

New Pathways to health and Well-being: Summary of research to understand and overcome barriers to accessing woodland



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Introduction

Scotland maintains and nurtures an exceptional natural heritage and evidence shows that having access to woodlands and greenspace is beneficial for our mental and physical health and well-being. However, the evidence also suggests that the benefits are unevenly distributed and many groups of people, for whatever reason, are noticeably absent or failing to reap the rewards of their natural environment.

On behalf of the Scottish Government, Forestry Commission Scotland is aware of the need to promote wider public use of woodlands and forests and to be proactive in addressing any perceived and actual 'barriers' to access.

This research study, commissioned by Forestry Commission Scotland aimed to understand better the factors influencing people's access; to open up new pathways; and to identify new approaches to people's use of Scotland's woodlands and forests to benefit their health and well-being.

The findings of the study suggest that the promotion of woodland access goes beyond tree planting and the removal of physical and social barriers. It is about utilising woodlands and forests better; engaging with people in the context of their lifestyle and their local environment; and, with their collaboration, building a new culture of woodland use.

Effective engagement is not just a matter of resurrecting traditional woodland cultures. A new woodland culture means building on tradition and natural heritage, whilst taking on social and environmental change and the need to promote health and well-being for the whole nation, and not just a fortunate few. As the recommendations outlined below suggest, a commitment to widening access to woodlands and forests for these purposes implies a new approach to forestry in Scotland.

The Study

An initial review of existing research examined the range of benefits, for health and well-being, of accessing woodlands and to explore and better understand the factors affecting access. Then an 'action research' approach, based on five case studies, enabled the researchers to explore people's perception, expectation and understanding of access to and use of, local green spaces. It also brought together community groups and providers of green space initiatives in order to experience an organized green space activity and to encourage future contact. The research methodology was designed to facilitate actions such as networking and organized green space activity and encouraged future action in terms of bringing together providers of green space initiatives and potentially new users¹.

Four of the case studies focused on urban/peri-urban localities in central Scotland, Dundee and the Borders region and on selected under-represented groups in these areas. The fifth case, set in the Ardnamurchan Peninsula was selected to raise awareness about factors, such as rural isolation and the loss of a traditional rural craft skill base, that are influencing rural isolation for communities in the Highlands. Each of the case studies featured an existing woodlands initiative or project, as the table below indicates.

¹ For the full report see <http://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/website/forestresearch.nsf/ByUnique/INFD-78PDPC>

Case study	Greenspace Project	Community Group	Woodland/Greenspace Activity
Access issues for parents with pre-school children in Motherwell Glasgow in the context of an urban green footpath/cycleway and outreach work.	Greenlink	Mother & Toddler Group	Guided buggy walk
Access issues for young men seeking paid work in the context of Langlee woodlands in Galashiels and through activities organised by Borders Community Woodland officers.	Woods in and around Town (WIAT)/Borders Community Woodland	Young men seeking paid work	Building and installing bird/bat boxes in local woodland
Access and mobility issues for older people in the context of woodland managed by Forestry Commission Scotland in and around Drumchapel.	WIAT/National Forest Estate community woodland	Older persons attending Day Care Centre	Guided 'Health walk'
Access, safety and other social issues for young people in the context of Dundee's recent regeneration and access strategies in and around Dundee.	Trees, Woodlands in Greenspaces (TWIG)	Ardler Centre, Youth Group	Cycling/stunting activities in local woodlands
Access issues for people living in a remote rural community in the context of the Sunart Oakwoods initiative.	Sunart Oakwoods initiative	Mixed local residents	Community woodlands

The benefits of woodlands in promoting health and well-being

There is well documented evidence of the physical, psychological and social benefits that access to good quality greenspace and woodland can provide. In Scotland there are clear policy messages that easy access to such areas is an important aspect of their strategy to encourage people to become more active. In a recent briefing paper, issued by Health Scotland's Physical Activity Health Alliance (PAHA, 2007), comprehensive evidence is supplied to support the view that woodlands provide the ideal setting to promote health and physical activity². In recent Scottish Regeneration Statements (2002, 2006)³ there is also recognition of the value of high quality urban and rural green environments in tackling social exclusion and in contributing to regeneration.

