



Outdoor Health Cluster Project

Evaluation Report

April 2021-June 2023



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Paddle-boarding through the Pembrokeshire Outdoor Health Cluster

Unit 1, Forestry Hub, Dyfi Eco Parc, Machynlleth, SY20 8AX

 01654 701495  coedlleol.org.uk  coedlleol@smallwoods.org.uk

Background



Animal Assisted Therapy – Dyfi Valley

There is a growing body of evidence that demonstrates that outdoor nature-based activity can improve mental health, increase lifespan, and reduce the incidence of chronic diseaseⁱ. Currently, it is estimated that only a quarter of the population in Wales participates regularly in outdoor recreation and 47% are active for fewer than 150 minutes per weekⁱⁱ. The NHS report that one in four people will experience mental health issues at some point in their livesⁱⁱⁱ. The rise in mental and physical health issues is putting additional stress on GPs and the NHS, with an estimated 20% of all GP appointments concerning social rather than medical health issues^{iv}.

In Wales, it is recognised that despite the first-class natural resources to hand many people are not accessing them regularly, and opportunities for social prescribing to outdoor health activities in some areas were minimal or uncoordinated. Moreover, although several independent agencies and charities offer outdoor health and wellbeing activities there was no joined-up network (or partnership) that could link them to healthcare providers to explore and ensure best practice across this sector and embed social prescribing more fully to encompass outdoor health and wellbeing.

Social prescribing to Outdoor Health (or ‘Green Social Prescribing’) has been gaining ground and recognition in Wales (through government interest and consultation)¹. There is a need to streamline the process, offering a wider choice of outdoor activities for all abilities, and developing a joined-up system for registration, monitoring and evaluation thus addressing some of the challenges that have been identified from research². Social prescribing to outdoor health can play a role in supporting people to engage in outdoor activities to

¹ [Developing a national framework for social prescribing | GOV.WALES](#)

² [Wales School for Social Prescribing Research \(WSSPR\) | Health Care Research Wales \(healthandcareresearchwales.org\)](#)

address social isolation, and some mental and physical health conditions whilst also acting as a preventative health measure.

Research and consultation undertaken during the pilot phase of the first Outdoor Health Cluster set up in the Dyfi Valley found the following key barriers,

Barriers for Health Professionals	Barriers for Participants
A lack of knowledge about the benefits of social prescribing	Social Anxiety (fear of the unknown, lack of social support)
A lack of knowledge about what activities are available and when (short or long-term)	Transport
A lack of confidence in the longer-term funding, governance, cost-benefit and (health) training of providers	The need for one place to access all
Lack of an effective system and lack of time to consult with patients (10 mins)	Concerns over access in the outdoors (accessible pathways, seating, toilets, parking)

Key barriers to participation identified in consultation with health professionals and the community.

In 2021, Coed Lleol (Small Woods Wales) received funding from Enabling Natural Resources and Well-Being in Wales (ENRaW) match funded by The Healthy and Active Fund (HAF) to establish three Outdoor Health Clusters and maintain an existing cluster that was set up in 2019 in the Dyfi Valley (Powys, Ceredigion) that had consistently received over 100 referrals since its official launch in 2020.

Coed Lleol (Small Woods Wales) worked in partnership with other environmentally focused or outdoor activity-focused organisations to set up and deliver the programme.

Introduction

The Outdoor Health Clusters addressed the challenges that have been raised around social prescribing to outdoor health activities by developing a single point of entry and evaluation for a range of different outdoor health activities that are accessible to the communities where they are situated. New clusters were developed in Pembrokeshire, Gwynedd and Rhondda Cynon Taf.



The projects developed a referral system where people in need can either be referred directly by their GP surgery, link, or support worker to the project for a consultation and subsequent registration to suitable activities. Alternatively, people can refer themselves to the project, thereby providing the potential to take pressure off public services (see diagram below). In response to the initial evaluation, continuous delivery and signposting have been encouraged for participants who need longer-term support to engage and access the outdoors.

The referral system is illustrated in the following infographic,



Outdoor Health Clusters - process for referral

All activities offered through the four Outdoor Health networks were closely aligned with the NHS' Five Ways to Well-being illustrated below.



Through the project, a suite of training was open for activity leaders/providers. Through the project, all leaders received minimum standards training, introduction to outdoor health, mental health first aid and first aid in the outdoors.

The Outdoor Health Clusters in The Dyfi Valley, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Pembrokeshire and Gwynedd developed and published an information pack for health professionals to highlight the model of the Outdoor Clusters, the range of activities and their impact³.



³ [Outdoor-Health-Information-Pack.pdf \(smallwoods.org.uk\)](https://smallwoods.org.uk/Outdoor-Health-Information-Pack.pdf)

The Clusters

Dyfi Valley

Coed Lleol (Small Woods Wales) and Eco Dyfi worked in partnership to establish and run the cluster (piloted after consultation in 2019). Outdoor Activity partners and activities were as follows,

Partner	Activity provided through the Outdoor Health Cluster	Structure of course	Number attended
Dyfi Donkeys	Animal-Assisted Therapy with Donkeys	6-week sessions and follow-on sessions	45
Dolau Dyfi	Walking Groups – Guided walking groups – including accessible surgery walks	Ongoing weekly groups	58
Ynys-hir RSPB site/Coed Lleol	Provided location for woodland well-being activity groups (run by Coed Lleol) and walking locations for walking groups	6-week sessions and optional follow-on sessions	60
Ynysmaengwyn site, Tywyn/Coed Lleol	Provided location for woodland well-being activity groups (run by Coed Lleol)	6-week sessions and optional follow-on sessions	22
Magic Lantern Cinema – Garden/Coed Lleol	Provided an accessible site for Tywyn residents to attend Nature Wellbeing Activities hosted by Coed Lleol	Drop-in sessions	(as above)
Ysgol Bro Hyddgen (Machynlleth), Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn (Tywyn)/Coed Lleol	Two secondary schools where woodland wellbeing activities were hosted for students struggling to engage	4-week sessions	88
Coed Lleol (Small Woods)	Provided additional short programmes: Bump to Buggy walk, Teen and Family Woodland sessions	2–3-week programmes	34
Total	307 (266 excluding double counted)		

Pembrokeshire

Coed Lleol (Small Woods Wales) and Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum (PCF) worked in partnership to establish the first outdoor health network in Pembrokeshire. The activities and partnerships developed are displayed in the table below,

Partner	Activity provided through the Outdoor Health Cluster	Structure of course	Number attended
Reconnect in Nature	Woodland Well-Being using therapeutic methods (REAPS)	6-week course (optional follow-on)	18
Wild Swim Wales	Wild Swimming and Well-Being	6-week course	25
TYF Coastal Connections	Ocean connection and well-being	6-week course	9
Windswept CIC	Paddle and Connect – paddleboard & more	6-week course	8
Adventures Beyond	Nature Journey - SUP	6-week course	0
Buzzard bushcraft	Woodland Wellbeing at Kingsmill	6-week course	28
Coed Lleol online courses	Nature and Well-being online services	6-week course	2
Total			90 (73 excluding double counted)



Gwynedd

Coed Lleol (Small Woods Wales) establish an Outdoor Health Network in Gwynedd. The following partnerships and activities were offered,

Partner	Activity provided through the Outdoor Health Cluster	Structure of course	Number attended
Snowdonia Donkeys	Animal-Assisted Therapy with Donkeys	6-week course	19
Pandy farm/Coed Lleol, Tregarth	Movement and Music	6-week course	12
Partneriaeth Ogwen, Bethesda	Food Growing Programme	6-week course	8
Coed Lleol	Nature Connections Programme	6-week course	5
Wild Elements, Partneriaeth Ion Maesgeirchen	Roots Programme – singing and music in the woods	6-week course	10
Carole Bevis, Dolgellau	Walking for Well-being Group	6-week course	14
Nature Keen Guided Walks/Coed Lleol,	Wild Bangor – Nature connection walking group & Mindfulness	6-week course	7
Total	75 (60 excluding double counted)		



Nature connections programme



Walking for well-being Group

Rhondda Cynon Taf

Coed Lleol (Small Woods Wales) and Interlink worked closely together in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Interlink was already established in the sphere of well-being activities in Rhondda Cynon Taf but was keen to expand on the outdoor provision of these activities through the partnership.

Partner	Activity provided through the Outdoor Health Cluster	Structure of course	Number attended
Meadow Street Community Gardens, Pontypridd	Gardening Group & Nature Connection for Beginners Groups	6-week course, taster sessions & health professional and interlink promotional days	35
Dare Valley Park, Aberdare	Well-being in Nature	Short 2-week course	19
Cariad Pet Therapy, Pontypridd	Dog walking therapy	6-week course	11
Welcome to our Woods, Treherbert	Bushcraft for GP referrals from Forest view surgery, Treherbert	6-week course	6
Total		71 (66 excluding double counted)	



Nature Connections and Bushcraft at Meadow Street Community Gardens

Unit 1, Forestry Hub, Dyfi Eco Parc, Machynlleth, SY20 8AX

☎ 01654 701495 🌐 coedlleol.org.uk ✉ coedlleol@smallwoods.org.uk

Outputs



*Excluding double counted that attended across the two years (total engagements = 563)

The Outdoor health Clusters had an overall target of 256 participants throughout the project. For the three new Outdoor Health Clusters, some time was built into year one of the project for training, development, staffing and embedding and promoting the method into the existing health framework.

