



# Outdoors for All

## Case Stories 2011-12

### Introduction

The Government's recent Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP) aims to strengthen connections between people and nature. It acknowledges that the opportunities to benefit from spending time in the natural environment are currently not open to everyone, which can contribute to health and other inequalities and its ambition is that 'everyone should have fair access to a good quality natural environment'.

Natural England has a responsibility to promote access to, and recreation in the natural environment and public well-being, for the benefit of today's and future generations and to help Government deliver the ambitions set out in NEWP. Natural England is therefore championing Outdoors for All on behalf of Government and the natural environment, greenspace, volunteering and heritage sectors.

Natural England has worked very closely with a range of partners over 2011-12 to help deliver projects which aim to ensure that people living in deprived areas, the elderly, those with physical disabilities, learning difficulties, mental health illness, and people from black and minority ethnic communities all have opportunities to access high quality natural environments.

This report captures just some of the stories from these projects which we hope will provide a valuable source of information and inspiration.



## Diversity in Community Projects

### Autism and Nature - Visiting the Countryside

*Visiting the Countryside in Kent* is the first in a series of guides for parents and carers of children with autism, written by the new social enterprise *Autism and Nature* and supported by the Woodland Trust's Visitwoods Project, Natural England and others. The guide is divided into 3 sections. Part 1 seeks to demonstrate the health benefits of experiencing nature and the countryside for those with autism.



Part 2 provides a description and access information for each of 23 'natural' sites (eg National Nature Reserves, Local Nature Reserves, woodlands, Country Parks and gardens) in Kent. Part 3 is a series of 6 case stories telling how school children with autism have made structured visits to specific sites including Natural England's NNR at Swanscombe focusing on an archaeological theme and at Wye Downs NNR with an orienteering purpose.

The other sites were provided by the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers and the Woodland Trust. The guide can be found on the [visitwoods.org.uk](http://visitwoods.org.uk) website  
<http://visitwoods.org.uk/en/visit-woods/things-to-do/peace/Pages/nature-with-autism.aspx>

### Wandering in the Woods – Dementia Care

Wandering in the Woods is an action research project which aims to show the benefits of taking groups of care home residents living with dementia out of their care home into the natural environment. The project was designed and delivered collaboratively between three partner organisations: the Woodland Trust (Visitwoods), Dementia Adventure Community Interest Company and Caring Homes.



This project combined the substantial experience Caring Homes staff have in supporting their residents to enjoy outings away from the home, the expertise Dementia Adventure has in assessing, designing and delivering nature-based adventures, and the opportunities provided at Woodland Trust sites. Recognising the importance of this action research Natural England supported activity to disseminate the findings more widely to the health and social care sector, resulting in articles in the Journal of Dementia Care, Caring Times and the Journal of Working with Older People.

The work has featured in a number of recent conferences

including one at the University of Essex on Dementia which resulted in the formation of a hospital based walking group for people with dementia undergoing hospital assessment.

For more information visit [http://www.dementiaadventure.co.uk/research/visit\\_woods](http://www.dementiaadventure.co.uk/research/visit_woods) and [www.visitwoods.org.uk](http://www.visitwoods.org.uk)

## Wiltshire Young Carers

The Magdalen Environmental Trust with funds from Natural England was able to provide a 3-day therapeutic residential stay for 21 5-9 year old Young Carers at its environmental education centre on an organic farm in West Dorset. Wiltshire Young Carers provides support to the county's children with 'significant, inappropriate caring responsibilities' due to parents having chronic or terminal illness, disabilities or addictions.

Carers UK states that 75% of young carers do not tell their teachers about their situation, leading to poor attainment, and subsequent poor life chances. Most suffer from bullying. Typically, young carers have extremely limited access to nature or to play outside the house. Even those who do play outside often feel they have to return home every few minutes to check on their families.