Benefits of outdoor physical activity

Outdoor physical activities such as walking, running and cycling are a crucial means of addressing current UK government targets promoting physical activity as a means to better health i.e. 'at least 30 minutes a day of at least a moderate intensity activity at least 5 days of the week (Department of Health,

² See PAHA, 2007 Briefing paper 8. *Woodlands and Greenspace and the Promotion of Health and Physical Activity*. Downloadable at <http://www.paha.org.uk/>

³ SE (2002) *Closing the gap: the Scottish regeneration statement* <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2002/06/14990/8014>

SE (2006) *People and place: regeneration policy statement* <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/94244/0022669.pdf>

2004)⁴. Forestry Commission England and Forest Research recently produced a report on the positive health and well being benefits of regular engagement with trees and woodlands (O'Brien 2005). In terms of physical activity the report lists a number of benefits, including the reduction of the risk of premature mortality, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, some types of cancer, obesity, type 11 diabetes and osteoporosis as well as promoting psychological well being, improving and protecting brain function, helping to control weight gain, manage painful conditions and improve health related quality of life (O'Brien, 2005: 12).

Benefits for learning and education

Educational benefits can be experienced by all sectors of society, young and old, through learning about the relationship between a healthy environment and human health (Tabbush and O'Brien, 2003). It has been demonstrated that interaction with open space and natural environment through play and learning is particularly beneficial for children. Forest Schools are now becoming a mainstream activity in England and interest is growing in Scotland through Woods for Learning and Forest Educational Initiative Scotland (see O'Brien and Murray, 2006).

Therapeutic benefits

Outdoor places, landscapes and environments have special significance for people over and above the opportunity for physical activity and social interaction. Kaplan and Kaplan (1989, 1995) and Kuo and Sullivan (2001) have investigated the 'restorative' benefits of nearby nature in relaxing and mentally re-charging people. The concept of 'therapeutic landscape' has also been used to describe places that have associations for people based on memories and explains the importance of memory in stimulating the senses and in re-connecting people to pleasant experiences (Canter and Canter, 1979; Freeman, 1984; Gesler, 1992; Williams, 1999).

Building social capital

Access to, and engagement with, greenspace and woodlands can also have an important role in building new connections within communities and enhancing the health of the community. This is described as 'social capital' (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993; Pretty et al. 2005).

Arts in Health

The use of the arts to promote health and well being at both individual and community level and within an outdoor setting, is beginning to be established in England, Scotland and Wales. The Scottish Arts Council contends that the arts play an important role in strengthening communities and research shows that 86% of people in Scotland agree that arts and cultural activities help to bring people together.⁵

Economic benefits

All of the factors above (and many more) link greenspace and woodlands to health promotion and this in turn brings economic benefits. Economic benefits can be evaluated according to levels of engagement that vary from the introduction of trees in the redesign of hospital environments (Ulrich et al. 1991) to the role of woodlands in urban regeneration i.e. the contribution of environmental work in reversing cycles of social deprivation.

⁴ Department of Health (2004) *At least five a week: evidence on the impact of physical activity and its relationship to health*. DoH: London

⁵ See: <http://www.scottisharts.org.uk/1/artsinscotland/artsandcommunities.aspx>

Levels of Access

The notion of levels of access is set out below to clarify the many ways in which access to woodland can be understood. In promoting a wider notion of well-being, the schema goes beyond physical access.

