



CoedLleol
SmallWoods

Connecting People, Nature and Place through skills and training

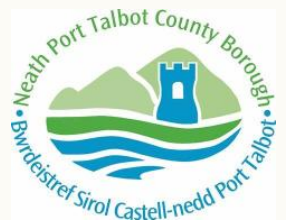
Neath Port Talbot

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Date: April 2025



Funded by
UK Government



Executive Summary

The Connecting People, Nature, and Place Through Skills and Training project, delivered by Coed Lleol / Small Woods (CLSW), has exceeded its targets and delivered positive outcomes across a range of programmes from November 2023 to February 2025. Designed to improve community wellbeing, foster a deeper connection with nature, and provide practical training, the project successfully engaged over 300 adults and children, with a total of 1,178 individual attendances across all activities¹. The project reached diverse communities, with 61% of participants from the most deprived areas in Wales and 37% reporting health conditions that limited their daily lives and 18% not in employment.

Key outcomes included:

- **Training and Volunteering:** Six volunteers contributed 87 volunteer sessions, surpassing the target for volunteer engagement. In addition, 58 adults gained qualifications or attended training, including courses on sustainable woodland management and health walking leadership.
- **Health and Wellbeing:** Qualitatively many participants (96%) reported increased confidence, and the majority (98%) gained new skills through attending sessions. Many parents or carers (85%) stated their child had increased their activity levels as a result of the project. Improvements in physical and mental health using standardised measures were positive but not significant.
- **Connection with Nature:** The project facilitated greater outdoor engagement, with participants reporting an increased connection to nature and more frequent visits to green spaces, increasing by 18%.

The project targeted individuals in vulnerable or economically disadvantaged communities, helping to foster stronger social connections and providing opportunities for personal and professional development. The most significant impact was seen in skills development, with many participants gaining practical outdoor skills, such as foraging and woodland management, which they applied in both personal and professional settings. Feedback from participants highlighted the value of the programme, with many expressing interests in continuing to learn and develop new skills. Qualitative feedback from participants highlighted how the project helped to build confidence, improve social connections, and create a sense of relaxation and mindfulness for many. Overall, the project received strong satisfaction ratings, with an average score of 4.8/5 stars from both adult and child participants.

There is evidently a strong desire for continued support and opportunities for further engagement, particularly through extended training programmes and more frequent outdoor activities. The project has contributed significantly to community wellbeing and skills development, creating lasting impacts for both adults and children across Neath Port Talbot.

¹ Note some participants attended more than one event.

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1. Introduction

Connecting People, Nature and Place through skills and training

Project

Between November 2023 - February 2025 Coed Lleol / Small Woods (CLSW) worked Neath Port Talbot to deliver outdoor, nature-based activities aimed at improving skills, wellbeing, and resilience, especially for individuals distanced from the job market. The project targeted those over fifty, people with health challenges, and economically inactive individuals, offering access to green spaces and outdoor learning opportunities. Focused on vulnerable groups and areas affected by poverty and social exclusion, the initiative promotes pathways into “green” careers.

The project has three key objectives:

1. **Improving Confidence, Skills & Wellbeing:** Providing outdoor health and wellbeing programmes to those hardest to reach, enhancing confidence and skills.
2. **Providing Training & Volunteering:** Offering green skills training, volunteering, and apprenticeships, including an apprenticeship in woodland management. Taster sessions in “green” careers will also be available for schools and colleges.
3. **Creating Networks & Infrastructure:** Developing outdoor learning hubs and improving green space accessibility to create lasting community connections.

Participants engaged in activities such as mindfulness, bushcraft, campfire cooking, and practical conservation, building confidence and teamwork while learning skills in woodland management. Accredited and non-accredited training was provided, preparing participants for future green career opportunities. This initiative also fostered social interaction, reduced isolation, and aimed to support preventative healthcare through group activities that promote positive lifestyle changes.

UK Government’s Shared Prosperity Fund

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund is a central pillar of the UK government’s Levelling Up agenda and provides £2.6 billion of funding for local investment by March 2025. The Fund aims to improve pride in place and increase life chances across the UK investing in communities and place, supporting local business, and people and skills. The overarching objective of the UK Government Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) is Building pride in place and increasing life chances.²

The UKSPF aims to achieve this through three investment priorities:

- Community & Place.

² For more information, visit <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-prospectus>.

- Supporting Local Business; and,
- People & Skills (including adult numeracy)

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) is an initiative aimed at addressing inequalities and supporting local investment with £2.6 billion allocated by March 2025. The Fund focuses on domestic priorities, such as fostering pride in place, delivering high-quality skills training, and promoting pay, employment, and productivity growth to improve life chances nationwide.

The Fund encourages local places to build on their strengths and address specific needs, emphasising pride in place and improved life opportunities. It complements other funding streams and integrates with mainstream employment and skills programmes to enhance impact and streamline delivery. Councils and mayoral authorities in England, Scotland, and Wales lead the planning and implementation of the Fund's interventions, working collaboratively with local partners and the devolved governments of Scotland and Wales. This approach aims to ensure targeted investments that lead to visible, tangible improvements in both infrastructure and human capital, giving communities more reasons to take pride in their local areas.

About Coed Lleol/Small Woods

Coed Lleol/Small Woods was established as Coed Lleol (Small Woods Wales) in 2002, the Welsh branch of the Small Woods Association, an organisation supporting woodland practitioners in sustainable woodland management since 1988 (originally as National Small Woods Association). In 2010, Coed Lleol/Small Woods launched a successful woodland health and wellbeing programme, known as Actif Woods Wales. The programme ran for a decade and established the charity's expertise in social forestry, connecting people with their local woodlands and natural spaces, whilst promoting healthy and sustainably managed woodlands. Since that time, Coed Lleol/Small Woods has expanded to deliver woodland wellbeing sessions in most counties of Wales. At time of writing, Coed Lleol/Small Woods is working on the Isle of Anglesey, and in Conwy, Pembrokeshire, Powys, Swansea, Carmarthenshire, Neath Port Talbot, Blaenau Gwent, and Rhondda Cynon Taff. Small Woods also delivers social forestry work over the border, in Shropshire.

