local nature reserves. The growth team met with the council to look at the opportunity to develop their work into paid opportunities, which was well received and contracts were drawn up.

One of the main sites the team has been working on is a designated urban fringe local nature reserve. It had been in a very poor condition with challenges accessing the site, due to it being close to two SSSI sites. Funding to transform the space was approved through the Suitable Alternative Natural Green Spaces initiative and a management plan was discussed and presented to the team. The Growth Team produced a monthly schedule; once this was approved the work began.

Mark Evenden, Growth Team Leader at Surrey Choices said: "Starting the project was a nerve-racking experience. During the initial months we constantly felt that we were running behind schedule. The Woking Borough Council managers came for an on-site visit and were delighted with the progress, which helped to settle our nerves as we then knew we were on track."



The team maintaining a local Nature Reserve (Surrey Choices)



The Surrey Choices Growth Team improving local community space (Surrey Choices)

The team worked incredibly hard to clear over 20 trees from the centre of the site, and found remnants of an old wildflower area. Contractors were brought in to plough through the five acre area, before a sow of wetland wildflower mix to create a meadow that the team could manage.

Reflecting on the challenges the team has faced, Mark said: "In the initial stages of the project we did face a number of challenges. We received hostility from the local community at first, who thought we were clearing the area for property development, or were taking away a space they felt was their own. On the other end of the scale we were mistaken for being part of a probation service, so people would keep their distance from us. We tackled these issues by having Surrey Choices signs and leaflets made, and people's

perceptions quickly changed. The local community then became very interested in our work, and would often pop by for a chat. This was great for our customers as it really broke down the barriers, and helped those who can find communication challenging."

"As an organisation, Surrey Choices' vision is to inspire people of all abilities to fulfil their potential and reach their goals, whilst breaking down preconceptions of what can be achieved by people with learning disabilities. The Growth Team have successfully demonstrated this, and felt immense pride in the effort and work they have put in"

The Growth Team's only regret was that they didn't take enough photos of the transformation at the nature reserve and didn't publicise the project. On reflection, the team felt that if the project had been publicised it may have encouraged people to respect the site.

Sadly, funding was later withdrawn from the original site, which was a great disappointment. However, driven by a desire to ensure that all the hard work wasn't wasted, the team decided to volunteer at the site for free to help keep the area accessible and looking tidy, with a group of young people with learning disabilities.

The excellent work carried out by the growth team has resulted in more work from another site which was larger than the previous one. Alongside that, the growth team has been busy volunteering for Surrey Heaths Green Spaces team, helping them to manage a number of sites. The teams have struck up a brilliant partnership, which they hope to continue for many years. As a result of that partnership, Surrey Choices Growth Team was offered a derelict council nurse, which has become a waste dumping ground. Within six months the space was transformed, and they now have a rent free horticulture project with a poly tunnel, a building with a classroom and storage room. In addition to it being used as a training centre, they also use the space to grow fruit and vegetables, which they sell, as well as plants to improve community spaces.

One difficulty is finding industry specific training for long term volunteers. Despite volunteers having years of experience, because they have poor numeracy and literacy skills they are unable to pass Lantra or City and Guilds training for using machinery, which is a health and safety requirement. To help overcome this, the Growth Team found Surrey Heath Training Group, a local training group, which provides training and learning support to make sure customers achieve the best they



The end of a very busy day managing a local nature reserve (Surrey Choices)

can. If customers can't meet the strict criteria to pass, they receive a certificate of achievement, which highlights what they have learnt. The certificate is a great help for people looking for employment, and helps the Growth Team to meet its health and safety commitments.

Mark said "The last couple of years have been very busy for the Growth Team, and it has been an amazing experience for everyone. The team has proved to be a great success, and we've opened up so many possibilities. With an enthusiastic team and positive managers, we're determined to take as many opportunities as we can, to raise our profile within the community and showcase our hard work and capabilities".

If you would like any further information or would like to make a referral please do not hesitate to contact the Surrey Choices Growth team on 01483 806806 or via email to info@surreychoices.com

Which way now?

People with dementia face many challenges in life not least in navigating their way around the natural environment. Faced with a plethora of signs and not being able to remember quite where you intended to go in the first place which way would you go?

This may feel like an irrelevance compared with challenges faced by other groups but it's a real barrier to people with dementia.

