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# Roots to Wellbeing

The role of Woodland Social Enterprises  
for Nature, Health and Wellbeing

## A handbook

Prepared by Natural Academy  
for **Making Local Woods Work**



## About the author

# Michéal Connors

BSc, PGCE, Adv. Dip. Couns. and Psych., Dip. Supervision, Mountain Leader

Michéal Connors has a BSc in Applied Economics, is a qualified psychotherapist, supervisor, further education lecturer, mountain leader and Wild Mind practitioner. He has innovated, designed and delivered many education and health services in his 25 years in the field of education, health and wellbeing.

As a senior manager at executive and board level, he has managed a large team delivering holistic and therapeutic services across the UK. He has been interim CEO and Director of Innovation in a national charity as well as working with a range of charities and social enterprises focussing on innovating services in nature, health and wellbeing.

He is co-founder of Natural Academy which is the first UK accredited training organisation solely focussed on eco-psychology and nature-based practice. Natural Academy is also

involved in establishing networks for nature-based practitioners and exploring standards needed for professional practise in emerging approaches. Alongside Avon Wildlife Trust he has developed the Wellbeing With Nature approach which is an evidenced, evaluated and scalable approach that supports people's health and wellbeing and the natural world.

He is co-author of the Natural Self which explores an eco-psychological model of working with people in nature.

This document has been designed for Woodland Social Enterprises to find useful information, advice and resources to help them develop and/or grow wellbeing in woodland services. Thus, bringing more people into connection with woodlands for their benefit and to encourage care for the natural world around them.

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# 1 Introduction

## I. Making Local Woods Work

*Making Local Woods Work* (MLWW) is a pilot project funded by the National Lottery through the Big Lottery Fund, which helps woodland social enterprises (WSEs) to develop and grow, through delivering targeted support and consultancy, and stimulating networking and peer learning in its client enterprises.

An element of the programme is discretionary, responding to issues and aspirations directly raised by WSEs. This handbook is a direct response to WSEs requesting support in starting and/or developing nature, health and wellbeing projects or services in woodlands.

## II. Intentions of the document

This document is designed to be a useful way of considering some of the key questions that emerge when developing or growing woodland-based health and wellbeing projects or services. It is intended to offer information, advice and tools that can be used by a WSE and other organisations to help establish, sustain or develop services or projects that bring people into connection with nature for their health and wellbeing. There are also links to further information, research papers, toolkits, networks and professional development opportunities at the end of the document.



## 2 Nature, Health and Wellbeing (NHW)

### I. What is NHW?

The World Health Organisation described health and wellbeing as a “state of complete, physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease.”<sup>1</sup> An even more holistic view incorporates the natural world around us, “From birth to death, life enmeshes individuals within a dynamic culture consisting of the natural environment (light, heat, air, land, water, minerals, flora, fauna), the human-made environment (material objects, buildings, roads, machinery, appliances, technology), social arrangements (families, social networks, associations, institutions, economies), and human consciousness (knowledge, beliefs, understanding, skills, traditions). Wellbeing depends on all the factors that interact within this culture and can be seen as a state of health or sufficiency in all aspects of life.”<sup>2</sup> Amongst the many ways the natural world benefits human life, health and wellbeing can be considered the final and primary ecosystem service.<sup>3</sup>

From the broadest perspective all our personal, social and economic wellbeing is dependent on the natural world. From economic resources, clean air and water through to shared community green and blues spaces alongside support for our personal health and wellbeing, the natural world around us is vital for us to live well and flourish.

Within this publication, we explore the wider field of (NHW) but focus specifically on the intertwining of woodlands and health and wellbeing. Woodlands, as part of a larger eco-system service, impact on our health and wellbeing through the delivery of many of life’s essential services, for example they

can; provide fuel, support livelihoods, create community cohesion, hold important aspects of our heritage and host diverse ecosystems. Crucially, they impact on the air we breathe and the water that we need.<sup>4</sup> Alongside these eco-system services we are now able to measure and evidence the unique benefits woodlands bring to our physical health, and our overall wellbeing<sup>5</sup> these will be discussed in further detail in section 5.

### II. Historical context of NHW

There is a long history of going into nature for our health and wellbeing; from 2000 years ago in Taoist China through to 17th century European gardening books. There are also ancient traditions of indigenous peoples accessing natural environments for personal, cultural and spiritual reasons. In the last 150 years doctors and medical professionals have been recommending nature interventions for restorative health and wellbeing benefits for all people, as well as more specifically for returning soldiers and those suffering from physical and mental illness.<sup>6</sup>

### III. The landscape today

The national appetite for finding new models of support for people and for nature is starting to converge. The 2019 NHS 10-year plan states their commitment to “commission, partner with and champion local charities, social enterprises and community interest companies providing services and support to vulnerable and at-risk groups”.<sup>7</sup> This desire for community-based approaches converges with the Department of Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) 25-year environment

plan which sets out a full chapter on nature, health and wellbeing with ambitious targets for implementation.<sup>8</sup>

The challenges to provide prevention and treatment within our health system remain huge, these include:

- An ageing population
- Health inequalities
- The growth of people living with long-term conditions
- The growth of people needing support for physical and mental health issues
- Changing professional and public expectations<sup>9,10</sup>

Alongside this we have a crisis in biodiversity and environmental degradation as set out in the RSPB 'State of Nature' report – the UK is ranked 189 out of 218 on the biodiversity intactness, where 218 is the lowest country with least biodiversity intactness.<sup>11</sup>

Finding new models for healthcare and conservation is necessary to meet these challenges. Exploring ways to integrate individual and community nature connection

can be a way forward as it has been shown to encourage both pro-environmental attitudes and positive health and wellbeing outcome.<sup>12,13</sup> Through this integration it might be possible to jointly address aspects of the human and environmental health crises and bring about the much sought after 'Double Dividend' of creating more healthy people and more health for our environment.<sup>13,14</sup> Over the last 20 years a new sector has emerged which brings together these thoughts and actions; this is the NHW sector.

#### IV. The NHW sector and different contexts for access to nature

As stated above it is within the dual crisis in both human and environmental health that the NHW sector has emerged.

Diagram 1 presents the different contexts through which people can access nature for their health and wellbeing. These are:

- Nature as part of everyday healthy living
- Nature-based health promotion activities
- Green Care services



Source adapted by Natural Academy from Haubehofer, Bragg *et al.*<sup>15,16</sup>

There is, of course, significant overlap between these areas at times, however this discernment can allow more focus for the development of nature-based activities, health and wellbeing interventions and the design of events, projects, services and processes that meet a defined target audience and have clear relevant health-related outcomes.

#### **a) NHW as part of everyday healthy living**

The first context highlights the many benefits of nature connection in everyday life, where people choose to engage and connect to nature as part of their general lifestyle, leisure or work activities, and/or as a part of healthy living. One of the outcomes from this for the natural environment can be a greater valuing of green, blue and wilder spaces that are accessed regularly. An area that needs attention is inequality of access due to social, cultural or economic barriers and addressing these is an important task for the sector.<sup>17</sup>

#### **b) NHW as part of nature-based health promotion activities**

The second context highlights events and projects that conservation organisations, social enterprises, public health initiatives and other groups facilitate to encourage people to improve their health and wellbeing through connection to nature. The participants are from the general public and may or may not have any specific need, they will normally self-refer but may be encouraged to come along through the recommendation of professionals in health or social care. Often these are community/social events or projects.

#### **c) NHW delivering Green Care services**

The final context is Green Care which defines projects or services that are provided for people with specific needs and seeking specific health-related outcomes. These are aimed at specific health and social care needs, sometimes the phrase 'Ecotherapy' is used to describe Green Care services. The use of the

word 'therapy' can infer that the facilitation of these interventions requires some professional training in an eco-therapeutic approach.

The National Framework for NHS continuing Healthcare defines health and social care needs as<sup>18</sup>:

***“A (health) need is one related to the treatment, control or prevention of a disease, illness, injury or disability, and the care or aftercare of a person with these needs (whether or not the tasks involved have to be carried out by a health professional).”***

***“A social care need is one that is focused on providing assistance with activities of daily living, maintaining independence, social interaction, enabling the individual to play a fuller part in society, protecting them in vulnerable situations, helping them to manage complex relationships.”***

Thus, Green Care includes, amongst many others, working with groups with long-term conditions, specific physical illnesses, individuals and groups with complex or common mental health issues, people with social issues and people in the justice system. These services may be part of social prescribing, community health, health and social care programmes, primary care or hospital-based services.



