

Wye Wood Project

Tackling social deprivation in rural Herefordshire



The Wye Wood Project is an impressive example of how to tackle the many social challenges associated with rurally disadvantaged communities - and get results. Based in rural Herefordshire, where pockets of social deprivation present issues of ill health, social exclusion, unemployment and barriers to local economic growth, the Project seeks to provide solutions through the utilisation of woodland resources. The Wye Wood Project has enabled local people to improve their health and well-being through exercise programmes, skills training, and conservation work, and to benefit from the uplifting experience of spending quality time in the natural environment.

The Project is funded by 2 key funders: Herefordshire PCT and the Lloyds TSB Foundation.

The Wye Wood Project illustrates a model for sustainability that could be replicated throughout the UK.

Objectives

- To facilitate a working and sustainable partnership between agencies who have an interest in promoting the health and education benefits of woodlands.
- To increase opportunities to be physically active in an outdoor setting
- To support individuals with particular needs to engage in these activities in a sustainable way
- To work with people who are normally seen as hard to reach
- To provide a health and learning progression route for individuals through effective partnership working
- To provide access to training and employment opportunities, develop a portfolio of Open College Network (OCN) qualifications relevant to the region and meet the needs of local employers
- To engage in good woodland management practice and enhance habitats for wildlife
- To develop a sustainable social enterprise

Current Activities

- Walking for Health Programme - a Programme of 16 walks per month, based in Wigmore Rolls, Newton Coppice, Aconbury Woods and Mortimer Forest. Over 100 participants walk on a regular basis.
- Coppicing and Green Wood Working Groups- 3 regular sessions per week operate in Aconbury Woods and Wigmore Rolls. Over 40 participants in any week.
- A Programme of Woodland Activities for vulnerable families in South Wye and Leominster as part of the Living Well BIG Lottery funded project.
- Live and Learn Programme – weekly session for 14-19 year olds working towards qualifications as part of the ESF funded Live and Learn programme.
- Forest Schools Programme – 2 staff working towards level 3 Forest Schools qualification. A pilot programme of forest schools sessions with students from Wyebridge (now Hereford Academy) took place in June/ July 08.

Partnership Working

- The Wye Wood Project is managed by a steering group of partners including the Small Woods Association, Herefordshire PCT, Herefordshire Sustain Project, Herefordshire Council & the Forestry Commission. (see funding overleaf).
- The project employs a Health Development Worker (3.5 days a week) and a Coppice and Woodcraft Tutor (4 days per week). Project Development and future funding is managed by the Herefordshire Sustain Partnership Officer (2 days per week). All staff are line managed by the Small Woods Association.
- Participants are referred into the Wye Wood Walks and Coppicing Groups via a wide range of avenues. GP referrals, CMHT, Stonebow Unit and other support services.
- The Health Development worker introduces the participant to the activity and maintains regular contact with both the participant and their support workers.
- Referrals onto the Living Well Project are via school nurses.
- The new Live and Learn programme for 14-19 year olds has been developed through Herefordshire Councils 14-19 team.



Context and continuity

- The *Choosing Health* White Paper (DH, 2004) outlines a new approach to public health, with a focus on tackling health inequalities amongst those with poorer physical and mental health, usually at the lower end of the social scale and enabling them to make healthy lifestyle choices (for example, a programme of health trainers)
- Evidence suggests that trees, woodlands and green spaces have a positive impact on people's health and well-being – *Health and Well-being: Trees, Woodlands and Natural Spaces* (P Tabbush and L O'Brien, 2002); *Trees and Woodlands: Nature's health Service* (L O'Brien, 2005)
- The Wye Wood Project, comprises: *Wye Wood – Newton Coppice (2003-04)* a £29,000 pre-project pilot to identify potential for: development skills and employment opportunities, transferable skills training, a local sustainable supply chain of timber, improved health of community members and increased visitors; *Werndee Wood (04-07)* focused on first level training –coppicing and green wood-working (OCN level 1), survival skills, woodland products and the Basic Expedition Leaders Award (British Sports Trust); *Wider Wood (05-06)* emphasises health improvement
- The current phase - *Wye Wood IV* – has seen developments in capacity, offering more regular health walks and more opportunities in Coppice and Woodland Management.
- The work with children and young people through the new education programme builds on an already successful model.

Future plans

- Development of progression routes for participants of the weekly Coppice sessions.
- Development of a sustainable social enterprise, which would enable participants to utilise the skills they have learnt in Woodland Management and coppice skills to produce products for sale such as hurdles, beanpoles and walking sticks. The Social Enterprise would also obtain contracts for woodland management and maintenance. Income to the Social Enterprise would help to sustain further developments in the Wye Wood project.
- Develop closer links with the probation service working with offenders and those at risk of offending.
- Continue to develop monitoring and evaluation systems that will demonstrate to funders and commissioners the project's effective contribution to land based interventions.

Funding Total per annum: £78,700

Herefordshire PCT	£19,000
Lloyds TSB Foundation	£28,000
Forestry Commission (Forest schools)	£5,800
BIG Lottery (Living Well Project)	£12,900
Live and Learn (ESF Funding)	£13,000
Contribution in kind – one day/week Hereford Sustain Project	

Quotes

"This is a good example of partnership working...Health is everyone's business, not just the NHS's, and we have demonstrated how different agencies have an important contribution to make in health improvement." Dr. Frances Howie, Associate Director of Health Improvement, Herefordshire PCT

"Vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups will need to be targeted Offering employment and regeneration opportunities to local communities" Investing for Health: Staying Healthy Clinical Pathway Report NHS West Midlands 2008

"I was on drugs but have been clean for 18 months now. I've got my chainsaw licence and love it here in the outdoors. I'm learning coppicing skills which are dying out." Programme participant.