



"NATURE IS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL THING
& MAKES ME FEEL MY BEST"
(HENRY, YEAR 6)

SOMERSET'S Nature & Wellbeing

Project Evaluation - 2016-2019



Landscapes
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{ QUANTOCK HILLS
BLACKDOWN HILLS
MENDIP HILLS
Three of the
AONB Family



Foreword

“We are experiencing increasing levels of obesity and physical inactivity and one in four of us will experience a mental health problem at some point in our lives. Improvements in overall health are skewed towards wealthier sections of society, causing health inequalities to increase...there is considerable evidence to show that contact with nature can help to prevent and reverse poor health and wellbeing... Now, at last, we have the evidence to show just how much people need nature.”

Green Paper from the Wildlife Trusts and the RSPB 2014

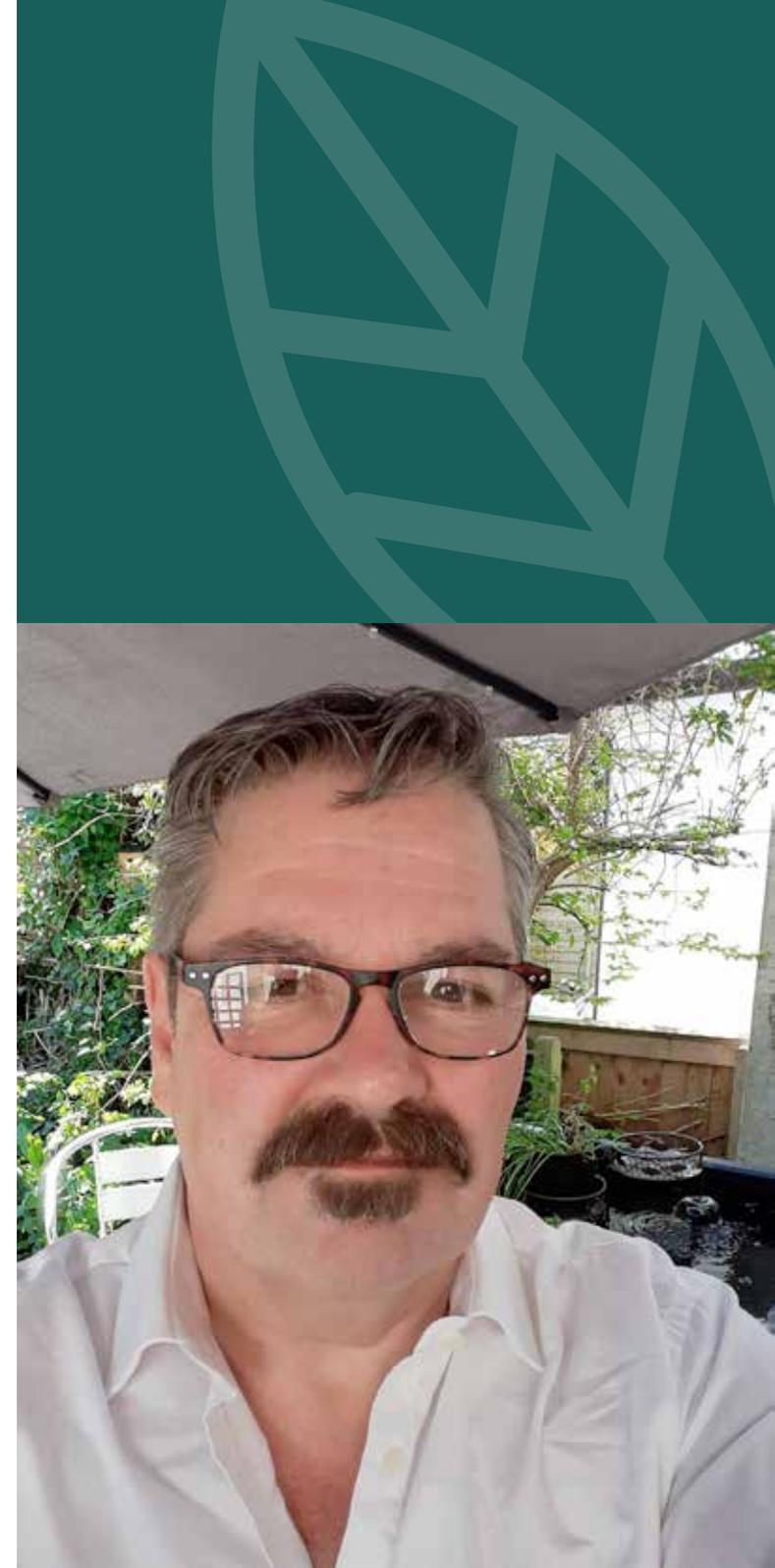
Take the physical benefits of a walk in the hills, combine them with the self-worth enhancement of doing valued voluntary work and the satisfaction and warmth of being part of a small team. Immerse these activities in a nature-rich location in a nationally important landscape and you have created a recipe for improving people’s health and enhancing their wellbeing both physically and particularly mentally. If you then identify, invite and encourage people in most need of support in these areas to take part in the activities, you will find the benefits to individuals, their families, their friends and communities are genuinely significant - as are the potential savings to the public purse (subject to the scale

of the project). This is what Somerset's main three Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (Quantock Hills, Blackdown Hills and Mendip Hills), supported and funded by Public Health Somerset, have been working on for the last 4 years through the Nature and Wellbeing Project.

The development of this work has critically involved the coming together of two very different world views – that of conservation and natural environment professionals, and that of public health and welfare professionals. As someone from the former world my experience has been particularly enlightening, I began working on the development of this project four years ago with a clear goal of producing a clear, monitored example of why we must invest in protecting, conserving and enhancing our natural environment. I believe that has been achieved and that is pleasing, however the outcome I now value far more is the impact on those who have taken part. Their stories and benefits received from this project have on many occasions touched me strongly and I suspect the mental health benefits flow both ways between those providing the natural interventions and those taking part.

The recruitment and dedication of our Nature and Wellbeing Project Officer, Kristen Lambert, has been critical to the success of the project evidenced in this report. Kristen came to us with experience in both the worlds mentioned above and, as a new venture for us, had a very free hand to shape the project to generate the maximum benefits. She has achieved this to a level beyond all expectation and has added significant aspects to the brief including the sustainability of many activities created under the project, support for staff and volunteers and developing self-management approaches for participants. While Kristen had no team of her own to support her in delivering this initiative her work has called on and engaged all members of the three AONB Teams, many Public Health professionals (with a particular mention and thanks to Louise Finnis from Public Health at Somerset County Council), NGOs and charities - particularly those involved with mental health such as Mind, and volunteers associated with the AONBs. It is the inspirational nature of her work and the way it has been delivered that has drawn this support willingly from all involved.

Chris Edwards,
Quantock Hills AONB Manager
4th March 2020





Project Overview

1.1 Background

In February 2016, Public Health at Somerset County Council funded a two-year, Nature and Wellbeing project which was later extended, running for four years in total. Managed by the Quantock Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), the project also worked in partnership with the Blackdown and Mendip Hills AONB, to provide opportunities for county-wide engagement.

The project targeted specific geographical areas within the county, including areas of Taunton, Bridgwater and Williton, Cheddar and Wells and Chard and Wellington. The areas of focus were suggested by Public Health in Somerset at the beginning of the project, decided upon using health indicators. The project aimed to tackle some of the barriers that prevent groups and individuals experiencing the health and wellbeing benefits that Somerset's AONBs can offer. The project supported people to access these top-quality natural spaces, with a particular focus on supporting mental wellbeing and physical activity, working with groups and individuals who may benefit from such engagement. Project activities focused both on linking people to existing provision and setting up new activities and events.

This evaluation document has been written between November 2019-February 2020, as the project nears its end. Stories and surveys were collected throughout the project and during the autumn/winter of the project's final year.

1.2 Nature and Wellbeing Project in numbers

Evaluation was completed throughout the project by the Project Coordinator in an informal and flexible way – suiting the needs of participants.

2016-2019	TOTALS
Total people engaged in Nature & Wellbeing Activity Sessions/Projects	2345
Total Number of Project Sessions	515
People benefitted from Training /Awareness Raising	216
People presented to at Meetings /Engagement events	1160
AONB Community Engagement Volunteers Recruited/Trained Working on the Project	10

1.3 Nature and Wellbeing in numbers – break down

Year One (Project Coordinator 3 days a week)	
Sessions	66
Session Participants	641
Training & Awareness Raising Events (22) people	44
Meetings (31) people	763
Year Two (Project Coordinator 4 days a week)	
Sessions	178
Session Participants	1187
Training & Awareness Raising Events (22) people	152
Meetings (20) people	329
Year Three (Maternity Cover 2 Days a week)	
Sessions	144
Session Participants	180
Training & Awareness Raising Events (22) people	No Data
Meetings (31) people	No Data
Year Four (Project Coordinator 2 days a week)	
Sessions	127
Session Participants	337
Training & Awareness Raising Events (2 sessions) people	20
Meetings (2) people	34

During year three of the project, Project Coordinator, Kristen Lambert took 10 months off work for Maternity Leave. The post was covered by Danielle Wrench who joined the project as a volunteer and quickly developed a real passion and skill for supporting people to connect with nature and wildlife.