Levels of access to Woodland

Level of access	What can be accessed?
<p>Level 0 virtual access At this level the subject is distant from an actual greenspace or woodland. He/she can only access a virtual or mental image, a TV programme, a picture or a memory.</p>	<p>As Morris and Urry point out in their analysis of access to the new National Forest: <i>'the range, or reach of forest affordances is not limited to the confines of forest areas' but may also affect embodied experiences within other, unforested locations'</i> (2006:31)⁶.</p>
<p>Level 1 a view Access to a view requires proximity to greenspace or woodland but does not require one to be 'in' the landscape.</p>	<p>The changing scenery, contours of the landscape, weather patterns. Kuo and Sullivan (2001) and Taylor et al (2002) have confirmed what many of us instinctively know – that access to a view of the countryside from a window is a positive benefit.</p>
<p>Level 2 being in Access afforded by being in, or passing through, a greenspace/woodland environment</p>	<p>Being in, by walking or cycling through greenspace/woodlands, gives one access to a greater level of sensory amenity. These include sights and sounds and smells of the wildlife and the environment.</p>
<p>Level 3 active engagement Being actively and physically engaged in working with within greenspace or woodland</p>	<p>Active engagement, by digging, clearing or planting gives access to a two-way physical and mental interaction with the environment and can also effect changes in the environment.</p>
<p>Level 4 ownership and/or management Being in a position of responsibility. Able to determine the future management of the greenspace/woodland</p>	<p>Involvement in, and responsibility for, the management and maintenance and use of the area (including commercial uses).</p>

It could also be argued that another, more global, level of access arises from the ability of everyone to access the environmental benefits of clean air and maintenance of biodiversity.

Access for All

In 2003 the Land Reform (Scotland) Act transformed the access situation by legalising open access to the Scottish countryside. The Act makes a political commitment to a statutory code of practice and places a duty on countryside agencies to provide for an increasingly wide range of countryside users. Providers must now be aware that this statutory duty also includes a requirement to provide access for people of differing abilities and from different cultural backgrounds as part of their remit to meet the legal requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act and Race Relations Amendment Act.

⁶ They use the example of schoolchildren who, after a day spent in their local woods, had later participated in a range of activities featuring woodland and connected with their experiences.

Factors affecting access for health and well-being

Factors affecting access for users

A number of commonly identified barriers are known to affect people's recreational access to woodlands and greenspaces. These can be broadly categorised as:

- Lack of knowledge:
- Negative perceptions, fears and safety concerns:
- Lack of motivation:
- Lack of time:
- Physical accessibility:
- Lack of physical fitness:
- Feeling unwelcome:
- Lack of reasonable facilities:
- Conflicts of use:

Similar issues were raised in the research. In the context of the case studies they arose in a number of ways. Overall, however, it was found that factors affecting access are less about single issues highlighted in current access surveys, and more to do with wider factors. Findings of the study indicate that complexity, local contingencies and life-stage are equally if not more important in determining who will use a particular woodland and for what purpose. A young mother in the Motherwell group made this point when she said:

it's a wider problem, it's no just about us and our young kids. ...[and]....the problem doesnae just lie with us going out country walking and things like that..

The significance of these findings is crucial in recommending practical ways of widening access because many people recognise the importance of being able to access their local outdoor environment. This is particularly the case for young mothers, because of its contribution their own or their children's well-being, nonetheless, they have huge reservations about the conditions under which they would access areas such as woodland. Similarly, many of the participants described feeling hemmed in or isolated by the bad weather, by anti-social disorder, by fear of personal attacks or, in rural areas, because of the traffic on narrow lanes. So, it is particularly important to understand that each of these groups has specific needs at specific times in their lives.

The research identified the need for a range of levels of access, from an accessible view of trees to an opportunity to work in the woods and to take an active part in their management. It was found that people's needs are different in different circumstances and they change according to lifestage. For 'hard to reach groups' there are clearly identified gaps between these specific needs and provision of woodland access arrangements to meet them, so there is much scope for improvement.

Issues raised by access providers/policy makers

The research found that access providers are struggling to balance all the needs of their jobs against their own aspirations to make headway in order to:

- Mainstream access
- Open up, or widen access for all
- Deal with conflicts of use
- Deal with public liability issues
- Get communities to 'take ownership'
- Maintain access after the project

- Make a case for the economic value of what they are doing
- Trying to re-kindle new ways of using woodland in the community

In struggling to cope with the complexity of what they are doing, providers are aware that they have often failed to engage with local needs and, in doing so, that they are leaving those people who are hard to reach out of their provision. Typically, for instance, schoolchildren and older people remain in the classroom or sitting in the day centre because the risk assessments are too complex to allow them to get out; mothers with young children are trapped in their homes because they have nowhere safe to take their children; teenagers continue to wreck the local playgrounds and leave litter in the woods because no-one is willing to provide the social space that they need; young men are under-utilised and under-resourced to do work that they would enjoy in an outdoor environment because there are no training programmes to help them to develop the skills that they need to get employment and so on.