# 3 Woodland Social Enterprise in the health and wellbeing sector

**From the most recent report by Social Enterprise UK, “The social enterprise sector has expanded significantly in the past years adding £24 billion to the economy and employing nearly a million people.”<sup>19</sup>**

These businesses are seeking to make profits, which distinguishes them from charities and voluntary organisations. These profits are then put back into the community to increase social, educational, environmental, health and wellbeing outcomes.

## 1. What is Woodland Social Enterprise?

WSEs could have a significant part to play in helping to design, deliver and scale health and wellbeing projects and services, bringing positive changes to individual participants, local communities and the woodland ecology. The focused management and development of woodlands alongside projects and services that actively facilitate nature connection for health and wellbeing can provide a cost effective and integrated way forward.

This description below sets out Making Local Woods Work’s understanding of how WSEs play a significant role for communities with economic, social and wellbeing benefits. It also points to the benefits woodlands receive through conservation activities associated with WSEs.

“Woodlands can provide a wonderful resource for many forms of social enterprise. Woodlands may be places that are known, loved and shared by groups or communities, and thereby

serve as venues for the delivery of outdoor social activities. When managed for production they can provide a sustainable stream of timber, firewood, food and other products, which can be traded through the social enterprise. And as places where production, conservation and meaningful place-making combine, they are a focus and a model for sustainable local economies.

There are many ways in which woodland can support social enterprise, by providing sustainable natural resources, personal wellbeing and a focus for community cohesion. Much of this can form the basis of enterprise activity and when profits are put to use for public and community benefit they can provide funding to manage and conserve woodland – to make it pay for itself and to deliver self-sufficient services. In this way a woodland social enterprise could help save a much-loved piece of local ground, provide a relaxing and stimulating environment for learning, recovery, rehabilitation and recreation, finance support services for vulnerable people, or create employment through the sale of timber.”<sup>20</sup>

Woodland social enterprises are therefore a positive way forward in helping support local communities and individuals to access the many health and wellbeing benefits of nature connection, which are evidenced below.

## 4 The impact of woodland-based NHW

**There is good evidence of a multitude of benefits for individual mental and physical health and wellbeing, for social inclusion and community development through connection to natural environments.**<sup>21,2,22</sup>

The evidence that relates to natural environments in general applies to being in woodlands but there is also compelling and developing evidence that woodlands offer specific, multiple and measurable health and wellbeing,<sup>5</sup> social inclusion<sup>21</sup> and nature ‘connectedness’ benefits<sup>13</sup> as well as specific economic outputs.<sup>31,32</sup>

### 1. Mental and physical health and wellbeing

Woodlands provide an ideal location for social and practical activities. Whether through managing the woodland itself or crafting products from woodland materials, woodlands provide an accessible and diverse range of activities to suit all audiences and we will be exploring some of these in section 6.

Natural England’s recent review<sup>22</sup> demonstrates that nature connection enhances personal wellbeing and quality of life, they found good evidence of stress reduction, a greater sense of happiness, a restoration of sense of self, improved mood, greater meaning and purpose, and other improvements in quality of life and mental wellbeing, further studies have also shown a range of benefits and wellbeing results.<sup>2,13,21,22</sup> In addition to this, the recent analysis carried out by Plymouth University for DEFRA’s 25-year Environment Plan<sup>21</sup> makes strong statements about the many benefits for people’s mental health and wellbeing including:

- Spending time in the natural environment – as a resident or a visitor – improves our mental health and feelings of wellbeing.
- It can reduce stress, fatigue, anxiety and depression.

Research clearly shows that time in woodland environments improves our sense of relaxation and our psychological and emotional wellbeing. This is known to enhance the parasympathetic nervous system (a division of the autonomic nervous system, which is turned on when we relax) and therefore reduce levels of the stress hormone cortisol (studies have clearly measured this reduction.<sup>5</sup> With this reduction of stress and cortisol there is an improvement in the immune system function, potentially helping us to live better with disease and to keep well.<sup>21,23</sup> There can be other benefits such as improved digestion, reduction in hyper tension, healthy microbiome development and reduction of inflammatory-based diseases such as asthma.<sup>21</sup> One of the most prolific streams of research in this area is within Shinrin Yoku or Forest Bathing, this is structured or facilitated, relaxed and mindful time in woodland settings.<sup>5,23</sup>

Woodland and trees ‘afford’ many types of health and wellbeing promoting activities. They provide a context for the development of children’s fine and gross motor skills, through climbing trees and playing on rough terrain, as well as also playing an important part in

direct experiences in nature during childhood. Exposure at a young age has been shown to benefit our later ability to connect and support nature.<sup>24</sup>

There is also developing evidence around the air in forests containing beneficial substances that can improve or support our health. There is emerging evidence that the bacteria, plant-derived essential oils (*phytoncides*) and negatively-charged ions that are within woodland settings have a positive impact on our gut health and immune system.<sup>21,23</sup>

Interestingly, it is also the physicality of a woodland that can be beneficial. Woodlands have the ability to disconnect people from

the everyday. Even a relatively small wooded space in a dense urban area, can achieve a marked separation from its surrounding area. The combination of acoustic and visual barrier provided by trees enables a high carrying capacity. The same relatively small woodland can accommodate more people and achieve more health outcomes than can a more open landscape.<sup>25</sup>

Below is an example from MLWW partner site Achieving Results in Communities Community Interest Company (ARC CIC) which has developed a 'Sustainable Urban Woodland' site that now accommodates many activities for the local and wider community.

## A. Case study

### ARC CIC

Directors of ARC CIC met with Trilogy Developments in 2011 to get involved in the development of the 'Green Space' at the back of the Ford Foundry site on Princes Drive in Leamington Spa, Warwickshire.

An important part of ARC CIC's work has been extensive community engagement and consultation to encourage ownership and use of the 'Sustainable Urban Woodland' by the community.

The two main points that came from the community consultation were to use the space to promote wildlife and environmental education which we have incorporated into the aims and vision of Foundry Wood.

Volunteers started work on site in March 2012 – with some planting and weed clearing and projects carried on throughout the year. We have been



making the site accessible by creating paths, building a compost toilet, outdoor classroom and a pond. Early in 2013 a 'Friends of Foundry Wood' group was established with a Steering Group to look after the site in the long term. In June 2013, the site was officially opened.

In 2014, the Friends of Foundry Wood became a registered charity and a group of trustees now maintain the woodland on behalf of the community.

The land has now been leased to us by the developer on a peppercorn rent for 99 years.<sup>26</sup>

## II. Social cohesion and inclusion

Forest Research group<sup>28</sup> have also been focussing on social inclusion, access and the wellbeing benefits of woodland spaces. They discuss evidence that indicates the importance of trees and woodlands to people from different social groups, and how community and health interventions can encourage people to visit woodlands and possibly get involved in new activities, and therefore access the health and wellbeing benefits.<sup>27</sup>

Social Forestry is a movement that specifically seeks to build communities within woodland settings, exploring ways that create positive social, economic and wellbeing outcomes for the local area.<sup>28</sup> Connecting to natural spaces, and their inherent biodiversity, can play an important part in developing and/or re-developing a strong sense of belonging

and place.<sup>29</sup> There is also evidence that green spaces can reduce loneliness and be a place for social cohesion and community development.<sup>21</sup>

***“Since coming here I’ve gained a lot of confidence and learned coping mechanisms of how to deal with my illness, like socialising, being creative, meeting up with friends”***

### Participant

It is also clear that forests and woodlands hold an historic and current value for people. Trees and woods are culturally important. The sheer longevity of trees means that individual trees can often carry an emotional connection for people and connect people with place and heritage.



Neroche Woodlanders / C. Briggs



### III. Connectedness to nature and pro-environmental behaviours

Reciprocal recovery and mutual health and wellbeing between people and their environment can be found in the evidence around nature connectedness. Connection to nature is an individual's subjective sense of their relationship with the natural world, often experienced through the lens of senses, feelings, meaning, reflections, beauty, inspiration etc. There is emerging evidence that shows the development of connectedness is associated to certain health and wellbeing outcomes, and pro-environmental behaviours. Meaningful, positive experiences in nature and developing a connection to place can therefore, in turn, lead to deepening care for our environment and the biodiversity around us.<sup>13,29,30</sup>

***“I feel like I have found my spiritual home. I love coming up here. I honestly don’t know what I would do without it.”***

Participant

### IV. Economic benefits

Natural England estimate that £2.1 billion could be saved every year if everyone in England had equally good perceived and/or actual access to green space.<sup>45</sup> This figure is derived from research which showed that where people have good access to green space, they are 24% more likely to be physically active. Moreover, they found that the annual physically active visits to the natural environment were associated with an estimated 109,164 Quality Adjusted Life Years (QALYs), with an annual value of approximately £2.18 billion. If only 1% of the sedentary population adopted a healthier pattern of activity, 1,063 lives and £1.44 billion would be saved each year.<sup>21</sup> Another study, by NEF



Consulting,<sup>31</sup> estimates the value of the Eco Minds programme (nature-based health interventions for mental health); they found that for five Eco Minds participants savings of £35,413 in one year were created, this was an average of £7,082 per person. In addition to this through the MLWW programme it has been identified that WSEs have the potential to save local authorities money through the provision of services that help alleviate problems, improve mental and physical wellbeing, provide hyper-local and flexible jobs and upskill individuals to support them back in to employment.<sup>32</sup> Nature, health and wellbeing services run by WSEs not only save money but drive income in to local economies.

