

English Nature Research Report 611

Phoenix House Therapeutic Conservation Programme: Underpinning theory

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Introduction

The Phoenix House and English Nature partnership exists to help substance misusers challenge themselves as individuals to build self-esteem, self-confidence and motivation through the power of activity in wildlife-rich environments.

The partnership objectives are to:

- Provide an eco-based therapy treatment programme to improve the mental and physical well-being of individuals;
- Promote and assist in conservation to jointly benefit wildlife and people undergoing recovery;
- Disseminate best practice in the field of eco-therapy;
- Build on local experience to develop a national programme.

A wildlife-rich environment and the personal challenges it offers are important to everyone's quality of life. It is important that this is accessible to all members of our society.

Phoenix House is a leading UK drugs charity providing specialist drugs and alcohol structured treatment services and residential rehabilitation programmes. English Nature is the Government's advocate for nature conservation.

What was done

Phoenix House and English Nature have been working in partnership since 1997 to develop a therapeutic conservation programme. The initial work has been between the Sheffield base of Phoenix House and the English Nature's Peak District National Nature Reserves. This innovative work has been formalised into a project called PHEN that aims to roll out the approach nationally and provide a model that similar organisations can adopt and adapt to meet their needs.

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This report sets out the theoretical basis for an eco-based therapy treatment programme, and the first hand experiences of participants. There is an on-going evaluation programme in place to quantify the added value that such a programme can bring to the therapeutic process.

Results and Conclusions:

The report determines that cognitive-behavioural therapeutic model applied is effective in supporting and enhancing the rehabilitation programmes of clients. The experiences reported show that there are very real long term benefits for the individual gained from engagement with the natural environment; the team orientated activities; and the tangible outputs of the tasks ie a dry-stone wall.

English Nature's Viewpoint

The report represents a substantive step-forward in showing that activities in support of nature conservation and engagement with nature can play an important role in addressing the needs of socially excluded individual. The messages from clients clearly demonstrate that benefiting from experiences of nature is not a phenomenon limited to better off within society.

From the environmental perspective the land management tasks done through the programme are of a high standard. The programme therefore makes a substantive contribution to biodiversity conservation through maintenance of infrastructure eg walls to enable grazing, and habitat management eg clearance of choked streams.

Further information

For the full report or other publications on this subject, please contact the Enquiry Service on 01733 455100/101/102 or email enquiries@english-nature.org.uk

For further information about the work of English Nature, please visit our website at: www.english-nature.org.uk