

Woodland Therapy Project

**Report on the third year of this
four year project which supports
adults living with mental health**



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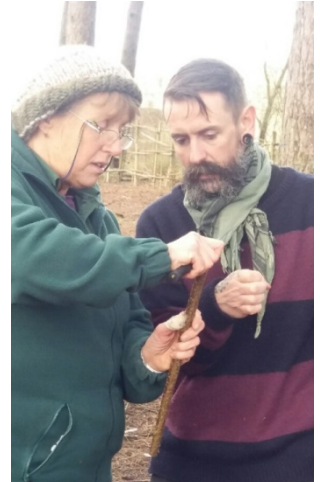
**Reporting period:
1st September 2017 – 31st August 2018**



1 Project Overview

Key activities undertaken during the reporting period:

During the reporting period we have delivered **41** woodland sessions to **52** adults living with mental health conditions. The sessions are usually attended by between 9 and 14 people each week. The sessions are participant-centred so that the focus of the sessions and how we spend the time is chosen by the clients, facilitated by staff and influenced by a number of factors including the weather, the season, what the clients are interested in doing and the state of each individual's mental health on the day. During each session clients decide what they would like to do the following week and what they would like for lunch, so that appropriate preparations can be made. As confidence builds clients are asked to share skills with others and our client volunteers play an important role in supporting others' learning.



Activities undertaken during the past year include: Hazel coppicing; Rustic fence building; Willow harvesting; Willow weaving; Knife skills training with an external tutor, Simon Turk from Treecreepers; Making Christmas decorations, Hedgerow planting and aftercare; Spoon, spatula and butter-knife carving; Snow play; Eco-printing; Making a Christmas tree structure from willow and hazel; Wildlife watching; Healthy campfire cooking; Making hot drinks and Building friendships.

Year 3	Run weekly woodland Therapy sessions for 14 participants per session involving creative green woodwork, nature and craft activities and providing social support.	41 sessions have been delivered during the third year and a total of 52 people have taken part. The number of people attending each session varies between sessions with lower numbers attending when the weather is particularly challenging. The average number of people attending each week has remained stable at 12 to 15 clients.
	Hold steering group meetings every 4 months to discuss progress against targets and outcomes and to discuss issues, opportunities and improvements.	We held steering group meetings in October 2017 when we planned our exhibit for the Brighstone Christmas Tree Festival; January when we discussed and decided on what external training the group would like to access (the knife skills training with Treecreepers was delivered in March 2018); May when we discussed staffing; and June when we discussed and planned the VIP visit in August.

2 Project Progress

Progress in meeting initial outcomes

Outcome	Target	In the reporting period	Cumulative total	By the end of the project
Outcome 1	People using the scheme will report an increase in confidence and emotional wellbeing.	8 people	39 people	39 people
	People using the scheme will report a reduced use of other crisis services	8 people	20 people	40 people
Outcome 2	People using the scheme will report feeling less isolated	9 people	40 people	39 people
	People using the scheme will report an increased confidence in meeting new people	11 people	44 people	39 people
Outcome 3	People using the scheme who report the development of new skills	11 people	41 people	39 people
	People on the scheme who will have taken up volunteering opportunities	1 people	10 people	5 people
	People using the scheme will report an increased level of participation in other community activities	11 people	37 people	20 people

3 Nature's Healing Powers

The natural environment is an essential ingredient in the success of the Woodland Therapy project and the extreme weather conditions over the past year have contributed to some memorable nature moments, such as taking a walk on the snowy heath and making snow sculptures of various animals; enjoying the bountiful butterflies over the summer, observing nesting robins and enjoying the antics of the fledglings as they emerged, fearlessly bounding around the clients' feet as they went about the session routines; and being visited on a regular basis by a young red squirrel who delighted clients when he joined us on the log seats around the fire.



4 Volunteers

Three of our long-term clients, Albie, Tony and Jane, continue to volunteer regularly at the sessions, supporting others and helping with the routine tasks which keep the sessions running smoothly. Their personal experience with mental illness is invaluable in providing support to others in similar situations. Joan also continues to lend her support, often taking a lead on the cooking activities. Robin was recruited when he came to our stand at Wolverton Garden Fair in September 2017 and he brings with him a wealth of experience from his career as a countryside ranger and from supporting Forest School, living history activities and a well-being project in Sussex. He is also a keen willow weaver and enthusiastic about bush craft skills. One client who joined the group this year, Stephen, volunteers with HIWWT's reserves teams. The project paid for some volunteers to take part in training covering Outdoor First Aid and Knife Skills during the reporting period.