## B. Case study

### Neroche Woodlanders

#### OVERVIEW

Neroche Woodlanders is a social enterprise based in 100 acres of the public forest estate of the Blackdown Hills in Somerset. Our aim is to “work with nature to fire spirit, kindle community and foster wellbeing”. The wellbeing programmes are one element of what we do. They support personal wellbeing, mental health, community cohesion and life transitions through rites of passage. We work with socially excluded and disadvantaged adults, young people and families in the local area, also run open programmes for people from further afield. We are supported by a large number of local volunteers.

#### GETTING STARTED

The pilot ‘Families in the Forest’ project was the springboard to develop a picture of need, services and contacts, and focused on connecting directly with local families in need by running a ‘pop-up forest school’ outside a local supermarket. From this, many opportunities grew and helped us establish the now very successful ‘Wild Learning’ programme for adults and families. Our first step was to describe our activity as Forest School for adults, as people knew what that meant, and they trusted the ‘brand’.

#### APPROACH

We provide an open, rolling programme of Wild Learning days, which operate mostly in term-time on one or two days per week. Days are a mix of exploration walks, mindfulness, crafts, conservation, cooking and time together in a circle. We

use the John Muir Award as a framework and something for people to aim for. We have referrals from mental health services, work closely with a local homeless charity and other local community organisations. Carrying out real woodland management activity and build projects has been integral to our approach, as it creates meaning and substance. Our team are also trained in bushcraft, conservation, ecology, ecotherapy, adult training and counselling. Outcomes include: improved confidence, feeling able to express oneself, not being judged, feeling calmer, more peaceful, learning new skill, finding work, getting off drugs and becoming more settled – and much more.

#### CHALLENGES

Getting people to the woods, helping them find us for the first time, and keeping finance working in difficult times!

#### LAND AND WOODLAND RESOURCE

Neroche Woodlanders are the first lease-holding social enterprise on public forest land in England doing this kind of work and are keen to share the model with others.

#### INCOME GENERATION

Wild Learning is financed through a mix of contracts with adult learning, commissioned by local providers, small grants and sometimes larger grants. We also generate income through charcoal sales, team days for local organisations, celebratory events and fundraising. As a community benefit society our members have shares, which is another way to raise funds and engage people.<sup>33</sup>

# 5 Application in WSEs

**Having explored how woodlands support our health and wellbeing, this document will now focus on the opportunities on offer for WSEs to create or enhance NHW services or projects.**

## 1. Different contexts and participants in woodlands

We will now look at Diagram 2, on the contexts of the Nature, Health and Wellbeing sector, and see how it applies to a woodland setting and the development of social enterprises.

Deciding on which context a services or project will be located in is vital to the service/project's design and delivery. It may be that they occur in all three areas or are located in only one or two.







#### a) Woodland as part of everyday living

Aimed at the general public, this aspect of health and wellbeing provided by woodlands might include one, or a combination, of these examples (there are many more): work-related activities, timber production, wood fuel, bushcraft, educational uses and recreational activities. The WSE would allow, or facilitate, access to the woodland for these endeavours. Engaging with the local community in this way can be an important part of the development of the WSE by showing its value as a local asset. See cases study A above.

#### b) Woodland-based health promotion

These are woodland-based activities, sometimes in partnership with other organisation, that are promoting positive health behaviours like; activity, social inclusion, health promotion, healthy lifestyles or ill-health prevention.

These sessions are aimed at the general population, or specific groups within the community, and not part of recovery, health interventions or care around a specific need.

The sessions are generally focused around a nature-based activity such as a green gym, walks, conservation, wild food collection, healthy eating exploration, woodland community gatherings or green building development.

#### c) Woodland Green Care

These are woodland-based projects and services for people with defined health and/or social care needs (see below). This will be a facilitated programme incorporating both nature-based activities and health and wellbeing interventions. There is a requirement for well trained and supported staff (see section (vii)( 'Professional and Reflective Practitioners')). In section 3(iv) above there is a definition of defined need in health and in social care. From this we can then define the participants that might access woodland-based Green Care services. It will include people living with and beyond mental or physical illness and those in need of social support for purposes of inclusion, recovery and occupation/employment.



## C. Case study

### EcoWild

EcoWild aims to engage people with the natural environment through woodland-based activities including tool & craftwork, natural art, fire making and cooking, wildlife exploration, shelter making, imaginative play and much more. Since early 2013, we have been taking groups of children and adults out in an inspiring natural environment and giving them the chance to find their own special connection that will stimulate curiosity, encourage wellbeing, relieve tension, bring a sense of peace and connectedness. We have been commissioned by the local social prescribing college to deliver woodland mindfulness sessions for the wellbeing of people.

Over a course of our woodland mindfulness sessions participants get a chance to use natural materials and gain skills in activities such as fire lighting with natural materials, hazel weaving whittling a spiral or cooking

fire bread. We combine mindfulness exercises with these hands-on experiences.

In these fast-paced modern times, it is easy to become disconnected and lose touch with our inner sense of feeling balanced and well in our everyday lives. In woodland mindfulness we invite people to learn the basic skills of mindfulness combined with being present in the “natural” world.

Mindfulness practice outdoors, surrounded by trees, provides a nurturing and creative space to explore awareness of sounds, sights, scents, textures and tastes of the elements abundant in nature, bringing us back to the sense of connection.

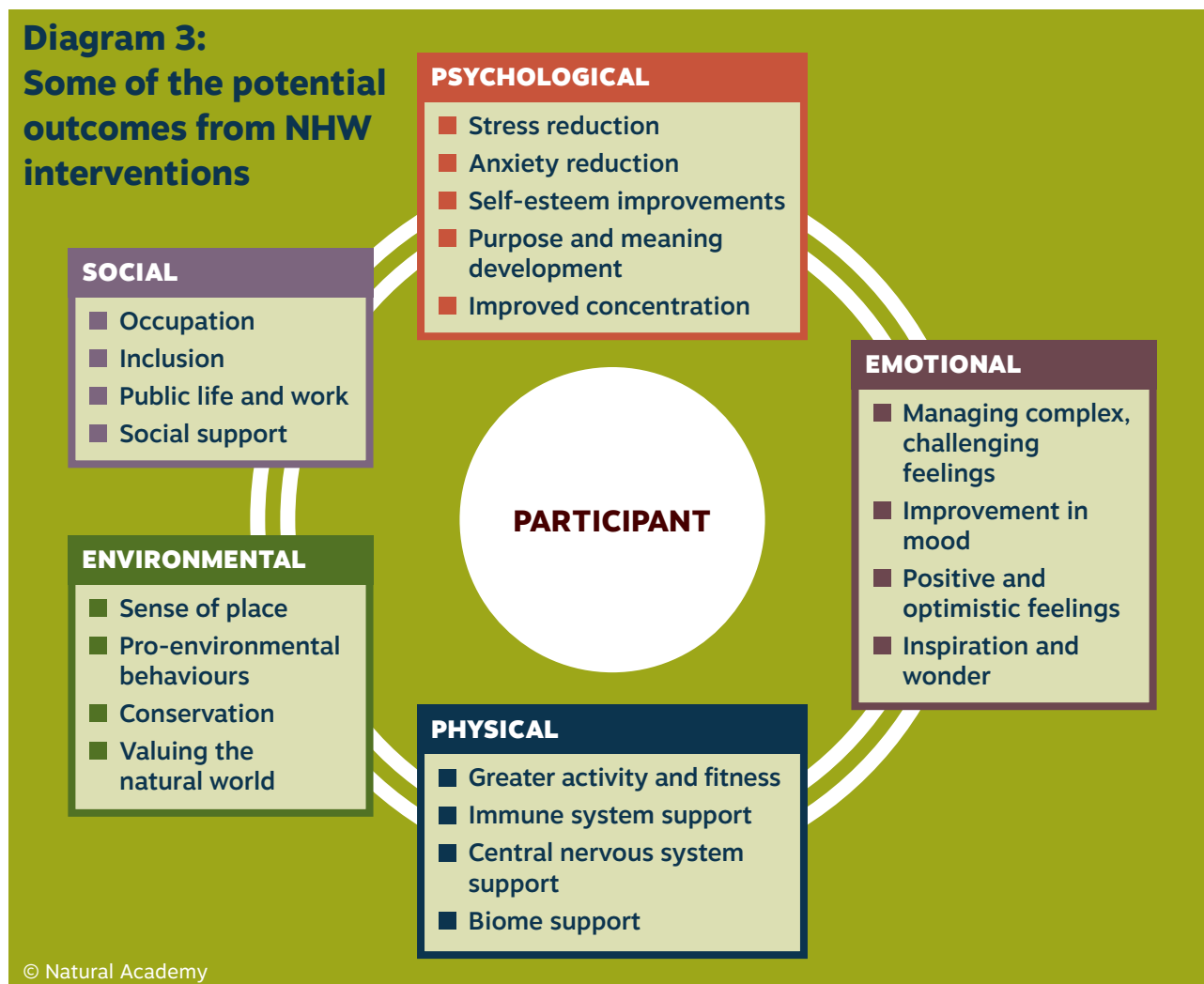
In addition to woodland mindfulness we run many other courses and events in the woods that support people’s relationship with the natural world. These include tai chi, willow weaving, wildlife walks, wood carving, wool craft, wild drumming and seasonal celebrations.<sup>34</sup>