The woodland wellbeing programmes predominantly engage adults and children who live in areas with high health needs, low employment rates and poor access to services. Additionally, they encourage and support social prescribing by working in partnership with health services and general practice surgeries, which refer people to programmes. Coed Lleol/Small Woods has actively professionalised and promoted social prescribing to outdoor health activities through the development of outdoor health clusters in four areas in Wales: The Dyfi Valley; Pembrokeshire; Gwynedd; and Rhondda Cynon Taff. Coed Lleol/Small Woods also has an established and well-respected training programme for staff, leaders, providers, and health professionals to up-skill and embed wellbeing in nature into their everyday practice.

Coed Lleol/Small Woods aims to protect and develop woodlands for current and future generations by encouraging the use of woodland resources for the long-term health and wellbeing of people and the environment – creating healthy woodlands and healthy people.

Wellbeing in nature and social prescribing

Evidence demonstrates that outdoor, nature-based activity can improve mental health, increase lifespan, and reduce the incidence of chronic disease^{3;4;5;6}. Even a view or suggestion of nature via another sense (e.g. hearing birdsong or other natural soundscapes, smelling natural oils secreted by plants) can have potent effects in indoor environments, reducing stress and anxiety and boosting immune function^{7;8;9;10}. The health and wellbeing benefits of time spent in – and connection with – nature is an area of research that has gained momentum in recent decades, reinforced by many studies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

People who live in greener neighbourhoods, or those close to the sea, report higher positive wellbeing, but only in response to recreational visits¹¹. Frequency of visits to green spaces, inland waters and coastal areas has been shown to be associated with higher wellbeing and lower mental distress. During the COVID-19 pandemic, greater greenness within a 250m radius of a person's post code was a good predictor of higher levels of mental wellbeing¹², suggesting that proximity to nature is an important factor in accessing it.

A longitudinal study of 2.3 million adults in Wales showed that greater exposure to green spaces was associated with reduced risk of future common mental health disorders, especially for those living in deprived communities¹³. While further research is needed into the causative pathways for the links between nature and wellbeing³, additional health benefits associated with undertaking nature-based activities include statistically significant reductions in diastolic

³ Lovell, R., Depledge, M. and Maxwell, S., 2018, Health and the natural environment: A review of evidence, policy, practice and opportunities for the future, Defra Project Code BE0109.

⁴ Cervinka, R., Höltege, J., Pirgie, L., Schwab, M., Sudkamp, J., Haluza, D., Arnberger, A., Eder, R. and Ebenberger, M., 2014. Green public Health – Benefits of Woodlands on Human Health and Well-being. [Zur Gesundheitswirkung von Waldlandschaften]. Vienna, Austria: Bundesforschungszentrum für Wald (BFW).

⁵ Pretty, J., Peacock, J., Sellens, M. and Griffin, M., 2005. The mental and physical health outcomes of green exercise, *International Journal of Environmental Health Research*, 15 (5) 319-337.

⁶ Park, B., Tsunetsugu, Y., Kasetani, T., Kagawa, T and Miyazaki, Y., 2010. The physiological effects of Shinrin-yoku (taking in the forest atmosphere or forest bathing): evidence from field experiments in 24 forests across Japan, *Environmental Health and Preventative Medicine*, 15 (1) 18-26.

⁷ Ulrich, R. S., 1984. View through a window may influence recovery from surgery, *Science*, 224, 420-421.

⁸ Ratcliffe, E., Gatersleben, B. and Sowden, P. T., 2013. Bird sounds and their contributions to perceived attention restoration and stress recovery, *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 36, 221-228.

⁹ Gould van Praag, C., Garfinkel, S., Sparasci, O., Mees, A., Philippides, A., Ware, M., Ottaviani, C., and Critchley, H., 2017. Mind-wandering and alterations to default mode network connectivity when listening to naturalistic versus artificial sounds, *Scientific Reports*, 7.

¹⁰ Li, Q., Kobayashi, M., Wakayama, Y., Inagaki, H., Katsumata, M., Hirata, Y., and Miyazaki, Y., 2009. Effect of phytoncide from trees on human natural killer cell function, *International Journal of Immunopathology and Pharmacology*, 951-959.

¹¹ White et al., 2021, Associations between green/blue spaces and mental health across 18 countries, available at: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-021-87675-0>

¹² Robinson et al., 2021, Nature's role in supporting health during the COVID-19 pandemic: a geospatial and socioecological study, available at: <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/18/5/2227>

¹³ Geary et al., 2023, Ambient greenness, access to local green spaces, and subsequent mental health: a 10-year longitudinal dynamic panel study of 2.3 million adults in Wales, *The Lancet – Planetary Health*, available at: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196\(23\)00212-7/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196(23)00212-7/fulltext)

blood pressure, salivary cortisol and heart rate, and statistically significant reductions in the incidence of diabetes and cardiovascular mortality¹⁴.

Following a consultation period, where over 1,000 stakeholders were engaged, a National Framework for Social Prescribing was released by Welsh Government in December 2023¹⁵. In it, social prescribing is defined as being ‘an umbrella term that describes a person-centred approach to connecting people to local community assets. Community assets include community groups, interventions and services which could be delivered online or in person, as well as buildings, land or even a person within a community.’ The intention of social prescribing is to connect people with their community to improve their health and wellbeing.

1. Approach

The Connecting People, Nature and Place through Skills and Training project, delivered by Coed Lleol/Small Woods, continued its successful efforts from November 2023 - February 2025, providing a diverse range of programmes aimed at fostering a connection with nature while promoting health and wellbeing in Neath Port Talbot. These initiatives included monthly gatherings, multi-session programmes, formal training, and family programmes, which were open to participants from all backgrounds and abilities.

The project engaged both adults and children, with over 300 adult participants attending a range of courses and events (see Table 1). These included one-off and taster sessions, multi-session programmes, weekly volunteer groups, and accredited Agored Cymru courses. Notable highlights of the adult engagement include 216 adults participating across 54 one-off and taster sessions from October 2023 to February 2025, 86 adults attending 46 multi-session programmes from May 2024 to December 2024, 21 adults taking part in 21 weekly and monthly volunteer groups from June 2024 to December 2024



Figure 1 The project ran in Neath Port Talbot, between November 2023 - February 2025.

