



Cumbria
Wildlife Trust

Project update – Gosling Sike

Have we achieved what we set out to do?

Yes. Our application was for a grant towards employing a person at Gosling Sike to provide for activities, volunteering opportunities and to bring benefits to a diverse range of people.

The building is now up and running – it's kitted out for long-term use. Over the years the provision will build and more activities will be offered and more events run. Since the building was complete, we have already run a range of activities and involved people in these.

The grant from The Nineveh Charitable Trust has enabled us to:

- Employ a person, four days per week for two years, to work with volunteers and groups to create the wildlife and community garden on-site at Gosling Sike (and to secure the match funding needed for the post as well as the capital improvements)
- Run weekly volunteer work parties that, as well as carrying out practical works and benefitting the habitats, have improved the health and wellbeing of the participants.
- Involve people from young people's organisations some of which who do not have opportunity to experience the natural environment.
- Events and activities to take place.
- Yoga sessions for the community.
- Talks and guided walks.
- Education and training activities and sessions.
- Art and craft sessions.
- Drop in days for the community just to come along and see what they opportunities are for them.
- Gardening events
- Pop-up cafes (monthly) – which the community love (and the food is good too).
- Pond dipping – exploring the watery depths.
- Community Big Lunch

A range of groups and individuals have come to Gosling Sike and taken part in activities. Some as a one-off, some return regularly on a weekly basis.

There is a regular, weekly, group of volunteers who come to Gosling Sike and carry out a range of activities including pond building, gardening and ground works for the gardens. We have trained this group in traditional crafts such as green oak fence making and use of tools. This group includes retired, people with mental health issues, people with physical health restrictions, refugees.

We have been able to bring young people from the centre of Carlisle to Gosling Sike. These young people do not usually have many opportunities to experience the nature and the outdoors. Their feedback was that this has been a wonderful experience for them and they loved it.

Key differences because of the grant

Receiving this grant allowed us to show to other potential funders that we had the backing of The Nineveh Charitable Trust. This gave other funders confidence to also support the work and we were able to secure additional grants to allow the work to go ahead.

Other funding helped to kit-out the building with all the necessary equipment to allow us to work with groups and so that groups may use the spaces for their own activities.

We were able to employ a person in dedicated to creating the wildlife and community garden and to working with groups means that we can provide activities for people. The people participating are also making a valuable contribution towards creating the garden that will be there for generations to come – whether people wish to simply be close to nature, take part in activities or help to maintain and improve the gardens.

As the gardens and areas of habitat mature and establish there will be more space for wildlife and diversity. Within just a few days of digging the pond (it was nowhere near finished at the time!) we already had frogs moving in. We had to be very careful when completing the pond edging and made sure the frogs were safe. Amongst other birds, tree sparrows regularly visit the garden feeders. As the plants mature and provide sources of seed and berry increase the number and range of birds will increase.

Over the years – we aim to develop this provision further. We also aim to make this post a longer-term post and are hoping to submit an application to the Big Lottery Fund for work from 2020.

The people who have benefitted to date include:

- Carlisle Youth Zone and their disability group.
- Beaumont College (working with young adults with a range of special needs).
- Prism Arts have used the building and now have artwork in a couple of the rooms. They also visit the site.
- Carlisle Youth Zone.
- Mencap, Stanwix Parish Council and Mind.
- Individuals with mental and physical health issues.
- Refugees.
- People from deprived communities.
- Local community.
- People completing community service.
- We also have student placements based at Gosling Sike. We currently have 9 month placements, 10 week placement and people gaining work experience on a shorter term.
- These have given people with a range of skills, interest and mobility activities they can take part in.
- The site is also open every day for people to walk around and enjoy - which many people do! We would like the building to be open at weekends, but staffing costs currently prevent this.

Feedback from the people taking part at Gosling Sike so far:

The community has benefitted from:

- events at Gosling Sike
- training and education sessions
- pop up café providing a social place to meet and chat
- improved mental health through the yoga classes
- getting active through volunteering

Many of the people who come along to our activities report an improved mental and physical health.

In regards to improved wellbeing, both Julia and Angela (Julia had a brain haemorrhage in her early 20's and Angela is her carer). Julia told us a year ago when the brain haemorrhage happened she had to change her life plan, leaving University. Not being able to be part of her usual social and peer groups left her feeling isolated and disconnected. This combined with the effects of the haemorrhage on her physical and mental functioning has negatively impacted her confidence and has left her feeling low. Both Julia and Angela have both been attending the garden regularly to assist with taking photos of the garden and recording the birds and wildlife in the garden as well as assisting with garden research. They have both mentioned how spending time bird watching and surveying the garden helps them to forget their problems and relax leading to greater feelings of wellbeing.

Riyad is a Syrian refugee and asylum seeker community. He has also enjoyed helping in the garden (he only missed coming to the farm due to Ramadan and family duties but is very keen to continue regular visits). He enjoyed using his vast horticultural skills, practicing his English and getting some personal space.

Chris is carer to his wife who had a severe stroke. He has told us the one day each week when he comes to Gosling Sike is very important to him. Whilst he clearly cares for his wife, this time is his and it gives him the opportunity to relax, invest in his own well-being and to meet new people (as well as some familiar faces). He brought his wife to our craft activities and pop-up café last weekend to show her what he had achieved and what he is part of.

Stephen and Norman who have been attending most weeks enjoy getting stuck into tasks and the regular routine. This has benefitted them through the green gym concept and also by providing them a place to meet socially.

Looking ahead and our for the future at Gosling Sike

Over the years the provision will increase and, as the garden develops, there will be more opportunities for people to volunteer. There are plans to have specific 'quiet' zones and days within the garden along with regular days where people can come along if they are looking for company and friendship.

The Lost Words is a beautiful and poignant book (of poems by Robert Macfarlane and illustrations by Jackie Morris) inspired by the words that have been removed from the children's Oxford dictionary. These words include the likes of wren, otter, acorn, conker, bluebell and lark. As children become disconnected from these words, they also become disconnected from nature. Imagination and play sparked by the natural environment is at risk of being lost. We are looking at incorporating The Lost Words into the garden space and activities at Gosling Sike.

We also hope to be able to run more growing projects from Gosling Sike. This will include the setting up of a plant nursery and growing of native wildflower plants to be planted out across Cumbria – increasing wildflower meadows, rich and diverse roadside verges and providing habitat for pollinators. It will also give a new host of people opportunities to volunteer growing the plants and planting them out in their communities.

As the gardens are completed and grow – this will provide somewhere for people to relax and enjoy. Our provision in the building will grow over the years and we hope to do even more of what the community and groups want.



The regular volunteers learned new skills with the green oak fencing. Something we could only do with the building. Each week they enjoy their breaks and their lunch in the building. Training courses often include an inside element to them – the training rooms is essential for this.



Prism Arts handing over the artwork which now looks great in the training room.



Carlisle Youth Zone helping to install the board walk – the building meant they had somewhere to take comfort breaks and to have lunch. During the summer, it gave them somewhere to shelter from the sun (and will in the winter from the more usual in Cumbria rain too!). Some of these young people said the rarely have the opportunity to get outside and do activities like this.