Dementia is an umbrella term which encompasses several diseases of the brain which manifest in different ways depending on which part of the brain is affected. Alzheimer's Disease is probably the most well-known of all types with 85% of people diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease, others include Vascular Dementia, Dementia with Lewy Bodies and Frontotemporal dementia.

In the UK and worldwide people are living longer and more and more are being diagnosed with dementia. By 2025 it is estimated that over a million people in the UK will have some form of dementia (Alzheimer's Society, 2015¹).

People with dementia experience a range of symptoms. Short term memory loss is probably the most common symptom but people with dementia may also experience problems with visual acuity, spatial awareness and orientation all of which may affect their ability to navigate and enjoy the countryside.

There is well documented evidence that being outdoor benefits both physical and mental health but surveys indicate that people with dementia are largely absent from outdoor activities. The reasons are not clear but people with dementia describe a "shrinking world" with a spiralling progression towards less and less outdoor activity and fewer adventures into unfamiliar places. In addition as the disease progresses there is an increasing reliance on carers for transport and access to outdoor activities. However, aside from suffering from dementia many people are otherwise fit and healthy and capable of enjoying the natural environment.

Alison Irving, currently a PhD student at Stirling University carried out a pilot study to explore the reason why people with dementia were not accessing the natural environment as the basis of an undergraduate dissertation at SRUC.



Which way now (Alison Irving)



Wayfinding in woodlands (Alison Irving)

The study gathered data directly from people with dementia through the use of walking interviews which took place in an urban park in the small market town of Forres. During the walks eight people with dementia

undertook a variety of practical challenges, such as wayfinding, and their thoughts on the natural environment around them were recorded.

Results indicated that people with dementia had significant difficulties in wayfinding when using conventional maps and signs but that they were no more prone to getting lost than other people. This contradicts other research conducted in the built environment which indicated that people with dementia were able to use signs for navigation. It may be that wayfinding in the built environment, which often relies on the recognition and use of familiar landmarks, such as churches, might not be a suitable proxy for the natural environment where such landmarks are often not present. More research is needed to understand what would enable people with dementia to navigate the natural environment.

The study also showed that people with dementia clearly enjoyed and appreciated colour, nature and activity. During the walking interviews the participants responded to the environment around them with comments such as:

"Look at that grass it's amazing"

"It's lovely being here and seeing everything the people, the trees and the flowers"

They appreciated being in an active and visually stimulating environment where they could watch other people and enjoy vicarious adventures from flying kites to climbing trees.

"I think what a lovely tree. I'm not going to climb it, if I was on my own I would climb it then if I fell off no-one would see"

Bland, safe, quiet environments with little scope for imaginary adventures do not appear to fit with the aspirations of people with dementia. Vicarious adventures appear to be important and the presence of other "active" users increased the frequency of pleasurable comments made by people with dementia.



Sparrowhawk at Loch Spynie (Richard Humpidge)

This work highlighted the need for more research into barriers in the natural environment and a need to test the findings in other less managed settings, such as woodlands and nature reserves. It also concluded that countryside managers should be provided with specific design guidance for managed natural environments based on the voices of people with dementia.

Following the pilot study Alison Irving is now carrying out a full scale three year project in conjunction with Stirling University and the

RSPB into dementia and countryside access. Fifteen people with dementia have taken part in the first phase of the project with walking interviews in woodlands and on the coast. In the next phase of the project people with dementia will design and test solutions to any barriers. The important role of carers and their needs in accessing the countryside will also be part of the research.

The RSPB is providing expertise and will look at developing the new reserve at Loch Spynie in Morayshire as an exemplar site for dementia friendly design. Richard Humpidge, North East Scotland Coastal Reserve Manager for the RSPB said " I am very excited to be involved in this new project and to be leading the way in this increasingly important field. To have the first dementia friendly nature reserve will be very exciting".

More information on the project can be found at www.nature4dementia.com or by emailing Alison Irving at alison.irving@stir.ac.uk



Sunlit reeds at Loch Spynie (Alison Irving)

References

1 <http://c-js.co.uk/2fZqzWy>

Engaging the senses outdoors

Jane Stoneham, Sensory Trust



A sensory approach

It's well known that getting out and about and engaging with the natural world is beneficial to most people, but for some the benefits are especially profound. For example, for young people with disabilities, engaging with nature and the outdoors can be key to them learning about the world, and about themselves. For people living with dementia and other health issues, it can inspire new activities and interests and help build connections with communities and the wider world at a time when social networks are shrinking.

