



Actif Woods Wales Stakeholder Events 2019

Stakeholder Consultation



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Photos of Actif Woods Wales Stakeholder Events



Ceredigion



Anglesey



Gwynedd



RCT



Merthyr Tydfil



Anglesey



Swansea



Gwynedd



Neath Port Talbot

Introduction

Actif Woods Wales is a programme of activities designed and delivered by Coed lleol (Small Woods Wales) to promote health and well-being across nine areas in Wales. The nine locations, derived from the Welsh index of multiple deprivation, represent communities that have high health needs, low employment rates and often poor access to services.

Actif Woods deliver weekly half-day sessions to vulnerable adults from the local community that consist of woodland exercise and skills-building sessions. Activities are delivered by expert leaders and range from bush craft and fire lighting skills to charcoal making, coppicing, green woodworking, whittling, willow-weaving, green gym and foraging, tree and wildlife identification walks. Some sessions include campfire cooking with a focus on healthy eating. Participants also take responsibility for clearing rubbish and light woodland management whilst engaged in the Actif Woods Programme. Additional walking groups are run at the Merthyr Tydfil, Gwynedd and Wrexham groups.

To celebrate the end of the financial year, eight stakeholder events were undertaken at each of Actif Woods Wales locations (note: the Wrexham group held a separate event for its walking group participants this has not been included in this report). The events provided an opportunity to gather together past and present participants, partner and referral organisations (past and future), local councillors and council members, conservation groups and other relevant stakeholders. The events provided a platform to disseminate news about Actif Woods Wales programmes, its progress made, the research that has been undertaken and to discuss plans for future delivery. Each event had taster sessions to showcase Actif Woods Wales programmes and each provided an opportunity to consult with the stakeholders.

The stakeholder events presented an opportunity to gather evaluative feedback on Actif woods programmes and consult with stakeholders on how Actif woods is progressing on its key performance indicators (see below)

The following report presents the findings of the consultation exercises undertaken across the eight stakeholder events.

Key Performance Indicators of Actif Woods Wales

Actif woods Wales have four principle key performance indicators, these are as follows,

1. Improve participants physical, mental and social wellbeing
2. Increased capacity of local organisations, practitioners and community volunteers to deliver woodland-based activities for health and wellbeing
3. Sharing knowledge and raising awareness about how and why to incorporate woodland activities into health and social care and practice and policy.
4. Local woodlands are accessed, and improved for the benefit of participating communities

Table showing the Stakeholder days, turnout and activities





Stakeholder Event Location	Date	Taster sessions	Presenters	Number of attendees	Organisations attended
Swansea. Penllergaer Valley Woods. SA4 9GS	31 st January 2019 10:30am – 2:30pm	Foraging walk	Amie Andrews (National Update) , Ceri Williams (south Wales update), Nico Jenkins (local update), Ed Lord (PhD research), Natasha Simons (evaluation)	20	Swansea Council Children’s Play and Learn services, Killvey Volunteers, Local Primary Mental Health service, Dryad Bushcraft , Welsh Wildlife Organisation Brain Injury Unit (Cefn Coed), Swansea University
Flintshire. Wrexham Woodland Skills Centre	12 th March 2019			10	
Merthyr Tydfil. Cyfarthfa Park. CF47 8RE	14 th March 2019 10am – 2pm	Willow weaving & Fire lighting skills with campside cooking	Ceri Williams (National and South Wales update), Carys Soloman (Local update AWW, Anna Stickman (Local update Connecting people and nature update), Natasha Simons (evaluation)	15	Hafel – mental illness recovery MIND Merthyr Tydfil – Mental health support
Neath Port Talbot. Knoll Country Park CF42 5NR	26 th March 2019 10:30am- 2:30pm	Bushcraft activities	Ceri Williams (National and South Wales update), Maggie Cox-Elsley (Local update AWW), Neil Heins (Local update Working with Nature), Ed Lord (PhD research) Natasha Simons (evaluation)	32	MIND NPT – mental health support, Swansea University Woodlands Community Group, Neath Port Talbot Carers group, Pontedawe Town Council, Neath Port Talbot Council (environment), Cwn Ni Lach – Dove workshop
Gwynedd. Moel y Ci Farm & environment centre, LL57 4BB	28 th March 2019 10:30- 3pm	Bushcraft activities, Campfire cooking, music and whittling craft activity	Amie Andrews (National Update) , Melissa Dhillon (local update), Heli Gittins (PhD research), Natasha Simons (evaluation)	18	Gwynedd Council, Bangor University, The Walich Homeless charity, Hafal Mental Health Charity, CAIS addiction and recovery charity, Tan y Maen Mental health Charity.
Anglesey. Coed Llwynonn, LL61 6DQ.	29 th March 2019	Craft activity, campfire cooked lunch, Orienteering and green gym.	Amie Andrews (National Update), John (Local update), Natasha Simons (evaluation)	60	Caniad – Addiction recovery, Menter Mon - not for profit social enterprise, Red Squirrel Trust Wales, North Wales Wildlife Trust, Flying Start Anglesey, Isle of Anglesey County Council
Rhondda Cynon Taff. Dare valley Parc, CF44 7RG	5 th April 2019	Games, Tree and Bird ID walk.	Ceri Williams (National and South Wales update), Gareth Edge	12	Welcome to our woods Natural resources Wales University of South Wales (environmental studies) Homestart RCT (Felindre cancer care walking group).
Aberystwyth	11 th April 2019	Whittling, Spring Wreaths, campfire skills, wood turning.	Amie Andrews (national update and summary of Heli Gittin’s work, Cath Cave, Natasha Simons	32	MIND Aberystwyth, Social services (local council), Cycling community action group,
Total Attendees				199	35

Table 1: Stakeholder Events, Activities and Turnout

Method

Task one – Group SWOT analysis (feedback forest)

A creative method of evaluation was designed to maximise participation from the attendees (who had a range of abilities including those with special educational needs). This encouraged participation from all attendees and provided a visual representation of the feedback given. The aim of the evaluation was to gather ideas and feedback on what stakeholders consider to be the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) to the Actif Wood Wales programme. Colour-coded luggage tags were utilised to gather reflections on the following headings:

-  **Green – Things you value or like about Actif Woods Wales (STRENGTHS)**
-  **Red – Things that Actif Woods Wales could do better (WEAKNESSES)**
-  **Yellow – What could Actif Woods Wales do in the future (Your ideas!) (OPPORTUNITIES)**
-  **Blue – What might prevent Actif Woods Wales from developing or progressing (THREATS)**

The luggage labels were then tied to four identically labelled tree branches to create a visual feedback forest (see pictures below).

This evaluative exercise was able to collect the thoughts and feelings of a wide range of Actif Woods Stakeholders. The qualitative nature of this exercise presents an opportunity to understand the principle thoughts of the attendees on the value of Actif woods rather than an opportunity to measure outcomes in a systematic quantitative manner. Therefore, the results are not to be taken as an absolute measure, but as an indication of the direction of Actif Woods and the impact of Actif Woods Programmes on its varied stakeholders.

Photos of the feedback forest



Sample Size (task one)

The feedback forest garnered 756 individual responses. Table 2 presents the number of responses across the eight groups:

	Number of attendees	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats	Total
Swansea	20	23	9	22	9	63
Merthyr	15	38	8	30	17	93
Flintshire	10	53	11	44	21	129
Neath Port Talbot	32	37	10	24	25	96
Gwynedd	18	28	13	19	14	74
Anglesey	60	45	9	24	15	93
RCT	12	22	6	13	11	52
Aberystwyth	32	70	13	41	32	156
TOTAL	199	316	79	217	144	756

Table 2: Sample group for task 1 and response figures for SWOT exercise

Task two – Discussion Groups

Task two aimed to get more in-depth insight into the attendees' thoughts and experience on pre-defined topics that align with Actif Woods Wales' aims and objectives. The topics covered the following areas:

Topic	Discussion	Number of comments received
Health and Wellbeing	In what ways are Actif Woods Programmes effective in supporting the health and wellbeing of its participants?	54
The Programmes	Are Actif Woods Wales delivering the right programme for the right amount of time?	54
Supporting People	How effective is Actif Woods Wales at building confidence and building skills and knowledge relevant for volunteering and employment	26
The Environment	In what ways are Actif Woods Wales programmes having any effect on the environment?	56
Recruiting new people	Who should Actif Woods Wales be working with? (partners, organisations, groups and individuals)	83
Total		273

Table 3: Sample group for task 2 and discussion group topics

Each discussion group was also given a selection of prompt cards to guide them in their discussion (if required). Most of the attendees had prior experience of Actif Woods Wales, but some were new to the organisation, therefore all attendees were encouraged to discuss with others and work in pairs or small groups. Actif Woods staff were on hand to facilitate discussion groups and act as scribes where needed. The discussion group task were undertaken at six of the stakeholder events¹.