In addition, 177 children attended various school-based and family activities. Volunteers were integral to the programme’s success, contributing a total of eighty-seven volunteer sessions from January 2024 to December 2024 (see Table 3). With six volunteers participating throughout the year, their support helped extend the programme's reach and impact, particularly in outdoor education, community-building activities, and practical projects. These

¹⁴ Twohig-Bennett & Jones, 2018, The health benefits of the great outdoors: a systematic review and meta-analysis of greenspace exposure and health outcomes, available at:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0013935118303323>

¹⁵ Welsh Government, 2023, National framework for social prescribing, available at:

<https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2024-02/national-framework-for-social-prescribing.pdf>

diverse activities, from foraging and outdoor crafts to wellbeing courses, continued to support individuals facing barriers to employment, offering them opportunities for skill development and enhancing their physical and mental health through nature-based learning.

Table 1 Table 1 Summary of all adult courses and events, dates and number of registered adult participants

Course Name	Number of Sessions	Dates (From - To)	Total number of adult individual attendees over the programme
One off and taster sessions	54	10/10/2023- 4/02/2025	216
Multi session programmes	47	08/05/2024- 10/12/2024	86
Weekly & monthly volunteer groups	21	21/06/2024 – 18/12/2024	21
Agored courses	28	17/01/2024 - 20/11/24	43
School sessions	18	08/04/2024 – 16/10/2024	10
Total Adult Sessions	168		380*
*Note this is total individual adults per course, in some cases some individuals will have participated across multiple programmes			

Table 2 Summary of all child courses and events, dates and number of registered child participants

Course Name	Number of Sessions	Dates (From - To)	Total number of attendees over the programme
Family sessions	30	14/02/2024 – 18/12/24	118
School children	18	19/10/2023 – 27/11/2024	59
Total Child sessions	48		177

Table 3 Summary of volunteer activities

Total number of volunteers over the programme	Dates (From - To)	Total of sessions volunteered
6	January 2024- December 2024	87

Adult sessions

The Connecting People, Nature, and Place through Skills and Training project, delivered by Coed Lleol/Small Woods, offered a wide range of adult programmes aimed at promoting wellbeing and fostering a deeper connection to nature. The project engaged 380 adult participants across a variety of courses and events, which included 54 one-off and taster sessions, 46 multi-session programmes, and 28 Agored courses. Some adults attended more than one course.

Key highlights from the adult programmes included the MS Society's 6-week programme at Dove Training Centre, Woodland Improvements at Craig Gwladus, and the Nourished by

Nature accessible foraging programme at Dove Training Centre. Other courses such as Leathercraft and Woodcut printing sessions at Dove Roundhouse, along with Charcoal and sketching at Craig Gwladus, provided participants with valuable nature-based skills and creative learning opportunities. These sessions were designed to support physical and mental health while enhancing participants' connection to nature.

Agored courses and additional training

As part of the *Connecting People, Nature and Place through Skills and Training* project in Neath Port Talbot, a variety of Agored Cymru accredited courses were offered to enhance practical skills and strengthen connections with nature. These included Sustainable Woodland Management Level 1 sessions in March and October 2024, and Health Walk Leader (HWL) Agored courses in June 2024, which trained participants to lead nature-based wellbeing walks. Additionally, Agored Fabric and Plant Dyes Level 2 courses were held throughout summer 2024, focusing on sustainable fabric dyeing techniques, and Agored Exploring Craft Resources and Techniques (ECRT) sessions at Dove Roundhouse in May and June 2024, teaching outdoor skills and environmental practices.

Children, young people and school events

The Connecting People, Nature and Place through Skills and Training project engaged families in a variety of nature-based activities across 2024. Four different schools in the area were engaged in the project. Family sessions included Woodland Improvements at Craig Gwladus and Margam Park, where participants were involved in environmental conservation work and outdoor learning. Additionally, the project offered a wide range of family-focused events, including Family Nature Fun in May, Family Bushcraft in August, Halloween Crafts in October, and Winter Celebration in December.

Volunteering

Throughout the project, a dedicated group of six volunteers contributed a total of 87 sessions between November 2023 - February 2025. These volunteers played a vital role in supporting the delivery of outdoor wellbeing activities, engaging with participants, and helping to create meaningful connections between individuals and nature.

Publicity

Sessions were promoted, and various posters were designed to highlight all the planned sessions. Email updates, including bilingual publicity, were planned for both new and existing partners.

a)



Funded by
UK Government

Family Bushcraft Fun

Fun in the woods for families living in Neath Port Talbot. Under 16s must be accompanied by an adult.

When
Mon 19th Aug 2024,
10:30am–130pm

Where
Margam Park, SA13 2UA

Please contact Sophie Bennett for more information
sophiebennett@smallwoods.org.uk 07481075829

Connect with us
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LEVELLING UP

b)



Wedi ei anafu gan
Llywodraeth y DU

Hwyl Gwylltgrefft i'r Teulu

Hwyl yn y goedwig i deuluoedd sy'n byw yng Nghastell-nedd Port Talbot. Rhaid i unigolion dan 16 oed fod yng nghwmni oedolyn.

Pryd
Lun 19 Awst 2024,
10:30am–130pm

Lle
Parc Margam, SA13 2UA

Cysylltwch â Sophie Bennett am fwy o wybodaeth
sophiebennett@smallwoods.org.uk 07481075829

Cysylltwch â ni
CoedLleol NPT

CoedLleol SmallWoods

FFYNIANT BRO

Figure 2 Example of bilingual publicity for a family bushcraft session in Neath Port Talbot) in both English (a) and Cymraeg (Welsh; b).

Welsh Language

All posters and promotional materials were created in both Welsh and English to ensure accessibility and inclusivity for a wider audience.

Equalities

All programmes were designed to be inclusive, ensuring accessibility for everyone. Efforts were made to assess the accessibility of the sites, particularly for wheelchair users, with necessary adaptations planned to enable participation for all attendees. Collaboration with referral agencies was actively pursued to support individuals in accessing the programmes. The team worked to establish strong connections with these agencies, promoting inclusivity for all participants. Sites were carefully evaluated, and assessments were completed to review their accessibility, including provisions like accessible toilets, phone signal, and car parking facilities, to ensure they met the needs of all participants.

3. Evaluation Methodology

The majority of the registration forms were completed online, using Microsoft Forms, however a paper version was also available for those that requested it. All registrants agreed to collection and storing of their personal data via a General Data Protection Regulation statement. Where respondents did not want, or could not complete the questionnaire, a member of staff or carer was able to read and gain assent.