In summary, the research indicates that the process of promoting and widening access requires a step beyond – or rather *a step before* – the removal of barriers. The individual barriers, noted above, are experienced in many different ways in different contexts. Therefore, the recommendations proposed in the next part of the report prioritise new approaches that are designed to address these issues in context. Initially, what is required is an engagement with and reaching out to local communities and hard to reach groups. This is the opportunity gap that is so often left out in the provision of access.

Recommendations for widening access to woodlands for health and well-being

In considering the implications for Forestry Commission Scotland in its future strategy, in addressing the barriers to access to woodlands for health and well-being of all its users, we make the point that this requires a new way of working as well as a set of practical actions to address specific barriers.

It is recommended that providers of access to woodlands and forests will be aware of the need to:

1. Engage Communities

First and foremost, community engagement is the key to improved access and to addressing the majority of the barriers identified by users. Other recommendations follow from this and are facilitated by the initial engagement process. Community engagement is about understanding the local context and building trust within the local community in order to create realistic projects and realistic expectations. Engagement is about better communication, understanding people's needs and providing relevant information where it is needed. It is also about being visible and accessible (on site or a phone call away) for local users and potential users.

Examples from the research case studies

Community engagement activities were found to be at the heart of the access initiatives investigated for this research. Community networking and engagement was a core strategy for community forest rangers working on the following urban woodland projects: 'Woods in and around Town' (WIAT) funded projects in Glasgow and Galashiels; the Greenlink project work in Motherwell; and 'Trees, Woodlands in Greenspaces' (TWIG) and the youth and community work in Dundee⁷. Community engagement is equally important in remote rural areas such as Ardnamurchan⁸.

⁷ 'Woods in and around Town' (WIAT) see: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-5w2nfz>

'Trees, Woodlands in Greenspaces' (TWIG) see: <http://www.dundeetwig.com/main.htm>

'Greenlink' see: <http://www.northlan.gov.uk/leisure+and+tourism/sports+activities/cycling/walk+and+cycle+route++the+green+link.html>

⁸ For Sunart Oakwoods Initiative see: <http://www.sunartoakwoods.org.uk/>

2. Build local capacity

It is now recognised that a capacity building approach i.e. getting the wider public to ‘take ownership’ of their environments is the only way to make projects and initiatives sustainable in the longer term. From within existing greenspace initiatives such as ‘Greenlink’, WIAT and the TWIG initiatives, there is a desire to: *‘get the community to feel a sense of ownership’*.

Where, in the past, public greenspaces and woodlands have been managed by Local Authority contract services, the aim of a ‘community ownership’ approach is to engage a local community in taking some responsibility and to be involved in management. From the providers’ point of view, there is a belief that getting the community on board to address such things as vandalism and anti-social behaviour is a vital part of engendering access to and use of, local green space as part of community health and well being. Where there is irresponsible, or anti-social use of local woodlands, particularly by young people, it is often a challenge to get them to accept responsibility for their impact on the environment and on other users. However, as one rural development worker explained, this can be a challenge worth addressing.

“Young people are chopping down and burning good wood, they leave branches hanging, hurt themselves, it’s illegal, hacking and ripping branches. Get them involved in clearing etc., legitimate working with wood crafts, [. . .] making things from wood, kids having a go. [. . .] Get people out there steer them into a role, find the strong people. Help them to realize the potential they have. Unless they have the ownership, [of local woods/greenspace], it’s going to die”.

(Scottish Borders Council, Community Learning & Development Worker)

Typical barriers associated with building capacity include a lack of any sense of ownership of the local environment and outdoor amenities. Feedback from research participants included comments such as: *‘Its someone else’s problem’*, *‘we wouldn’t volunteer – see no point’*: these attitudes can only be overcome by active engagement and capacity building within the local community.

