



Wildways Project Final Evaluation Report

1. Project Summary

Wildways has been a three year project in South Gloucestershire which has delivered an innovative programme of natural environment engagement projects in the Priority Neighbourhood communities of Staple Hill, Kingswood and Cadbury Heath engaging over 26,000 people between 2009 and 2012.

The project was funded by a grant of £100,000 from the Big Lottery Fund's Changing Spaces Programme which is managed by Natural England under the Access to Nature Scheme. A project officer (job share) was employed to co-ordinate the project which was managed by the Environmental Projects and Partnerships team within the Community Spaces team of South Gloucestershire Council. Match funding for the project was contributed from the South Gloucestershire Aggregates levy fund (£63,165) and Community Services budget (£15,000).

Wildways was developed in response to the following needs and priorities which were identified following a 6 month consultation in 2008:

- The need to **connect and involve** residents from Priority Neighbourhoods and beneficiary groups with their local green spaces for learning, health and site improvement.
- The need to **widen and increase** access to the local natural environment of South Gloucestershire for these groups and to engage these beneficiaries and communities in their natural environment through innovative and enjoyable ways.
- The need to implement actions to **improve biodiversity** for specific species and habitats as identified in the South Gloucestershire Biodiversity Action Plan.
- The need to assess and **improve site access and interpretation** in Priority Neighbourhood green spaces.

To meet these needs a project plan was developed across 4 broad themes to engage Priority Neighbourhood communities and specific service user groups who through consultation were identified as having limited access to the natural environment. These target groups included children and young people from Priority Neighbourhoods, people of all ages supported through the Breakthrough mentoring programme, people referred for active lifestyle/weight management support, people with disabilities including adult learning disability service users and adults with Alzheimer's dementia.

Wildways was delivered with a variety of partners including the South Gloucestershire 'Breakthrough' project, the Avon Frome Partnership, Walk to Health Initiative, Avon Wildlife Trust, and British Trust for Conservation Volunteers. The project worked in partnership with site friends groups, conservation groups, schools, children's centres and the South Gloucestershire Disability Action Group to improve access, interpretation, engagement and biodiversity at sites across the project area.

The total numbers of people **directly** engaged through the project is **26,224 people (over twice the original target of 12,000)** with many thousands more engaged through site improvements, site leaflets, online and library resources and information. 13,657 residents from Priority Neighbourhood communities have been directly involved in the project, 10,549 children under sixteen, 1294 young people age seventeen to twenty four, 1083 disabled people, 1093 people from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups and 126 regular volunteers.

Wildways has implemented an innovative range of projects under four broad themes as summarised below. All project outcomes have been delivered and most have been exceeded in terms of participation levels and sustained legacy. In addition to the original outputs agreed, the project has been successful at delivering further outcomes (both direct and indirect) and secured significant further match funding for additional project outputs.

Key outputs for each of the 4 themes of Wildways have included:

- **Closer to Nature** – 12 bat walks involving 1050 people, 3 wild food foraging walks engaging 67 people, 15 owl prowls involving 2391 people, 114 people in 7 bird watching walks, 11 hedgehog workshops for Priority Neighbourhood schools, community wildlife gardening and allotment projects, a permanent bat audio trail at Willsbridge Valley Local Nature Reserve, a community River Festival involving 648 people and the launch of a new campaign to tackle the spread of Himalayan Balsam (a non native invasive plant) – the Big Pull!
- **Naturally Active** – 1110 people involved in 66 'Walk Fit' and 'Walk to Health' walks, practical conservation workdays, 11 raptor rambles and bike rides involving 1184 people, the development of a new orienteering trail at Warmley Forest Park, production of 2 site interpretation leaflets, 23 wild play sessions to support priority neighbourhood holiday play schemes involving 639 children and 3 site disability access audits which at Warmley Forest Park was key to the successful securing of £50,000 of further external funding to implement recommendations.
- **Branching Out** - A community Forest Festival involving 300 people, 22 Forest School sessions involving 234 children, 3 tree trekking involving 66 young people and 10 bushcraft sessions for 89 Breakthrough service users.