## II. Outcomes

Deciding the main outcomes of the service or project, and how to measure and evaluate these, requires an investment of time, money and energy. However, this can prove to be a very good use of resources as you can use your findings to help access further funding or communicate your impact. A range of holistic outcomes that can be achieved in nature, health and wellbeing are set out in Diagram 3. It may be that the service or project focusses on one or a smaller combination of these outcomes, or it may seek to affect and measure a broad range. The evidence discussed in section 5 –shows how a service or project, professionally managed and facilitated, can have a holistic impact on both people's and nature's health and wellbeing.

## III. Nature-based interventions for health and wellbeing

In order to achieve these outcomes standard nature-based activities need to be combined with specific interventions. These interventions can be defined as “specifically designed for health maintenance, promotion and provision of care.”<sup>15</sup> Some of the services and projects listed in (iii) below show a way that this integration of activities and interventions can occur. For example, a conservation programme about managing a woodland, can become a service for NHW if there is facilitation of the group to experience one or more of the interventions listed below alongside the conservation activity. For example, this might include a grounding experience, sharing, some solo time in nature,



some nature-based arts. (A nature-based activity is any experience, skill development or learning in the natural environment. This could include accessing the woods for leisure or work; conservation programmes, Skills development, such as camp making, fire making, den building, making objects and other crafts: Learning about nature, wildlife and other learning experiences. A nature-based intervention for health and wellbeing is where the focus is on one, all or a combination of the outcomes stated above and will be integrated with a particular nature-based activity.)

These interventions can be very broad and wide-ranging, and each facilitator will have an approach to the application and delivery of these interventions. It is important that the facilitator is trained, competent and

aware of desired outcomes and potential contra indications when applying health and wellbeing interventions. It is also recommended that facilitators self-reflect on their own, or team, competency limits in order to ensure the health and safety of themselves and their participants. Knowledge of the participants' needs, limits and challenges is vital to ensure the interventions are appropriate, safe and effective.

Here is a short overview of a list of interventions compiled by Natural Academy. This table is not exhaustive but gives an overview of some key themes, specific interventions and methods that can be employed within a NHW service or project and how interventions can be incorporated into nature-based activities and experiences.

**Diagram 4**

INTERVENTION	NATURE-BASED ACTIVITIES AND EXPERIENCES			
<b>Nature-based mindfulness</b>	Grounding	Sense connection	Relaxation focus	Clarity and insight focus
<b>Reflective space in nature</b>	Solo time from minutes to days	Listening to nature		Sit spot for ongoing relationship to place
<b>Environmental arts</b>	Sculpture	Nature-based prose and poetry		Collage
<b>Natural symbols and reflections</b>	Nature objects	Plants and animals	Place, ecology and eco-system	Ecological wisdom
<b>Gratitude and reciprocity for, and with, the natural world</b>	Valuing and appreciation		Giving back to, and supporting, the natural world	
<b>Bushcraft, outdoor skills and making</b>	Bushcraft	Natural craft making		Outdoor skills
<b>Nature-based games and play</b>	Structured forms for games		Free play, free time	
<b>Sharing and listening in natural spaces</b>	Check in and check out	Group time in circles sharing		1:1 time to share and listen and be listened to

## Explanation of diagram 4

INTERVENTION	BRIEF OUTLINE
<b>Nature-based mindfulness</b>	Making time in natural spaces for mindful connection and presence.
<b>Reflective space in nature</b>	Time reflecting in natural environments, perhaps in a regular space, considering a question and experiencing nature and the natural world around us.
<b>Environmental arts</b>	Arts, such as sculpture, mandala, poetry, story, collage that emerge from experiences in nature and incorporate natural materials or images.
<b>Natural symbols and reflections</b>	Objects, plants, trees, animals and/or spaces in nature that reflect or symbolise something to us that can improve our wellbeing
<b>Gratitude and reciprocity for, and with, the natural world</b>	<p>Finding time to experience gratitude/thankfulness for what nature offers us (in our own nature and nature around us).</p> <p>Reciprocal action is to support or enhance the natural world, recognising our health and wellbeing and the rest of nature's health and wellbeing are intricately connected.</p>
<b>Bushcraft, outdoor skills and making</b>	<p>Employing various bushcraft techniques to explore the natural world and how it serves our health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Outdoor skills, such as natural navigation, weather reading, orientation.</p> <p>Making objects with natural materials to bring us into a closer connection to the sources of the material.</p> <p>Fire lighting and fire tending for care, warmth and cooking.</p>
<b>Nature-based games and play</b>	Games that explore natural themes or plants and animals. Nature play for awakening curiosity and wonder.
<b>Sharing and listening in natural spaces</b>	<p>Arriving and checking in is an important way of landing (grounding) and checking out a way of offering reflections and integrating what is being taken away.</p> <p>Having time to reflect in circles, maybe around a fire, is a way of helping people connect to each other and to the world around them.</p> <p>The skills needed to listen to each other and to the world need to be developed by the facilitator and encouraged in the participants.</p>

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## IV. Woodland-based NHW services or projects

There are a multitude of ways that services or projects can benefit people's health and wellbeing. Diagram 5 sets out a range of possible services or projects, in woodland settings in three columns representing the different contexts above. As can be seen in the diagram there are overlaps between the contexts and each service or project can be applied in at least two.

Which of these the WSE will focus on will depend on experience, knowledge, the space, the environment, the needs of the participants and the team assembled to deliver these.

The Five Ways to Wellbeing are often used as a framework to define and deliver activities and interventions that encourage wellbeing.<sup>35</sup>

**Diagram 5**

EVERY DAY LIFE	HEALTH PROMOTION	GREEN CARE
<b>Woodlands as beautiful local space</b>	<b>Designated woodland area for health and wellbeing</b>	<b>Appropriate woodland safe spaces for individuals and groups to access support for defined need</b> <b>Professionally trained facilitators</b>
Woodland-based exercise	→	← Physical, psychological and social programmes
Foraging and wild foods	→	← Forest gardening, horticultural therapy, wild foods and foraging
Timber framing and saw mill	→	← Forestry management for people with defined needs, psycho-educational programmes
Wood fuel	→	← Creativity and natural materials, woodland-based arts
Wildlife ID and walks	→	← Woodland conservation and health
Forestry	→	← Animal, wildlife, assisted therapies and interventions
Orienteering	→	← Nature-connection groups
Bushcraft	→	← Outdoor skills and adventure activities
Green wood working	→	←

Natural Academy. Source: Adapted from Haubenhofer, 2010; Sempik and Bragg, 2013; Bragg 2014

## D. Service and project example

### ARC CIC

Ecotherapy @ Foundry Wood sessions do not offer one-to-one or group therapy in the traditional sense. Healing and growth is nurtured by the participant's own interaction with the natural environment.

