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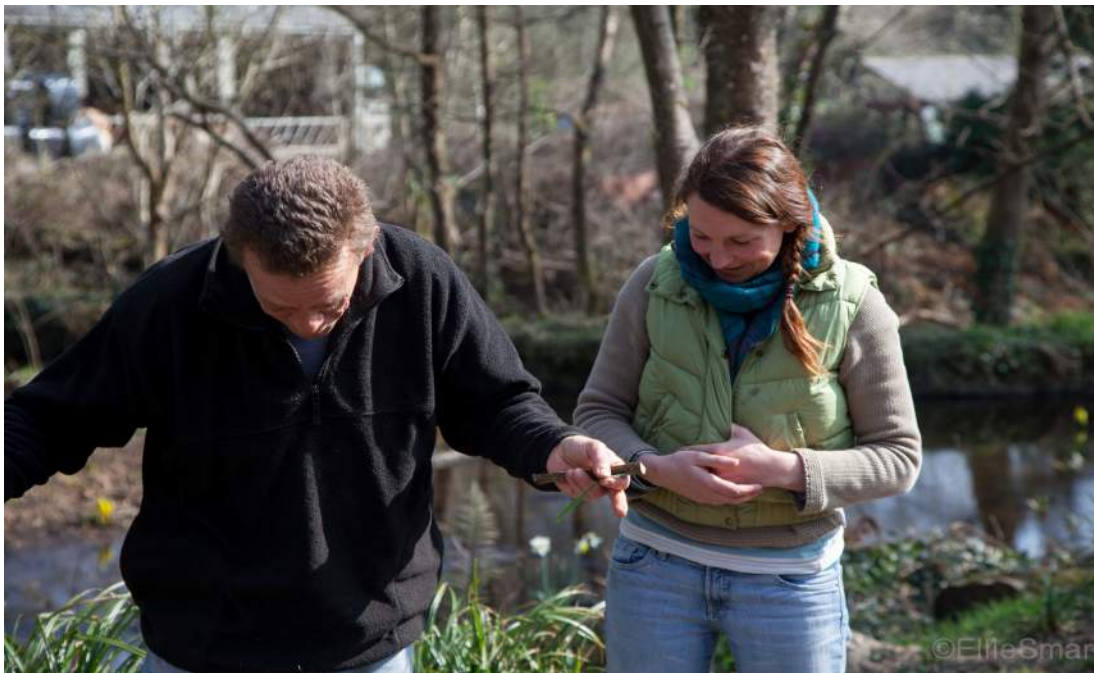


## Working in woods for health and well-being

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*We are a South-West based social enterprise, working to reconnect people with the natural world. Through outdoors-focused classes, workshops, events and training sessions, people are encouraged to interact with their environment and to experience the physical, mental and social benefits of time spent outdoors.*

## THE WHEAL NORTHEY PROGRAMME

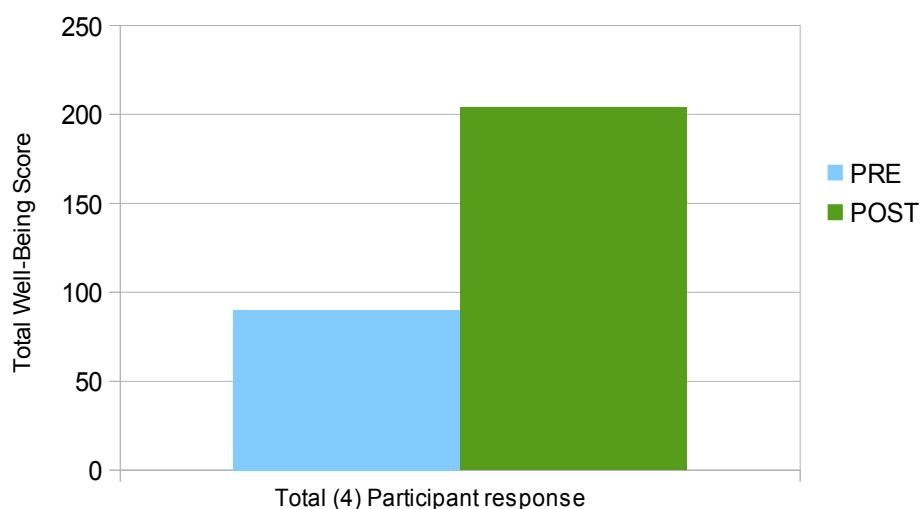


For me it's better than my medication.  
(Patient, Wheal Northey Health Centre)

In collaboration with a project trialled by Dan Bloomfield of Exeter University<sup>1</sup>, we have been using immersive activities in local woodlands to help build confidence, self-esteem and resilience to help increase mental and physical well-being. As a result of participating in our first Dose of Nature programme, two patients from Wheal Northey Health Centre in St Austell showed an increase of over 300% in their mental well-being and across the project we noticed an average increase of 127% in well-being.