- **Celebrating Orchards** – 3 Community apple days involving 2,443 people, 3 wassailing events involving 443 people, establishment of 12 community orchards and an orchard heritage research project.

2. Project Evaluation

Throughout the project, feedback was gathered from all stakeholders involved using a range of methods relevant to each group as identified in the Wildways Evaluation Action Plan developed at the start of the project.

Stakeholders included:

- Priority Neighbourhood (PN) residents attending events
- Children and young people attending Forest School, bushcraft and wild play sessions
- Teachers, youth leaders, community centre and service user support staff
- Project Partners – Breakthrough Project, Walking to Health Project, Avon Frome Partnership, Active South Gloucestershire, Community Spaces Team and local groups

Photographs with image permission were also been taken to document and evaluate the project.

The event evaluation postcard design developed by Wildways is being used to gather feedback from public community events across the Authority and the Wildways Evaluation Action plan has been used as an example of exemplar evaluation practice by the Council.

3. Evaluation Findings

Samples of evaluation feedback from project participants and partners:

3.1 Project participants

In order to capture feedback from participants in relation to the agreed project outcomes, participants were asked the following questions via postcards, questionnaires and interviews:

- *What did you most like/enjoy about today's event?*
- *Did you learn anything today at this event?*

'What did you most like/enjoy about today's event?' - participant feedback

- Dawn Chorus Walk 2012 (23 participants 5am!)

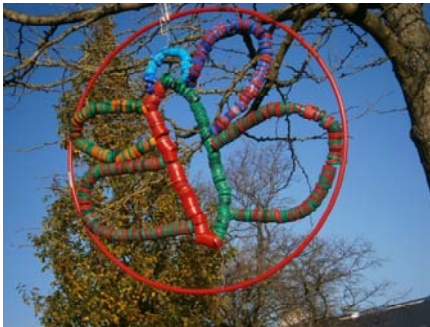


'I've got a list of things I want to do before I die. Hearing the dawn chorus is one of my things so when I heard about this on the radio I knew I had to come. Thank you so much'

Participant on dawn chorus walk

- Tree Dressing 2011

Tree Dressing workshops and public tree planting event in Kingswood Park involving local schools, the public and the Sure Start Dad's group.



'This was great - we've never done anything like this before. I wish you could stay longer.'

Local child from Kingswood Priority Neighbourhood



'Thank you so much for a lovely morning. The families really enjoyed it and we had lots of positive feedback and I have written a short bit about it for the Kingsforest community newsletter'

Kingswood Sure Start Centre manager

- Apple Day events

'I've lived here for 40 years. I never knew this place was right on my doorstep. I'll bring my grandchildren - next week. Thank you so much for showing me this wonderful place.'

Grandmother on first visit to Grimsbury Farm attending Apple Day event

- **Wild Play sessions**

'This is my most fun day and it keeps getting funner. Can't you come every day?'

Kingsmeadow Playscheme

- **Bushcraft projects**

'I like being outdoors – I feel more relaxed and you can be yourself. I liked making new friends and learning how to whittle'

Breakthrough service user age 14

'Enjoyed everything, working with friends as part of a team. Loved the camp fire and nettle tea (which I have now taken up)'

Breakthrough service user age 21

'Learning new skills with an enthusiastic group of people was amazing! It was a great team building/family building experience I was privileged to be a part of. I enjoyed mixing with a team of young people and enjoyed doing something I would not otherwise have done and loved every minute!'

Breakthrough service user age 50+

- **Forest Festival 2010**



'Thank you for showing our family a local place that is free to explore.'

Leaf postcard written feedback

- **Wild River Festival 2011, River Discovery Day**



'I never knew this place was here – it is really beautiful and we will definitely be coming back again. I have lived in this area for years and can't believe I haven't been here before!'

Leaf postcard feedback



'We had an absolutely fantastic time. The children didn't want to leave and the fact that everything was free when day trips these days cost a small fortune made it even better. Thank you to everyone that arranged the day we will definitely be coming back in the future.'

Feedback by email

- **Wild River Festival 2011, River Song Celebration**



'Children, families coming together to sing & celebrate the wonder of the river/water. It was great.'

