



Cysylltu Pobl, Natur, a Lleoedd **Connecting People, Nature and Place**

Ynys Môn | Anglesey

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Crynodeb Gweithredol

Rhagorodd y prosiect Cysylltu Pobl, Natur, a Lleoedd drwy Sgiliau a Hyfforddiant a gynhaliodd Coed Lleol / Small Woods (CLSW) ar ei dargedau, yn ogystal â sicrhau amrywiaeth o ganlyniadau cadarnhaol ledled amrywiaethau o raglenni o fis Medi 2023 i fis Chwefror 2025. Gyda'r bwriad o hyrwyddo llesiant cymunedol, iechyd meddwl, a chysylltiad mwy clòs â natur, llwyddodd y prosiect i fodloni ei holl dargedau, a rhagori arnynt, gan gyflawni ymgysylltiad sylweddol ac effeithiau mesuradwy i gyfranogwyr. Gwnaeth cyfanswm o 477 o oedolion a 539 o blant gyfranogi mewn o leiaf un sesiwn, gydag 1,859 o ymgysylltiadau unigol ar draws yr holl weithgareddau. Mynychodd dros 60% o'r cyfranogwyr ddwy neu ragor o'r sesiynau. Ymysg y rhaglenni oedd sesiynau wythnosol, cyrsiau llesiant misol, hyfforddiant achrededig a hyfforddiant heb ei achredu, a digwyddiadau'n canolbwyntio ar deuluoedd. Bwriad pob un oedd cynyddu hygrychedd a chyfranogiad mewn grwpiau amrywiol, yn benodol y rheiny sydd mewn cymunedau bregus neu gymunedau dan anfantais economaidd.

Cyflawnwyd y prif dargedau, gan gynnwys:

- **Hyfforddiant a Gwirfoddoli:** Cyfrannodd 58 gwirfoddolwr at 141 o gyfleoedd gwirfoddoli, gan ragori ar y targed ymgysylltiad gwirfoddolwyr. Yn ychwanegol, enillodd 83 o oedolion gymwysterau neu fynychu sesiynau hyfforddiant.
- **Iechyd a Llesiant:** Dangosodd asesiadau cyn ac ar ôl y rhaglen bod gwelliant amlwg yn iechyd meddwl nifer o gyfranogwyr, gyda chynnydd cyfartalog o 3 pwynt ar y raddfa SWEMWBS, gan fodloni'r targed ar gyfer gwella llesiant.
- **Cysylltiad â Natur:** Adroddodd gyfranogwyr cynnydd sylweddol mewn gweithgareddau'r awyr agored, gydag ymweliadau mwy rheolaidd i goetiroedd. Llwyddodd y prosiect hefyd i gyrraedd 539 o blant a 81 o staff ysgolion trwy amrywiaeth o weithgareddau, gan gynnwys sesiynau blasu a rhaglenni'n seiliedig ar ysgol, gan fodloni'r targed ar gyfer ymgysylltiad yr ieuencid.

Ymgysylltodd y prosiect â chynulleidfia eang ac amrywiol, gyda 55% o'r cyfranogwyr o'r ardaloedd mwyaf difreintiedig yng Nghymru, a 37% yn adrodd bod eu hiechyd yn cyfyngu ar eu bywyd bob dydd. Cafodd y prosiect effaith gadarnhaol ar gyfranogwyr, a llwyddodd nifer i ennill sgiliau ymarferol megis adnabod coed, rheoli coedlannau, fforio, a choginio, i gyd yn bethau yr aethant ati i ddefnyddio yn eu bywyd bob dydd. Rhoddodd y digwyddiadau hyn hwb i hyder, ymwybyddiaeth ofalgar, a llesiant meddyliol. Mynegodd nifer o gyfranogwyr yr awydd i barhau i ddysgu, gyda threfniadau i ddilyn addysg bellach, gwirfoddoli, neu addysgu eraill mewn meysydd fel gwylltgrefft a garddio.

Amlygodd adborth yr angen am fwy o hygrychedd, amser i weithgareddau, a hyfforddiant dilynol. Ar y cyfan, rhoddodd y cyfranogwyr sgôr uchel i'r rhaglen (4.6/5 seren), a mynegasant awydd cryf i barhau i ddysgu a chyfleoedd i ddefnyddio eu sgiliau newydd. Mae'r prosiect wedi cael effaith sylweddol ar lesiant cymunedol, cynaliadwyedd, datblygu sgiliau, ac wedi rhagori ar ddisgwyliadau. Fodd bynnag, mae cymorth parhaus a'r angen i ehangu yn angenrheidiol i sicrhau bod hyd yn oed yn mwy o unigolion ledled Ynys Môn yn elwa o'r buddion hyn.

Executive Summary

The Connecting People, Nature, and Place Through Skills and Training project, run by Coed Lleol / Small Woods (CLSW), exceeded its targets and delivered a range of positive outcomes across various programmes from September 2023 to February 2025. Designed to promote community wellbeing, mental health, and a deeper connection with nature, the project successfully met and surpassed all its targets, achieving significant engagement and measurable impacts for participants. In total, 477 adults and 539 children participated in one or more sessions, with 1,859 individual engagements across all activities. Over 60% of participants attended two or more sessions. Programmes included weekly sessions, monthly wellbeing courses, accredited and non-accredited training, and family-focused events, all aimed at increasing accessibility and participation across diverse groups, particularly those in vulnerable or economically disadvantaged communities.

Key targets were achieved, including:

- **Training and Volunteering:** 58 volunteers contributed to 141 volunteer opportunities surpassing the target for volunteer engagement. Additionally, 83 adults gained qualifications or attended training sessions.
- **Health and Wellbeing:** Pre- and post-programme wellbeing assessments showed a marked improvement in many participants' mental health, with an average increase of 3 points on the SWEMWBS scale, meeting the target for wellbeing improvement.
- **Connection with Nature:** Participants reported a significant increase in outdoor activity, with more frequent visits to woodlands. The project also reached 539 children and 81 school staff through a range of activities, including taster sessions and school-based programmes, achieving the target for youth engagement.