Nature & Wellbeing Project outcomes

2.1. Feedback from Individuals

Information was gathered from 40* individuals representing around 10 groups who had engaged with the project (some were involved with more than one group). Not all interviewees answered all the questions.

The large majority of people interviewed were working age adults. Interviewees were selected based on willingness and ability to participate and obviously reflect the beneficiary experience, at the time of the interview. However it is believed that they are a broadly representative sample.

When asked about pre-existing conditions, there were around 50% positive responses about a variety of issues, broadly categorised as mental health concerns. Therefore, it can be confidently concluded that the participant group included a majority identifying themselves as having a significant mental health or wellbeing need. Lying behind these overt mental health and wellbeing needs were a range of contributory factors such as physical health issues (19%), homelessness, and caring responsibilities (10 – 12%). A similar number explicitly and spontaneously mentioned Brexit anxieties. (50%) also reported a learning disability of some kind.

All respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the project had improved their mental wellbeing and that it had made them appreciate Somerset's Countryside more.

All but one (97%) agreed or agreed strongly that participating in the Nature and Wellbeing Project had made them feel more positive about the future.

Between 89-98% of participants agreed or agreed strongly with a range of other positive indicators; feeling less lonely, less anxious, having more energy and having more confidence. A small minority (3-4 people) noted no change or that they disagreed that the project had helped with a few of these individual indicators. This may reflect the fact that the evaluation included individuals with a much poorer baseline in terms of mental health and wellbeing (for example some respondents were currently supported within inpatient wards and community mental health services).

There were 37 free text reactions, all positive and expressing happiness, a sense of calm, enjoyment, social engagement, and valuing the countryside experience. Participants reported an overwhelmingly positive experience and impact. Despite the reservations about the data collection (see 4.6), it can be confidently concluded that, from the

perspective of the participants involved, the project was successful in meeting needs and supporting people to manage their own wellbeing through nature-based interventions.

*The evaluation for this project was completed in partnership with Somerset Wildlife Trust (SWT) as part of Nature and Wellbeing review locally. 40 individuals responded in total, but 6 of these were from SWT specific projects, the rest (34) were from Nature and Wellbeing Project only.



Quotes from Participants

“Being part of the group has improved my confidence so much.”

“It gave me hope and got me back into doing things again.”

“It made me feel whole again - I'm not frightened anymore”

“Sessions were calming and satisfying”

Quotes from Partners

“The whole group reported being more physically active since getting involved in the project”

“...within our group there have been improvements to both mood and engagement since involvement in the project”

“The group say that the sessions make them feel good, proud, and tired.”

2.2 Feedback from Partner Organisations

12* partners completed the questionnaire. These were mostly from the health and social care sector.

For two thirds (8) a lack of knowledge about suitable sites had been a significant barrier to working in the countryside. Lack of transport, lack of availability of suitable staff, skills, and/or knowledge were also important factors (5 mentioning each of these).

All 12 strongly agreed that engagement with the Nature and Wellbeing Project had improved participants' mental wellbeing. There was some variation between strong agreement and agreement about reducing loneliness, improving physical health, anxiety, positivity, and other measures, but there was consistently a 100% strongly agree or agree response across all positive indicators. There is no doubt that all the partners believe the project to be extremely beneficial to people they work with and support.

There was similar 100% agreement that the project had helped the organisations concerned to build their own skills, knowledge, and confidence. They experienced the project not only as being of great benefit to their clients but as empowering and developing their own organisational capacities and ambitions. This is an important finding in terms of sustainability and value for money invested.

All organisations would strongly welcome more training opportunities to embed the nature-based approach in their own work, if future funding (to include the AONBs in Somerset) were to be secured.

*The evaluation for this project was completed in partnership with Somerset Wildlife Trust (SWT) as part of Nature and Wellbeing review locally. 12 individuals responded in total, but 2 of these were from SWT specific projects, the rest (10) were from Nature and Wellbeing Project only.



Projects

3.1 Quantock Hills Projects

Name of Project	Health/Community Partner	Other Partners	Will the project continue beyond 2020
Rydon Ward Gardening Group	Rydon Ward (NHS)	Privately owned farm Quantock Hills AONB Team and Volunteers	Yes
Eastover Community Primary School	Eastover Community Primary School	National Trust, Quantock Hills AONB Team and Volunteers, Somerset College	Yes
Conservation Volunteering Project The Bridge School	The Bridge School, Bridgwater	Forestry England	Yes
Working Well Volunteering Group	Mind in Somerset	Quantock Hills AONB Team and Volunteers	Yes
Reading the Landscape/Green Days Conservation Group	Green Days Day Care	Quantock Hills AONB Team and Volunteers	Yes
Quantock Hills Group with CAMHS	Children and Adolescents Mental Health Service (CAMHS)	Quantock Hills AONB, Huntstile Farm, Forestry England	Yes
Williton Children's Centre	Somerset County Council children's services	Somerset Wildlife Trust, Somerset Coast	No
Huntstile Farm Volunteering	Community Mental Health Service (NHS)	Quantock Hills AONB Volunteers	No
Symphony Project Visits	Symphony Project	National Trust, Quantock Hills AONB	No

3.2 Blackdown Hills Projects

Name of Project	Health/Community Partner	Other Partners	Will the project continue beyond 2020
Watch at Folly	Watch CIC	Folly Farmyard and Blackdown Hills AONB volunteers	Yes
Chard Memory Café Art & Gardening Projects	Alzheimer's Society	Ferne Animal Sanctuary	Yes (art & visits aspect)
Wild Days	Somerset Activity & Sports Partnership	Forestry England and Blackdown Hills AONB	Yes
Green Days Conservation Group	Green Days Day Care	Otterhead Forest School and Friends of Otterhead Estate, Long Mead Meadow	Yes
Blackdown Hills Nature and Wellbeing Group	LiveWest, Plot Pals, Somerset Skills and Learning	Park Farm, National Trust, Blackdown Hills AONB	Yes
Manor Court Primary School	Manor Court Primary School	Forestry England, Ferne Animal Sanctuary, Natural Futures, B+Q Chard	Possibly
Outdoor Play and Exploration Sessions with Manor Court	Manor Court Primary School	Forestry England, Ferne Animal Sanctuary, Blackdown Hills AONB	Possibly
Robert Blake at Folly	Robert Blake Secondary School	Folly Farmyard	No

3.3 Mendip Hills Projects

Name of Project	Health/Community Partner	Other Partners	Will the project continue beyond 2020
Green Hill Care Home visits and talks	Somerset Care	Mendip Hills AONB Volunteers and Staff	Yes
Heads Up Walks and Conservation sessions	Heads Up	Mendip Hill's AONB, Somerset Wildlife Trust and Forestry England	Yes
Discovery Conservation Group	Discovery at Dimensions	Yeo Valley and Mendip Hills AONB staff and volunteers	Yes
In Charley's Memory	In Charley's Memory	Mendip Hills AONB, Mendip Outdoor Activity Centre, The West Country Man	No
Rethink Walks	Rethink, Health Connectors	The Blue School	No
Stoberry Park School	Stoberry Park School	Forestry England and Mendip Hills AONB	No

3.4 Cross AONB Projects

Name of Project	Health/Community Partner	Other Partners	Will the project continue beyond 2020
Baby Carrying Walks	Carry me Kate	Mendip, Blackdown and Quantock Hills, Plantlife and National Trust, The Hive Café and Community Centre	Yes
Somerset Wellbeing and Learning College Walks and Forest Bathing	Somerset Recovery College (NHS)	Mendip, Blackdown and Quantock Hills	Yes (in some way)
Young Carers	Mendip, South Somerset, Taunton & West Somerset Bridgwater Groups	Mendip, Blackdown and Quantock Hills AONB's Kilve, Wilder Woods, Frogmary Green Farm, Otterhead Lakes, Nettlecombe Field Studies Centre	Yes
Get Set Training	SCC – Children's Services	Quantock Hills AONB, National Trust, Young Wood	No

3.5 Conclusion

The projects established throughout this piece of work wouldn't have happened if it wasn't for the support of our many brilliant partners. In total we estimate that we have worked with over 50 health, social and nature-based partners.





Project
Stories

4 Project Stories

Throughout the project we have been lucky enough capture the impact nature connections have on people's lives. Whether this has been with participants directly, or through support workers and peers who know them best.