Leaf postcard feedback

'Did you learn anything today at this event?' - participant feedback

Key Wildways project work which specifically supported new learning opportunities included pruning training workshops which resourced local people to maintain newly planted and restored community orchards, wildlife encounter walks, school hedgehog and orchard workshops, bushcraft and wild play sessions for children and young people and wildlife gardening projects. Feedback received on written feedback from beneficiaries and partners indicates the high level of learning these and other experiences and opportunities delivered through Wildways have provided for participants:

'This is what I am most proud of ever. I wish school was like this'

Service user age 13 talking about the tool he made on a Bushcraft session

- **Priority Neighbourhood community events**

The final Wildways event in July 2012 provided a bee and wildlife gardening themed area for the Page Park Jubilee event which was attended by 10,000 people in Staple Hill Priority Neighbourhood. Children and families made masks, bee homes, sampled local honey and learnt about gardening and planting to optimise support for wildlife from our very own Wildways 'Queen Bee!' Verbal and written comments about learning from this event included adults' delight at finding and seeing which plants are best for attracting bees and receiving information leaflets and seeds to a 9 year old Priority Neighbourhood resident learning and experiencing the taste of honey for the first time: *'I have never had honey before'* and being amazed that this honey came from the flowers in the park!



'I have never had honey before'

Page Park Jubilee Wildlife Workshop 2012

- **Wildlife workshops and assemblies for schools**

Over 12 school workshops and assemblies have been run across the project area about hedgehog and owl conservation. **1,269** children have been reached and enthused through these talks about nature conservation and many have then come to subsequent community events and owl prowls.

'Just a quick note to say thank you to you both for such an enjoyable and informative visit. The children loved it and have talked a lot about what they learnt today. They have all taken their hedgehogs home today so hopefully they will be in pride of place somewhere in homes around Downend! Please don't forget us. Come back soon. You will be very welcome.'

Christchurch primary, Staple Hill

- **River Festival River Discovery day**



'What a great event! Kids got to try new and special things. I live nearby and have never come before but I will now visit again'

Post it feedback

3.2 Project partners feedback

Evaluation questionnaires were sent to partners every 6 months throughout the project and an end of project evaluation questionnaire was sent to 10 key project partners in July 2012. Comments from these questionnaires are included in the wider body of this report and in relation to project outcomes and management included:

- **Feedback from project partners regarding Wildways outcomes**

'Improving the health and well being of residents is a concern for all the Priority Neighbourhoods. We know that rates of cardio vascular disease, childhood obesity, and early mortality are greater in the Priority Neighbourhood areas and Wildways has provided significant support to increase physical activity through encouraging people to make use of local green spaces. Wildways support for Sure Start Centres and schools to access local green spaces has given children and young people a range of opportunities which they have not experienced, expanding their horizons, raising aspiration and giving them confidence and new skills.'

Priority Neighbourhood Community Engagement Team

'Families are now aware of the natural environment on their doorstep and the benefits to their health and well being e.g. most participants tell us that they would not have heard of Warmley Forest park if Wildways had not introduced them to the park.'

Active Lifestyles Manager

Bushcraft sessions for Breakthrough service users

'Wildways support with bush craft sessions for vulnerable young people opened up opportunities to learn skills which would not be available to them. It provided some very valuable time out in an environment which allowed them to relax and gain very valuable peer support from each other and build self esteem. This was four invaluable days, a bow and arrow one lad made he described as the thing he was most proud of in his life.'

Breakthrough Project Co-ordinator

- **Feedback from project partners regarding project management**

'Excellent - It has always been easy to speak to the team, and they have been open to working in partnership, always willing to chat over new ideas.'

Kingswood and Cadbury Heath Sure Start Children's Centre manager

'Excellent - I have worked closely with both Rowena and Sally and can honestly say they don't leave any stone unturned when it comes to organisation and are great people to work in partnership with.'

Breakthrough Project Co-ordinator

'Excellent - Good liaison has been a vital factor in the success of the project.'

Avon Bat Group

'We have worked with Wildways over the past 3 years and have built a very effective partnership. We have been amazed at how effective interacting with the natural environment has been in helping us deliver long term and sustainable changes for mentees.'