The project reached a broad and diverse audience, with 55% of participants from the most deprived postcodes in Wales, and 37% reporting that their health limited their daily lives. The programme had a positive impact on participants, with many gaining practical skills such as tree identification, coppice management, foraging, and cooking, which they applied in daily life. These activities boosted confidence, mindfulness, and mental well-being. Many participants also expressed a desire to continue learning, with plans to pursue further education, volunteer, or teach others in areas like bushcraft and gardening.

Feedback highlighted a need for more accessibility, time for activities, and follow-up training. Overall, participants rated the programme highly (4.6/5 stars) and expressed a strong desire for continued learning and opportunities to apply new skills. The project has had a significant impact on community wellbeing, sustainability, and skills development, surpassing expectations. However, continued support and expansion are needed to ensure these benefits reach even more individuals across Anglesey.

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1. Introduction

1.1. The Connecting People, Nature and Place Project

Coed Lleol / Small Woods (CLSW) partnered with local organizations on Ynys Môn (Anglesey) to deliver outdoor, nature-based activities aimed at improving skills, wellbeing, and resilience, particularly for those distanced from the job market. The project targeted people over 50 and those facing health-related challenges, offering access to green spaces and outdoor learning opportunities. It focused on vulnerable groups, young families, and those most affected by poverty and social exclusion, aiming to promote pathways into “green” careers.

Targeting areas of high deprivation, CLSW worked to address gaps in greenspace provision, particularly in the most deprived communities according to the Wales Indicators of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD). The project aimed to improve accessibility, offering opportunities for participants to engage with nature, enhance wellbeing, and develop green skills.

The project had four key objectives:

- **Improving confidence, skills, and wellbeing through nature-based activities**
- **Supporting mental and physical health through outdoor engagement**
- **Developing green skills and training opportunities**
- **Creating connections between individuals, communities, and nature**

Participants engaged in activities like mindfulness, nature art, bushcraft, and campfire cooking, which built confidence, teamwork, and skills in woodland management and conservation. Both accredited and non-accredited training was provided, enhancing participants' abilities and preparing them for future opportunities.

To break down barriers, especially in rural areas, CLSW worked to improve accessibility to woodland sites and offered a wraparound delivery model, ensuring inclusivity for all. This initiative also encouraged social interaction, reduced isolation, and promoted preventative healthcare through positive group activities.

1.2. UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund is a central pillar of the UK government's Levelling Up agenda and provides £2.6 billion of funding for local investment by March 2025. The Fund aims to improve pride in place and increase life chances across the UK investing in communities and place, supporting local business, and people and skills. The overarching objective of the UK Government Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) is Building pride in place and increasing life chances.¹

¹ For more information, visit <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-prospectus>.

The UKSPF aims to achieve this through three investment priorities:

- Community & Place.
- Supporting Local Business; and,
- People & Skills (including adult numeracy)

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) is an initiative aimed at addressing inequalities and supporting local investment with £2.6 billion allocated by March 2025. The Fund focuses on domestic priorities, such as fostering pride in place, delivering high-quality skills training, and promoting pay, employment, and productivity growth to improve life chances nationwide.

The Fund encourages local places to build on their strengths and address specific needs, emphasising pride in place and improved life opportunities. It complements other funding streams and integrates with mainstream employment and skills programmes to enhance impact and streamline delivery. Councils and mayoral authorities in England, Scotland, and Wales lead the planning and implementation of the Fund's interventions, working collaboratively with local partners and the devolved governments of Scotland and Wales. This approach aims to ensure targeted investments that lead to visible, tangible improvements in both infrastructure and human capital, giving communities more reasons to take pride in their local areas.

1.3. About Coed Lleol/Small Woods

Coed Lleol/Small Woods was established as Coed Lleol (Small Woods Wales) in 2002, the Welsh branch of the Small Woods Association, an organisation supporting woodland practitioners in sustainable woodland management since 1988 (originally as National Small Woods Association). In 2010, Coed Lleol/Small Woods launched a successful woodland health and wellbeing programme, known as Actif Woods Wales. The programme ran for a decade and established the charity's expertise in social forestry, connecting people with their local woodlands and natural spaces, whilst promoting healthy and sustainably managed woodlands. Since that time, Coed Lleol/Small Woods has expanded to deliver woodland wellbeing sessions in most counties of Wales. At time of writing, Coed Lleol/Small Woods is working on the Isle of Anglesey, and in Conwy, Pembrokeshire, Powys, Swansea, Carmarthenshire, Neath Port Talbot, Blaenau Gwent and Rhondda Cynon Taff. Small Woods also delivers social forestry work over the border, in Shropshire.

The woodland wellbeing programmes predominantly engage adults and children who live in areas with high health needs, low employment rates and poor access to services. Additionally, they encourage and support social prescribing by working in partnership with health services and general practice surgeries, which refer people to programmes. Coed Lleol/Small Woods has actively professionalised and promoted social prescribing to outdoor health activities through the development of outdoor health clusters in four areas in Wales: The Dyfi Valley; Pembrokeshire; Gwynedd; and Rhondda Cynon Taff. Coed Lleol/Small Woods also has an established and well-respected training programme for staff, leaders, providers and health professionals to up-skill and embed wellbeing in nature into their everyday practice.

Coed Lleol/Small Woods aims to protect and develop woodlands for current and future generations by encouraging the use of woodland resources for the long-term health and wellbeing of people and the environment – creating healthy woodlands and healthy people.

1.4. Wellbeing in nature and social prescribing

Evidence demonstrates that outdoor, nature-based activity can improve mental health, increase lifespan, and reduce the incidence of chronic disease^{2;3;4;5}. Even a view or suggestion of nature via another sense (e.g. hearing birdsong or other natural soundscapes, smelling natural oils secreted by plants) can have potent effects in indoor environments, reducing stress and anxiety and boosting immune function^{6;7;8;9}. The health and wellbeing benefits of time spent in – and connection with – nature is an area of research that has gained momentum in recent decades, reinforced by many studies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

People who live in greener neighbourhoods, or those close to the sea, report higher positive wellbeing, but only in response to recreational visits¹⁰. Frequency of visits to green spaces, inland waters and coastal areas has been shown to be associated with higher wellbeing and lower mental distress. During the COVID-19 pandemic, greater greenness within a 250m radius of a person's post code was a good predictor of higher levels of mental wellbeing¹¹, suggesting that proximity to nature is an important factor in accessing it.

