



# Together for Change Forum | Fforwm Gyda'n Gilydd dros Newid

## Communities and the Green Agenda | Cymynedau a'r Agenda Werdd

### People, Nature and Wellbeing

## Event Report

By Amy Gill

### Date and time

Friday 23 July, 10:00-11:50

### Purpose

Third in the Together for Change Forum Series, the 'Communities and the Green Agenda' online event explored the relationships between nature, people and wellbeing. Aimed at communities, third, public and private sector professionals, researchers, practitioners, planners and managers. It included four presentations on a green model of wellbeing and the relationship between our natural environment and people. There was also group discussion on the role of nature in community wellbeing and how this can be further encouraged and supported in a post-pandemic world.

### Agenda

10:00 **Welcome and Introduction** - Jessie Buchanan, Together for Change

10:10 Presentation: **Nature at Work** - Suzi Tarrant, Ecotherapist

10:25 Presentation: **Greening a Community** - Jeremy Wadia, Ecodewi

10:35 Questions

10:40 Break

10:45 Discussion groups and feedback on the following:

- Share something you are involved in or have participated in that works well.
- Is nature and wellbeing important in Welsh policy and how could its profile be raised?
- How can we ensure that opportunities to access nature are as inclusive as possible?

11:05 Feedback from discussion groups - Chaired by Sue Denman, Together for Change

11:15 Presentation: **Building a Knowledge Base on Wellbeing and Local Assets** - Amy Gill, Together for Change

11:25 Presentation: **The Great Outdoors - A largely untapped Resource for Life** - Tom Moses, Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority

11:40 Questions

11:45 Closing remarks - Sue Leonard, Chief Officer Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services

11:50 Vote of thanks - Sue Denman, Together for Change

### Attendees

There were 55 attendees from the public, private and third sectors.

## Key points of group discussion

Following the presentations, attendees were divided into small break-out rooms to discuss the following:

### **Share something you are involved in or have participated in that works well.**

Group discussion of this question revealed not only things that have worked well, but also ideas about what we should be doing, and areas for improvement. Groups included organisation representatives, group facilitators and residents setting up community groups, among others.

## Funding

- The value of funding and keeping it solution focussed.
- Make sure people understand what 'Social Value Measurement' really means.
- Change ways of funding health; there is a need to transform the health model with respect to wellbeing. This great work cannot be done without volunteers, but it requires structure and support for volunteers as well as funding.

## Access

- One speaker mentioned that their community lacks safe exercising space, but that they are trying to find land to create a space.

## Evaluation

- Why do good projects stop? For example, the St. Dogmaels Orchard project.
- People want to evaluate and measure the impact of their projects in order to be taken seriously and for them to be sustainable, and although the actual project delivery is great, collecting the data to prove [the impact they have on] wellbeing is difficult. To expand on this, a speaker from West Wales Walking for Wellbeing said the walks are good, but evaluation is a big barrier, with data gathering being a problem.

## Collaboration

- Collaborate and network; do not hold things separately, for example, art and nature/food and nature because everything is connected. Working with this as a fundamental concept is important.
- Collaborate and communicate more, like this event (people agreed on the success of meetings like this and the need to stay connected and share with each other, and expressed that connect platforms should work well) as well as bottom-up approaches because they work well.
- There is a project in Newtown, Powys where 3 acres of land and a bungalow are used for producing food, drink and holding events in a variety of ways, including a community garden, micro allotments, a forest garden and ponds. Advice is available on growing and using the produce (i.e. cooking). An ENRaW project has enabled wellbeing workshops, through collaboration with the project, the Wildlife Trust and an art gallery. It was also enabled by an asset transfer, which in turn was enabled by co-operation between the county and community council.

## Outdoor projects

- One person has been working with several growing projects over the last 12 months and said that it is amazing to see the difference it makes to people; the pride they take in the garden and growing.
- Another mentioned repurposing grounds into vegetable beds, etc and that there should be recognition that partners can play a key role, and that you don't have to take ideas forward yourself - it is worth looking at existing networks in the community and utilising them to benefit.

- From an OCC therapist working in the Pembrokeshire National Park; online networks exist for occupational therapists. She wrote a feature article in OT news about her work with the National Park and networks.
- It was thought that some people are scared to go outside which is a shame as the outdoors is a healing environment and people are more responsive when they are outside; there is a freedom that being outside allows without doing anything special.
- From Cwm Arian Llantegryn; their wellbeing project has activities including Himalayan balsam and tree planting. They want to create enterprises to bring income in, which is challenging, as can be forming a partnership the local authority. A suggestion was made about time banking, which they had tried, but had found it hard to match offers/requests.