The aim of the project was to enable the children to play with each other, without fear of stigma, in the open countryside of the organic farm, and to interact with the farm animals (itself regarded as a therapeutic process). They made dens and lit fires in the woods, did a night-walk, fed the animals, had an evening camp fire, learned a greater appreciation of wildlife and the countryside, tasted produce from the farm and planted trees.

This opportunity for play will strengthen the social and interpersonal skills which can so often become under-developed among young carers. The Trust worked in partnership with Wiltshire Young Carers so the project fits within the overall support package being provided to the children, making it vastly more effective as a tool to build mental resilience, interpersonal skills, and to reconnect with the simple pleasures of childhood.

“It’s been brilliant – they have really loved it” – Gemma, project worker for Wiltshire Young Carers.

Find more information about the Magdalen Environment Trust [here](#).

### **DAWN – Didcot All Women’s Network**

*DAWN* was established as a result of a small group of immigrant women realising that the number of women with young families in Didcot who were feeling isolated, and who had a lack of connection with local services, was increasing. The core group who established *DAWN* wanted to bring women together to discuss a range of themes including health and the environment.

*DAWN* worked with the Oxfordshire PCT BME Mental Health Officer and Natural England to develop a project plan and secure funding to help the group set themselves up and strengthen their connection with the natural environment. The established group has since been able to source support and funding from other organisations. After 6 months in operation the group has increased members to 24 from 13 different countries.



The founding members with Oxfordshire PCT BME officer Ben Lloyd Shoabesan.

The group leaders decided they wanted to improve *DAWN*’s environmental knowledge and get to know their local green spaces so they can visit with their families. Natural England facilitated links with the Earth Trust who now work with the group to host visits to their local wildlife sites. Natural England also asked Didcot Town Council and local wildlife groups to

provide information on areas of accessible green space and family events. *DAWN* have organised their own multi-cultural picnics and play days in local parks, where they also discussed ways of helping the environment.

In addition to these ongoing activities, the group is keen to learn more about wildlife gardening and food growing and are planning a visit to the New Forest.

## Devon Link Up for Learning Disability

The *Glen* project is run by Devon Link-Up which is dedicated to helping people with a learning disability enjoy life in the community by giving them real choice about what they do. The project enables volunteers with a learning disability and mainstream volunteers to work together to improve the habitats and landscapes in the Glen which is an area of open space parkland in Honiton.



A co-ordinator runs a weekly training programme through which the volunteers have learnt new skills and confidence that increases their independence and helps overcome feelings of isolation. They have become a valued part of the local community. As one lady said while out walking her dog *"It is lovely, what you are doing, thank you so much for keeping this place clean, planting shrubs and clearing the paths. I love walking my dog here now"*

The on-the-job training has been made possible by forging strong links with Home Grown Community Owned - a

community horticultural organisation. The group are currently working with them on a site plan and are being taught the best places to plant the shrubs and fruit trees.

The project success has been helped by good partnerships eg practical support and advice from another volunteer group and the local council and from the local college which helps with carpentry jobs such as hand rails and boxes for the wildlife. They are also working with the Brownies, Scouts and local schools once a quarter at the start of each season 'to prepare' the Glen. The local community also partner the project and have donated tools, plants and gardening equipment.

In addition the members of the group and the local community around the Glen are able to benefit from health walks as a member of Devon Link-Up has completed his Walking Trainers Certificate in healthy walking and has set up a programme of regular walks.

Thinking to the future the volunteers have come up with new ideas to help sustain the project such as harvesting produce from fruit trees, and using materials from the Glen to make crafts to sell at local community markets.



They also considered starting a photography class to learn about taking photos and making cards etc to sell. Another idea for the future is working with the local college to put up picnic tables to be enjoyed by Devon Link-Up members and the local community.