4.1 Somerset Partnership Rydon Ward Farm Gardening Project 2017-2020 (Quantock Hills)

For the past 2.5 years Somerset Partnership's Rydon Ward (an inpatient assessment and treatment ward, primarily for adults of working age experiencing an acute mental health problem), made weekly visits to a privately-owned farm on the Quantock Hills. Two Occupational Therapists (OTs) supported up to 4 participants at a time to work with the Lodge's gardener. Tasks included looking after organic vegetable patches, clearing, burning and learning about the land. These sessions will continue beyond this project as it is now completely self-sustaining.

'As an occupational therapist, I am aware of the importance being in nature has for our health and wellbeing. This is why as an inpatient occupational therapist on an acute mental health ward, I encouraged service user participation in the Nature Group that we were running with The Quantock Hills AONB and a privately owned farm there.

This was by far our most popular group. Every service user who attended the group said they felt less anxious and less stressed post group.

Our service users returned to the ward with arms full of roses they had picked for their rooms and vegetables ready to cook with.

I always returned to the ward covered in mud and felt like a very happy OT indeed!

Emily
Senior Inpatient Occupational Therapist

“It's the first time I have felt joy in many months”

Emily Strange, Recovery College Lead



4.2 Somerset Partnership Community Mental Health Service (CMHS) 2016-2019 Huntstile Farm (Quantock Hills)

An occupational therapist working within the CMHS, based in Taunton, approached the project within a few months of it starting. A 6-week trial then took place at Fyne Court with the National Trust as our partners. The group focused on supporting with practical tasks – such as painting, weeding and planting. In listening to participant feedback we later moved to a private farm (Huntstile) on the Quantock Hills.

We ran 10 weekly blocks of sessions and people could come along (transport provided) to take part in farming and gardening tasks led by head gardener John. The owner Lizzie and her team were very supportive, providing the group with homemade biscuits and fresh coffee and tea during breaks as well as a cosy wood burner during the winter months. Between 5-8 people attended at any one time and some people continued beyond the 10-week block while others moved on to other volunteering opportunities or groups - including the Working Well Group 5.6.

Zoe was involved in lots of different nature-based volunteer work throughout the four-year project including the gardening and farming practical task group we set up at Huntstile Farm.

Zoe told us that along with her family and staff at Wellsprings House (NHS), the project helped her to regain her independence. She now attends other groups within her community as well as supporting others as an Alzheimer's Society memory café volunteer. She continues to enjoy the wellbeing benefits that connecting with nature provide supporting her parents with gardening and walking on the beach and hills – things she has told us she wouldn't be doing if it hadn't been for the care and support the project gave her and her husband.

Zoe produced this written piece to describe her experience:-

Happy Days

Sitting at home, in the garden, looking towards the Quantocks, Cothelstone Hill looks back at me. Good memories, happy times. I remember repairing drystone walls, cutting gorse back, repairing the bird hid. The lovely bluebells, the trees and ferns, buzzards flying overhead, the friendly bander of fellow workers.

I remember the hills. I know the comfort it gave me, concentrating, just on the job. All my worries disappear, and I know I am doing something to help the Quantocks, that helps me and others and of course the wildlife. I know others are working up their now. In my thoughts, I am there, happy and content.

Zoe, project participant and volunteer



4.3 Children and Adolescents Mental Health Service (CAMHS) 2017-2020 (Quantock Hills)

As a direct result of our successful work with Somerset Partnership Community Mental Health Team the Children's Team were keen to set up a similar project. The project worked with two senior Occupational Therapists who supported young people they were working with, to better connect with local natural environments. Originally, we closely supported visits – linking the staff up with different sites and activities on the Quantock Hills. As staff got more confident with running sessions for young people on the hills themselves, they began to visit independently and more frequently too.

These visits continue to take place and staff see this as a key part of the support they offer young people.

Comments from Senior Occupational Therapist:

“Without the support provided, we would have been unable to make the links to our local community and probably wouldn't have considered the activity we are currently engaging in. We are now able to take the young people we work with out on a weekly basis and have seen a greater willingness to engage with their education due to this.”

We have seen clear differences in the presentation of the young people we support both while we are out in the local area and longer term. At present the project we have been linked with is providing the opportunity to be outside, learn a new skill, practice social skills, learn about careers that they may have never considered, learn about where their food comes from, open discussions about healthy eating and diet and lifestyle, provide exercise as well as simply have a break from being “a patient”.

Young People toasting marshmallows during CAMHS session



4.4 Working Well Practical Volunteering Group 2016-2020 (Quantock Hills)

This practical conservation volunteering task group project was set up during the first year of the project in partnership with the Quantock Hills AONB team and Mind in Somerset. Following funding bids to Somerset Community Foundation this project will continue to run in 2020 (and hopefully beyond).

The project continues to take referrals from Mind in Somerset with over 30 people currently registered with the project. There are 4 community engagement volunteers that support the project to run and one project lead - AONB Ranger Andy Stevenson. Tasks include dry stone walling, hedge-laying, coppicing, gorse clearance and burning. Some volunteers who have been part of this group have gone on to do other things within the conservation sector and elsewhere, including joining other AONB volunteering groups.

Comments from participants

“It helped me to feel more confident and to embrace my strengths”

“It helped me to feel more active, involved with the community aspect and learn more about plant and animal species”

“it helps everyone come to terms with fears and inner worries”

“I feel happy and exhausted... alive”

“I learnt about believing in yourself - that you can do stuff”

“Being outside among the trees and the birds makes me the happiest I can be”

Working Well participants during dry stone walling session



4.5 Watch at Folly Farmyard 2017-2020 (Blackdown Hills)

The Watch Project in Chard have been visiting and getting involved in practical tasks at Folly Farmyard on the Blackdown Hills since 2017 and have transport funding confirmed to enable these visits to continue throughout 2020.

Watch is a voluntary group set up to reach out and engage with adults who, because of various conditions and issues, are socially isolated and who face barriers within their community and surrounding areas.

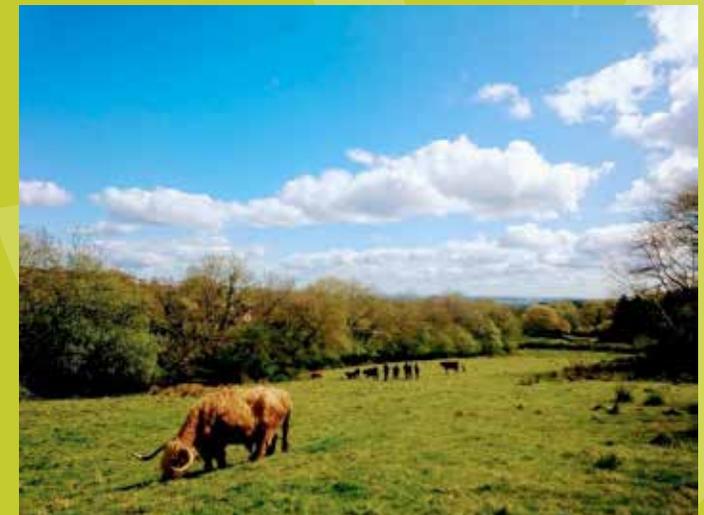
Folly Farmyard is privately owned and farmed using traditional methods to conserve and enhance nature and wildlife. Participants assist farmer Jonathan with basic tasks such as brash clearance, ditching and butterfly and other wildlife monitoring. This year the group may also take on the John Muir Award. One of the participants Joan told us about her experience.

“I really enjoy practical tasks and have loved helping Jonathan with ditch clearance – getting covered in mud and working hard. It’s feels good to help and it’s always appreciated. Seeing the beautiful orchids, the deer with the cattle, butterfly monitoring and seeing the pond develop over the years/seasons have all been great. Everywhere you look there is something new to see. My daughter who also comes along loves the bonfires.

I come away feeling content and very happy, like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders. It’s given me confidence to do other things too - it’s acted like a snowball effect. For example, Folly Farmyard inspired me to write the first poem I had written in 30 years

(See Appendix A)

‘Hairy John’ during Watch session at Folly Farmyard



4.6 Chard Memory Cafe – The Alzheimer’s Society, Art and Gardening Projects 2017-2020 (Blackdown Hills)

For 3 years of the project we have been working with Chard Memory Café. The Café provides a place for people with dementia and their carers to meet others in a similar situation in a relaxed and social setting. Our involvement has included talks to the group about opportunities and events on the Blackdown Hills, visits to different sites on the hills nearby, gardening sessions at Ferne Animal Sanctuary and art sessions. The nature-based art sessions are now a regular item on the café’s programme with Blackdown Hills community engagement volunteer, Sue, leading the sessions. Each time she visits she prepares a seasonal art task that is inspired by the landscape of the Blackdown Hills in some way. In 2017/18 the work produced was displayed throughout the year at Ferne Animal Sanctuary in their new conference facility. Ferne later supported with some sessions at the café too. This year we plan to run a summer trip to the Blackdown Hills for the Memory Café group.