The established Cluster, Trywydd Iach (Dyfi Valley) was able to continue delivery from the start of the project. Each Cluster ran with one project officer working three days a week.

The outputs for each Cluster are presented below,

Cluster	Year 1 - participants	Year 2 – participants	Total Participants over two years (excluding double counted)
Trywydd Iach (Dyfi Valley)	96	228	266
Pembrokeshire Outdoor Health Cluster	Set up / 3	90	73
Gwynedd Outdoor Health Cluster	Set up / 0	75	60
Rhondda Cynon Taf Outdoor Health Cluster	Set up / 1	71	66*
Total	100	463	465
Grand Total of participants attending 6-week sessions	563		

*RCT Cluster also engaged 48 people via a health professional taster day and an interlink taster session

The three new clusters were able to deliver activities to 236 people (this equals 199 people excluding those that attended more than one of the activities across the year (16% of the participants attended more than one activity)).

Including the established Outdoor Health Cluster (Trywydd Iach, Dyfi Valley) the Clusters were able to provide 465 people with outdoor health activities throughout the project (plus an extra 48 through the RCT taster events for health and community care professionals).

Referrals

The Clusters established referral links with several organisations. To build trust and promote the activities, several presentations and immersive experience days were held across the clusters. These resulted in an increased number of referrals, including a partnership with a GP surgery in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

The number of referrals and referral partners is listed below,

Area	Number of referral partners	Number of referred participants (Y1&2)
Trywydd Iach (Dyfi Valley)	23	146
Pembrokeshire Outdoor Health Cluster	11	14
Gwynedd Outdoor Health Cluster	7	13
Rhondda Cynon Taf Outdoor Health Cluster	7	22
Total	48	195

41% of the participants who took part in activities through the 4 outdoor health clusters were referred by health or support services (excluding the established cluster, this figure is 25% for the new clusters).

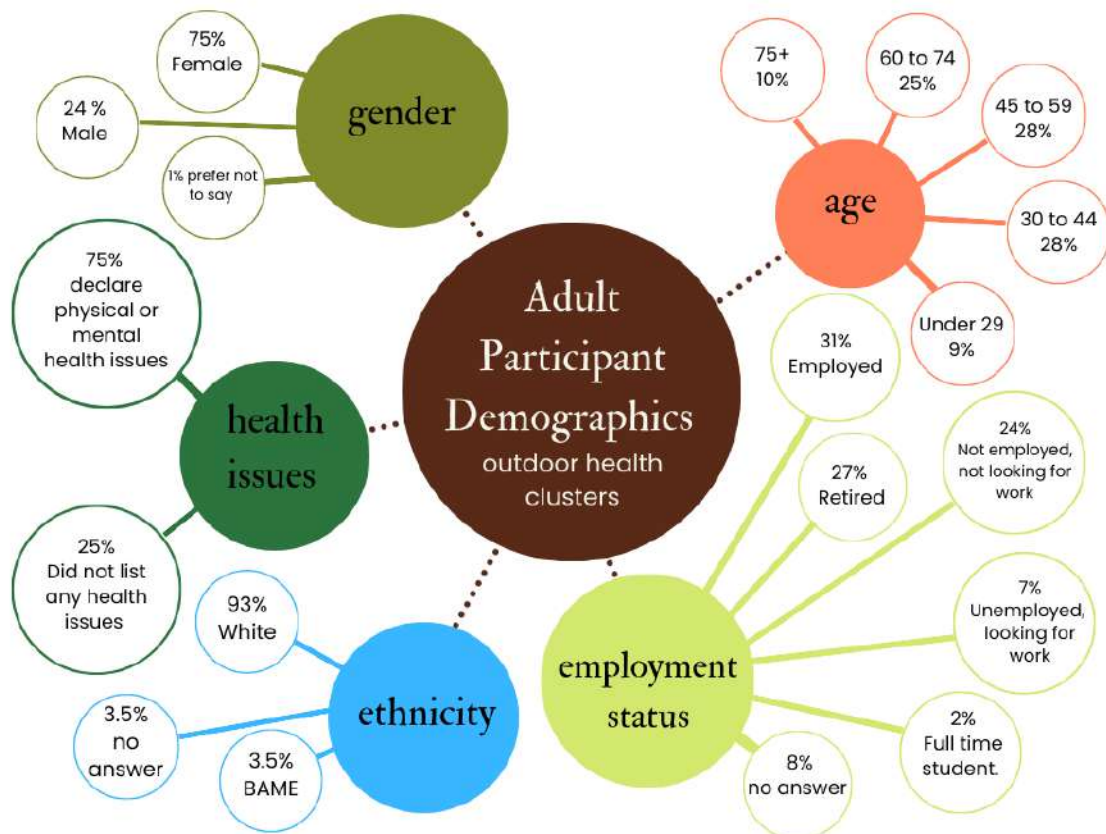
A full list of referral agencies is below,

Area	Referral agency
Trywydd Iach (Dyfi Valley)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church Surgery Aberystwyth • Machynlleth Surgery • Tywyn Health Centre • Dolgellau GP Surgery • Unspecified NHS/GP referral • Mind • Camad • CMHT • DDAS • NERS • Mental Health Services • PAVO • Cyfle Cymru

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caerffynnon • Cerrig Cornel Care home • Ceredigion community connector • Powys community connector • Job centre DWP Aberystwyth • Tan-y-maen • Age Cymru • Social worker /support worker • Eco-Dyfi Pilot/Dolau Dyfi/Actif Woods • School well-being referral
Pembrokeshire Outdoor Health Cluster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VERSUS arthritis • Hywel Dda Health Board – various departments including, UHB Community Neurorehabilitation Service, Health Disability, Psychology. • Mind Pembrokeshire • Local Primary Mental Health Support Service • Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority • GTBAL (Get the Boys A Lift) • Tir Coed • Pembrokeshire Association Voluntary Services - Community Connectors • Lifeseeker • NHS - Primary Care Occupational Therapy • Gryffs Mind Space
Gwynedd Outdoor Health Cluster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red Cross • BCUHB • Substance Misuse Services, NHS • Mental Health Services, Hergest Unit • Tan y Maen, Mental Health Clinic • Dementia Actif Gwynedd • Mantell Gwynedd
Rhondda Cynon Taf Outdoor Health Cluster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hafod Housing • Pobl Group • Ocean Community Services - Ty Brynteg • Social Services Team RCT • Early Intervention Mental Health Team • Drive • Groundwork
Total	48

Participant Demographics

The demographics of the four Outdoor Health Clusters are shown in the infographic below⁴. A breakdown of the demographics of the four clusters is presenting in the following tables,



⁴ The percentages have been calculated only using the participants who provided this data, some participants did not provide this data (n=322).

Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation

33% of participants live in areas
1-5 WIMD (most deprived)



59% of participants live in areas
6-10 WIMD (least deprived)

*8% gave no answer

Urban or Rural?

73% of participants live in rural areas



27% of participants live in urban
areas



Gender

The Outdoor Health Clusters attracted around 70% female and 25% male participants. A breakdown for the four clusters is below,

Gender	Female	Male	Non-binary
Gwynedd Outdoor Cluster	76%	34%	0%
Pembrokeshire Outdoor Cluster	78%	19%	0%
RCT Cluster	69%	30%	1%
Trywydd Iach Cluster	76%	24%	0%

Age Group

The four clusters attracted a different distribution of age groups. The Trywydd Iach (Dyfi Valley) attracted a higher percentage of participants over the age of 60 (this was due to the two popular accessible walking groups that they offer). The Pembrokeshire and Gwynedd clusters attracted a slightly younger demographic.

Age group	under 29	30 - 44	45 - 59	60-74	75+
Gwynedd Outdoor Cluster	9	31	26	24	9
Pembrokeshire Outdoor Cluster	6	42	34	16	1
RCT Cluster	19	21	43	15	2
Trywydd Iach Cluster	8	21	18	34	18

Ethnicity

Overall, 93% of the participants that accessed activities through the Outdoor Health Clusters were 'white'. 3% were from other ethnic backgrounds and 3% did not state their ethnicity. The ethnic makeup of the four target areas ranges from 96.7% white in Rhondda Cynon Taf to 97.6% white in Pembrokeshire⁵. Therefore, considering those that did not state their ethnicity, the project engaged the average or just below the average number of people from non-white ethnicities in each area.

Ethnicity	White	Asian/A sian/ British	Black/A frican/C aribbean/ Black British	Mixed ethnic origin	Other ethnic groups	Prefer not to say/N/ A
Gwynedd Outdoor Cluster	96%	2%	0%	0%	0%	2%
Pembrokeshire Outdoor Cluster	96%	1%	0%	0%	0%	3%
RCT Cluster	93%	0%	2%	0%	4%	2%
Trywydd Iach Cluster	89%	2%	0%	2%	2%	5%

⁵ [Ethnicity by Region \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales)

Health

44% of the participants in the Outdoor Health Cluster activities were limited a little or a lot daily by their health issues. 48% were not limited daily and 9% did not provide an answer to this question.

