

A calm, peaceful and beautiful place

Evaluation of the Heritage Lottery Fund - Westonbirt Community Project

Liz O'Brien 2018



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Contents

Contents	3
List of Figures	3
List of Tables	3
Executive Summary	5
1. Introduction	8
2. The Westonbirt Heritage Lottery Programme	10
3. Methods	13
4. Results	19
5. Conclusions	64
6. References	70
Appendix 1. Day and outreach visits observed	72
Adult visits are in blue and youth visits in light brown.	72
Appendix 2. John Muir Award Certificate	74
Appendix 3. Multi-visit interviews.	75
Appendix 4. Interview protocol	78
Appendix 5. Example of day visit observation data	80
Appendix 6. Multi-visit flyer	82
Appendix 7. Evaluation sheet for some of the youth groups	83

List of Figures

Figure 1 Five ways to wellbeing	16
Figure 2 Logic model and theory of change	17

List of Tables

Table 1 Original plans for the Community Project and the adapted delivery	11
Table 2 Number of groups (in brackets are the numbers of groups studied in the evaluation)	14
Table 3 Number of observations made across all groups and types of visit.....	14
Table 4 Number of interviews <i>in situ</i> at final multi-visit sessions (group leaders are representatives of the organisations bringing groups to the site)	15

Table 5 Summary of wellbeing benefits for different engagement approaches	20
Table 6 Reasons why the Community Project was seen as effective	67

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The Community Project developed at Westonbirt Arboretum was set up as part of a larger Heritage Lottery Funded Programme and has run for 5 years. An innovative and flexible programme was developed to enable and reach out to young people with autism, behavioural problems, and with low self-esteem and confidence, and adults with mental health problems, drug and alcohol problems, and those with dementia and vulnerable groups. These groups were offered a range of visits either to Westonbirt or outreach visits by Forestry Commission England staff and volunteers to care homes and community locations. The people targeted through the Project were audiences that were less likely to engage with Westonbirt Arboretum.

Day visits and outreach visits were set up through a collaborative approach with organisations and participants to introduce them to Westonbirt's heritage in ways that met their personal needs. The Community Project was further developed after discussion and consultation, and a multi-visit programme was set up so that participants could undertake a number of visits over a period of time. This evaluation of the Community Project used mobile and multiple methods to explore the outcomes for participants in terms of their wellbeing and any changes to behaviour. Interviews, participant observations and attendance at staff and volunteer de-briefing sessions were used to gather data including:

- Participant observation was undertaken for 49 groups (19 Youth and 30 Adult), resulting in 1,206 separate observational comments
- 61 interviews were undertaken with Community Project participants, Organisational leaders, Forestry Commission England staff and volunteers in situ as participants undertook their activities at final multi-visit sessions. The researchers attended 10 final sessions (5 youth and 5 adults)
- 10 de-briefing sessions were attended.

Key results

In terms of the overall Community Project - 551 community sessions were led by Forestry Commission England (FCE) staff and volunteers, there were 4,944 participant visits of which 2,220 were adult participants and 2,724 were youth participants. As part of the Community Project, FCE has worked with over 134 organisations.

What types of activities were facilitated?

The Community Project facilitated a very wide range of practical and creative activities allowing participants to get involved in a variety of ways:

- Creative nature activities – art, sensory activities (taste, touch, sight, sound, smells), mindfulness, leaf printing, sound mapping, nature printing
- Woodland craft, management and maintenance activities – coppicing, deer fencing, wood cutting, making faggots (e.g. making small waste wood into bundles to make kindling), making a log store, tree planting, making a cob oven in the wood, making a community shelter, making charcoal, bramble clearance
- Social engagement activities – working and learning together, playing man hunt, preparing, cooking and eating together – making pizza, pancakes, cooking marshmallows over the fire.

The youth groups particularly benefited from and were engaged with the woodland craft activities with the thrill of carrying out activities that they had not done before. The adult groups benefited particularly from the creative activities with participants enjoying using all the senses, being mindful and getting involved and being creative.

Did participation lead to wellbeing outcomes?

The results clearly illustrate a wide range of wellbeing outcomes were gained by the majority of the participants both youth and adult for outreach, day and multi-visits.

The evidence highlights that young people gained many positive wellbeing benefits including greater self-confidence and self-worth from getting involved in both day and multi-visits. The multi-visits provided an opportunity for more prolonged and intensive engagement and a chance to get to know each other, and could lead to changes in behaviour and attitudes.

'yes they have put us in groups and they have mixed us up and we could speak to other people and making friends as I only knew one person in this group before I came here. Now I know everyone' (Youth School group 2 Male)

The majority of adults talked particularly about mental wellbeing benefits they gained especially the peace and calm they found on site and the feelings of stress reduction from difficult and sometimes chaotic lives.

'I find Westonbirt very therapeutic because of the calm and peaceful surroundings and you can forget about the real world for the time you are here'. This activity gets me out of the house when I'm not working. (Mental psychosis adult group Female)

What elements of the Community Project were successful?

Participants, organisational leaders and FCE staff and volunteers identified key reasons why they thought the Community Project was successful, this included:

- The setting was non-clinical or residential, it was a large beautiful woodland and an important national tree collection (therefore seen as a special place), and nature was used as part of a targeted intervention

- A combination of activities and a holistic approach (mental, physical, social), meaningful practical hands on activities, and a community shelter area that participants felt a sense of ownership towards
- A non-judgemental and supportive environment with a focus on positives and what participants could achieve, as well as the development of trust and respect.

Where there additional benefits from multi-visits vs one-off activities?

The evidence outlines that each of the different types of visits could provide a broad range of wellbeing benefits for participants. However, evidence from the multi-visits illustrate that extended engagement through repeat multi-visits and becoming familiar with the site and the activities, could provide a greater depth of benefits and impact on wellbeing and could also lead to changes in behaviours.

Day and outreach visits were one-off visits: day visits allowed opportunities for 'being away' and somewhere different, while outreach visits were important for those who could not necessarily visit Westonbirt and allowed nature to be taken out into places such as care homes.

Key lessons learnt and Community Project legacy

There was a strong desire for continuation of the Community Project. Organisations and participants wished to continue their engagement with Westonbirt Arboretum. With organisations wanting to explore bringing new people to the site and participants interested in visiting with friends or family.

The structured and creative approach taken allowed for flexibility and could be adapted and changed to meet the diverse needs of participants who faced a range of difficulties, and allowed for a collaborative approach to Project delivery.

The Community Project was able to successfully engage with and benefit young people and adults facing a range of disability, addiction and behavioural problems.

Volunteers supported FCE staff and participants and gained wellbeing outcomes themselves from their involvement.

A Community Project Officer post has been made permanent at Westonbirt and the Community Project will continue in an adapted form. Discussions are taking place on a range of issues including a possible Community Access Scheme and for a new approach to working with care homes. These illustrate a legacy beyond the end of the Community Project.

1. Introduction

Mental health problems are one of the main causes of disease burden worldwide. Mental health and behavioural problems such as anxiety, depression, and drug abuse are primary drivers of disability according to the Mental Health Foundation (undated). It is estimated that 1 in 6 people in the past week experienced a common mental health problem. A Government Office for Science foresight report on mental capital and well-being in 2008 (Foresight, 2008) described mental capital as a person's cognitive and emotional resources, and mental wellbeing as a dynamic state in which the individual is able to develop their potential. According to the World Health Organisation for the first time world leaders are recognising the importance of promoting mental health and wellbeing and the prevention and treatment of substance abuse. This has led to the inclusion of these two issues in the Sustainable Development Goals (World Health Organisation, 2017). MIND the mental health charity outline that Ecotherapy which involves working in nature or experiencing nature can help with the management of existing mental health problems and in their treatment as well as in prevention (MIND, 2015).

There is also increasing concern that people are not engaging with nature as much as they did in previous decades and in particular there is evidence that particular sections of society are not accessing natural environments and greenspace as much as the general the population (Morris et al, 2011). The 'Monitor of engagement with the natural environment' is a large survey that has been running since 2009. In a targeted report of survey results from 2009-2012 it highlighted that those from ethnic minority groups, those in urban deprived areas, those with a disability, the over 65 year olds and those of lower socio-economic status, who can often face exclusion, take fewer visits to nature and greenspace on average every year than the general population (Natural England and TNS, 2012) and therefore do not, as often, gain the wellbeing benefits that can arise from connecting with nature (O'Brien et al. 2013). A further analysis of the survey focused on children suggesting that 12% of children under 16 rarely visit the natural environment and this was greater for those of lower socio-economic status (Burt et al. 2015). There is an increasing body of evidence that outlines the important role contact with nature can play in contributing to people's health and wellbeing (O'Brien et al 2010, 2011, 2013 and 2016, WHO, 2016) with benefits to physical and mental health, the contribution to social and nature connections, cultural and symbolic significance and opportunities for learning and skills development.

A range of interventions and programmes have been designed and delivered to reach out and enable those who are potentially facing a variety of barriers to accessing nature, in order to improve their mental health and wellbeing. (Morris et al. 2011). The Community Project at Westonbirt the National Arboretum (see Section 2 for a fuller description) is one such approach as it reaches out and engages with young people with autism, behavioural problems, and with low self-esteem and confidence, as well as to

adults with mental health problems, drug and alcohol problems, and those with dementia and vulnerable groups. It offers the opportunity for inclusion of people who are less likely to access and benefit from contact with Westonbirt Arboretum, particularly an environment of high quality such as Westonbirt. Evidence suggests that contact with forest environments can aid restoration. Restoration theory suggests that this occurs via providing an opportunity to 'be away' from everyday life and stresses; it can provide 'fascination' through sensory experiences, contact and activity in nature and 'compatibility' with people's inclinations (Kaplan, 1995).

Pretty et al. (2017) calls for a manifesto for the 'green mind' and argues that three particular types of engagement increase regular attentiveness:

- Nature engagement – being and doing in nature
- Social engagement – being with and engaging with others
- Craft engagement – that delivers attention and immersion such as bush craft, whittling, hedge laying, coppicing.

All of these types of engagement are part of the Community Project at Westonbirt.

The groups identified above have been targeted by the programme at Westonbirt and these are new groups for the site to engage with and a new approach for Forestry Commission England to take at Westonbirt.

1.1. Purpose of the report

This report focuses on the evaluation of the Community Project to evidence:

1. What types of activities did the Community Project facilitate and what types of people took part?
2. Did participation in these activities lead to wellbeing outcomes for participants?
3. Did participation lead to any changes in behaviours or attitudes for participants?
4. What particular types of programme or elements of the programme led to the greatest positive impact on wellbeing?
5. Are there additional benefits to carrying out multi-visit programmes versus one-off activities?

2. The Westonbirt Heritage Lottery Programme

The Community Project at Westonbirt Arboretum has been part of a larger Heritage Lottery Funded (HLF) programme and was led by Forestry Commission England (FCE). The overall aims of the full programme were as follows:

- Project Aim 1: Enable our visitors to increase their learning about and appreciation of Westonbirt Arboretum's tree collection and landscape heritage by improving their welcome.
- Project Aim 2: Conserve the Grade 1 registered historic landscape of Westonbirt Arboretum to enable us to be good custodians of our landscape heritage.
- Project Aim 3: Increase the number of people and the range of people who take part in Westonbirt Arboretum's heritage.

A targeted evaluation has been undertaken by Forest Research (FR) to provide insights about the outcomes of the Community Project against aim 3. This evaluation feeds into the overall evaluation of the Westonbirt HLF programme. This report focuses on the Community Project and assesses the impact on participants, and identifies the types of activities undertaken and the well-benefits gained. The programme was a new approach for FCE at Westonbirt and an innovative mix of day visits, multi-visits and outreach visits were developed and adapted to reach and support a range of excluded and vulnerable groups. A visitor experience evaluation was also undertaken as part of the wider overall evaluation of the Heritage Lottery funded Programme focused on aim 1: results can be found in the O'Brien and Forster (2018) report.

2.1. The Community Project

The original target audiences for the Community Project were:

1. Youth groups at risk of exclusion (age 14-26)
2. Older people at risk of exclusion

However, as the project developed adults of other ages at risk of exclusion were targeted and enabled to engage with the project. A key focus in the beginning of the Community Project was one-off visits (both day visits to the site and outreach visits to care homes and community groups) to reach out and increase the number and range of people engaging with Westonbirt. The original plan of activities in the submission bid (see Table 1) were adapted as the project developed and the needs of groups and participants were taken into account. The focus on one-off visits evolved and a multi-visit programme was developed. For example the FCE Community Youth Officer started to work more closely with schools which were more interested in longer programmes

that ran for a term or more. Longer term engagement gave young people the opportunity to feel more connected to nature and settle in and become familiar with Westonbirt and could also lead to behaviour change according to teachers. Therefore the Community Project was able to develop and build a bespoke programme to reach out to excluded groups, both youth groups and adults.

Table 1 Original plans for the Community Project and the adapted delivery

Original HLF submission plan activities	What Westonbirt delivered as part of the Community Project
Westonbirt wellbeing facilitated visits	These were delivered both as day visits and as part of multi day programmes. Called 'Wellbeing'
Get involved practical volunteering for older audiences	Some were delivered as day visits but often on longer programmes (community coppice restoration) Called 'Nurtured by Nature'
Westonbirt sensory journeys	These were delivered both as day visits and as part of multi day programmes. Called 'Wellbeing'
Outreach to care homes	Delivered as one-off sessions although with some repeats. Some also came on facilitated day visits after the outreach session. Called 'Branching Out'
YG explorer challenge	Self-guided packs have been delivered but this has tended to be run as activities as part of facilitated day sessions
Practical conservation with young people	These were delivered both as day visits and as part of multi day programmes – but often included craft / sensory activities as well (as feedback indicated the need for variety)
Youth forum	Developed into monthly youth club. FCE has also delivered additional 'one-off consultation' e.g. at concerts

As part of the preparatory work for the Community Project FCE contacted youth groups and nursing homes. For example, FCE staff interviewed the managers or activity coordinators of twenty nursing homes within 2 hours drive of the site to understand whether a trip to Westonbirt was of interest or feasible given the limited physical capability of some residents. All of the homes contacted highlighted interest in staff from Westonbirt visiting the nursing homes to bring the arboretum to their residents and this led to the development of outreach visits (Westonbirt the National Arboretum, undated). New partner organisations were engaged in discussion throughout the Community Project planning process. An internet questionnaire was sent to eighty community

organisations in Gloucestershire offering a wide range of services to people at risk of social exclusion and disadvantage both adults and young people, to explore potential partnerships between them and Westonbirt. Fifty two youth groups were contacted within a 10 mile radius of Westonbirt and ninety two youth workers from the voluntary sector within an hour's drive of Westonbirt were contacted to explore opportunities for involvement in the Community Project. This background and preparatory work and on-going engagement and consultation led to the development of the following types of visits.

2.1.1. Outreach visits

The outreach visits by FCE staff and volunteers aimed to go beyond the site and into local communities to involve a range of groups including those in care homes, dementia sufferers, women with post-natal depression and older or vulnerable adults at risk of social exclusion. Appendix 1 shows the types of activities they were undertaking during the sessions. The outreach visits were aimed primarily at adults, only one youth group got involved in an outreach visit.

2.1.2. Day visits

Day visits to Westonbirt were arranged for youth groups with autism, psychosis, and with additional needs and for older groups with dementia, adults at risk of social exclusion, those with mental health issues and adults with learning difficulties. Activities were varied and included sensory walks, nature printing, nature walks, arts and crafts, sound mapping (Appendix 1). Visits lasted on average 4 hours.

2.1.3. Multi-visits

Specific local groups with mental health, behavioural, drug and alcohol problems were targeted by Westonbirt staff. The focus was on groups that were less likely to access Westonbirt. FCE explored whether the organisations and schools identified were interested in bringing their groups to Westonbirt to undertake a range of activities via multi-visits over a period of approximately 2 months. Visits lasted from 10.00am until 2 or 3.00pm.