Comments from Dementia Support Worker

“The service users at our group clearly enjoy the activities and are encouraged to draw on relevant memories in their work. Being able to visit Ferne Animal Sanctuary with their families to see their artwork exhibited publicly was an enjoyable and uplifting activity, and a perfect setting. Bringing natural materials into the group made activities accessible and inclusive for all and helped service users to feel connected to the activities. Staff and Volunteers leading the sessions showed sensitivity, adaptability, and good humour, putting service users at ease, and improving confidence to get involved and contribute”



Spring artwork from Chard Memory Café

4.7 Discovery at Mendip Hills AONB and Yeo Valley Farms 2016-2020 (Mendip Hills) Case Study Written by Chris Parker Discovery Support Worker

“For nearly three years I have been bringing a group to the Mendip Hills every Thursday. The projects were originally set up as part of the Nature and Wellbeing Project. They now run without (the project’s) direct assistance. Our clients on these projects mostly have moderate learning disabilities.

The dry-stone walling has produced three completed walls around 70 metres in length and our team have made good friends with other workers on the farm and our trainers. The walls are in a very picturesque spot and we all appreciate the regular contact with the land and the animals and birds around us. Being in the middle of such peaceful countryside has made its mark on our interactions and our clients enjoy the tranquillity and calm.

Our volunteering days with Mendip Hills AONB have enabled us to address many different jobs and my team have become quite skilled. We have cleared paths of any litter and overgrowth; we have repaired benches and cleared old buildings. We have recorded the activities on camera and reviewing these pictures is

a great aid to those of the party who have difficulty remembering things. The pride, the skills acquired and pleasure at meeting with the staff and other volunteers is evident in these reviews with photos.

These are some of the benefits I observe I those attending. Sometimes not until many weeks or months later - but in no small measure, these all contribute towards their wellbeing.

Pride: In clearing a shed or that our wall shows on a Google map. Telling others what they do.

Friendship: In the people they meet officially and meet out and about. Also working together.

Happiness: In the environment and the company.

Fitness: From considerable physical work.

Skills: In dry stone walling, woodwork and conservation.

Memory: Reviewing previous tasks with pictures and stories.

Stability: Knowing what they will be doing and how to do it.

Mending the Mendips – celebrating completing another section of dry stone walling



4.8 Somerset Care – Green Hill House 2017-2020 (Mendip Hills)

We started working with Somerset Care in 2017. They were keen for us to pilot something in one of their residential homes. Green Hill House in Cheddar worked with the Mendip Hills AONB team and together, during the months, we organised visits to different places on the Mendip Hills. This included a visit to Deer Leap where residents got to enjoy the views, go for a short stroll and hear a little bit about the landscape's history and wildlife. The visits led to many conversations between residents about the local landscape with people recalling memories of different places they have lived and visited on the hills. Because these summer sessions were so well received, staff were keen for the Mendip Hills team to continue to work with them.



Following on from that, Volunteer David Knight has been making regular visits to Green Hill House, where he shares stories, artefacts and photographs about the history, landscape and current activities on the Mendip Hills. His beautifully behaved dog, Molly also attends and is a big hit with the residents at Green Hill House. These visits have been taking place for 2 years now and David is always made to feel very welcome by staff and residents. Because of the success of this model, Community Ranger Lauren is looking at extending this offer to other Somerset Care Homes across the Mendip area with a new project starting at a Somerset Care home in Draycott in 2020.

Alongside this Mendip Hills AONB volunteers also supporting residents and staff at Green Hill House to create a wildlife area in their back garden. Making mini ponds, bird tables and bug hotels for residents to enjoy. Quite literally bringing nature and wildlife to their back door!

Residents from Greenhill House enjoying a visit to Deer Leap



Volunteer David and his dog Molly after a visit to Greenhill House

4.9 The project worked with three primary schools all keen to support children to connect more effectively with local natural environments for wellbeing.

Eastover Community Primary School at Fyne Court 2016-2020 (Quantock Hills)

“I took my dad there (after the project visit) but he wasn’t as good at building dens as me though”

“I enjoyed jumping in muddy puddles with friends”

“I learnt that there are sticky plants... I loved being in nature.”

For three years, pupils from Eastover Community Primary School (from Bridgwater) have been visiting Fyne Court during the Spring and Summer Terms. It has now become part of the school’s annual programme with the school now funding some of the transport costs themselves. The school continue to link with both Quantock Hills AONB volunteers and the National Trust to support these visits.

During the first year of the project, over half the children we worked with hadn’t visited Fyne Court before, despite it being less than 15 minutes away. The environment allowed for plenty of physical activity and opportunities for children to develop their confidence through trying new things and challenging themselves in exciting and unfamiliar surroundings. 95 % of pupils felt they got to move around more than they would on a normal day; the average number of steps taken at school were 3423 and at Fyne Court 6933 - more than double the steps.

93% of pupils felt that they got to spend more time with friends, talking and having fun together than they would on a normal school day. 95% of pupils felt that they were able to play outside with nature more than they would on a normal school day with 95% saying they would like to visit Fyne Court again.

Manor Court Primary School 2016-2019 (Blackdown Hills)

Work with Manor Court School has been in collaboration with Forestry England, Ferne Animal Sanctuary and The Natural Futures project. The school came out to the hills to play explore, learn and connect through making things, building, using tools and learning about nature and wildlife. The project also supported the school to help develop their pond/nature area which meant children could connect with nature during the school day, every day - in between visits to the AONB. Over 20 people came to help develop the area, including pupils, parents and teachers. There was a feeling of true community spirit with everyone coming together to get stuck in, weeding, clearing and planting. The area is now a great resource for all pupils to use developing a better connection with nature and wildlife within the school grounds. Teacher Laura Gregory said:-

“It really was a great success and enjoyed by all. I cannot wait for the pond area to be blooming and full of wildlife to explore and learn from.”

Stobbery Park School 2016-2018 (Mendip Hills)

“I feel like I’m on top of the world”

“I feel very happy because it’s calm”

“I was happy because we got to play”

The project worked with Stobbery Park School for 2+ years on a project that has supported Key Stage One children to explore the Mendip Hills.

The children connected with the environments in different ways - some took photographs of things they liked (whether it was a view, a tree or a leaf), others enjoyed getting their hands dirty, touching, gathering and sorting things they found during their visits. When back at school the children talked about their experiences and, supported by teachers, started to create artwork inspired by the colours and textures of the landscape.

When out on the Mendip Hills 68% of pupils told us that they spent more time with friends, talking and having fun than they would on a normal school day and 83% of children told us that they got to play outside with nature more than they normally would.

4.10 In Charley’s Memory 2016-2018 (Mendip Hills)

The project worked with ‘In Charley’s Memory’, a local charity that supports young people aged 11- 25 in a variety of ways, including one-to-one counselling. The project supported the team to encourage young people they were working with to enjoy the Mendip Hills in a variety of ways and to also recognised the important role nature and wildlife can play in managing mental wellbeing.

Visits included night walks with ‘The West Country Man’ and botany colleagues, activity sessions with the Mendip Hills AONB (including geo-caching) and a visit to the Mendip Outdoor Pursuits Activity Centre. Some of the young people who got involved were starting to offer peer support in schools, to fellow pupils, around mental health and wellbeing. The sessions provided them with another ‘tool’ to share with others in the form of nature connections.

In Charley’s Memory later applied for money from the Mendip Hills Fund to ensure they could continue to keep nature and wellbeing work stayed firmly on the agenda.

Young person enjoying the day at Mendip Outdoor Pursuits Centre



4.11 Green Days Day Care 2016-2019 (Blackdown and Quantock Hills)

Since 2016 the project has worked closely with Green Days Day Care a day care provider for adults with learning difficulties. In various ways the project worked with both the Blackdown and Quantock Hills AONB.