	Yes, limited a little	Yes, limited a lot	No	Prefer not to say
Gwynedd Outdoor Cluster	35%	15%	43%	7%
Pembrokeshire Outdoor Cluster	21%	16%	49%	13%
RCT Cluster	19%	15%	54%	13%
Trywydd Iach Cluster	37%	12%	46%	5%

75% of the registered participants stated one or more health issues that they were suffering from upon starting the programme (including mental health and anxiety, depression, and isolation). This figure demonstrates that the cluster approach can work with people with genuine long- and short-term health needs. Approximately 45% of the participants listed mental health issues – depression, anxiety, stress and loneliness or longer-term mental health conditions (in lesser numbers). Others listed physical health issues like diabetes, blood pressure and asthma. Some participants had mobility-related problems or chronic health issues (COPD, cancer recovery, stroke recovery, arthritis etc.)

Employment Status

The Clusters were able to attract a range of people from unemployed to working people. The Dyfi Valley Cluster attracted a higher percentage of retired people than the other Clusters.

Employment status	Full-time student	Not in paid employment, looking for work	Not in paid employment, not looking for work	In paid employment or self-employed	Prefer not to say	Retired
Gwynedd Outdoor Cluster	4	9	28	31	9	19
Pembrokeshire Outdoor Cluster	1	4	22	42	10	19
RCT Cluster	2	9	24	44	7	13
Trywydd Iach Cluster	1	6	22	20	7	41

Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation

The four clusters were able to attract people from the most deprived areas in Wales and the least deprived areas in Wales. The RCT cluster was able to attract more people from WIMD 1-5 (most deprived) than the other clusters. The Dyfi Valley Cluster attracted more people from the least deprived area. The results per cluster are below,

	1 to 5 (most deprived)	6 to 10 (least deprived)	N/A
Gwynedd Outdoor Cluster	38	53	9
Pembrokeshire Outdoor Cluster	40	58	1
RCT Cluster	53	28	19
Trywydd Iach Cluster	19	76	5

Urban-Rural Index

The clusters in Gwynedd, Pembrokeshire and Dyfi Valley attracted the majority of the participants from rural areas (reflecting the general geographic distribution in those areas). The cluster in RCT attracted more people from Urban areas (reflecting the overall trend in that county). The results per cluster are below,

	C1 - Urban: City and Town	C2 - Urban: City and Town in a Sparse Setting	D1 - Rural: Town and Fringe	D2 - Rural: Town and Fringe in a Sparse Setting	E1 - Rural: Village	E2 - Rural: Village in a Sparse Setting
Gwynedd Outdoor Cluster	10	2	32	10	22	24
Pembrokeshire Outdoor Cluster	18	2	29	8	18	26
RCT Cluster	88	0	12	0	0	0
Trywydd Iach Cluster	0	16	0	33	0	52
ALL	20	7	15	17	8	32
	27			73		



Coastal Connections – Pembrokeshire Outdoor Health Cluster

Evaluation

322 registration forms and 162 evaluation forms were collected from adult participants⁶. This provided a good basis for understanding the reception to, and impacts of, the Outdoor Health Cluster Activities.

Methodology

A pre-and post-survey method was utilised to measure changes in participants' physical health and mental well-being. Surveys could be completed with an online link, on paper or over the phone.

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

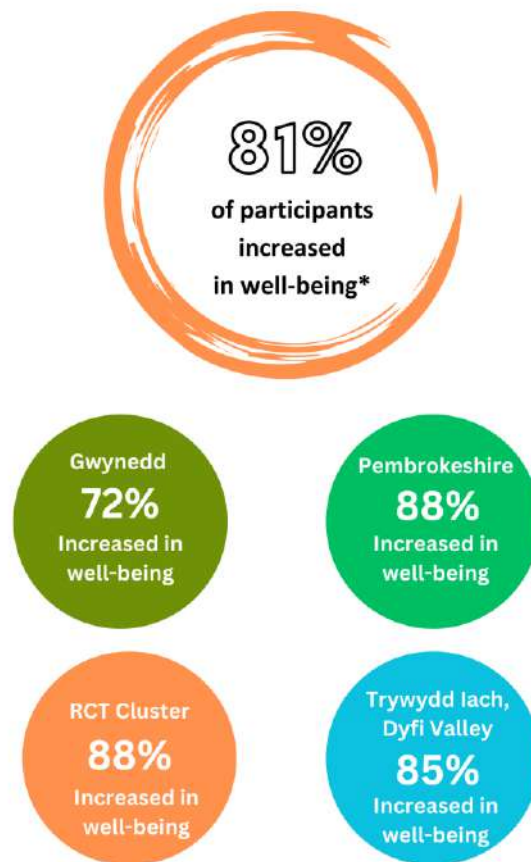
- The Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) was used to measure the impact on well-being.
- The International Physical Activity Questionnaire (IPAQ) was used to measure changes in physical activity.
- The EQ-5D-5L health thermometer was used to measure self-perceived changes in overall health.

Other evaluative questions were asked to establish a fuller picture of the impact (including an open-ended question where participants could define the impact the sessions might have had on them in their own words). Additionally, rating-scale questions that relate to the NHS's 5-ways to well-being were asked along with questions on how the service/activities could be improved.

The results of each are presented in the following section.

⁶ This gives a sample size (95% confidence level, 6% margin of error).

Mental Wellbeing Benefits



*n=132 participants

The Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS)⁷ was used to calculate the overall well-being scores for the participants using a well-recognized validated method. This utilises a two-week recall, self-report, and wellbeing indication using a 5-point scale on fourteen set wellbeing indicators⁷. Wider research across the UK using this method has found that the average well-being score for adults is 51 points (out of a possible 70 points). A point score change of three or above is considered a 'meaningful change' in well-being. The Participants completed a WEMWBS test before starting the programme and then completed the same test once the programme had finished.

132 participants provided complete pre-and post- WEMWBS scores. Overall, the mean score for well-being increased from 41 (out of 70) for participants who completed the WEMWBS before the sessions to 49 (out of 70) for the same participants who completed the post-

⁷ The 14 WEMWBS indicators are:

I have been feeling optimistic about the future, I've been feeling useful, I've been feeling relaxed, I've been interested in other people, I've had energy to spare, I've been dealing with problems well, I've been thinking clearly, I've been feeling good about myself, I've been feeling close to other people, I've been feeling confident, I've been able to make up my own mind about things, I've been feeling loved, I've been interested in new things and I've been feeling cheerful.

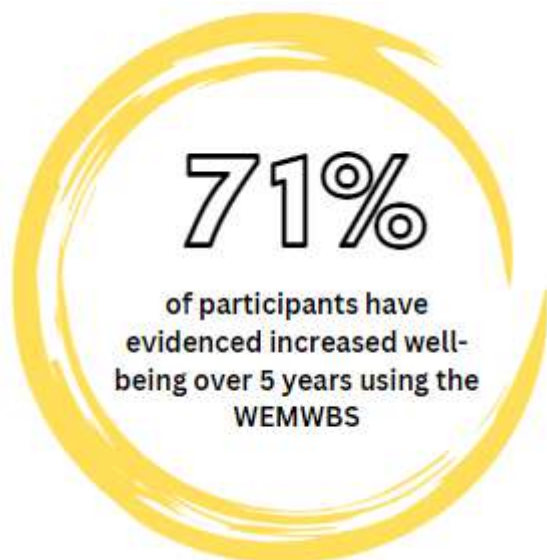
evaluation form. This represents an overall increase of 8 well-being points, demonstrating that the activities that the Outdoor Health Clusters provided were able to contribute to increased well-being across the cohort.

Taken on an individual level, 81% of the participants who completed both pre-and post-WEMWBS had increased well-being (74% of these showed well-being increases of 3 or more – significant change).

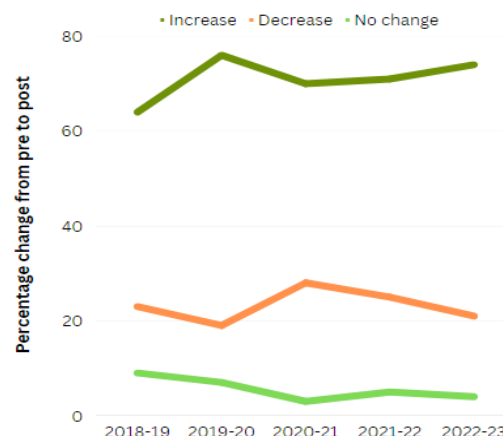
The different projects showed the following well-being increases,

Area	WEMWBS INC	WEMWBS SAME	WEMWBS DEC	Mean Score START	Mean Score END
Gwynedd Outdoor Cluster (n=18)	72%	11%	17%	40	46
Pembrokeshire Outdoor Cluster (n=32)	88%	0%	13%	40	50
RCT Cluster (n=16)	88%	6%	6%	43	54
Trywydd Iach Cluster (n=66)	85%	5%	15%	42	49
ALL	81%	2%	17%	41	49

Coed Lleol (Small Woods Wales) has been collecting well-being data for the last 5 years using the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale as a measure. The chart below shows a consistent increase in the well-being of participants across this period of 71% (average),

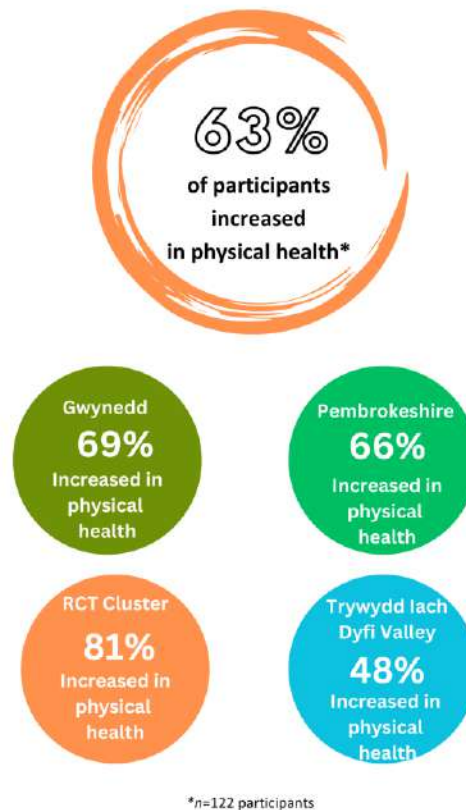


Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) % of participants who evidenced changes from pre- to post-participation following Coed Lleol sessions



The initial findings from the Outdoor Health Clusters indicate that by providing a wider range of activities to suit different needs, well-being outcomes can be increased.