¹ The participants at the Anglesey group have special educational needs, some are non-verbal and some unable to write or have low-literacy skills. Although participants, with support, were able to participate in task 1, it was felt that task two would be too complex and difficult to undertake in the outdoors environment. Wrexham/Flintshire stakeholders the evaluator was unable to attend and therefore only task one was undertaken by the mentors on her behalf in task

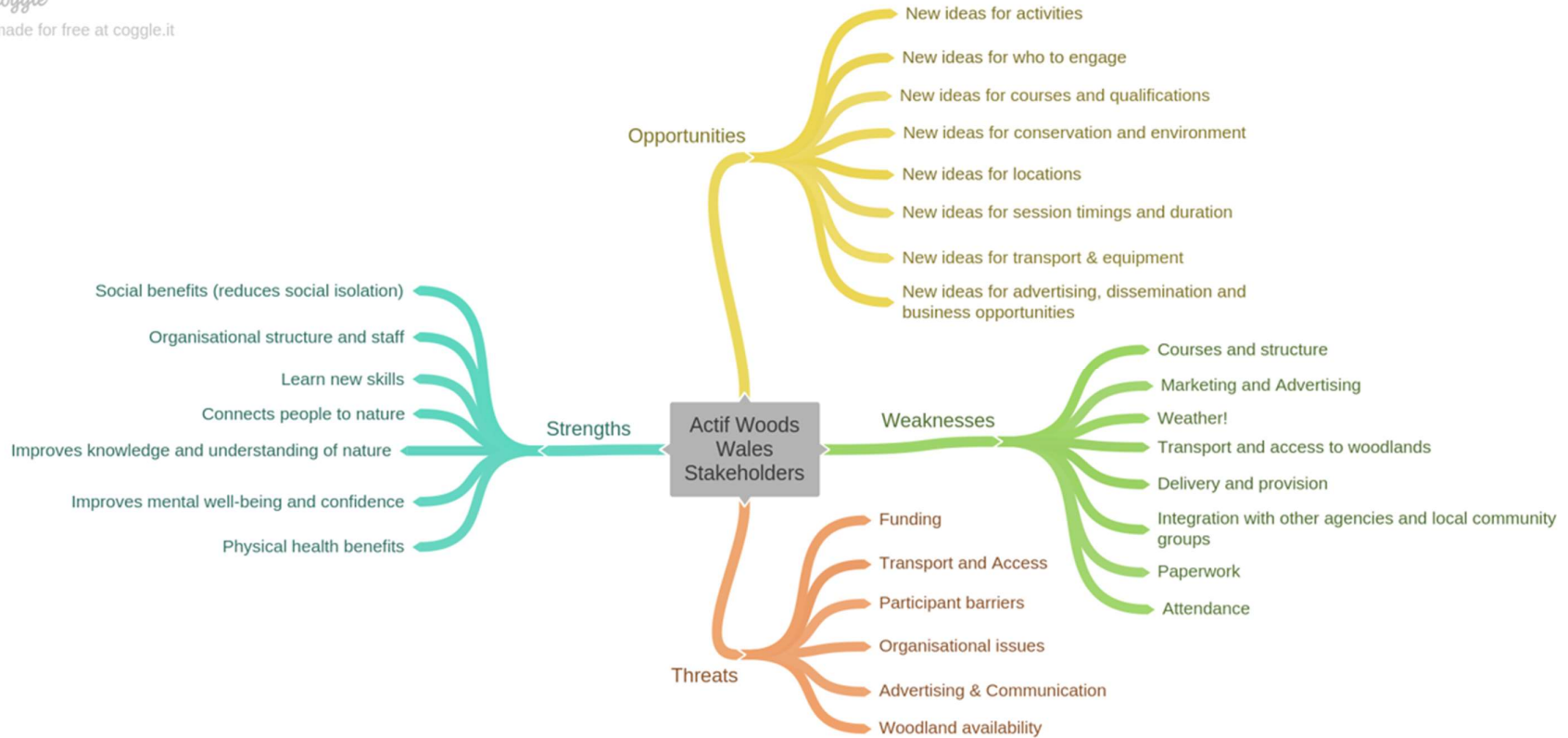
Additional Evaluation

At each event, evaluation postcards were placed on the tables for the attendees to fill in if they had prior experience of Actif Woods Wales and wanted to provide further feedback. A total of 28 evaluation postcards were filled-in and returned. See Appendix B for a selection of the quotes given regarding the benefit of Actif woods Wales programmes. During lunchtime or break sessions the evaluator gathered contact details from participants and alumni who were interested in sharing their stories further in the form of case studies. A total of 17 participants across the groups agreed to be case studies for further evaluation. It is anticipated that this will produce richer data and be an opportunity to gather more personal journeys from participants. This will be written up in a separate report.

Results

Figure1: Summary of the major themes from the group SWOT analysis

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Strengths – what do you like of value about Actif Woods Wales?

The 199 attendees of the stakeholder events provided a total of 316 positive comments about what they valued or liked about Actif Woods Wales. The comments were coded into 26 sub-themes and then recoded into 8 major themes (see Table 4). Figure 2 below illustrates the percentage of comments coded by major theme this demonstrates that most comments related to the social benefits of being part of the Actif woods programme. Figure 3 below demonstrates the number of comments received for each sub-theme. A breakdown of each major theme is presented below.

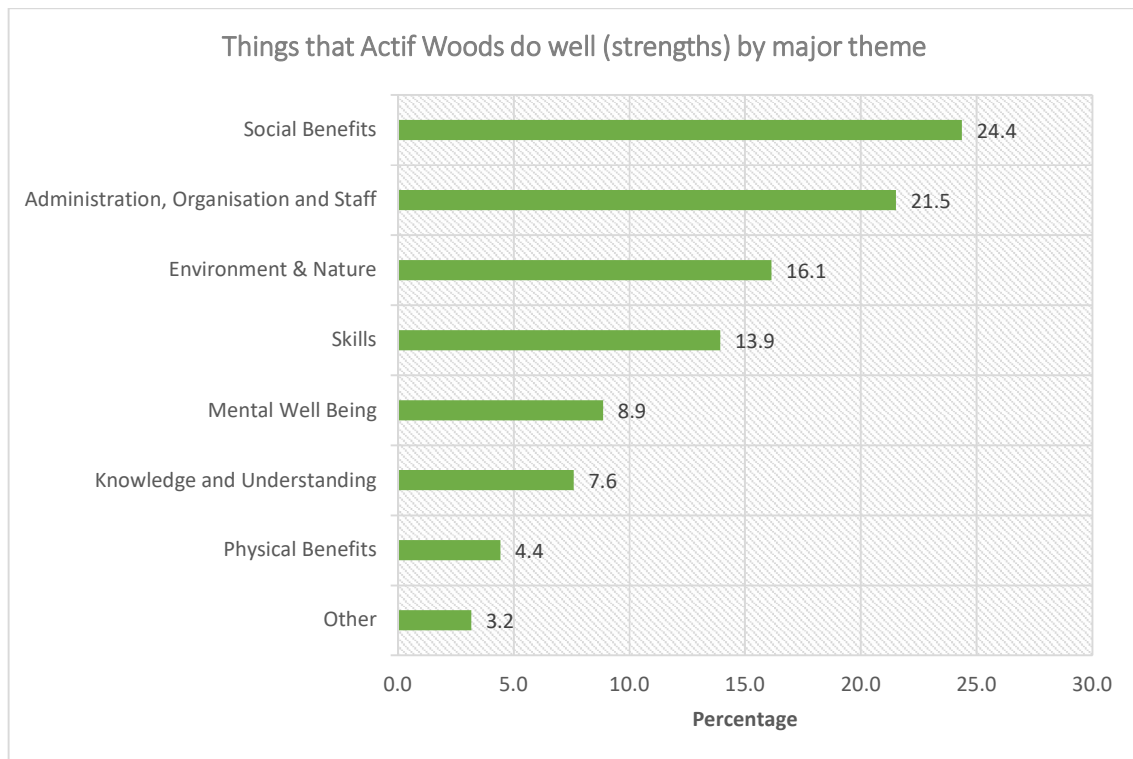


Figure 2: Chart illustrating the major themes for 'strengths'

Theme (major and sub)	%	Count
Social Benefits	24.4	77
Make new friends/work together	12.7	40
Inclusive and diverse groups	6.6	21
Reduces social isolation	5.1	16
Administration, Organisation and Staff	21.5	66
Friendly, helpful, informative and kind staff	5.1	16
Easy going, non-pressurised and positive environment	2.8	9
Administration, training, organisation and structure	3.8	12
Timings - regular weekly sessions	0.9	3
Campfire	2.5	8
Biscuits, food and tea	2.5	8
Variety of activities offered (inc. creative)	3.8	12
Environment & Nature	16.1	51
Being outside, in fresh air and lovely location	9.5	30
Being closer to nature - connecting with nature	4.7	15
Environmental benefit & Conservation	1.9	6
Skills	13.9	44
Increases skills/variety of skills	10.8	34
Pride, satisfaction in making or achieving something	3.2	10
Mental Well Being	8.9	28
Mental wellbeing - feel better/lifts mood	4.4	14
Increases confidence - trying new things	3.2	10
Evokes memories/reconnects with childhood	1.3	4
Knowledge and Understanding	7.6	24
Increases knowledge of nature and environment	5.1	16
Increases knowledge of local history - knowledge sharing	2.5	8
Physical Benefits	4.4	14
Physical Exercise	4.4	14
Other	3.2	10
Helping and supporting others/each other	1.3	4
Enjoyment & Enthusiasm	0.9	3
Transport	0.6	2
Gives opportunities to people	0.3	1

Table 4: Table of major and sub themes for the strengths of Actif Woods

Things that Actif Woods do well (strengths) by sub-theme



Figure 3: Chart illustrating the sub-themes of the strengths of Actif woods

Social Benefits

Most of the comments that were received referred to the social benefits afforded by being part of an Actif woods Wales group (77 comments). This included reducing social isolation (16 comments) and providing opportunities to connect with new, like-minded people or a diverse group of people (40 comments) For others the groups represented inclusivity and the ability to attract a range of people with differing needs (21 comments). For one participant the strength of Actif woods was in, “The opportunity to work as part of a team and meeting new people” (Flintshire participant) for another the social aspects of the weekly groups enabled them to, “make friends and share experiences” (attendee Merthyr). One Anglesey participant felt that the value of the regular groups was in the, “enthusiasm of participants, building relationships, reliability of numbers and knowing participants become friends” (attendee Anglesey). Being inclusive was of key importance to some participants and referral agencies, one person commented, ‘I love Active Woods Inclusive approach’ (attendee Swansea) and another praised Actif woods for its inclusion of everyone, they wrote that it is, “not ageist – never too young or too old” (attendee Ceredigion). Other comments referred to the benefits of community participation and ‘togetherness’. A breakdown of the data by the eight Actif Woods groups demonstrated that Ceredigion received the most comments that referred to social benefits. 29.9% of those that made comments about social benefits were from the Ceredigion group (see appendix A).