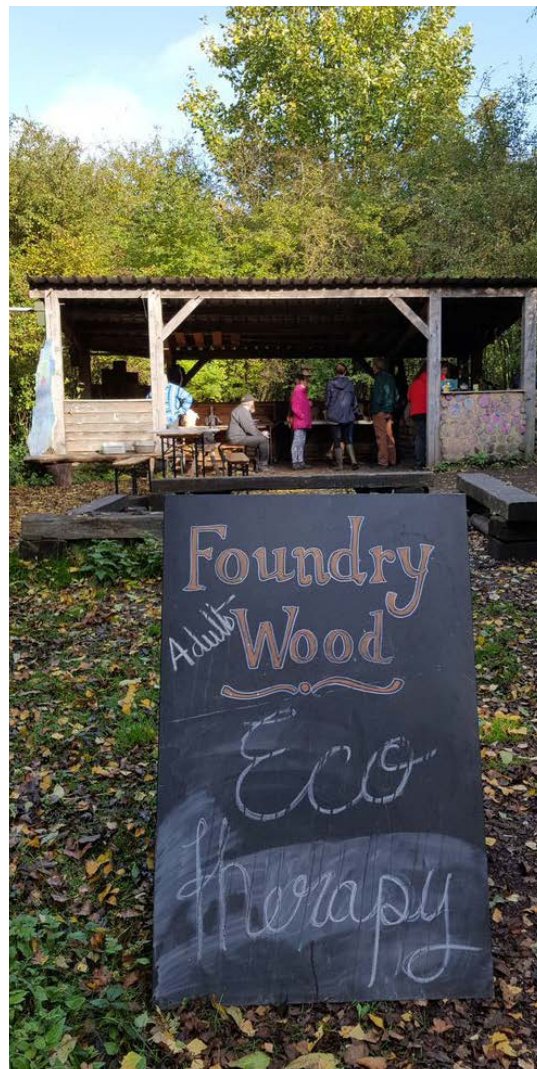
Ecotherapy @ Foundry Wood runs for the benefit and pleasure of anyone with a mental health problem as well as for the wider community. No experience is necessary, but if you do have skills to share, please do.

The sessions aim to incorporate Mind's Five Ways to Wellbeing.

- Connect
- Be active
- Take notice
- Learn
- Give

Sessions tend to involve practical woodland maintenance tasks as well as art/craft activities (indoors on wet days). There are opportunities to learn more about the natural world. We take time to observe nature and the changing seasons. Participants share and learn skills from one another. We spend time socialising over a hot drink and a biscuit or two. We incorporate mindfulness meditation in some sessions.

Sessions aim to establish a friendly, respectful culture where participants support and encourage one another. Caring for Foundry Wood together



provides an opportunity for talking and listening to one another. Through learning to care for the natural environment we learn to care for and nurture ourselves. Working through the seasons can help us to see that the environment is continually changing, and we can also be open to change within.<sup>36</sup>

## V. Good Governance

Ensuring that the service or project is held in a 'good container' is important for safety, consistency and sustainability. Below are some areas to consider, focus and reflect on when setting up and running your enterprise.

- Is there a clear organisation/group structure for financial governance, risk management, legal compliance and accountability to all stakeholders (participants, staff, partners, funders, community)?
- Are there general policies e.g. equality, health and safety, employment, environment, safeguarding and volunteering?
- Are there more specific health and wellbeing service policies e.g. managing challenging individuals and group, professional standards (see below), mental health procedures and referrals?
- How will information be managed? Are you partner or participant data protection act compliance? How is confidentiality and accuracy ensured?
- For sustaining the service or project is there good financial management and funding development? Is there a variety of income streams, clear and transparent financial processes, funding that is focussing on sustainability or growth?
- The development of an ongoing professional practice requires a commitment from the group/organisation and the individual facilitators to be open to constantly learning and growing. This is the best way to serve the participants, whilst helping the facilitators to respond and be resilient to the challenges they will face. The organisation or group needs to consider this in the design and development of any service or project; time and financial support should be factored in to ensure this is integrated effectively.

## VI. The physical environment

Design, health and safety and ensuring access to the spaces that any NHW project or service will work in is an important consideration as a duty of care but also in creating the best spaces for health and wellbeing to be encouraged. Warmth, access, shelter, and good facilities are essential if you wish to offer ongoing services to individuals and communities, even for one-off events these elements need to be considered as well. Beautiful, green, woodland-based and naturally crafted spaces are also a way that people can feel more connection to nature and access benefits to their wellbeing even in a human built environment.

There are many examples of good spaces for projects or services within MLWW and visits are recommended to places locally, or regionally, that offer these services or projects. This will showcase the important elements that create good and beneficial experiences for participants in woodland environments.

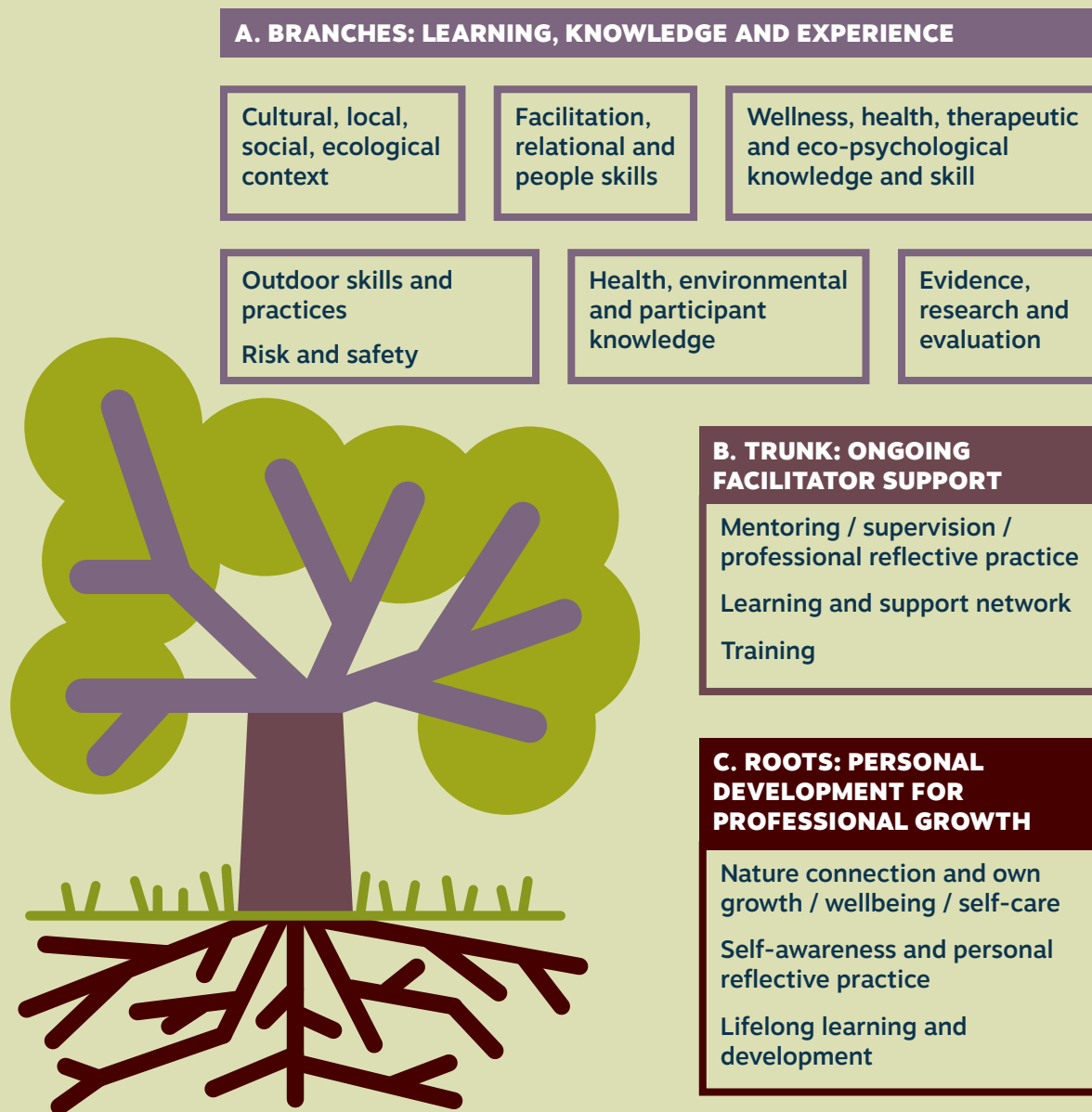
## VII. Professional and reflective practitioners

Facilitating these services or projects require a broad and deeply integrated range of skills, knowledge and experience. As stated above, there are important considerations once you start to facilitate projects, events and ongoing services for people's health and wellbeing.

For the session leaders the need to be able to professionally manage the complex issues and risks that can arise when facilitating people's health and wellbeing in woodland spaces is vital.

The skills, knowledge, personal awareness and reflective practice set out in Diagram 6, the Natural Academy's 'Professional Practice Tree' (PPT), are one way to consider, and action, processes, training and development that can support the many challenges and opportunities the facilitators and the sector as a whole might meet. The intention is to ensure high quality, beneficial experiences for the participants.