Physical Health Benefits



Physical health changes were also measured using the short version of the International Physical Activity Questionnaire (IPAQ)^{vi}. These measures were taken before the sessions started and after the sessions had finished. IPAQ uses a self-report, 7-day recall of the amount and duration of vigorous, moderate, and walking exercise that a participant recalls from the previous week. The scores are converted into an overall MET score that provides an indicator of weekly physical activity. To calculate change, individual scores are converted into a single MET score that provides an indicator of weekly physical activity. A high MET score of over 1500 indicates a high level of physical activity, a MET score of between 600-1500 indicates a moderate level of physical activity and a MET score of under 600 indicates a low level of physical activity.

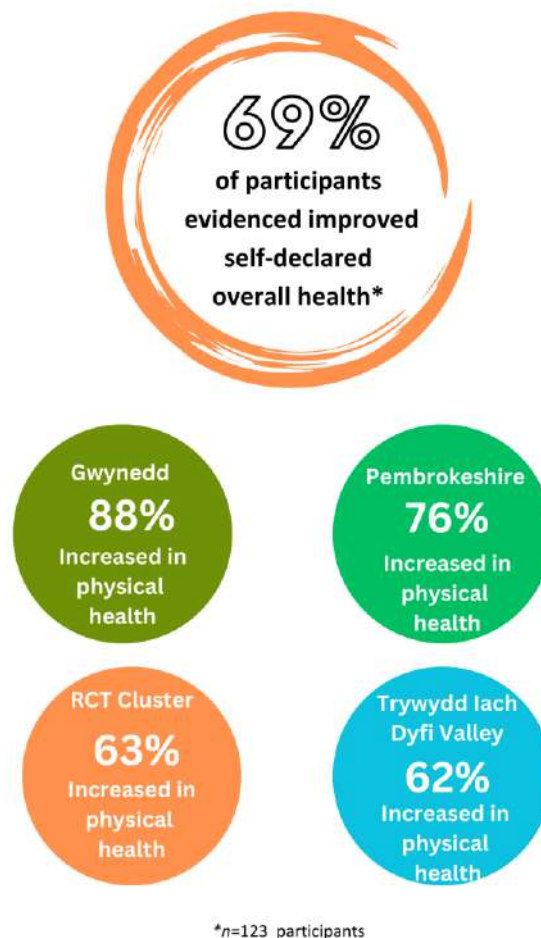
122 participants completed both pre-and post- IPAQ measures. The mean score increased from 2429 MET points pre-activity to 2753 MET points post-activity – an average increase of 324 MET points.

Taken on an individual level, 63% of the participants showed increased physical activity from pre- to post-activity. This figure varied across the projects,

Area	IPAQ INC	IPAQ SAME	IPAQ DEC	Mean Score START	Mean Score END
Gwynedd Outdoor Cluster (n=16)	69%	0	31%	2055	2489
Pembrokeshire Outdoor Cluster (n=29)	66%	0	34%	1757	2121
RCT Cluster (n=16)	81%	0	19%	2361	3349
Trywydd Iach Cluster (n=61)	48%	2%	51%	2864	2967
ALL	59%	1%	40%	2429	2753



Overall Health Benefits



Overall health was measured using the 'health thermometer' from the EQ-5D-5L^{vii} where participants were invited to state how good or bad they felt their health was on that specific day. Participants completed this before the sessions started and again when they had completed the sessions. The participants were shown a 0-100 scale, where 0 was 'the worst health that they could imagine' and 100 was the 'best health they could imagine'.

123 participants completed both pre-and post- EQ-5D-5L health thermometers. The results showed that the mean score for overall health rose from 58 (out of 100) to 69 (out of 100), an increase of 11 points. Taken on an individual level, **69%** of the participants showed increased, self-declared, levels of overall health from the start of the programme to the end of the programme.

The results for the four clusters are shown below,

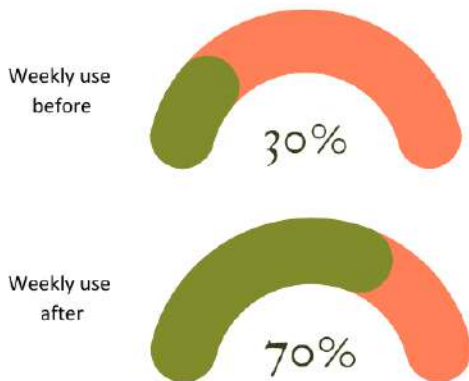
Area	EQ-5D-5L INC	EQ-5D-5L SAME	EQ-5D-5L DEC	Mean Score START	Mean Score END
Gwynedd Outdoor Cluster (n=17)	88%	0%	12%	51	63
Pembrokeshire Outdoor Cluster (n=29)	76%	7%	17%	61	75
RCT Cluster (n=16)	63%	31%	6%	62	76
Trywydd Iach Cluster (n=61)	62%	11%	26%	57	67
ALL (n=123)	69%	11%	20%	58	69

Nature Connection – green and blue spaces

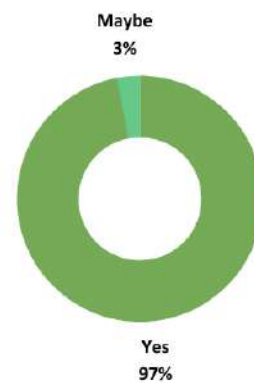
The Outdoor Health Cluster activities aim to encourage the greater use of woodlands and green spaces to promote the use of outdoor green spaces for longer-term health and well-being. Outdoor contact was measured using a pre-and post-evaluation question. This question sought to explore how much annual contact with woodlands or natural green spaces a participant had before and then immediately after the sessions. An additional question established whether the participant would use woodlands or natural green spaces for their health and well-being in the future.

Nature Connections

Before joining activities 30% of participants were frequent visitors to natural greenspace or blue spaces (visit weekly or more). This rose to 70%, an increase of 40%, after contact with the Outdoor Health Clusters



97% of participants will continue to use natural greenspace or blue spaces for health and wellbeing longer-term



123

participants completed both pre-and post- nature connection questions. The results show that before the sessions 30% of the participants were frequent natural green or blue space users. Frequent use was designated as weekly or more. After the sessions, this rose to 70% of the participants who used these spaces weekly or more. This represents an increase of 40% of people using woodlands more frequently following the Outdoor Health Activities.

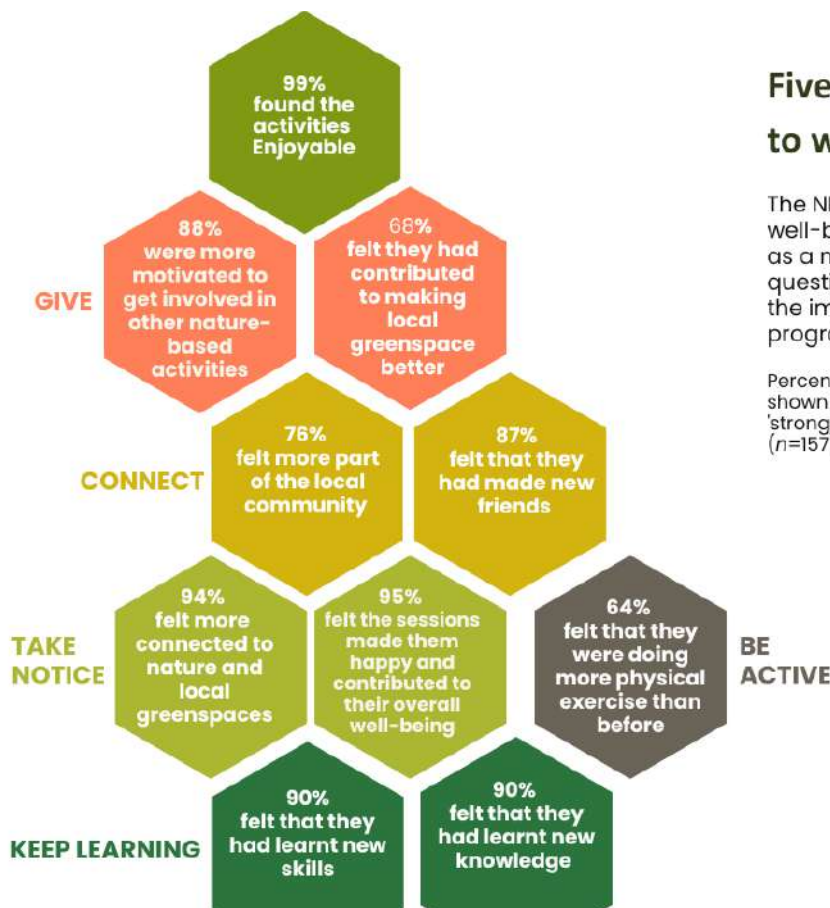
The four clusters evidenced the following increase in frequent natural-spaces usage,