Administration, organisation and staff

68 of the positive comments were about the structure and content of the programmes and the staff. 16 comments referred to the friendliness, kindness, knowledge or helpfulness of the staff (mentors and leaders). One attendee commented, “lovely people and staff – a community of kind, open and sensitive people” (attendee Ceredigion) another wrote of the, “the enthusiasm of the leaders” (attendee Neath Port Talbot). For some it was the way in which staff interacted with the group that was of central importance, they commented about, “having sensitive tutors who understand the dynamics of the group” (attendee Flintshire) and another commented that, “staff take time to get to know the participants and their needs” (attendee Anglesey). A breakdown of data by the eight Actif Woods groups showed that Ceredigion and Flintshire received the most comments that referenced positive comments about the staff.

9 comments were given about the overall positive environment of the groups. One attendee commented that the new skills were delivered at a, “nice gentle pace” (attendee Flintshire) and another suggested that the group was, “friendly, supportive and nothing is too much trouble to make people at ease, feel wanted and of value” (attendee Ceredigion). For others it was the mix of participants and democratic feel of the groups that they valued, they commented, “no one in our group was an alpha-male – this was great” (attendee Ceredigion).

There were 12 comments that referred to the value of the variety of activities offered by Actif Woods. These included the range of craft, practical and knowledge-based activities offered. One attendee stated that they valued the, “variety – engaging, different and democratic” (attendee Swansea).

12 attendees presented positive comments about the organisation, structure and administration of the groups (this included some training and support for Actif Woods leaders)

8 comments were given about the value of the campfire. For some this represented an important social function, “sitting by the fire chills everyone out” (attendee Ceredigion) for others it represents

an opportunity for, “cooking together on an open fire” (attendee Gwynedd). 8 comments were about the refreshments, tea and biscuits.

Nature and the Environment

51 comments were made about the positive value of being in nature and the helping the environment. 30 of these comments referred to the benefit of being outside in the fresh air and in a beautiful environment. For some attendees it was the change in environment that they valued, one attendee commented that they liked, “doing things outdoors instead of indoors” (attendee Neath Port Talbot) and for another it was a chance to be away from the technologies that can fill modern life, “outdoors, empowered, back to basics – NO SOCIAL MEDIA” (attendee Neath Port Talbot). For one attendee the experience of being part of Actif woods has changed their perspective on the outdoors, they commented, “I have enjoyed Actif Woods Wales and it has made me enjoy the outdoors” (attendee Merthyr Tydfil). 15 comments were made that referred to connecting people to nature. The comments coded to this sub-theme ranged from, “being involved in nature” (attendee Merthyr) to “observing the natural surroundings” (attendee Neath Port Talbot) and “Watching the various stages of plant life” (attendee Neath Port Talbot). There were fewer comments given about any positive environmental impacts to being part of the Actif Woods Programme. Only 6 attendees presented comments that referred to tangible environmental benefits, these included, “where we have left positive outcomes in woodlands (habitat and access etc.)” (attendee Swansea), “Learning about nature and how we can help maintain it” (attendee Neath Port Talbot) and that the programmes, “benefit wildlife” (attendee Rhondda Cynon Taff).

A breakdown by Actif Woods Group shows that most comments that referred to nature and the environment came from the Neath Port Talbot group attendees (see appendix A).

Skills

A large proportion of the positive comments given were about the opportunity, variety and acquisition of new skills that Actif woods programmes encompass. 44 comments related to skills. 34 of these were about the value of providing new skills and 10 referred to the satisfaction achieved after making or achieving something. One attendee commented that it was, “doing things that you would never do otherwise” (attendee Flintshire) and another suggested that “sharing skills” was valued (attendee Rhondda Cynon Taff). Another said that being part of the course and learning new skills gave a, “sense of pride from taking part” (attendee Merthyr) and a further comment suggests that they got a, “sense of achievement in creating things” (attendee Ceredigion). For some participants, it was the challenge of acquiring new skills that was valued, one attendee suggested, “I have learnt new skills that I *NEVER* thought I could do” (attendee Swansea).

A breakdown of the comments by Actif woods group showed that the Flintshire attendees were most likely to make comments about acquiring new skills. Flintshire attendees made 27.3% of the comments referring to skills (see Appendix A).

Mental Well-Being

28 comments referred directly to the value of Actif Woods programmes on mental well-being. 14 of these comments related to people feeling better or having their mood lifted from being in a

woodland environment, being with others and focusing on learning new skills. One attendee commented that being part of a group, “reduces anger over work-based issues” (attendee Ceredigion) and another suggested that, “working with wood is always beneficial for me” (attendee Swansea). 10 of the comments referred to growing in confidence which, in turn, benefits mental well-being. One comment suggested,

I think it's brilliant that Actif woods provides for adults in particular – I see that it makes them feel safer to try new things, particularly because they meet other people that are relatable. They also then are given the confidence that the session IS for them and it's OK to have a go.

(attendee Swansea)

This highlights the importance of providing group activities in a supported and supportive environment, this was reinforced by a participant from the same group who suggested, “Actif woods activities have built and increased my confidence” (attendee Swansea). A further comment from a participant from the Merthyr group highlights this further,

It has given me a huge boost in confidence and sense of wellbeing. The sense of fulfilment that I get from the work I do with Actif woods is astonishing.

(attendee Merthyr)

An attendee at the Rhondda Cynon Taff event wrote that the Actif woods programmes, “help build confidence and reduce isolation” (attendee RCT). A breakdown of the comments by Actif Woods Group demonstrated that the most comments that referred to mental well-being were collected at the Swansea event (see appendix A).

Knowledge and Understanding

24 of the comments received valued the knowledge growth that Actif Woods provides. This was divided into the sub-themes, knowledge of nature/trees/woodlands (16 comments) and knowledge of local history & peer to peer learning (8 comments). For some, the value that they gained was in, “Learning about the environment” (attendee Ceredigion) or “Learning how to use hand tools and identify species of plants” (attendee Merthyr) for others the activities sparked interest, “Collecting plants for foraging was interesting” (attendee Swansea) and provided access to experts, “learning of unknown knowledge from talented and instructional people” (attendee Flintshire). The comments also revealed that the programmes are able to instil a longer-term sense of value about woodlands and the environment – one comment read that they valued, “Learning about nature and how we can help maintain it” (attendee Neath Port Talbot).

8 comments related to learning from others and learning about local history or traditional skills. For some the value was in the participants’, leaders’ and mentors’, “willingness to share knowledge” (attendee Gwynedd) and for others it was a opportunity for everyone to get together to share and learn, for example, one comment read, “sharing information with others” (attendee Flintshire) and another the value was in the ability to, “learn from others” (attendee Merthyr).

For other attendees the value of the Actif woods programme was connected to their sense of the past, forgotten skills and knowledge and to reconnecting with their childhood memories. One attendee commented that the experience of being in a woodland that held childhood memories was central to the value that Actif woods brings, “being on Kilvey Hill brings feelings of local history from

Swansea's past" (attendee Swansea) and another from the same group commented, "for myself, attending Actif woods programme was returning to a local area which held memories from childhood" (attendee Swansea). This was echoed in another comment collected at the Neath Port Talbot event, where the value of the groups was in "re-connecting with childhood and being carefree" (attendee Neath Port Talbot). For other attendees the opportunity to learn traditional crafts was central to the value of the programme.

A breakdown of the comments by Actif Woods group demonstrates that the Flintshire group were most likely to write comments that related to gaining knowledge and understanding (see appendix A)

Physical Benefits

Only 14 comments were made about the physical benefits of being part of the Actif Woods programme. Most of these comments were received from the Anglesey group who hold regular woodland gym sessions with their participants. Merthyr and Ceredigion also received some comments relating to the positive physical benefits (both of these groups also run regular walking groups).

Other

There were 10 comments that did not code into any of the major of sub themes. These were therefore coded into the 'other' category. These comments related to 'helping others & supporting each other' (4 comments), 'transport' (2 comments) and 'enjoyment and enthusiasm' (3 comments) and 'provides opportunities' (1 comment).

Weaknesses - What could Actif Woods Wales Do Better?

The attendees were encouraged to also think about how the Actif Woods Programme could be improved. Attendees were not guided in this however they were encouraged to feedback from their own experience or knowledge. The 199 attendees provided 78 suggestions on how Actif Woods Wales can be improved (there were an additional 12 comments that stated that no changes were needed, these have not been included in the final count). The 78 suggestions were coded into 19 subthemes and 8 major themes. Table 5 illustrates the sub and major themes that emerged from the comments.

Major and Sub-theme	Number of comments	%
Courses and Structure	20	25.6
Increased regular sessions	7	9.1
Follow-up sessions	4	5.2
Progression route for advancing skills	6	7.8
Longer sessions	3	3.9
Marketing, Publicity and Communications	18	23.1
Better/more publicity and marketing	14	18.2
Better/more communications	4	5.2
Weather	9	11.5
Better weather!	6	7.8
Support for weatherproof clothing	3	3.9
Transport & Access	9	11.5
Better transport & access to woodland sites	9	11.7
Delivery and provision	9	11.5
Better expertise and better health and safety	3	3.9
More focus to overall aims	2	2.6
Seating	1	1.3
Better Food/cakes/biscuits	3	3.9
Integration with agencies & community	6	7.7
Closer links to community & social prescribing	4	5.2
Closer links to schools	1	1.3
Educating health professionals	1	1.3
Paperwork & attendance	4	5.1
Less paperwork & better structured paperwork	4	5.1
Attendance	2	2.6

Table 5: Table showing the major and sub themes for the 'weaknesses' of Actif Woods