Schools groups were encouraged to take part in the John Muir Award which is an environmental award scheme for people from all backgrounds. Four challenges lie at the centre of the award and these are: 1) discover a wild place, 2) explore it, 3) discover it and 4) share your experiences. Youth participants were encouraged to take part in the Award to develop skills, confidence and gain a sense of achievement, learn about heritage and conservation, as well as gain a certificate and badge in recognition of their efforts (see Appendix 2). John Muir awards issued to staff, volunteers and participants as part of the Community Project were: Discovery awards: 221, Explorer awards: 43, Conserver awards: 2.

3. Methods

A qualitative methodological approach was developed to gather data including participant observation, interviews, and attendance at de-briefing sessions. FCE staff and FCE volunteers played a vital role in gathering observational data (using an approach designed by Forest Research (FR)) for day visits, outreach visits and multi-visits. FR attended the last day of a sample of multi-visits to informally interview participants, staff and volunteers and spend the day with the groups to understand more about the activities being undertaken and the context of the programme (Table 2). The data gathering included:

- **Observational data:** Data was gathered by FCE staff and FCE volunteers at a sample of 39 day visits, outreach and multi-visits (see Table 2). For the multi-visits observations were made of a small sample of individuals to explore change over the 4-6 or more visits participants made to Westonbirt. Two school groups in the sample spent a whole school year visiting once a fortnight. For the day and outreach visits general observations and comments were made of the whole group rather than of individual people (Table 2). Each observation was a short piece of written text against the 'five ways to wellbeing' (see page 16 and Appendix 5), as well as an overall comment for each group and any reflections from the observers on the session, including any comments from organisational group leaders. These were added to an excel spreadsheet for analysis.
- **In *situ* 'being and doing with' interview data -** (see O'Brien and Varley, 2012): FR participated in the final session of 10 multi-visits, spending the day with groups and interviewing group leaders, FCE staff, FCE volunteers and participants. For a small number of schools, visits were made to Westonbirt every 2 weeks for a whole school year i.e. from September until July. 22 youth groups got involved in 221 multi-visit sessions via 12 organisations and 5 were studied as part of the evaluation (Appendix 3). Of the five youth groups studied, three had autism (two groups lived in residential accommodation), and two school groups had young people with issues of low confidence and self-esteem. Five groups were adults, 2 groups of those with drug and alcohol problems, an early intervention group with mental psychosis and a group with debt, addiction and mental health problems and a social prescribing group with isolation and low wellbeing. Three of these groups lived in residential treatment accommodation.

Not all young participants were interviewed as 3 out of the 5 groups evaluated had young people with severe autism and were sometimes non-verbal or with limited vocabulary. In these instances the group leader was interviewed as they had a very good overview of the abilities and changes in the young participants. Some of the adults with addictions did not want to be interviewed, and again in these instances therefore, the group leaders who know the participants well

provided valuable data on the impact of the programme and observations were made about how the group experienced the multi-visits and worked together (see Table 2, Table 3, Table 4 and Appendix 1 and 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7)

- **De-briefing:** For the 10 multi-visits that FR attended, the researchers also sat in on the de-brief sessions FCE staff held with other staff and volunteers to explore how the sessions had gone for the groups, what worked, what could be learned from the session.
- **On-line survey:** Throughout the community programme both group leaders and participants have been able to provide feedback to the Community Officers using survey monkey questionnaires as part of the overall evaluation of the community programme. The Community Officers have used this feedback to continually adapt their activities as the programme has developed over the last four years. The original survey questions sent to group leaders were changed in early 2016 to align with this evaluation project. The survey was completed by 75 different group leaders from both the adult and young people groups. The team at Westonbirt have also surveyed a number of community groups as part of their consultation for the future of the programme. For the results from group leaders and participants see the separate report: 'Appendix M of the Evaluation Report, Phase One of the Westonbirt Project' (Forestry Commission England, 2018).

Table 2 Number of groups (in brackets are the numbers of groups studied in the evaluation)

	Youth Groups	Youth Sessions	Adult groups	Adult sessions total	Adult participant numbers
Outreach	(1) 7		(10) 54	102	1032
Day visits	(13) 69		(15) 38	64	647
Multi-visits	(5) 22	221	(5) 18	91	533
Total number of groups observed as part of the evaluation	19		30		

Table 3 Number of observations made across all groups and types of visit

	Multi-visit observations	Day visit observations	Outreach visit observations	Total number of observational comments
Youth	526	64	8	598
Adults	453	79	76	608
Total 1,206 observations				

Table 4 Number of interviews *in situ* at final multi-visit sessions (group leaders are representatives of the organisations bringing groups to the site)

Group leaders	FCE staff	FCE volunteers	Participants	Total number of interviews
13	8	12	28	61

The types of activities the groups were undertaking included:

- Creative activities – art, sensory activities, mindfulness
- Woodland craft, management and maintenance – coppicing, deer fencing, wood cutting
- Social engagement – working together, preparing, cooking and eating together.

All of these were nature focused. Verbal permission and consent to be part of the research was sought from all of the participants or from group leaders from various organisations for those with severe autism. Forest Research followed its code of research ethics (Social and Economic Research Group, 2010) The names of organisations that participants were part of, is not provided in this report, any names of individuals provided in quotes are not the real names of the participants. It should be noted that for many of the multi-visits and some of the day and outreach visits many of the participants had complex mental health issues and problems. Some were based in residential rehabilitation and treatment homes for those with drug and alcohol addiction, while others were in residential schools for those with severe autism. Some of the autistic participants are unlikely to ever be able to work or live independently. One group that visited included 10 young people with autism and 9 carers to look after them, as they had to be supervised and supported continually. The majority of participants get involved in a range of activities in their usual settings (schools or residential treatment centres) as well as participating in the Westonbirt programme, for example those in residential addiction rehabilitation have structured sessions to explore their addiction and cognitive behavioural therapy to aid the creation of new behaviours and ways of thinking and doing. They also get involved in a range of creative and learning activities, one of which is the multi-visits to Westonbirt. Therefore the Westonbirt programme is sometimes part of a wider package of rehabilitation activities these groups are undertaking. Participants are given a choice of activities and therefore coming to Westonbirt was the choice for the participants who attended. There are challenges of working with and researching the groups involved in this evaluation, flexibility and sensitivity was important in gathering data.

The data gatherers (including observers and interviewers) were always introduced to the participants at the beginning of each session to seek consent.

3.1. Five ways to wellbeing

For the evaluation of the Community Project, the New Economics Foundation (nef) five ways to wellbeing framework was used (Aked et al. 2008). This provided a structure used to investigate the impacts of the programme and includes a focus on Connecting with people and nature, being active, taking notice, keeping learning and giving or sharing time, interest and enthusiasm.

Figure 1 Five ways to wellbeing



In this report we use the term mental and physical wellbeing rather than the 'be active' term, as a place to add quotes about mental wellbeing from participants. The framework was developed by nef as a result of the government commissioned Foresight report on 'Mental capital and wellbeing' (Foresight, 2008).

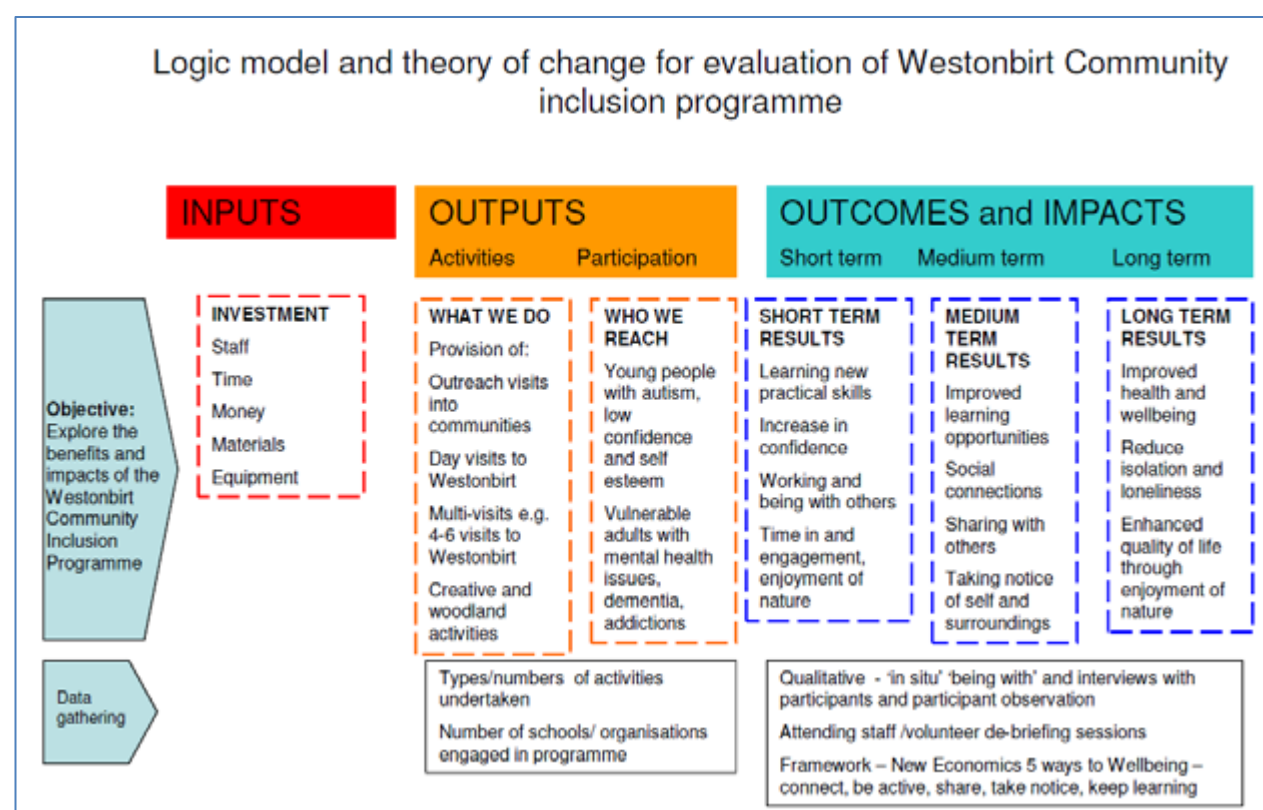
3.2. Theory of change

The theory of change¹ that underpins the Community Project was that the programme would engage 'vulnerable and under-served' groups. It provides an experience either at Westonbirt, or taken out to groups in their local area for those that were less likely to visit the site, and via this approach and the activities participants undertook, the project could result in outcomes around the five ways to wellbeing (see Figure 2)

¹ The theory of change is a description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context.

Outcomes are the direct experiences gained by those involved in the programme as a result of engaging with the Westonbirt Community Project, and any impacts are longer terms changes that participants identify as having happened or have the potential to happen. In the interviews and participant observation care was taken to capture outcomes and impacts that were directly attributable to the Community Project. However, direct attribution to the programme was sometimes difficult given the complex needs of the participants and issues they faced and the range of other activities they were sometimes involved in. This research also explored the issue of behaviour change.

Figure 2 Logic model and theory of change



3.3. Data analysis

Data was analysed using NVivo which is a qualitative management software package. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed or notes were taken. The data were coded in NVivo; this is an interpretive technique used to organise qualitative data and requires the researcher to carefully read all the text and allocate that text to codes and themes that provide an indication of what the text is about. These codes can be inductively identified e.g. they emerge from the data or they can be deductive using a pre-structured coding scheme. In this evaluation the five ways to wellbeing was used as an existing list of analytical themes. The data were further explored to identify differences between youths and adults, and the different types of visits, as well as the key factors that might explain the wellbeing benefits of the programme. Quotes are

given to illustrate the views, perspectives and experiences identified by the participants or their group/organisation leader, as well as FCE staff and FCE volunteers. Summary tables are also used to synthesis and illustrate the results of the evaluation.

3.4. Challenges of the evaluation

The evaluation sought to understand the experiences of participants and how involvement impacted their wellbeing. Some key lessons have been learnt from the evaluation:

- The complexity of issues, problems and challenges the participants faced meant that interviews could not be undertaken with all participants in the multi-visits, particularly young people with autism who were non-verbal or had limited verbalisation. Therefore the group leaders were interviewed to provide insights on the young people. This is one reason why there are fewer direct quotes from young people.
- Interviews while undertaking activity with participants 'in situ' at the multi-visits worked very well and when combined with observations provided a rich picture of the experiences of participants. Which is why the findings for multi-visits are longer than those for day and outreach visits. However observations of day and outreach visits on their own, while providing very useful data were less revealing of the detailed experiences of individuals as they focused on the whole group and involved no interviews and were one-off experiences.
- Interviews had to fit in with the activities of participants and the running of the sessions and therefore some interviews were very short or were often interrupted.
- The methodological approach needed to be adaptable and flexible to fit with participants with complex issues and needs.
- FCE staff and volunteers making observations originally made these in view of participants. However this did not generally work as participants were curious to know what was being written. FCE staff and volunteers changed their approach to making observations, by observing and then moving away from participants to write quick notes when they were not being observed.

FCE staff and volunteers learned about participant observation via the Community Project and this type of data gathering was a new role for the volunteers and for some of the staff.

4. Results

In reporting on the wellbeing benefits of the Community Project it is important to note that there are many links between the different types of wellbeing outlined below. For example the '*mental*' wellbeing gained by some participants was linked to the mindfulness activity they undertook when they were '*taking notice*' of their surroundings and of the sounds in the forest. '*Learning*' and skills development benefits could be linked to the '*physical*' activities participants were undertaking and enjoying, which can give them a satisfied tired feeling at the end of the day. The concept of '*sharing*' was very much linked to '*connecting with other people*', while '*taking notice*' was closely linked to '*connecting with nature*'. Table 5 provides a broad overview of the wellbeing benefits gained from the day, out-reach and multi-visits. Physical activity was not a part of the outreach visits but could be an important component of the multi-and day visits. The observations of benefits for outreach and day visits are primarily descriptive observations from the person carrying out the observations, while the benefits for multi-visits are the thoughts and feelings of participants themselves or their group leaders and therefore these provide a richer description about the wellbeing benefits participants gained from the Community Project.



Making pizza at the Community Shelter (Young autism group 3)

Table 5 Summary of wellbeing benefits for different engagement approaches

Five ways	Day visits	Outreach visits	Multi-visits
Mental and physical	Walking Cutting wood Bending and moving e.g. collecting things and foraging Relaxing – ‘Chilling out’	No physical activity during the outreach visits	Calm, atmosphere, stress free, tranquil, peaceful, therapeutic, revitalised Stimulation from activities and engaging with nature Feeling tired and stronger due to physical activities
Connect with nature	Connecting with trees of interest Treetop walkway – giving a different aspect high up in the canopy Collecting natural materials to make things Practical activities e.g. cutting woods, making bird feeder, lighting fire, toasting marshmallows	Spending time thinking of nature Birds sounds provoked much comment e.g. separate owls making twit twoo sounds, a participant said they had a resident robin Other sounds e.g. identifying sounds of roe deer, hedgehogs	Spending time in nature Fresh air Beauty of the site Creating a sound map Natural beauty Seeing changes in the site over time Connecting to birds, trees Sense of freedom Atmosphere of the wood
Connect with people	Greeting and talking to strangers Cheering for each other e.g. in mix and match game Praising each other e.g. whittling Chatting and joking together	Chatting and discussing e.g. leaves and flowers provoked discussion, activity being undertaken with others	Learning to be with others after being isolated Working together in an unthreatening way Welcoming and supportive staff and volunteers Being away Acting differently in a different environment

Share	<p>Experiences and stories</p> <p>Helping each other e.g. cut wood, light fire, make tea, find leaves for nature printing</p> <p>Working as a team</p> <p>Encouraging each other e.g. to try new colours when nature printing, praising each other's work</p> <p>Sharing reflections e.g. on achievements</p>	<p>Sharing different approaches, memories, and ideas e.g. designs of prints</p> <p>Helping each other carry out activity</p> <p>Sharing enthusiasm for the activity</p> <p>Shared comments and conversations</p> <p>Share with others e.g. activity with grandchildren</p>	<p>Experiences</p> <p>Achievements</p> <p>Skills</p> <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Childhood memories</p> <p>Preparing, cooking and eating together</p>
Learn	<p>About trees – identification, growth</p> <p>History of site</p> <p>Foraging in nature</p> <p>Safe tool use</p> <p>Making things e.g. natural paints, mobiles</p> <p>About practical woodland management such as coppicing, charcoal making</p>	<p>Learning from each other e.g. try different print designs</p> <p>Lots of questions from the older adult group and dementia groups e.g. what type of tree is this, why Westonbirt has national Japanese maple tree collection</p>	<p>Learning about Westonbirt, trees, about the tree collection</p> <p>Developing new skills</p> <p>Learning about oneself – how to preserve or be with others</p> <p>Overcoming nerves</p> <p>Feeling purposeful</p> <p>Gaining a sense of achievement</p> <p>Learning practical skills – lighting fires, coppicing, layering</p>
Take Notice	<p>Of trees, bark leaves</p> <p>Of sounds e.g. birds, crunch of leaves underfoot</p> <p>Of smells</p> <p>Site and its history</p> <p>Treetop walkway and crows nest</p>	<p>Reflecting on activity and watching others e.g. nature printing</p> <p>Listening to instructions e.g. for the activities</p> <p>Recognising leaves and linking to Westonbirt logo</p>	<p>Using all the senses</p> <p>Taking notice of breathing, feelings</p> <p>Being mindful</p> <p>Forgetting troubles</p> <p>Spiritual connections – nature as something bigger than oneself</p>

4.1. Mental and physical wellbeing

4.1.1. Outreach visits

There were no specific physical activities during the outreach sessions as the activities were taken to and run in the care homes, memory cafes, community buildings where people were based. The women with post-natal depression were proud of their prints and mandalas which could help to play a role in building their self-esteem. Participants from the groups enjoyed and were interested in the activities organised for the sessions, it gave them a chance to talk to others about their experiences and memories. This can be important in socially connecting with others and in turn this can impact on overall mental wellbeing. The majority of participants enjoyed the sessions, chatted to others and engaged with the variety of activities the FCE staff and volunteers had developed for the sessions.