'Our service is all about inclusion and building esteem through new experiences. Wildways has been a fantastic new set of opportunities. The outcomes have been many and varied including new skills, new friendships groups, activities undertaken independently but the main measure of success with these client groups is that they are asking for more of this type of activities.'

Breakthrough and Inclusion Manager

4. Site access improvements

Summary of outcomes from 3 site disability access audits delivered by the Wildways Project

- **Warmley Forest Park**

The Warmley Forest Park Access Audit report has been used to develop a funding bid for site access improvements from Ibstock Corey. This funding bid has been approved and has secured £50,000 investment in access improvements to the site to implement the key recommendations of the access audit report. This access improvement work is scheduled to complete by September 2012. The South Gloucestershire Disability Action Group were instrumental in the development of this access audit and will be invited to attend the launch event to see how their recommendations have been implemented. Students from Warmley Park Special School will also be invited to attend the launch and test the new access improvements as following support from Wildways, 4 classes of ambulant students from the school have been using the forest park for weekly outdoor learning sessions since September 2011. The new site access improvements will enable students who are wheel chair users to fully participate in future programmes,

- **Page Park**

The Page Park Access Audit report has been submitted as a key piece of evidence for a £1.5 million project application submitted to the Big Lotteries 'Parks for People' programme. Page Park is a key green space in Staple Hill Priority Neighbourhood. Staple Hill Priority Neighbourhood has the lowest amount of public open spaces/head of population and the highest levels of deprivation in South Gloucestershire so access improvements to this site will significantly improve the lives of many of the most vulnerable people in South Gloucestershire

- **Grimsbury Farm**

An access audit for Grimsbury Community Farm is currently under completion. The findings of this audit will be used to develop a funding bid by the Friends of Grimsbury farm with support from the Council. Grimsbury Farm is a key community resource and open space for the residents of Cadbury Heath Priority Neighbourhood which is used by many young families and people with learning and physical disabilities.



'DAG members have welcomed the chance to meet up with people and give their opinions as we all have many different disabilities to contend with. Showing people our limitations has given us hope for future improvements to allow us to use these excellent facilities time and time again safely.'

Chair of South Gloucestershire Disability Action Group (DAG)

5. Site management, biodiversity and interpretation projects

12 community spaces have received significant improvement and investment to management, biodiversity and interpretation through the Wildways project including the examples of work on 3 sites given below:

- **Warmley Forest Park**

- Access audit which contributed to a successful funding bid for £50,000 access improvements to implement the audit recommendations.
- Installation of a permanent orienteering and nature trail which has already been well used by local schools, youth groups, cadets and members of the public. Trail information can be downloaded from <http://www.southglos.gov.uk/orienteering>
- Planting of a new community orchard.
- Support for local special school to access and use the site for ongoing learning.
- Support for partner organisations to engage adult learning disability service users for ongoing projects at the site.
- Support for community payback team re involvement in site improvement and maintenance.
- 1 Community Forest Festival, 3 bat walks, 8 bushcraft sessions, 10 Forest School sessions, 2 owl prowls and 3 orienteering taster sessions.

- **Grimsbury Farm**

- New site leaflet produced and banner displayed at libraries and events.
- Signage audit and new signs and map of site.
- Access audit completed.
- 3 community bat walks and 2 service user bat walks, bird watching walks, Apple Day and wassail events and supported visits for local schools and children's centres.

- 7 times increase in weekly visitor numbers as a result of engagement of local groups, interpretation and signage improvements.
- **Cockroad Ridge**
 - New site leaflet.
 - Promoting site links to farm.
 - New community orchard planted and volunteer training workshops.
 - Supported school visits to link local schools to the site.
 - Bird watching, food foraging and bat walks.
- **Willsbridge Valley**
 - Installation of a new permanent glow in the dark Bat Audio Trail designed to accommodate the needs of the visually impaired and those with mobility needs. 10 packs including a bat detector available at libraries and information for download from: <http://www.southglos.gov.uk/bataudiotrail>
 - 3 bat walks and 3 owl prowls to raise awareness of site biodiversity.
 - Supported visits for local children's centres, learning disability service user groups and schools.
- **10 Community Orchards (including Warmley Forest Park and Cockroad Ridge) have been planted across the project area and local people trained to provide ongoing management.**