**Diagram 6:  
Professional Practice Tree (PPT)**



Professional practice for working with people's health and wellbeing in nature.

- Facilitators to have and be developing individual, appropriate, awareness and understanding of the 'branches'. To engage with the branches as a continuous professional development.
- Facilitators to get support themselves in order to further support their participants.
- Facilitators to have a commitment to personal development for their professional growth.



Some of the principles behind the PPT include:

- A commitment to lifelong learning and continuous professional development.
- A commitment to reflecting on professional practice.
- A commitment to reflecting on personal development.

#### a) Continuous professional development and the branches of learning, knowledge and experience

It is not expected that the facilitator be expert in each of these branches, rather it is a guide to the areas that would be good to develop understanding and experience in. For a facilitator to work with the PPT they can take each Branch and reflect on current understanding and experience, and if that is appropriate for the project, event or service. It would be good to do this with a peer or supervisor. If there are gaps, then they could consider if there is a need for training and/or self-directed learning or research.

#### b) The trunk of reflective practice and facilitator support

A commitment to ongoing reflective practice is an important part of building professional practice; finding suitable people to work with as supervisors, mentors and/or peers will help this reflective process. This will support the work of the facilitator and further ensure the safety and best outcomes for the participants.

There are a range of emerging practice networks developing in Green Care, Eco-psychology and Nature-based Health Services. The WSE facilitators can link into these emerging networks locally and nationally as a way to share and disseminate practice and find support, knowledge and experience that can enhance the project or service. Some of these are listed in the Appendix 1.

Training is an important part of ensuring good practice. Working with people's health and wellbeing requires a good understanding of the branches of learning (PPT above) and will require training in one or all of these at some time in the journey of being a facilitator. When working with people with complex mental or physical health issues it is essential that the facilitation team are properly trained and supported with a reflective practice process. There are some training organisations listed in the Appendix 2.

#### c) The roots of personal development

For the facilitator to continue in building a professional practice, developing self-awareness and self-care are a vital part of resilience and ongoing personal development. This personal self-reflection might be best integrated into a nature connection practice as a way of living the experience.

Neroche Woodlanders / C. Briggs



## E. Training and support

### Natural Academy

Natural Academy (NA) is a social enterprise rooted in accredited training and supporting nature-based facilitators of health and wellbeing, while helping organisations develop professional service to work with others in nature. Its vision is that through the potential of training, education and professional development there is a way of supporting nature-based facilitators to deliver the best solutions they can to the human health and environmental crises.

#### CREATING PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

A main focus is exploring the adoption of professional practice guides (such as the PPT above) and ensuring this is explored with care and respect for the emerging field of practice. At the core of the adoption of this is keeping any use of the guide as a supportive and enhancing experience for individual practitioners and organisations, whilst always acknowledging the uniqueness and diversity of each project, group, organisation and place.

#### TRAINING

As part of MLWW, Natural Academy has been helping WSEs create and access the learning and support they need to develop projects and services. NA has organised and facilitated a number of training programmes and events. Firstly, a one-day training Delivering Green Care in Forests and Woodlands was offered at Brown Rock Woodland, near Bristol, for all the MLWW sites. This was followed by a similar day in N. Ireland at Garvagh Community Forest and then further training of three days in Nature Health and Wellbeing in N. Ireland. This training was instrumental in the development of a Green Care Network in N. Ireland.<sup>37</sup>

#### CREATING NETWORKS

In spring 2018, NA co-led the development of the Green Care Conference hosted by Brown Rock Woodland and funded by MLWW. This was a very successful event, well-received and led to the setting up of a Forum for Green Care. A video review of the day is in the appendices on further reading.<sup>38</sup>

# 6 Funding and resourcing

**In order to design, deliver and sustain the project or service accessing the necessary resources is vital.**

There are different ways to resource and finance the delivery of health and wellbeing services in woodlands. These include volunteering, partnering, local authority funding, commissioning, grants, other fundraising and payments directly from individuals. Often the services are started and sustained with a combination of these sources of income and resource. Diversifying funding and creating multiple income streams is an important way to reduce reliance on a single funder and be more able to develop, grow and sustain a project or service.

## I. Volunteering

Finding volunteers to deliver aspects of your service could be a way of developing and sustaining your health and wellbeing project or service. In order to ensure good practice, it is important that the volunteers are suitably experienced, trained and supported to be able to manage the challenges they may face in working with people's health and wellbeing (see 6:vii 'Professional and Reflective Practitioners').

## II. Partnering

There may also be partner organisations locally that can deliver the service with you; the partners could provide the space, the expertise or a combination of these. On the health side these could include local health providers,



therapeutic organisations, mental health providers, charities and other health social enterprises and on the environmental side could include, local conservation organisations, woodland charities, other WSEs, individuals with land and private organisations.

## III. Local authority funding

Local councils sometimes fund work through their public health and social care budgets. These budgets are aimed at providing support and personal care to those with needs relating to illness or disability.



## IV. Commissioning through health services

Projects may be funded through health services, for example a contract with a local Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). Such a contract can include the ability for GPs, or other healthcare professionals, to refer their patients to the service. It is possible to approach GPs practice managers directly to build the links to local GP practices and there will also be commissioners locally who will be interested in community-based approaches, Self-Care and maybe even specifically in Green Care.

If you are looking to raise longer term funding and larger contracts then the Social Value Act 2013 states that for public bodies procuring service contracts over a certain threshold (currently £111,676 for central government bodies and £172,514 for other bodies), the authority must consider “a) how what is being proposed to be procured might improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the relevant area, and b) how, in conducting the process of procurement, it might act with a view to securing that improvement”.<sup>39</sup>

## V. Grant funding

Small scale grant funding is perhaps the commonest form of support for delivery of these services. This can come from a wide variety of grant giving bodies such as trusts (local and national), Big Lottery Fund's Awards for All programme, local authorities or other charitable giving (e.g. donations from businesses). National level grant schemes have also been a common source of funding for nature-based health and wellbeing services.

Programmes delivered by Natural England (e.g. Access to Nature), Mind (Eco Minds) and the Heritage Lottery Fund, for example, have all provided funding. Moreover, services supported by such grants have been known to receive referrals from health and social services.

## VI. Individual giving – customers and donations

Individuals, or their families, occasionally pay directly for health and wellbeing services and there may be donations from customers and their supporters.

## VII. Corporate giving – time and funding

Another potential source of resources and income are local private, social and public organisations. Most of these now have a community social responsibility (CSR) policy and/or a staff wellbeing policy. It is possible to offer a way that they can cover both of these with the provision of volunteer nature-based activities in the woodland. The evidence for being in nature and the positive impact on health and wellbeing is solid, therefore a nature-based activity is a good choice for many organisations seeking social responsibility and wellbeing. If you want to focus deeply on wellbeing, then you could bring in specific wellbeing interventions and would need the professional capability to deliver this through trained facilitators and applying the 'Professional Practice Tree' above.

## VIII. Cross-subsidisation

Many WSEs cross-subsidise, at least in part, their health and wellbeing services by generating income from other activities such as wood fuel, hiring spaces, businesses etc.



## F. Case study

### Hill Holt Wood

#### OVERVIEW

Hill Holt Wood (HHW) is a social enterprise focused on individual personal and social development through conservation, forestry, eco-construction and green-space management. Health and wellbeing fits well with this. They run a Woodland Wellness Health Programme which offers a holistic nature-based therapeutic service through woodland management, conservation and coppice craft activities.

#### APPROACH

A conscious decision was made to use the fabric of the woodland as the medium for intervention, rather than traditional talking therapies. Participants therefore engage in therapeutic activities without an explicit emphasis on 'receiving treatment'. Rather, it is the time spent outdoors, being active in constructive and practical ways, interacting and working together with others which provides the benefit. HHW uses the 'five steps to wellbeing' approach to structure its programme:

- Connect
- Be active
- Take notice
- Learn
- Give

#### GETTING STARTED

The programme was initially set up with a grant from Mind. Since that point the local council, social care and mental health services have been instrumental in the funding and development of the project.



#### STAFF DEVELOPMENT

The programme was initially established by an occupational therapist but over the last few years has been managed by practitioners with specialist knowledge, understanding and a passion for the sector, though not necessarily with a professional qualification.