Demographics

The adult registration process included the collection of demographic data to ensure a clear understanding of participants' backgrounds. The data captured key details such as gender, age, and ethnicity, alongside information about employment status and socioeconomic circumstances. Additionally, health-related information was gathered to enable a risk assessment to be carried out, to help tailor the programme's delivery to meet the specific needs and challenges of participants and keep everyone safe. This approach ensured that the project could effectively support a diverse range of individuals while enabling accurate monitoring and evaluation of its impact. While health questions were mandatory, other elements, such as gender and ethnicity, included a 'prefer not to say' option.

Standardised tools for measuring health and wellbeing.

A pre-and post-survey method was utilised to measure changes in adult participants' physical health and mental wellbeing. Surveys were completed with an online link, on paper or over the phone, during the registration process and upon completion of courses.

The validated measures that were used in the pre-and post-surveys were:

1. the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS¹⁶), to measure the impact on wellbeing.
2. the EQ-5D-5L health thermometer¹⁷, to measure self-perceived changes in overall health.

Other measurement tools

A non-validated short measure on nature connection was used to collect pre- and post-course scores, as well as an evaluative questionnaire relating to the Five Ways to Wellbeing. A post-activity survey established the participants' views about the programme and gathered participant ideas on what improvements could be made.

4. Results

In this section we present results from participants that registered on the courses. In addition, further sections use qualitative measures to describe the impact from participants and volunteers.

Referrals and green prescribing networks

A total of 74 individuals were referred to Coed Lleol, with pathways from different organisations including social prescribers (n=25) and local area coordinators (n=14). Other pathways included via social services, community wellbeing groups and other community interest groups. Those referred to Coed Lleol / Small Woods attended a total of 252 sessions

¹⁶ <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs>

¹⁷ <https://euroqol.org/>

which lasted between 2 and 4 hours, with an average attendance of over three sessions. In total, of those referred, 13 individuals attended accredited courses with many attending the Agored level 1 coppice products course at Cwmgoris.

Registration and attendance

In total 272 adults and 177 children including school pupils attended one or more events or sessions as part of the project, with a total of 958 adult engagements across all the events. Over 50% (n=140) of the registered adult participants attended two or more events or sessions held by Coed Lleol/Small Woods over the project timeline with a mean attendance of 3.5 sessions. Non-attendance included 45 adults who were registered for project but could not attend.

Demographics

4.1.1. Gender, age, ethnicity

The statistics below reflect the participants who attended at least one session of any adult course, excluding teaching and college staff, and those who registered but did not attend. The majority of participants were female (65%, n=178), followed by male participants (30%, n=82), with 3% (n=9) preferring not to disclose their gender. The age of participants ranged from under 19 to 80-89 years old, with the largest age group being 40-49 years (24%, n=67), followed by 50-59 years (19%, n=53). See figure 3b for more details. Ethnically, most participants identified as White British/Welsh (74%, n=202) see table 4 for more information.

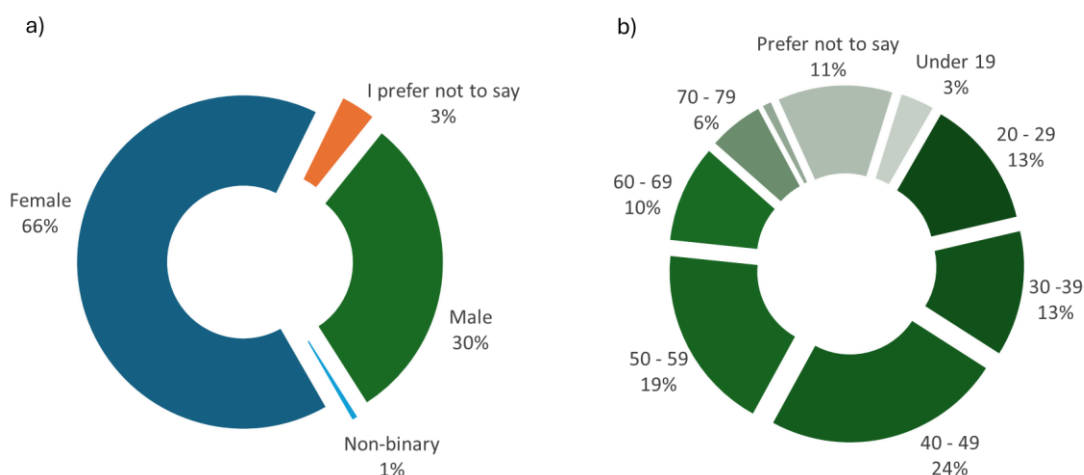


Figure 3 Pie charts showing the a) gender and b) age groups of registered participants.

Table 4 Ethnicity of registered participants

Ethnicity	Number of registered participants
Asian or British/Welsh Asian	6
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British/Welsh	1
I prefer not to say	16
Mixed ethnic origin	5
White British Scots	1
White British/Welsh	202
White European	3

4.1.2. Socio economics

The largest group among participants reported being in paid employment or self-employment (42%, n=115, see Figure 4). The data showed that 50 attendees (18%) were unemployed with 4% actively looking for work. The attendees who provided postcodes (n=260) resided in both urban and rural areas, with the majority living in urban areas (70%, n=200), according to the UK Government Rural Urban Classification system. The largest proportion of attendees lived in C1 - Urban: City and Town (70%, n=200). The remaining participants lived in rural areas D1 - Rural: Town and Fringe (14%, n=40) and E1 - Rural: Village (10%, n=29).

Attendees' postcodes were distributed across areas in the first to tenth deciles of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation, which categorizes areas based on deprivation levels. Areas in the first five deciles are the most deprived, while those in the sixth to tenth deciles are the least deprived. Of those that gave post codes (n=270), 61% of participants (n=165) lived in the most deprived areas (first to fifth deciles), while 39% (n=105) resided in the least deprived areas (sixth to tenth deciles).