4.1.2. Day visits

The day visits group activities generally involved some walking from the Welcome building where visitors arrived and moved on to the treetop walkway to the community shelter if they were getting involved in cutting wood for firewood or coppicing. Some of the groups also had a guided walk around different parts of the wood for a sensory walk or an introduction to the arboretum. At least 4 groups had participants with mobility issues and who used a walking stick, wheelchair or mobility scooter. Some of the adult groups talked about aspects that could be linked to mental wellbeing such as enjoying '*meditation with eyes closed*', and describing the day as peaceful, '*it lifts my spirits*'.

An adult group with mental health issues made sounds maps and became immersed in the activity connecting to nature but also gained mental health benefits:

'That didn't feel like 15 minutes. That was really relaxing and peaceful, it took a minute to feel comfortable and stop thinking about itchy bugs but then I enjoyed it' (Art therapy group for those with mental health issues)

A couple of young autistic participants enjoyed running along the paths and hiding behind the trees. One of the youth groups were young carers; they made hearts out of wood on their visits onto which they wrote life mottos. The dynamic of the carers groups was observed to be different compared to other youth groups as it was clear they came from a background of giving support to others. Some of the life mottos they wrote recognised the challenges of their lives and included:

'Love life'

'Life has its ups and downs'

'You can't have a rainbow without the rain'

4.1.3. Multi-visits

The data from the multi-visits includes observations of a sample of participants over each visit they made (see section 4.8 for observations of multi-visits), interviews at the final visit the groups had to the site and attendance at staff and volunteer de-briefing sessions.

Physical and mental wellbeing are closely linked and this came out strongly in the interviews with participants. However, mental wellbeing benefits were more strongly described than physical benefits, this is potentially unsurprising given participants often had a range of mental health issues and problems. Terms such as calm, atmosphere, stress free, tranquil, peaceful and therapeutic, as well as exhilarated were used to describe participant's experiences of Westonbirt. Linked to their mental wellbeing, the physical side was also important in terms of making them feel tired, thus helping them to sleep and become stronger. There was recognition by many that the physical benefits were important and gave them feelings of mental wellbeing and a sense of achievement that could make them feel proud.

Interviewer: how important is the physicality of it?

'That is massively important and people with mental health problems tend to die earlier because of poor physical health. So that is a drive in our service so getting people moving - it can improve their motivation and get them fitter. We do a lot of psycho - social work and people are more receptive when doing something like this. It's not in a clinical setting' (Mental psychosis adult group, Group leader)

'The exercise here was a bit different, stretching, lifting and bending, keeps you young' (Mental psychosis adult group Male)

'Some of it does tire you out, some of it does hurt your hands a bit, but it's like a nice kind of hurt. It's a hurt you don't mind doing, that you get a sense of achievement at the end of it' (Youth School group 2 Male)

'It's exercise, normally I would be sat at home, so it's exercise, you get out and do a bit of walking for an hour or so and it helps the circulation' (Social Prescribing Group Visually impaired Male)

'This is a big aspect just being outdoors and doing some physically activity as well rather than just sitting there. Josh is really isolated at home. It is so different to what they normally do' (Young autism group 3 Group leader)

Being active also helped participants to keep warm in the colder months:

Interviewer: What has it been like through the winter months?

For us it wasn't really that bad, it got a bit cold but I expected that and to be honest I'd rather be out here in the cold cause you do much more like using the mallet and froe to cut wood, it's just enjoyable, like when you finally cut it you've done it.

Interviewer: Does that activity keep you warm as well?

Yes and like when you make shingles you do it and it gives you a bit of warmth moving your arms' (Youth school group 2 Male)

The reduction in feelings of stress and the peaceful nature of Westonbirt were identified as important to participants who were often dealing with difficult addictions and a range of problems or isolation. The activities at Westonbirt gave them respite from this. Being in a different environment that they were able to become familiar with was also particularly beneficial, enabling participants to forget their problems for a while:

'It's stress free, biggest thing to get off your chest is stress (Mental psychosis adult group Male)

'I find Westonbirt very therapeutic because of the calm and peaceful surroundings and you can forget about the real world for the time you are here'. This activity gets me out of the house when I'm not working. (Mental psychosis adult group Female)

Interviewer: Why do you feel it's therapeutic?

'It's quiet, you're not relying on technology, it's back to basics, there is no outside interference it's just nature. Being able to start a fire without a lighter and make pizza without a gas oven. It's gives a sense of satisfaction' (Drug and alcohol rehabilitation adult group Male)

The sense of feeling separated when going into rehabilitation and treatment could leave people feeling isolated and cut off from everyday life:

The whittling for instance was a really good calming space. As Deidre says sometimes we have quite heavy groups (at the residential treatment centre) and just to have some time in nature it gives you a real sense of wellbeing' (Mental psychosis adult group Female)

'...and to be out in the fresh air, I kind of go away feeling exhilarated some weeks. When I first got here (to the residential treatment centre) I got a bit stir crazy and started feeling down and depressed because you don't go out a lot and you don't feel part of the real world. So when Claire [FCE staff] came and spoke about it I was really interested and when you've had a tough week or heavy week this is a really good release it gets you out of the house. I really look forward to it; I'm going to miss it' (Drug and alcohol rehabilitation adult group 1 Female)

'Yes it's been great, it's a bit different from what I thought, I was never into trees in the first place. But it's been good as there have been different aspect, doing the tasting and the sound and willow making. It makes a change from lounging on the sofa cause no one comes to see you. This is different you get out in the fresh air' (Social Prescribing Group Visually impaired Male)

The relaxed atmosphere and encouragement of FCE staff and volunteers was also considered important, as just being with other people could be a big challenge for participants:

*Interviewer: How do you feel at the end of the day when you have been here?
'Good, revitalised is a good word to describe it. Rachel [FCE staff] is great she has all the time in the world for you and good people skills. It's very much there in the headlights for me speaking to people and Rachel has been great - this gives you a bit of a zest for life. You can appreciate the small things like a walk in the woods that you forget in everyday life' (Drug and alcohol rehabilitation adult group Male)*

'Yeah it is absolutely the biggest challenge is being in a group of people for me let alone struggling with the rehab. It's all a challenge, gets you out of your comfort zone which is why it's nice to come here because you can kind of switch off from that environment for a while' (Drug and alcohol rehabilitation adult group 2 Male)



Young person using fire irons to try and light cotton wool (Young autism group 1)

4.2. Connect to nature

4.2.1. Outreach visits

Connection to nature for the outreach visits was via nature focused activities including looking at nature photographs, exploring scents, leaf printing, feeling and touching natural objects and sometimes making something such as a scent sachet or willow star. One of the dementia sufferers at an Alzheimer's memory café got excited when seeing a picture of a cherry tree, this was the most animated she was during the session *'she flapped her hands a lot and looked like she was trying to remember something'*. Participants in this session were also interested by the owl calls, there was mixed reaction to an activity based on soap smells as some were not able to smell them at all. Residents of one of the care home groups on seeing a picture of an old birch tree said that it provided her with inspiration as she used to embroider tapestries but had not been able to since having a stroke. A mental health group connected with nature by touching and smelling wood samples which led to reminiscences of childhood and nature, and visits with grandparents. In a vulnerable adult group one participant was excited by using the nature dyes saying *'It's amazing how a flower can give that colour'* and many in the group persisted with the dyes to get the colour they wanted. An older community group member when learning about the picturesque style of planting at Westonbirt stated *'It makes a garden more interesting if you have lots of different colours and leaf shapes'*. Residents in one of the care homes liked the cones of the Atlas cedar and one commented on lichen saying *'It's beautiful actually'*.

4.2.2. Day visits

A dementia group took a sensory walk and showed real interest in the sensations of touching the trees, bark and leaves and in the textures, this acted as a real talking point for them. For a young group of people with signs of psychosis there was enjoyment in the foraging activity and picking and eating garlic leaves. One of the youth groups with autism commented *'that's a really lovely tree – I like that one'*, while another in a different young autistic group asked about the age of a number of trees on the walk and how big the largest tree as Westonbirt was. A young carers group collected leaves for card printing and also chose small branches to make pencils, whilst carrying out this activity they also encouraged each other and talked about the type of leaves and branches they had. While another carer youth group were really interested in finding the tree that smelt of 'toffee apples' (Katsura tree).

A group of adults at risk of exclusion were particularly interested in the texture and species of trees and leaves in their walk around the site. An adult in an at risk of social exclusion group talked about Henry VIII using oaks from the Forest of Dean to build ships, the group was also interested in how different soils influenced the varying colours of the hydrangea's on site. A young person (from an early signs of psychosis group) enjoyed *'seeing the sunlight through the trees'* on their walk. A female adult in an

alcohol addiction treatment group commented *'this is my favourite place to be in the rain amongst the trees'*, while another adult group talked about an interest in different tree species, concerns about 'ash dieback' and foraging for firewood with one person asking *'what can't be burnt'*? In an all-male adult group one participant said *'you need to stop to appreciate and talk about the different colours in nature'* during their activity of walking and observing trees and sawing wood. One of the group leaders of adults at risk of social exclusion stated *'it's been inspirational, there are times that stand out as being really special and this is one of them'*.

4.2.3. Multi visits

The National Arboretum at Westonbirt is a nationally and internationally important conservation site as well as a very scenic environment and this was appreciated by all of the participants. However, it is not just how the site looks but the atmosphere, the variety of trees and open spaces that were appreciated. One participant said *'there is something about woods'*, another described the site as beautiful, for another it was a chance to get away from technology. There was much appreciation of the site overall with comments about the birds, trees, the sense of freedom people gained by coming to the site (which can also sometimes be found in other woods) which was described as calm as the following quotes suggest:

'Living in southwest London it's nice to go into the woods, peaceful. There's something different about being in the woods. Stress free environment, there is space and quiet. 'I don't know how to describe it but since coming here I have become a bit more of an outdoorsy person' Started going to woods more, went to Stanton woods last weekend with my mum (Mental psychosis adult group Male)

'It's such a lovely setting to do it in, we went on a walk to the old arboretum and we did a sound map so we drew everything we could hear, it was a lovely day that day (Drug and alcohol rehabilitation adult group 1 Male)

'Natural beauty really, it's a really nice place' (Supporting those with debt, addiction and mental health problems adult group Male)

The activities that were undertaken at Westonbirt were appreciated as practices that it would be difficult to do elsewhere:

'We talked about not being able to do the things they do at Westonbirt elsewhere build fire, shelters etc' (Mental psychosis adult group Male)

One young man suggested that he would only want to visit Westonbirt again if he was undertaking these practical activities:

...but to be honest I would rather not come outside of the visits as I would rather do what we are doing now than just come for a walk – cause I like what we are doing now and I enjoy it (Youth School group 2 Male)

Most stated that the weather was not an issue, although it could be occasionally for some, and they all enjoyed seeing changes in the site over the period of time of their visits:

'There has been one horrible day and we were moaning but we walked here in the rain and we soon dried off with the fire and made a cup of tea and the rain stopped so in the end it was okay' (Drug and alcohol rehabilitation adult group 2 Male)

'I want to come in summer and see the seasons; I'd like to come in all four seasons.

Interviewer: Have you been noticing changes?

Yeah things have changed over the last few weeks' (Drug and alcohol rehabilitation adult group 2 Male)

For young students visiting from a local school being outdoors had been a significant advantage in the hot summer weather, which was one of the pleasures of being outdoors.

Yes others are jealous of us because we get to come outdoors a lot and when it has been hot recently we got to come out in the heatwave, they were all sat in a hot stuffy classroom but we were under the shade of the trees (Youth School group 2 Male)

Getting the opportunity to explore nature on their own and be trusted was also important for the school groups:

'Interviewer: Have you been all round westonbirt?

Yeah we got a chance to wander and we did some quizzes and we had one where we had to come back at a certain time and it was good like they trusted us to go round like we usually do. It was fun.

Interviewer: You didn't get lost

No, they gave us a map and we all had a walkie talkie with us as well so if we did get lost we would be a click away' (Youth School group 2 Male).



Being creative (Young autism group 2)

4.3. Connect to people

4.3.1. Outreach visits

The women with post-natal depression were quite quiet but became more chatty with each other towards the end of their outreach visit undertaking nature printing activities. An over 60s group was very responsive, engaged and interested; they recollected easily and discussed their experiences with others, the staff and the FCE volunteer. Participants in the care homes interacted with each other, chatting together and to the carers during the sessions. Most of the chatting was prompted by the activities they were undertaking. One participant was laughing with an FCE staff member saying how the lichen that was brought along to the session *'looked like an iceberg lettuce'*. A community group member when looking at photos of a May pole said *'I remember seeing May pole dancing in 1977 at the Queen's jubilee party'*. Often the activities provoked memories that participants shared and discussed with each other of places they had been, sights they had seen, plants and flowers from gardens they had grown or seen.



Cooking round the fire (Rehabilitation adult group 1)

4.3.2. Day visits

For one of the dementia groups involved in a sensory walk touching the bark of different trees increased the chat within the group with comments such as '*it's smooth, it's flaky*'. A young autistic group had participants that helped to carry equipment and make drinks for others without being asked. While another young autistic group cheered each other on when participants matched things in a mix and match game. Many of the youth groups tended to be quite quiet at first but soon relaxed once they got involved in an activity and would often encourage each other in the tasks they were undertaking. A young carers group talked about their experiences and also listened to the ideas and experiences of others in the group. At times the conversation became quite lively with banter and laughter. The observer noted that the participants grew in confidence as even the quieter members of the group became more animated and either asked questions or made observations. In one of the young carers groups a young women was scared of heights and two others in the group offered to walk side by side with her over the Tree top walkway (which rises to a height of 13.5 metres), in the same group a

young person was scared of fire and others in the group helped and worked with this person to allay their fears. Two adults groups at risk of social exclusion chatted a lot amongst each other and supported each other e.g. by complimenting others on their whittling. Two adult groups referred to childhood memories, for one group this was while looking and discussing a horse chestnut with one person talking about '*chucking sticks into the trees to collect what you could get down*'. While the other groups shared childhood memories and stories of playing outside, telling stories around fires on bonfire night and building dens.

4.3.3. Multi-visits

For some with mental health problems such as psychosis just learning to be with other people is an important step in their treatment and recovery as participants can often feel very isolated.

