



## WOODLAND WELL-BEING WITH NATURE WORKSHOPS



*My physical health's been much better as I've been getting out the house a lot more.*

Patient- Stennack Health Centre

## About the Project:

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. Over nine weeks in June and July 2015, at woodlands in West Cornwall, patients registered Bodriggy surgery in Hayle and Stennack Health Centre in St Ives were invited to attend a weekly 4-hour outdoor session lead by an experienced outdoor practitioner.

The activities were iterative, participant-focussed and included survival skills, reflective play, as well as games designed to improve team-work skills and build social confidence. At each session a healthy lunch was cooked from fresh ingredients over an open fire, which participants would help build upon arrival in the woods. Sessions were open to any adult patient registered at the participating surgery experiencing some sort of long-term or chronic health condition or issue.

To facilitate participant retention, we arranged transport to the woodland locations through local taxis and minibuses services from participating surgeries. We also dedicated specific administrative staff members to act as 'case-workers' with participants for the duration of the project.

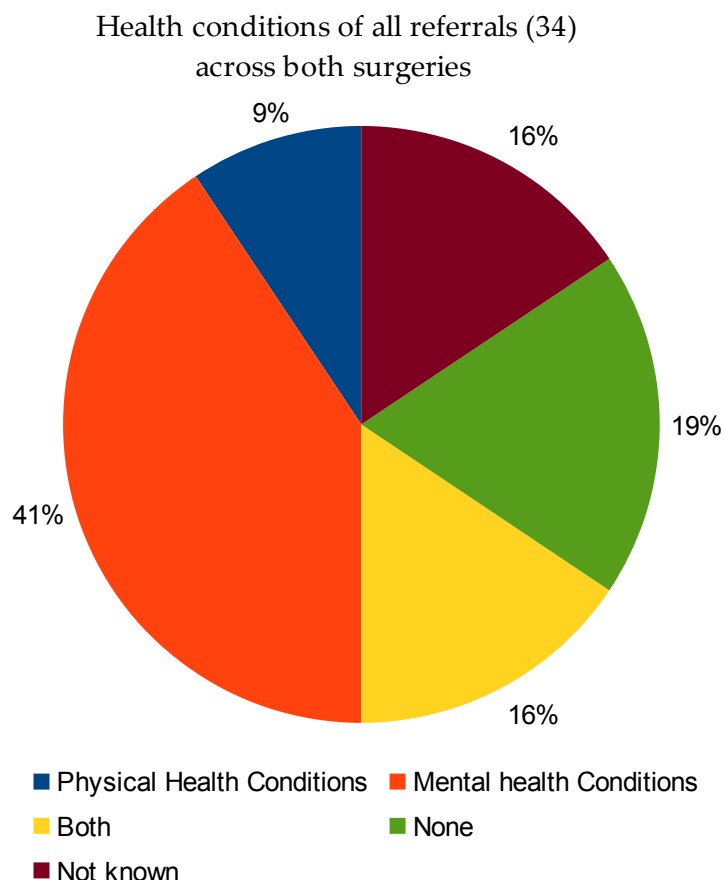
We worked closely with GPs at participating surgeries throughout the project, in particular to discuss participants medical histories so that we could best help everyone attending. We are data protection license holders and therefore are legally able to deal with sensitive information. We also invited GPs and other surgery staff to the woods. In this instance doctors from both West Cornwall Health Centres visited sessions. Both Session Leaders and patients remarked this to be an important part of the process:

*“We had a Doctor and trainee visit (from Bodriggy Health Centre) This was a useful and interesting time. Everyone was able to talk about what they had learned; the benefits, future ideas, how they felt and ways of promoting future sessions and projects. I think the doctors benefited from the visit as it gave them a clearer idea of what the sessions were about.”*

**Mark, Session Leader- Bodriggy Surgery**



## Who we reached:



We found 57% of referrals were experiencing symptoms of, or receiving medication for a mental health problem. less than 10% of referrals were experiencing solely physical issues. A fifth of all referrals claimed to have no health problems<sup>2</sup>. Physical health conditions of patients referred were varied and included chronic fatigue, heart conditions and long-term injuries, whilst some of the mental health diagnoses included depression and anxiety, addiction issues and psychosis.