Area	Frequent use of Nature - start point	Frequent use of Nature - end point	% increase (% point inc.)
Gwynedd Outdoor Cluster (n=19)	26%	74%	47%
Pembrokeshire Outdoor Cluster (n=28)	32%	86%	54%
RCT Cluster (n=15)	33%	80%	47%
Trywydd Iach Cluster (n=63)	29%	62%	33%
All (n=125)	30%	70%	40% points

97% of participants said that they would continue to use natural green and blue spaces for their health and well-being in the future. The four clusters showed similar results as shown below,

Area	Will continue to use green/blue spaces for health and well-being
Gwynedd Outdoor Cluster (n=19)	100%
Pembrokeshire Outdoor Cluster (n=28)	98%
RCT Cluster (n=15)	95%
Trywydd Iach Cluster (n=63)	95%
All (n=125)	97%

5-ways to Wellbeing Measures



Five ways to well-being

The NHS' 5-ways to well-being was used as a model for questions relating to the impact of the programmes.

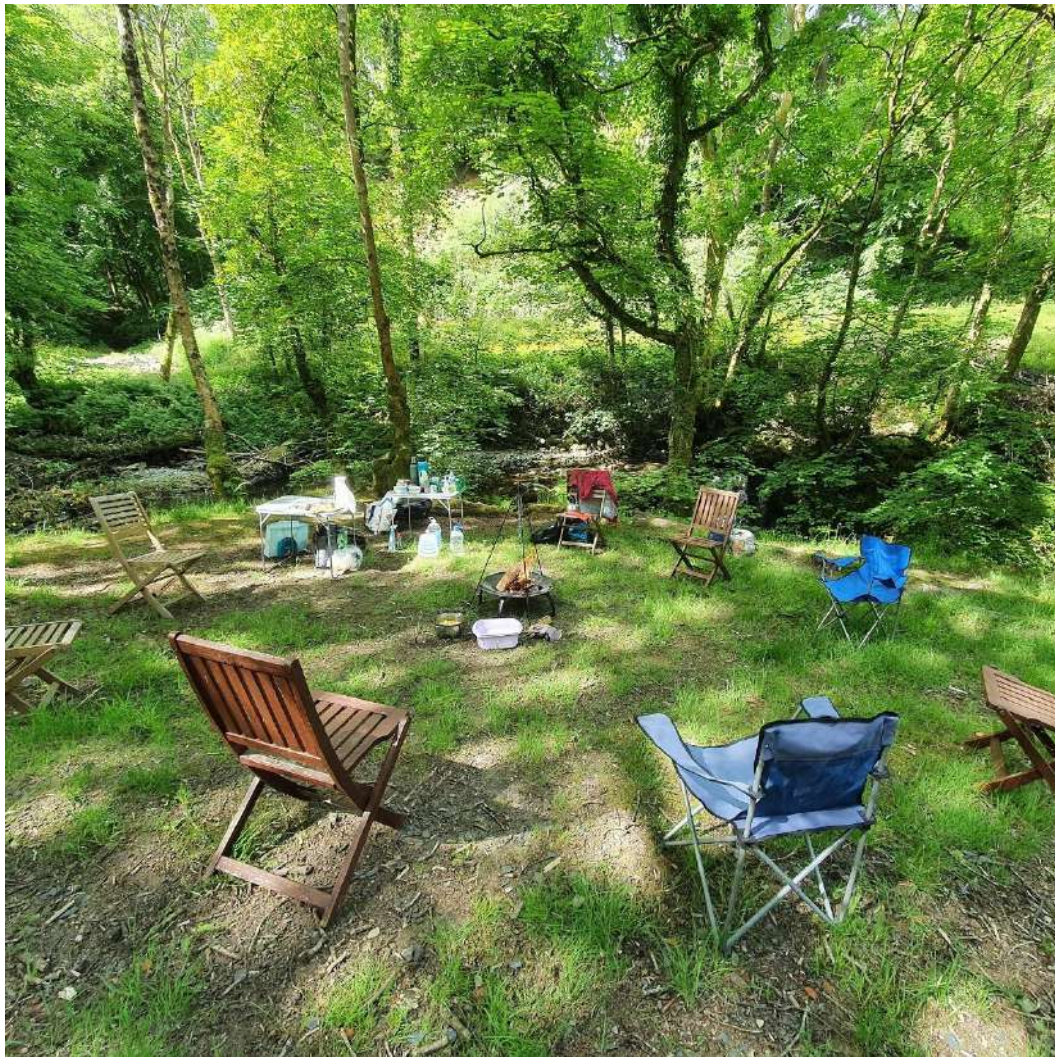
Percentage results are shown for all 'agree' and 'strongly agree' ratings (n=157).

A breakdown of these ratings per cluster area is given below,

Area	...has been enjoyable	...has helped me to make new friends	...has taught me new skills	...has taught me new knowledge	...helped me feel more connected to local

	greenspaces /nature				
Gwynedd Outdoor Cluster (n=24)	87.5%	63%	71%	63%	79%
Pembrokeshire Outdoor Cluster (n=52)	98%	81%	88%	90%	92%
RCT Cluster (n=20)	100%	90%	100%	90%	100%
Trywydd Iach Cluster (n=64)	100%	89%	89%	95%	92%

Area	...helped me feel more like part of the local community	...has made me feel happy (contributed to my overall well-being)	...has led to me doing more physical exercise than I did before	...has contributed to making my local greenspace better/more accessible	...has motivated me to get more involved in activities in the future
Gwynedd Outdoor Cluster (n=19)	67%	83%	50%	46%	75%
Pembrokeshire Outdoor Cluster (n=28)	66%	96%	60%	58%	81%
RCT Cluster (n=16)	85%	100%	50%	85%	95%
Trywydd Iach Cluster (n=63)	75%	92%	64%	66%	86%
ALL (n=157)	76%	95%	64%	68%	88%



Woodland site, Gwynedd

Unit 1, Forestry Hub, Dyfi Eco Parc, Machynlleth, SY20 8AX

☎ 01654 701495 🌐 coedlleol.org.uk ✉ coedlleol@smallwoods.org.uk

Inspiring changes in participants

The participants were asked an open-ended question about how the Outdoor Health Cluster activities may have inspired any changes in themselves (physical or mental well-being or environmental change) through the course of the programme. The responses were themed into the following themes and illustrated in the comments below,

KEY IMPACTS



INCREASED CONNECTION TO NATURE

SOCIAL WELL-BEING & CONNECTION TO COMMUNITY



IMPROVED PHYSICAL HEALTH

IMPROVED MENTAL WELL-BEING



LEARNING NEW SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

INCREASED CONFIDENCE



MOTIVATION, SENSE OF ACHIEVEMENT & INSPIRATION

SHARING BEYOND THE GROUP



Connection to nature/outdoors

"The project made me get outside. And it has motivated me to look for more outdoor things to do"
(Snowdonia Donkeys, Gwynedd Outdoor Health Cluster)

"I'm accustomed to walking in wild places but this has encouraged me to settle in one spot, sit, take in the surrounding and make something from the materials around me. It clears my head taking time to sit and just be" (Kingsmill Woodland Wellbeing Group, Pembrokeshire Outdoor Health Cluster)

"Over time, these routine engagements with this kind of programme would benefit a sense of connection to nature and support a deepened appreciation of my environment" (Reconnect in Nature, Pembrokeshire Outdoor Health Cluster)

"This has inspired me to continue doing mindfulness practices daily and to spend more time in nature" (Reconnect in Nature, Pembrokeshire Outdoor Health Cluster)

"It has been great to have a weekly reason to get out of the house into nature. It has acted as my weekly chance to 'reset' and has massively benefited my mental health. Even on days when I start off feeling quite gloomy or anxious, it has helped me feel more positive and engaged. It also motivated me to take a bus to and from sessions - which is a massive personal challenge - but knowing how good I will feel afterwards has helped me attempt it, and it feels like a great accomplishment!" (Wild swimming for well-being, Pembrokeshire Outdoor Health Cluster)

Social Well-being

"My time at Snowdonia Donkeys really made me feel part of the local community. I moved to the Llyn Peninsula during lockdown in 2020, and it was difficult to form social networks. It has been lovely to meet local people and to be part of a wonderful local organisation. Meeting new people and hearing Welsh being spoken has given me a push to try and learn the language again. Taking part in the activities has really motivated me to push forward with my own plans and dreams and has given me a sense of wellbeing and purpose. Being in friendly and happy surroundings was a great experience" (Snowdonia Donkeys, Gwynedd Outdoor Health Cluster)

"I was socialising which has made my life easy and interesting. I loved making new friends it is one of my only social events in this area"

(Animal-assisted therapy, Dyfi Valley Cluster)

"I enjoyed it and I am more confident following the sessions. I liked meeting new people and want to keep up doing the dog walking. Others say that I am more confident and have come on 'leaps and bounds'"

(Cariad Pet Therapy, RCT Outdoor Health Cluster)

I am going on more walks as a result of making friends that I have found through this group"

(Tywyn Woodland Well-being group, Dyfi Valley Outdoor Cluster)

Physical Health

"I've been extremely inactive throughout Covid so this project has helped to gently ease me back into more physical activity again, and I find myself spending more time in my own garden working. I always have more energy on the days I am able to participate in these sessions"

(Animal-assisted therapy, Dyfi Valley Outdoor Cluster)

"This course has improved both my physical and mental well-being. It enabled me to cycle to and from the course and taught me some valuable new skills, which I can do with my children or for myself to enjoy in the future" (Kingsmill Woodland Wellbeing Group, Pembrokeshire).