'One thing about psychosis is that people tend to withdraw they tend to lose communication because of all the stuff that is going on in their heads. So doing this activity has so many positive benefits not just from a physical health point of view but from a psycho-social side of learning how to be with people' (Mental psychosis adult group, Group leader)

'Can you imagine how isolated people are and how difficult it can be to talk to people, but here they can just naturally chat about stuff. I think people get fed up of being recognised as someone with schizophrenia sometimes they just want to be recognised as people' (Mental psychosis adult group, Group leader)

'Well I think for me personally I have been quite isolated and that is one of the reasons I asked for an activity that was outside and with people so this has been perfect really. It's just being sociable, and outside in the fresh air for the whole day' (Supporting those with debt, addition and mental health problems adult group Female)

'Oh yes I will be glad to come back. I'm just glad to get out. I go days without seeing people, it's terrible really. They should do more community projects... (Social Prescribing Group Visually impaired Male)

Working together in an unthreatening way was described by one participant as beneficial, while another spoke of having the space to engage with people but also to be alone if needed. Most talked about everyone as 'nice' people, this links to the calmness of the environment and the welcoming and supportive nature of staff and volunteers, as well as working as part of a team.

Being away from their usual environment was seen as important for the young autistic people living in a residential school:

In the school environment we support them... and its safe and secure but I've noticed Frank was helping Ethan to do his coat up and he'll tell him to watch out

for things (trip hazards). They are aware that new people are working with them and that is another brilliant thing, they get to meet new people and because of that you get more interaction between the students (Young autism group 1 Group leader)

Some felt more relaxed when at Westonbirt:

*Interviewer: Are people different when they are out here or the same?
He is, he is just as playful but you can see he enjoys what he does; it does help you get to know people better yeah. (Drug and alcohol rehabilitation adult group 2 Female)*

'Socialising, meeting new people, doing things as part of a team, it's really good and I enjoy it' (Supporting those with debt, addiction and mental health problems adult group Male)

However, getting to know and be with others could take time:

'It takes me quite a while to trust people and feel comfortable' (Drug and alcohol rehabilitation adult group Female)

For those in residential rehabilitation having a break from this was seen as very important:

'Yeah without a doubt, there are a lot of politics in treatment, it is a very intense environment in rehab but out here there is not a bad word to say, the environment it's nice' (Drug and alcohol rehabilitation adult group 2 Male)

'I guess we are mixing with people we wouldn't get to know so much in our houses and it's not too big a group that you feel overwhelmed and where you would struggle with interaction. It's kind of a safe space, you feel comfortable that you can be yourself' (Drug and alcohol rehabilitation adult group 1 Male)

Participating in the programme at Westonbirt also provided participants with something positive to talk about to others.

'Also getting home afterwards having something nice to talk about when other people approach me about what I'm doing I don't have to just say about the stressful things, I can say I've been going to Westonbirt. So it helps me socially to have something nicer to talk about' (Supporting those with debt, addiction and mental health problems adult group Female)

For the school students being at Westonbirt was a chance to get to know others in the school (the students were from the same year not class) as the quote below illustrates.

'yes they have put us in groups and they have mixed us up and we could speak to other people and making friends as I only knew one person in this group before I came here. Now I know everyone' (Youth School group 2 Male)

A young women in the school group also identified friendship as a key element of what they gained from the programme.

Flexible, non-judgmental, encouraging, friendly, lovely, accepting – these are some of the words participants used to describe both the staff and volunteers who run and help to run the programme and day to day activities at Westonbirt. This is particularly important for the types of participants in the programme whether adults or young people as they are suffering from a range of issues including drug and alcohol problems, debt and housing issues, lack of self-esteem and confidence, learning difficulties, and autism.

'it doesn't play out here, I think that is the point, we are not judged on what we've done or who we are, or the mistakes we've made' (Drug and alcohol rehabilitation adult group 1 Female)



Preparing to present a reflection on their school year at Westonbirt (Youth school group 2)

4.4. Keep learning

4.4.1. Outreach visits

In general many of the groups asked questions about the trees, smells, leaves they were asked to look at and the activities they undertook. For some of the dementia participants they remembered, sometimes with prompting, things they had done in the past such as playing conkers in school. One of the women in the post-natal group asked for the name of each leaf so she could write it down. This group were also interested to learn about magnolias, Douglas fir smells and the New Zealand wire netting bush. A mental wellbeing group enjoyed learning to make hand balm with one person stating *'It felt nice to do something different'* that was just for them.

The vulnerable adult group got involved in nature printing, one participant said about the nature dyes *'It's amazing how a flower can give that colour'*. The dementia sufferers asked many questions when the leaves and flowers were passed round such as *'what type of tree is this?'*, *'what is the real name of the handkerchief tree?'* The over 60s group were interested in the plant hunter stories and the fact that Westonbirt has a national collection of Japanese maples, sparking comments such as *'does Westonbirt rival Kew?'*.

4.4.2. Day visits

The majority of the youth and adult groups were curious and asked many questions about trees, Westonbirt and its history and the activities they were undertaking. For example an older person with a dementia group asked about the sequoia bark and why it was so *'spongy'*. One of the young autistic groups learnt to use tools safely when they were involved in cutting wood. A member of a care home group stated *'I didn't know about the different layers of the tree, I thought it was just bark, sap and leaves. I loved finding out about trees and how the wood is used'*. An autistic youth group participant when informed by the FCE staff member that Vaseline helped the cotton wool to light more easily stated that *'Vaseline is coagulated petroleum jelly and bark is a trees protection'*. A school group asked questions about charcoal, redwoods, how the tree top walkway was built and about the wood work area at Westonbirt, they were very curious and keen to know more. One of the older adult social community group participants asked about the family activities at Westonbirt and said she would bring her grandchildren. While another from the same group was interested to learn that a mobility scooter could be hired to get round the site and she felt she could visit the site again because of this. An adult from a social community group asked about acers and sycamores saying *'I thought acers were maples'* and this led to a discussion about botanical names for trees and common names.

In a young carers group several had never cut or split any wood before, while one young person when creating sparks using a fire steel said *'I'm 9 and I didn't realise I could do this'*. Many had never lit a fire before and some were a bit wary about it, but learnt how

to be safe around the fire area. Another young carers group needed quite a bit of reassurance in terms of the tasks they were undertaking; however they also persevered with their activities and wanted to complete them. Learning about health and safety and listening to instructions was an important aspect of many of the youth visits.

4.4.3. Multi-visits

Learning encompassed developing new skills, learning about nature, learning about oneself such as how you can persevere, or learning how to be with people. For some there was nervousness at the beginning of the multi-visits in terms of what might be expected of them and feelings of concern that they could not do certain activities. However, through encouragement and support many described overcoming this and gaining a real sense of achievement and purposefulness. One participant stated that *'the best way to see nature is to work in nature'*. Learning practical skills such as fire lighting, whittling, chopping wood, being creative (i.e. making mobiles) were enjoyed.

'... people should do more of it and if you're not used to working outdoors then people should try it. It's being surrounded by nature, working in nature and not just watching it on the telly and going for a walk with the dog you are actually seeing how nature is managed. How man impacts on nature and how man manages nature' (Drug and alcohol rehabilitation adult group 1 Male)

Learning new practical skills was seen as valuable.

'We've learnt about different sorts of trees that I never knew anything about before. So thoroughly enjoying it, shame it has to come to an end, but hopefully might be able to do it again at some stage' (Supporting those with debt, addiction and mental health problems adult group Male)

Lighting fires, coppicing, layering. I saw a tree getting chopped down over there which was pretty cool, using all the old tools that was really good. I've made my own pencil, made charcoal, did drawings with the charcoal. We done loads really, it's a shame it's only six really (six weeks), inking with leaves, we have used the kettles and learnt to boil our own water.

Interviewer: Are these things you had done before?

No never, never in my wildest dreams did I think I would do that. This is all new. But in recovery you are told to find your higher power it can be anything it doesn't have to be god or anything like that, I don't believe in him I'm agnostic, but I love it here, absolutely love it here; so nature is mine (higher power) (Drug and alcohol rehabilitation adult group 2 Female)

Interviewer: 'Do you think you have learnt things while you have been here?

M1 yeah definitely

M2 a lot

M1 cause, I have learnt about trees and monkey puzzle trees and what woods are better to use like hard wood and soft wood. I have learnt a lot, we made a brush as well and a pen with a feather. I felt that we have learnt more because we have been in the outdoors its hands on instead of being in the classroom and just sat there. Class is much more boring' (Youth School Group 2 Males)

For the school pupils the practical skills and ability to try and experiment with activities helped with kinaesthetic learning (learning by doing).

'We have been learning how to make deer fences and clearing out the coppice coupe which was fun. It's really enjoyable when we come cause it's a way of getting to know more than you would in school, so we have more experience. I like going into the coppice coupe cause we took everything out and when we were done I was proud, I got a sense of achievement' (Youth School Group 2 Male)

*What do you think you have learnt while you have been here?
Everything, everything that you wouldn't learn in the classroom, like teachers don't let you experiment but here they always let you have a go they don't just talk you through it and do it on a piece of paper they let you do it and experience it' (Youth School Group 2 Male)*

One young person said *'I have learned that I just need to keep trying, if I keep trying I will do it' (Youth School Group 1 Male)*

Those with severe autism could experience difficulties but come through them:

'Ed was very very frightened of using the saw at first and was very shaky but he got into it and it gave a real sense of achievement. They are developing skills. Ed has really struggled with the tools (Young autism group 1, Group leader)

Carrying out the various activities at Westonbirt could also provide opportunities to learn more about oneself:

'...yeah I think particularly for people who haven't done this before it's a really chance and I love it and I think everyone whose done it has. You may discover a side of yourself that you never really knew about, it's really therapeutic, I would highly recommend it' (Drug and alcohol rehabilitation adult group 1 Female)



Young participants getting the cob oven fire ready to cook pizzas (Youth school group 2)

Undertaking meaningful activities was considered important by a group leader of an autism group:

'Westonbirt sessions are very relaxed, the outdoor environment and it's the support Karen has enough volunteers with her. It is different activities as well... And there is always a meaning behind it you saw logs for the fire and make pizza to eat or coppicing or build a deer fence and they get to understand why they are doing things and the meaning behind the activity. They get a certificate and they are proud as they achieved something. Especially Jack as he had a really poor attendance at college and with us he has been to the most sessions. We capture his interest. He trusts us now' (Young Autism Group 3, Group leader)

4.5. Take notice

4.5.1. Outreach visits

Participants took a lot of notice via the activities they were undertaking whether that was looking at photos, feeling different objects, smelling scents and making things such

as scent bags, hand balm. Several of the post-natal depression participants were taking notice and reflecting regularly on their nature prints; saying whether they had worked or not. The over 60s group was animated and recognised Japanese maples and magnolias. One of them mentioned that one of the maple leaves looked like the Westonbirt logo. One of the care home participants, who took part in the 'feely' bag activity in which they had to put their hand into a bag and guess what was in there, took every single hazelnut from the bag, touching every one carefully and feeling each in turn. In another care home participants play acted scared when putting their hand in the 'feely' bag. They were all surprised when they saw what was inside (e.g. pine cones) and some said they would never have guessed what it was.

4.5.2. Day visits

Many of the groups looked at the interpretation signs they passed by, particularly those on the Tree top walkway which the groups crossed to get to the community shelter area. Groups also commented on the walkway about being high up in the trees with an adult exclaiming *'look we are higher than the pigeons and it moves like trees move with the wind, not staying still'*. Groups also looked at the labels on the trees, with many enjoying discovering the name of the trees as well as touching the bark, talking about the different textures and feel of wood and leaves and carrying some leaves to take home with them. A dementia group enjoyed touching and feeling the bark of different trees on their sensory walk with one participant stating *'it's all crumbly'*. A young person in an autism group pointed out the sound of bird song to the group, and an adult group at risk of exclusion noticed many differences in the trees as they walked around the site and asked questions about them all. Another adult group with mental health issues enjoyed the smells stating *'if only you could bottle it and take it away'*. An older adults group talked about the crow's nest on the Treetop walkway and its construction. One of the participants was unsure about walking on the Treetop walkway at first but after some reassurance was able to manage the walk and height. One of the youth club groups showed lots of interest and enthusiasm on their visit, particularly wanting to know more about how to get involved in the various activities the FCE staff member had organised. A woman in a drug treatment group was particularly interested in Westonbirt woodworks and asked questions about whittling, chair making and spoon carving, while others in the group liked the charcoal kilns. An adult recovery group participant became focused on their activity stating *'forget what's happening around you, concentrate on fire lighting, shut off, like another world'*.

4.5.3. Multi-visits

Sound maps and mindfulness activity were ways in which people took notice of their surroundings using all their senses, their breathing, and their feelings.

'I've never really sat and listened to the birds lost in that tranquil moment. It felt really calm and safe' (Drug and alcohol rehabilitation adult group 1 Female)

Interviewer: Did you do the mindfulness?

'yeah I really enjoyed that'

*'I think time flies when you're here but you it gives you time to slow yourself down'
'mindfulness is about slowing down and having more awareness' (Drug and alcohol rehabilitation adult group 1 Male and Female)*

'My favourite thing was the mindfulness. It's sitting with your mind, you have things going through your mind 24 hrs a day right but with mindfulness it's about you being in control, sitting there and seeing what's in your mind but not letting it take over and just letting things pass through. You can do breathing techniques as well to regulate the body. So we walked through the other side of the arboretum up through the redwoods and we all found a bit of time to go off and sit by ourselves so I chose a tree and sat down next to it put my jacket over my knees like a little old lady but I don't care and the sun was shining down on me and literally you hear the birds, I've never really sat and listened to the birds lost in that tranquil moment. It felt really calm and safe' (Drug and alcohol rehabilitation adult group 1 Female)

Taking notice could also encompass taking notice of how you feel and how you think about yourself. It could also cover forgetting about your troubles and taking notice of other things.

'They have done well with me as I have never kind of known myself and being sober and clean I kind of like myself and it's not a big headed thing to say but I've never know it before. Usually I'm a bit more chatty than I am today but I have a wishy washy head with lack of sleep but I've been enjoying myself for a change' (Drug and alcohol rehabilitation adult group 2 Male)

Interviewer: When you come out here do you think things through or forget about things?

'When I'm out here I forget about our residential setting, it is nice to get out the house and come out and experience different things' (Drug and alcohol rehabilitation adult group 1 Male)

Taking notice could also involve a spiritual element and influence perspectives, which were also linked to connecting to nature.

they make you feel calm and make you feel how small you are really and how small your problems are cause your part of nature, your part of a bigger wider thing and we are quite spiritual

Interviewer: spiritual has something to do with nature?

'definitely if you put 10 people in the middle of town for an hour and do a stress test on them they will come out at a 7 or 8 and then here for an hour and let them embrace it then there stress levels are going to be dropping' (Drug and alcohol rehabilitation adult group 1 Female)



Using the cross cut saw (Young autism group 3)

4.6. Share

4.6.1. Outreach visits

Most of the groups discussed with each other what they were doing during the sessions, with some groups sharing banter or expressing friendly competitiveness over some of the activities. Sharing scents, comments and memories was common. At one of the care homes a woman who touched the clematis called '*old man's beard*' shared that she used to decorate the church with it at harvest festival time. The sharing of memories prompted a participant from a mental wellbeing group to say it was a way of getting to know others in the group better.

One of the vulnerable adult participants that got involved in nature painting and printing was excited about the prints and said her grandchildren would be impressed, and that she was going to try and do the activity with them. A member of an over 60s group shared a memory with the rest of the group after looking at a May pole dancing photograph. For the over 60s group the flower activity sparked a lot of sharing of comments with the group about the flowers they had or liked in particular with one person saying '*I have a fusia that flowers in August and is still flowering in autumn*'.