A longitudinal study of 2.3 million adults in Wales showed that greater exposure to green spaces was associated with reduced risk of future common mental health disorders, especially

² Lovell, R., Depledge, M. and Maxwell, S., 2018, Health and the natural environment: A review of evidence, policy, practice and opportunities for the future, Defra Project Code BE0109.

³ Cervinka, R., Hölzge, J., Pirgic, L., Schwab, M., Sudkamp, J., Haluza, D., Arnberger, A., Eder, R. and Ebenberger, M., 2014. Green public Health – Benefits of Woodlands on Human Health and Well-being. [Zur Gesundheitswirkung von Waldlandschaften]. Vienna, Austria: Bundesforschungszentrum für Wald (BFW).

⁴ Pretty, J., Peacock, J., Sellens, M. and Griffin, M., 2005. The mental and physical health outcomes of green exercise, *International Journal of Environmental Health Research*, 15 (5) 319-337.

⁵ Park, B., Tsunetsugu, Y., Kasetani, T., Kagawa, T and Miyazaki, Y., 2010. The physiological effects of Shinrin-yoku (taking in the forest atmosphere or forest bathing): evidence from field experiments in 24 forests across Japan, *Environmental Health and Preventative Medicine*, 15 (1) 18-26.

⁶ Ulrich, R. S., 1984. View through a window may influence recovery from surgery, *Science*, 224, 420-421.

⁷ Ratcliffe, E., Gatersleben, B. and Sowden, P. T., 2013. Bird sounds and their contributions to perceived attention restoration and stress recovery, *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 36, 221-228.

⁸ Gould van Praag, C., Garfinkel, S., Sparasci, O., Mees, A., Philippides, A., Ware, M., Ottaviani, C., and Critchley, H., 2017. Mind-wandering and alterations to default mode network connectivity when listening to naturalistic versus artificial sounds, *Scientific Reports*, 7.

⁹ Li, Q., Kobayashi, M., Wakayama, Y., Inagaki, H., Katsumata, M., Hirata, Y., and Miyazaki, Y., 2009. Effect of phytoncide from trees on human natural killer cell function, *International Journal of Immunopathology and Pharmacology*, 951–959.

¹⁰ White et al., 2021, Associations between green/blue spaces and mental health across 18 countries, available at: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-021-87675-0>

¹¹ Robinson et al., 2021, Nature's role in supporting health during the COVID-19 pandemic: a geospatial and socioecological study, available at: <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/18/5/2227>

for those living in deprived communities¹². While further research is needed into the causative pathways for the links between nature and wellbeing³, additional health benefits associated with undertaking nature-based activities include statistically significant reductions in diastolic blood pressure, salivary cortisol and heart rate, and statistically significant reductions in the incidence of diabetes and cardiovascular mortality¹³.

Following a consultation period, where over 1,000 stakeholders were engaged, a National Framework for Social Prescribing was released by Welsh Government in December 2023¹⁴. In it, social prescribing is defined as being ‘an umbrella term that describes a person-centred approach to connecting people to local community assets. Community assets include community groups, interventions and services which could be delivered online or in person, as well as buildings, land or even a person within a community’. The intention of social prescribing is to connect people with their community to improve their health and wellbeing.

2. Approach

Between September 2023 and February 2025, Connecting People, Nature and Place project with Coed Lleol/Small Woods delivered a variety of programmes aimed at fostering a connection with nature and promoting health and wellbeing on Ynys Môn (Anglesey) (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). These included monthly gatherings, multi-session programmes, formal training, health professional days, and family programmes, providing opportunities for people of all abilities and backgrounds to participate.

The Connecting People, Nature and Place project, delivered by Coed Lleol/Small Woods, offered a wide variety of activities from 2023 and into 2025, aimed at promoting community wellbeing, mental health, and a deeper connection to nature on Anglesey. The project engaged both adults and children, with 420 adult participants across programmes such as weekly sessions, wellbeing courses, and accredited Agored Cymru courses. These initiatives included 74 weekly Friday sessions, 36 six-week wellbeing courses,

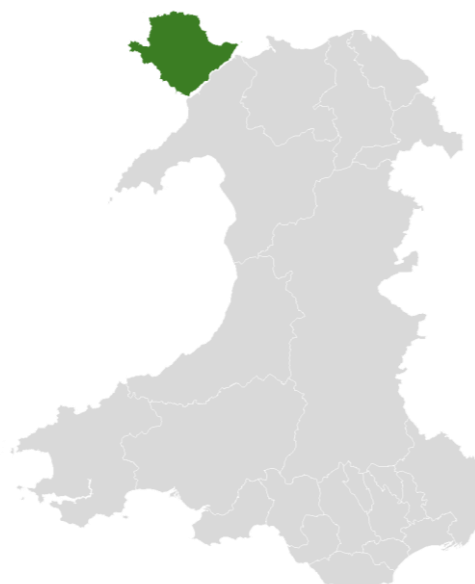


Figure 1 The project ran on Ynys Môn (Anglesey), between September 2023 and February 2025.

¹² Geary et al., 2023, Ambient greenness, access to local green spaces, and subsequent mental health: a 10-year longitudinal dynamic panel study of 2.3 million adults in Wales, The Lancet – Planetary Health, available at: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196\(23\)00212-7/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196(23)00212-7/fulltext)

¹³ Twohig-Bennett & Jones, 2018, The health benefits of the great outdoors: a systematic review and meta-analysis of greenspace exposure and health outcomes, available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0013935118303323>

¹⁴ Welsh Government, 2023, National framework for social prescribing, available at: <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2024-02/national-framework-for-social-prescribing.pdf>

and 12 online training courses, all designed to improve physical and mental health through nature-based learning. Children also benefited, with 539 young participants attending school-based activities and taster sessions.