Find more information about Devon Link Up [here](#)

## **Diversity on National Nature Reserves (NNRs)**

### **Enhancing Sensory Experiences for NNR Visitors**

In partnership with the Sensory Trust Natural England is investing in a pilot project which engages vulnerable client groups living in communities around four National Nature Reserves (NNRs). At Goss Moor, Stoborough Heath, Martin Down and Wyre Forest NNRs local groups with a range of disabilities including autism, visual impairments, learning difficulties and dementia are being invited on to the reserves to explore and express their views on what improvements would enhance their visitor experience of the site.

The work is being carried out using the Sensory Trust's unique methodology to engage with these groups to help inform improvements in the provision of outreach services on these sites. The learning from the pilot will be shared across more NNRs at an event in June. The work is being carried out in 11/12 and 12/13 and the impacts and outcomes will be reported next year.

### **Talking Trail at Aston Rowant NNR**

An audio and sculpture trail is being developed at the Oxfordshire National Nature Reserve with £43,000 of Heritage Lottery Fund money. The NNR will be working with Outdoor Culture – a not-for-profit company that connects people with the landscape through the arts, learning and play.

The Talking Trail, to be located in the reserves beech woodland, will consist of eight sculptures made from natural sustainable materials some of which will be harvested from the site by volunteers as part of the coppice programme. Each sculpture will have an audio player embedded within it which will offer a choice of eight sound recordings to listen to, making the experience more real and accessible for visitors. The trail will be unique to Aston Rowant NNR and will focus on the key species, the geology and the archaeology of this special site – its hidden heritage.

The NNR has a lot of support from the local community and who better to design new interpretation for the site than the people who know it best! A range of community groups, volunteer groups and schools linked to the site will be invited to a “learning and discovery day”. They will then begin working with sound artists and sculptors to turn their ideas into reality, learning new skills and actually creating the final installations.

Once the trail is completed it is hoped to establish a Friends Group to maintain and promote the trail. Once the trail is in situ we will update on how it is impacting the reserve.

Find more information about the trail [here](#) and for information about Aston Rowant NNR [here](#)

### **Phoenix Futures Conservation Therapy - rehabilitation for drug and alcohol addiction**

Humberhead Peatlands NNR hosts activity as part of the Phoenix Futures Barnsley Widening Horizons Conservation Therapy Programme (CTP). Service users from a

background of drug and alcohol addiction or prostitution come to the NNR and carry out practical tasks providing a day in the fresh air and in an environment that will complement their rehabilitation rather than encourage old habits.



The group has built two dipping platforms and a viewing platform off the Easy Access/Disabled route on the NNR – all of which are Disability Discrimination Act compliant under the Equality Act. These have encouraged a wider range of NNR visitors to come and enjoy the reserve and allowed school and disabled groups to pond dip and to extend learning opportunities.

The group also undertake other habitat management tasks on the reserve. They are encouraged to take the John Muir award. Participants really appreciate the benefits.

“I enjoy everything about CTP even when it rains! I can’t wait till Wednesday comes around”.

“It gives me peace of mind and helped build my confidence, I feel the work is very rewarding both for me & the public who will hopefully enjoy the platform for years to come”.

“I didn’t just enjoy going, I loved it!”.

“The peaceful environment really helped calm my soul each week and I could forget my problems for a few hours”.

Find more information on Humberhead Peatlands NNR [here](#)

## **Woodworks – mental health rehabilitation**

*The Woodworks Group* is a mental health rehabilitation programme run by MerseyCare Trust (a joint initiative between Sefton Council and Southport & Ormskirk NHS Trust). Two permanent full time staff are funded to support the group and run the community rehab programme.

The group provides rehabilitation from mental illness through therapeutic care in the community, using the medium of woodworking and practical manual skills. The group use Ainsdale Sand Dunes and Ribble Estuary NNRs to provide additional therapeutic care through contact with the natural environment – biophilia.

The group provide the NNRs with practical volunteering support, delivering a number of environmental outcomes (eg scrub clearance, tree planting, fencing, maintenance of visitor infrastructure etc). The group carries out weekly work days across the two NNRs.



*“If it wasn’t for the conservation work I do and helping prepare meals at church I don’t know where I would be”* Danny, age 24.