One project was called 'Reading the Landscape', where a small group visited different sites on the on the Quantock Hills, exploring, taking photos, writing poetry (see Appendix B for one of the groups poems) and really 'taking notice' of the diverse natural environments – the notes and records the group kept fed into the Landscape Character Assessment that team at Quantock Hills AONB were developing at the time. Those involved reported feeling calm and relaxed and that they learnt a lot together whilst volunteering on this project. From this, many other projects emerged. Having met the AONB staff and volunteers as part of this initial project, the group told us that they were keen to get involved in more practical tasks and so the Quantock Rangers started working with the group, who began to support by cleaning bird boxes, removing plastic sleeves from saplings and litter picking. The Volunteer Coordinator on the Blackdown Hills also started to involve the group in practical tasks at Otterhead Lakes. The

group learnt to use hand tools safely, as well as learning about local nature and wildlife. Alongside this, the group assisted the Blackdown team to review the accessibility of different sites across the hills. This included reporting back on the state of footpaths, gates, stiles, car-parking facilities, and interpretation boards. This was then published on the AONB website. Both AONB's continue to work with Green Days across various sites, with different partners including Long Mead Meadow in Hemyock and The National Trust. This year the group plan to take on the John Muir Award to ensure their learning and development is recognised more formally. Since their involvement in these AONB projects, individuals from the group are now also involved in more community gardening projects with local parks and green spaces as well as Somerset Wildlife Trust.

Greendays group visiting Cothelstone Hill





Additional Project Work

5.1 Young Carers

During the last 6 months of the project, Somerset County Council Public Health Team funded a specific piece of work with Somerset Young Carers. The Project Coordinator worked with Mendip, South Somerset, Taunton, Bridgwater and West Somerset Groups

- Taunton Young Carers were linked up with Otterhead Lakes Forest School on the Blackdown Hills
- Bridgwater Young Carers with Kilve on the Quantock Hills
- Mendip Young Carers were with Mendip AONB
- South Somerset Young Carers with Wilder Woods and Frogmary Green Farm.
- West Somerset Young Carers were linked up with Nettlecombe Field Studies Council.

These links have been established in a way that will hopefully mean they go beyond the one-off visits that took place between 2019 and 2020.

Problems

There was a long delay to this work beginning due to uncertainty around Young Carers Project funding. The work was recommissioned between July and September so youth workers were reluctant to put meetings/sessions

in the diary for Autumn 2019 because they weren't sure whether they would continue to hold this contract. This meant that the summer period (which is obviously the easiest period to run outdoor engagement activities for young people) was missed which meant we were attempting to engage new audiences to step outside and connect with local natural environments during the cold and wet, winter months.

5.2 Baby Carrying Walks

In 2019 the Project Coordinator made links with Carry Me Kate Parenting Services, a Community Interest Company, supporting parents through breastfeeding peer support, social meets and consultancy services for people wanting to try out different types of baby carriers in Somerset. As a new parent herself the coordinator was keen to support post-natal mental wellbeing through offering opportunities for new parents to get out and connect with nature and experience the mental and emotional benefits of baby wearing for both carrier and baby.

We started by hosting 3 meets at Fyne Court on the Quantock Hills - all of which were really successful, with some sessions involving over 30 parents/carers and their babies. People told us that there was gap in projects that offer new parents opportunities to get outside and reap the

benefits this allows and that going on these walks really supported their wellbeing - in particularly telling us that on the walk days - their mood positively shifted during and after the walk. A WhatsApp Group was established for this particular group as it was agreed this was the preferred method of communication for these walks.

Following the success of the 2019 programme of walks a full Programme (of 11 sessions) have been agreed for 2020. This project will continue to be supported by all three AONB teams, Plantlife, Exmoor National Park and Carry me Kate.

5.3 National Association of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

During the project the Nature and Wellbeing Coordinator was asked to speak and run workshops at the National Association of AONBs Annual Conference two years running. This provided the Project Coordinator the opportunity to share learning and participant feedback with other AONB teams looking to start similar projects in their area. Since speaking at these conferences - other AONBs (including our neighbour North Devon AONB) have started their own Nature and Wellbeing Projects. The project in Somerset has been able to offer further support by hosting visits during which people new to this work can come and speak to volunteers, participants and



Baby sleeping during baby carrying walk at the foot of the hills

5.4 Forest Bathing

In the final year of the project the Project Coordinator was invited to attend 'Shinrin Yoko' Forest Bathing training that formed part of Plantlife's Building Resilience in Communities Project. Following this - sessions were organised as part of the project during 2019/20. Part of this work included linking up with the NHS Somerset Wellbeing and Recovery Community who work with people with lived experience of Mental Health. The sessions were very popular and were fully booked through a self-referral process run by the college.

We worked with Forestry England at Great Wood to organise the NHS sessions. We hope that this will become a more regular event with Forestry England's continued support.

5.5 Does Happiness Grow On Trees?

During the third year of the project we ran a competition that we encouraged participants of the project to enter but also promoted to the public too. The competition asked people to consider how connecting with natural environments in Somerset makes them feel – showing us through art, whether visual or written word. We received over 70 entries with our youngest artist aged 4 and our oldest, aged 85. We worked with the Museum

of Somerset who used National Lottery Funding to host a 2-month exhibition entitled 'Does Happiness Grow on Trees'. One piece (a chalk and charcoal painting called 'Happy', inspired by foraging on the Mendip Hills) was kindly donated by the artist and was later auctioned off to a local business. The money raised was given to the Mendip Hills Fund to support future nature and wellbeing opportunities for those who find it hardest to access them. Another piece, a photograph entitled 'Friends Fresh Air and Freedom' taken on the Quantock Hills, has been entered into a National Public Health competition after a member of Public Health staff seeing it in the Museum of Somerset exhibition. This piece of work also supported our evaluation as by asking participants to show us, through art, the impact nature has on how they feel and their wellbeing, we were offering another way for them to demonstrate the project's impact. Appendix E shows a few examples the feedback we received.



5.6 Mapping

During the project's final year time we worked with partners to collate information that went on to form the basis of a Somerset Nature and Wellbeing Map. It is intended that the information will be used by individuals and support staff who may be seeking nature and wellbeing opportunities across the county. Having an online 'hub' will hopefully help to ensure this project's legacy in some way. The list of key providers will be hosted by Somerset Wildlife Trust on their website. One of the project's final tasks has been to work with the communications and marketing team to get this up and functioning and it will then need to be promoted by health and nature-based partners. There are currently over 30 organisations registered to feature on the map.

Some of the entries from the 'Does Happiness Grow on Trees' Competition

5.7 Naturally Healthy May

The project took a lead role in delivering the first 'Naturally Healthy May' in Somerset, back in 2017. This is something that Devon Local Nature Partnership Local Nature Partnership (LNP) have been doing for some time. We worked closely with Devon (LNP) to ensure consistent communication across the two counties, sharing hashtags and targeting the same demographic. Events have included walks, mindfulness sessions, yoga, art, singing, practical tasks and educational visits. In 2017 the project coordinated a programme of 75 events with 1660 participants, with 836 of these as new participants. As part of the programme of events the project also organised a gathering that fed back to health and nature-based partners about the project's successes so far. This included talks from participants and project partners.

In 2018 Somerset Wildlife Trust took over the coordination of the programme (which included over 40 events across the county) with continued support from the three AONBs in Somerset who put on a range of events once again.

In 2019 the Nature and Wellbeing Project led the programme coordination once again and supported 14 events to take place across Somerset.

In 2017 and 2018 there was an additional budget given for planning and delivering the programme. In 2019 this was done in addition to day to day role and responsibilities, without additional budget.

5.8 Somerset Nature and Wellbeing Network

Within the projects final year, we established the Somerset Nature and Wellbeing Network. Made up of nature-based delivery teams/individuals as well as some working in the health sector in Somerset – the network plans to meet 4 times a year (2 gatherings have already taken place in 2019 with over 30 partners at each meet up) and have agreed their purpose and initial actions. See Appendix C for the full network description.

The second gathering included speakers from organisations suggested by network members – including Rowena Passy from the University of Plymouth who spoke about monitoring and evaluating nature and wellbeing work and Emily Strange the Recovery College Manager from Somerset Wellbeing and Learning Community (NHS).

Network gathering attendees during Carymoor Environmental Trust



5.9 Partnership Work with LiveWest

For 3 years the project worked in partnership with Sally Hill (pictured, centre) and her colleagues from LiveWest. In various ways we supported residents to connect with local natural environments (see Appendix D for full case study written by Sally Hill). We are currently exploring how AONB's (in particular the Blackdown and Quantock Hills) and communities that LiveWest Housing Association support in Somerset, can continue to work collaboratively to develop new projects and ideas that have come directly from residents within towns that surround the hills (namely Bridgwater, Taunton and Wellington). One of these projects has seen partners from Somerset Skills and Learning, The National Trust, a private landowner at Park Farm nr Wellington, Forestry England, Plot Pals (run by Marion pictured on the left) and the AONBs come together to plan and establish the possibility of a joint bid. This project could see the development of an 'Urban Ranger' training programme emerge.

As a result of engagement with the AONBs through the Nature and Wellbeing Project, Sally from LiveWest has also been heavily involved in the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS) bid to the National Lottery – (See 5.10) ensuring those she supports are

represented. Most recently, she was a panel member for the LPS Manager's recruitment.