4.6.2. Day visits

The majority of the sharing was associated with participants helping each other in their activities, sharing stories and experience and often working together to perform an activity, or giving each other encouragement and tips of how to carry out an activity. One of the young autistic groups helped each other to light the fire and collect kindling, while another blew out a burning twig that was near to a friend's foot. An adult group at risk of social exclusion shared ideas and enthusiasm for each other's work and praised each other achievements. Many of the participants pointed out or read out some of the things they learnt from the interpretation or pointed out birds or trees. In one of the young carers groups participants were able to share ideas and tips for example one participant said *'blow on the fire to keep it going and perhaps we need some more twigs to go on it'*.



Visually impaired person involved in the tasting sensory session (Social prescribing group)

4.6.3. Multi-visits

One youth group shared their experiences and achievements at Westonbirt when they went back to their residential school and would also share experiences with their parents, with a sense of pride. Sharing skills and knowledge was also mentioned, one person shared their cooking skills, and another shared childhood memories while working with another person.

'They are sharing what they do with the other students and that's a real achievement. But they have got so much out of these sessions and they go back and are so proud of themselves. They take things back they have made and show their parents. They got into the school newsletter they I [the parents] can see their children do something they may not have expected' (Young autism group 1, Group leader)

'they like to take something back with them, today they took back their bug hotel' (Young autism Group 1, Group leader)

One youth group at their last session involved the pupils preparing and delivering a short talk to the whole group, however on this occasion the FCE Director of Westonbirt came along to the session, which caused some nerves as outlined by a couple of the FC volunteers in the de-briefing session:

'When they first said it their faces went a bit like [odd, scared] - but the children they did never said they were not going to do that. They practiced and then they did it'. 'It's about them accepting that they can do things, they can achieve' (Youth School Group 1)

The young school pupils would tell their friends about what they were doing and enjoying at Westonbirt and sometimes they felt bad that others did not have the opportunity to have the experience they were having.

'Yes and I would definitely recommend it to people, to be honest I feel quite bad that some people weren't able to come and to have the experience that we have experienced' (Youth School group 2 Male)

'Yes I guess, not only did we miss school but I tell my friends about it and they say they would like to do it as it sounds really cool' (Youth School group 2 Male)

Adults were sharing experiences and team building skills:

'when we go back and sit around the fire people just chat and talk about their experience. The older guy can talk about how they manage stuff that he can pass on to younger people' (Mental psychosis adult group, Group leader)

'we've been sharing team building skills and we have been working together on some things such as building fires. It's been great for me because I've finished

treatment and I have come back to do this and it's a really nice way to keep connected to people ' (Drug and alcohol rehabilitation adult group 1 Male)

One of the women in a support group (non-residential) found that her sessions at Westonbirt gave her activities to try out with her children at home and a more upbeat positive message when people asked her what she was doing or how she was doing.



Walk and taste sensory session (Social prescribing group)

4.7. Behaviours

Sustaining behaviours or changing behaviours were identified in some of the participants in the multi-visits. These changes could be identified by the participant or by their group leader or FCE staff or volunteers who go to know them over a period of time. Changes in behaviour were not specifically looked for in the outreach or day visits. Small changes could be significant for some participants, for example an autistic young man remained

sitting on a log when someone sat next to him; when according to his group leader this was very unusual behaviour for this young person.

4.7.1. Multi-visits

Gaining confidence and being trusted enabled some of the young people to feel able to try new things. One person talked about coming back to the site to volunteer, while others spoke about coming back to the site with their families revealing a knock on effect of the programme linked to friends and family.

For a young group with autism routine is usually very important; however, at the last multi-visit session this seemed to be less of an issue:

'I'd completely forgotten about the break [they usually had a drink and biscuit] and that didn't faze them. In the past they would have been agitated about that; 11.30 is break time' (Young autism group, Group leader)

One young man in the same group was able to concentrate for longer than usual when trying to light a fire and kept shouting 'fire, fire' as he persisted in his efforts, while another became more aware of risks and more proactive, and another became more used to the dogs he saw on site.

'what I found is that John stayed focus for a long time trying to start a fire and he often finds that difficult' (Young autism group 1, Group leader)

'Frank is most likely to be the one that might access employment and watching how carefully he risk assess and he is beginning to show a lot more initiative instead of passively waiting he is starting to do things himself. This is very much to do with being in the outdoor environment but it's doing the tasks and they don't get to use these tools and these things in schools, so it's new' (Young autism group 1, Group leader)

Ed is scared of dogs and he managed, dogs have come near him and he has coped very well. Are you less scared now you've come here?

Ed – yeah

because we've seen lots, you don't normally see that many do you (Young autism group 1, Group leader)

'Andy [who had very limited verbal communication skills] wanders off quite a bit but today he walked off and he came back without being called and that was the first time he has done that. Normally Nancy does a sign to him to come back. (he walked off to the side of the shelter area).

Andy is now more relaxed in the environment. Normally he walks off ahead of the group to the shelter area but today he stayed with the group and that is unusual' (Young autism group 3, Group leader)

Some of the participants spoke about being inspired to come back to visit Westonbirt or to visit their local woodlands, revealing knock on impacts of the programme:

'Yeah I do and I have been looking at the map at home with my children and there is a chance we may have to take a family dog from my ex-husband. So I thought maybe we can get membership for a year and I can bring the children. I have also thought about coming along and volunteering because I have really enjoyed it' (Supporting those with debt, addiction and mental health problems adult group Female)

Interviewer: Mentally does being here have an impact?

'Yes very much so when I first came here I was very nervous but Graham [FCE staff] and the team and everyone put you at ease and everyone is a really nice bunch. I would like to come back here, I have my daughters on the weekend and it would be nice bringing them along and come down for a family day' (Supporting those with debt, addiction and mental health problems adult group Male)

'Started going to woods more, went to Stanton woods last weekend with his mum and talked about what he did at Westonbirt' (Mental psychosis adult group, Male)

For one woman participating in the programme at Westonbirt provided an opportunity to reconsider the type of work and activity she was interested in:

'it's made me realise that there is a lot more to life than working and sitting underground all the time [she previously worked for London Underground]. So I will be going back to work but I will never forget this and hopefully I will keep this in my mind when I come to making a decision about what to do (Drug and alcohol rehabilitation adult group 2 Female)

Pupils at one of the local schools spent time telling their peers about what they did at Westonbirt, creating a certain amount of envy.

'We have had 1 or 2 say they come out at the w/ends for wild Westonbirt [youth volunteering] with Karen [FCE staff] and we had one lad last year who lost his dad and was desperate to come out so the school funded a taxi to get him here once a month as his mum didn't drive. It does make a difference and they go back to their friends and talk about it and so many say why can't we go on the course. So the fact that they go back and talk about it in a way that makes other students want to do it tells me it's worth it. I can't put into words how much the students do benefit from it. And it's not always what you see, you tend to hear the feedback afterwards. Some of the previous groups still get the benefit and they still talk about it. The first group that did the course have just left as they have done their GCSEs and they will still talk about 'when we did this at Westonbirt' (Teacher Youth Group 2)

The pupils in some cases were also inspired to think about further training in this area.

Interviewer: 'So potentially a legacy do you think it might lead on to people working in this area?

'We have had people saying I didn't know you could have jobs like this, one of the guys in the first year has gone to college to do a conservation course and I think

the love started here, so it does have an impact without a shadow of a doubt but not for all but for the majority' (Teacher Youth Group 2)

Coming back to the site to volunteer or to volunteer elsewhere in nature was also mentioned by a few:

'He has volunteered for 'TCV' [Trust for Conservation Volunteers] (Mental psychosis adult group, Group leader)

Interviewer: Will you feel freer to visit woods as a result of this?

Yes it's just, I know now that this makes me calm and I know now that I like doing this and I will come back again whether it be here or somewhere more local to me. I would like to come back and do volunteering here and there are a couple of others who are interested and that's great as I wouldn't necessarily have thought of it and now I have done this I know its welcoming here. I feel like I know this place now it feels comfortable, it's a nice atmosphere. (Drug and alcohol rehabilitation adult group 1 Female)

A woman with her disabled son was keen to come back to the site but unsure about whether that was possible without the support via the Community Project.

'We can't really afford to come anymore, I'm on benefits. This is the first time in ten years we have been here. If they did a special cut rate then it would be easier to come in. We used to walk into Silkwood in the past but now with the wheelchair it's more difficult' (Social prescribing group Female carer)

Young School Group 1 made some changes in the types of food they brought for their lunch when at Westonbirt, they started to understand the importance of better food when they were being physically active.

'On the food, at the beginning some students will bring only a tin of biscuits for lunch... but now they still will bring some unhealthy stuff.. but they all bring a kind of sandwich or a wrap... less sugary drinks... and now they tell each other off... Today Malcolm said... "that's bad, we should have water' (Youth School Group 1, Volunteer)



Preparing food to cook in the cob oven (Mental health adult group)

4.8. Observational multi-visit case studies

Observations were made over a period of weeks of some of the multi-visit participants to explore their experiences and whether change and development over time could be captured. It is worth noting that changes could be very small and that the groups were facing a range of difficulties with mental health issues, autism, addictions, low self-esteem and therefore positive changes noted in one week might not appear in the next week due to how the participants were coping and progressing with their overall treatment and support. However, the following vignettes provide an indication of what activities took place and the outcomes against some of the five ways to wellbeing for each group.

4.8.1. Youth groups

Case study: Young autism group 1 aged 16-17 years

Group context: This was a small group of young autistic men getting involved in preparing for work activities. They lived in a residential school; two of the young men had limited verbal speech.

Participants: 3 participants observed over four visits

Activities: Preparing a log store for small and medium logs, finding and collecting suitable size branches to create four corners for the log store, using wooden mallets to hammer sticks into the ground. Setting targets for future sessions. Repeating tasks to reinforce learning, introduce new tools and methods of working e.g. 2 person cross-cut saw, learning safe use of tools, using a froe and hammer, using fire irons to light a fire.

Connect with people: Ted was the most verbal of the group and worked well with the others; he was responsive to questions and comments and looked at people when he was speaking or listening. He encouraged Jack when he was splitting logs using the hammer and froe. He also worked with Rob on the last visit to split logs. Jude was hesitant at first to use the bow saw to cut his 'bug hotel' log, however with reassurance from Cathy and help he took part and completed the task. Again, in his final visit he was nervous about using the fire tongs but with reassurance from Karen he put his tins of stick (to make charcoal) into the fire. Jack was active but moved around a lot and seemed quite distracted during his first session. He offered to help Jude who was having difficulty hammering in poles for the wood store. He worked with Jude on the cross-cut saw which required two people to use it. He worked with a volunteer to try and light his cotton wool in the final session and although was not successful he kept trying and getting excited shouting 'fire, fire' when he got a spark from the fire tongs, he showed great determination and persistence, without having a 'melt down' which the group leader suggested could often be the case.

Connect with nature: Ted was interested in the wildflowers during the walk to the community shelter and correctly identified some of them by name. On the third visit he observed a birds nest in a tree next to the Tree Top Walkway and a Robin that perched next to the shelter. Jude showed interest in a millipede found under a log and when Cathy was pointing out trees he joined her in tasting a young beech leaf. By the final session he seemed much more comfortable in the community shelter and walked about freely looking at different things. When Jack was asked what he could see under the trees he correctly said bluebells He intently watched a Robin on the third visit, while Cathy put out a couple of crumbs for it.

Learn: Ted identified one of his targets as '*keep safe in the woods by spotting dangers*' which was tied to health and safety awareness instructions given in preparation for work. During the third visit he identified sharp dangers of working with saws, when asked why gloves were used he answered '*they keep us safe*'. On the first visit Jude identified a

target of working consistently for thirty minutes. During the second visit he had achieved this target and remembered what equipment they needed for the session, '*hat, gloves and first aid kit*' and where the kit was kept. He was the least vocal of the group but showed excitement in the last session when he was first to light his cotton wool. Jack identified his target as working with another person. He correctly identified the equipment needed to work on making a log store on the second visit, he held a log safely and correctly moved the glove from his hand when he was hammering.

Case study: Young autism group 2 aged 17-19 years

Group: Young people post 16 vocational provision with severe autism

Participants: 9-10 with 8-9 support workers. 3 participants observed over six visits.

Aims: learn new skills, explore with the senses, safe tool use, fire safety, self-confidence, observing nature

Activities – sensory walk, play trail, nature printing, xylophone making – using saws, measuring, drilling holes, bird viewing, mini-beast hunt

Connect with people: Polly took part in all the sessions and activities, she was chatty and comfortable talking to others (not all of the group were verbal). In her 5th session she was less likely to ask for reassurance that she was doing the right thing, and she was carrying out less repeated self-comforting talk than in previous weeks. This potentially suggests that she was becoming more familiar with the site and the types of activities. However, she said she was tired at the 6th and final session and cried at the end of the day due to a support workers hand movements (suggesting she calm down), which upset her. She took turns with others in a pair game and worked well in tandem on the saw. She also played with other participants in chasing them playing tag or hiding and jumping out from behind trees at others. This allowed her to connect well with others in the group and laugh and joke with them. She photo bombed a support worker taking a selfie which made everyone laugh and she was pleased with the joke.

Ed has some speech difficulties and signs to support his speech. He gave FCE staff the thumbs up doing sensory activities and laughed with others. He smiled and laughed with a helper when weaving. During the 5th week he invited a volunteer to walk on the balance log and talked to another participant and member of staff. Tom was mainly non-verbal, although he did say thank you to a male volunteer during the 'pair game' and laughed and smiled with others during some of the activities.

Take notice: Polly was descriptive in outlining the things she noticed such as outlining a fat ball for birds was '*slimey*', describing a sweet chestnut leaf as '*jagged – like a porcupine*', the treetop walkway as '*scary*' and stating that the tree spirit she made looked like a '*pig in a wig*'. Tom was very interested in cooking marshmallows over the

fire and listened to the instruction to blow on it to cool it down. When the group came upon a heavy flowering handkerchief tree, Ed picked up some of the fallen brackets to look and play with them. He noticed when another participant was upset. He did not appear at first to notice the willow weaving his support worker was showing him, however when he put on his headphones he quickly got engrossed in a figure of eight weave.

Learn: Polly learnt the names of some birds and trees, she used a calculator to work out the age of trees saying of one: *'that's really old'*. She identified on a target sheet that she had learnt the words saw, drill and xylophone. She walked and ran when chasing another member of the group. When walking along a balance log at first she got a bit scared and did not reach the end. However, she tried again and completed it. When she first saw the balance beams she said *'you've got to be kidding me'*, however she did them and said *'I succeeded'*. Tom when playing the pair game he deliberated over turning over a card showing he understood he was supposed to find two matching ones. Ed learnt the names hazelnut, walnut and xylophone one week and remembered this and was able to sign X the next week and say xylophone.

Case study: Young autism group 3 aged 18-28 years

Group context: Young adult group with autism. A relatively new organisation offering services for young people with autism.

Participants: 3 participants observed over five visits

Activities: Fire lighting, tool use, deer fencing, faggot making, bamboo xylophone making, walk around Silk Wood whilst colour matching, pizza making, undertaking John Muir award.

Learn: Jack asked some questions particularly the first time he learnt about fire lighting. He managed to remember on his second visit which leaves belonged to which trees, these were leaves they had collected for nature printing. He can sometimes give up easily. In his final week (visit 5) he remembered all the trees of the leaves they had printed in visit 2. Holly was scared of the fire at first but did get involved and learnt how to use the mallet and froe with Verity. She also learnt to use the hand drill and took instruction well when sawing wood. Holly missed a couple of weeks due to a holiday and a funding assessment by the Local Authority. Verity learnt that it was a good idea to turn a piece of wood if it got stuck when she was sawing it. She also passed this information on to a volunteer, when she saw them using the saw and it getting stuck. At one point she slipped and thought she had hurt herself, however she only got a bit of a knock, but she said she was a bit scared of the saw after this incident and was more careful about where she put her hands on the wood whilst sawing.

Connect with people: At first Jack spoke and worked mainly with the group leader, but

during the third visit he was chatty with everyone and talked about food with others. During his 4th visit he chatted and laughed with others and in his final visit worked with a new volunteer without any questions. Holly lacked confidence, she mainly listened to others. At the beginning of the visits she would repeat back what people said to her, as she grew in confidence she started to reply in her own words. In her last visit she also asked questions of others. Her aspiration was '*to become more confident*'. Verity talked easily with others from the beginning and her aspiration was to '*to make new friends and work in a team*'. One of the other members of the group with very limited communication skills would often wander off, however he responded well to Verity and she worked well to encourage him to get involved in the tasks.