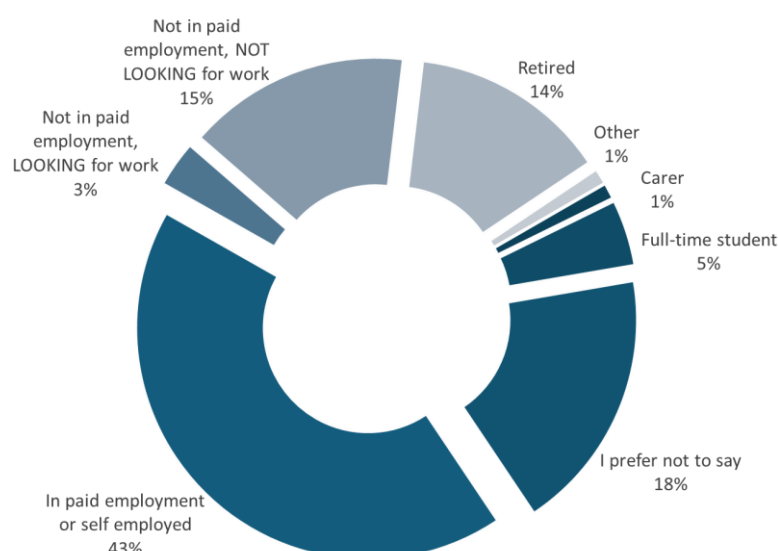


Figure 4. Employment status of registered participants as part of the project

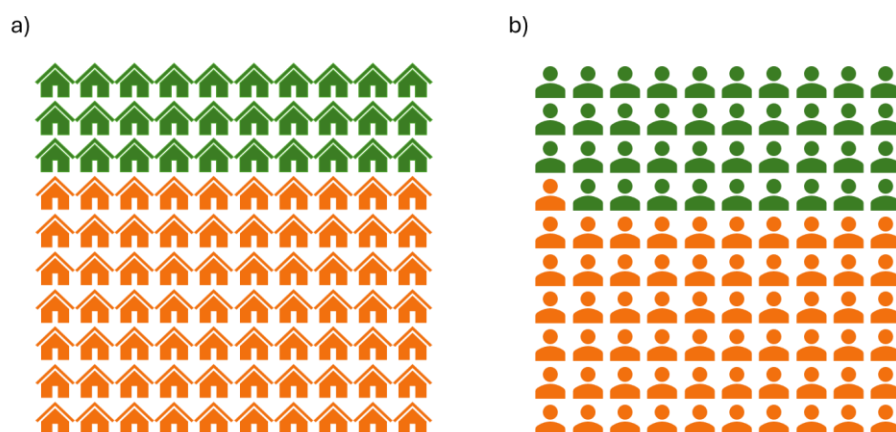


Figure 5 Showing a) Proportion of participants from both urban (red; 70%) and rural areas (green 30%), according to the UK Government Rural Urban Classification system and b) Showing proportion of participants living in the most deprived areas of the UK (red, 61%) based on the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (first to fifth deciles).

4.1.3. Health and wellbeing

Registrants were asked if they felt that their health and wellbeing were limiting their lives, and to list any issues or concerns. Of the 270 participants who responded to this question, 32% stated that their day to day lives were affected by a health or wellbeing concern. In total, respondents reported this as either limiting a little (18%, n=50) or a lot (14%, n=38). In total 54% of participants reported that their health was not limiting, with 14% choosing not to disclose (Figure 6a).

Over 30% (n=90) of attendees listed a total of 115 health and wellbeing issues or concerns during registration; in some cases, more than one concern was mentioned (Figure 6b). Key health concerns were broadly categorized into: mental health conditions (including anxiety,

depression, and loneliness/isolation) – 43%, neurodiversity – 2%, activity levels, mobility, coordination and joints (including back and hip problems, dyspraxia, and hypermobility) – 16%, airway or fatigue-related conditions (including asthma, long COVID-19, fibromyalgia, breathlessness, and fatigue) – 10%, and long-term or chronic conditions (including those associated with the heart, kidneys, thyroid, neurological and other conditions, high blood pressure, and cancer) – 30%. Notably, 4% (n=5) of participants specifically mentioned social isolation.

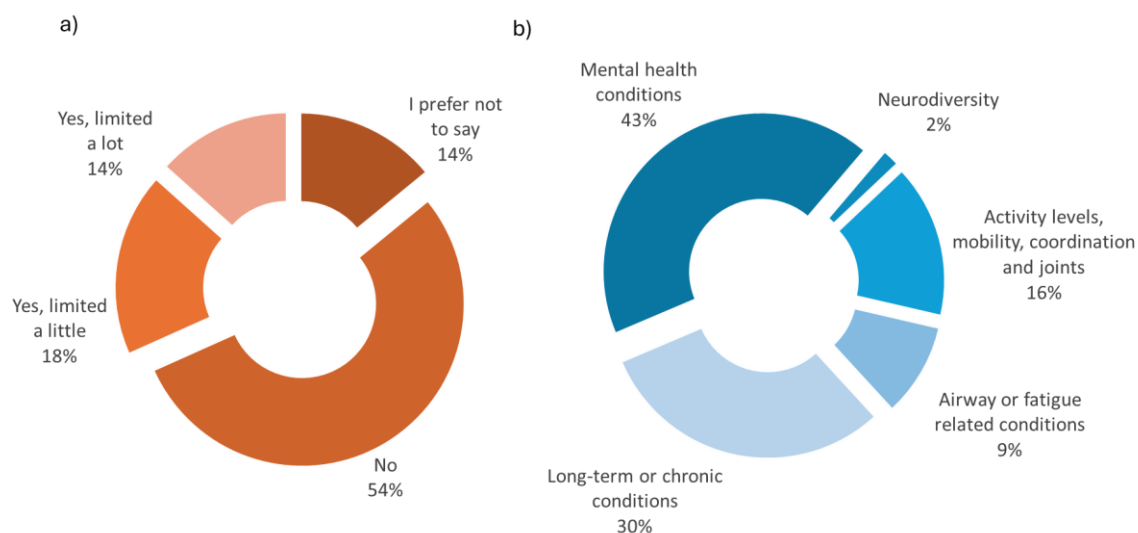


Figure 6 Showing a) How much participants felt their lives were limited because of health concerns, and b) What conditions were their key health concerns.

Evaluation responses

Of the 272 adult programme registrants, 24% (n=64) completed the both the pre- and post-questionnaires online. The pre- and post-questionnaires included non-compulsory questions, which may result in fewer scores that could be compared across the time frames.