'Wildways work on orchards and gardening has helped to continue building the profile of Grimsbury Farm (community farm) as a farm and educational facility and provided positive activities for local teenagers and assisted community groups to put on very popular events. In providing workshops, training and activities for targeted groups, including young people, this has helped to raise the standards of some open spaces which have a history of anti-social behaviour and vandalism. This has helped to give a positive stamp to some parks which need this input to help throw off their negative past. Sally and Rowena are always very positive and flexible and good at seeing and seizing on new opportunities. Although the project has a set programme of work and targets there seems to be the right degree of flexibility to respond to changing priorities as they come along. I love it! Well done to you both for a fantastic job!'

South Gloucestershire Community Landscape Project Officer

5. Local people involved in the ongoing management of community spaces

364 volunteers including 126 regular volunteers have been engaged through Wildways. The following case studies illustrate some of the ways volunteers have worked with the project and the work they continue to do to sustain sites beyond the life of the project:

- **Community orchards**

10 community orchards have been planted and maintained with local residents and management plans established to support continuation of maintenance into the future by local people. Residents have participated in training to manage these orchards to sustain benefits into the future.



Orchard pruning workshop



'The community orchard and surrounding garden will continue to be a long term project for our families which will provide quality outdoor experiences for under 5's. Many of our families have low incomes and Wildways has been instrumental in introducing them to the free resources of our local area'

Kingswood Sure Start

- **Orchard Heritage Survey Project**

The Wildways Orchard Heritage Survey Project contributed to The People's Trust for Endangered Species national orchard survey. Wildways received 6 months help from a volunteer who had finished a Masters in Environmental Sciences (approx 50 days in-kind) who studied the old 1915 OS maps to find out just how many orchards had been lost locally. The results including maps were sent to each parish council and many local volunteers are now involved in 'ground truthing' and contacting landowners. An information poster was produced and a short video of interviews with local residents and is available to watch on You Tube www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPRiyRlojkc.

- **Orienteering trail and Bat Audio Trail maintenance**

Resident volunteers and local offenders serving community payback sentences with the probation service are now involved in ongoing maintenance of the orienteering and bat audio trails including pruning and litter removal.

- **The Big Pull**

Wildways came up with the name and initiated the start of a new regional partnership project to build community action to remove Himalayan Balsam – ‘The Big Pull!’ Partners include the Avon Frome partnership, Environment Agency and Avon Invasive Weeds forum as well as community groups and volunteers. Branding was developed, training workshops and pilot days delivered and there is great enthusiasm to carry the campaign forward into the future by community groups and partners.

www.southglos.gov.uk/thebigpull



- **Lees Hill – bee friendly meadow**

2 local residents from the Kingswood Priority Neighbourhood came forward with an idea to turn a drab grassy bank near one of our new community orchards into a bee haven. Wildways has been able to help them plan their ideas and secure funding. The site now has bee friendly shrubs, wildflower plugs and a newly sown perennial meadow. Council grounds staff are watching this spot closely to see if these methods can be replicated. The local school wanted to get involved too and St Stephens Junior School improved their nature area with plug plants of native wild flowers suitable for pollinating insects, with the head teacher keen to develop community ownership of the project.



Lees Hill planting spring 2012

- **Community gardens**

The garden at Cadbury Heath library Priority Neighbourhood has been transformed into a community allotment and orchard with help from Wildways and local volunteers. To support this project the volunteers and other members of the community had the opportunity to learn more about wildlife friendly gardening as part of the 2011 Active

Mind month. The garden won a **'best garden in parish'** award in 2011 and continues to flourish.



Local residents of all ages helping plant the community garden and orchard at Cadbury Heath Library



Young people involved in wildlife friendly planting at Our Place community flat, Staple Hill Priority Neighbourhood

- **Pictorial meadows**



A pictorial meadow has been created in Page Park by pupils from Staple Hill School. There was also an opportunity to extend the meadow and seed has been sown on the nearby derelict building site. Everyone awaits the results with baited breath.