The project supported individuals facing barriers to employment, focusing on improving skills and wellbeing, particularly for those with complex health needs. Monthly drop-in sessions and seasonal programmes, like foraging, navigation skills, and outdoor crafts, fostered community resilience and wellbeing. Volunteers played a key role, with 58 individuals contributing over 140 hours to support the delivery of the programme. These efforts aim to promote physical activity, preventative healthcare, and a sense of belonging through connection to nature and community.

Table 1 Summary of all adult courses and events, dates and number of registered adult participants

Course Name	Number of Sessions	Dates (From - To)	Total number of adult individual attendees over the programme
Weekly Friday Sessions	74	15/09/2023- 28/02/2025	184
Monthly wellbeing sessions	21	1/12/2023- 13/06/2024	78
6-week wellbeing courses	36	14/03/2024 – 20/02/2025	50
Online training courses	12	7/11/24 – 21/10/24	17
Agored courses	40	17/01/2024 - 20/11/24	76
Health professional day	1	18/07/24	30
Stakeholder day	1	31/05 2024	1
Total Adult Sessions	55		420*
*Note this is total individual adults per course, in some cases some individuals will have participated across multiple programmes			

Table 2 Summary of all child courses and events, dates and number of registered child participants

Course Name	Number of Sessions	Dates (From - To)	Total number of attendees over the programme
Monthly Drop-in Sessions (including family sessions)	1	April 2024	2
Taster sessions	2	August 2024	42
School children	51	19/10/2023 – 27/11/2024	495
School teaching staff	51	19/10/2023 – 27/11/2024	81
Total Child sessions	54		539 (and an additional 81 adults)

Table 3 Summary of volunteer activities

Total number of volunteers over the programme	Dates (From - To)	Total of sessions volunteered
58	December 2023- December 2024	141

2.1. Adult sessions

The project offered a range of adult programmes throughout 2024 and into 2025 to support wellbeing and foster a deeper connection with nature. The project provided 74 weekly Friday sessions from 15th September 2023 to 28th February 2025, engaging 184 participants in activities designed to promote physical and mental health. In addition, 21 monthly wellbeing sessions were held from December 2023 to June 2024, attracting 78 individuals, offering nature-based experiences to enhance personal wellbeing. The project also ran six 6-week wellbeing courses from March 2024 to February 2025, with 50 participants gaining skills and knowledge to improve their health through nature. These sessions included a combination of creative, practical wild skills, mindfulness practices, and outdoor learning, such as foraging, bird language, and natural navigation, providing participants with valuable tools to connect with nature and each other.

2.2. Agored courses and additional training

As part of the Connecting People, Nature and Place project on Anglesey, a variety of Agored Cymru Level 1 accredited courses were delivered to help participants build practical skills and enhance their connection with nature. Some of the key courses included Coppice Products, with sessions in July and August 2024, focusing on sustainable woodland management and creating products from local woodlands. The Nature Health Walk Leader training also ran in November 2024, providing participants with the skills to lead nature-based wellbeing walks that encourage physical activity and mental health support.

In addition to the in-person training, online courses were offered, covering topics such as foraging for plants and crafting with natural materials. Sessions on foraging ran in September and October 2024, focusing on wild food such as berries, mushrooms, and roots. There were also online workshops on nature crafts, including creating seed bombs, dreamcatchers, and wood decorations. These online opportunities allowed participants to learn new skills from the comfort of their homes while staying connected to nature. Additionally, one health professional day was held, with 13 stall holders and over 30 in attendance.

2.3. Children, young people and school events

In addition to family programmes the project engaged 14 different schools and educational groups across Anglesey in a variety of nature-based activities. These included regular sessions and bespoke programmes tailored to different year groups and age ranges, providing opportunities for students to connect with the environment and improve their wellbeing. Schools that participated in the project include Ysgol Rhosneigr, Ysgol Gynradd Amlwch, Ysgol Llanfawr, Ysgol Niwbwrch, Ysgol Pencarnisiog, Ysgol Bryngwran, Ysgol Rhoscolyn, Ysgol Corn Hir, Ysgol Parc y Bont, Ysgol Uwchradd Amlwch, and Dechrau'n Deg/Flying Start Newborough, as well as Coleg Menai Life/Work Skills Department. These schools hosted various programmes, from 4-week and 6-week structured courses to taster sessions, each offering students hands-on experience with outdoor activities like bushcraft, crafts, and environmental exploration. The programmes reached 495 school children and 81 staff

members, creating lasting benefits for both students and teachers through their connection to nature and outdoor learning.

2.4. Volunteering

Throughout the Connecting People, Nature and Place project, a dedicated group of 58 volunteers contributed a total of 141 sessions between December 2023 and December 2024. These volunteers played a vital role in supporting the delivery of outdoor wellbeing activities, engaging with participants, and helping to create meaningful connections between individuals and nature.

2.5. Publicity

Sessions were promoted, and various posters were designed to highlight all the planned sessions. Email updates, including bilingual publicity, were planned for both new and existing partners.

a)



b)



Figure 2 Example of bilingual publicity for a foraging session on Anglesey (Ynys Môn) in both English (a) and Cymraeg (Welsh; b).

2.6. Welsh Language

All posters and promotional materials were created in both Welsh and English to ensure accessibility and inclusivity for a wider audience. Additionally, some of the programmes incorporated Welsh language into the sessions.

2.7. Equalities

All programmes were designed to be inclusive, ensuring accessibility for everyone. Efforts were made to assess the accessibility of the sites, particularly for wheelchair users, with necessary adaptations planned to enable participation for all attendees. Collaboration with referral agencies was actively pursued to support individuals in accessing the programmes. The team worked to establish strong connections with these agencies, promoting inclusivity for all participants. Sites were carefully evaluated, and assessments were completed to review their accessibility, including provisions like accessible toilets, phone signal, and car parking facilities, to ensure they met the needs of all participants.