Examples from the case studies

Volunteering opportunities (through BTCV⁹ and Forestry Commission Scotland) provide an excellent way in for local people who want to develop a new relationship with their local greenspace and woodlands. Local community management groups had been established by the Greenlink project workers and the Forestry Commission Community Ranger in Drumchapel. In remote areas such as Ardnamurchan, where voluntary action appears to be a rural necessity, community companies have been established as part of the Sunart Oakwoods Initiative in order to build capacity and promote local employment.

3. Link places and services

For many greenspace and woodland access providers the key to success in widening participation and access is the inclusion of access to greenspace and woodlands as a key part of the community planning structure. This would entail (as in the case of the Dundee TWIG) linking access to greenspace and woodland into health, housing and regeneration policies. An essential aspect is ‘joined up thinking’ and partnership with other access providers within an organisation (local council) or between different agencies. This might entail a fresh management approach. In the case of tree maintenance and countryside access it was suggested that, within a Local Authority, different departments often had a ‘bunker mentality’ in that, because they have different objectives, they fail to work together to achieve joint outcomes. Where provision arises from both public and private enterprises this can be even more difficult. For example, SMARTways¹⁰ is an integrated transport information point provided by North Lanarkshire Council that promotes alternative and healthier methods to travel. It also recognises the

⁹ British Trust for Conservation Volunteers: http://www2.btcv.org.uk/display/btcv_home

¹⁰ SmartWays <http://www.northlan.gov.uk/>

need for 'integrated' transport that is affordable, reliable and accessible with facilities for 'all' (e.g. bikes, buggies, wheel chair users). The reality of bringing together a plethora of privatised transport providers is another challenge.

An additional positive outcome of joined up thinking is joined up places i.e. green networks formed by linking discrete greenspaces/parks and woodlands with green access corridors. The Greenlink project is a good example of this. It is important to target access areas to link with existing woodlands and greenspaces and to provide safe access routes to local facilities (shops schools etc.) and local parks and playgrounds and out into the countryside.

Examples of good practice from the case studies

Specific projects and initiatives can often provide the opportunity for agencies to work together to promote access: and Paths for All¹¹ and Safe Routes to School¹² are good examples of successful partnerships that deal with common issues, working with land owners/managers to provide improved access.

4. Provide mediation

Outdoor social space requires a certain amount of social integration to address intolerance of other users and to address a 'them and us' mentality, however they are defined i.e. people with or without dogs; local people versus tourists or minority groups etc. A ranger may be required to act as a community broker. This may require practical intervention and the development of mediation strategies and skills. Both providers and users spoke of different groups of people using woodland access for different purposes according to circumstances and life stage. Views on multi-purpose access routes vary. In some heavily used areas, such as Border Forest regions, it was argued that: '*you have to have set paths for set users, can't mix them for safety.... Where space is limited, walking predominates*' (Border Forest Trust, Development Worker). On the other hand, the SMARTways personnel try to construct:

paths suitable for all , for example, bridges with parapets suitable for all. The expectation [of users should be] that you have consideration for all. You have to raise awareness of other users' needs, for example NOT having swing gates as these are a barrier for wheelchair users.

(SMARTways personnel)

Examples from the case studies:

Providers spoke about the need to provide access that is flexible enough for both multi-purpose use and for the rapidly changing use of local green space. For example, the Langlee area in Galashiels has witnessed the growth of new houses and some of these built within walking distance of local woodland – woodland that a community ranger suggested, has traditionally been used by horse riders, most of whom come in from neighbouring rural communities. These paths can get quite churned up by horses' hooves, but as this is now a regular haunt for dog walkers it can become contested social space.

Health and safety issues are a major concern in some areas. For instance, one of the biggest problems for countryside managers has been managing the illegal use of motor-bikes on trails.

Some young people, they take motorbikes through [woods] illegally, too tempting for them. Means they're out and active but it's dangerous.

(Scottish Borders Council, Community Learning & Development Worker)

¹¹ Paths for All <http://www.pathsforall.org.uk/>

¹² Safe Routes to School <http://www.saferoutestoschools.org.uk/index.php?f=scotland.htm>

An unhelpful attitude of some private landowners is still affecting access to woodlands in many areas and, although a more responsible attitude to public access may be encouraged by grant aid, this may require negotiation and diplomatic mediation on the part of the community ranger.