#### Young people outdoors

- From the chair of governors in a local primary school; the head teacher had noticed the difficulty in engaging kids in learning. Changes were made to teaching and it was taken outside instead, using greenery around the school. This outdoor learning and interaction with children has been positive and will be developed in upcoming years.
- From someone working on a former project on a smallholding where children and young people with learning difficulties learnt skills, such as, cheese making and bread making. They also had experience in villages in India helping farmers transition to organic agriculture, and women in particular, to reconnect with traditional medicine.
- As for the future, people would like to see children being 're-wilded' and there is hope that One Planet Development will link with the National Park to use derelict houses to house therapists, clients and children, perhaps for short periods in order for them to reconnect with nature.

#### Outdoor space in the work environment

- From Biophilic; at Swansea Bay University Health Board sites, there are native Welsh flora for wellbeing, and spaces for patients, staff, visitors that are away from the clinical environment. It is a green cocoon and is working very well. There has been no such provision in past, with staff once sitting on bollards amidst rubbish. This has been good to help them during Covid. For the evaluation; 6000 people applied to receive seeds to plant at home, and had to complete wellbeing studies at the beginning, middle and end, using the Warwick Edinburgh scheme, plus extra questions.
- From the Community Connectors project; feedback from connectors shows that planning walks is good for their wellbeing. How can we support our workforce? Helping others helps us too.

#### Prescribing projects

- From the Health Board; nature wellbeing prescribing project with 9 providers in the Caerphilly area, which involves GPs and psych wellbeing practitioners. They worked with the Welsh Government on VRP and are working on funding models. How can these projects can be funded?
- From the [Denmark Farm] Conservation Centre in Lampeter; one speaker said "I could be myself" as a new mum and highlighted reciprocal relationships, supporting and being supported by others. Nature helped.
- Art, food and nature projects being delivered in nature. Do these workshops improve people's wellbeing? It is not eco-therapy, it is green social prescribing. The speaker mentioned plans for this to develop over the next two years when funding comes through.
- There is a concern that there may be a link between a reduced connection with nature and increasing violence.

## Is nature and wellbeing important in Welsh policy and how could its profile be raised?

### Need for joined-up policy

- Policy is important; it dictates where funding will be directed, but the two elements could be interwoven better. Some good examples were green travel, the M4 relief road not being built over the Gwent Levels, and the National Forest. It is also working better across departments, for example, between National Parks and mental health services.
- However, many agreed that it could be better; policy ambition doesn't always reach every layer of policy making and delivery and it doesn't always get put into practice.
- Nature and wellbeing is given lots of air time in Welsh policy, but there are questions over whether it filters down as it should, effectively. For example, with the Future Generations Wellbeing Act; Sophie Howe is working on this with housing developments etc, but there is a time lag/disconnect; we need to make the connections. There needs to be an integrated wellbeing journey.
- Land access for growing is a policy issue and it is greatly needed. Local authorities and highways have land that could be used for being in nature, such as cycling and walking, and this is not happening enough. The issue of maintenance costs need to be brought to the public for resolution.
- Policy silos need to join up, for example, health and nature. From the Older Peoples' Commissioner for Wales office; looking at what an age friendly community means and the holistic approach that it needs. The role of the green environment in helping people age well; it is important that the green environment plays a role within all policies, not just those that are promoting a green agenda. We must recognise it in all areas of life and use it as an element in areas where it might not be considered key, like involving nature for people recovering from illness or even having green spaces within visibility which enables a quicker recovery.
- Helping people remain active builds independence and confidence. It is easy to see how to move between access and creating a healthy community.

### Planning and Funding

- Can bio-diversity be encouraged in the planning stages? For example, inclusion in LDP.
- There is a 'blood bath' when new funds come up. Invest in rather than compete.
- We need one voice. This way, we can come together to knock on the door much louder and make it Wales wide, not just county wide.
- How do we share our findings wider and further?
- Translating policy into practice is helped by us sharing stories, like at this event.
- Welsh Government and beyond needs to see the importance of health and wellbeing and how we can influence change.
- The environment and wellbeing health are tokenistic, need structure and are not usually mainstream enough (for example, plastic bags, which was a fringe issue, but managed to become mainstream); the Welsh Government do not see it as central and it always loses out to economic development. The funding structure is last minute with no time to plan and is short-term. There is a need for long-term funding, and time to ensure funding opportunities can leave a legacy for the future.
- There is need for more outdoor wellbeing and less pills. It needs to be bottom up, coming from communities.
- There are good initiatives, but for small organisations, there is lots of legislation to negotiate and there is a fear of change, which makes it hard to adapt.
- One speaker mentioned Enraw, Welsh Government funded, but another believed this is still seen as a luxury, and is not mainstream.

- It doesn't always need to be funded. Organisations like NT will provide voluntary opportunities anyway. One speaker said this isn't the case in the Valleys, as it is a deprived area.
- Not all organisations have volunteer coordinators to make use of volunteers, which is a key area to target with funds.