At the Sensory Trust our work explores how people connect with the outdoors and how we make personally meaningful and memorable experiences. We promote sensory engagement as an effective way of connecting people with place. It is key to creating compelling, outdoor experiences that encourage people of all ages and abilities to explore, discover and remember.



Why engage the senses?

We experience everything through our senses. We use our intellect, memories and assumptions to process the information, but it all starts from the raw materials we receive from looking, touching, smelling, listening, tasting and a whole range of lesser headlined senses. They trigger different parts of the brain and elicit different responses, smell for example is strongly connected with memory.

The Big Five – sight, smell, hearing, touch and taste – are what most people think of when we talk about the senses. But two more, proprioception and vestibular, relate to our sense of movement, balance and awareness of our own bodies and are as fundamental as the other five to how we negotiate and decipher the world around us. The real picture is wider still and includes ones like a sense of heat, pain, hunger, balance etc. There's an exercise that we have done many times. We ask people to close their eyes, think back to when they were ten years old and recall a favourite memory of being outdoors in nature. The recollections are always dominated by sounds, smells, tastes and textures and the visual sense barely features. So if we want people to engage more closely and to remember their experiences more strongly, we need to think about wider sensory experiences in the landscapes we design, the outdoor experiences we provide, and the interpretation we create.

Designing to engage the senses

There are many different ways for a venue to build opportunities for sensory engagement. The simplest is to look at what opportunities already exist and to make these accessible to visitors. We developed sensory mapping as a technique to review a site for its sensory highlights. The results can be used to plan a sensory trail, to identify where best to locate seats or as the basis for new visitor information. An added bonus is how it helps site teams take a fresh perspective on a place they are very familiar with.

Sensory trails provide experiences along a route to immerse people in a multi-sensory journey. They are good for the whole range of settings – parks, woods, schools, care homes and hospitals - and can be extended to indoors too. They can be especially useful when space is limited or to link between different spaces. In a learning context, sensory trails can help develop orientation skills, for example by people recognising different textures, sounds and scents along the trail and gaining confidence in way-finding. In a care setting, sensory trails can encourage people to venture further afield, to explore new areas or to become more immersed in the detail of the home environment.

We often hear from sites wanting to develop trails but lacking the funds to invest in site works, and it has inspired us to make a low-cost resource. The Sensory Trail Marker kit provides a simple and flexible way of installing a trail and has the advantage of being easy to change with the seasons or to open up different parts of the site. You can find more details at <http://www.sensorytrust.org.uk/information/factsheets/sensory-garden-6.html>



Sensory Trail markers in use at the Lost Gardens of Heligan, inspiring people of all ages to immerse in the sensory detail of the gardens (Sensory Trust)

In a similar way, we design different types of sensory engagement activities and resources to help sites open up more opportunities. Some are as simple as a collection of sensory props that we use as the basis for creative workshops, but most are resources that have been developed through a process of user-testing with many different groups. There is a collection of ideas free to download from our website at <http://www.sensorytrust.org.uk/information/creative-activities/index.htm>

gofindit has proved to be one of our most popular resources. It's a scavenger hunt in the form of a card game and has proved to be a great way of getting children immersed in the outdoors as they seek out objects to

match the different cards. You can read more at <http://www.sensorytrust.org.uk/gofindit.html>



***gofindit* is a game of scavenging to make a sensory match with the cards (Sensory Trust)**

Designing specific sensory garden spaces is an option that lends itself especially well to care and health settings. These spaces are designed as collections of different sensory experiences, where people are encouraged to explore through touch, smell and as many other senses as the design can inspire. You can find free guidance at <http://www.sensorytrust.org.uk/information/factsheets/sensory-garden-1.html>

All our techniques have been tested in different environments and settings. They help awaken a sense of wonder in people, and create opportunities to discover new things. We continue to find that engaging the senses changes the way people explore and connect with their surroundings and its stories.

The Sensory Trust advises on the development of accessible, engaging outdoor experiences. Our website

www.sensorytrust.org.uk has guidance and details of our consultancy and new training packages. Jane Stoneham is director of the Sensory Trust, do get in touch if we can help – enquiries@sensorytrust.org.uk.