"I have not come across any other walking groups that afford such help and encouragement to disabled participants. The group as a whole is very companionable and we have some very spirited discussions. The fresh air stimulates the mind, and we feel so much better after a walk"

(Aberwystwyth walking group,
Dyfi Valley Outdoor Health
Cluster)

"It's been really uplifting. It's taught me that I can enjoy moments and learn about nature. It's inspired me to give up tobacco - in the last 6 weeks, I've switched to using a vape but want to give up nicotine completely. Coming to this group has helped me give up tobacco and drink less"

(Participant, Ynysmaengwyn woodland wellbeing)

Mental Well-being

"I've realised that getting outside and doing things makes me feel better mentally" (Nature connection group, Gwynedd Outdoor Health Cluster)

"The project has definitely improved my mental well-being as I wasn't really happy. Now I feel happier and more connected to nature" (Roots Group, Gwynedd Outdoor Health Cluster)

"It has helped my mental health which has been bad. It has given me the opportunity to challenge myself to do something new that I would not have done otherwise. It was good fun and helped with my physical health too. Built confidence" (Windswept Paddleboard, Pembrokeshire Outdoor Health Cluster)

"I have learned how important it is to do something just for me. It has been my favourite two hours of my week. I feel confident to try experimenting in the garden and have discovered how much I love it! My mental health is at its best when I am here!" (Gardening Group, RCT Outdoor Health Cluster)

"Increased confidence levels and skills have improved. Enjoyed being outdoors on the water with a wonderful group of people who have been encouraging, supportive and fun. The Course has been extremely beneficial to my mental health and wellbeing and helped me to cope with the stress and difficult time in my life since covid" (SUP, Pembrokeshire Outdoor Health Cluster)

"I suffer from SAD and depression and lower mood during the winter, so doing this in November meant a lot to me and helped me a lot" (Wild Swimming for Well-being, Pembrokeshire Outdoor Health Cluster)

I have enjoyed the calm relaxing nature of the programme. It has made me feel happy, calm and relaxed. The week I didn't come I could tell it affected my wellbeing. I missed it and the group contact. I now look more at the trees when I am walking my dog" (Nature Connections, RCT Outdoor Health Cluster)

"This has been completely transformational to my mental health and well-being. Being in a safe space with beautiful surroundings, supporting facilitators and like-minded people whilst learning new skills is more beneficial for any other counselling or treatment I have done" (Ynys-Hir Woodland Activity Group & Animal Assisted Therapy, Dyfi)

Learning Skills and Knowledge

"The leaders are so knowledgeable and passionate about caring for the donkeys and this was lovely to witness. Learning about donkeys, and being able to groom them, walk them, clean out the stables, and spend time with them gave me a sense of achievement and well-being. The project is such a positive one, and you just could not help but to smile and laugh during your time there" (Snowdonia Donkeys, Gwynedd Outdoor Health Cluster)

"I have gained self-knowledge which I can further these skills in the future when I acquire more land. I can confidently start growing food and have a self-sufficient garden" (Gardening group, RCT Outdoor Health Cluster)

"The course has helped me to learn how to feel peace of mind – (and made me realise) I can do it for myself! - the wind through the trees makes me more relaxed" (Woodland Wellbeing, RCT Outdoor Health Cluster)

"It has helped me make a regular habit of getting into cold water and feeling its benefits. I'm more curious and more knowledgeable about sea safety and can identify much more wildlife than ever before. It's helped me to calm my mind and focus better and stop panicking so much about my situation. It has given me something to look forward to. Additionally, my aching joints feel better after swimming" (Wild Swimming for well-being, Pembrokeshire Outdoor Health Cluster)

Increased confidence

"It has encouraged me to believe in myself" (Music and Movement, Gwynedd Outdoor Health Cluster)

"As a personal assistant to a lady with dementia, it has been lovely to see her going from not wanting to touch the donkeys to patting, stroking and 'hugging' them" (Snowdonia Donkeys, Gwynedd Outdoor Health Cluster)

"I am now more confident talking to people that I don't know" (Snowdonia Donkeys, Gwynedd Outdoor Health Cluster)

"Taking part boosted my confidence in the outdoors and in general. It was so amazing to be out of the water and feel strong, healthy and it was also peaceful and calming" (SUP Paddleboarding, Pembrokeshire Outdoor Health Cluster)

"I feel more sociable and confident and feel physically fitter after building up my strength paddleboarding and it feels good to have learnt new skills. I have seen the coast from a different viewpoint (ocean/peaceful). I can feel a weekly progression with feeling more stable and grounded standing up on the board (which is probably mirrored in wider life)" (SUP Paddleboarding, Pembrokeshire Outdoor Health Cluster)

Motivation, sense of achievement & inspiration

“Invigorated my interest in bushcraft and helped me to relax and be more mindful of my surroundings” (Roots Group, Gwynedd Outdoor Health Cluster)

“I have now started going out again I am not going to stop. I already feel fitter and much happier. It has shown me places that I can continue to go to and places I can show my children” (Coastal Connections, Pembrokeshire Outdoor Health Cluster)

“At times when I feel down I think about the donkeys! I'm going to start volunteering with the donkeys” (Snowdonia Donkeys, Gwynedd Outdoor Health Cluster)

“I feel invigorated by spending time with others in nature and it has encouraged me to attend similar activities and volunteer with outdoor groups and even seek out relevant experience, training and qualifications to allow me to work in the area of wellbeing in nature” (Nature connections group, Gwynedd Outdoor Health Cluster)

“It has empowered me as a woman to share my voice and to move my body more freely. I felt safe, more confident and less self-aware during these sessions” (Music and Movement, Gwynedd Outdoor Health Cluster)

“I am determined to swim more throughout the winter as I feel such a benefit from it. I am better informed about planning a swim. I make time to spend time outdoors and really take it all in rather than go from A to B and then home” (Wild Swimming & Wellbeing, Pembrokeshire Outdoor Health Cluster)

Sharing beyond the group

"I am hoping to share the skills and knowledge that I have gained within the community via a local art group that has linked to a community green space (Tabernacle Garden through time in Pembroke). This will help others to benefit from all that I have learnt/experienced. I also have recently suffered a very recent bereavement of a dear close friend - this course has helped in the shock and grief by all that has been offered above" (Kingsmill Woodland Wellbeing Group, Pembrokeshire)

"It has inspired me to do more outdoor activities with my children using some skills I've learnt here; it's also inspired me to encourage/facilitate community projects /activities that promote outdoor learning" (Kingsmill Woodland Wellbeing Group, Pembrokeshire)

"It has made me inspired to explore natural spaces. I didn't realise how beautiful Wales is, and the project has reframed my opinion/view of my home country. I feel inspired to share these spaces with my family and friends" (Woodland Well-being group, RCT Outdoor Health Cluster)

"I can't believe what a positive impact just six sessions have had on my life. Along with my newfound positivity, I have made new friends and found new places to connect with myself and nature and have mini adventures with my children" (Ocean Connections and well-being, Pembrokeshire Outdoor Health Cluster)

Case studies

Case studies were undertaken with nominated participants who had taken part in one or more activities through the Outdoor Health Clusters. The case studies provide nuanced and personal stories of impact in the participant's own words.

Nathaniel – RCT Outdoor Health Cluster

WOODLAND WELL-BEING AND COPPICING COURSE



I am 20 years old. I enjoy watching TV and playing on my Playstation. I sometimes go out with my mates at the weekend.

I have been suffering from anxiety that got worse during the lockdown. Early in the lockdown, it got so bad that I wasn't able to leave the house and I confined myself to my bedroom. I was referred to the early intervention team and they suggested that I look at doing an activity locally. The Coed Lleol programme offered through the Outdoor Health Cluster looked interesting, but I was sceptical at first because I am wary of new things and hadn't been out of my house for a long time. My mum agreed to come with me to take me to the sessions – that was the first time that I had left the house in a year.

The first session was at a local community garden that has a small woodland. It is a lovely location and a very peaceful place to be. The staff are welcoming and very relaxed, non-threatening, knowledgeable and make me feel supported.

I enjoyed the sessions. We did bushcraft, and I even tried willow weaving. I am quite a shy person, so for the first few sessions I didn't say much, but after a while, I chatted with some of the people in the group and that helped me to become a bit more confident.