3. Evaluation Methodology

The majority of the registration forms were completed online, using Microsoft Forms, however a paper version was also available for those that requested it. All registrants agreed to collection and storing of their personal data via a General Data Protection Regulation statement. Where respondents did not want, or could not complete the questionnaire, a member of staff or carer was able to read and gain assent.

3.1. Demographics

The adult registration process included the collection of demographic data to ensure a clear understanding of participants' backgrounds. The data captured key details such as gender, age, and ethnicity, alongside information about employment status and socioeconomic circumstances. Additionally, health-related information was gathered to enable a risk assessment to be carried out, to help tailor the programme's delivery to meet the specific needs and challenges of participants and keep everyone safe. This approach ensured that the project could effectively support a diverse range of individuals while enabling accurate monitoring and evaluation of its impact. While health questions were mandatory, other elements, such as gender and ethnicity, included a 'prefer not to say' option.

3.2. Standardised tools for measuring health and wellbeing

A pre-and post-survey method was utilised to measure changes in adult participants' physical health and mental wellbeing. Surveys were completed with an online link, on paper or over the phone, during the registration process and upon completion of courses.

The three validated measures that were used in the pre-and post-surveys were:

1. the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS¹⁵), to measure the impact on wellbeing.
2. the International Physical Activity Questionnaire – Short Form (IPAQ-SF¹⁶), to measure changes in physical activity; and

¹⁵ <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs>

¹⁶ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3214824/>

3. the EQ-5D-5L health thermometer¹⁷, to measure self-perceived changes in overall health.

3.3. Other measurement tools

A non-validated short measure on nature connection was used to collect pre- and post-course scores, as well as an evaluative questionnaire relating to the Five Ways to Wellbeing. A post-activity survey established the participants' views about the programme and gathered participant ideas on what improvements could be made.

4. Results

In this section we present results from participants that registered on the courses. In addition, further sections use qualitative measures to describe the impact from participants and volunteers.

4.1. Referrals and green prescribing networks

One event titled “Wild Health Event” focused on engaging health professionals with green prescribing networks. Over 30 health professionals attended the event, with 15 stall holders in July 2024. In total, 124 adults were referred from various charities on the Isle of Anglesey that support adults with learning disabilities. These included AgeCymru (n=5), Anheddau (n=12), Blaen y Coed (n=25), Byron Centre (n=22), Cartrefi Cymru (n=7), Integrated Autism Service (n=1), Mencap Mon (n=8), Tal y Sarn (n=1), and Tyddyn Mon (n=43). The majority of these participants attended the *Actif Woods Fridays* events, with an average of over ten sessions attended per participant. In total, 20 individuals attended over 20 events. These sessions lasted between 2 to 4 hours.

4.2. Registration and attendance

In total 477 adults (which includes 81 teachers or school staff) and 539 children attended one or more events or sessions as part of the project, with a total of 3024 adult engagements across all the events. Over 60% (n=287) of the registered adult participants attended two or more events or sessions held by Coed Lleol/Small Woods over the project timeline. Non-attendance included 115 adults who were registered for project could not attend.

4.3. Demographics

4.3.1. Gender, age, ethnicity

The statistics below reflect the participants who attended at least one session of any adult course (n=396), excluding teaching and college staff, and those who registered but did not attend. The majority of participants were female (39%, n=153), followed by male participants (27%, n=109), with 34% (n=134) preferring not to disclose their gender. The age of

¹⁷ <https://euroqol.org/>

participants ranged from under 19 to 80-89 years old, with the largest age group being 30-39 years (13%, n=52), followed closely by 50-59 years (13%, n=52) and 40-49 years (10%, n=40). Ethnically, most participants identified as White British/Welsh (57%, n=226), with smaller groups identifying as White European (2%, n=6), Asian or British/Welsh Asian (1%, n=3), and Other (1%, n=6).

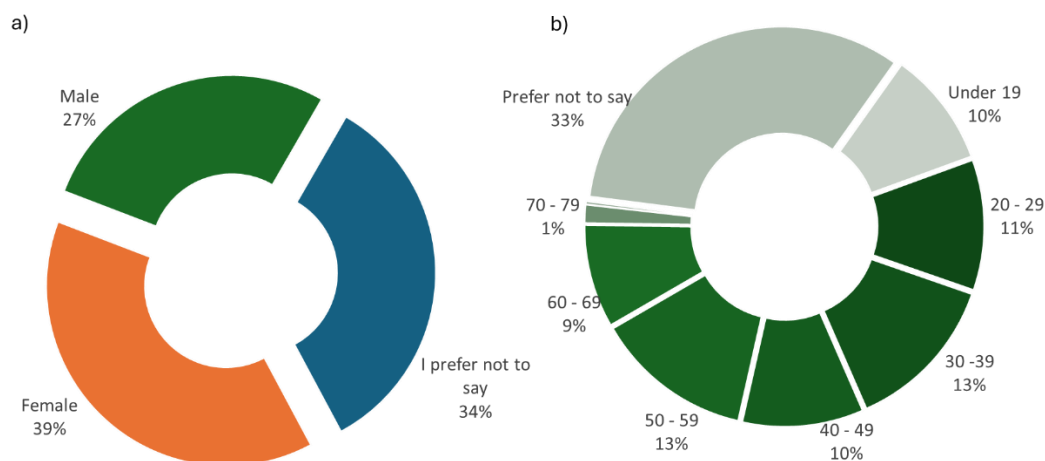


Figure 3 Pie charts showing the a) gender and b) age groups of registered participants

Table 4 Ethnicity of registered participants

Ethnicity	Number of registered participants
White British/Welsh	226
White European	6
I prefer not to say	6
Asian or British/Welsh Asian	3
Other	6

4.3.2. Socio economics

The largest group among participants reported being in paid employment or self-employment (33%, n=88, see Figure 4). The data showed that 49 attendees (18%) were full-time students, while 14 (5%) participants were involved in day service provision or support. Notably, 1% of participants identified as home educators or stay-at-home parents and 1% of participants considered themselves unpaid carers.