*“When Monday morning comes around I leap out of bed because I know I’m off to work on the nature reserve, other mornings can be a bit more difficult”* Paul, age 42.

“The Woodworks group are a real team, some of them have worked together for years and are quick to welcome new participants and make them feel at home. They work like Trojans and have an amazing set of skills and experience to offer the NNRs.” Dave Mercer, Senior Reserve Manager.

Find more information on Ainsdale Sands NNR [here](#) and Ribble Estuary NNR [here](#)

## **Diversity in Access to Nature Projects**

### **People and the Dales – engaging with BME groups**

Yorkshire Millennium Trust set up the *People and the Dales* project to work with groups – including minority ethnic communities – that have little or no positive experience of the countryside. The project enables individuals to take part in fun, active and thought provoking activities in the southern Yorkshire Dales. These positive and enjoyable activities aim to inspire, enthuse and encourage individuals to return independently with family and friends.

Over 3,500 day visitors have taken part in 250 events which have included walks in nature reserves and stunning scenery, craft activities (dry stone walling, willow weaving, felt art) farm experiences (lambing) and fun activities (kite making and environmental games).

The project has learned that to be successful in reaching target groups it must:

- work through key contacts and those who have good links with the target communities.
- use existing links to establish contacts and relationships.



- attend community events to market the project.
- develop strong partnerships with other providers.
- offer activities that are tailored to meet the needs and interest of individual groups.
- be flexible and design activities that can be adapted to meet the needs of any group.
- provide a diverse range of activities that emphasise enjoyment and new, interesting and stimulating experiences.
- not underestimate the time needed for reaching out, recruiting groups and planning activities.

When working with minority ethnic groups it was most successful to:

- give people as much information as possible in advance to prepare for their first visit to the countryside – photographs and personal testimonies are useful.
- make appropriate clothing and items such as walking boots and waterproofs available to groups when they arrive.
- work through school liaison workers and Children’s Centres as this helps to reach people who are not members of groups.

The project’s important messages are:

- it takes time to build confidence among key contacts. These individuals are critical to the success of the project as they ‘get people on the bus’. They help people overcome the barriers to taking part.
- even after attending training some group leaders may not feel able to return and lead a group of their own. This may be due to factors such as confidence, lack of funds and lack of transport.
- group leader weekends offered to the key contacts and group leaders ‘give something back’ to this vital group of people.

*“It was the first time I have experienced the countryside in the UK after living 20 years in England!” (Bangladeshi woman)*

*“I thought I was in my country - when I came here today I found four plants in the field which I cook in my country”*

Find more information about the People and the Dales project [here](#)

## **Get out There! in London – working in deprived communities**

*Get Out There!*, run by Hammersmith Community Gardens Association, trains adults from disadvantaged backgrounds (such as homelessness and long term unemployment) in environmental management techniques. Participants develop social skills, confidence and practical skills with many going on to work as volunteers or undertaking further training. One of the project beneficiaries tells his powerful story:



*“Brought up in foster care, I left school at 16 and got an office job which I turned into a career in the court service for about 20 years. Private life got out of control due to social life with the more ‘bohemian’ elements which led to recreational drug use which led to hard drug addiction, family break up, loss of career, bankruptcy, homelessness, complete loss of self confidence and self worth.*

*I was starting to ‘turn a corner’ and had engaged with drug and housing services. It was decided that one tool for helping me to progress was to find activities to stimulate my interest in life – my key worker at Broadway Housing showed me a leaflet and website for Get Out There! and I applied. I admit that initially I was attracted to the free lunch and free boots!*

*Once the course started, I quickly discovered that the more I attended, the more I enjoyed it. Apart from the obvious benefits of fresh air and exercise, I rediscovered my deep seated love of nature and the environment. I also found myself wanting to learn again. The things that I enjoyed about the course made a dramatic difference to my life. I very quickly started feeling physically better. My age and the years of self abuse and stress had taken their toll but the course put a real spring in my step.*