A great way to boost visitor engagement at outdoor sites is through the use of outdoor audio points. Our U-Turn Round is weather, vandal resistant, and easy to program. We also offer a Solar Audio Post that is self-powered, cost-effective and ideal for any environment. Find out more at www.blackboxav.co.uk



Sighted Guiding - 17/02/17. This course gives an introduction to the techniques used for safely guiding people who are blind or partially sighted. Safe techniques will be taught on how to safely guide someone who is blind or partially sighted. scotland-training@tcv.org.uk www.tcv.org.uk

Sensory Trail Markers are simple, low cost solutions to creating accessible, sensory trails around outdoor spaces. They help highlight sensory stimulus and take you on a journey of discovery. The trail kit contains all you will need to create your own sensory trail including 40 markers and full instructions. www.sensorytrustshop.org.uk

“Proximity Interpretation...Audio Trails are creators of mobile digital visitor experiences and location-based storytelling. Audio tours and content-triggering apps (native and web) for local authorities, charities and community groups. Excellent value, excellent service. See audiotrails.co.uk for case studies and more information about us or email cjs@audiotrails.co.uk.

accessiblegardens.org.uk

A website providing articles and reviews on the accessibility of gardens for the elderly, less able-bodied and disabled people. With a Directory of Gardens for England and Wales with reviews written by disabled people for disabled people to share. Contact reviews@accessiblegardens.org.uk / mark@marklanedesigns.com



Barriers to Access and the Benefits of the Countryside for Disabled People

By Phil Chambers

In August, I saw an article in the Independent online entitled “Paralysed patient walks again in medical breakthrough” and this morning on the radio I learned that a quadriplegic person has through another amazing breakthrough achieved the return of sensation to his hand following an intervention using electronic technology. I am always interested in these reports as I had a spinal cord injury back in 1977 and since then have been a wheelchair user. During the last two or three decades medical science seems often to have been on the cusp of a breakthrough to enable people with spinal cord injury to perhaps walk again. There are many high level projects occurring around the world to address the need and no doubt it will surely come, but given that my accident was nearly forty years ago I doubt if I will be first on the list or even in the queue.



Phil Chambers, Beningbrough Hall (NT)
(Phil Chambers)

I am always a little sceptical about anything that points to a panacea and as I pushed around Cannon Hall Country Park in South Yorkshire yesterday, amazed by the emerging

autumn colours, I pondered if my disability or anyone else’s for that matter is a barrier to being able to enjoy the great outdoors. Given that I was already there it clearly wasn’t posing a major barrier to me on that occasion. I have spent a great deal of my adult life working to enable disabled people to have access to the countryside on their own terms. My feeling is that it is not the fault of the disabled person if they cannot enjoy the footpaths and open spaces along with everyone else. It is environmental constraints that are the real barriers.



Peaceful Viewpoint at Damflask
(Phil Chambers)

These may be physical in terms of the landscape which we often can’t do anything about, the countryside is up and down, and that’s why we love it. However, at another level a stile where a gate might be provided can be an absolute barrier to me. I once met a couple whilst I was wandering along a footpath near Curbar Edge in the Peak District who enquired why I was there; by the way if you do meet a disabled person in the countryside please don’t ask what happened to them, it’s said frequently to me, so I said I was checking out the route suitability to a wheelchair user. Oh that’s good one of them replied, as people like you couldn’t come here. As well as physical barriers, there still remain social and cultural barriers to inclusion. For me access to the countryside is an intrinsic need which I can’t fully explain, but everyone who enjoys the outdoors will know what I mean. It is well known that there are therapeutic benefits of being in the countryside and there has been some evidence recently that people living with dementia can gain from green environments and I have met people with mental health needs who say that practical conservation schemes can be uplifting to their spirit and

self-esteem.

I spend a fair amount of time talking to other disabled people about barriers to access and find it's not the physical environment that deters them, the main barrier is poor information about opportunities. I have been involved in a couple of interesting access projects recently, one with Yorkshire Water at Damflask Reservoir and latterly completing an equality impact assessment on behalf of Natural Resources Wales, to determine if they are meeting their requirement under the Equality Act (2010) at six of their important visitor destinations; they are. On both occasions I was able to arrange for disabled people to meet directly with countryside managers and inevitably the importance of information was a topic for discussion. On Anglesey the Disabled Ramblers wanted to see more challenging routes for their powerful outdoor mobility scooters, but barrier free routes; they wanted to know where they could go without being confronted by stiles or narrow gaps in the rights of way. A blind young woman who is involved with Riding for the Disabled made a case for information about equestrian opportunities presented in a Braille format, which she could read herself. After a discussion between the group of disabled people and several NRW managers I heard someone say; that was great I now know someone that I can talk to and get good information about access barriers - but was the speaker a disabled person or a countryside manager?