The attendees who provided postcodes (n=267) resided in both urban and rural areas, with the majority living in rural locations (82%, n=220), according to the UK Government Rural Urban Classification system. The largest proportion of attendees lived in E2 - Rural: Village in a Sparse Setting (25%, n=68), followed by D2 - Rural: Town and Fringe in a Sparse Setting (20%, n=53), and E1 - Rural: Village (20%, n=53). The remaining participants lived in urban

areas, with C2 - Urban: City and Town in a Sparse Setting comprising 10% (n=26) and C1 - Urban: City and Town comprising 3% (n=7).

Attendees' postcodes were distributed across areas in the first to tenth deciles of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation, which categorizes areas based on deprivation levels. Areas in the first five deciles are the most deprived, while those in the sixth to tenth deciles are the least deprived. In total, 55% of participants (n=147) lived in the most deprived areas (first to fifth deciles), while 45% (n=120) resided in the least deprived areas (sixth to tenth deciles).

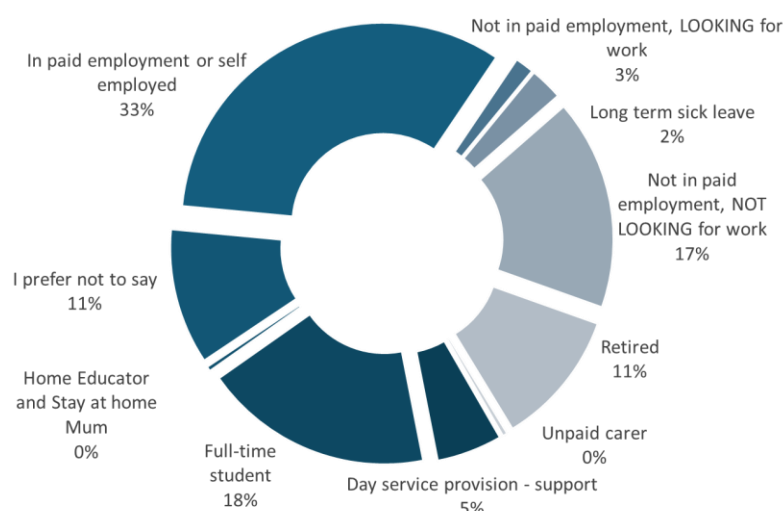


Figure 4. Employment status of registered participants as part of the project



Figure 5 Showing a) Proportion of participants from both urban (red; 18%) and rural areas (green 82%), according to the UK Government Rural Urban Classification system and b) Showing proportion of participants living in the most deprived areas of the UK (red, 55%) based on the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (first to fifth deciles).

4.3.3. Health and wellbeing

Registrants were asked if they felt that their health and wellbeing were limiting their lives, and to list any issues or concerns. Of the 267 participants who responded to this question, 37% stated that their health was either limiting a little (25%, n=68) or a lot (12%, n=31) day-

to-day because of health concerns. In total 49% of participants reported that their health was not limiting, with 13% choosing not to disclose (Figure 6a).

Over three-quarters of attendees (78%) listed health and wellbeing issues or concerns during registration; in some cases, more than one concern was mentioned (Figure 6b). Key health concerns were broadly categorized into: mental health conditions (including anxiety, depression, and loneliness/isolation) – 34%, neurodiversity – 19%, activity levels, mobility, coordination and joints (including back and hip problems, dyspraxia, and hypermobility) – 6%, airway or fatigue-related conditions (including asthma, long COVID-19, fibromyalgia, breathlessness, and fatigue) – 3%, and long-term or chronic conditions (including those associated with the heart, kidneys, thyroid, neurological and other conditions, high blood pressure, and cancer) – 19%. Notably, 3% (n=7) participants specifically mentioned social isolation. 18% of participants (n=49) expressed no health or wellbeing issues.

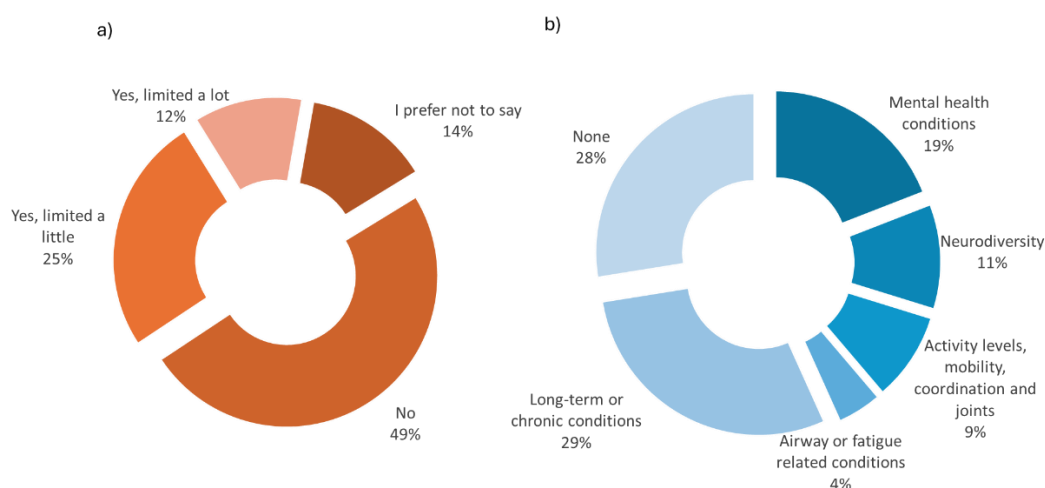


Figure 6 Showing a) How much participants felt their lives were limited because of health concerns, and b) What conditions were their key health concerns.

4.4. Evaluation responses

Of the 396 adult programme participants, 12% (n=46) completed the both the pre- and post-questionnaires online. The pre- and post-questionnaires included non-compulsory questions, which may result in fewer scores that could be compared across the time frames.