Sally Hill Community Connector from Livewest and Marion Vincent from Plot Pals in Wellington

5.10 Landscape Partnership Bid

The Nature and Wellbeing Project fed into the Quantock Hills LPS bid, during the project's development phase (2018-20). Development Officer (Bill Jenman) was keen to meet with nature and wellbeing partners and groups we had worked with to ensure that the LPS project was developed taking in to considering any learning taken from the 4-year project. See 5.9 for one of the key partnerships established here. As part of this project there will be a full-time Community Engagement and Volunteering Officer whose role it will be to engage people who find it most difficult to access natural environments but who may perhaps benefit the most in terms of health and wellbeing.

5.11 Working with AONB Teams to ensure Nature and Wellbeing continues to be firmly on the agenda.

One of the more 'unofficial' project aims was to support nature and conservation partners to not only engage harder to reach participants, who may benefit most from connecting with the natural world in terms of their health and wellbeing, but for them to consider it as part of their core offer. The Volunteer Coordinator's across the three AONBs and the rangers at Quantock AONB have all directly supported nature and wellbeing work throughout the project and, through various ongoing work (including the Working Well Group, Work with Green Days Day Care and work with Somerset Care), will continue to ensure that groups set up as part of the 4 year project, continue to run. These projects are now seen as an important part of AONB officers' roles.

Informally teams involved the Nature and Wellbeing Coordinator in decisions around inclusive practice and supporting and engaging vulnerable people in nature and conservation projects. External nature partners have also sought advice around mental health and wellbeing about too. More formally the Nature and Wellbeing Coordinator organised safeguarding and child protection sessions for each of the AONB teams and encouraged staff to attend the Mental Health First Aid courses offered by Somerset County Council. The project also organised training for volunteers which included Safeguarding and Child Protection, Mental Health Awareness (with Mind in Somerset) and Dementia Friend/Dementia Awareness Courses (with the Alzheimer's Society and Reminiscence Learning).



Lessons Learnt



6.1 Transport

Problem

Because the project was managed by Somerset's AONBs, a key element of the work was to support people to experience and connect with the bio-diverse and top-quality landscapes the AONBs have to offer, away from urban spaces. Simply getting people to these spaces was always going to be a barrier and from day one was identified as such. The annual transport budget for the project was quite low and many of the groups and individuals that the project was tasked with engaging didn't have access to transport. Furthermore, public transport doesn't tend to work well for most AONB sites and therefore has very rarely been used to transport groups and individuals during the project.

What we did

We helped groups to write small grant bids that were used to pay for transport. This was effective in the short term (1-2 years) but became trickier when groups want to continue with work beyond this point.

As soon as people became volunteers and started to mix/socialise with others, people start to offer each other lifts, which worked well as a longer-term solution but is still not ideal, as it relies on volunteers who may choose to move on to other things and any time.

We worked closely with the Transporting Somerset Team to ensure that low cost transport options were available to groups we support. This was a good solution for many groups as it was affordable compared to other transport options.

We provided groups with free activities and opportunities so that the only cost to them was transport, making this a more affordable option. This worked well for groups like the Young Carers, who were able to access some funding for transport from their Friends of Young Carers pot.



6.2 Geography

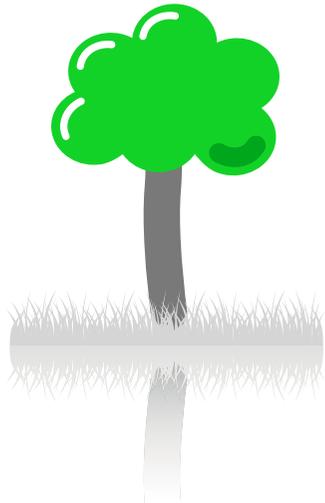
Problem

The Project Coordinator was tasked with working across the three AONBs within Somerset. This large geography proved to be difficult within the 2-4 days a week that was funded across the 4-year project.

Inevitably, the host AONB, the Quantock Hills, where the Project Coordinator was based, were more involved in directing and supporting the project. They provided additional staff time and project support (for example line management, 2 Rangers assisting with project delivery and more communications and marketing time) which led to this AONB getting more out of the project in terms of numbers of groups and activities. Sadly, this did mean that the other two AONBs got less out of the project - particularly Mendip because of the significant distance from the coordinators base.

What we did

Because of the large project geography, during the first year, we realised that in order to have the best impact in terms of health and wellbeing outcomes for participants - we would need to reduce the project focus in terms of audiences/groups. In years 2-4 we focused much of our attention on Mental Health and Wellbeing outcomes/support more specifically, with less of a focus on physical activity (although most sessions/activities that are run as part of this work inevitably involve physical activity anyway).



6.3 Long Term Focus

Problem

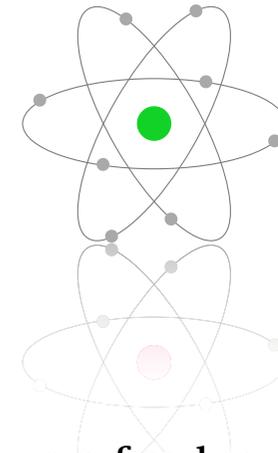
The project was originally funded for two years. Because of its short-term nature, many of the objectives related to putting on one-off events for groups and schools. In terms of 'impact' this just didn't

work for many of the groups we were tasked with supporting. Furthermore, the originally funded two year project didn't allow for much time to do the ground work that was needed to ensure that nature-based partners felt equipped to better assist groups with additional support needs. This required them to help group leaders bringing groups to the hills to develop the confidence and skills needed to encourage and engage with individuals in natural environments away from urban centres.

What we did

After discussing this with key partners and funders during the early stages of the project, it was felt that in order to impact positively on people's health and wellbeing we would need to first build up trust with groups and individuals by visiting projects within the towns and villages surrounding the AONBs. We spent time with these projects, getting to know what group leaders and those attending groups needed. Only then did we support staff to bring groups and individuals to the AONBs.

We also spent time developing better links between the nature and health and social care sectors. This included putting on training sessions for staff in both sectors as well as running talks and attending meetings where information, advice and alike was offered to teams wanting to get involved.



6.4 Focus on referral process/links with health care providers

Problem

Improving links between nature and health care providers was always something this project had intended to do but because there wasn't a specific objective regarding referral processes or even 'Green Prescribing' - it made it difficult for this to be a key focus, with such limited time over the wide project geography.

What we did

During the first year the project coordinator spent time attending Clinical Commissioning Group meetings across the county, talking about the Public Health funded projects and the links with the AONBs in Somerset as well as other nature-based providers. This was well received and some relationships with health care providers were developed - for example the Community Mental Health Team in Taunton.

In the final year of the project we set up a Nature and Wellbeing Network, running two meet-up days and communicating with over 60 providers. This group are keen on looking into the referral process in Somerset and the links between health and social care providers and nature-based delivery teams. This will hopefully be something that continues to develop as a legacy to the project.



6.5 Evaluation

Problem

Unlike other Nature and Wellbeing projects funded by Public Health locally (e.g. Moor to Enjoy with Exmoor National Park) there wasn't a specific budget for evaluation or an external consultant to organise and manage this aspect of the project from the outset. This was recognised as a potential issue by funders and managers early on and it was agreed that the Project Coordinator would need to do what they could to manage this potential issue.

As the project developed, we also found it difficult to monitor different groups in a measurable/comparable way, as participants were so varied in age and demographics.

What we did

At the end of the project we joined forces with our colleagues and long-term project partners at Somerset Wildlife Trust (SWT) and agreed to work on an evaluation together as we had been working with similar groups in a similar way, just at different locations (us more rural and SWT more urban). This worked well as we were able to use data collected for project evaluation and for future bids to build upon what had been achieved during the Nature and Wellbeing Work that had taken place between 2016 and 2020.

Throughout the project we worked with health and nature-based partners to monitor the successes and learning points of different projects that were established as a result of the work we were doing. We ensured that we adapted projects locations and partnerships when things weren't working quite right.



6.6 Questionnaire Design and Final Data Collection

Problem(s)

Because we worked with a project partner (Somerset Wildlife Trust) and a consultant for a future bid to collect final questionnaires, the way it was worded and structured wasn't necessarily how we would have done if working alone.

The questions asked also created a bias towards positive responses. While a client might express disagreement with a question about positive outcomes, there was no prompt to give them an opportunity to say that the experience had had a negative effect. This seems unlikely but, for instance, someone with anxiety might have been made more anxious by having to worry about being asked to work in a social setting with others. Any future survey should allow for negative responses as well as positive and neutral ones, not least because there may be some individuals for whom this isn't the right form of intervention.