#### INCOME GENERATION

HHW offers a day-rate for participants to attend their programme. This is payable either personally or through an individual's personal budget (through a health or social care package). They have established a Coppice Craft enterprise which allows participants to make and sell crafted items from the woodland resource such as wooden bowls, spoons and bird boxes.<sup>33</sup>

# 7 Evaluating your work

**Conducting an evaluation is a good way to gather evidence of outcomes and impact of your service or project. It is then important to find ways to communicate this to the relevant stakeholders.**

## I. Why evaluate?

Evaluation can be used to:

- Communicate the health and wellbeing outcomes to participants of your project or service
- Evidence the effectiveness, or otherwise, of your model, approach and idea
- Test a 'theory of change' – a specific approach to explore if an idea is plausible, feasible and testable, with clear outcomes, articulation of social/environmental context and designed activities towards outcomes<sup>40</sup>
- Inform service development and design
- Communicate health and wellbeing outcomes to health and social care audiences
- Communicate health and wellbeing outcomes to other relevant audiences such as funders, partners, local community organisations, corporate and commercial businesses etc
- Evidence impact against key objectives (personal, social, environmental, financial).

## II. Preparing and planning

It is important to be clear about a number of key areas in advance:

- Capability to carry out an evaluation

- Data management
- Duty of care and ethics
- Needs and abilities of your participants
- Resources needed to evaluate and analyse
- Desire to grow or to sustain

It may be that using a particular tool can take up significant space in the delivery time needed within the service or project. So, preparation and testing is important.

It may also be the case that the management or analysis of gathered data might require training, specialist knowledge or software. So, research into the expertise needed is also recommended.

## III. Evidencing impact and outcomes

Evidencing your project or service can be seen as journey of discovery, change and learning. This allows a development process for the WSE and the project or service. The Nesta Standards of Evidence in diagram 7<sup>41</sup> also mirrors a journey. Level 1 is the WSE articulating what they are going to do, highlighting the need addressed, linking to the existing data, research and other sources, then coming up with a coherent idea, theory of change and/or approach that will support and benefit the participant's outcomes. This then needs to be evidenced as the project or service progresses

## Diagram 7: Nesta Standards of Evidence

EVERY DAY LIFE	HOW TO GENERATE EVIDENCE
<b>1</b> You can describe what you do and why it matters logically, coherently and convincingly.	You should be able to do this yourself by drawing on existing data and research from other sources. Constructing a theory of change should help you to logically and coherently describe how your intervention will achieve the effects you outline.
<b>2</b> You capture data that shows positive change, but you cannot confirm that your intervention caused the change.	At this stage, data can begin to show the effect your innovation has but may not demonstrate direct causality. Many of the methods outlined in the previous topic will help as would more structured surveys of your participants before and after, or at intervals during your intervention.
<b>3</b> You can demonstrate causality with reference to a control group or comparison group.	In order to demonstrate causality, you will need to show evidence of what happened to those involved in your intervention alongside evidence of what happened to a similar group who were not involved in your intervention (called a control group). Selecting participants randomly to both groups strengthens your evidence and you will need to have a sufficiently large sample for your results to be convincing.
<b>4</b> You have one or more independent evaluations that confirms your conclusions and potentially replicates your results.	You should commission a robust, independent evaluation that demonstrates and validates why and how your innovation creates impact. You might also seek endorsement via commercial standards, industry kitemarks or similar.
<b>5</b> You have manuals, systems and procedures to support and ensure faithful replication of your innovation.	You need to show that your product or service can be operated by someone else, somewhere else, whilst continuing to have positive direct impact on the outcome and remaining a financially viable proposition. Towards this end, you might pursue an evaluation across multiple contexts that, amongst other things, tests the fidelity of practice and outcomes between sites.

through the levels showing how the evidence grows. It may be that the service or projects that the WSEs provide do not travel through the whole journey as this is dependent on a desire/ability to grow in scale and impact, and some WSE might want to stay smaller and more local.

## IV. Methodology

There are three ways that data can be presented as evidence:

1. Quantitatively – using numbers and measurements with methods like counting, scales and percentages.
2. Qualitatively – using the participants' or other stakeholders' perspectives through methods such as comments, case studies, video and creative methods.
3. Using both of these techniques – often described as a mixed method.

## G. Evaluation in action

### EcoWild

We have used different methods to measure impact over the years. The longest standing assessment asks people to score themselves before and after the course based on statements:

- I have been feeling useful
- I have been feeling close to other people
- I have been feeling positive about the future
- I have been able to think clearly
- I have been able to make decisions

A significant majority,  $\leq 95\%$  show an improvement in all these self-reported outcome indicators.

We also find qualitative impact data very insightful and moving, as it can paint a much more nuanced and meaningful picture than the statistically comparable numerical data.

Below are examples of qualitative feedback we have recorded. In terms of impact assessment and reporting to funders these are also very important as they add human emotion and

expression to the data. Looking at impact predominantly from this perspective also puts the power back in the hands of the individual, who decides for her/himself which are the key measures of success and change in their own lives. For EcoWild, this underpinning of respect for the self-determination of each person is fundamental in our overall approach to relieving suffering in the long term.

#### Examples of statements from participants:

*"I find I can use what I have learnt outside of the classes when I am struggling with life".*

*"Made significant changes to life – continuing to lose weight (2 stone now) and change career".*

*"After attending one Monday morning session I felt really calm for the remainder of the day. Something I hadn't felt for a long time".*

*"It has helped me with my social anxiety".<sup>40</sup>*



## V. Tools

Which tool you choose will be influenced by many factors and it is important to take time to consider the information above before you start to use or design an evaluation tool or method.

There are a broad range of already available tools to use and there is also the possibility of designing bespoke quantitative scales or questions, qualitative methods or a mix of both. See 'Design' section below.

There is a comprehensive guide to evaluation tools called 'Which Tool to Use?'<sup>42</sup> from the Social Farms & Gardens. This explores a range of possible tools to evaluate nature-based activities, projects and services. It is written for the NHW sector, with a focus on community food growing, but it also has good application in woodland settings.

## VI. Participants

An important question to consider is how the evaluation is primarily benefiting the current participants and can we include them in the design, delivery and expression of the evaluation? There can be a sense of disconnect from the needs of the participants when some evaluation methods or tools are employed that seem to impose non-relevant or very personal questions. Some evaluations can appear disconnected from the direct experience of the participants in the project or service. The common response is 'It's just a tick box!', or something participants have to do! Ways to avoid this are that the WSE considers the primacy of the participant's needs in the evaluation and finds way to include them in the design process. This can be from the beginning of the idea and/or within the ongoing journey of evaluation and evidence gathering.

## VII. Designing an evaluation

Understanding the context in which evaluation takes place is a key precursor to putting it in place. It can provide the difference between "evaluation for the sake of evaluation" and a meaningful process which supports the participants, the quality of delivery, and the ability of the WSE to plan, monitor, and report outcomes and impact. The Better Evaluation initiative has suggested that there are six (or seven depending on the strength of evidence needed) steps to a typical evaluation: this is what they call the Rainbow Framework and it is reproduced below with some questions included to consider.<sup>43</sup>

**Manage – Manage an evaluation (or a series of evaluations), including deciding who will conduct the evaluation and who will make decisions about it.**

What is the purpose of this evaluation? Where does it sit within the operations of our WSE?

**Define – Develop a description (or access an existing version) of what is to be evaluated and how it is understood to work.**

What are we looking to evaluate? What does a successful outcome look like and how can this be observed?

**Frame – Set the parameters of the evaluation – its purposes, key evaluation questions and the criteria and standards to be used. Who will use the evaluation? What are the intended uses of it? What are the main question?**

**Describe – Collect and retrieve data to answer descriptive questions about the activities of the project/programme/policy, the various results it has had, and the context in which it has been implemented.**

How will you deliver the evaluation and collect qualitative and quantitative data?

**Understand Causes – Collect and analyse data to answer causal questions about what has produced outcomes and impacts that have been observed.**

Use control groups and demonstrate causality – this will only generally be undertaken at more advanced standards of evaluation (see NESTA standards above).

**Synthesize** – *Combine data to form an overall assessment of the merit or worth of the intervention, or to summarize evidence across several evaluations.*

How does the data build up? What do they tell us about the activity? Is it delivering our success criteria?

**Report and Support Use** – *Develop and present findings in ways that are useful for the intended users of the evaluation and support them to make use of them.*

Having understood our impact, how do we best communicate it?

Whichever way you design and implement the journey of evaluating and evidencing your project or service the importance of it for quality, support, development, learning, good practice and sustainability cannot be over stated.

## H. Evaluation in action

### ARC CIC

Since starting the Ecotherapy sessions, ARC have experimented with various forms of evaluation to collect useful information about the outcomes and impacts of the sessions. We have found that people do not enjoy filling out tick box forms, and therefore we have created something that is a simple mix of quantitative and qualitative questions. People were also invited to evaluate the project using their own creative methods – art, poetry, film, etc.