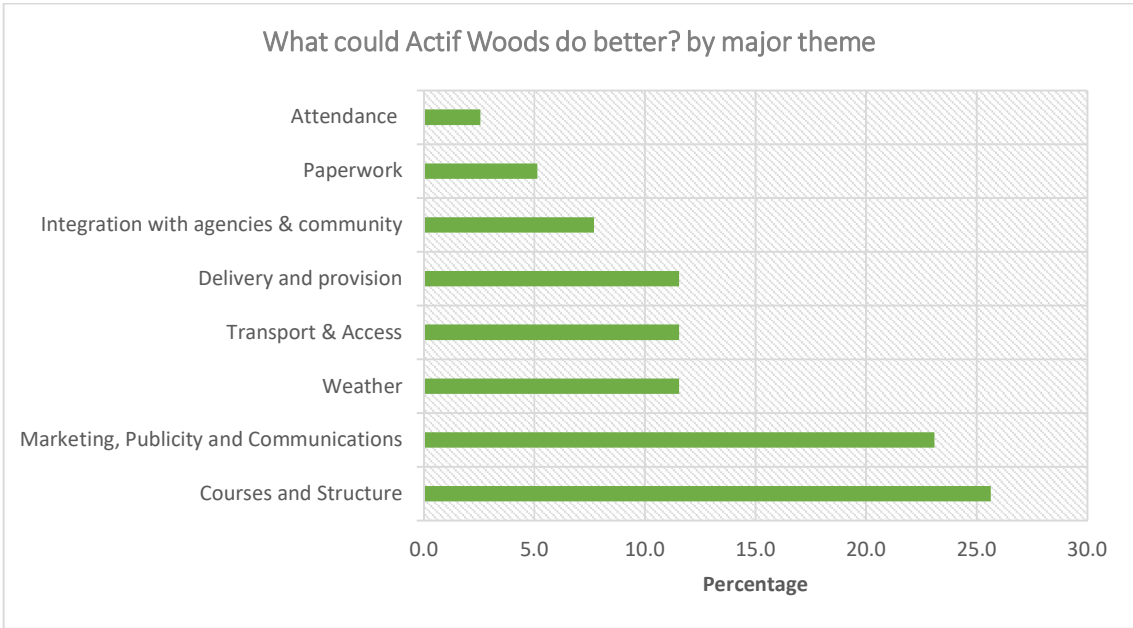


Figure 4: Chart illustrating the major-themes of the 'weaknesses' of Actif Woods.

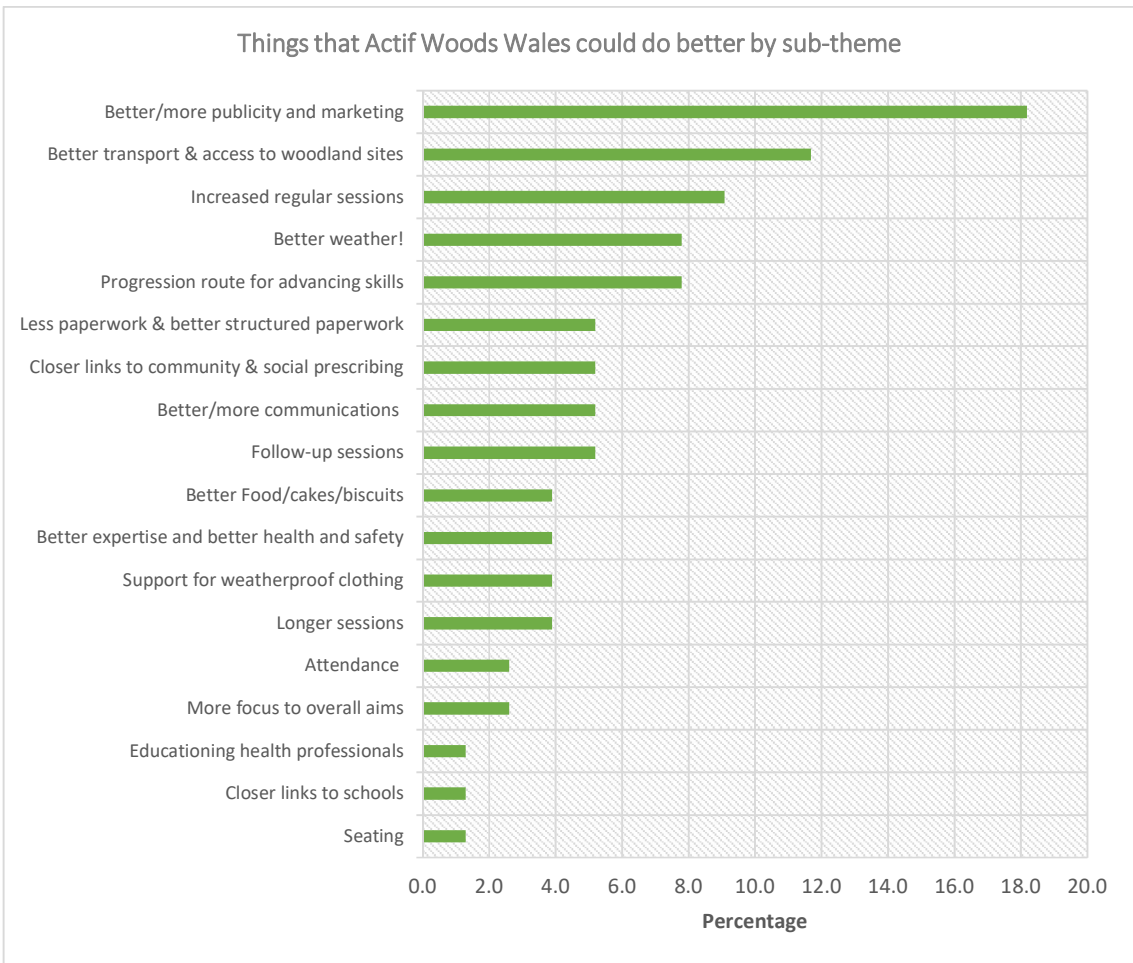


Figure 5: Chart illustrating the sub-themes of the 'weaknesses' of Actif Woods.

Figure 4 demonstrates that the main improvements suggested focus on the major themes of publicity and marketing and course structure and regularity. The 20 comments coded to course structure focused on the desire for more courses, more regular meetings and follow-up courses. Some participants commented that they wanted a stronger progression route once the initial 'introduction' course had finished (6-week course). This was illustrated in a comment that read, "extended sessions – for those who are more abled and with skills to make craft things" (attendee Gwynedd) or "more in-depth studying and more practical work" (attendee Flintshire) and another who commented that there was, "not enough time to improve skills properly" (attendee Ceredigion). This was discussed in more detail during discussion group 2 (see page 29).

18 comments referred to marketing, publicity and communications. The main emphasis of these comments was for improved or increased marketing and publicity in their local areas. One attendee commented, "more publicity. As I wasn't aware of them until being referred by the brain injury unit" (attendee Swansea) and another suggested that Actif woods needed to, "explain how they (local people) can access Actif Woods" (attendee Merthyr) further, that there was a, "need to advertise more locally i.e. charity shop windows etc" (attendee Merthyr). For publicity, attendees felt that Actif woods should promote their successes in a more productive manner, one attendee commented, "more case studies, get your good news stories out there!" (attendee, Swansea). Communication was also mentioned by 4 attendees. One suggested that, "a timetable in advance of the activities on offer and where" (attendee Ceredigion) would be useful and another felt that communication with the community and participants could be, "improved to encourage people to attend" (attendee Gwynedd).

The weather, particularly bad weather (rain and snow) garnered 9 comments (although it was clear that the attendees knew that Actif woods couldn't control the weather). 3 comments that related to this, were connected to a lack of suitable clothing (waterproofs or walking boots) that could act as a barrier to some participants who are financially restricted. The locations that Actif Woods meet are varied, some having access to indoor shelters or buildings and others that do not, as Actif woods meet year-round the weather can often be a deterrent for some participants (linking this with 'patchy attendance' in general).

11 comments related to transport, access and attendance. The access to the Actif woods woodlands is varied, some being accessible by public transport and others only accessible by car or shared lift (in some instances Actif woods are able to provide transport for participants). The nature of being a woodland environment group means that more remote locations are often inevitable, however careful choice of the woodland setting taking into account public transport links, accessibility for less-abled participants and availability of facilities and shelter could mitigate some of these issues. The attendance at groups was mentioned by 2 attendees, who both suggested that attendance at some groups was intermittent.

9 comments related directly to the delivery and provision of the Actif woods Groups. 4 of these comments referred to having better or more food, biscuits, cakes and seating. 5 comments were specific to the delivery of the programme and its focus. One comment from a volunteer specified, "as a volunteer there was little information and I was unaware of the purpose of the group" (attendee Ceredigion) and another felt that more clarity was needed in the outward profile of Actif woods commenting, "more clarity – Small woods/Coed Lleol/Actif woods?". One attendee commented that more attention was needed over health and safety, "(there was a) lack of PPE – especially eye protection" (attendee Ceredigion) and further attendee at the RCT event felt that improvements could be made in the delivery of the programmes, "when running courses in

woodlands, have people whom are more experienced and versed in bushcraft to deliver a better and more informed experience” (attendee RCT).

Better and more effective integration into the community, community health and schools was also suggested by 6 of the attendees. Too much paperwork was mentioned by only 3 attendees, and one commented that a lack of attention to the OCN paperwork meant that there was a lot of repeated entries that were unnecessary, they commented, “OCN workbooks – think about how it is laid out for dyslexic people. Try to avoid repetition where you have to write the same thing twice” (attendee Ceredigion).

Opportunities - Things that Actif Woods Wales could do in the future

The attendees provided 217 new ideas or opportunities for Actif Woods Wales to pursue in the future. These were coded into 27 sub-themes and 9 major-themes (see Table 6 below).