Mental and physical wellbeing: The group got involved in physical activity via the deer fencing, cutting of wood and walks in the wood. They sometimes spoke of these as tiring. One of the young men with more severe autism when getting involved in the scent activity [smelling different scents and guessing what they were], was able to cope. The organisation group leader stated he often physically sick when confronted with strong smells but was able to cope in the woods. The group were all proud when they gained their John Muir badge with one young person allowing a volunteer to pin the badge on him, something he would have moved away from in the early sessions. Holly wrote '*I like being in the forestry*'.

Case study: Youth school group 1 aged 13-14 years

Group context: Secondary school young men on pre-work experience. Identified as vulnerable young men who cannot cope in an educational setting for five days a week

Participants: 3 participants observed over five visits

Activities: Kelly kettle challenge, cob oven building, prepping firewood – using cross cut saw, bow saws, froe and mallet, collect and stack firewood, team building games, forage for nettles, make and try nettle tea, nature printing, tree felling.

Learn: Simon listened carefully to the instructor, for example when outlining the process of making a cob oven, at one point he was put in charge of felling a small tree and worked hard to fell it safely. By the last session he got involved in the activity quickly and was comfortable to use the tools safely. Andrew was keen on asking questions from the first visit and carried this on, except in the last session he felt able to experiment and to carry on with his activity without seeking reassurance or asking was he doing the right thing. Malcolm particularly enjoyed the process of making a mallet and produced a very good end result; he remembered how to use the froe and mallet from two weeks previously. Once he made the mallet he was keen to test it with the froe showing he understood how the tool could be used.

Be active: Simon and Andrew were active during the 'manhunt' (hide and seek) game.

Andrew was active in a number of sessions in sawing up wood. In the final session he saw another struggle with a knotty piece of wood and chose it deliberately to cut with the froe and mallet. He was determined to rise to the challenge and did not stop until it was completed. Malcolm put a lot of effort into sawing up a tree and wanted to finish the whole tree. At his fourth visit he had a very active day sawing, carrying wood, running and hiding during 'manhunt'. When using the bow saw he selected challenging pieces of wood, it seemed like he wanted to prove himself and find out the limitations of the tool.

Case study: Youth school group 2 aged 13-14 years

Group context: Children from a school identified with low confidence and self-esteem. The school participants visited for a whole school year every two weeks. Permission had to be sought from their teachers for them to participate and be out of school for a day every fortnight.

Participants: 3 participants observed for the final seven visits at the end of the school year.

Activities: Worked for the John Muir level Award over the school year. Deer fencing, bramble bashing, coppicing, chestnut hunting/roasting, charcoal making, fire lighting, whittling, splitting wood, scent bags, sound map, orienteering, identifying and measuring trees, using tools, craft activities, preparing and making pizzas'.

Share: Chris from the beginning said he wanted to work outdoors and live off the land. He was very eager to help carry things to the community shelter area and to contribute to discussions about John Muir although some of his contributions were not serious. He answered questions about the scent activity and offered to let another participant light a fire even though he was very keen to do so himself. Joan was friendly and spoke to everyone, she made hot chocolate for friends, offered helpful instruction on how to grind up things for the scent bags and shared her enthusiasm with others. Amelia helped to fetch tools, she reminded others that they needed their gloves when they left the community shelter. She offered her coat to another participant when she noticed he was cold. She took home sweet chestnuts and sweets to share with her family. Sometimes waits for others to tell her what to do but works well with others and is helpful towards them.

Connect with nature: Chris threw and played in the leaves with friends, he jumped in the mud, noticed a robin and some animal faeces and asked questions about which animal it might be from. He said he wanted to plant a pine tree in his garden and took an interest in photographing the bark of trees. Joan took notice of clouds and was interested in habitat piles of rotting wood. She said the trees '*looked beautiful*' around the coppicing area with different coloured leaves. Amelia spoke about how to spot

badger setts with the FCE leader, she composed two poems about nature and autumn, she noticed birds and squirrels when working on her sound map and explained about removing sap wood and leaving hard wood.

4.8.2. Adult groups

Case study: Mental and physical health, housing and debt group aged 30-60

Group context: Group with mental and physical health issues, housing and employment issues. A lot were on benefits or low incomes and are unable to pay for trips to Westonbirt.

Participants: 3 participants observed over six visits

Activities: Kelly kettle challenge, meditation, creating woodland mobiles, ride widening, willow hurdles, soundscape, coppicing, clearing shelter, tree poems, long walk, cob oven fire, cooking over campfire, wood processing.

Take Notice: Sarah was interested in the fire lighting and asked questions about how it worked, she showed interest in others' lives and asked them questions, and she took notice of the interpretation on the tree top walkway – taking a photograph of it. She talked to one of the volunteers about different tree species. Derek took notice of the group leaders instructions on how to carry tools and tried to carry them correctly. He enjoyed the tall tree trail and was amazed by how tall the tree was. While, Steve only attend two sessions he did take notice of the quiet time he could have in the woodland as he outlined that he lived in a busy area.

Share: Derek shared his enthusiasm for kick boxing with others, he also talked about his children, and told the rest of the group he had previously been involved in landscape gardening so was used to the type of working they were doing at Westonbirt. Sarah shared and talked to her children about the activities she was doing at Westonbirt, she talked about stories from her home life and related these to the activities she was doing at Westonbirt. She enjoyed showing the group a photograph of a mandala table she had painted at home and she showed her reflective booklet which she had taken home and had done some leaf prints with her children after she had done this activity at Westonbirt. Steve told people he enjoyed making mobiles and shared with the observer that he had had a bad day the day before.

Case study: Mental psychosis adult group aged 30-60

Group context: This group was an NHS early intervention for psychosis group. There are in a residential treatment centre.

Participants: 4 participants observed for six visits

Activities: Kelly kettle challenge, fire lighting, coppicing, making tree spirits, mindful sound mapping, walk through Silk Wood, leaf printing, photography, coppicing, creating coppice products, whittling butter knives, layering, bramble clearance, campfire cook up, coppicing.

Take Notice/ Share: Sandy was interested in all the activities and had an awareness of others in the group. In her 5th visit she noticed a new member of the group was walking alone and spent time with him explaining her experiences at Westonbirt and what he could expect. When using the Kelly kettle she said *'I love this activity, as even though I can't do it all yet, we are working as a team and sharing our skills'*. She also, shared her concern for another participant who was not feeling well and worked to include him in a way that he felt he could manage. Steven noticed the tasks that others were not doing or were not picked by others and undertook those. He shared his enthusiasm for trees with others especially when the group were involved in taking photographs. Richard had a quiet enthusiasm for crafts and was happy to get involved straight away. During photography he noticed and exclaimed *'what an amazing tree, what is it'* and expressed awe and wonder during the activity. He wanted to share his thanks at the end of the fourth session by saying *'thank you for a lovely day'*. Brian had been on the programme at Westonbirt the previous year stating *'I love camping, bushcraft, firelighting and would like to live permanently outdoors'*. He offered to light the first fire and had brought birch bark tinder with him. He frequently shared his knowledge and experiences with group members.

Learn: Sandy admitted that she started activities impulsively but was confident in asking questions and for support. She was nervous about whittling as she was not confident in pressing hard on the knife, however she changed what she was making to match her slower progress. Steven asked lots of questions about different types of trees and the history of Westonbirt during the photography session, he was happy to ask for help when he needed it and asked questions about tree work and activity. Richard had a keen eye for coppicing, where and how to cut and was clear about pieces to leave for layering. On a walk to collect materials he was interested in reading the tree labels and on discovering that a pine came from the Himalayas remarked *'that's a long way'*. Brian listened to guidance and instructions but also commented that often he does things differently, he gave gentle instructions to others to explain what materials he needed and would give advice to others.



In the cherry glade with their creative outputs (Rehabilitation adult group 2)

Case study: Drug and alcohol rehabilitation group 1 aged 30-55

Group context: Drug and alcohol rehabilitation group. Lived in residential treatment home.

Participants: 3 participants observed over 6 visits.

Activities: Kelly kettle challenge, working with froe and pull saw, coppicing, nature printing, walk in Arboretum, meditation, sound map, deer fencing, shave horse, whittling, marshmallow roasting, camp fire cook up.

Mental and physical wellbeing: One participant in their third visit said '*oh I just love it here*'. During this third visit the group seemed reluctant to leave and were happy to sit and not doing anything much. One participant told the FCE leader that she looked forward to the sessions, found them amazing and wanted to get involved in landscape gardening with a family member. FCE volunteers noted that the group became more comfortable from their 3 and 4th visit. When whittling one participant noted '*it's amazing how something so simple can be so enjoyable*' and when she broke a knife whittling she

was not upset but got up and went to get another. In previous sessions she was less likely to try again, however on this occasions she got straight on with the activity. Another participant told the FCE leader he enjoyed coming as it was a social activity for the group to meet up once a week. Towards the end of their visits the FCE leader and volunteers noticed the group dynamics had shifted with participants happy to get on with tasks without being asked and they seemed more confident. A participant identified as 'painfully shy' by the organisation group leader at the fourth visit stated she loved being outdoors.

Alan completed reflective diary entries at the end of the sessions, these were prompted by the questions 'how did you feel at the beginning of the day' and 'how do you feel now'. For three visits he said he felt 'tired' at the beginning of the day, with one entry stating *'tired, angry and frustrated'*. His comments on how he felt at the end of the day were *'at ease'* and he stated that he would take away from the visits a sense of *'achievement, satisfaction and accomplishment'*. Laura also made comments in her diary, her comments on how she felt at the beginning of the sessions included *'numb and happy'*, *'sleepy'*, *'a bit fat'*, while her comments at the end of the day on how she felt were *'happy, joy, great'*, and she commented that she loved trees. Celia's comments were that she felt okay or positive at most of her visits although at one she said she was *'a bit stressed as have had a difficult few days'* however, at the end of that day she said she felt *'a bit more relaxed and at peace in myself'*. She said *'I feel very privileged and pleased to have the opportunity to spend time in such a beautiful place. It's great to be spending time outdoors'*.

Case study: Drug and alcohol rehabilitation group 2 aged 30-55

Group context: Mainly an alcohol rehabilitation group, residential

Participants: 3 participants observed over 4 visits, although the group visited 6 times

Activities: Coppicing, mindfulness activity, fire lighting, food preparation and cooking, walk in the woods, Kelly kettle challenge, carving.

Share: John asked everyone if they would like a drink and prepared them for everyone on the first visit, he was also keen to help with tidying and washing up. On the final visit he shared his pizza with another member of the group. He also shared his knowledge about wildlife, particularly birds. Tabatha helped the group leader and a participant to fell hazel and create timber pegs as well as helping to fence a tree. She made a carved figure one week for a participant who was not able to attend the session and said she would take it back to them. She shared the popcorn she had popped on the final visit with everyone and helped others to make their pizzas organising a system so that someone cut vegetables while another rolled dough and added the vegetables. Sam helped the volunteers with the ratchet strap when using the cross cut saw. He asked lots

of questions about staff backgrounds and shared his own work experiences.

Mental and physical wellbeing: The group were active when coppicing and walking round the wood. At the end of a mindfulness session John said that being out in the woods is like *'sitting by a stream rather than a busy road, you can enjoy the space to think'*. He said he had a great time saying how peaceful the site was and an *'escape from chaos'* giving him time to think and reflect. Tabatha also found the visits very enjoyable and she had interacted with people she would not normally interact with and made great friends, who supported her. Sam also after a visit stated *'it's been a good day'* and outlined it was nice to be outside.

Case study: Social prescribing group aged 20-70

Group context: This group has a focus on general wellbeing and reducing isolation via a social prescribing scheme. One young person was in a wheelchair, the other participants were in their 50-70s and included a visually impaired person, and a person with a rollator (i.e. a wheeled walker) who came for the last session.

Participants: 3 participants observed over three visits

Activities: A walk, visit to bird shelter, listening to sounds and creating a sound map, touch sensory walk, willow hurdle making, walk, creating scent bags, make hand cream with bees wax and essential oils, tasting activity.

Connect with nature: Albert was visually impaired and could see little. On the second visit he brought along his two grandchildren (about age five). The sessions had a strong sensory component to engage and involve Albert. He enjoyed touch the bark of redwoods and feeling the tufty bits of Douglas Fir cones. He thought the Scots Pine bark felt different to what he remembered when he was younger. He enjoyed trying to guess what was in the 'feely' bags and was very interested in the scent bags smells and the tasting session. Cat showed interest in birds and stated they *'were more interesting than the trees'*. She was not so keen 'feely' bag session and seemed to struggle with touch in general. In the sound session she wanted to record the sounds of birds. Paul struggled with the sessions as they started at 10.00am and he had chronic fatigue syndrome. He enjoyed looking and feeling the shapes of leaves, particularly a ginkgo leaf and told the group you can find the shape on kimonos. He does not like strong smells so was not keen on smelling scents, but showed interest in the Dew pond and how it was being constructed.

Connect with people: All of the group particularly enjoyed the session when Albert brought along his two young grandchildren as their enthusiasm and interest made a difference, there was lots of laughter in the group when the children wanted to answer questions and shot their hands up. Albert likes to make jokes and to talk to people, he joked that the pine cone felt like an ice cream cone. He knew one of the other

participants from a long time ago. They had not seen each other for years, so this group brought them together. Cat was quite vocal but also said because she works in the building she lives in she sometimes does not get out for weeks. Therefore getting out and chatting to others was enjoyable and she tended to laugh a lot and enjoyed seeing Albert after many years. Paul tended not to talk to individuals unless asked a question, he talked to his mother (carer) or addressed the group as a whole. He speaks up when interested and sometimes makes jokes but not always appropriately.

4.8.3. In summary

Overall the young autistic participants needed a lot of support and sometimes reassurance about what they were doing or how they were doing it. Familiarity was important: becoming more familiar with the site, the community shelter and / or the learning area and the different types of activities. Small achievements were important and meant a lot to them. There was some nervousness sometimes about activities such as fire lighting and sawing. Repeating tasks was important to reinforce learning. Connecting to people and nature was significant for these groups. For the youth school groups learning by 'doing' was particularly important and the site gave them a sense of freedom and escape that they did not experience in their school environment. Also, the practical activities gave them a sense of feeling that they could achieve things and this also gave them a sense of pride.

For the adults groups the chance to be in a different environment apart from their residential setting, treatment, problems and addictions was particularly important. The mental wellbeing benefits were identified as especially important, and Westonbirt and participants activities there were a chance to forget troubles or reflect on their own lives. Taking notice and sharing were two of the key wellbeing benefits gained particularly via the creative activities they engaged in.

4.9. Volunteers' perspectives

The volunteers mentioned in this report are people who are volunteering for FCE at Westonbirt. Interviews with volunteers highlight that they also gained benefit through volunteering. The volunteers got involved for a variety of reasons, for example one was recently retired, two had been given annual membership of Westonbirt on retirement and that acted as the trigger. For one volunteer it happened more by accident than design:

'I sort of fell into it, I used to work in an office and I got really stressed so decided to just leave and I ended up here liked the place and then found that I could volunteer so I started. I've volunteered in most areas and I'm using it as part of a career change and it's triggered that career change' (Male Volunteer)

One of the volunteers was relieved to finish work and get outdoors into the fresh air as well as have the opportunity to give something back to young people in particular:

Interviewer: 'What motivates you to volunteer'?

'I enjoy the outdoors, I did a horrible job confined to an air condition computer room all my life and I hated every second and as soon as I retired out I came. And it's a bit of payback time for all the things people did for me as a kid' (Male Volunteer)

They had been volunteering for different lengths of time, the longest being eight years, with four having volunteered for several years. The volunteers, like the participants gained a wide variety of benefits from both helping the participants and feeling they were doing something useful and meaningful for others, to also gaining personal benefits from being in and helping out at Westonbirt. These were often similar to the wellbeing outcomes described by participants and included being outdoors, being active, socialising with others, having fun and giving something back to the local community, environment and Westonbirt. The following quotes illustrate the importance of being physical activity without really noticing it while undertaking the activities; however, feeling tired at the end of the day.