- **Site interpretation information**

Local people and volunteers from the friends of Grimsbury Farm and Cockroad ridge have been supported to develop their involvement in management of these sites and

worked closely with the project officer to develop new interpretative leaflets and signage for both sites.

6. Transforming lives through access to nature

In addition to widening and increasing access to nature opportunities for Priority Neighbourhood residents and beneficiary groups, in some cases involvement in Wildways has supported significant change in participants' lives as illustrated below:

Case Study One:

'X was socially isolated and referred to Breakthrough by his GP suffering with clinical depression. Taking a key role in developing the Bat Trail was his first step on the road to recovery; providing a purpose, a goal and self confidence.'

Breakthrough Project Mentor

This 17 year old service user who was involved in a key role in the Bat Audio Trail project has now progressed from NEET (not in employment or training) to a vocational college course.

Case Study Two:

'I enjoyed working with different groups of people and being given responsibility for major elements of the project. It has been a great learning experience for me and helped enormously whilst I have been unemployed.'

Bat trail unemployed volunteer

This volunteer went on to gain employment using her work experience with Wildways as a key case study in her interview and following a reference from the project officer.

Case Study Three:

Another Breakthrough mentee was able to access a local bike project to restore a donated bike through support from Wildways:

'This bike has opened his world up; he can go out on it confidently and go further. He went from not going out to spending time outside every day. We are very grateful.'

Breakthrough coordinator

7. Project Legacy

The improvements to site management, biodiversity and interpretation implemented by Wildways and associated management plans will leave an enduring legacy to the project. These improvements include the 12 community orchards, the orienteering and bat audio trails, the community allotments, the 3 site access audits and 2 site interpretation leaflets.

A key aim of Wildways and the Access to Nature programme (which funded the project), is to widen and increase access to nature opportunities for specific groups. Introducing, embedding and sustaining opportunities for beneficiary groups to access nature beyond the duration of the project have been achieved through the mentoring and training opportunities provided by Wildways for local Priority Neighbourhood schools, children's centres and youth workers. Staff have been resourced and inspired to continue to provide access to nature opportunities for the groups they work with as part of the future development and delivery of their work as illustrated in the examples below:

- **Kingsmeadow community flat**

'Our young people are lacking in self confidence, aspiration and skills and although they live 20 minutes from the Common had never visited or picked a blackberry. Wildways brought orienteering skills with an added bonus of Blackberry picking. Next day every youngster beamed with their success and asked to collect blackberries again. Something so simple remains with that child and a sense of achievement. Our first year of Dreamscheme we had 9 - 12 young people. 3 years on with Wildways commitment to our Community flat we have 30 regular attendees.'

Volunteer Co-ordinator

- **Wild City Project – Bristol Access to Nature project**

'Working with Wildways has been hugely beneficial for the Wild City Project, as another Access to Nature funded project. The Wildways Officers have provided invaluable advice on running a similar project, including sharing information and tips relating to monitoring and evaluation. Thank you!'

Wild City Project Officer

- **Warmley Park Special School Forest School**

Following the delivery of 9 Forest School sessions by the Wildways Project Officer, Warmley Park Special School has developed ongoing outdoor learning opportunities at nearby Warmley Forest Park. Staff were so inspired by the

outcomes for children participating in the project that they undertook Forest School training in 2011 and now run weekly sessions.

To embed this work further, Wildways delivered training for older students in the school to do the site preparation tasks for when the younger students attend forest school sessions eg laying a trail, setting up shelters, putting up notices and clearing paths etc. This has been fantastic for these students to learn new skills, apply them in a meaningful context and to contribute to their community. The school has independently continued with this work over the last year (even in winter) and 3 classes now participate in weekly Forest School sessions at the site as well as the post 16 class who assist with the practical organisation of sessions as part of their own curriculum. This work is providing the students with the opportunity to take responsibility and make a valuable contribution to their school community and local natural environment. Fantastic sustained outcomes!