### Young people and nature

- Policy such as the Future Generations Act needs teeth and to be scrutinised. How are we holding practices to account and enforcing objectives?
- There were mentions of child poverty in Pembrokeshire and a comment was made that children get less outdoor time than prisoners. We have to consider issues like child poverty, with the children being the future.

### Education

- People would like to see better education for farmers to help them step away from industrial-type farming. This is of particular relevance in the National Park; what is the role of the National Park Authorities in this?
- Is there an element of "jumping on the bandwagon"? For example, climate emergencies were declared by many authorities, but what has happened since?
- At VRP, wellbeing is a key aim. There is a virtuous circle because people then care for the environment, which is providing glimmers of hope.
- N Pk now directed to serve well-being for the first time and there is hope that things are changing.

### **How can we ensure that opportunities to access nature are as inclusive as possible?**

#### Funding

- Funding in order to get projects off the ground and to be sustained. It doesn't matter what policies come out if the funding isn't there behind them. While some projects will come out at a grass roots level where funding isn't needed, others will require it in order to run workshops, etc.
- Keep good things moving; why do successful things struggle to keep funding?

#### Accessibility

- Having a variety of opportunities to improve networking, not just funders, leads or project workers. Having a mix of expertise across layers of organisations, and opportunities for people to have nature based experiences so commissioners can see what it is like, as it can often be perceived as something pleasant to add on rather than something that adds real value. They may be reluctant to go outside, but the experience may help them realise it's a better way of doing things.
- There are challenges and solutions around inclusivity, such as digital access to events like this. There are people who prefer non-digital methods, and that doesn't detract from their want to contribute.
- There are projects being delivered across the river Severn. It is important to go out and do taster sessions to show people and gain interest so they can join workshops. People tend to stay within their communities, for example, people in social housing on one side of town might not venture elsewhere, so it is about getting these people into places they might not necessarily go and taking it to communities rather than waiting for them to come to you.
- We need an access point for help and information. The GP could be an access point rather than being closed off more than ever.

- Improve awareness; this acts as a barrier in terms of not knowing what exists, for example, young people not knowing about the coastal path, and not knowing the value of what they know is there, the creatures living nearby, etc.
- Understanding how to measure value and benefits, or even how to define what works, such as green prescribing. Lack of knowledge on how to do this acts as a barrier.

### Transport

- Put projects/sites where they are needed most - on the doorstep, where they are not hard to reach and where people can see improvements. People cannot see the benefit when it's out of sight. However, we need to ensure transport links because transport is an issue with regards to inclusion.
- Provide travel costs and PPE for volunteers.

### Participation/Engagement

- Include both ends of developmental spectrum; the old and the young
- It is lucky that there are some willing people in schools with a nature background who are ready for outdoor learning. A barrier has been getting some children back outdoors after lockdown.
- Include BAME communities and think about what role nature plays to all people.
- There is a need for a mixture of methods and to focus on not only who we include, but how
- Make sure people are involved continually rather than consulted with and forgotten.
- Remember mobility and see who needs what when designing new things. Give people the chance to shape and design improvements.
- We all need to follow the participation standards.
- We want to share ideas and come together like today.

### Communication

- Ensure communications is given at a level that people understand.
- Make extra effort to have advocates within and reach out to marginalized groups, for example, 'make it safe for just you to come'.
- Look at the barriers locally; a local context is vital.

### Other

- Improve the standards for green space and gardens in new builds and developments.
- Address practical issues such as footpaths, transport and money.
- Consider day opportunities, older people and people with learning difficulties. The closure of day centres is a problem.
- Consider in terms of prevention
- Every surgery should have the ability to offer green prescribing. One speaker had experience of 'deep listening walking' with people with poor mental health. PAVS was suggested as having examples of this type of work.

### Abstracts of presentations

[Communities and the Green Agenda - Programme](#)

[Communities and the Green Agenda - Presentations and Event Recording](#)

### Evaluation of the event

Some main themes arose from the group discussions, particularly with regards to funding, accessibility, evaluating projects, the importance of collaboration and continued engagement, young

people, and joined-up policy. The groups mentioned what works well, such as community growing projects, teaching outdoors, creating spaces for people to enjoy nature in the work environment and green social prescribing. There were also suggestions about what we should be doing, such as changing how health is funded, ensuring communities have safe outdoor spaces, and collaborating, networking and communicating with each other more. It was generally believed that improvements need to be made in some areas, for example, there were several comments highlighting that data collection and measuring value in order to evaluate is difficult, and that we need to encourage people, especially young people, to get outside. A lack of awareness of opportunities to engage with nature acts as a barrier to inclusivity, however this could potentially be resolved through better transport, more accessible project locations and advocating for marginalised groups.

Feedback:

*"Thanks, it was a wanted meeting."*

*"It was very interesting and inspiring."*

*"Great event today."*