*I found the course personally rewarding and got a real sense of achievement which did wonders for my self confidence. The increase in self confidence and self worth has given me the impetus to carry on addressing my personal problems. I continue to engage with other agencies and I’m now short listed for re-housing and successfully continue to address my long term addiction issues.*

*Since I initially completed the course I’ve been lucky enough to be asked back, first as a mentor and now as volunteer assistant to the course leader. This in turn has continued to boost my self confidence. I’ve been rewarded by the course which has funded me to attend three BTCV training courses. The main thing is that I’m now in a position and frame of mind to continue to volunteer even if the course comes to an end; and to continue to learn new skills and gain fresh knowledge. I also dream of maybe gaining paid employment in the field.*

*I think doctors and social workers should be able to prescribe attendance on the Get Out There! course to people who’ve lost their way in life as I’m certain that, like me, they’d soon find themselves back on the right path”.*

Find more information on the Get Out There! project [here](#)

## **The Green Academies Project for Young People**

*The Green Academies Project (GAP), run by the National Trust in the West Midlands, started in July 2009 as a partnership between the National Trust, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, Three Estates Youth Project (Birmingham City Council Youth Service) and Bournville*

College. The project was aimed particularly at young people, aged 14-25, providing learning through accredited training, opportunities to participate in community based environmental projects and learning activities, building their confidence to play a role in the project and its structure and ensuring continued delivery of conservation skills training at National Trust sites.

Lessons learned:

- working with the right, but not necessarily obvious, partners has been effective because each organisation brings something completely different to the table and each benefits from the project enough to want to invest in it.
- Outreach work by youth workers has been the best way to recruit young people on the GAP Project. NEET young people who are disengaged and with low confidence are much more likely to respond to a personal invitation by either a youth worker that they trust or their peers.
- Creating opportunities for young people to contribute and not just participate has given them a sense of pride and responsibility for the project eg designing a logo and new GAP work clothing has increased their level of engagement and sense of ownership.
- Seeing professionals (rangers, hedge layers, wood turners) tutoring in their own working environment inspires young people and gives them hope for their future and the skills they are learning.
- The target communities were very disengaged with the work of National Trust and with the natural world in general which is a significant challenge. Working in the target communities to deliver events as well as contributing to existing events has enabled the Trust to gain significant ground in developing a relationship and awareness of GAP and the work of the NT in general.
- This is a new way of working for the Trust and so it was initially hard to get buy in from the whole organisation. It has been essential to tie together the GAP Objectives and the National Trust Strategy and show a clear business case for the work.



### Key Messages:

- New learning and leisure opportunities for young people aged 14 – 25 are valued and needed by our target beneficiaries as evidenced by attendance and retention as well as evaluations by young people and partners.
- Skills learned through GAP by young people aged 14 – 25 have given them the opportunity to support the delivery of events and activities in their local community as young leaders.
- Young people have gained skills that have allowed them to contribute to the development of a new Natural Play Space on National Trust land and will soon replicate this project in their own community at Millennium Green. They have also made other improvements to their local green spaces through an allotment project.
- Some young people have shown a commitment to supporting GAP and representing their peers by supporting the delivery of events, running GAP stalls and presenting the project to the public through a film as part of their involvement in the GAP Forum.

### Discovery Quest - addressing mental health

*Discovery Quest*, run by Julian Housing Support Trust in Norfolk, provides unique, challenging outdoor activities for adults with severe and enduring mental health problems who live in deprived areas of Norfolk.



The group at the summit of Ben Nevis

Discovery Quest works with adults whose mental health difficulties have had a significant impact on the way they manage their lives. This year the team have worked with a group of around 50 beneficiaries with varying needs, providing walks three days a week across Norfolk. The walks have provided a real physical challenge, as well as helping participants to address issues such as healthy eating, smoking and alcohol reduction.