The collected feedback is from only a small sample and so, by its nature, may be subject to sampling bias. It is also too small to undertake statistical analysis. A more rigorous quantitative assessment of outcomes might be possible if built into a future project from the start but only at a significant additional cost. An external consultant would probably need to be commissioned to do this work. Given the vulnerable nature of the participants, care would need to be taken that the assessment did not itself generate negative outcomes. Such an in-depth evaluation is probably not justified unless the resulting data were to be used as part of a much wider study.

What we did

The questionnaire did allow participants to note if there had been 'no change'.

The issues around data collection has been a key learning point of this project and will be used to advise future projects.

The possibility of a follow up in Summer 2020 (i.e. a year or so after this survey was undertaken) has been discussed to see if the organisations who felt empowered by engagement with the project do indeed go on to deliver more nature-based activities independently, and if those who were already doing so before the project have expanded their scope or found new sites to work on compared to what they were accessing before.

Qualitative data was collected throughout the project which has also been used to form the basis of some of the project stories within the report.



Concluding Comments

7.1 Nature and Wellbeing and Somerset's AONBs

The Nature and Wellbeing Project has demonstrated that within Somerset there is a great deal of energy and enthusiasm for nature-based health interventions, recognising the important role that nature and wildlife connections have in supporting people to manage their health and wellbeing.

**“I feel more motivated,
physically able and have
greater self-esteem”**

(Quote from project participant)

The AONB managers and teams in Somerset are committed to ensuring nature and wellbeing work remains firmly on the agenda. This is supported by the recent Glover Review of National Parks and AONBs across the country that clearly emphasised the importance of landscapes for health and happiness.

“We want our nation’s most cherished landscapes to fulfil their original mission for people, providing unrivalled opportunities for enjoyment, spiritual refreshment and in turn supporting the nation’s health and wellbeing”

(Quote from Landscapes Review: final report - summary of findings, September 2019)

With this in mind, the 3 AONBs involved in these projects, together with one of the project’s key long term partners the Somerset Wildlife Trust, have been working on a bid to the National Lottery. Taking learning from this project and work that the Wildlife Trust have been doing in this area over the last few years, we have developed a 3 year Somerset based project called Nature Connections. The bid was developed with participants of various Nature and Wellbeing Projects. The project will include having staff in each of the AONBs and a Project

Coordinator. Scope to continue to support ongoing groups with activities and funding has also been included. Furthermore, a specific 10-week programme has been written in that people can access through self-referral or through a charity or agency referral. The programme will include different elements of nature and wildlife connections, offering opportunities for learning, skill development, art, practical tasks and much more. Time and capacity to support individuals to find longer term volunteering, work-based or social opportunities that are suitable to them has also been built in to the new project, in order to link people up with the network of nature and wellbeing offers that have been established throughout this project.

“I like the idea of blocks of sessions. I need them to be weekly as this brings structure to my life”

(Comment from participant in Co-Design session for Lottery Funding Bid)

7.2 Cost/Benefit

Evidence for the value of investing in nature-based connections continues to grow. It now convincingly demonstrates the impact projects specifically aimed at supporting nature connections for wellbeing can have in terms of return on investment. Not only does it make people feel better and more able to manage their own health and wellbeing, it saves money too.

‘In 2019, Leeds Beckett University undertook a Social Return on Investment analysis of Wildlife Trust programmes. They found that targeted programmes designed for people with a health or social need showed a return of £6.88 for every £1 invested. This value was generated from health gains such as improved mental wellbeing’

(Quote from Social Return on Investment analysis of the health and wellbeing impacts of Wildlife Trust programmes by Leeds Beckett University)

We are therefore hopeful that health sectors (including Public Health and NHS) continue to see the importance of investing in this area, with an increase in emphasis on green prescriptions as well as supporting more informal nature-based offers to continue to develop.

Although work that has taken place within the Nature and Wellbeing Project has been 'people' focused, this offer clearly has great benefits to nature too. As we are reminded of the importance interacting with the natural world can have on our own health and happiness, we start to value it more and even begin to take action to help protect and restore it. For example, one participant involved in a few of the projects set up as part of the Nature and Wellbeing work went on to become an extremely passionate and valuable volunteer and later, a paid member of staff within the nature conservation sector. She continues to give a great deal of her time to protecting and restoring natural environments – while supporting people to connect and build up nature-based tools to help them to feel good at the same time. The extract below is taken from a full case study (see Appendix F).

'It was here (taking part in one programme within the Nature and Wellbeing Project) my desire to learn more was ignited and I was keen to take part in more. So, my love for all things nature and community engagement began! Since taking part...

I have helped to support a range of family events and community engagement activities. Today, I feel I have gone full circle and it has been a huge privilege support the Huntstile Farm Project, which... will run as a 10-week programme.'

(Quote from participant)

7.3 Final remarks - Nature and Wellbeing Project Coordinator Kristen Lambert

This project has been an absolute dream to work on. I have loved supporting two sectors to come together, to learn from each other in order to develop nature-based health interventions which, in turn, has helped to encourage people to manage their own wellbeing by connecting with natural environments locally to them.

The overwhelmingly positive response we had from both nature and health/ community partners and participants has been so incredible to see. The natural, intrinsic need people have to connect with nature, to help us feel our best, is seemingly so simple. This project has allowed us to spend time encouraging partners in both fields to continue to develop, shape and share this idea, inclusively, with communities in Somerset, focusing on reaching out to those who may struggle most to access such opportunities.

The project has (perhaps unsurprisingly) demonstrated that by supporting individuals to connect with nature, we are highlighting a significant tool that people can freely use to improve and maintain their own wellbeing and happiness. This is also great news for

nature and community, as in doing this, we encourage people to spend more time outside, caring for the natural environments and landscapes that are so important to our communities.

The people I have worked with have made this project. Somerset is very lucky to have such a vibrant and varied nature and wellbeing sector, with lots of opportunities for people to get involved and feel better.



Kristen Lambert, Nature and Wellbeing Project Coordinator

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Appendix

Appendix A The Network

Somerset's Nature and Wellbeing Network is a group of organisations, individual providers and businesses, community interest companies and charities who recognise the health and wellbeing benefits that connecting with Somerset's natural environments, wildlife and landscapes can provide. Nurturing both people and the natural environment is at the heart of what we all do and is therefore a core principle we will always follow within the network. We respect the work of our colleagues and value the range of opportunities on offer. By focusing on partnership and collaboration we share a commitment to support each other, provide guidance and share skills.

What's our collective purpose?

The network aims to;

- provide a strong collective voice to advocate the benefits of nature-based health interventions
- offer a single point of contact for individuals and professionals looking

to find local nature and wellbeing opportunities

- ensure that skills, resources and good practice are shared with one another so that there is continued learning and development within the group. This helps to ensure we continue to provide and support quality nature-based health interventions and opportunities that allow people to reconnect with their local natural environment

What will we do?

Gather: We will organise regular 'gatherings' - with meet ups happening at least twice a year. By bringing people together the network will open up the possibility of new working relationships, potential joint working and funding bids that can follow. We will also ensure that we move around, so different organisations or individuals have the opportunity to host if they would like to.

Influence: As a network we want to engage and influence local health professionals, decision makers and funders in order to ensure our work can continue to grow within Somerset,

offering more opportunities for people to experience the beneficial health and wellbeing impacts that connecting with nature can provide.

Communicate: We plan to have clear, outward facing, online communication platforms – to include a webspace and an online forum (social media?)

Monitor: We want to develop evaluation and monitoring techniques together, in order to provide a clear, local evidence base for funders. Perhaps to include linking up with universities?

Support: Those members of the network who can, will support (whether through funding, time or resources), the ongoing development of the network.

Share: The wide range of network members means we have a wealth of experience, knowledge, passion and enthusiasm for nature and wellbeing work. By working collaboratively and communicating to our county wide audiences more collectively, we hope to continue to share the magic of nature connections with more people across the county.

Appendix B Nature and Wellbeing Project and LiveWest - Case Study

Our engagement with the project began just over three years ago.

At the time, our organisation was a predominantly Somerset based housing association called 'Knightstone'. We were able to work with Kristen Lambert in some of our most deprived areas, where we have residents.

Since 2016, one of the initial projects we carried out together, was a joint consultation with an extensive number of young people in the Sydenham and Bower area of Bridgwater. Sydenham ranks high on the Indices of Deprivation and many families have been trapped in third generation un-employment impacts.

We worked with the Roller Coaster Youth Club, managed by a local organisation called 'Youth Unlimited'. With the support of the highly qualified youth workers, we were able to carry out a consultation with young people attending the club, on their interest in nature, green spaces and associated activities. Of the 60 young people who took part, 58 confirmed their interest in nature and nature activities.

Kristen was able to utilise the feedback into the early stages of the Heritage Lottery application and as useful information for the Nature and Wellbeing project.