5 Connections with other organisations

- **Community links.** We maintain close links with the West Wight Community Mental Health Team, Chantry House supported living group and the New Avenues programme. Although when we started the Project we focussed on the local West Wight community, we now work with organisations from across the Island supporting mental health and clients attend from all areas of the county.
- **Green Army.** This is a project funded through one of the local housing associations which enables young people with mental health problems to benefit from taking part in practical conservation projects. We've been in communication with Claire Hector from the project on how clients who are now too old to attend the Green Army sessions can access Woodland Therapy instead. Four young people from Green Army have accessed the Woodland Therapy group so far.
- **The Youth Trust.** We have been in conversation with one of the counsellors, Steph Brittain, from the Youth Trust regarding using nature connection to support mental health with the young clients. Steph has taken the idea back to staff and we look forward to working with the Trust's clients and / or staff in the future.
- **Perinatal Mental Health Service.** Staff attended the launch of the Hampshire, Isle of Wight and Farnham Perinatal Mental Health Service and attended one of the team meetings to inform the team about the Woodland Therapy Project and the benefits for people with mental health issues in attending our sessions. Posters were displayed at the Pan Partnership Well-being sessions and the Women on Wight Project building and flyers were taken to share with clients. Staff also launched the idea of running parent and toddler sessions specifically for clients with post-natal

depression and the idea was met with much enthusiasm. We see this strengthening relationship as a major factor in extending this area of our work in the future.

6 The difference the project is making

Evaluation forms show that at the end of the reporting period:

84% of respondents felt more confident about meeting new people since attending Woodland Therapy.
84% of respondents felt more confident about learning new skills since attending Woodland Therapy.
84% of respondents felt more enthusiastic about joining in group activities since starting the sessions.
84% of respondents had a greater awareness of nature on their mental health since starting the sessions.
84% of respondents felt more self-confident since starting Woodland Therapy.
84% of respondents reported a growth in self-esteem since starting Woodland Therapy.
76% of respondents felt more independent since starting Woodland Therapy.
53% of respondents reported a decrease in their dependence on support services since starting sessions.
69% of respondents felt more confident about sharing skills with others since starting Woodland Therapy.

Further Comments

As well as ticking boxes on the evaluation forms, we encourage clients to write about how they feel about the sessions and the difference the project has made to their lives. These comments were made by the current cohort on their evaluation forms:

- “The sessions make me feel calm and I sleep better. My quality of life has improved significantly. I think everyone could do with some Woodland Therapy!”
- “This was my first visit. I enjoyed the experience and I like the concept and arrangement of meeting like-minded people who also struggle daily. It is helpful and refreshing to not feel so alone. Had a nice fire glowing and some food with company”.
- “Woodland Therapy has given me the confidence to go out more and learn new skills. In the last year I have done a photography course and a woodturning course. With help from the WT staff I now attend the Isle of Wight Woodturners Club”.

7 Examples and case studies

• Laura

Laura found out about the group from meeting another of our clients at the WOW Centre. WOW (Women on Wight) is a Lottery-funded project supporting women on the Island with a range of issues. The Centre offers support and a range of workshops. Laura suffers with fibromyalgia, a debilitating illness from which she suffers a great deal of pain. Her marriage broke down and, because of her condition, she had to give up work and a lot of her independence. She became isolated, anxious and depressed. She was thrilled to find out about Woodland Therapy and picked up the details from a flyer at the Centre. Laura is naturally an extrovert, gaining energy from contact with others and she has really enjoyed making new friends, particularly with those who share her passion for making art. Without being aware of it she often boosts others' self-esteem because of the interest she takes in their well-being and from her compliments about their achievements during the session, whether it's those who made the lunch, gave her a cup of tea or made something with wood, she has words of praise and encouragement. Laura's sense of belonging in the group has contributed to her own well-being too. *When she announced plans to move to Devon to be closer to her family, staff were able to put her in touch with Jenny Archer from the Youngwood Project who also deliver woodland sessions promoting mental health and well-being for adults. We look forward to keeping in touch with Laura as she continues to use nature and community to support her mental health.*

• Kerry

Kerry is a child-minder who has had to take a break from work while she undergoes treatment for breast cancer. She is also an Education volunteer with HIWWT and trained with us to be a Forest School leader in 2015. She loves being outdoors and has a clear understanding of the benefits to learning, and to health and well-being of spending time in nature. Kerry was



diagnosed with an aggressive tumour at Christmas 2017 and started treatment in January. She had to give up her child-minding work because the risk of infection from the children she worked with was too high. She missed her work and the regular outdoor activities she undertook with her charges. She mentioned this in conversation with her oncologist and he told her that maintaining her mental health was as important as her physical health and that spending time outdoors would be beneficial to her. After Kerry got in contact I suggested she attend the Woodland Therapy sessions, which she has been doing as and when treatment allows. Sometimes she has attended sessions when she was still recovering from chemotherapy treatment and says that she has felt so much better after being in the woods than when she had spent the day on the sofa at home. On the day that Simon Turk from Treecreepers came to the session to deliver the knife skills training, Kerry didn't think she would be able to attend as it was scheduled for the day after a round of treatment. Even though she was unable to use a knife because of infection risk if she cut herself, she came along to learn and spend time with the group. She brought a garden lounge and sleeping bag and we provided extra blankets, a hot water bottle, hot drinks and warm soup to her in her spot beside the fire. When she felt well enough to walk around she spent time listening to the tutor and chatting with other clients as they went about the different projects. When she felt tired, she was able to rest in comfort. As it was March there was plenty of wildlife to watch with various bird species and red squirrels courting and nest building. Kerry has gained a lot of support from other clients, from sharing skills and learning new ones and from simply being in the woods. As I write this Kerry is undergoing a course of radiotherapy, and is doing well.