5. Develop codes of conduct

Closely linked with the need to address conflicts of interest and use, for example between cyclists and walkers or dog walkers and bird watchers, is a requirement to agree a negotiated 'code of conduct' to encourage respect for different access needs.

Example from the research case studies:

We earlier noted that the argument for a multi-purpose track, and an informal code of conduct to govern its use, was put by a member of the rural community. This is a difficult balancing act for providers and, as each situation is unique, there are no set rules. The use of multi-purpose tracks requires mutual respect and, as the Sunart Oakwoods project leader and the local Highland Council ranger reflected, this often requires mediation and education:

*There has been an issue with [young] cyclists because of them riding on the footpaths – but they needed [safe] places to go. We've done a bit of education with them and they know roughly which are the bits they should/shouldn't go.... We sometimes have dog walkers complaining of kids rushing by as they are walking their dogs.
And dog-fouling is an issue – as it is everywhere I suppose. But certainly here in Strontian its been raised again and again.'*

(Sunart Oakwoods project workers)

6. Contribute to a new cultural identity for a local woodland culture

In order to address under-representation in woodland access for health and well-being, it is recommended that woodland managers think more widely than physical access, normally enjoyed by a narrow sector of the Scottish community undergoing traditional recreational activities. There is an understanding of the potential that woodland and green spaces have to provide social benefits for communities, but it is argued that a *cultural change* is needed in order to address all of the issues raised above and to bring about a shift in perspective; from seeing local woodlands as being inaccessible alien environments to them becoming part of the extended community i.e. from top down provision to bottom-up engagement with local people in local contexts. A new cultural identity promotes access on a range of levels – from a view from a window to working in the woods - and for a wider range of cultural traditions, including those enjoyed by minority groups.

There is recognition that this is not just about changing the landscape. The experience of some of the project managers has led them to the conclusion that work to nurture and sustain public benefits of access to and use of woodland and green spaces has to begin with the community not the access point to the woodland. And that such provision can rarely be superimposed – it has to arise out of identified needs. In support of this overall aim we heard talk about the need to re-establish a *new woodland culture* and about various new approaches to woodland management. For instance:

Borders Forest Trust is rekindling woodland culture, events and activities for a wide and varied range of people.

(Borders Forest Trust Development Worker)

Example from the research case studies:

In the Ardnamurchan case study, both the Sunart Oakwoods Initiative project leader and a member of the community woodland management group described their aspirations to recreate a new woodland culture in their local area in order to contribute to much needed social, environmental and economic improvements¹³. The project started after the community made it clear to the local woodland managers

¹³ The area has been classified as vulnerable by the Initiative at the Edge

(the Forestry Commission) that they wanted the community to have a greater involvement and for the community to see the benefit of their own woodlands. For the local community it was not enough to be consulted about a future Forest Design Plan; they wanted to see changes that would affect their livelihoods – specifically in terms of local employment. They demanded, and won the right for the whole community including the local primary schools, to participate in the management of the forest. Alongside the restoration of the ancient oakwoods in the area and the opening of new footpaths and cycle tracks, success can now be measured in real tangible community benefits such as a new High School and Community Centre and community companies and ‘start up’ businesses in the area. The project workers recognised that a key to these successes has been their own willingness to listen and respond to the needs of the community.

7. Encourage changes in attitude to outdoor access

Alongside cultural changes, improved access can also arise from changes in attitude, by potential users. Changes in attitude can arise when people identify with a new activity and when they envisage ‘people like themselves’ doing it. Peer group images and media campaigns that focus on people’s needs e.g. weight-loss, short walks for people with limited ability etc. can have a marked positive outcome in terms of widening access. In addition to this it is important to provide positive, balanced information to encourage people, give them confidence to use the space e.g. how to approach grazing animals.

Examples from the research case studies:

The researchers noted that some of the ranger activities had encouraged access to woodlands for new user groups by providing regular ‘health walks’ for people with limited mobility and for others who would like to improve their fitness and lose weight. They were aware that good communication and press coverage is one way to change attitudes.