Knightstone was able to support the youth club to explore further their expressions of interest and with Kristen's guidance through the project, we were able to support a group of 17 young leaders to experience a day at 'Wildside' outdoor nature and education centre. This experience of learning about woodland management enabled two young teenagers, to establish their interest in land-based skills and both have pursued this into a career. The young leaders were so inspired by their day out, that they worked together with the rest of the club, to make a major decision.

They turned their Friday night youth club into a Nature and Conservation club from then on. They also helped with the junior club and they have taken a similar direction. Both groups keep weekly scrap books on their learning about nature. Knightstone funded some sessions with a former Ranger and qualified youth worker and both groups have made bat boxes, bird boxes and hedgehog houses. Their pride in their local environments has grown over the last three years and their confidence has visibly increased.

In 2018, the young leaders organised a free family nature day for the community. It was completely organised and managed by the young people and attracted an attendance of 160 families. This was an incredible achievement and raised aspiration and confidence in the young people. In the same year 18 out of 20 of the young leaders achieved University places and this is a major turning point for a community so used to unemployment and lack of opportunities to break out of the poverty trap.

The health and wellbeing of these young people and their leadership of the junior group is of immensely high value. To date there is no known drug misuse in this group and in 2019 the police intelligence reflected a lower crime rate amongst young people. In an area challenged by County Lines activity, this is a major outcome and potential savings for health and social care overall.

The club has gone from strength to strength and shows no abatement in their interest and willingness to learn and take local action for the environment and nature in the area. They have carried out several litter picks instigated by themselves and are reflecting a responsible role model for people of all ages in the community.

Knightsone has since become a merged housing association called LiveWest and houses over 35,000 people from Isles of Scilly right through to South Gloucester and Dorset. It means that if a model works well in one area, it can be shared, and knowledge exchanged with other areas.

It has been important to reflect to the young people that they have much to be proud of in all that they have achieved and their interest in nature and conservation has gone from strength to strength.

Much of this positive development has been instigated by working with Kristen and the Nature and Wellbeing Project from the onset.

LiveWest has carried out extensive consultation in other areas and interest and willingness to support nature, is very high as a priority for people of all ages and especially families.

The wellbeing impacts have been proven by the young people in the case study and its wider reaching impacts on family members and the community, is clear in the wide- ranging positive outcomes reflected in the report.

We are currently exploring, as collaborative partners, connections to international measures in Quality of Life, Nature and Wellbeing impacts and Wildlife and Wildlife Welfare, when near human habitation. The Nature and Wellbeing project has helped to provide a baseline for this exploration. This could lead onto vital intelligence on the numerous benefits of nature and nature related activities on people of all ages and individual needs. These outcomes also relate to Goal 3 in Health and Wellbeing, of the United Nations 17 Sustainable Goals. This is an increasingly important global measure to include in localised projects with bigger picture outcomes.

LiveWest has an extensive plan for new developments and new communities and support for existing communities. As a social landlord, LiveWest will always be housing some of the most vulnerable and socio-economically challenged in society. It is imperative to work in collaborative partnerships, where we can pool resources and reach out to those harder to reach groups and communities. We have extensive proof that interventions such as those provided by the nature and wellbeing project, are great social and nature capital generators and of immense benefit to residents, providers and our precious and shrinking natural environment, alike.

**Written by Sally Hill -
Community Connector, LiveWest**

Appendix C

Folly Farmyard

What can I say about this place, to help you understand?

It's not what you expect to see, in today's farming land.

Orchids, flower meadows, birds all around and number of dormice that truly astound.

Orchards, a pond, cows and a deer, views of the Blackdown's and hearts full of cheer.

I love to go ditching, not a lot I know, but I'm doing my bit to 'Slow the Flow'.

Surrounded by hedges bursting with life, a place to forget all you trouble and strife.

We stop for lunch and Jonathan makes tea
We all chat and we laugh and are happy to be.

In a place full of beauty and wonder and more, with no chemicals, it's returned to how it was before.

We head home, tired from all the fresh air
The walking, the work and the wind in our hair.

But above all else, we feel alive and for this we give Jonathan a big high five.

Written by Joan about her visits to Folly Farmyard

Late January at Hodder's Coombe

The fallen tree, covered in moss, grassy green, cold and soft.

Fern is growing, a sign of spring, the birds sing a sweet tune.

The stream drifts away, the sound of trickling water.

Claggy brown, muddy shoes, through the bright green bushes and the steep path.

Feeling sleepy, relaxed and warm.

Written by Green Days Day Care Conservation Group

Does Happiness Grow on Trees Entries

'Trees'

Wonderful as it might seem, life is but a dream – trees so tall and majestic, letting through their wonderful light. To lift you on a sunny day – to wipe your tears in the rain, to let you know, that you too can stand tall and really know their strength has helped you grow, from their love they sent to those below. 85 years young - and still smiling - standing beneath the trees.”

Written by Diana



Photo taken by Greendays 'Reading the Landscape' Group





Top photo: Contemplating Youth, Dawn Mahoney's entry to competition

Bottom photo 'Happy' Andrea Bonetti's entry to the competition

'Friends, Fresh Air & Freedom'

Therapy on our doorstep - A photograph taken a Quantock Hills Volunteer Dawn Mahoney, while out walking on the hill (with the permission of the young people featured). She captured this group of young people enjoying the view at sunset on a spring evening.

'Happy'

Artist Andrea Bonetti entered these 5-canvas pastel and charcoal drawings. She told us that she feels happy when she spends time in nature, and that she likes to draw the natural things that she sees on her walks around the Mendip Hills.

H is for Hawthorne sketched by Blagdon Lake;

A is for Apple Blossom from the crab apple trees drawn up on Burrington Ham;

P is for Primroses sketched in Sandford Wood;

P is also for the Parasol Mushrooms found in abundance on Burrington Ham in the autumn;

Y is for Yellow Archangel or dead nettle sketched in East Harptree Woods.

Quantock Hills Blog

Hi, I have been volunteering with the AONB for about 8 or so months now and I have very honestly not looked back since. To give you a bit of background as to how I got to be writing this today I thought I would start from the very beginning - I promise I won't take too long on this but I thought it was important to share with you how the impact nature has been on my wellbeing and how it has given me a new lease of life and understanding of the world around us as well as feeling a sense of giving something back to community. I hope through my journey it will help and inspire others who are either going through their own battles or for anyone who has a feeling they want to get out there but don't know how or why.

I was lucky growing up to be exposed to the natural world and wildlife one way or another, but since my battle with a mental health illness a lot of my identity had got lost and I didn't have the confidence or space to develop what I liked and what made me tick. It was not until during treatment when I signed up to a programme lead by members of the Community Mental Health Team at Somerset Partnership that something began to click. It was the first group to go to Hunstile Farm, which is where I first met Kristen our Nature and Wellbeing Officer who helped to co-ordinate and set up the project.



It was after this 10 week programme that I was put in touch with Quantock Volunteer Group lead by Kristen that goes up to the Quantocks once a month helping our ranger with a range of conservation-type tasks around Cothelstone. It was here my desire to learn more was ignited and I was keen to take part in more. So my love for all things nature and community engagement began!

Since taking part in the Monthly Group I have also helped to support a range of family events and community engagement activities over the summer to include family activity days to Otterhead Lakes and Castle Neroche both in the Blackdowns, as well as taking part in the Halcon trail in Taunton, organised by Zing Somerset.

Today I feel I have gone full circle and it has been a huge privilege to be supporting the Hunstile Farm Project which began again this morning and will run as a 10 week programme.

After a 20 minute drive by bus to the farm we went from an urban vista to beautiful scenery of farmland and hills, where we were introduced to the head gardener John. The views alone just lighten your load and you immediately feel free! Our first task which we took no time getting stuck in to was harvesting the tomatoes in the polytunnel ready to be made in to chutney (the green tomatoes are perfect for this) and sauces, relish and the like.

By this point it was amazing to see the group relax and flourish, feeling comfortable to chat a bit and share stories. It was great to find out a bit more about the people who I hope will benefit the most through this programme and to be able to participate in what I hope to be a positive experience for them to learn a bit about themselves, encouragement to come as they are, and gain a sense of freedom from trials and tribulations at home. After a short tea and biscuit break it was then on to tackling the herb garden which we did with much gusto – pruning herbs like lemon balm, lavender and oregano, and pulling up weeds and grasses to make way for next year's crop.

It was a testament to how well when we realised it was time for us to go and was met with a “WHAT, already!?”

A couple of interesting things we learnt today Alkonet is a member of the borage family; its roots are used as a natural red dye. Calendula - it is a great aphid/black fly deterrent for your green beans or any other veg that gets hit by these pesky bugs in your garden. Also egg shells and cinder are equally good for deterring slugs!

It has been an absolute joy to work with such enthusiastic people and I look forward to seeing how the group evolves and seeing what happens next.