Sub and Major themes	Comments	Percent
New groups to engage	26	11.7%
Schools	5	2.3
Families and children	7	3.2
Community groups	11	5.0
Activity Ideas	94	42.3%
Performance and music	10	4.5
Arts and crafts	24	10.8
Woodworking	6	2.7
Nature talks and learning, expert talks	15	6.8
Woodland infrastructure	16	7.2
Bushcraft and survival (food)	9	4.1
Physical activities	10	4.5
Well-being activities	7	3.2
Courses and Qualifications	15	6.8%
Courses in specific areas	8	3.6
Ideas for development of courses	7	3.2
Environment and conservation	12	5.2%
Woodland management	4	1.8
Environment and conservation	8	3.6
Locations	15	6.8%
Visit/go to other locations	5	2.3
Use other locations	10	4.5
Types of Sessions	26	11.7%
Drop-in or one-off activities	9	4.1
Length of courses	8	3.6
Evening camp or overnight	9	4.1
Logistics	7	3.2%
Equipment	2	0.9
Transport	5	2.3
Advertising, dissemination and business	11	5.0%
Dissemination	6	2.7
Advertising	3	1.4
Monetise	2	0.9
Other	11	5.0%
Training opportunities	3	1.4

Work with other referral agencies	8	3.6
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Table 6: Table of major and sub-themes for 'opportunities' for Actif Woods Wales

Figure 6 illustrates the percentage of comments received for each major theme. This demonstrates that most of the comments suggested new ideas for activities that could be undertaken during the woodland sessions (43.3%). A breakdown of these ideas has been provided in Figure 7 which shows the sub-themes. Figure 7 shows that 10.8% of the suggestions for activities focused on arts and crafts. These included activities such as, land art and community art, making wooden jewellery and toys, nature-photography, basket-making and water-colour painting. 7.2% of the comments referred to doing activities that related to woodland infrastructure such as pathways, fencing, dry-stone walling, building shelters and cob ovens. 6.8% were suggestions for more nature focused activities and talks including presentations from experts and information walks. 4.5% of the comments made performative suggestions such as story-telling, drama workshops, songs and African drumming. Other comments made suggestions for more bushcraft and survival activities, traditional food preservation and cooking activities and mindfulness and wellbeing activities. Comments under the physical activity theme referred to more active sessions including paint-balling, archery, wide-games and rock-climbing. Other comments suggested yoga and Tai-Chi activities that could be undertaken in the woodland environment.

11.7% of the comments received referred to the types of sessions offered. There were some suggestions for drop-in sessions or one-off events such as a family day, woodland café, woodland festival days, challenge days and bonfire parties. For families, it was suggested that weekend activities would be popular. There were 9 comments that requested evening session or overnight camping.

11.7% of the ideas gathered were about new people that Actif woods could engage with. 5% of these were about engaging local community groups such as retirees (for social benefit), parents with mental health issues, women (for women only groups) and the Brownies, Scouts and Guides. Other comments suggested engaging families and children specifically and school groups (primary and secondary).

6.8% of the comments were about the location of the Actif woods groups. Most of these comments were about using different locations to cite the programmes, for example expanding into different woodlands in different locations (covering more of Wales and improving access), using meadows, beaches and local parks. Other suggestions were for trips to different locations as part of the Actif woods programme – examples given were, visiting other Actif woods groups, visiting historical or nature sites and day hikes.

The attendees also provided some ideas on how to develop the accredited or new courses. This included ideas for mindfulness and yoga courses, nature courses (birds, plants and animals), whittling course, archery and fletching course, building woodland pathways course, wildlife photography and outdoor drawing courses. Other suggestions just wanted more variety and choice and further development of the OCN accreditation. One suggestion was to offer participants accreditation badges for each course they complete. There were 12 comments that related directly to environmental or conservation activities. These suggestions included, cleaning up areas of beauty, helping farmers to improve their land, recycling, managing woodland areas for biodiversity and accessibility and planting trees to create new woodlands.

Other comments were connected to advertising (posters locally, 'show off what you do more!') transport, levelling of activities (i.e. for some groups with a mixed ability cohort level the activities so

that less able and more able can take part). There were also comments related to expansion and dissemination of what Actif woods do (i.e. 'share internationally what you do and promote a Wales-centred approach', 'Wales and countrywide expansion', 'research opportunities for students' and 'provide how-to-do leaflets' so that participants can work on projects outside of the group').

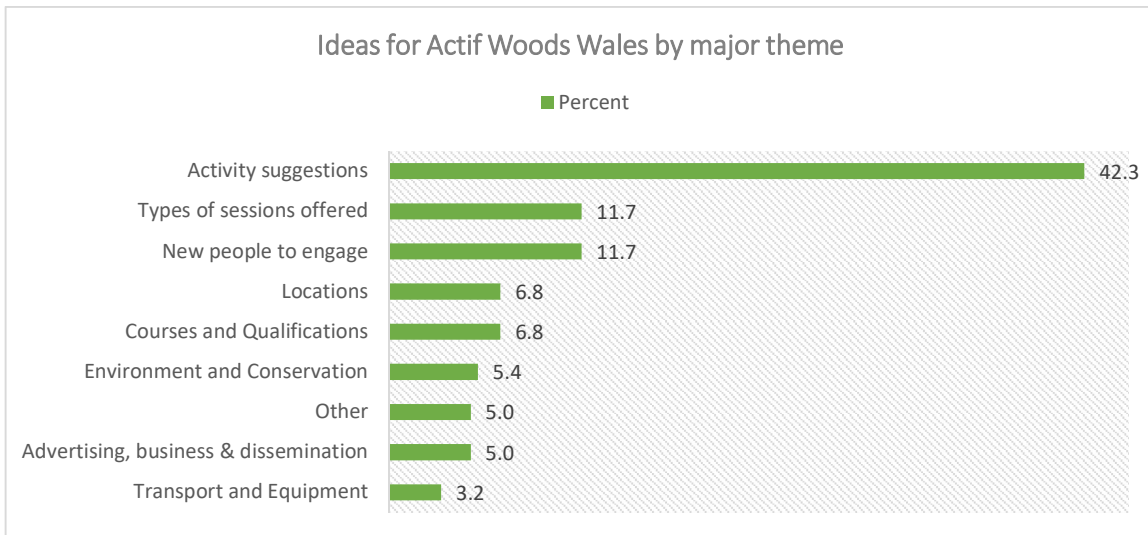


Figure 6: Chart illustrating the major-themes for the 'opportunities' for Actif Woods Wales

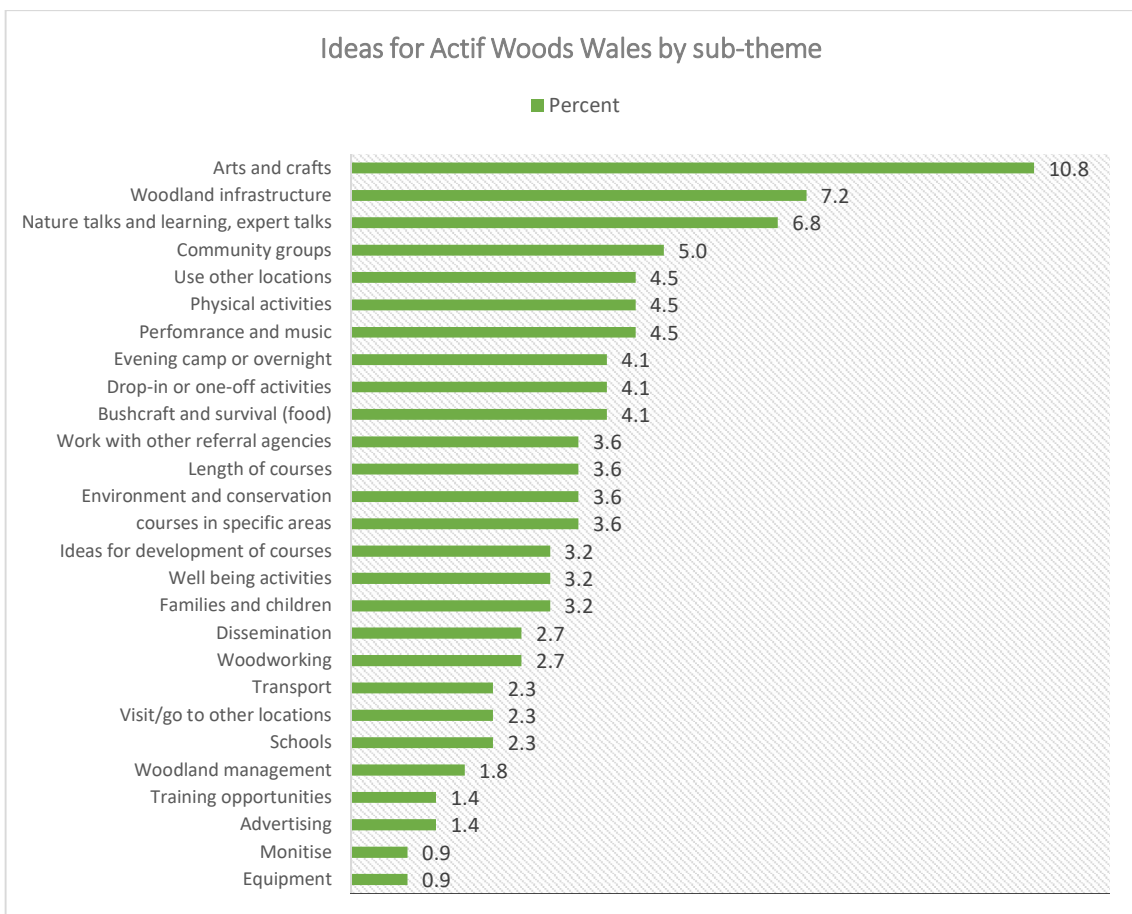


Figure 7: Chart illustrating the sub-themes for the 'opportunities' for Actif Woods Wales

Threats - What might prevent your ideas from happening

The attendees provided 144 suggestions of 'threats' that might prevent ideas from happening. The stakeholder's thoughts enable Actif woods to assess the potential barriers to ideas reaching fruition and to be able to plan and challenge these from the outset. The comments were coded into 7 major themes these are presented in Table 7 and Figure 8 below. The results show two main threats of 'funding' and 'transport and access to the woodlands'. The uncertainty surrounding funding was also connected to Brexit and connected to differing funding streams resulting in short-term programmes with differing emphasis. Transport and access to the woodlands was also considered a barrier (or threat) for those without their own transport and where woodlands are inaccessible or difficult to get to by public transport. 20 comments related to meeting the needs of local people. This included understanding the needs of individual groups (local communities, mental health groups, carers groups) and having strategies to encourage people who might not ordinarily join a group (e.g. befriending service, getting timings right for different groups – weekends for families).

Organisational issues and publicity and communication were flagged up, these included health and safety concerns that might prevent woodland fires or activities happening. There was also a concern that Actif woods needed continual fresh and new ideas to drive the organisation forward (attracting new people). Another thought was that new programmes would require the availability of to run groups across the week. Good communication with participants ('centralised booking system needed') and well-placed local publicity to keep the organisation relevant and popular were also suggested by attendees. Participant barriers were connected to the ability to afford weatherproof clothes, shoes and transport in the light of benefit changes such as universal credit. There were 8 comments about access and availability of suitable woodland sites going forward.