Participants were either referred onto the project by their GP, or were able to self-refer after seeing local publicity. In total we had 34 referral across both surgeries. 17 referrals from Bodriggy surgery of which 9 attended between 1-3 sessions and three 3+ sessions. From Stennack health centre we also had 17 referrals, 8 attended between 1-3 sessions and six 3+.

*"I suffer with mental health issues and it has helped me enormously; its kind of like a breath of fresh air in a way, you see things differently and you forget your worries for the day, which is good. Talking to others who have gone through similar experiences such as myself has also helped me very much with my mental health. All round it's been a definite benefit."*

Patient- Bodriggy Surgery

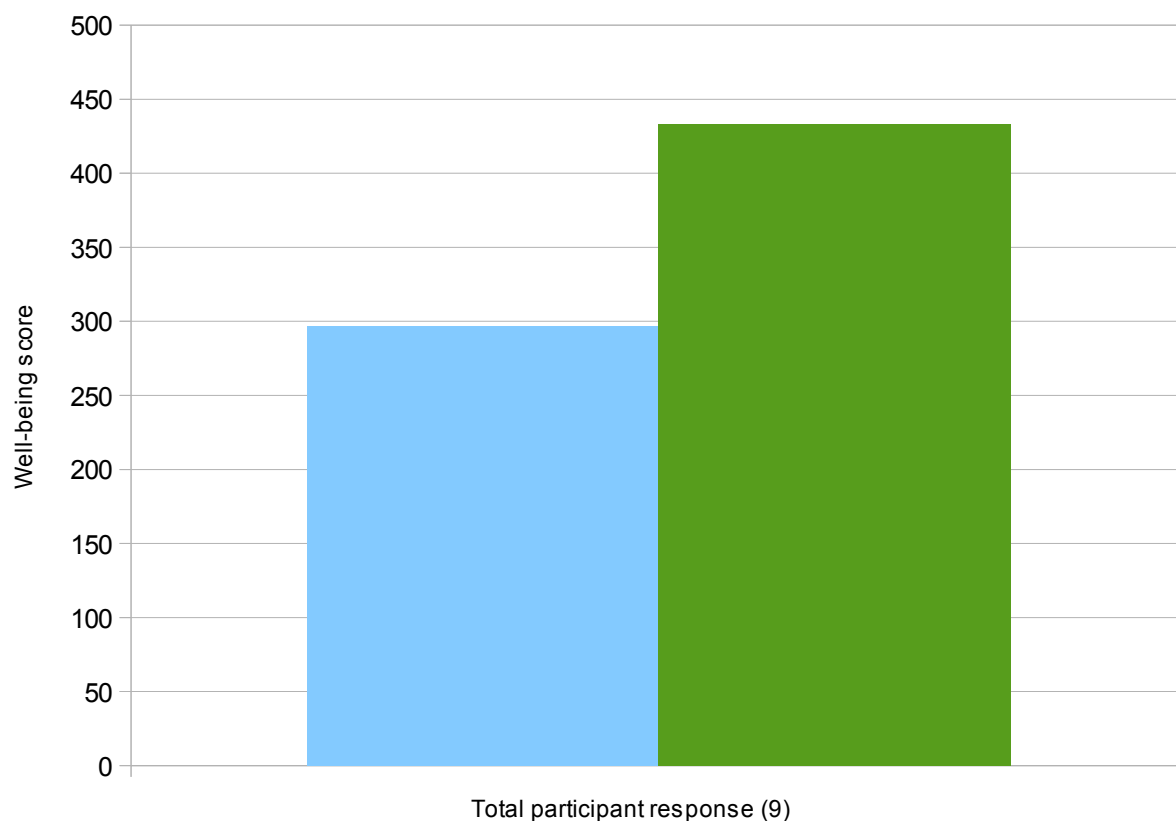
	Bodriggy Health Centre	Stennack Health Centre
Number of referrals	17	17
Number of referrals who attended between 1-3 sessions	9	8
Number of referral who attended 3+ sessions	3	6

<sup>2</sup>Two of the five the referrals who claimed to no health conditions or problems went on the attend 3+ sessions (both Stennack patients). At the start of the programme both had a well-being score lower than the general population mean (51.6) with one of the participants scoring over 10 point lower than the population mean.



