

Follow-On interviews with AF participants after 2 years

As part of the Forestry Commission England and Sport England 'Active Forest' programme, data was gathered from a small number of people two years after they had participated in a focus group or interview about their Active Forest activity. Two Nordic walkers from Delamere, three Real Spin cyclists from Bedgebury and two parkrun participants at Sherwood Pines agreed to take part in a follow-on interview. The interviews took place over the phone and explored whether participants were still engaging with the Active Forest programme or not.



What originally motivated participants and has this changed?

All of the interviewees were women, 6 were in the 45-64 age category and 1 was in 25-34 age category. All but one of the women were still undertaking the activities outline above, although one woman had moved the location of her parkrun activity from the forest to a country park due to needing to run on flat ground after a knee replacement. Original motivations for getting involved in Active Forests included having more time due to working reduced hours; being made redundant and looking for activity to do; signing up to a cycle charity event and wanting to get fitter; knee problems and therefore taking up cycling, getting back to activity after having children; wanting to spend time with a friend; and depression as outlined by this participant:

'I've never really had a problem with motivation it just I've had a really bad history of depression when I was younger which still comes from time to time and the only sure fire success for me is running it always lifts my mood'.
 (Female parkrun Sherwood)

Interviewees highlighted that their motivations for carrying out the activities had not really changed but had been reinforced over the two years often due to the camaraderie and social contacts developed through the activities, the enjoyment of being in the forest environment and the desire to do physical exercise and movement. One woman outlined that her cycling was a form of escapism, taking a break from the demands of looking after her children.

Benefits of physical activity and the Active Forest programme

'The fact that you are outside it just feels great, no matter what time of year or weather its such beautiful surroundings, it's fantastic really and a really great group of women to do it with. I love it.' (Female Real Spin, Bedgebury)

'And being in a group is quite good I probably wouldn't do warming up exercises and cooling down exercises if I was on my own. And also learning different techniques as well, I suppose I could have gone off and thought I can do this on my own but I didn't, it's a group activity. I think I do more myself when I am part of a group activity' (Female Nordic Walking, Delamere)

'During school time I've been doing the school run and going to Sherwood at 9.15 when there is nobody there and getting a good four miles walk in, so that was all the way through my pregnancy and now with the buggy. So I have probably been there even more in the last year with the dog than before and now we have a discovery pass' (Female parkrun, Sherwood Pines)

Behaviours: other activities or more activity?

Participants were often involved in other physical activity; one woman started an adult ballet class to improve balance and coordination as she said she was *'tall and a bit clumsy'*. She stated she was carrying out more physical activity now as she was not working full time anymore. A Real Spin participant was cycling from London to Paris for charity and had in a previous year been on a cycling holiday to Vietnam and Cambodia. She said that she would have not done this without the Real Spin class.

'Yes without a doubt the Real Spin has inspired me' (Female Real Spin Bedgebury)

The woman no longer involved in the Active Forest cycling at Bedgebury had moved away from the site and did not want to travel to keep attending the classes. One of the parkrun participants had recently got a dog and was aiming to start doing canicross and run with her dog. This participant had also bought a discovery pass and was using Bedgebury more to walk the dog and run in the day with friends. She was a strong advocate of the discovery pass.

'I keep saying to people get a discovery pass because if you go 4-5 times a year you will have paid for it.' (Female parkrun, Sherwood Pines)

All but one of the women was still involved in the Active Forest activity they had started two or more years ago. Being active and social was important. The different activities were viewed as very inclusive and there was often a core of people who were engaging over the long term, with other people coming and going. For a few of the women their Active Forest activity had led to significant changes in behaviour, while for others it was about sustaining or adapting existing activity. Ageing well was a motivation for the older participants and having some 'my time' was an opportunity for women with children.

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