Threat	percentage	Count
Funding	38	54
Transport and Access	22	32
Meeting the needs of the people	14	20
Organisational issues	12	17
Publicity and communication	7	10
Participant barriers	2	3
Woodland spaces	6	8
Total	100	144

Table 7: Table showing the major-themes for 'threats' to Actif Woods Wales

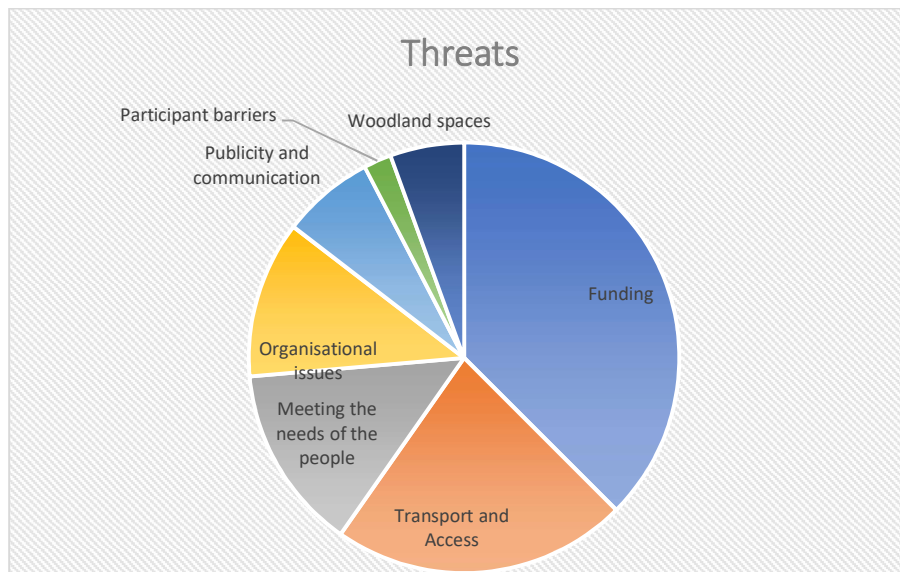


Figure 8: Chart illustrating the major-themes for 'threats' to Actif Woods Wales

Discussion Breakout Groups

The discussion breakout groups provided time for each group to discuss and appraise how and in which ways Actif Woods Wales was meeting its key performance indicators and bring greater depth to the responses given in task 1. The five discussion areas garnered 273 responses in total (Table 3). The results are discussed below,

Discussion 1: Health and Wellbeing – In what ways are Actif Woods Programmes effective in supporting the health and wellbeing of its participants?

The SWOT task demonstrated that social benefits, the structure and organisation of the programmes and staff along with the opportunity to be immersed in nature and learn new skills and knowledge were the most highly valued experiences of the stakeholders. The discussion that followed explored further how the Actif woods programmes support the health and wellbeing of its participants. The responses given mirrored those from the major themes that emerged from the 'strengths' feedback tree.

Social Benefits (14 responses)

The discussion groups explored in greater depth how the Actif woods groups can provide social benefits for the participants. The responses showed that for some, the groups were an 'opportunity to meet like-minded people that I can relate to and talk to' (attendee Ceredigion). One attendee commented that coming to the groups has made them less 'socially isolated' (attendee Swansea) and another from the same group suggested that they had joined the group because there was, 'a possibility of making new friends' (attendee Swansea). One response demonstrated how the focus and location of the group appealed to them, 'I spend a lot of time on my own, and no other groups – especially ones that are indoors – really appeal to me. This group is great because it is outdoors and very inclusive' (attendee Ceredigion). The structure of the groups are also important in providing opportunities for people to come together and share knowledge and ideas. One response suggested that, 'eating together around the fire and communal wellbeing' bonded the group (attendee Merthyr) and another that, 'meeting and working as a team and also learning new skills has improved social connection in a group' (attendee Neath Port Talbot). This last point was reiterated

by an attendee at the RCT event who suggested that the groups provide, 'the opportunity to make new friends. Doing activities with new people – forms bonds' (attendee RCT). For some people who suffer from poor mental-health joining a new group can be challenging, one attendee suggested,

it can be intimidating joining a new group, it can make me anxious, but for me, the group is very inclusive and very supportive. The leaders are so patient and take their time with every participant when learning new skills
(attendee Ceredigion)

The social aspect of the group is clearly important to the participants and the group set-up with opportunities for campfire chats and sharing stories and learning new skills together helps to bond the group and develop friendships. However, for some, group dynamics and the size of the groups can be challenging (e.g. autistic participants may prefer to be in smaller groups) and one attendee commented that sometimes the 'mix of people can be a challenge' (attendee Ceredigion). However, as another attendee commented, 'the benefits of being in an outdoor environment is that people can take themselves away from the group if they need to be on their own for a bit' (attendee Swansea). Social isolation or perceived isolation is a major factor in poor mental health (Cornwall and Waite, 2009, Fenton, 2015) and therefore providing safe and structured outdoor opportunities for participants to socialise can be beneficial to mental well-being.

Knowledge and Understanding & Skills (11 responses)

There were seven responses that explored more about how knowledge and understanding connected to health and wellbeing. These focused on the natural and traditional learning that resulted from attending the groups and on the peer to peer learning that happens organically within the groups. One attendee felt that the, 'opportunity to learn all of the flowers names' had provided her with a huge sense of satisfaction and well-being (attendee Swansea). Two comments suggested that using and learning about 'natural ingredients collected from the site' was beneficial to health (attendees: Gwynedd & Merthyr). One attendee felt that there was great benefit for mental well-being in having the opportunity to, 'share life experiences' (attendee Merthyr) and another felt that, 'it is good to share knowledge together as a group – makes everyone feel valued and worthwhile' (attendee Ceredigion). Learning new skills was also explored, and responses showed similar impacts to learning new skills, one attendee commented,

Coming home with something tangible that I have made is really valuable and gives me a feeling of accomplishment – "I made that!" – I bring the spoon I made to every session
(attendee Ceredigion)

This 'sense of fulfilment' (attendee Merthyr) and 'discovering new skills together' (attendee Ceredigion) demonstrate that Actif Woods programmes are providing more than just a tangible output (i.e. a spoon or basket or a new bit of knowledge) but that the process of making something with a group, sharing knowledge, producing something new and challenging yourself to complete a task is contributing to an improved sense of well-being across the participants.

Mental & Physical Well-Being (18 responses)

The discussion about physical and mental well-being were in some ways linked, as one attendee stated, 'exercise helps with your mental health' (attendee Neath Port Talbot). Actif woods programmes include woodland walks, some physical tasks and activities that 'gets you moving' (attendee Gwynedd) however this might vary depending on the activity. Some attendees felt that being part of the group had made them less sedentary and 'improved their fitness' (attendee Merthyr). The mental health benefits were more widely discussed, with attendees suggesting that there is a, 'therapeutic element to the activities' (attendee Merthyr) and others suggesting that being part of the group has 'improved their mood' (attendee Swansea) and 'improved their confidence' (attendee Swansea). Confidence building was also discussed at the Ceredigion event where it was felt that, 'The group often challenges people to go beyond what they think that they can do' (attendee Ceredigion). At the RCT event an attendee responded that Actif woods programmes, 'get people out of the house and into the woods which is good for anyone's mental health. Activities take your mind off the day to day things that are getting you down' (attendee RCT).

Health and Diet (4 responses)

There were a few responses surrounding health and diet. It was felt that the foraging and healthy food recipes using natural ingredients were beneficial to passing on positive food messages, as one attendee comments these, 'show you healthy fresh cheap food which is easy to prepare' (attendee Neath Port Talbot). Although 'fruit is available at each session' (attendee RCT) it was also noted that tea and biscuits around the fire are an integral part of the sessions. As one attendee comments,

Fruit as well as biscuits. Food as a connector. Square nutritious meal as part of coming – learning about low cost cooking and foraging.

(attendee Gwynedd)

Longer-term support

The discussion groups revealed that to more effectively support an individual's mental and physical well-being needs longer-term intervention. It was felt that shorter programmes with no follow-up or progression route was not providing the longer-term support and development that might be required by some participants (this is discussed in more detail below).

Discussion 2: The Programmes – Are Actif Woods delivering the right programme for the right amount of time?

The discussion about the programmes naturally migrated to the length and duration of the programmes rather than a discussion about the range of activities (which has been covered in the 'opportunities' section above). There was a variety of suggestions given for the length of programme dependent on the type of participant and their individual needs and the motivations that the participants might have (i.e. emphasis on social rather than skills learning or vice versa).

The consensus was that the 12-week courses were best for developing sound skills and in-depth knowledge but that these were often too long for people to commit to. The 6-8-week course was felt to provide a good balance but considered too short for those who really wanted to develop their skills and gain qualifications. A suggestion for a monthly drop-in session for each group was made

that would aid those that want to continue to socialise and gain new knowledge and skills. A long-term commitment was also thought to be beneficial to those suffering from poor mental health or those who are in recovery (advice from the Welsh Centre for Action on Dependency and Addiction). Another suggestion was given to provide a levelled programme of differing lengths that could satisfy those who just want an introduction but also provide a progression route for participant's who want to gain more skills, knowledge and qualifications or become volunteers. This was set out as:

- o Level 1 = 6-week wellbeing sessions (intro)
- o Level 2 = On-going (intermediate)
- o Level 3 = OCN qualifications and other qualifications (leading to volunteering?)

There was also a suggestion for one-off activity or challenge days where past or current participants could use the skills that they have learnt over the Actif woods programme.

The number of participants per group was discussed at the Gwynedd and Ceredigion stakeholder events. It was felt that because of the 1-2-1 support needed by some participants, smaller groups around 10 people could be beneficial (giving a 1:5 ratio of staff to participant). However, it is recognised that some participants attend with their carers and some groups have more volunteers who can facilitate the activities.

In general, the OCN qualification was well received and valued, however the logistics of completing this for some participants, especially those who might be a carer, dyslexic or suffer from mental health issues, could be problematic. One attendee commented, 'be aware that carers (duties) and medical appointments can hinder completion of workbooks which is frustrating for participants – therefore this needs more flexibility' (attendee Neath Port Talbot) it was suggested that separate 'admin sessions' might be fruitful to complete OCN and other paperwork.