4.1.4. Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS)

Across the group that completed the pre-scores, (n=120), the mean SWEMWBS score was 24.1 while across the group the post scores, (n=32), the mean SWEMWBS score was 26.5, which was positive but shows no significant increase in wellbeing across the groups (which requires an average of greater than a three-point rise). At the individual level, 30 participants completed all 14 questions (7 before and 7 after). All questions are required to be answered to give a SWEMWBS score at the individual level. We found that in total 12 individuals showed significant positive wellbeing scores (greater than a three-point change; including one individual with a greater than 10-point change). In total 13 participants showed no significant difference and five showed a decrease in wellbeing. Those that showed a significant positive increase, had an average increase of 6.9 points of wellbeing scores difference. See figure 7 for an illustration of the change in wellbeing scores across the participants.

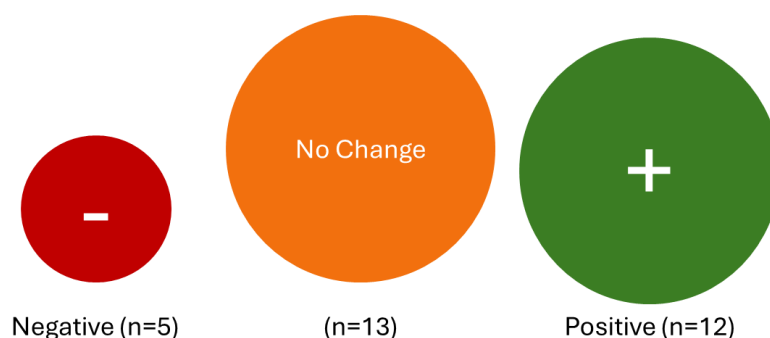


Figure 7 At the individual level, the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS) was used to calculate the percentage reduction or increase in personal wellbeing, based on a sample size of 30 respondents that reported both before and after scores.

4.1.5. EQ-5D-5L Health Thermometer

Health Thermometer responses were collected from 118 participants in the pre-programme questionnaire and 33 in the post-programme questionnaire, with 28 completing both. This allowed for a direct comparison of health perceptions before and after the course. Twelve participants reported a positive health change, 11 reported a negative change, and four experienced no change. The variability suggests the programme had a positive impact, though some participants faced challenges that affected their health perceptions.

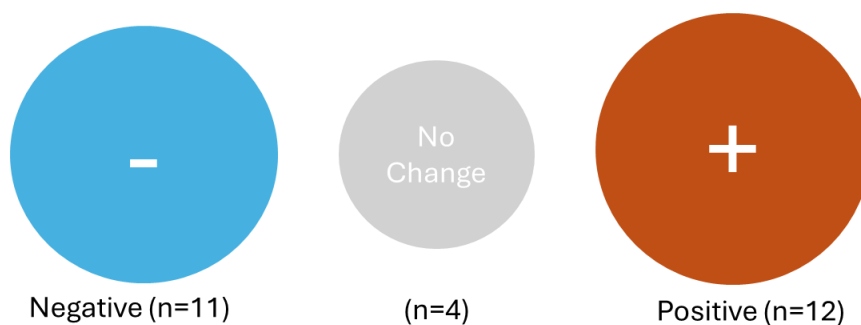


Figure 8 Showing changes in the Health Thermometer Scores across participants.

4.1.6. Nature Connection

In total 32 responses were collected to the nature connection questionnaire with both a pre- and post- response from the same participant (See Figure 9). Participants were asked how much contact they had with woodlands before the course, and how much contact afterwards. Before the programme, 34% of respondents visited woodlands only 2-3 times a year or less, while 28% visited moderately (every two weeks to every month), and 38% visited frequently (weekly or more). After the programme, the percentage of participants who visited moderately or weekly increased, with 84% now saying they visit regularly, and no participants said they “never visit.” This highlights a shift to more frequent visits to woodlands, showing the lasting impact of the project in Neath Port Talbot.



Figure 9 Showing frequency of visits to woodland before and after the Connecting People, Nature and Place project, as a percentage.

Additionally, the evaluative questionnaire included three questions about connection to woodlands:

1. Do you think that you will continue to use woodlands or green spaces to improve your health and well-being in the future?
2. Do you feel that green spaces and woodlands are more accessible to you than they were before you started this programme?
3. Please tell us how the green spaces or woodlands are more accessible to you than they were before?

Ninety-five percent of respondents indicated that they plan to continue using woodlands and green spaces to improve their health and well-being in the future (See Figure 10). Additionally, 82% of respondents reported that green spaces and woodlands are more accessible to them than before they started the programme. Participants also provided open-text responses, detailing how these spaces have become more accessible, offering insights into their personal experiences and increased engagement with nature (see Figure 11).

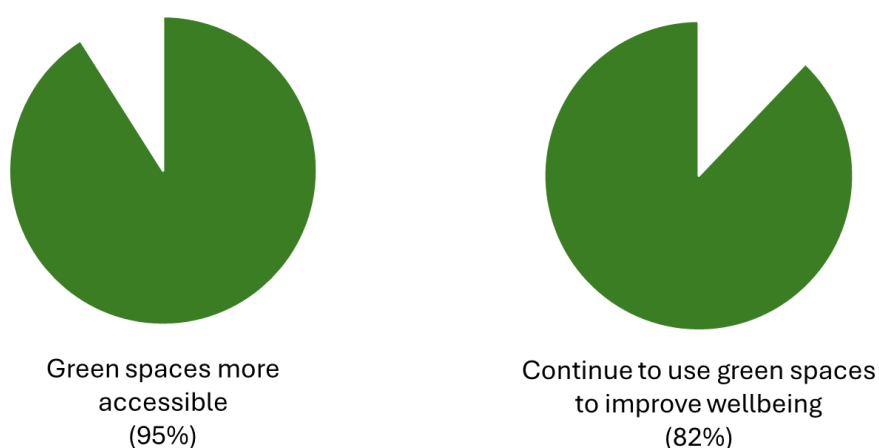


Figure 10 Percentage of respondents that felt green spaces were more accessible after the course, and percentage of those continuing to use green spaces to improve wellbeing.



Figure 11 Showing quotes from participants in response to whether they will continue to use woodlands or green spaces to improve their health and well-being in the future.