8 Successes and what we are most proud of

This year we are most proud of the achievements of the group in taking part in the activities and reaping the rewards to their mental health and well-being of spending time in nature. Strong friendships have been built and some individuals have really stepped up to keep things going during the staffing gap between Woodland Therapy Assistants. However, there have also been some notable events over the last year which have brought validation to the project and what we continue to achieve with the funding.

- In 2017 Martin White, Lord Lieutenant of the Isle of Wight, visited the Project with Debbie Tan, CEO of Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust. During the visit Martin chatted with group members who told him what a positive impact the sessions had on their lives. The experience had a profound effect on Martin and when asked to nominate local projects to receive a Royal visit in 2018 Martin chose, among others, Woodland Therapy. The visit took place on 6th August 2018. The Woodland Therapy clients enjoyed making preparations for the visit as much as the actual day and were delighted to hear the Princess Royal exchanging campfire recipes with staff, asking questions about the items they had made in the crafts on display and taking an interest in the project. The visit was reported in the local press, radio, television and social media.



<https://www.hiwwt.org.uk/news/princess-royal-visits-wildlife-trusts-bouldnor-forest>
<https://iwradio.co.uk/2018/08/09/in-pictures-princess-anne-visits-apprentices-at-isle-of-wight-wildlife-trust/>

9 Future opportunities

The Woodland Therapy Project has shown us first hand how valuable long-term and regular access to nature is on people's mental health. 100% of clients agree that attending Woodland Therapy has benefitted their mental health and they now access nature on a regular basis to support their well-being as a result of their experience with the Project. During holiday breaks, clients are given "homework" to take time in nature and they now make arrangements to meet up with each other to spend time at the beach, in the woods or the park in their friendship groups. There are other practical aspects of the sessions which

we have learned through experience over the last three years and which help towards their success, such as

- Being aware that people on medication may struggle with early mornings;
- Understanding that clients with physical difficulties or who live with chronic pain will need suitable chairs with back support;
- Knowing that some people need to be active and expend energy at the beginning of the session and having activities available for them to do that safely;
- How to read body language and make appropriate activity suggestions based on mood and state of mind;
- That the food provided is sometimes the only hot meal some clients have during the week so it should be nutritious and plentiful;
- When clients have made challenging demands we, as practitioners, should be mindful of their mental health condition and learn to take a step back to consider requests in a measured way rather than trying to be all things to all people.

We have also found out about the alarming statistics on perinatal mental health and the long-term impact this can have on families. Building on our experience from running Woodland Therapy over the last three years, we would therefore like to extend this project by implementing the following:

- **Long-term and regular access to nature.** It is clear from our evaluation forms that those clients who have been attending the project for the longest have made the most progress. This includes A who no longer uses Crisis Line or the support of a mental health social worker; B who has lost a total of four stone in weight having gained the confidence to take up a sport and manage her diet; and C who is a regular volunteer having been house-bound with anxiety for several years. We would, therefore, like to continue the Monday sessions to provide more life changing long-term benefits to people living on the Isle of Wight with mental health conditions.
- **Sharing skills, advice and experience.** We have come across various courses and workshops promoting nature connection to benefit mental health and well-being. However, we haven't found any that actually provide practitioners with practical advice on how to set up and run projects like this. Our Education Officer ran a workshop at the South West Forest School Association conference which was over-subscribed and well-received. Therefore, within our new project we would like to offer workshops, training and mentoring in nature connection and well-being, both locally and regionally.
- **Perinatal mental health.** Within the new project we would like to deliver additional days specifically for mothers with post-natal depression. To deliver this we would draw on our experience of delivering Woodland Therapy sessions and Wildlife Tots sessions, our woodland toddler group for parents and carers with children from 0 – 5 years which is also based on Forest School principles. The new toddler group would be a supportive space for women to gain the benefits from spending time in nature and enjoy their children's experience in the woods. To this end we have:
 - Organised a meeting with Maria Vine from the Perinatal Mental Health Service.
 - Spoken to a GP about the potential for the sessions and the best ways of keeping GPs and Health Visitors informed.
 - Scheduled three pilot sessions for this Autumn.
 - Acquired funding to staff the pilot sessions from the Isle of Wight Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Unit.
 - Organised specially chosen volunteers to support the sessions.