Discussion 3: Supporting People – How effective is Actif Woods at building confidence and building skills and knowledge relevant for volunteering or employment?

Discussion 3 was designed to tease out how Actif Woods builds confidence and skills in its participants that could progress them onto volunteering or employment. This was a more challenging topic to foster discussion because many of the agency and referral groups and current and past alumni of Actif woods programmes were not directly involved in looking for employment or employability. Discussion groups 1 also crossed-over with this discussion group in terms of demonstrating how Actif woods programmes can build confidence and help participants overcome barriers to acquire new skills (see above). It was felt that for some, the course had been extremely beneficial in supporting and building confidence to re-enter the work of work via volunteering. One attendee gave a short presentation at the Merthyr stakeholder event told of overcoming his anxiety and gaining new interests and hobbies as a result of joining the Actif woods group and that this had propelled him to volunteer for other environmental groups. He is now managing his anxiety and looking to apply for jobs after being unemployed for a year. Another attendee at the Ceredigion event signalled that his confidence in himself, after being diagnosed with autism and ADHD, had grown immeasurably since being part of the Actif woods programme and that he had gone on to volunteer with the RSPB. A further Merthyr attendee has gained an interest in nature through the programme and had gone on to volunteer as a gardener at Cyfarthfa Park. For other attendees however, volunteering and employment had not been a motivator for them to join the group and they had not considered the programme to be employability focused, one attendee at Swansea commented,

To support people who are unemployed you need a longer course – 6 weeks is not enough. I didn't find much to do with employment on the actual course. However, it was good at building confidence and helping me to make links in the local community. I think what would be good would be to build knowledge of what is accessible in terms of volunteering – the job centre would think that this was good (attendee Swansea)

The Swansea discussion group also suggested,

For employment – talking at a job centre to advertise. Take job centre sessions in the woods rather than in the job centre. Go to community centres to talk about Actif woods with an employment focus.

(attendee Swansea)

This discussion was not able to clearly explore the effectiveness of Actif Woods in building confidence and skills specifically for employability and volunteering (although there are examples of participants going onto volunteering opportunities). However, it raises some issues surrounding the embedding of employability skills into the programme and the recruitment of participants ready for employment.

Group 4: The Environment: In what ways are Actif Woods programmes having any effect on the environment?

One of the aims of Actif Woods Work is that local woodlands are accessed and improved for the benefit of participating communities. This discussion group was to provide the stakeholder with an opportunity to discuss how they think the woodlands are being improved and what actions need to be taken to increase Actif woods impact on the environment. This discussion group garnered 56 responses mainly focused on how Actif woods could develop their impact further. Stakeholders who belonged to environmental groups such as Welsh Wildlife, Woodlands community groups, Environment representatives from councils, Natural Resources Wales and the North Wales wildlife trust were encouraged to contribute to these discussion groups.

It was universally felt that Actif woods could play a central role in educating the public and promoting the value of local woodlands. The principle ways that it could achieve this is by getting local people using and respecting their woodlands. It was also felt that litter clearance, light woodland management and clearing invasive species would aid in building up a sense of ownership and responsibility within communities to maintain a longer-term connection to the woodlands. The discussion groups felt that while this was occasionally part of the Actif woods programme, it did not form a regular activity especially with the shorter 6-week courses. However, it was felt that by educating people about wildlife and biodiversity this can raise awareness of wider environmental issues. It was also thought that learning about the individual histories of the woodlands used could help people understand more and gain a sense of ownership. In the light of global warming, it was also felt that woodland creation (for carbon sequestration) could also be a potential mission for Actif Woods Wales. In addition, there was some discussion about the threat to local woodlands (via development or diseases) and that education was key to protecting woodlands for future generations. One attendee stated,

It is important for people to see how things shift and change across generations – this prevents the ‘there is nothing I can do’ mentality and the ‘well – I don’t notice any changes’ mentality. Some educational stuff about the generational changes in green spaces would be valuable

(attendee Ceredigion)

There was a mixed reception to building shelters in the woodlands, as although this could be beneficial to the participants during winter it might also encourage anti-social behaviour and vandalism. Some groups felt that there needed to be, ‘more connection between woodland management and creation of sensitive/zero carbon wood structures/facilities and sustainable woodland products’ (attendee Neath Port Talbot).

There was also a discussion about choosing woodland sites carefully and being able to meet the needs of the landowner (if applicable) as well as the community whilst also taking care of the woodland. There was a suggestion to work with private landowners and help them to identify what their own woods can offer.

It was noted that the more use a woodland gets the more disturbance to the biodiversity on the woodland floor. However, it was also recognised that some woodlands that are located close to towns are overgrown and inaccessible and that it would benefit both community and woodland to clear pathways. In response to this suggestion one attendee commented,

Children seem to have lost contact with nature and the outdoors, and all too often stay indoors with their computers or tablets. This could have knock-on impacts for child health and wellbeing. So, bring nature into their lives – as we had when we were younger- it is very important

(attendee Merthyr)

Working with children was also discussed at the Ceredigion event. It was felt that children play a crucial role in the future of our woodlands, so the value and importance need to be imparted at a young age. One attendee commented,

Once people ‘value’ the woodlands this can lead to long-term engagement and environmental activism to safeguard our green spaces

(attendee Ceredigion)

This led to a discussion about engaging schools and undertaking school assemblies or workshops using environmentally-themed games and activities,

You could use Actif woods as a vehicle to educate young and old about the environment and the importance of woodlands

(attendee Ceredigion)

It was also suggested that getting the participants to participate in community or collective art work that is left in the woods for others can also impart ownership and value as well as encourage others to do so. It was felt that giving the community and voice and choice is important.

Discussion 5: Recruiting new people? Who should Actif Woods be working with?
(partners, organisations, groups, individuals)

This group was an opportunity for the stakeholders to suggest potential partners, referral organisations or types of participant that we should be working with and who could benefit from training from Actif woods. The stakeholders gave 83 suggestions, these are presented in Table 8 below,

Stakeholder Group	Comment
Swansea	Remploy
	Women's groups
	Women's Aid
	Youth Groups
	GPs/Social Prescribing
	Taster days for staff – so that they can prioritise sending referrals
	YMCA
	Mindful photography
	Connect/Cwmbwrla day centre
	Local celebrity
	Venues for fundraisers
	Pathways
	Job centres
	Probation service
	St James Centre, Swansea
	Include Hub
	Asylum seekers
	Ethnic minorities and youth support team Swansea (EYST)
Ethnic women's and family's groups	
Merthyr	Mind
	Teenagers! In the evenings in the summer
	Hold events at the organisation's venue (i.e. MIND) MIND can help promote
	Hafel
	Local schools – engage teachers
	Men's Shed
Neath port Talbot	GP surgery
	Pharmacy
	Libraries
	Community/sport centres
	Schools
	Outreach activity
	Fun days
	Park run, dog walks
	Slimmers world / weight watchers
	Carers

	Schools
	GP's
	Hospital
	Pharmacy
	Third sectors
	Social services
	Local authority
	Disability (services)
	Addiction groups (AA, CA and WCADA)
	Community centres
	Age Cymru and Stroke associations etc.
	Self-referral
	Lone DV parent groups
Gwynedd	Transport services
	Recovery (addiction)
	Isolated people
	Schools (start to appreciation of woodland activities while they are young)
	People with poor health
	Counselling agencies/services
	GP signposting
	Health services
	Cubs/Scouts
	Leisure centres
	Caniad
	Active 8 – Emergency respite care
	General public living 5-mile radius of activity postcode
	Primary and secondary inclusion units
	Youth Clubs
	Sports Wales
	Plas Menai National outdoor centre
RCT	Could involve offenders/people with criminal record
	Homeless people/children in care
	More social prescription for relevant illness/issues
	Youth groups (cubs, scouts etc.)
	Young carers
	Viva project (http://www.cwvys.org.uk/member/viva-project-wales/)
	Advertise in schools
	Women's institute
	Fathers group
	Velindre Cancer Care hospital walking group (see Sue from Homestart)
	Homestart RCT
Ceredigion	Get children outside and active
	Exercise referral scheme
	Doctors!

	Give talks at the Women’s Institute – they are always interested in something different
	Building relationships with family groups
	Work with families
	Schools

Table 8: Table of new stakeholders

Discussion of results

The results from the stakeholder consultation will be discussed in relationship to three of Actif woods Wales key performance indicators²,

1. Improve participants physical, mental and social wellbeing

The stakeholder consultation exercises showed that the Actif woods programmes, by their very design, are able to promote and encourage social opportunities that reduce social isolation, enable friendships to develop and increase opportunities to share ideas and knowledge. The consultation exercise revealed that Actif woods was successful in this because they build-in conversation time round the fire or during walks that allows participants to feel comfortable, supported and able to contribute and feel valued. In addition, it was found that the new skills and knowledge imparted during the groups not only enables them to grow in confidence but also can bring deep satisfaction and pride to the participant and enable connection with others. The connection to nature and the outdoors was also found to be central to the strength of the programme and was the impetus for some participants to join the group. The fresh air, surroundings and being closer to nature were able to evoke feelings of well-being and reconnect some with childhood experiences. Mental well-being was highlighted as a great strength of the programme with numerous examples given where participants felt mentally stronger, felt more valued and calmer in the woodland surroundings and by having achieved something. In some instances, this has led to participants finding the confidence to volunteer with other organisations and start seeking employment. The inclusiveness of the groups and the skill of the staff to make the group feel comfortable and supported was also noted during the consultation.

The physical aspects of the Actif Woods Programme were variable depending on the activity that is undertaken, as not all weeks contain physical tasks (arts and crafts for example). The Anglesey group build in a woodland gym into every group which therefore resulted in more comments about physical activity in this group. Participants felt that there was a strong connection with physical health and mental health and there were some examples given about the groups improving general fitness and physical health. To raise the physical activity a woodland walk or physical exercise activity could be built into each weeks’ activities. Furthermore, Actif woods provide healthy and foraged food during some sessions the knowledge of which is passed on to participants.

