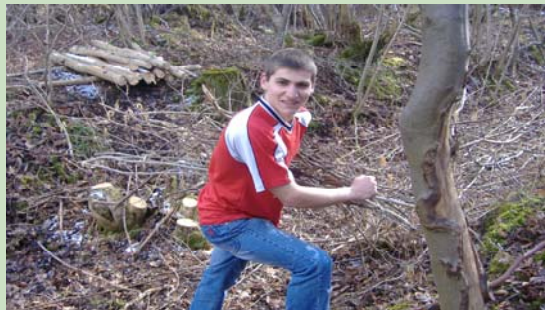


Wye Wood Project

Tackling social deprivation in rural Herefordshire



The Wye Wood Project is an impressive exemplar of how to tackle the many social challenges associated with rurally disadvantaged communities - and get results. Based in rural Herefordshire and South Shropshire, where pockets of social deprivation present issues of ill health, social exclusion, unemployment and barriers to local economic growth, the Project seeks to provide solutions through the utilisation of woodland resources. By putting trees, communities and business at the heart of a sustainable partnership, the Wye Wood Project has enabled local people to improve their health and well-being through exercise programmes, skills training, and conservation work, and to benefit from the uplifting experience of spending quality time in the natural environment.

The Wye Wood Project illustrates a model for sustainability that could be replicated throughout the UK.

objectives

- To link organisations and locations to make the most of locally available resources and skills, and obtain and share best value from these limited resources
- To identify and work with 'hard-to-reach' individuals – the long term unemployed, those with low skills, ex-offenders, people with poor physical and mental health, the socially isolated, ethnic minorities, the disabled and those who lack access to facilities and the countryside
- To provide access to training and employment opportunities, develop a portfolio of Open College Network (OCN) qualifications relevant to the region and meet the needs of local employers
- To increase awareness of local woodlands for recreation and provide opportunities for local communities to improve their health and well-being in a natural environment
- To increase levels of rehabilitation programme completion
- To engage in good woodland management practice and enhance habitats for wildlife

actions

- A Health Development Worker (HDW) was appointed to liaise with local organisations to promote a greater understanding of the health benefits of woodland. Following consultation, an audience-led programme of events and regular activities including 'walking for health', coppicing and coppice craft workshops, buggy walking and games, building benches, exercise classes and conservation days, was developed
- Interest in the project was generated through media press releases, events, leaflets, approaching local GP practices, health visitors and contacting existing community groups
- Two initial volunteers trained as walk leaders under the Walking the Way to Health scheme, which increased to three regular volunteers and two occasional ones

achievements

- 45 people attended one or more event, and 22 attended over four events. Surveys revealed that participants 'felt fitter', liked 'doing something constructive', felt more confident, relaxed, experienced improved sleep, and found that the social aspect motivated them to return each week.
- Attendance at each public event ranged from 10 – 150, totalling 300 in all. The events were an effective awareness-raising and networking exercise. Most participants, from within a 10 mile radius, were unaware of access to the woodlands prior to the Project
- Participant success stories:
 - A man in his thirties, who was unemployed for eight years and apathetic about the jobs market, found that coppicing "[gave] structure to my life". His enthusiasm for outdoor work grew, he gained two qualifications and with the new-found confidence to share his skills he secured a part time job working with young people
 - A 75 year-old widow, living in a rural village, expressed feelings of loneliness, negativity and physical "stiffness". By attending a Gentle Exercise Group she reports feeling more active, better after socialising with the group, and has rekindled former relationships with other people in the village.



context and continuity

- The *Choosing Health* White Paper (DH, 2004) outlines a new approach to public health, with a focus on tackling health inequalities amongst those with poorer physical and mental health, usually at the lower end of the social scale and enabling them to make healthy lifestyle choices (for example, a programme of health trainers)
- Evidence suggests that trees, woodlands and green spaces have a positive impact on people's health and well-being – *Health and Well-being: Trees, Woodlands and Natural Spaces* (P Tabbush and L O'Brien, 2002); *Trees and Woodlands: Nature's health Service* (L O'Brien, 2005)
- In the Project area approximately 19% of people live in poverty in rural areas. The most common factor relating to rural disadvantage is access to services and facilities (such as health and education) and advice. South Wye is the most disadvantage area of Hereford City. Average earnings are at least 12% less than the West Midlands average. 16.2% are lone parents
- The Wye Wood Project, comprises: *Wye Wood – Newton Coppice (2003-04)* a £29,000 pre-project pilot to identify potential for: development skills and employment opportunities, transferable skills training, a local sustainable supply chain of timber, improved health of community members and increased visitors; *Wyrendee Wood (04-07)* focused on first level training –coppicing and green wood-working (OCN level 1), survival skills, woodland products and the Basic Expedition Leaders Award (British Sports Trust); *Wider Wood (05-06)* emphasises health improvement
- *Wye Wood IV* will look at progression routes and tighter integration between partners, and the development of social enterprise

quotes

"This has given me the ability to get out of the gym and do something I enjoy. I like being outside...I can walk much further now as my angina is better...I believe exercise is as important as pills." A member of Wye Wood Walking Group

"This is a good example of partnership working...Health is everyone's business, not just the NHS's, and we have demonstrated how different agencies have an important contribution to make in health improvement." Dr. Frances Howie, Associate Director of Health Improvement, Herefordshire PCT

"One of my main aims was to get people to realise that those great swathes of conifers on the top of the hill belonged to them and they could use them to walk or exercise as this was a public space" Elizabeth Parrott, Health Development Worker, Wye Wood

Partners

| | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Herefordshire Sustain Project | |
| The Green Wood Centre | |
| Hereford PCT | Herefordshire Council |
| Shropshire PCT | LSC |
| The Probation Service | Diocese of Hereford |

Funding

| | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|
| | Total: £49,000 |
| Forestry Commission - West Midlands | £20,000 |
| Forestry Commission - National | £15,000 |
| PCT Herefordshire | £4,000 |
| PCT Shropshire | £4,000 |
| West Mercia Probation Service | £6,000 |

lessons learnt

- Making contact with community members via existing groups was a slow process. The focus switched from audience-led, to product-led. 'One-off' events, whilst successful, did not attract inactive people, a more tailored referral system worked far more successfully
- The HDW found that working in partnership with one very enthusiastic community worker and focusing on sign-posted individuals who represented the ultimate target audience was more fruitful than approaching a number of organisations and trying to target too many people at once.
- Overcoming practical challenges to developing activities for the user groups including lack of transport, the timing of activities (ie, the young were only available in the evenings) and staffing