'Without the Wildways initiative and support, Warmley Park School pupils would not have had the opportunity to experience Forest School practice. This initiative has proved so beneficial to the pupils in terms of their learning outcomes and general well being (from Reception right through to Post 16 year groups), and so popular with both the pupils and their parents, that it has become established as part of the school's provision. Wildways also organised a collaborative project between some secondary students at the school, and a local artist, to make wall hangings for the Warmley Forest Park Visitors Centre. They continue to access the Visitors Centre where the work is displayed, and thus are able to experience pride in their achievement.'

Warmley Park Special School

- **Breakthrough Project**



'Enjoying and supporting access to the natural environment has been a great experience to so many of our service users that Wildways activities are now a key part of our menu of opportunities.'

Breakthrough Project manager

- **Regional Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service CAMHS seminar November 2011**

'This presentation was described as 'brilliant', 'fantastic!', 'engaging', 'touching', 'excellent', 'inspiring' by some of the delegates. It was appreciated that it demonstrated real projects with great outcomes, and someone wrote that 'we need more of this type of work'. It was also described as 'infectiously enthusiastic' 'heart-warming' and as having a 'feel good factor'.'

Collated written feedback summary from participants

- **Regional seminar 'Into the Woods' organised by the Forest of Avon Trust June 2012**

'To remember the value of experiential learning over collecting facts.'
'How the outdoors has so much to offer us in educating children.'
'The more consistent time children are allowed to experience nature outdoors the more they will benefit and learn from that environment.'
'Thank you once again for a very inspiring talk'
'The fact that more children are now more likely to be safer in the 'big outdoors' than on a PC'

Written feedback from participants of key learning

- **'Avon Learning Disabilities Research Network' presentation March 2010**

'I have been to many many academic sessions, presentations and talks over the years, and I have to say I thought your presentation was one of the best I have ever had the privilege of listening to. You were totally enthusiastic, very knowledgeable and clearly very experienced: you made all the links with your audience that they needed both with theory/language in order to broaden their thinking in a new field and with practical ways of establishing better local partnerships. The written feedback I have got confirms a unanimous view that your talk was inspirational, very well rated and very relevant: the story of how children (eg with ASD or ADHD) changed in the woods compared to the classrooms and your view about them simply having unmet needs was very well put. I personally hope to take my psychiatric practice more outdoors, and encourage all my patients and carers to do the same, and to use the resources you gave us.'

Bristol Consultant Psychiatrist for People with Learning Disabilities

7. Key learning from Wildways to carry forward

By learning from and reflecting on feedback from participants and assessing the levels of engagement for different elements of the project the following key learning and messages have emerged from the project:

- **Working with schools and children's centres as a very effective way to raise awareness and increase local involvement in community events and projects.** Delivering school and children's centre workshops prior to wider Priority Neighbourhood community events has resulted in higher numbers of local people and target groups attending the community events. This method was identified at the start of the project and built into subsequent project planning for the Apple Day, wassail and River Festival events to raise the profile of public events among local residents.

'Wildways helped to plan and run a day out for our families to Grimsby Farm, Which helped the families become aware of where it was and what it offered. This has led to many families visiting the farm on a regular basis, and it also gave staff ideas for outside activities.'

Kingswood Sure Start children's centre

- **Use of innovative and creative approaches** to engaging people in the natural environment which respond to beneficiary interests, ages and needs and provide new opportunities were very successful eg arts projects and performance as part of orchard celebration events and coracle building with youth groups.
- **The importance of stakeholder consultation** to identify and respond to the needs and interests of beneficiary groups and communities to optimise engagement and outcomes. For example community orchard planting was extremely successful because the project officers carefully consulted with stakeholders including local residents, community groups and partners to identify optimum locations and involve them in ongoing management.
- **The importance of building in flexibility** to enable projects to respond to new needs and opportunities which arise in response to further ongoing feedback and consultation mechanisms. This process enabled Wildways to remain user led and for additional outputs to be identified and delivered.
- **Partnership working with existing local forums, support services and networks** to identify, access and engage key beneficiary groups has been key to the success of the project and these links have developed effectively over time to optimise outcomes for beneficiaries eg with the Breakthrough Project, community lead groups, site friends groups and other teams within the Council.