We also find qualitative impact data very insightful and moving, as it can paint a much more nuanced and meaningful picture than the statistically comparable numerical data.<sup>36</sup>

## 8 Key challenges



### **Working with people in woodlands comes with many challenges and potential barriers.<sup>34</sup>**

Research by the Forestry Commission<sup>44</sup> shows that barriers to accessing woodlands include a lack of knowledge, motivation, time or physical fitness. There are also often negative perceptions of woodlands and safety concerns. These can be addressed with a variety of measures including positive community engagement (such as through local advocates and beneficiaries) and developing strong local partnerships.

Transport can be a significant barrier for people to access woodland-based services. For woodlands which lack nearby public transport, one solution is to hire a mini-bus to provide transport and make it easier for people to attend. The cost of this can be recovered through grant schemes and/or appropriate pricing of the service. Alternatively, the local voluntary sector may

run a subsidised minibus scheme which can be accessed by participants.

Raising awareness of projects within local authorities, health community, environmental services is identified as an ongoing challenge and groups are advised to tap into as many local health and social care networks as possible. Having time to attend useful networking meetings in your local area can be challenging for small organisations but is worthwhile. A relatively simple solution to promote your activities and engage with the community can be through the setting up of a social media account, here you can explain activities, post photos, display activity times and woodland opening times. Social media accounts are often easier to update and more cost effective than a website, especially whilst your WSE is in the early stages of development.

## 9 Designing, developing, sustaining and growing

**Designing and developing a project or service that is fit for purpose, that delivers and evidences impact/outcomes and can also be sustained/grown, brings many challenges.**

In this section we will go through a service innovation cycle (see Diagram 8) that explores how to bring continuous development and improvement into service design and delivery. This will help to meet the outcomes that are sought for participants through evaluation, review and re-design and offer ways to make a strong case for growth and/or sustainability.

This process diagram of design, test and deliver highlights some key factors to consider and can be referenced to the Nesta Innovation Cycle<sup>41</sup> Theory of Change<sup>40</sup> and to other standard models of service design and prototyping.

1. At the start of your service design process there is a time of research and gathering information. There are a few key parts to this:
  - Clearly articulating what the challenges and opportunities are. Consider these in the context of local and regional realities. It is always good to consider some aspects of the national picture as well.
  - Consider what context of the NHW sector you will operate in i.e. health promotion activities, Green Care?





- Carry out research into the local/regional health, social care, wellbeing sector to build links and gather useful knowledge.
  - Identifying participant groups and partner organisations that you are able to work within your professional limits. Find out what is already available for different participant groups. Review your limits, people, resources, spaces and capability.
2. The next step is generating ideas, approaches and models to define and frame your project or service design. What is your theory of change? What outcomes do you want to help participants achieve? What activities and interventions are you able (within your professional, environmental, resource limits) to employ to achieve these? How are you going to evaluate your work? Finally ending up with an initial idea and design for delivery.
  3. From here we move into testing your service or projects design and effectiveness.
  4. Engaging with the participants and the stakeholders through an evaluation of the design, the intended impact and the intended outcomes.
  5. This evaluation data/feedback is then used to review the initial design and delivery; the cycle is then repeated.
  6. You may have to go around the cycle a few times to complete a version that works well.
  7. This then can be delivered with ongoing evaluation and testing.
  8. Finally, a strong case can be made to grow or ensure the sustained resourcing of the service.

By following this process, the WSE will undertake a continuous improvement process that will help ensure the intended benefits, value and impact for the participants, stakeholders, the community and the woodlands are met.

# 10 Appendices

## I. Further information and support: Organisations

- Making Local Woods Work
- The Green Care Forum
- Natural Academy
- ARC CIC
- Neroche Woodlanders
- EcoWild
- Hill Holt

## II. Referenced toolkits or tools

- MLWW website tools
- Evidence slides from University of Exeter  
[https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/bitstream/handle/10871/31598/Evidence%20Statement%20on%20the%20links%20between%20natural%20environments%20and%20human%20health\\_Slides.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/bitstream/handle/10871/31598/Evidence%20Statement%20on%20the%20links%20between%20natural%20environments%20and%20human%20health_Slides.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)
- Which tool to use<sup>41</sup>  
<https://www.farmgarden.org.uk/resources/whichtool>
- The Development Impact and You (DIY) toolkit innovation cycle and Nesta evidence tool  
<https://diytoolkit.org/background/>
- Better evaluation rainbow framework  
[https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/rainbow\\_framework](https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/rainbow_framework)
- Nesta Standards of Evidence  
[https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/standards\\_of\\_evidence.pdf](https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/standards_of_evidence.pdf)

### III. Further reading: PDFs, books and websites

- **The Who constitution including the reference to wellbeing**  
[https://www.who.int/governance/eb/who\\_constitution\\_en.pdf](https://www.who.int/governance/eb/who_constitution_en.pdf)
- **The new NHS Long Term Plan**  
<https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/nhs-long-term-plan-june-2019.pdf>
- **Priorities in Health and Social Care**  
<https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/what-are-priorities-health-and-social-care>
- **State of Nature (UK)**  
<https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/stateofnature2016/>
- **The 25 year environment plan**  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan>
- **Natural England Research on Nature Based Interventions for Mental Health**  
<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/4513819616346112>
- **Social Enterprise (State of Social Enterprise 2015)**  
<https://www.socialenterprise.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=828443a9-2f80-4c2a-ab2b-81befed6ed05>
- **Evidence list for Forest Bathing**  
<https://www.natureandforesttherapy.org/about/science>
- **Ecotherapy Evaluation ARC CIC**
- **Five Ways to Wellbeing**  
[https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/d80eba95560c09605d\\_uzm6b1n6a.pdf](https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/d80eba95560c09605d_uzm6b1n6a.pdf)

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9. <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/what-are-priorities-health-and-social-care>
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<https://www.farmgarden.org.uk/resources/whichtool>
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**MAKING  
LOCAL WOODS  
WORK**

**Making Local Woods Work** is a pilot project working to help support and grow woodland social enterprises across the UK. The project is funded by the National Lottery Community Fund (Big Lottery Fund) and led by Plunkett Foundation in partnership with: Community Woodlands Association, Locality, Llais y Goedwig, Woodland Trust, Shared Assets, Grown in Britain, Hill Holt Wood, National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Forestry Commission and Forest Research. The project has created a vast array of case studies, tool kits, research papers, films and resources, all accessible via the Making Local Woods Work website.

■ Email: [woodlands@plunkett.co.uk](mailto:woodlands@plunkett.co.uk)

■ Website: [www.makinglocalwoodswork.org](http://www.makinglocalwoodswork.org)

■ Twitter: [@localwoodswork](https://twitter.com/localwoodswork)

■ Facebook: [www.facebook.com/makinglocalwoodswork/](https://www.facebook.com/makinglocalwoodswork/)

**Plunkett  
Foundation**

**Plunkett Foundation** helps rural communities UK-wide to tackle the issues they face, through promoting and supporting community business. Community businesses are enterprises that are owned and run democratically by members of the community and others, on behalf of the community. They come in many forms, including shops, pubs, woodlands and anything which lends itself to community ownership. In addition to developing and safeguarding valuable assets and services, community businesses address a range of issues including isolation, loneliness, wellbeing, work and training.

■ Email: [info@plunkett.co.uk](mailto:info@plunkett.co.uk)

■ Website: [www.plunkett.co.uk](http://www.plunkett.co.uk)

■ Phone: 01993 810730

■ Twitter: [@plunkettfoundat](https://twitter.com/plunkettfoundat)

■ Facebook: [www.facebook.com/plunkettfoundation](https://www.facebook.com/plunkettfoundation)

■ Address: Plunkett Foundation, The Quadrangle, Woodstock, Oxfordshire, OX20 1LH

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**Natural Academy** is a Social Enterprise and is the first education, training and service development organisation in the field of ecopsychology and nature-based practice. It runs accredited vocational courses for those interested in developing their career in nature-based approaches to health and wellbeing.

It is the training partner for the Wellbeing With Nature approach, developed with Avon Wildlife Trust, and offers training for facilitators who wish to offer this approach and develop services in their own location.

In consultancy it works with a number of service development partners looking at how to design, develop and deliver fit for purpose nature-based approaches within current or new provision. It is a major contributor to the development of a local Woodland Social Enterprise 'Brown Rock Woodland'.

Its mission is that nature connection is an inherent part of everyday life for people and communities, integrated fully into health, education, conservation and wellbeing service provision. People and the natural world will significantly benefit from this integrated connectedness.

■ Website: [www.naturalacademy.org](http://www.naturalacademy.org)