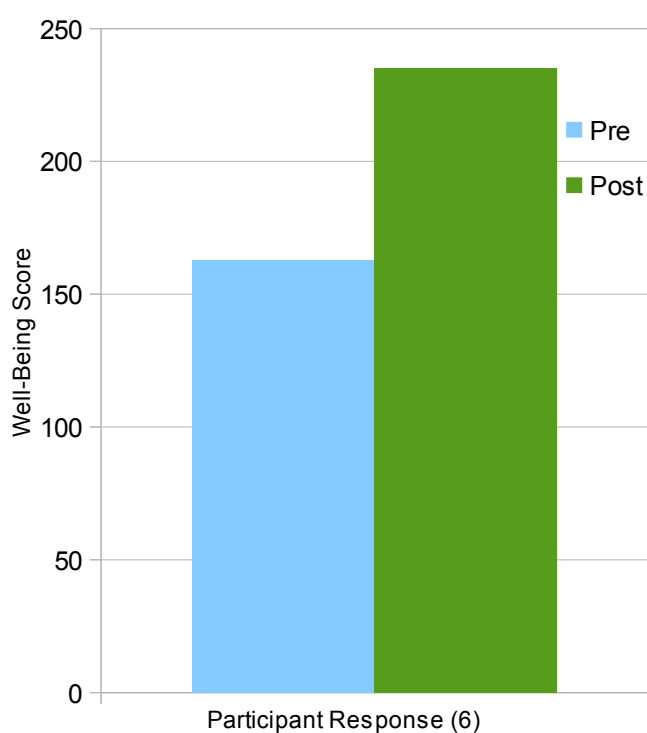
Total participant well-being score before and after Nature Workshop (51% increase)

**DOSE Project West Cornwall**



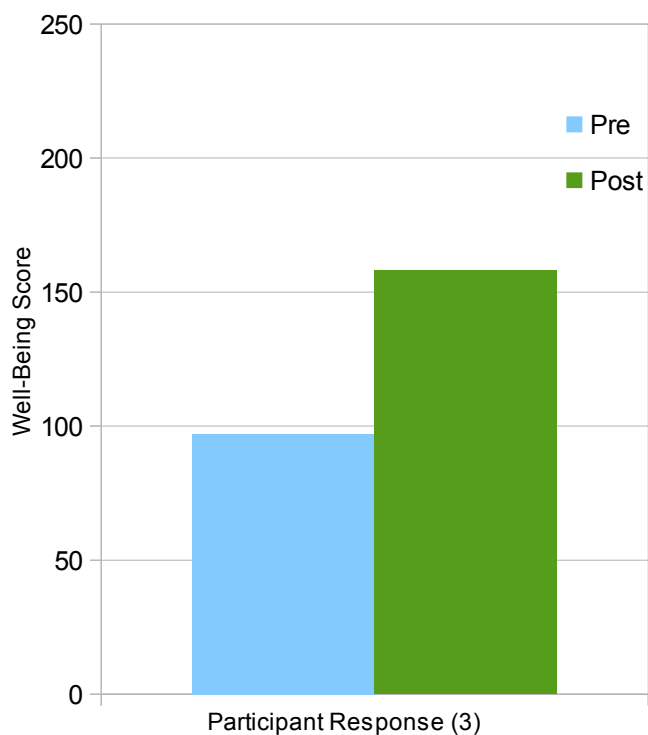
Total Well-being Score Before and After Nature Workshop (44% increase)

**Stennack Health Centre, St Ives**



Total Well-being Score Before and After Nature Workshop (62% increase)

**Bodriggy Surgery, Hayle**





## What we found out:

*"A very positive series of workshops. the impact and value to those who took part was very clear. Individually each person gained skills and confidence that will carry through with them in the future. I think everyone recognised their own learning and development (social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional ) Each person spoke to me individually during the day to say how the sessions had helped them with a genuine honesty. I loved the fact they recognised their own development and felt relaxed enough to talk about it."*

**Mark, Session Leader -Bodriggy Surgery Group-**

We received overwhelmingly positive feedback from everyone who took part. Most commenting on how **brilliant** the sessions were; a **highlight of the week**, and a **fantastic experience**. Participants also repeatedly expressed how relaxing the woodland environment was; a place to **forget your worries**. Nearly all participants referred to feeling at ease during the sessions and nearly all noticed an improvement in their mood and how they were feeling. When asked what they liked the least about the session or what could be improved, the many answered that in their opinion sessions were too short and the whole project should have gone on for longer and that their least favourite part was when it ended. Furthermore most participants also commented how projects such as this should be more widely available to a greater number of people.