Countryside Day Richmond Park Isabella Plantation (The Royal Parks)
(Phil Chambers)

At Damflask Reservoir due to good communication and trust between the group of disabled people and the Yorkshire Water recreation managers, more than two miles of footpath was upgraded to an access standard

that meets the needs of a diverse range of visitor needs including disabled people and the information need was met with the installation of a RNIB Maps for All, which blind and visually impaired people along with everyone else can benefit from in understanding the layout and orientation of the waterside trail.



Damflask Reservoir Team (Phil Chambers)

In terms of benefits the value of informal communication shouldn't be underestimated either, it's a given that if you meet someone on a countryside footpath you will greet each other, perhaps a conversation ensues, before each continues their journey; that is a real social benefit, though if you do meet me don't ask what happened to me!

opportunities for all, believing that everyone should have shared access to the great outdoors and historic places. Please contact me at www.philchambersconsultancy.co.uk

Phil Chambers works with service providers and disabled people to enable access to outdoor and historic heritage

DisabledRamblers.co.uk run rambles in England & Wales on mobility scooters. "Rambling on my scooter means freedom to explore the countryside as I used to when able-bodied. I meet so many interesting people from all walks of life. It lifts the spirits and gives a huge sense of contentment" (Val) rambles@disabledramblers.co.uk

Experience Community makes short films about access in the countryside for disabled people. We also run events and activities using specialist off-road mobility aids for physically disabled people. For further info please see www.experiencecommunity.co.uk email: info@experiencecommunity.co.uk or find us on www.facebook.com/ExperienceCommunityCIC

The mobility tramper at Seaton Wetlands can be hired by members of the public who would like to explore the wildlife along the Axe Estuary. Contact the East Devon District Council Countryside team to find out more and book a visit: countryside@eastdevon.gov.uk, 01395 517557. More information on hiring the tramper and countryside sites can be found at: wildeastdevon.gov.uk

Living Options Devon delivers two closely-linked services: Countryside Mobility, which provides all-terrain Trampers on a lease basis to countryside sites; and Heritage Ability, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, which supports heritage sites in the South West to develop more accessible facilities for disabled and Deaf people. More details at www.livingoptions.org and www.countryside-mobility.org



Inclusive Countryside

Pony Axe S (Axe S/Access, ghastly pun) takes anyone in any wheelchair, anywhere. I have just driven an iBex, a pony powered, wheelchair enabled vehicle, from Winchester to Beachy Head along the South Downs Way. I asked every walker we encountered, when they last saw a person in a wheelchair, on the South Downs Way. "Never" was the standard answer. My next question "If you were in a wheelchair, would you want to be able to come back here?" made everyone think, and understand why Pony Axe S matters.



Beachy Head end of the South Downs Way, National Trail. Toby working, Obama along for the ride (Pony Axe S)

Hannah Cockcroft, on Countryfile, guest edited by Prince Charles said, "We have to accept that some areas are simply out of bounds if you're disabled and no one wants the countryside to be concreted over with paths. But many places could do better."

Pony Axe S took a wheelchair from Winchester to Beachy Head, and Andy Gattiker of the South Downs Way National Trail will confirm that I didn't lay one bit of concrete. Hannah is right, many places could do better and Pony Axe S can make it easy.

The iBex is a unique vehicle because I am a very weird pony drawn vehicle designer. I have the advantage of no engineering background, an arrogant belief that I can do anything and a fear of horses. With this skill set I couldn't fail.

Cowardice is the most important design tool, and I started building safe pony drawn vehicles from day one. In the early days they were just safe by horse drawn vehicle standards which isn't saying much. After a particularly painful accident, I designed the instant pony release system which does what it says on the tin. Pony drawn vehicles are lethal with a pony attached, (worse with a horse), but without a pony, they are garden furniture. I have watched my vehicles for hours, and with no pony, they just sit there. More importantly, Rod Bromfield, Senior Lecturer Engineering and his students at Kingston University Engineering Dept, have done in depth safety analysis of the engineering and safety systems.