4.4.1. Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS)

Across the group that completed the pre-scores, (n=169), the mean SWEMWBS score was 25.6 while across the group the post scores, (n=51), the mean SWEMWBS score was 25.9, showing an no significant increase in wellbeing across the groups (which requires an average of greater than a three-point rise). At the individual level, 24 participants completed all 14 questions (7 before and 7 after). All questions are required to be answered to give a SWEMWBS score at the individual level. We found that in total nine individuals showed significant positive wellbeing scores (greater than a three-point change). In total 11 participants showed no significant difference and four showed a decrease in wellbeing (n=4). Those that showed a significant positive increase, had an average increase of five points of

wellbeing scores difference. See Figure 7 for an illustration of the change in wellbeing scores across the participants.

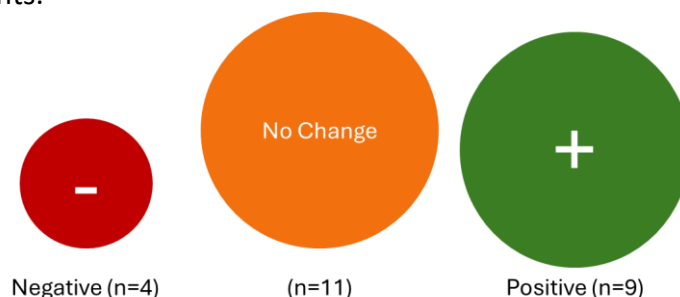


Figure 7 At the individual level, the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS) was used to calculate the percentage reduction or increase in personal wellbeing, based on a sample size of 24 respondents that reported both before and after scores.

4.4.2. EQ-5D-5L Health Thermometer

Health Thermometer responses were collected from 186 participants in the pre-programme questionnaire and 55 in the post-programme questionnaire, with 28 completing both. This allowed for a direct comparison of health perceptions before and after the course. Nine participants reported a negative health change, 15 reported a positive improvement, and four experienced no change. The variability suggests the programme had a generally positive impact, though some participants faced challenges that affected their health perceptions during the year-long course.

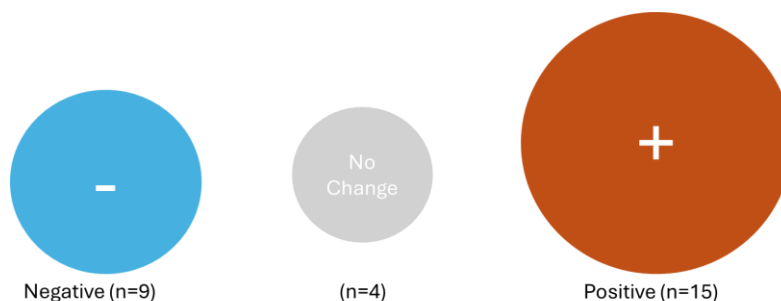


Figure 8 Showing changes in the Health Thermometer Scores across participants.

4.4.3. Nature Connection

In total 34 responses were collected to the nature connection questionnaire with both a pre- and post- response from the same participant (See Figure 9). Participants were asked how much contact they had with woodlands before the course, and how much contact afterwards. Before the programme, 12% of respondents visited woodlands only 2-3 times a year or less, while 41% visited moderately (every two weeks to every month), and 44% visited frequently (weekly or more). After the programme, the percentage of participants who visited moderately or weekly increased, with 82% now saying they visit regularly, and no participants said they “never visit.” This highlights a shift to more frequent visits to woodlands, showing the lasting impact of the project in Anglesey.



Figure 9 Showing frequency of visits to woodland before and after the Connecting People, Nature and Place project, as a percentage.

Additionally, the evaluative questionnaire included three questions about connection to woodlands:

1. Do you think that you will continue to use woodlands or green spaces to improve your health and well-being in the future?
2. Do you feel that green spaces and woodlands are more accessible to you than they were before you started this programme?
3. Please tell us how the green spaces or woodlands are more accessible to you than they were before?

Fifty four percent of respondents indicated that they plan to continue using woodlands and green spaces to improve their health and well-being in the future (See Figure 10). Additionally, 89% of respondents reported that green spaces and woodlands are more accessible to them than before they started the programme. Participants also provided open-text responses, detailing how these spaces have become more accessible, offering insights into their personal experiences and increased engagement with nature (see Figure 11).

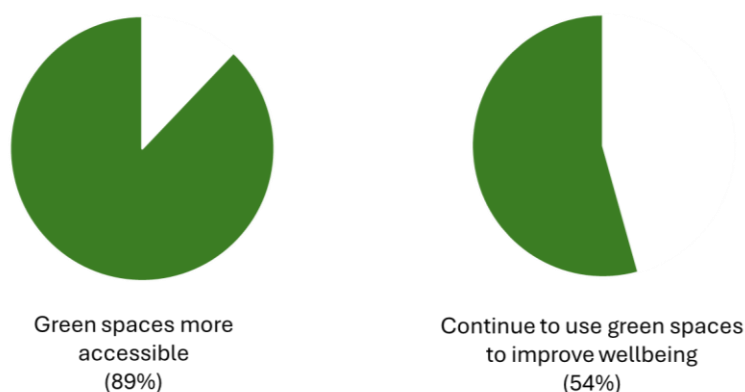


Figure 10 Percentage of respondents that felt green spaces were more accessible after the course, and percentage of those continuing to use green spaces to improve wellbeing.



Figure 11 Showing quotes from participants in response to whether they will continue to use woodlands or green spaces to improve their health and well-being in the future

4.4.4. Five Ways to Wellbeing

A total of 46 responses were collected for the post-programme evaluation, covering eight questions related to the NHS's Five Ways to Wellbeing. All participants (100%) found the course enjoyable. Regarding confidence, 59% felt it improved, while 41% reported no change. On social connections, 36% said they made new friends. For skills and knowledge, 91% agreed they learned something new. In terms of connection to local nature, 88% felt more connected, and 70% felt more part of the local community. On exercise, 30% became more active, while most reported no change. Finally, 31% were motivated to volunteer more. The data reflects positive impacts in enjoyment, skills, and community connections.



Figure 12 Percentage of responses to the Five Ways to Wellbeing-based questions, showing participants that either “Agreed” or “strongly Agreed” to the series of statements about the programme.