Participants from both groups left the project with hand-made journals recording their journeys. One patient, referred from Stennack Health Centre, also compiled a short film using images and recordings taken whilst in the woods.

In addition to qualitative evaluation through interviews and session leader observation, we measured participant well-being at the start and finish using The Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Score (WEMWBS) questionnaire. Across the two West Cornwall surgeries we found an improvement of 51% in participant well-being after attending 3+ woodland sessions. It is worth noting that WEMWBS has been developed to assess well-being across populations rather than just individuals. It may be helpful therefore to compare participating surgeries before and after scores with our total well-being scores across all projects we have conducted since 2013.

	Stennack Surgery Participants		Bodriggy Surgery Participants		West Cornwall DOSE participants combined		All Nature Workshops participants (2013-15)	
Number of participants	6		3		9		42	
Well-Being Score <b>Before &amp; After</b>	163	235	97	158	260	393	1627	2072
Score difference	72		61		133		445	
Percentage increase	44.00%		62.00%		51.00%		27.00%	

All the participants who attended 3+ sessions had initial scores that were below the population mean of 51.6<sup>3</sup> (89% of participants had starting WEMWBS 10-points or more below population mean). On completing Dose of Nature 56% of participants' WEMWBS had increased above the general population average.

	Stennack Surgery (total 6)		Bodriggy Surgery (total 3)	
No. of participants with well-being scores <b>above</b> population mean (51.6) - <b>before</b> and <b>after</b> -	0 -	2 (34%)	0 -	2 (67%)
No. of participants with Well-Being Score <b>below</b> population mean (51.6) - <b>before</b> and <b>after</b> -	6 (100%)	4 (67%)	3 (100%)	1 (34%)

*"The group seemed to get a huge amount from the social side of the project and many of them really felt that what we were doing was a form of group therapy. One of them even said 'I've been to lots of different group therapies and this is the best'. Other comments were that it was just great to get out and be in nature. The group really bonded and we're looking out for each other. They said they felt very at home in our spot in the woods and would like to live there!"*

*They even began to bring there own projects to do. One taught us how to make a hemp and stone necklace and another, how to make pizza on a fire."*

*James, Session Leader- Stennack Health Centre Group-*

<sup>3</sup> Based on data collected in 2011

[http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/med/research/platform/wemwbs/researchers/interpretations/wemwbs\\_population\\_norms\\_in\\_health\\_survey\\_for\\_england\\_data\\_2011.pdf](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/med/research/platform/wemwbs/researchers/interpretations/wemwbs_population_norms_in_health_survey_for_england_data_2011.pdf)

**Michael, 58** has been out of work for approximately 15 years due to anxiety, depression and panic attacks. Six years ago he damaged his back and is now on long-term medication. He was referred onto the course by his GP at Stennack surgery, who believed it may be of benefit. Michael noticed improvements in both his physical and mental health whilst attending the sessions. Since the sessions he has been volunteering with various organisations. He has expressed an interest in continuing working with Nature Workshops as a volunteer.

*"It's been one of the best things I have done for years. The sessions were brilliant, and when I was there I was feeling much better."*

**Naomi, 21** has suffered with depression since her early teens, worsening several years ago following the death of her Grandfather. At the time of starting the project Naomi said she was nervous in crowds and didn't feel she did that well socially. Aside from learning new skills and enjoying the time in nature Naomi also formed new friendships and since the project ended she continues to socialise with one of the other participants. She has also said she feels less nervous about starting college again and feels more confident and social. ,

### Observations for future programmes:

From our viewpoint as the delivery agent there was approximately 6-weeks between the commissioning of the project and its start-date. For future projects we would plan for at least 3 months between commissioning and the first session in order to ensure sufficient time to organise publicity and make sure surgery GPs in addition to other local health and family workers in the area such as district nurses, CPNs, health visitors and support workers etc.. are aware of the project and can therefore assist with referrals.

Sufficient time between project commissioning and delivery would also enable us to arrange open events at participating surgeries. Both individuals working in local health fields as well as patients considering taking part, would be invited to meet the project session leaders and key workers as in order obtain more information about the programme and what to expect. We have successfully organised similar events with previous projects (working with Job Centre Plus claimants) and found improved referral rates as well project retention rates.

*"It's been a fantastic experience for me and I do hope in the future that instead of being a pilot scheme this will go on to become a more permanent thing."*

**Patient, Stennack Health Centre**