Safety matters. Pony Access works with everyone, regardless of ability or disability. Some people cannot give informed consent, so the activity MUST be safe. If you can release the pony instantly, safety is a reality. In addition to the instant pony release, the iBex has a seriously low centre of gravity, is insanely manoeuvrable, corners like a sportscar and doesn't mark the ground. 22"x11"x8" front tyres and a 16"x6.50"x8" rear spread the load and leave hardly a trace. Ground clearance is limited, but where a powered vehicle would struggle, when the iBex bottoms, the pony is pulling a smooth bottomed sledge.



Cuckmere Haven (Pony Axe S)

The pony is the power unit, and for some, part of the attraction, but if you want to watch the butterflies on Salt Hill (which are awesome) the pony is just the engine; with the added attraction, that if he poops, butterflies come from miles around to settle on fresh horse manure.

Traditional horse people worry about releasing the pony. Doing the South Downs Way this summer I took two ponies, and let Obama, my experienced pony, run loose, while I drove my new, rather goofy and very inexperienced 7 year old, Toby. On the occasional road bits I put Obama on a lead rope, otherwise I left him free to enjoy the trip. If you train ponies with kindness, (I only use equipment I am allowed to test on children, so no whips, bits or spurs) they come to you when they are scared.

Travelling the South Downs Way with a wheelchair was half way between a challenge and a holiday. Tough, steep, flinty, narrow tracks are hard work. Not many of the people I know who use wheelchairs will volunteer to do the really steep bits. The point is that it will be their choice. Pony Access makes Salt Hill from East Meon or the climb heading East from Amberley or the climb after Devil's Dyke possible, not fun, not easy, but possible. Driving round Chanctonbury Ring, in a wheelchair is awesome. The views over Devil's Dyke, from Firle Beacon and galloping at Beachy Head with Obama hooning around like an idiot, and Toby joining in, are the stuff of great holidays.



Greg, River Teign above Fingle Bridge (Pony Axe S)

Pony Access doesn't need to change anything to make the countryside accessible to people who use wheelchairs. We completed the South Downs Way using the pedestrian and rider's gates. We changed nothing, we damaged nothing, and we have made the countryside open to anyone. Inclusion is the buzz word.

Using the iBex is simple. Lower the ramp, drive or push the wheelchair into position and tie it down. Raise ramp, attach pony and you are off. No hoists, no need to transfer from a wheelchair. You can take people to where they want to be and park them for collection later. Family picnics, dog walks, birdwatching or just the pleasures of wide horizons are open to people who haven't been able to visit the countryside for years.

I took Bex out in her wheelchair as my first ever customer round West Town Farm, Ide. The piglets weren't where I expected, the calves had gone to market and it drizzled. As I apologised Bex said "That's the first time I have seen a rabbit hole in 9 years." So much that we take for granted, is not accessible to people who use wheelchairs. Pony AxeS changes that.

Bex wanted a trip round West Town Farm in her wheelchair, so, as my very first customer, I carefully tied down the front wheels to the Bannedwaggon, then the rear wheels, then decided to re-tie the front wheels in a better way. Then set off uphill, through the orchard. Somehow I had failed to tie the front wheels of Bex's wheelchair at all, and she gracefully flipped over backwards. I pulled the ripcord, releasing the pony and rushed around like a lunatic, apologising, getting the wheelchair upright, taking her back to the barn, apologizing ad infinitum. When I ran out of breath she said, "When are we going round the farm then?" The Bannedwaggon was renamed the iBex on the spot.



Simon Mulholland
Pony Axe S,
simon@ponyaxes.com, 07510 736518
<https://ponyaxes.com/>

Internationally-experienced Consultants combining extensive experience in the access and mobility requirements of disabled and older people with professional planning and environmental assessment skills, to provide achievable, practical design and management solutions www.accessdesignsolutions.co.uk and email info@accessdesignsolutions.co.uk



Inclusion & Sustainability
Consultants

Accessibility; more than just wheelchair accessible paths

Accessibility has been on our radar as a sector for many years not least because of the requirements of the Equalities Act. But how can accessibility be a tool for creating a truly compelling visitor experience?

Too important to ignore

Looking at UK disability stats is a real wake up call to the enormity of potential audience with additional access requirements. Nearly 1 in 5 people have a disability (Papworth Trust, 2016). Can you afford to ignore almost 20% of your potential visitors?