'The benefits for me are getting out into the woods, into nature and into fresh air and doing some physical activity' (Male Volunteer)

Interviewer: How do you feel at the end of a day at Westonbirt?

'Good, enjoyed it and it's so peaceful and it's something different from the other things I do. So you feel you make a difference and some of the groups are quite physically tiring and occasionally it's hard to talk to people (e.g. in the care homes or autistic youth) and you think about what could I have done differently. Sometimes it's not as satisfying in one respect as you are getting nothing back but you still make a difference and sometimes they spark off about something' (Female Volunteer)

Interviewer: What about being active?

'Yes absolutely, for me I had so little exercise over the last 15 years because I have been working in Oxford and having to commute so being in the car 3 hours a day but you're not doing anything active. And one of my aims was to get fitter and volunteering here you can't make excuses and say I'll only do this and then get some exercises you have committed yourself and have to do it. I have a pedometer on my phone at the end of the day when I have been here I have done about 15,000 steps. You are not doing anything too strenuous but you are on the move all the time. So it's good for me' (Female Volunteer)

Undertaking meaningful activity and having a purpose can be particularly important for those who have retired and were used to gaining this from their work roles, while volunteering also provided structure to their lives.

Interviewer: What do you get out of this personally?

'Well the first time I came down here I thought it's further than I thought and I came down and had a day out with Karen who was showing me round and I just felt so much better in myself out in the open air, relaxed. Although we are working with the students it's a nice day for us to. But it's a day where you are not just ambling about you have a purpose, you have a role and feel useful. Being out

in the outside just makes me feel better and I remember thinking on the way home it's a bit of a way but it is worth it' (Female Volunteer)

Interviewer: How long have you been volunteering at Westonbirt?

'Not very long I started this Easter and I have been working with the year 9 community support group and I've been out once or twice a dementia group which was fun, they came here to Westonbirt. I am really enjoying it, I want to give something back and to be helpful and I love being in the woods. But what I hadn't appreciated was how rewarding it has been for me meeting lots of other volunteers and the kids as well' (Female Volunteer)

Being at Westonbirt was an important benefit for all of the volunteers as well as being included and feeling part of a team along with FCE staff:

'for me its woodlands and the natural world anyway but for me there is something special about Westonbirt, its physical environment, it's also the staff and the volunteers, it's very inclusive. Yes we are all volunteers but we don't get treated any differently by staff, obviously the responsibilities are slightly different, but apart from that there is no difference we are treated just the same. For me I have developed a sense of ownership of the place' (Male Volunteer)

Being able to meet and talk to others was important, have fun with others and friendships could develop:

'a lot of the time I'm at home I'm doing home renovation at the moment which is a solitary thing so this gets me out and I see other people, get to have a chat with the other volunteers it social' (Male Volunteer)

Interviewer: Have you been out with this group before?

Yes I've been coming out since September (9 months) and you start to build friendship, a 70 year old man and 14 year old kid can have fun together. It's great we have the mickey taking, and its part and parcel of the interaction.

Multi-visits provided the opportunity for volunteers to get to know the participants and support them over a period of time. Learning new skills and learning how to work with those who have no speech was both a challenge and a new experience that could be an important part of learning new ways of working and engaging with people.

Interviewer: That is where the training comes in there may not be that expectation of dialogue with some groups

'Yes, with the memory café that can be good as sometimes they have partners with them who can explain what that person needs, because you don't have much time to work out what it is. That is why I like the multi-visits as you can work out what each individual person needs or the approach to use' (Female Volunteer)

Interviewer: What do you feel you get out of it yourself personally?

'It's therapeutic working in this environment it allows you to work with people and other volunteers as well as participants. Covering a huge cross section of ages and

different abilities and different backgrounds. The whole diversity of it and it's quite rewarding to actually work with people who are enjoying it. And working with volunteers who hopefully I can also learn from and meeting people with different interests and skills' (Male Volunteer)

'We've spent a lot of time outside but even so I have learnt an awful lot just being on the programme, particularly through the arts and crafts and just working with different groups and how different groups need different things from the environment and us' (Female Volunteer)

4.10. Organisational perspectives of multi-visits

The group leaders who brought along youth and adults for the multi-visits were interviewed in situ. There were key reasons why organisational group leaders thought the programme had an impact and was important and these are outlined in (Table 6 Section 5). The quotes below also illustrate some of the key reasons why the Community Project was successful from their perspective.

4.10.1. Structure

There was much interest from the organisations of continuing the relationship with Westonbirt and the Community Project and bringing new groups out to the site, if funding allowed.

'It's a joy to us to come off site as it can seem very intensive the whole process of rehabilitation and people yearn to get away and they can do that safely here and yet with a real sense of freedom' (Drug and alcohol rehabilitation group 1, Group leader)

Having a structure to the Community Project also combined well with the structure the organisations work at creating for their clients:

'A lot of what we do are the opposite of what happens in addiction, they get up on time and they clean the house, they then have breakfast they have to be in a group at 9.30 then it's back for lunch – addiction is the opposite of that – you get out of bed when you feel like it, you probably don't eat that much you don't clean anything. The structure is crucial and when they leave they are really shocked usually' (Drug and alcohol rehabilitation group 2, Group leader)

However, the structure at Westonbirt is flexible enough to be adapted to what the participants enjoy and benefit from:

'For some of our more challenging behaviour individuals - who struggle with change, transitions from one place to another etc, they had the most relaxing and wonderful time. I cannot thank the staff enough for their support throughout the day, and also to the volunteers who assisted - no matter how many questions our young people asked' (Drug and alcohol rehabilitation group 2, Group leader)

'there is a sense of tranquillity here and part of that is the natural tranquillity and part of it is the atmosphere that Claire and the rest of the team create and that is absolutely key. It's very relaxed and unhurried yet with a clear structure, very non-judgemental, just very accepting. But also Claire is very aware of the individuals and their needs. People come out here with me in all sorts of states, they might have had a terrible morning, a really difficult time, you don't always know what is going on in their lives but there is just an atmosphere and I notice it in 2 ways, one I'm aware of it when people are very very still and having a mindfulness moment and also when they are very active. And I see one member of the group who is painfully shy just through being absorbed and involved in it all it getting stuck in and active, she has just blossomed and that happens a lot here. That has happened every time I have come here there is always one person where I see a massive change' (Drug and alcohol rehabilitation group 1, Group leader)

One local school had been bringing Year 9 (aged 14) students for three years (different students each year) with the pupils spending a day every two weeks for a whole school year participating in the Westonbirt Community Project. The school has moved from sending children with behavioural problems to identifying children who have low self-esteem and confidence. The students have time to undertake the activities that help them work towards the John Muir Award².

'But the difference the teachers have seen in the students that come here from sitting in a classroom never putting their hand up, never answering, quite lonely and then you see them at the end of the year with their hands up, with more confidence and seeing them with friends and some of them stick right the way through with these friendships its great' (Teacher Youth Group 2)

4.10.2. Combination of creative and practical woodland based activities

The combination of activities was seen as effective with both practical and creative opportunities that engaged the attention and help participants focus on what they were doing, as well as the importance of getting away from their normal everyday location.

'Somebody said to me earlier is there somewhere else we could go as this is ending, there are places I'm aware of but nowhere I know of that does such a fantastic combination of woodland management skills with the creativity, I think that's what makes it special' (Drug and alcohol rehabilitation group 1, Group leader)

'I think I can recommend this programme because I love the combination, I mean I can recommend going to woodland and having a walk. But I think there is something very specific about this programme. It's about finding something in each of them, finding a way for each of them to connect with this place. There is not one person here who in the last 6 weeks has not had one of those moments to be at peace, to

² An environmental award for people of all backgrounds with four challenges, 1) discover a place, 2) explore it, 3) conserve it, 4) share experiences.

feel I am creative, I am worthwhile' (Drug and alcohol rehabilitation group 1, Group leader)

This concept of 'being away' from habitual activities is one of the four key factors identified in the Attention Restoration Theory developed by Kaplan (1989). The importance of this can sometimes be underestimated.

'Just being away from their situation out in the woods it does them the world of good, and me – I can come here feeling ridiculously stressed and spend the day here and I go home relaxed and happy. They have their reflective diaries and every week we write notes in and the feedback from that from what Graham said is quite good in terms of people outlining feelings at start of the day and how they feel at the end. It's nice to be away from everyday hassles and be distracted for a day, as they have a lot of housing, money and debt issues, so that weighting on them every day can be a great strain. So getting away from that is important' (Supporting those with debt, addiction and mental health problems adult group Female)

For the school pupils the kinaesthetic 'learning by doing' was in stark contrast to the classroom environment.

Interviewer: Is there something about them doing practical activities?

'Getting them out of the classroom some are not that academic but you get them here hands on and it opens their eyes, every group in every year at least one has done their work experience here, so again its getting them involved. It's a cracking course and it's absolutely brilliant and I have seen 30 students over the 3 years if not more so beneficial. I haven't ever seen a student who has come out the same with confidence levels; with some the difference is amazing' (Teacher Youth Group 2)

The first time the school started taking part in the programme the facilities were not yet developed and the pupils helped, along with other groups, to create them providing a space they could view as their own.

'think it is more about what they are doing and as far as this place. The first time we came out this (the shelter, cob oven, fire place) wasn't here and the first group had to clear out the space and then this shelter was put up and we have been doing the coppicing just back there and they do see the difference they make and they do the deer fencing and know why it is important. It is hard physical work sometimes and you always get one or two at some point to say we are only out here for cheap labour, they don't mean it but they know especially up to March from September we will always do a couple of hours of coppicing in the morning cause it's for conservation. So they do get it and understand why it's important and being done' (Teacher Youth Group 2)

5. Conclusions

This section makes concluding comments about the Community Project drawing on all the evidence gathered, highlighting some differences and commonalities across the different groups and the range of ways in which they were engaged.

5.1. What types of activities were facilitated and what types of people took part?

The Community Project facilitated a very wide range of activities and FCE staff and volunteers were able to adapt and be flexible with the activities to meet the needs of participants. For example, the project focused on sense of taste with a group that included a visually impaired participant. The activities could be grouped into the key following categories:

- Creative nature activities – art, sensory activities (taste, touch, sight, sound, smells), mindfulness, leaf printing, sound mapping, nature printing
- Woodland craft, management and maintenance activities – coppicing, deer fencing, wood cutting, making faggots (e.g. making small waste wood into bundles to make kindling), making a log store, tree planting, making a cob oven in the wood, making a community shelter, making charcoal, bramble clearance
- Social engagement activities – working and learning together, playing man hunt, preparing, cooking and eating together – making pizza, pancakes, cooking marshmallows over the fire.

These are the types of activities identified by Pretty et al. (2017) as important for a 'green mind' i.e. the linking of the mind and body and connecting that through behaviours in natural and social environments. He suggests that when engaging with these types of activities people are making memories, learning skills, sharing and giving to others which can calm the brain and improve health outcomes.

The woodland craft, management and maintenance activities provided the youth and adult groups with opportunities to conserve and maintain the habitats at Westonbirt. Participants gained opportunities to learn and get involved in coppicing and deer fencing in particular. They gained an understanding of the need for these on-going management activities and to learn about how woodlands can be managed and what can be made with wood into different products. These were often activities that were meaningful to participants giving them a sense of purpose and were mainly activities they had not done previously.

The creative activities such as producing sound maps, making art etc. allowed participants to work with wood and natural elements and create something they could share with others such as parents, children and grandchildren.

Those involved in the outreach activities got involved in creative activities and social engagement activities via natural elements that had to be taken to the care homes, community centres and memory cafes.

The day visit groups got involved in all the different types of activities and FCE staff communicated with the groups to explore which activities might be most suitable for the different groups and adapted the activities accordingly.

The multi-visit participants through longer term contact and engagement with Westonbirt were able to learn and become more familiar with both the site and the activities and get involved in a wide range of different activities.

The youth groups particularly benefited from and were engaged with the woodland craft activities. The thrill of carrying out activities that they had not done before (sawing wood, splitting logs, coppicing) or were often warned against (such as fire lighting) was important to their sense of achievement and self-worth. Undertaking these types of practical activities allowed for kinaesthetic learning and carrying these activities out at Westonbirt over a period of time (multi-visits) made them feel special.

The adult groups benefited from all of the different type of activities but the creative activities seemed to have a particular impact with participants enjoying using all the senses, being mindful and getting involved in thinking and being creative.

5.2. Did participation lead to wellbeing outcomes?

The results clearly illustrate a wide range of wellbeing outcomes were gained by many of the participants both youth and adults and for all of the different types of visits.

The evidence outlines that the young people gained many positive wellbeing benefits from getting involved in both the day visits and multi-visits. The multi-visits provided an opportunity for more prolonged and intensive engagement with Westonbirt and could lead to changes in behaviour and attitudes. There were times when some of the young people were upset, disinterested or misbehaving, however, as noted previously in this report many faced and had to deal with a range of challenges and problems. Important aspects of the Community Project for the youth groups was overcoming initial nervousness to getting involved, getting involved in tasks they had often never done before, carrying out practical activities and learning to work with tools. Being away from their everyday residential or school environment and having the opportunity of kinaesthetic learning, as well as being physically active was important. The use of tools and equipment not allowed in the young people's schools gave opportunities for all the young people to risk assess what they were doing, with some participants pointing out health and safety issues to their peers. This gave them a sense of agency and autonomy. The young people got involved in a variety of tasks and this is particularly important for young people who think that they cannot achieve much.

The majority of adults talked about the mental wellbeing benefits they gained particularly the peace and calm they found on site and the feelings of stress reduction from difficult and sometimes chaotic lives. As with the young people physical activity could be important in terms of making participants physically tired and being able to sleep better at night. The activities also helped to reduce social isolation for many participants but this could happen at their own pace in which they could dip in and out of working with others.

Greater awareness of trees, the tree collection at Westonbirt and nature in general were outcomes for many. This was not always explicit but occurred with remembrance of the some of the strange facts about trees participants had learned, the diversity of trees at Westonbirt was much appreciated as well as some of the fun and useful facts that FCE leaders talked about. There was quite strong awareness by adults of the calming and relaxing effects of being at Westonbirt. Making observations of wildlife and noticing aspects of nature through the senses was often an important component of the activities participants undertook.

5.3. Were there changes in behaviour?

Changes in behaviour were identified in the multi-visit programme (see Section 4.8) participants who repeatedly visited the site over a period of time. The evaluation methods were less able to identify behaviour change in day and outreach visits due to the one-off nature of the visit (no baseline was possible) and no interviews being undertaken with group leaders or participants.

5.4. What elements of the Community Project were successful and led to wellbeing outcomes?

Table 6 outlines key reasons why the Community Project was able to produce the wellbeing outcomes identified in Section 4. These were identified by participants, organisational leaders and FCE staff and volunteers.

Table 6 Reasons why the Community Project was seen as effective

Key factors that combine to make an effective Community inclusion intervention at Westonbirt	Further details
A non-clinical or residential setting	Visiting a different space that is seen as neutral and a safe space
Large beautiful wooded space	The scenic nature of the site, the size of the Westonbirt site, the size of the trees, the tranquillity of the site
Specially updated Community Shelter area	An area moved and specially updated for the Community Project with a fire pit, cob oven, table for preparing food, roof, and seating
Combination of activities and holistic approach	Woodland management skills, creative activities, sensory activities and mindfulness
Special nature of the tree collection at Westonbirt	The variety of trees, size, special nature of the tree collection at Westonbirt was seen as beneficial
Practical 'hands on' activities	Carrying out activities where participants can see what they have done e.g. cutting wood, coppicing, making pizza in cob oven etc
Doing something useful and meaningful	Gaining a sense of contributing even in a small way to the management of Westonbirt e.g. through activities such as coppicing
Trust and respect	Developing trust with participants over time. The participants, particularly young people, being trusted to use equipment such as saws, knives etc.
Non-judgemental and supportive	The FCE staff and volunteers were felt to provide a very good level of support and encouragement to enable participants to get involved
Focus on the positives and providing some challenges	A focus on what people can do and on encouragement as well as meeting some challenges
Use of nature as part of treatment or a targeted intervention	There is potential to use nature more as part of a programme of treatment for people with different problems, addictions and conditions

5.5. Where there additional benefits of carrying out multi-visit programmes versus one-off activities?

A key finding of the evaluation is that each of the different types of visits could provide a broad range of wellbeing benefits for participants. The evidence from the multi-visits illustrates that extended engagement through repeat visits and becoming familiar with a woodland site, particularly a site of such high quality as Westonbirt Arboretum can not only provide a range of benefits but also lead to changes in behaviour such as increases in confidence, learning of new skills, thinking of different career options. It also provided a safe space for people away from their residential accommodation / treatment or difficult lives.