4.1.7. Five Ways to Wellbeing

A total of 69 responses were collected for the post-programme evaluation, covering eight questions related to the NHS’s Five Ways to Wellbeing. All participants (100%) found the course enjoyable. Regarding confidence, 96% felt it improved and 85% said they had made new friends. For skills and knowledge, 98% agreed or strongly agreed that they had learned something new. In terms of connection to local nature, 100% felt more connected, and 88% felt more part of the local community. On exercise, 75% became more active, while most

reported no change. Finally, 65% were motivated to volunteer more. The data reflects positive impacts in enjoyment, skills, and community connections see Figure 12 for all results.

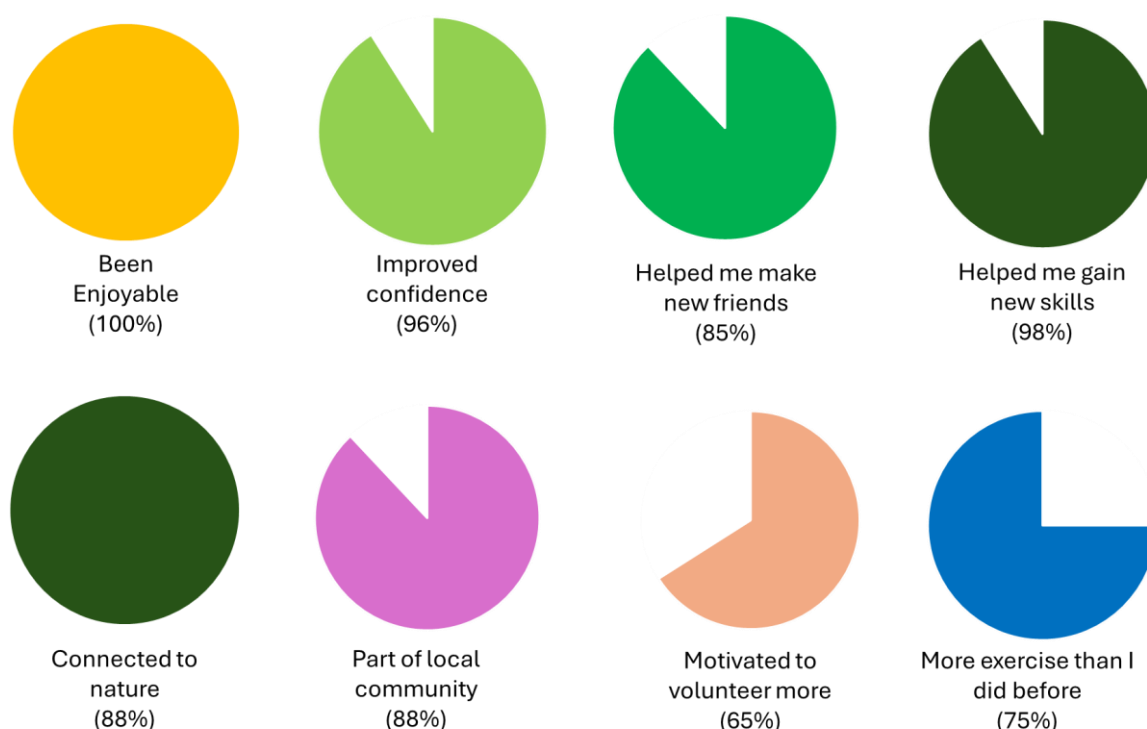


Figure 12 Percentage of responses to the Five Ways to Wellbeing-based questions, showing participants that either "Agreed" or "strongly Agreed" to the series of statements about the programme.

4.2. Post-activity survey

As part of the evaluation form, participants were asked to feedback in five ways:

1. If the project has helped you to gain new life skills or practical skills, how have these skills improved or been used in your everyday life? (think about both practical and life skills)
2. How are you going to use the skills and knowledge you learnt to progress to further learning, courses, volunteering or employment?
3. Overall, please tell us if, or how, being part of this programme has inspired any changes in you (for your physical or your mental well-being, or anything else!)
4. Tell us what we could improve on
5. Overall, how would you rate your Coed Lleol/Small Woods experience? (1 star = poor, 5 stars = excellent)

4.2.1. Life skills

Out of the 39 responses, many shared how the project allowed them to gain practical skills and boost their confidence. Several learned hands-on techniques such as woodworking, foraging, fire building, and crafting, with some continuing to use these skills in their personal lives or as hobbies. The group setting enabled the group to foster new social connections, and participants reported improvements in their social skills, with many expressing a sense of calm and relaxation through the activities. Some participants mentioned how the sessions helped them feel more confident in leading nature walks or using the skills they acquired in their professional roles, such as working with children or managing community woodlands. Many participants also noted the positive effect on their mental wellbeing, appreciating the mindfulness and grounding that came from engaging with nature and learning practical life skills. Overall, the project provided a valuable opportunity for learning and personal growth, with lasting benefits for mental health and community engagement.



Figure 13 Quotes from participants on the project responding to the open-ended question: “If the project has helped you to gain new life skills or practical skills, how have these skills improved or been used in your everyday life?”

4.2.2. Further development

Participants shared a variety of ways they plan to use the skills and knowledge gained from the project in the future, both in their personal lives and professional roles. Many expressed interests in enrolling in further accredited courses, such as horticulture, wilderness therapy, and outdoor wellbeing, to deepen their knowledge and enhance their employment opportunities. Several participants noted their intention to apply the skills in their current or

future volunteering roles, particularly in community projects, conservation efforts, and forest school activities. Many are eager to pass on what they have learned whether by teaching others in their social or professional circles, leading peer support groups, or incorporating the skills into their work with young people. Some participants also plan to use their newfound skills for personal projects, such as gardening, DIY crafts, and creating nature-based gifts. Overall, the responses reflect a strong commitment to continued learning, community engagement, and using the skills acquired in both professional and personal settings.



Figure 14 Quotes from participants in response to the question: "How are you going to use the skills and knowledge you learnt to progress to further learning, courses, volunteering or employment?"

4.2.3. Inspired changes

Participants reported a range of positive outcomes from the programme, with many highlighting improvements in both their mental health and physical well-being. Time spent outdoors helped reduce anxiety, boost confidence, and foster mindfulness. Several participants felt inspired to engage more deeply with nature, whether through foraging, bushcraft, or volunteering. Some were motivated to pursue additional learning opportunities, while others expressed a newfound appreciation for the environment and outdoor activities. Overall, the experience encouraged participants to slow down, reconnect with nature, and

develop a greater sense of community, leading to a significant improvement in their overall well-being.