Volunteers testing out a visual echolocation app (copyright Living Options Devon 2016)

The 2.7 million domestic visitors with disabilities that regularly travel (South West Tourism Alliance) are an extremely loyal market with huge spending potential. Disabled people tend not to travel alone and are often accompanied by carers, family or friends. So steps to become more accessible immediately have a wider impact beyond disabled and Deaf communities.

It turns out that thinking about access in the widest possible sense and threading it through everything we do can make the visitor experience better for many of our visitors. Think about easy access paths with stopping or 'perch' points being good for visitors with young children and pushchairs; think about the growing audience of older visitors who might benefit from non-reflective interpretation materials or larger

print; think about visitors who want a snappy introduction to your site using an easy-read version of your map and welcome information. They are just a few examples.

Develop a deeper audience understanding

So how do we go about developing this new model of visitor experience at our outdoor sites? Thankfully it's not rocket science; we can employ the principles of great masterplanning and getting to know your visitors and potential audiences is a great first step.

We're all strapped for time and cash but an investment in developing a better understanding of your audience will pay dividends. It's an amazing professional learning journey and will help to remove guess work from where to direct resources to gain the most benefit for visitors. Start by writing down a list of what you would like to find out (once you start thinking you will no doubt have loads!) – use post-it notes so you can order and prioritise your questions and decide which ones to start on first. For example, you might want to get a better idea of what influences disabled people to visit or the barriers that they face in accessing your site.



Filming underway at NT Killerton for a BSL signed tour (copyright Living Options Devon 2016)

At this point consultation, evaluation and research become great tools. There is a wealth of secondary sources of data you can access for free that can give you local population information. But talking to your target audience will add the colour and help build-up a rich picture of their particular needs and motivations.

Living Options Devon's Heritage Ability project aims to improve the access at 20 heritage sites including countryside and outdoor sites. The range of consultation undertaken during project planning by this user-led organisation (80% of the Board and 53% of employees are disabled or Deaf) has included training a team of volunteers (members of the local disabled and Deaf communities) to undertake 26 mystery visits to 19 heritage sites. This was vital in gaining a high level

picture of the current levels of regional accessibility and identifying key barriers for the project to address.

Create a brilliant welcome and mobilise your people

Being welcoming is paramount to a more accessible visitor experience (and it's actually a key building block of any inspiring visitor experience). Audience research shows us that just being able to find out what's going to be accessible for them at a site can be a frustrating experience for disabled or Deaf visitors.

The RSPB Minsmere Discover Nature project found that training staff and volunteers was a really powerful tool to developing a more inclusive welcome for visitors with disabilities. A raft of accessibility improvements have enabled disabled people and their families to come face-to-face with nature in a wild environment. Positively engaging staff and volunteers was key and the RSPB have worked hard to develop an open culture of learning internally. Staff and volunteers were trained to provide disabled visitors with an informed welcome; helping them to plan their visit and get the most from their day as well as inputting into developing an accessibility statement.

Mainstream it

Motivations to visit for many visitors are social and disabled and Deaf people are no different. Therefore, providing interpretation and services separately for those with particular access needs just doesn't make sense if we have an option to mainstream accessibility.

Shakespeare's New Place is a new interpretative garden and visitor centre developed by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. From the start the Trust have been thinking about how to plan accessibility throughout their visitor experience, for example, icons and visual imagery in interpretation help visitors with learning disabilities as well as those for whom English is a second language and pre-literate children.



Icons used throughout the visitor experience at Shakespeare's New Place (copyright Heritage Insider Ltd 2016)

We can also learn from our colleagues in museums. The Information Age project dramatically transformed the second floor of the Science Museum into a vibrant and accessible space. There was a clear plan not to ghettoise access and to place accessible interpretation and resources equally alongside other gallery elements. For example, central in the gallery space is the accessible lift and disabled visitors said they felt this means people now don't think it is only for 'special people'; contributing towards changing attitudes towards disability.

Taking steps to be more accessible makes good business sense and shows that as an organisation you really get the importance of being open to everyone. What's stopping you from starting tomorrow?

Written by Kate Measures

Founder of Heritage Insider and Chair of bgen; inspiring people through plants

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'Cairngorms – A National Park for All'

The Cairngorms National Park is Britain's largest National Park. It contains some of the best wildlife habitats in the UK including ancient pine forests, arctic mountain tops, lochs, rivers and moorlands. Home to a quarter of UK threatened species, it is rich in landscapes, habitats and heritage.