The importance of the repeat visits was outlined as particularly important for some participants, for example those with autism need repetition, others felt more at ease when they became more familiar with the site. Three to four weeks of visits was seen as the minimum to gain benefits by the organisational group leaders and FCE staff of those involved in the multi-visits.

'Multi-visits are designed to have a longer lasting impact. The first time you go anywhere you cannot often learn because everything is new. We are sometimes asking/expecting too much of the students. When they are relaxed they are more prone to learn in a different way' (FCE staff)

Day and outreach visits were primarily one-off visits. People connected with nature through the outreach activities and this can be a particularly useful approach with those who are limited in terms of their mobility and those in residential care homes. The outreach visits provided important opportunities to spend time thinking about and working with natural elements from Westonbirt, rather than being in nature. This approach allowed FCE to reach out to different groups of people that would otherwise not easily get the opportunity to visit site.

Day and multi-visits provided opportunities for 'being away' and 'time out' from everyday concerns. Mental wellbeing, connecting to nature and connecting to people came through as the most significant aspects of wellbeing people identified from the Community Project with strong sensory connections being made via the various activities.

5.6. Key lessons learnt and Community Project legacy

- Each type of visit was found to provide participants with wellbeing outcomes.
- The multi-visit programme provided greater wellbeing benefits and an increased likelihood of behaviour change.
- It is clear from many of the organisations and participants that they wish to continue engagement with Westonbirt Arboretum and explore bringing new people

to the site (e.g. different people from the same organisations) or explore ways for the groups to organise a self-led visit to the site.

- A key challenge for the Westonbirt Arboretum site is that it is not accessible by public transport; the admission cost to the site can also seem prohibitive for those on low income or benefits.
- The different elements of the programme -
 - Nature engagement – being and doing in nature
 - Social engagement – being with and engaging with others
 - Woodland management and craft engagement – that delivers attention and immersion such as bush craft, whittling, hedge laying, coppicing.

were often integrated and have been identified by Pretty (2017) as key activities that can deliver health benefits in nature.

- The structured and creative approach allowed for flexibility and could be adapted and changed to best meet the diverse needs of participants and allowed for a collaborative approach to project delivery. The wide range of activities meant that these could be targeted at specific groups or combined in different ways to provide something of interest to everyone.
- Volunteers importantly supported participants in their activities and gained wellbeing outcomes themselves.
- There is a legacy to the Westonbirt Community Project:
 - The Community Officer post created as part of the Community Project is now permanent and the role of the officer will be to continue working with groups with diverse needs.
 - FCE are discussing developing a Community Access scheme whereby specific groups will be able to visit Westonbirt for a reduced fee.
 - A pilot to engage with a care home and leave a box of materials for a month to 6 weeks for residents to use, with a follow up by FCE staff has been well received and may be extended.

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Appendix 1. Day and outreach visits observed

Adult visits are in blue and youth visits in light brown.

Day visits					
Adult visits	Number of groups observed and age range	Activities	Youth visits	Number	Activities
Dementia	1 (older age)	Sensory walk Arboretum	Autistic	2 (age 12-19 and 13-15)	Nature printing, sound listening, tool use, sensory game
Care home residents and day care	2 (65-85+)	Learning centre activities, leaf printing, guided walk	Vulnerable	1 (age 16-25)	Nature printing tool use
Risk of social exclusion	5 (55+, 60+, 40-90, 40-60+)	Nature printing, tree top walkway, bird hide, sound maps, walk, leaf printing	With additional needs	1 (School group)	Sensory smell, mix and match, sound game
Mental health issues	1	Nature walk, bird hide, sound maps, woodland mobiles	Psychosis	1 (16-25)	Fire lighting, nature printing, woodland mobiles, using cross saw, splitting wood
Learning difficulties	2 (mixed age and 20-70)	Walking tour of arboretum, printing, willow snails	Special needs and disabilities	1 (8-20)	Learning centre activities
Social community group	2 (older adults and mixed age)	Guided walk, fire lighting, and meditation.	Scouts	1 (10-15)	Tool use
Drug alcohol treatment group	1 (mixed age)	Guided walk, fire lighting, toasting marshmallows	Young carers support group	3 (8-16 and 8-12)	Kelly kettle challenge, wood sawing, wooden heart decorating, lighting fire
Recovery group	1 (age	Fire lighting, meditation, leaf printing	Youth club	3 (11-20, 12-14 and 7-10)	Plant hunter challenge, fire lighting, log cutting

	unknown)				and splitting
Outreach visits					
Adult visits	Number of groups observed and age range	Activities	Youth visits	Number	Activities
Women with post-natal depression	1 (age 20-40)	Nature printing, making mandalas, lime tea tasting	Youth club	1 (age 12-19)	Creating willow stars, scent bags and tree planting
Vulnerable	2 (age 50-90)	Nature printing/painting, sound cards, soap smells, photographs			
Day care centre	1 (age not estimated)	Spring sensory activities			
Dementia	2 (age 30-90)	Sounds cards, showing photos, scent of flowers/leaves, elderflower tasting			
Community group	1 (over 60s)	Sounds cards, showing photos, scents, elderflower tasting			
Care home	3 (age 80+)	Show pictures of Westonbirt, feely bags, scents, plant samples, sounds identification			
Carers support group	1 (age 40-70)	Hand balm, tea tree, discussions			

Appendix 2. John Muir Award Certificate



Appendix 3. Multi-visit interviews.

Researchers spent the last day of multi-visit sessions with 10 groups carrying out a participant observation 'in situ' and interviews with participants (where possible), group leaders and volunteers. Youth groups are coloured green.

Multi-visit date	Name of group given in this document	Type of group and age range	Group leader / other support staff interview	FCE staff interview	FCE volunteer interviews	Participants / participant interviews	FR attendance at reflection session and / or debrief	Total interviews
March 2016	Mental psychosis adult group	Early intervention for psychosis - adult	2	0	0	6 (5 interviewed, 1 female, 4 male)	Yes	7
March 2016	Drug and alcohol rehabilitation adult group 1 (age 30-55)	Residential – treatment for addiction - adult	1	1	3	10 (8 interviewed, 5 female, 3 male)	Yes	13
May 2016	Young autism group 1 (age 16-17)	Residential – autism - Youth	1	1	1	3 (not interviewed)	Yes	3
July 2016	Young school group 1 (age 13-14)	Youth – vulnerable and behavioural problems	1	1	1	8 (Not interviewed)	Yes	3
July 2016	Young autism group 2 (age 17-19)	Residential – autism Youth	2 (9 carers not interviewed)	2	1	10 youth (not interviewed as severe autism)	Yes	5

Multi-visit date	Name of group given in this document	Type of group and age range	Group leader / other support staff interview	FCE staff interview	FCE volunteer interviews	Participants / participant interviews	FR attendance at reflection session and / or debrief	Total interviews
July 2016	Supporting those with debt, addiction and mental health problems (age 30-60)	For the socially excluded and vulnerable - adult	2	2	1	2 (1 female, 1 male)	Yes	7
October 2016	Young autism group 3 (age 18-28)	Youth group – not residential	1	1	2	0	Yes	4
March 2017	Drug and alcohol rehabilitation group 2 (age 30-55)	Residential – addiction - adult	1	0	0	4 (1 female, 3 male)	Yes	5
July 2017	Young school group 2 (age 13-14)	Low self- esteem and confidence	1	0	3	5 (2 female, 3 male)	Yes	9
October 2017	Social prescribing group (age (20s-60s)	People with low wellbeing and social isolation	1			4 (3 female, 1 male)	Yes	5

Multi-visit date	Name of group given in this document	Type of group and age range	Group leader / other support staff interview	FCE staff interview	FCE volunteer interviews	Participants / participant interviews	FR attendance at reflection session and / or debrief	Total interviews
Totals			13	8	12	28	10	
Total interviews = 61								

Appendix 4. Interview protocol

Interview protocol for multi-visit participants - Westonbirt HLF programme

Introduction:

As part of the qualitative research phase of FR's evaluation of the Westonbirt Heritage Lottery funded programme, interviews will be undertaken with participants.

Aims:

To prompt focused discussions of respondents' experiences of the HLF community programme activities in order to explore motivations, benefits (health and other),. This will provide an evidence base that will be used as part of the overall evaluation of the programme.

Introduction

- Thank you for coming. Introduce self, colleague (if applicable), outline that I am from FR which is part of FC and we are involved in a research project. The overall focus of the research is to explore people's experiences of coming to Westonbirt and participating in a multi-visit programme of activities.
- What we'd like to do today is join you in your activity and then undertake short interviews during or afterwards about how you've got on over the past few weeks in your visits to Westonbirt
- Outline that people are free to say they do not want to participate or can leave at anytime. We would like to record the conversation later and use the recording for research purposes, but nothing you say will be attributed to you personally. [check this is okay]. Gain verbal consent from participants [formal consent not asked for due to the nature of the groups and differing abilities with reading/writing].

Interview Questions

General

Have you been to Westonbirt before?

Connect to nature

Can you tell me a bit about what you have been doing at Westonbirt over the past few weeks?

When I say Westonbirt what is the first thing that comes to your mind?

What have you most enjoyed about coming to Westonbirt and doing your activities and why?
[probe]

What have you most disliked or not liked about coming to Westonbirt and doing your activities and why? [probe]

Connect to people / Share/give

When you undertook your activities were you working together with others in your group?

How did you find that – working together – easy/difficult? Did you find you could do more when you worked together?

If you worked together how did you decide who did what?

Did you feel you could achieve more working together than working on your own?

Have you helped anyone else in the group when you were doing an activity while you been here?

Take Notice

Do you use your senses when here at Westonbirt? Have you touched and felt things – bark, leaves, wood. What do you smell when you're here, what do you hear, what do you see? Do you look at the view, watch the weather?

What do you take notice of when you are here? Your activities, your surroundings, other people in your group?

Learning

Have you done anything here at Westonbirt that you have not done before? If so what?

Is there anything you know now that you did not know before coming on your trips – this might be about yourself, about an activity, about the site?

Be active

Do you feel that you have been physically active at your sessions here over the past few weeks?

Are you usually physically active – is that indoors or outdoors?

Behaviour change

Is there anything you've have done or are doing differently because of what you've done here at Westonbirt [decided you want to visit woodlands more, interested in making something in a similar way to what you did at Westonbirt etc]

Do you feel any different after coming here for a number of visits over the past few weeks?

Have you thought about anything differently after coming here for your visits over the past few weeks? [interests have changed etc]

Do you feel you've any change in confidence since coming to Westonbirt

Have you found anything about the sessions challenging? [whether something you found hard to do, or the weather or keeping warm]

What will you miss about not coming here?

What will you not miss about coming here?

Do you think you will come again in the future?

Appendix 5. Example of day visit observation data

Westonbirt day and outreach visit evaluation	YOUTH GROUP
Group name:	Youth Club
Description of group:	Social outing
Group type:	Autistic young people
Age range of group:	12-19 years
Has verbal permission been sought from participants for being involved in the evaluation - Yes/No	Yes
Number of group on the day	9 participants, 1 group leader, 9 parents/grandparents
Number of men and women	8 boys, 1 girl
Data entry by:	XXXXXXX
Description of activity	Use fire irons to light a fire; collect kindling/small twigs to get/keep the fire going; toast marshmallows; understand and be aware of the safety elements involved.
Aim / purpose of activity	To introduce autistic groups to Westonbirt and involve them in new activities that 'push the boundaries'.
Location of activity	Community shelter, Silk Wood
	Date of session: 19.05.16
Overall comments about the group during the session	The whole group were actively engaged in activities; they followed instruction well, were mindful of their own safety and others too, and appeared to enjoy their time at Westonbirt. Some of the group were very quiet to start but soon became more engaged and involved; the young girl in particular although quiet and rather shy to begin, was very observant, watched carefully and became actively and socially involved. At the end of the session, Karen asked them what they were most proud of and their answers included 'lighting our fire', burning wood' and toasting marshmallows'; 7 out of 8 gave a thumbs up (one participant had to leave early) with one cautiously hovering in the middle.

Take Notice	The group engaged with the interpretation when walking over the TTW, some stopped to read, most tried out the rope bridge and crow's nest. The group listened to Karen explaining the activities, asked several questions and some added additional information. Some looked around at different objects within the community shelter and beyond.
Share / Give	Participants were relaxed and at ease within the group, they helped each other to light fires; collect kindling; blow out a burning twig near to a friend's foot; give mugs to the group leader; toast a marshmallow for his mum; caution another saying 'watch your language'.
Connect with nature	A few participants especially liked sitting next to their fires carefully peeling small pieces of bark from a log to use as kindling. Several of the group wandered around the community shelter looking at all the other things in the area, of particular interest were the pizza oven and the den made from branches.
Connect with people	Due to getting lost en route, one participant and his mum arrived approx. 10 mins late, they were walked to the shelter by a member of staff with the boy out in front and eager to join his friends. On approaching the community shelter he waved to his friends and immediately sat down amongst them; when asked at the end of the session 'what are you most proud of today' he answered 'finally catching up with the group'. One participant was helped by a volunteer to toast his marshmallow on the kudia. One participant helped a volunteer to fill the fire bucket. The group chatted easily amongst themselves as well as to staff and volunteers.
Learn	One participant offered to help light the kadai saying 'I've probably got more experience than others with fire'. Another, when Karen informed that Vaseline helped the cotton wool to light more easily said 'Vaseline is coagulated petroleum jelly', and that 'bark is a trees protection'.
Be active	All of the group were physically active in walking from the Welcome Building to the community shelter and back again, and were active throughout the activities; one or two were very active and very vocal whilst others were more relaxed and happy to sit cross-legged on the ground adding kindling to their fire or toasting marshmallows.
Any reflections on the session in the de-brief	The group seemed to enjoy their time at Westonbirt, followed instruction well, interacted with staff/volunteers and were very sociable with each other. Better communication from the group leader would have helped to maximise their time as Karen was not expecting such a large group of young people or their accompanying parents/grandparents, plus they arrived at different times, some were late. This all resulted in reduced activities on site.

Appendix 6. Multi-visit flyer



Appendix 7. Evaluation sheet for some of the youth groups

Westonbirt Arboretum Feedback – What do YOU think?

Draw a circle around the activities that you liked the best. Can you tell us why you liked them?

Making things / using tools



Xylophone



Willow Hurdles



Bug / Insect homes



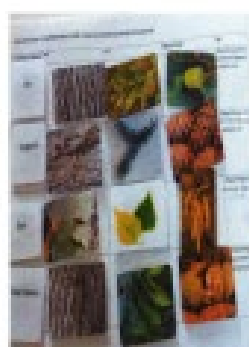
Using the Saw

WHY?

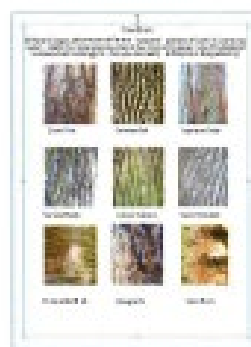
Learning about trees



The age of a tree



Tree identification



Bark rubbings



Leaf printing

WHY?

Sensory games



Matching pairs



Sound game



Smell/touch game

WHY?

Learning about wildlife and nature



Feeding the Birds



Looking for insects



Scavenger hunt



Watching the birds

WHY?

Exploring and physical play



Tyre tunnel



Balance beams



Stepping stones



Fallen tree balance

WHY?

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