Figure 15 Quotes from participants in response to "Overall, please tell us if, or how, being part of this programme has inspired any changes in you (for your physical or your mental well-being, or anything else)"

4.2.4. Delivery improvements

Participants shared a number of thoughtful suggestions to further enhance the programme, with many expressing a desire for more frequent sessions and longer course durations. Several participants felt that extending the weeks beyond the current six-week format and integrating the written work more seamlessly with the practical activities would improve the experience. There was also an interest in spending more time outdoors, especially during the winter months. That said, a significant number of participants (many of whom said "nothing to improve") praised the programme for its overall quality, highlighting the friendly, knowledgeable tutors and the welcoming atmosphere. Thoughtful touches like hot chocolate and soup were appreciated, and many expressed a wish for more hands-on activities, as well as additional course offerings, including play work qualifications. Overall, the feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with the programme receiving an exceptional average rating of 4.96 out of five stars.



Figure 16. Adult participants gave the project an average of 4.96 stars out of five.

4.3. Child, schools and family feedback

In total over 85 child or parent and carer responses were provided for the sessions eight key questions were asked

1. Overall, please tell us if, or how, being part of this programme has inspired any changes in your child (for their confidence, well-being, physical health, or anything else!).

To what extent would you agree or disagree to the following.

2. The sessions were enjoyable.
 3. My child learned something new at the sessions.
 4. My child did more physical exercise as a result of the sessions.
 5. My child made new friends at the sessions.
 6. My child gained in confidence as a result of the sessions.
7. How could we improve our sessions for children?
 8. Overall, how would you rate the Coed Lleol sessions? (1 star = awful, 5 stars = brilliant!).

4.3.1. Inspired changed in child.

The responses to the question about how the program has inspired changes in children show a positive impact on confidence, well-being, and a love for nature. Many children reported feeling happier and more confident, especially after engaging in outdoor activities like building fires, making friends, and participating in creative nature-based tasks. The sessions inspired a greater connection with nature, with several participants expressing a desire to spend more time outdoors, explore nature, and learn new skills like using tools or surviving in the wild. Some children noted an improvement in their physical health, feeling more active, and engaging in team activities. Additionally, the sessions helped foster social skills, with many participants making new friends and feeling more comfortable in group settings. Parents and guardians also highlighted increased well-being, with children expressing a sense of calm and happiness, both during and after the sessions.

"It makes me want to explore more in the outdoors and I learned new things that I wouldn't of googled".

"Mostly building dens was my favourite. Having snack time. I like going on the hammocks and putting the seeds in the ground."

4.3.2. Evaluative responses

The responses indicate that the sessions were overwhelmingly positive, with 99% of parents agreeing that the sessions were enjoyable. Ninety-five percent of parents reported that their child engaged in more physical exercise as a result of the sessions. Additionally, 85% of parents noted that their child made new friends, while 84% observed improvements in their child's social interactions. Furthermore, 89% of parents saw an increase in their child's confidence through their participation in the sessions. Overall, the programme had a significant positive impact on both the physical activity and social skills of the children see figure 17.

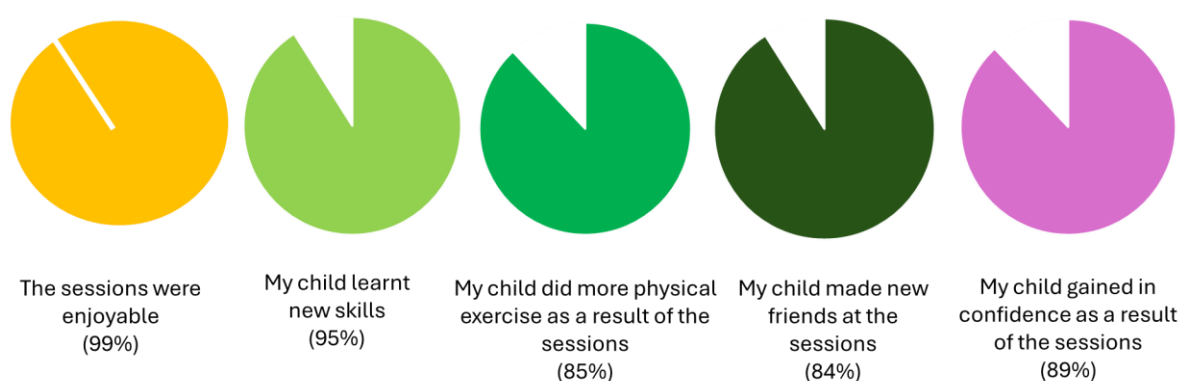


Figure 17 Post session evaluations from school and family groups.

4.3.3. Session feedback

The feedback was mostly positive, with many participants expressing no need for improvements. Common suggestions included adding more icebreakers, increasing activities like swings, mud, and fire-making, and ensuring enough resources in larger groups. Some requested more individual opportunities and larger fires. However, many were very satisfied, calling the sessions "amazing" and enjoying activities like making willow hearts and learning new skills. The children/ carers and group leaders gave a positive 4.79 stars out of five.



Figure 18 Children, parents and group leaders gave the sessions 4.79 stars out of five.

5. Conclusions

The Connecting People, Nature, and Place through Skills and Training project has engaged a significant number of participants, with over 300 adults and children taking part in a variety of nature-based activities. A notable 61% of adult participants (n=165) came from the most deprived areas, as indicated by the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (first to fifth deciles). Of the adults, 216 attended one-off sessions, 86 took part in multi-session programmes, and 43 engaged in accredited Agored courses. The project has shown that many participants gained practical skills in areas such as woodworking, foraging, and woodland management, with some continuing to use these skills in their personal lives or in professional roles related to outdoor education, volunteering, or community projects.

In terms of children, 99% of parents agreed that the sessions were enjoyable, with 95% reporting their children engaged in more physical exercise. Additionally, 89% of parents observed an increase in their child's confidence. While there was no significant improvement in the overall mental and physical health of participants, the project helped foster greater social connections, skills and confidence in both children and adults.

This strong demand for continued sessions and the positive feedback about the skills learned demonstrates the project's success in providing meaningful, accessible opportunities to those from various socio-economic backgrounds.

6. Acknowledgements

This project was possible through the Connecting People and Place Shared Prosperity Fund grant. We would like to acknowledge the participants who gave their time to respond to questionnaires so we could evaluate the impact this project has had on their lives.

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