Difference in participant Well-being before and after Nature Workshop:

Wheal Northey Health Centre Patients



<sup>1</sup> <http://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2014/09/22/dan-bloomfield-sometimes-patients-could-use-a-dose-of-nature-but-how-could-it-be-prescribed/>



Over the course of 10 sessions, twice weekly for five-weeks, 6 patients from Wheal Northey Health Centre near St Austell, Cornwall who each had varying mental and physical diagnoses spent a total of 40-hours in secluded private woodland close to the Eden Project.

Lead by an experienced outdoor practitioner, the activities were iterative, participant-focussed and included survival skills, cooking over a fire, as well as reflective play and games designed to improve team-work skills and build social confidence.



We have developed an exit strategy to help build on this success. Participants will be given free outdoor first aid and risk assessment training with the land-owner. They will also all become volunteers for Nature Workshops supporting the land-owner with woodland management, thus allowing Dose Of Nature to continue at zero-cost.

The sessions have given me something to look forward to. I've been eating better and have become more active, my mental health has also improved and now I don't see why it should continue to improve.

**(Wheal Northey Patient)**

## PATIENT STORIES



The sessions have opened me up to so many possibilities and have helped me find the key tools to my recovery

3 years ago **Rob**, 50, was involved in a serious climbing accident which left him with head and ankle injuries. As a result he has mobility problems. Having previously been a very active person since the accident Rob has suffered from various mental health issues included anxiety and depression. Due to his anxiety he was apprehensive about joining the project however since taking part he has begun cycling again and going out more. He has also signed up as a volunteer for Nature Workshops and is due to attend one of our Forest School training taster days to find out more about training options with us.

*I really look forward to the sessions, my health has improved and mentally I'm thinking clearer... for me it's better than my medication*

**Angela** has a history of suffering from depression and at the time of attending the Dose of Nature sessions was taking anti-depressants, she reported as feeling down and isolated since leaving her job 3-years ago due stress. Since attending Dose, Angela says she's feeling much better, has begun regularly getting out in her and has started looking for a new job and handing out her CV in local shops and businesses.



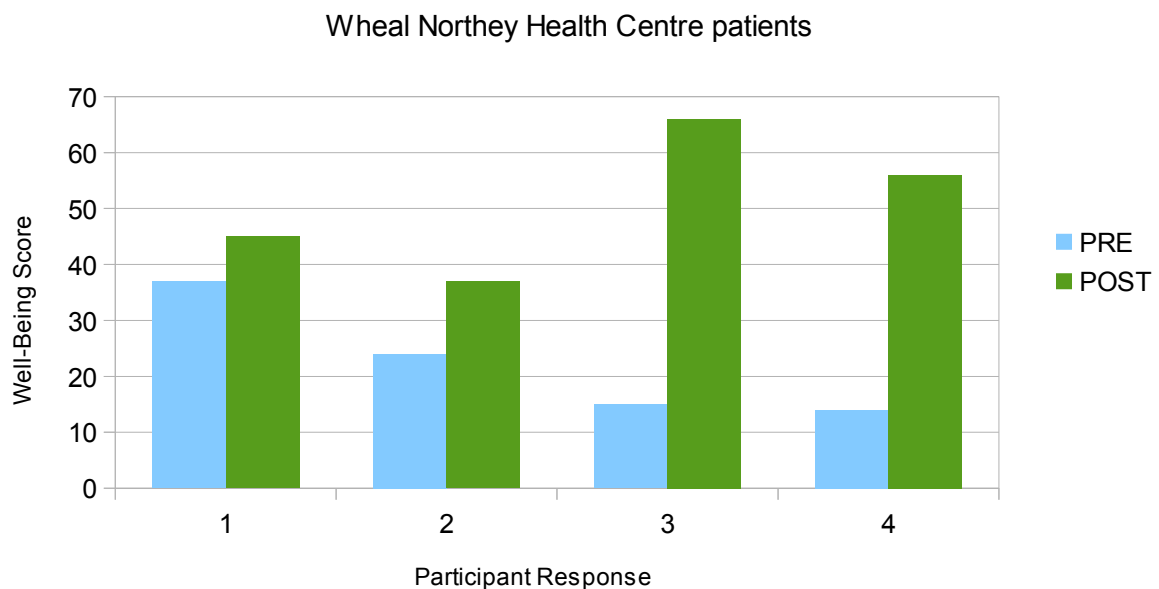
These sessions primarily offered participants time, peace and choice and they responded to this so positively it was wonderful to see. As session leader, I really enjoyed seeing their confidence grow with each session and how well they bonded as a group. To be so immersed in nature and freed of expectation for a few hours was truly liberating for them and I hope they take those feelings of positivity and freedom with them in all that they do

**(Lucy Green, Nature Workshops Session Leader)**

## OUTCOMES FOR HEALTH AND WELL-BEING FROM THE WHEAL NORTHEY PROGRAMME

- Aside from significant increases in participant's overall well-being scores, we also noticed that the participants with the lowest well-being score at the start of the sessions showed the greatest improvement in well-being. (see graph below)
- When asked whether they thought these kind of sessions should be more widely available every participant responded that they believed they should