The issues that were raised concerned the duration and length of the programmes and for some the mix and size of the groups. The lack of dependable follow-up groups for those who want to gain more skills and knowledge and have consistent social outlets was felt to be a weakness in design. A 6-8-week programme was thought sufficient as an introduction, but that for developing skills or gaining qualifications a longer programme of around 12 weeks or more was felt more suitable (although commitment to this length of time must be considered). Drop-in sessions to give longevity to the participants were also considered useful. Marketing and advertising were also seen as key to attracting more participants. Local community could be engaged by visiting local groups, placing

1. ² KPI ‘Increased capacity of local organisations, practitioners and community volunteers to deliver woodland-based activities for health and wellbeing’ was not directly discussed at the stakeholder consultation because of the mixed audience. However, the attendance of various organisations resulted in stronger links being formed for potential partnerships and training.

posters into shop windows and engaging local schools. Understanding the needs of the local communities and providing 'hooks' in the manner of one-day events was also deemed valuable in attracting more people.

Funding and transport/access to the woodlands were seen as the major threats to longevity and attendance.

Recommendations

- *The structure and length of the courses could be reviewed in the light of the comments given and the desire for progression routes*
- *Consideration given to how to structure year-round courses if weather and water proof clothing is a barrier to some. This could tie-in with a progression-route for keener participants who might want to participate in more environmental, woodland management and infrastructure courses that would take place through the winter months (i.e. coppicing, clearing, path structures etc.)*
- *Drop-in monthly sessions that provide longevity to the groups could be beneficial (although consideration would need to be made about how these can be cost effective due to uncertainty of turn-out)*
- *One-off events to attract family groups and engage children could be beneficial (tie in with schools)*
- *Build-in physical tasks or exercise into each session to increase the physical benefit to the participants*
- *Consider the healthy food messages sent to participants – can this be strengthened by providing on-line recipes and tips*
- *Biscuits and Tea are a great leveller and can bond the group – are their other ways this could be achieved with a greater health emphasis?*
- *Consideration of the mix of participants in each group (smaller groups for autistic participants for example)*
- *Understanding the needs of individual groups and communities – consideration of what different communities want/feel comfortable doing and adapt practice to suit*
- *Advertising and publicity need to be more widely recognised locally – in public-facing places (library, shops, hospitals, GPs etc.). Development of the Actif woods website and online profile to deliver more 'success stories' and 'talking head' case studies that show the impact of the work done.*

2. Sharing knowledge and raising awareness about how (and why) to incorporate woodland activities into health and social care and practice and policy.

The Actif woods events were able to impart knowledge about practice and policy and current research to 199 stakeholders across eight locations in Wales, this included representatives from 35 different agencies and organisations (see Table 1). They provided an opportunity for Actif woods to engage existing and new stakeholders and raise awareness about the health and social benefits of Actif Woods Work. The events also provided opportunities for stakeholders to discuss possible partnerships and to disseminate ideas around 'green care'. Academic research, undertaken by two PhD students using Actif Woods as a case study, was imparted at each event (in the form of a summary or a short presentation by the researchers). The discussion groups provided further opportunities for stakeholders to suggest new groups that Actif Woods could work with or partner with in the future (see list on page 33).

Recommendations

- *Provide an opportunity to share knowledge and awareness via the Internet – develop a ‘following’ for posts on ‘how to do...’ tips and ‘the importance of woodland activities to health, well-being and the environment’ – include research and media posts etc.*
- *Present at conferences*
- *Develop a teacher pack that is embedded into curriculum design and get schools interested. This could potentially have large impact (possibly work with academics to design this as they are required to demonstrate impact outside of academia)*

3. Local woodlands are accessed, and improved for the benefit of participating communities

Actif woods groups access a variety of local woodlands and community-based woodlands as part of their programme. The use of the woodlands was of central importance to the participants and the value of the woodlands was emphasized by the presence of Actif woods being able to ‘connect’ or ‘reconnect’ its participants to nature. Many stakeholders cited that a strong point of the programme is increased knowledge of nature and the environment and this helps to strengthen their connection and ownership over the woodlands.

It was felt that Actif woods could play a greater role in educating the public and promoting the value of local woodlands by engaging family groups, community groups and schools in their work. School groups were considered vitally important to engage with in the light of global warming and the ongoing destruction of woodlands worldwide.

Although some Actif woods groups involve themselves in improving woodland sites by litter-picking, clearing invasive species and improving access this has been more challenging for others in the face of shorter 6-week courses (or on sites that are council run). However, the suggestions given by the stakeholders show an enthusiasm to take part in more environmental activities and improving woodland infrastructure which could be exploited as an opportunity to engage those participants who wanted progressive follow-on courses.

Recommendations

- *Audit the selected woodlands to assess environmental benefit Actif woods could achieve*
- *Build in greater environmental activity into the programme*
- *Ensure each group has one environmental aim that they monitor over the course of the year*
- *Engage schools and family groups*
- *Consider designing a school workshop or presentation that imparts the value of the local woodlands to the local community and environment (see work of Size of Wales (<https://sizeofwales.org.uk/>)). Highlight the fact that environmentally friendly activities can be closer to home. Impart the value of local woodlands*
- *Consider developing a group that runs through the winter for progressing skills in woodland management, woodland infrastructure and coppicing.*

Conclusions

The stakeholder events and integral consultation exercises were extremely valuable in connecting stakeholders and disseminating Actif Woods practices, achievements, research and future plans. The events also enabled consultation and reflection time about how Actif woods are performing and where improvements or ideas could be implemented. It also provided an opportunity to gather ideas and suggestions going forward and to enable stakeholders to connect Actif Woods to their wider networks. The suggestions and comments given by the stakeholders will be used to guide future practice and development.

Appendix 1 – Breakdown by Group (Strengths)

% within group (to be read left to right)	Social Benefits	Knowledg e and Understa nding	Skills	Mental Well Being	Environm ent & Nature	Physical Benefits	Administr ation, Organisat ion and Staff	Other
Swansea	17.4%	8.7%	17.4%	26.1%	13.0%	0.0%	8.7%	8.7%
Flintshire	22.6%	9.4%	22.6%	0.0%	13.2%	0.0%	24.5%	7.5%
Merthyr Tydfil	23.7%	7.9%	15.8%	13.2%	15.8%	5.3%	18.4%	0.0%
Neath Port Talbot	16.2%	10.8%	8.1%	10.8%	35.1%	2.7%	16.2%	0.0%
Gwynedd	21.4%	10.7%	17.9%	10.7%	17.9%	3.6%	14.3%	3.6%
Anglesey	20.0%	6.7%	8.9%	8.9%	8.9%	15.6%	24.4%	6.7%
Rhondda Cynon Taff	36.4%	0.0%	9.1%	9.1%	13.6%	0.0%	31.8%	0.0%
Ceredigion	32.9%	5.7%	11.4%	5.7%	14.3%	4.3%	25.7%	0.0%

% within benefit (to be read top to bottom)	Social Benefits	Knowledg e and Understa nding	Skills	Mental Well Being	Environm ent & Nature	Physical Benefits	Administr ation, Organisat ion and Staff	Other
Swansea	5.2%	8.3%	9.1%	21.4%	5.9%	0.0%	2.9%	20.0%
Flintshire	15.6%	20.8%	27.3%	0.0%	13.7%	0.0%	19.1%	40.0%
Merthyr Tydfil	11.7%	12.5%	13.6%	17.9%	11.8%	14.3%	10.3%	0.0%
Neath Port Talbot	7.8%	16.7%	6.8%	14.3%	25.5%	7.1%	8.8%	0.0%
Gwynedd	7.8%	12.5%	11.4%	10.7%	9.8%	7.1%	5.9%	10.0%
Anglesey	11.7%	12.5%	9.1%	14.3%	7.8%	50.0%	16.2%	30.0%
Rhondda Cynon Taff	10.4%	0.0%	4.5%	7.1%	5.9%	0.0%	10.3%	0.0%
Ceredigion	29.9%	16.7%	18.2%	14.3%	19.6%	21.4%	26.5%	0.0%

Appendix B – key quotes on the benefits of Actif Woods Wales

Quotes from attendees who completed the evaluation forms on what benefit Actif woods has had on them.

I bonded with a group. I learnt a lot and developed interests. It is good fun and I really enjoyed the freedom of nature and the creativity that comes with the group. Nature is so good for wellbeing and to enjoy with a group was motivating and inspired me to keep group going for children during the holidays as it is great being outdoors!
(Female participant, Merthyr Tydfil)

It has helped me become a lot more confident and has helped discover who I am after several years of suffering with mental health issues. I've made new friends through being a participant and it has given me a new hobby. I am even considering the possibility of following a career with Actif woods now.

(Male participant, Merthyr Tydfil)

The participants have learned skills, practical and educational, that they would not have without the support of this project. They have also had the opportunity to meet new people which are now a support structure to each other

(Referral partner, Cwn-Ni Lach, Neath Port Talbot)

Certainly, it has improved my well-being and given a new focus to my life. Stress levels, B.P and self-worth have improved. I have been introduced to local area which I didn't know existed and have introduced friends and family to these areas also. Have learnt new skills and been involved in a variety of activities from forest connections, tree identification, willow and wood working etc. New circle of life-minded friends.
(Female participant, Neath Port Talbot)

My client has benefited well because of Active woods. The friendly and welcoming group provides socialising. Once he got used to being around the group, he has been happy to attend regularly. He has the chance to participate in various exercise activities as well as other activities such as art or games. The social side and outdoor nature of this project is very important

(Male carer, Anglesey)

I feel healthier, fit and happier since coming to Acfif woods. I have met a lot of people who I would not otherwise have met.
(Female participant, Anglesey)

My confidence has improved I can see a future for myself now. Learning new skills.

(Male participant Gwynedd)

It has allowed me to get out in the woods and learn some new skills.

Also meet new people

(Male participant, Ceredigion)

I enjoyed learning about tools and horticulture and foraging. I would like to continue doing more events and get more experience within an outdoor workplace.

(Female participant, Swansea)

References:

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