4.5. Post-activity survey

As part of the evaluation form, participants were asked to feedback in five ways:

1. If the project has helped you to gain new life skills or practical skills, how have these skills improved or been used in your everyday life? (think about both practical and life skills)
2. How are you going to use the skills and knowledge you learnt to progress to further learning, courses, volunteering or employment?
3. Overall, please tell us if, or how, being part of this programme has inspired any changes in you (for your physical or your mental well-being, or anything else!)
4. Tell us what we could improve on
5. Overall, how would you rate your Coed Lleol/Small Woods experience? (1 star = poor, 5 stars = excellent)

4.5.1. Life skills

Out of 27 responses, participants shared various skills and experiences gained through the project, with many integrating them into their daily lives. Common themes included tree identification, coppice management, foraging, and cooking, with some planning to use these skills at home or in community settings. Many participants felt more connected to nature, gaining confidence and mindfulness through activities like fire lighting, plant identification, and craft workshops. Participants also mentioned improvements in mental wellbeing, with some reporting increased awareness of their surroundings and a deeper understanding of

edible plants and medicinal herbs. The project supported practical learning, and stronger connections to nature, with significant benefits for mental and physical health.



Figure 13 Quotes from participants on the project responding to the open-ended question: "If the project has helped you to gain new life skills or practical skills, how have these skills improved or been used in your everyday life?"

4.5.2. Further development

Participants shared various ways they plan to use the skills and knowledge gained to progress in further learning, volunteering, or employment. Many expressed interest in applying their new skills in their current work or volunteering, particularly in outdoor environments like woodland management, foraging, and nature-based activities. Several participants noted their intention to pursue further education, with plans to look into courses in bushcraft, gardening, and leadership. Some are eager to teach others, whether through workshops, family activities, or volunteering. Others plan to incorporate the skills into personal projects, such as gardening, making crafts, or creating nature-based items. Overall, the responses highlight a strong desire to continue learning, sharing knowledge, and using their skills in both personal and professional contexts.

"I will look at things outside differently and look forward to my walks. I will use my learnt skills in the day centre."

"Useful in my weekly volunteering session"

Figure 14 Quotes from participants in response to the question: "How are you going to use the skills and knowledge you learnt to progress to further learning, courses, volunteering or employment?"

4.5.3. Inspired changes

Participants reported a variety of positive outcomes from the programme, with many noting improvements in both their mental and physical well-being. Spending time outdoors helped reduce anxiety, increase confidence, and promote mindfulness. Many found new inspiration to explore nature further, whether through foraging, woodland crafts, or volunteering. Some were motivated to seek further learning opportunities and change career paths, while others expressed an enhanced appreciation for the environment. Overall, the experience encouraged participants to slow down, be more mindful, and engage more deeply with nature, contributing to their overall sense of well-being.

"I have poor mobility, but I managed all sessions and paths weren't that bad and was very happy that I did the dry-stone walling. That was really good".

"This course has once again lifted my spirits and motivated me to do more within the woodland, volunteering etc maybe looking at some sort of career change."

Figure 15 Quotes from participants in response to "Overall, please tell us if, or how, being part of this programme has inspired any changes in you (for your physical or your mental well-being, or anything else)"

4.5.4. Delivery improvements

Participants suggested various improvements, with a focus on increasing accessibility, offering more time for activities, and providing opportunities for follow-up training or practical applications, such as creating woodland green woodworking crafts with coppiced materials. Some found it difficult to follow live sessions and proposed pre-recording content or providing materials ahead of time to enhance engagement. Others requested better website functionality, especially for mobile users, and the ability to search for local courses more easily. There were calls for more hands-on experiences, including field trips, and an interest in expanding course offerings in the area. Overall, the feedback emphasized the need for accessible content, more practical activities, and additional in-person or online engagement opportunities to further learning.

These responses highlight the value of maintaining the programme while considering small refinements to enhance accessibility. In total, out of five stars, respondents gave on average 4.6 stars.



Figure 16. Participants gave the project an average of 4.6 stars out of five.

4.6. School groups feedback

The Connecting People, Nature and Place project, delivered by Coed Lleol/Small Woods, worked with 495 school children and 81 staff on Anglesey between 2023 and into 2025. Feedback was positive with one school group providing written feedback.

“Can I take this opportunity to thank yourself and your fantastic team for the amazing activities that you organised for our young people back in November. Our pupils have a variety of additional needs; being social issues, behavioural and emotional. Outdoor activities are vital during their school time. Beneficial on many levels being as an incentive for good behaviour, goal setting and as a process to gain new and enriching experiences and therefore in turn improving their self-esteem and confidence. As you know many of our pupils come from an economically deprived community where new experiences are only possible through school-based activities. I know from feedback gained from the groups that attended that they thoroughly enjoyed the activities, and many have asked for more! Thank you again for your expertise, endless patience and your time spent with our young people who really do value the opportunities given. “

5. Conclusions

The Connecting People, Nature, and Place project has made a significant impact on community wellbeing, mental health, and connections to nature, exceeding all targets. The project engaged 477 adults and 539 children, with participants reporting meaningful improvements in their mental and physical health. Notably, 88% felt more connected to local nature, and 70% felt a stronger sense of belonging within their community. A significant 36% of participants made new friends, while 59% reported increased confidence and 91% gained new skills.

The positive outcomes extended beyond personal growth, with 30% becoming more active and 31% motivated to volunteer more. This success demonstrates the programme's strong ability to foster social connections, enhance wellbeing, and encourage skill development.

However, the demand for such initiatives exceeds capacity. Many participants expressed interest in continuing their education, volunteering, or applying their new skills in professional contexts. Despite this, the programme's high satisfaction rate (100% enjoyment) highlights a clear need for further investment and expansion to meet growing demand.

The success of this initiative, particularly in addressing the needs of individuals facing health and social challenges, underlines the importance of continued support. Expanding the programme will allow more individuals, both in urban and rural areas, to benefit from the lasting positive impacts on their wellbeing, sustainability, and connection to nature.

6. Acknowledgements

This project was possible through the Connecting People and Place Shared Prosperity Fund grant. We would like to acknowledge the participants who gave their time to respond to questionnaires so we could evaluate the impact this project has had on their lives.

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