Doing the initial 6-week course got me interested in doing a more skills-based course. So, I signed up to do the Agored Coppicing Level 1 course with Coed Lleol's Outdoor Health project. It was at the same location, so I felt comfortable attending straight away. This course taught me about Coppicing and how to use coppiced wood to make items. The tutor is really good at explaining how to do things that put me at ease. I have really enjoyed learning new skills and working with wood. It has opened up a new learning opportunity for me. I love the hands-on element as this is the way that I prefer to learn things.

Being outdoors is important for me as I tend to spend a lot of time indoors, it makes me feel relaxed and gives me fresh air. Being outside has helped improve my physical health too as I wasn't motivated to exercise in the house.

The Coed Lleol sessions have made a difference in my life, every time I came home from a session, I'd be so much happier, and I felt a huge sense of achievement that I had gotten out, done new things and learnt new skills. I'd like to develop my skills further; I would like to do more Coppicing work and find out about jobs working outdoors with wood and I am looking into how I can do this. My mum has seen a huge difference in my behaviour too – she has noticed that I have grown in confidence socially and that the programme has helped to ease my anxiety.

I am so thankful to Coed Lleol (Acif Woods) for getting me out of the house – it has made an impact on my life in terms of my mental health and got me interested in new things again.

SJ – Pembrokeshire Outdoor Health Cluster

PEMBROKESHIRE WILD SWIMMING FOR WELLBEING



I am 53 years of age. I have been living abroad since I was 26 and have lived in Wales for over 10 years. I like spending time in nature. I enjoy being creative, photography and contemplating reality. I am interested in the connection between mind and body. I have an interest in polyvagal theory, which examines the communication of the body and the brain and nervous system when faced with stress. I enjoy time with animals and find being around animals very grounding.

I suffer from autism-related anxiety, ADHD, depression, and low mood. I usually become filled with a sense of dread when winter approaches because I traditionally have taken an emotional dip at this time of year. Although I enjoy connecting with people, social interactions create quite a lot of anxiety for me. I find cultures and their implicit meanings confusing, most of the time

Before I started this programme, I was interested in the effects that cold water can have on the body. In 2018 I began taking cold showers after my warm ones and I noticed that my

overall immunity and well-being improved. I used to live by a river and would regularly take a dip throughout the year. I also visited local waterfalls from time to time and have felt the benefits of these excursions.

When I learned about the well-being and wild swimming course with Wild Swim Wales, under the banner of The Pembrokeshire Outdoor Health Project, I intuitively knew that this would be something that would be good for me to commit to. This was a major challenge for me in the middle of winter!

Because of the harsh winter weather, every Wednesday I had to battle my mind to rise to the challenge of attending the wild swimming group, however every time I decided to go, I was always so grateful that I did. Pembrokeshire is beautiful and this group has provided me with the additional treat of going to various stunning locations with our leaders and the group for a swim. We all venture into the waters together and support one another.

When I experienced wild swimming it felt like a complete reset of my nervous system, and the calm quietness of the experience would stay with me for days. The feeling I got from the experience made it easier for me to manage my emotional state. I have noticed a clear improvement in my resilience to take on the challenges of my life. During the sessions, I felt very safe and held. The leaders encouraged and guided me to explore and stay within my limits. The group provided more opportunities than just wild swimming, I have also enjoyed the beach cleans and learning about the seas, tides, waves, rip, swell and currents of which I had no previous knowledge. I have also appreciated the social connections and the bonding of doing something like this in a group.

All in all, I feel a huge improvement in my mental health and my emotional well-being. I would warmly recommend, no pun intended, for others to explore; it feels to me a very safe and guided way to experience winter wellness, increasing confidence and boosting moods. It is great that we are using nature to achieve this.

Julia – Gwynedd Outdoor Health Cluster

WOODLAND WELLBEING GROUP



I have lived a really exciting life as an artist and have been able to travel some of the world with my work. I was brought up appreciating nature and was always gardening and growing food with my close relatives. My parents gave me my own little garden under a lilac tree when I was five and I'd spend hours planting bulbs and shrubs there. My grandparents had a small holding surrounded by woods, so I was fortunate to be able to explore their land as a child. I remember how amazing the strawberries were in those days! I was fascinated by the woodland plants and flowers and even started my own botanical drawing book. I'd spend hours diving into my grandparents' illustrated encyclopaedias and researching all the plants to name them in my book. I just loved being outdoors, I was a girl guide and enjoyed the freedom that the outdoors provided. My work as an artist took me to Egypt, Sweden, Greece, Peru, Brazil, and the USA.

I returned to Wales to help my parents in 2006. Caring for my parents meant that my life shrank, and I became quite isolated. Both my parents have since passed away and unfortunately, I am now disabled and have mobility issues that mean that I walk with a frame. I have also been diagnosed with ADHD, and PTSD and recently I was diagnosed on the Asperger's spectrum. This all means that life is a lot less free than it was for me in my younger years. I try to be as active as possible, and I also support others in my community to do the same. I take an 88-year-old friend swimming each week and I attend a monthly art group. I'd love to make new local friends who have shared passions.

I found out about the woodland well-being group through the Gwynedd Outdoor Health Project. I thought that it would suit me because I wanted to make new friends and I enjoy being outdoors. Because of my disabilities, not wanting to use the car all the time and because I am living on my own, I also received Coed Lleol's nature chat telephone service. This provided me with weekly phone calls that focused on talking about nature. This is a fantastic service that made me feel human – it gave me weekly human contact with a like-minded person, and I got to talk about nature each week.

At the sessions, we participated in many lovely craft activities such as: making paper lanterns with willow and autumnal leaves; paper and paste angels, willow stars; and wreaths ready for Christmas using red dogwood and foliage we picked. These are all displayed around my house now and the wreath is on my front door. Having a group that

meets outside regularly is really good for me as it connects me to new people and allows me to do all sorts of arts and crafts. I can also share my artistic knowledge with others too.

Spending time doing arts and crafts makes me feel healthy – it makes me feel that I am doing something true to myself and I get absorbed in the activity. It is great that the group uses natural resources and not plastics with which to craft. As I live by the coast and marshes, spending time in the woodlands is lovely as it enlivens all the senses. I love seeing an open fire – the smell of it and cooking over it. We even made bread and jam from foraged berries one week. It is so evocative to cook over an open fire. The project officers are welcoming and ensure that vegan options are available.

Being passionate about the environment I always try my hardest to be environmentally friendly, help educate others, and live true to myself. I really love nature and believe we all need to look after her as she supports everything, including our well-being. I feel that these sessions have absolutely helped improve mine.

Warren – Dyfi Valley Outdoor Health Network

ANIMAL-ASSISTED THERAPY



I am 42, I moved to the area a few years ago. My accommodation didn't work out, so I fell into temporary accommodation that I have now been in for over a year. I was in a very low place a year ago, I was suffering from severe depression and was finding it hard to leave the house. Luckily it was my doctor who suggested this project, she called me and asked me what I'd think about doing a programme at the Donkey Sanctuary. I was really surprised and delighted because I like animals and I needed something that was going to help me to get out of the house and lift my mood. I hadn't had any experience with Donkeys before, so I was a bit nervous at first.

I signed up for a seven-week course at Dyfi Donkeys through the Trywydd Iach Outdoor Health Project. When I first started the course, I didn't have much confidence and I was a bit unsure about taking part. The lady who runs the sanctuary is really good and helped put us at ease and of course, being around the Donkeys themselves helped to calm my nerves.

Unit 1, Forestry Hub, Dyfi Eco Parc, Machynlleth, SY20 8AX

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We did a range of activities during this time including learning about the Donkey's behaviour, walking the Donkeys and spending time getting to know them – we even did some mucking out. The course was really good, I really enjoyed it. The course has been brilliant for my well-being, being with the Donkeys really cheers me up! I like being around animals because they are nice, and they don't give you any trouble. Being around Animals is calming and they don't judge you. The course took place in the summer, so it was wonderful to be outside each week in the sunshine. The fact that this programme takes place with a group of people is important as we get to know each other over the weeks, and we formed a good team.

Following the seven-week course, I became a volunteer at the Donkey Sanctuary, so I now go twice a week to help out. This means that I have learnt so much more about how to care for and look after the Donkeys. I can now clean out their feet, measure their breath rate and heart rate and of course, help with the mucking out.

This whole experience has definitely helped me, it has given me more confidence overall. Now, getting stuck in and volunteering is second nature and I have gained so much more confidence around animals.

I have built up my confidence so much through attending this group that I now volunteer at the local Cattery and Kennels and at a Charity Shop in town, both of which I pursued independently. So, I only have Sunday and Monday at home now. I'd love to look for employment, but my housing situation needs sorting first. However, I feel that I am in a good place to pursue this once my accommodation is sorted out.

I still suffer from depression every now and again, but it is so much better and more manageable as I now have so much to focus on during the week. The doctor who first referred me to the Dyfi Donkeys doesn't know what an impact it has had on me yet – but I am looking forward to telling her.

Cath – RCT Outdoor Health Cluster

DOG WALKING FOR WELLBEING



I am an active person who loves getting involved in different activities. I like walking and meeting people and going to different groups. I volunteer at my local charity shop and enjoy writing the newsletter for an organisation that supports me. This is an organisation that supports people with learning difficulties, mental health, or well-being issues, like me, to live independently.