8. Evaluate woodland projects to emphasise the importance of widening access

It is important to find appropriate ways of evaluating outcomes that have arisen as a result of improved and widened access because the learning process is ongoing. There is recognition that, in order to persuade funding bodies of the fact that these initiatives are, in the longer term, performing an important social function in meeting the health and well-being needs of local communities – particularly in deprived areas – they need to be properly evaluated. However, qualitative health and well-being outcomes can be difficult to assess with economic models and unwittingly, when measured against target driven ‘performance indicators’, can overlook or stifle the reporting of creative, localised success. It is always difficult to measure the success of a greenspace initiative when the outcomes are essentially anecdotal. It was noted, for instance, that many of the participants on health walk schemes and some of the project volunteers with mental health issues had reported improvements in general well being since engaging with the projects. Community rangers and officers also spoke positively of anecdotal success, particularly self-reported improvement to physical and mental health and overall quality of life. How best to measure, report and evaluate this?

Part of this concern stems from existing indicators of success that tend to be numerical, such as those outlined in the Scottish Forestry Strategy (2006: 37 and 41).¹⁴ Whilst these are valuable measurements of achievement, relying solely on quantifiable markers may unwittingly drive a culture of target performance (making the achievement of targets ends in themselves) and may stifle the reporting of creative, localised, success. Green space initiatives may be evaluated through their annual reporting of the number of conservation days, number of participants attending community events, number of

¹⁴ The Scottish Forestry Strategy gives a number of measurable indicators by which it can evaluate the progress of its key themes. For example in terms of ‘community development’ such indicators include: Number of schools involved in woodland based learning activities; Number of community group partnerships involved in owning or managing woodland; Number of ‘formal’ volunteer days associated with woodland activity; Percentage satisfaction with woodland recreation provision (through Public Opinion Survey)

health walks, number of community groups approached. It is felt that, alongside such reporting, there should also be recognition and *validation* of qualitative achievements, using the plethora of new media that is widely available.

Examples from case studies

The success of the reported projects (Greenlink, Drumchapel, TWIG and Sunart Oakwoods) is already being shared through good news stories, case studies and pictures and communicated through conferences and web sites. Evaluation and information sharing has also been facilitated by the extended networks arising out of multi-agency partnerships and by mentoring schemes. The action research methodology used by the researchers in this project was also designed to promote learning and ongoing evaluation.

9. Leave a sustainable legacy

Providers recognise that outreach work and engaging with communities requires a lot of resources. The roles of the countryside/forest ranger are complex, sensitive and highly skilled. In every area where we found community rangers their presence was highly visible within the local community. Residents may perceive them as brokers, stamped with a sense of 'authority', because they are often called upon to mediate between resident and council and other residents. The work is very demanding but the effect on the local community is positive and we witnessed the rewards. In terms of maintenance and management issues the ranger's presence is crucial. But concerns were expressed about the responsibility for longer term management, particularly in terms of managing funds, overseeing development, dealing with health and safety issues and in general, attracting wide representation from the community.

It is now a widespread view, amongst providers, that an 'exit strategy' needs to be built into all funded project work where staff allocation is dedicated to community access because projects lose momentum when funding streams are withdrawn and a project leader's contract terminates. Funding is often short term and project based. In many cases, particularly in well-used urban areas, it is not enough to rely on voluntary effort to continue the work. Several providers expressed the view that funding for outreach projects, to engage a wider range of people in active outdoor use of woodlands and forests, was too little and 'too low key'. The Drumchapel Community Forest Ranger was half way through a WIAT funded project when she was interviewed: she said: *'we must always remember that we are affecting people's lives with our work'*. She was acutely aware that in another year's time when her WIAT project funding runs out, the access situation in Drumchapel woods that she has worked so hard to turn around, may very quickly revert back to its uncared for state. Therefore, woodland access projects need to be planned with a built-in and appropriate exit strategy such as the setting up of a community woodlands group in order to leave a sustainable legacy for the community.

Examples from the case studies

Many of the WIAT funded projects have not been running long enough to test their sustainability but, in setting up community management groups (for example in the case of the Greenlink and Drumchapel Community Development Groups) they have anticipated greater community ownership. Community woodlands are more firmly established in rural areas such as Ardnamurchan. However, ongoing professional support and basic funding is still a crucial aspect of sustainable management and improved access.

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