With such unique qualities the National Park is a fantastic learning resource that inspires people to find out more about its natural and cultural heritage. The landscape begs to be explored and encourages people to get outside and become more active and healthy.



Information on planning a trip must be relevant and accessible to groups
(Copyright: Angus Findlay/ CNPA)

The Cairngorms National Park is used and enjoyed by 1.5m visitors each year, as well as the 18,000 people who live and work here. However, we know that there are several groups of people who are under-represented in engaging with the National Park, these include the younger generation, those with disabilities, people on low incomes and also ethnic minorities.

The Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) is committed to developing a Park for All, part of that work includes identifying the reasons why these groups are not visiting the National Park, then working in partnership with others to encourage and support such groups.

The barriers that prevent people from getting out into the National Park are varied. For some it is simply a lack of awareness and information whilst others don't feel that they have the confidence or skills to go outdoors. There are also practical issues like access and cost of transport or equipment. The CNPA is actively involved in several initiatives, through its inclusion and equalities work, that

address these barriers and support such groups.

Through our Active Cairngorms campaign the CNPA runs a Walking to Health programme which involves walking groups in over 30 communities across the National Park. These volunteer led walks are a way to engage those who are less active to become more active in the outdoors. Isolation can be a problem in some of the more rural communities and these walks offer a great way to increase social contact and wellbeing. The Park Authority is working with Medical practices across the Park in a new initiative to encourage GPs to refer patients onto their local health walk, and then to offer them monitoring to see how the walks improve their health and wellbeing.



Volunteer walk leaders provide a key role in supporting people to get active through the walking to health programme (Copyright: Angus Findlay/CNPA)

Information is key to supporting visits to the National Park, and is particularly important for groups who have additional or special requirements. The CNPA has produced several publications from

resource and education packs to paths and easy access leaflets. The 'Getting Into National Parks and National Nature Reserves Resource Pack'¹ contains lots of information and advice for teachers and group leaders to help with planning a visit to Scotland's National Parks and National Nature Reserves. It includes resources on the practicalities like transport and funding, packaging the experience, building commitment and managing risk. It also features information sheets and case studies on 8 accessible places to visit in the Parks and NNRs.



The Outdoor Festival for All introduced multicultural communities to the National Park and what it has to offer. (Copyright: Angus Findlay/CNPA)

Training to build confidence and skills in leading groups in the outdoors is another crucial area which CNPA supports to increase diversity and participation in the National Park. In partnership with other agencies, the Community Leadership Project works with trainees from multicultural groups to develop their awareness and competence in visiting the National Park as well as being ambassadors for it in their own communities.

Transport is another key barrier to groups visiting and getting around the National Park, not just in terms of the availability of good coordinated public transport, but also the cost of private transport.

To address this, the CNPA provides a travel grant² to schools and voluntary groups who experience disadvantage. Grants of up to £200 or 75% of transport costs are available to enable the groups to visit the National Park and learn more about it.

Building links with schools and through the curriculum is a great way to engage young people with the National Park and what makes it special. The CNPA has several educational programmes that raise awareness of the National Park and provide opportunities to discover, explore and conserve it, such as the John Muir Award and Junior Ranger project.

This has been a snapshot of what the CNPA is doing to address the issues these under represented groups face, our goal is to really make the Cairngorms National Park a Park for All. However, with all these initiatives it is crucial to develop good relationships with the user groups, because then you can bounce off ideas and take on the advice and expertise of those who have experienced it first hand. To this end the CNPA supports an advisory forum called 'Inclusive Cairngorms' who represent various equality and inclusion organisations and interests and help to promote a Park for All. The forum is a great resource to the CNPA in helping to make our projects and policies more inclusive and accessible to all.



Junior Rangers try out new skills and activities in the outdoors. (Copyright: CNPA)

For more information on CNPA's inclusion work, please contact:
Elsbeth Grant, Education and Inclusion Officer, CNPA
ElsbethGrant@cairngorms.co.uk
01479 870506

Links

- 1 <http://cairngorms.co.uk/authority/publication/248/>
- 2 <http://cairngorms.co.uk/park-authority/funding/travel-grant-scheme/>

The CJS Team would like to thank everyone who has contributed adverts, articles and information for this CJS Focus publication.

Next edition will feature Volunteering published on 13/2/17