They also help participants gain a greater understanding of the natural environment as Discovery Quest works with the Norfolk Wildlife Trust to provide workshops on Norfolk's coastland, heathland, broadland and woodland, increasing peoples' knowledge of, and interest in, local habitats. The team is working with academics at the University of Essex and East Norfolk's Northgate Hospital to measure the project's impact on emotional and mental well-being.

As part of the six-month programme, participants also undertake a 12-day field trip, this year to the Fort William area of Scotland. The group completed a range of activities, the most challenging being climbing Ben Nevis! They also spent five days in Knoydart, one of the most remote and spectacular regions of the UK.

It had a great impact on those that took part and one participant who got to the top of Ben Nevis with the group said:

*"I feel more confident and less depressed. I have been touched by the power of this place. It has given me the chance to sit still and be me, which I don't normally do."*

Participants brought along their friends, family and members of their support teams to celebration walks, to mark the completion of the first six month walking therapy programme, on Sites of Special Scientific Interest owned by Natural England and Norfolk Wildlife Trust. Activities continue in the winter months when the project's Outdoor Activity Leader delivers ten development events for those who have completed the six month programme and want to take part in further training, acquiring skills in mountain group leadership.

Access to Nature has produced four early learning papers for the programme which provide additional case story information. These can be accessed [here](#).

## Diversity in Walking for Health

### Walking for Health for BME groups in Bristol

**Walks 4 Women** in Bristol, is predominantly aimed at Somali women and those from other minority ethnic backgrounds. Indeed, several of the volunteer walk leaders are Somali and Sudanese – and the project began with two of them appearing on the city's Ujima radio station to promote the walks. This was followed by taster sessions organised by the city council, which led to a regular programme of walks taking place in St. Pauls, Bristol – an area of inner city deprivation and high concentration ethnic minorities.

Nicola Ferris, Bristol City Council's Health Walks Development Worker, describes one of the walks:

"It was a real pleasure walking with this group to one of my favourite areas of Bristol – St. Werburghs. We went



for a walk up a hill onto a hidden local nature reserve less than a mile from where most of the walkers live. Half of the group had never been to this place before and all enjoyed the views and experience! I hope the walks programme will introduce the women to many more new places in Bristol they didn't know existed as well as developing friendships."

Find more information on walks in Bristol [here](#)

## National Initiatives

### National Outdoors for All Working Group

A new National Outdoors for All Working Group has been set up bringing together users and providers of services for people living in deprived areas, the elderly, those with physical disabilities, learning difficulties, mental health illness and people from black and minority ethnic communities to work to ensure high quality opportunities to access the natural environment are readily available and meet the needs of all people in from these communities. Natural England chairs the Group and provides the secretariat .

The purpose of the Working Group is:

- to commission robust evidence of the need and priorities for access (in all its forms) to the natural environment, and barriers to access, for people living in deprived areas, the elderly, those with physical disabilities, learning difficulties, mental health illness, and people from black and minority ethnic communities.
- to design innovative projects to improve the provision of existing access services or deliver new services
- to help build new delivery partnerships and, test and evaluate new delivery models.
- to secure funding for evidence programmes or to implement delivery projects.
- to help improve the impact, reach and quality of access services for the diversity sector, striving to achieve consistency of provision across the country.
- to share good practice across the diversity sector and celebrate success

Current membership of the group includes amongst others English Heritage, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, Defra, Woodland Trust, National Trust, Royal Society for Protection of Birds, Fieldfare Trust, Disabled Ramblers, Black Environment Network, Phoenix Futures, Mosaic (Campaign for National Parks), Disability Rights UK, Age UK, MIND, Disabled Ramblers, Riding for the Disabled, Groundwork, Capacity Global, British Waterways, Royal Society for Wildlife Trusts, Disability and Environment Network, FACE, English National Parks Authority Association.

For more information about Natural England's Outdoors for All work contact Sarah Preston [sarah.preston@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:sarah.preston@naturalengland.org.uk)

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