



# Stepping Out, Coventry, Warwickshire

'Stepping Out' was a three year Action Research Project commissioned as part of Defra's Diversity Review in 2004. The project engaged people suffering with poor mental health and their carers in activities linking them to nature and the environment with the hope that they would experience health and therapeutic benefits. The project was hosted by Coventry Carer's Centre and facilitated by Warwickshire Wildlife Trust. 'Stepping Out' introduced a graduated approach, encouraging participants to enjoy the countryside close to their homes, before building their knowledge and confidence to enable them to access the countryside more regularly and independently.

## Key activities

The project offered 241 activities, ranging from walks in local parks & nature reserves to interactive or arts based activities. After a slow start, there was a steady average of six participants attending each trip. Ages of participants ranged from five to sixty-five.

The most popular activities were the arts focused activities.

"I was brought up in India; I've never done painting, nothing like that. I enjoy everything when I come here, it's very relaxing."

Project participant

## Key findings

The project found that one of the main barriers to accessing the countryside was transport, so a minibus pick up point was set up in Coventry City Centre.

After the first year the graduated approach was abandoned, as participants were willing to access sites further afield relatively quickly.

*“Parks and green spaces in the inner city can be scarier than bigger sites further afield. The perception of safety can come more from having the facilities and security of a formal site, rather than from being in familiar surroundings.”*

**Project Officer**

‘Stepping Out’ engaged more carers and people with poor mental health to the outdoors and helped to address their lack of confidence in using the countryside.

*“I have a fear of going out on my own, it’s good to go places in a group...it’s more fun.”*

**Project participant**

Participants with poor mental health cited the therapeutic benefits of being part of the project.

*“Sometimes I don’t fancy going and yet, when you come back you think wow that was fantastic. I look forward to it every week, very invigorating!”*

**Project participant**

## Conclusions

In its first year participants reported the therapeutic and social benefits, which appeared to be from the group work rather than the location. In subsequent years, the group work was still valued but there was also considerable value attached to the natural environment.

*“I know I already have got a lot out of it. It stops you going in because you’re literally going out.”*

**Project participant**

Through ‘Stepping Out’, Young Carer’s Week developed, involving a week of activities for young carers to get out and try different things. Young Carer’s Week continues to be hosted by the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust. One young person established an outdoor art group and another from urban Coventry now attends agricultural college.

## More information

For details on this and all the Action Research Projects visit [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)

For information about the Diversity Review and the Action Research Projects contact:

Melanie Maylen, Natural England

T: 0300 060 1698 M: 07827 833665 [melanie.maylen@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:melanie.maylen@naturalengland.org.uk)

Defra continues its work to increase the number of people from under-represented groups who access the natural environment through its ‘Outdoors for All’ programme. For more information contact:

Helen MacVicker, Natural England

T: 0300 060 4232 M: 07887 822652 [helen.macvicker@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:helen.macvicker@naturalengland.org.uk)

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