Difference in each participant's wellbeing before and after Nature Workshop

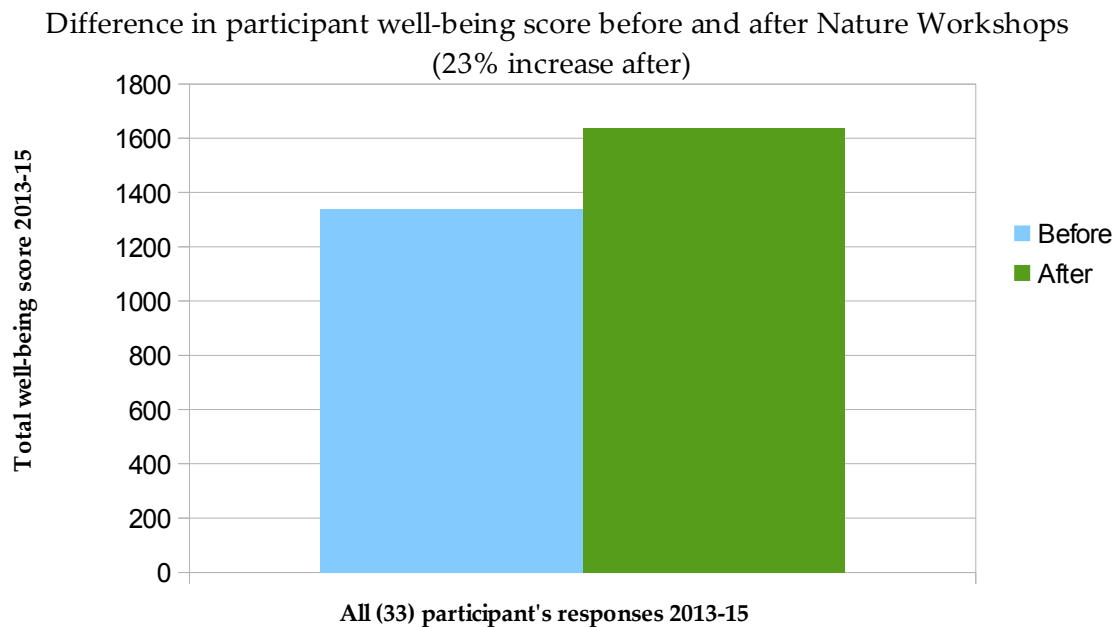


## OUR COMMITMENT TO REACHING VULNERABLE ADULTS IN THE SOUTH-WEST

Since 2013 we have reached 33 adults who are in some way vulnerable due to either health or social and economic reasons. This figure is set to double by the end of July due to the completion of two further Dose of Nature projects in West Cornwall and a separate Forest School/Organic Horticulture training programme targeting low-income residents in the Penryn and Falmouth area of Cornwall.



As social researchers, we are committed to measure the impact our outdoor programmes have on participants, we therefore routinely measure each individuals health and well-being using the Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Well Being Scale (WEMWBS)<sup>2</sup> before and after participating, as well as using other varied more qualitative measures. Across all of our programmes targeting vulnerable adults we have found an average increase of 23% in participant well-being<sup>3</sup> after attending one of our Nature Workshops.



#### Measurable Outcomes for Adults:

- Improved Well-Being
- Accredited Training
- Increased Employability
- Volunteer Opportunities

#### REACHING CLIENTS:

We have links with local NHS health promotion services as well as other community agencies. We also have a strong social media following and good relationships with journalists from local press including the West Briton, Cornishman and Plymouth Herald.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/med/research/platform/wemwbs/>

<sup>3</sup> Based on participant's WEMWS score

## BUILDING ON OUR EXPERIENCE



After taking part in a woodland well-being project targeting adult with mental health problems in West Cornwall, one woman, Marie, diagnosed with psychosis was able to come off her anti-psychotic drugs with the support of her GP. On speaking of the impact this experience had on her, she said, “I think it will probably last me all my life quite frankly.” 8 adults took part; 2 women and 6 men each diagnosed with mental health issues including schizophrenia, psychosis and depression. They were referred by their Community Psychiatric Nurses as well as other local health professionals. The project had a retention rate of over 80% and everyone who completed the 6-weeks also achieved a Level 1 certificate, despite the majority having had no previous formal qualifications.

As an approved supplier for Career South-West's Local Supplier Framework we have successfully delivered 3-week courses of woodland-based nature workshops totalling 24-hours spread over 6 twice-weekly sessions with adult customers from both Plymouth and Penzance Job Centres Plus. In both instances we have found participant well-being increased by 22% after attending our sessions. During 3-month follow-up interviews we found several participants were engaged in volunteer placements and another had been offered a place to study psychology at Plymouth University.