I suffer from anxiety and have had some experiences that have made me quite wary of people. I spend a lot of time in my flat on my own, which is very boring. So, I need things to do that get me out and about and keep me out of trouble! I have a few other health issues including poor eyesight. Because of this, I prefer to do activities that are supported so that I feel safe.

It was my support worker who told me about Dog Walking with Cariad Pet Therapy and the RCT Outdoor Health Project. My grandmother had a dog when I was a little girl and I have always liked dogs. I thought that it would be a good idea for me to try walking with dogs to see if I could take to it. I wouldn't be able to have a dog myself, so having the opportunity to walk them is a lovely idea, it gives me the experience of being with dogs.

We met at a local park that was easy for me to get to with my support worker. There were two dogs that I was able to walk – Idris and Gwen. I really loved Gwen and wanted to take her home! We went for a walk up the hill and went quite far. It was a great way to burn calories! I went on 5 out of the 6 walks and really enjoyed having the dogs and their owners walk with me. Having the dogs there made me feel more confident. I got on very well with the dog owners too – it was nice to be able to get to chat with new people as this is something that normally worries me a lot – I get quite anxious. I think having the dogs there helped to make me feel less worried about this and helped me to relax. I felt that the whole experience was good for me, especially for my well-being. I'd love to continue to do this as it would be a brilliant thing for me to do for both my physical and my mental health. Having

something that is a regular activity is much better for my mental well-being than activities that stop and start. The dogs are lovely and calming and help build up my confidence whilst pushing me on to walk more in the fresh air – I even walked them in the rain! I think that taking part in this activity has spurred me to look at taking part in other activities locally that are outside, like the gardening group.

I enjoyed the experience so much and I miss it now that it has stopped. I have written about my dog walks in the newsletter, and the dogs I walked featured in the Mail on Sunday newspaper article about well-being and loneliness. It is such a good idea to support people using animals, as we are not all lucky enough to be able to own them.



Some of the volunteer dogs at Cariad Pet Therapy

Improvements & Suggestions

86 people suggested improvements or ideas for the sessions going forward. Four main themes emerged for all of the Clusters,

- Longer or follow-on sessions for continued well-being and physical health recovery
- A clear timetable of events and activities (per session) so that participants can plan.
- Better advertising
- Selecting sites that are more accessible by public transport/car (help with transport & costs where needed)

The table below lists the suggestions and ideas that the participants provided per cluster area,

Cluster/Activity	Improvement
Gwynedd Outdoor Health Cluster	
General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better advertising x 2 • More sessions at different times (weekends) x 3 • Longer courses to maximise impact x 3
Snowdonia Donkeys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More involvement with the daily care for the donkeys, mucking out, feeding & watering
Roots	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speed up the sessions – some were a little slow
Pembrokeshire Outdoor Health Cluster	
General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More courses • Longer courses • Continuation of service or clearer signposting to follow-on services • More variety – arts, physical, nature • Ensure accessibility by public transport (avoiding driving where possible)/funding for transport • Clearer communications on who to contact for last-minute info/changes (the Cluster or the Providers?)
Kingsmill Woodland Well-Being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection against biting insects • A longer programme or ongoing drop-in would help with ongoing recovery • A clear timetable of events/schedule. Including snack breaks (the email was unclear)
Wild Swimming for Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wetsuits to borrow • Later start to miss rush hour traffic • Integrating physical movement or Wim Hoff Breathing techniques before/after the swimming could help prepare, warm down the body • Longer than 6-weeks to fully integrate the learning, practice and embed the practice of wild swimming

Coastal Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The compass demonstration – less video footage and more discussion would have a greater impact and integration • Encourage more men to join these sessions • Longer sessions – so all information is gained without rushing
Re-Connect Taster session & 6-week REAPS course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More practical activities or walking and less standing in one place (taster) • A timetable of the 6-week sessions (taster) • Chairs to sit down on (taster) • More practical activities (REAPS) • Vegan biscuits (REAPS) • Clear and ongoing confidentiality agreements • Offer more clarity that the sessions are therapeutic but not therapy
RCT Outdoor Health Cluster	
General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longer or follow-on courses • A timetable of events/schedule to plan and advertise • Better advertising
Meadow Street Gardening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care around social anxiety – not everyone enjoys telling others why they have come to the sessions • Offer different levels of skills courses – from beginners to advanced, to develop skills
Dog Walking Therapy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These could be held in different and more accessible parks (Ynysangharard Park is well-served by public transport)
Trywydd Iach – Dyfi Valley Outdoor Health Cluster	
General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuation of services and ongoing support: is key to maintaining mental and physical health for some participants • Ensure locations have disabled parking, dropped curbs and accessible toilets • More groups in more areas • Weekend or after-work (summertime) sessions • Longer courses (12 weeks or more) • Improved communication with transport support • Clarity about who to contact for each group if cannot attend (Trywydd Iach or the programme leaders). Difficult to ensure a response when staff work part-time. • Clarity about who the activities are for (i.e. do you have to have health issues to attend – literature and communications were unclear) • An event to celebrate the leader's and staff's hard work

<p>Animal-Assisted Therapy Session</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More mindfulness activities • More variety in the mindfulness
<p>Woodland Sessions (adult)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More flexible on times to attend (weekends) • More locations that are easier to access near communities • Follow-on or continuation of sessions beyond 6 weeks • Resource sheets and more help for skills-based activities (i.e. woodworking) • Fire pit (not allowed in some locations, but integral to the group) • The opportunity to learn deeper skills rather than just a series of taster sessions
<p>Woodland Session (Family)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age-appropriate activities for babies-in-arms or target older children • Sessions are too long and not set up for babies-in-arms (especially during the winter)
<p>All sessions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuation of services and ongoing support: is key to maintaining mental and physical health for some participants • Ensure locations have disabled parking, dropped curbs and accessible toilets • More groups in more areas • Weekend or after-work (summertime) sessions • Longer courses (12 weeks or more) • Improved communication with transport support • Clarity about who to contact for each group if cannot attend (Trywydd Iach or the programme leaders). Difficult to ensure a response when staff work part-time. • Clarity about who the activities are for (i.e. do you have to have health issues to attend – literature and communications were unclear) • An event to celebrate the leader's and staff's hard work

Overall Rating

Overall, 156 participants across the four clusters rated the Outdoor Health Activities, 4.8 stars out of 5.



For individual projects this was,

Area	Star rating
Gwynedd Outdoor Cluster (n=19)	4.7
Pembrokeshire Outdoor Cluster (n=28)	4.8
RCT Cluster (n=16)	4.9
Trywydd Iach Cluster (n=63)	4.9
ALL (n=157)	4.8

Recommendations

The following recommendations are for guidance going forward,

- A greater number of adult participants registered than attended sessions. An exploration of the reasons for non-attendance would inform future practice and highlight unanticipated barriers to attendance.
- A full-time member of staff (admin, advertising and organisation) would ensure consistent communication between the partners and the participants. Part-time delivery staff could run and support the groups. This would aid in consistent communication, advertising and timetables/schedule creation.
- A greater number of female participants both registered and engaged in activities (only about 25% of participants were male), the walking groups and wild swimming groups in particular attracted a lot of women. A collaboration/partnership with local men's mental health groups could ensure a great take-up by males. A consultation could explore how to attract more men to the groups (exploring what men want, how they find out about activities, and what barriers to engagement they have).
- Consider a range of programmes to attract a greater number of participants from minority communities in the area (work in partnership with faith groups or established groups that engage these communities)

- Further connections and promotion to the GP surgeries and communications about referral routes and suitability for participants could create stronger links and a greater number of referrals through this channel. Consider making one surgery an exemplar surgery – working more closely with them and creating a strong case study to make a compelling case for others to join in.
- Consider developing a network or outdoor health networks (co-run by Coed Lleol – Small Woods Wales) to share knowledge, best practices, and ideas and help to problem solve.

ⁱ Brag, Wood & Barton, 2013 Health and the natural environment: A review of evidence, policy, practice and opportunities for the future, Exeter University, 2018 and Cervinka, Renate, Holtge et al, 2014. Green public Health – Benefits of Woodlands on Human Health and Well-being. Austrian Research Centre for Forests, Pretty J, Peacock J, Sellens, M and Griffin, M. 2005. The Mental and Physical Health Outcomes of Green Exercise' International Journal of Environmental Health , 2005 15 (5) 319-337. Park, B et al. 2010. The Physiological effects of Shinrin-yoku: evidence from field experiments in 24 forests across Japan. In Environmental Health Prev Med 2010 15 (1) 18-26) to name a few

ⁱⁱ Natural Resources Wales survey 2014, 2018.

ⁱⁱⁱ Health in Wales, NHS. <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/healthtopics/conditions/mentalhealth>

^{iv} [Torjesen, I \(2016\) Social prescribing could help alleviate pressure on GP's, BMJ 352; 143](#)

^v [The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale \(WEMWBS\)](#)

^{vi} [Validity of the international physical activity questionnaire short form \(IPAQ-SF\): A systematic review \(nih.gov\)](#)

^{vii} [EQ-5D \(euroqol.org\)](#)

Unit 1, Forestry Hub, Dyfi Eco Parc, Machynlleth, SY20 8AX

☎ 01654 701495 🌐 coedlleol.org.uk ✉ coedlleol@smallwoods.org.uk