- **Resourcing service user staff to embed access to nature into their work.**
Through engagement of service user groups and mentoring for the staff who support them, many of these groups (children's centres, special schools, Breakthrough project) are now continuing to access local green spaces as part of their ongoing programme following support from Wildways, sustaining the benefits of the project into the future.

'We have learned many skills as an organisation and now using the woods and nature is incorporated into our every day mentoring with our service users. Some of our service users found this so useful they now take themselves off to wood or hills when they are stressed.'

South Gloucestershire Council Breakthrough Project Co-ordinator

'Without the support of Wildways our young people would not have had access to the areas and opportunities such as bush craft, mountain walking, coracle boat making, being part of the construction of the bat trails including doing the voice over for the bat walk info. Many of our young people have never accessed nature Wildways has given us fantastic information of how and where we can access nature in our sessions to continue this legacy.'

Breakthrough Project Co-ordinator

- **'Word of mouth' and building a reputation for quality events and experiences** has increased involvement and trust of target beneficiaries many of whom have gone on to attend other events run by the project, independent repeat visits to sites and spread the word to friends and family.

'Craft sessions using a variety of material, with patient tutors from Wildways produced interesting butterflies and boats, taking time to develop a child's interest and encouraging positive comments has proven to be hugely successful - Our first year of Dreamscheme we had 9 - 12 young people. 3 years on with Wildways commitment to our Community flat we have 30 regular attendees.'

Kingsmeadow Community Flat

- **The strong need and demand from stakeholders engaged at all levels of the project to develop and extend this work forward into the future:**

Wildways has been wonderful and a key reason for the success of the Dreamscheme holiday playscheme. We really need more of this!

Kingsmeadow Community Flat – Kingswood Priority Neighbourhood

- **The importance of delivering outcomes which resource, sustain and embed access to nature for beneficiaries into the future.**

'Wildways has had a direct benefit on the Walking to Health project as it has enabled people who may normally be limited from accessing nature opportunities to explore their local area and learn more; a good example of this is the work that has been done with Sure Start Centres and buggy walks. In addition to this a specific programme of work was also carried out with adults with learning disabilities both in the community and at a day centre to engage them more with local green spaces.'

'The Wildways project has made it possible for people to access areas of green space that they may not have previously done; the most significant way this has been done is to work with specific groups and build up people's confidence to engage. In many cases low confidence is the biggest barrier to people using/ exploring their local area whether that's due to physical ability, mental/ emotional health or learning disabilities, once people have been shown what to do and how to do it as part of a safe, secure group environment they feel much more able to replicate independently.'

South Gloucestershire Walking to Health Co-ordinator

'I would like to express my pleasure in working with the Wildways project. There has traditionally been limited capacity for agencies to meet the need within South Gloucestershire's Priority Neighbourhoods to support access local green spaces. Wildways has been an instrumental link to start building this support and increase local peoples' confidence. There is now a foundation for communities to play an effective and rewarding role in the future management of their green spaces.'

Community Spaces and Landscape Officer



This is the furthest I've walked in more than 8 years. I was nervous but I did it!

Mum at Staple Hill School

8. Further project work

Wildways Supporting Change Funding

An additional 6 months of project work is currently being delivered until April 2013 following a successful application to the Supporting Change fund of the Access to Nature programme which funded the initial 3 year project. Wildways Supporting Change funding is working with these communities to develop perennial meadows and planting schemes which support wildlife and biodiversity. Contact sally.pattison@southglos.gov.uk

Wild4life Project

Wildways evaluation feedback demonstrated a high level of demand for future projects which extended support for children and young people with inclusion and mental health needs and their families to access nature and local green spaces.

Following a 6 month consultation process, the Wild4life project was subsequently developed and the Council has been awarded a grant through the Reaching Communities Fund of the Big Lottery Fund and match funding from NHS South Gloucestershire to deliver this 4 year project starting in September 2012. This new project is building on the success, best practice and feedback from the Wildways project and will take forward key areas of work and extend these opportunities to other Priority Neighbourhoods and children and young people with inclusion and mental health needs and their families in South Gloucestershire. Contact: rowena.kenny@southglos.gov.uk

9. Wildways – farewell and thank you!

The Project Officers received an award in the South Gloucestershire Council annual Pride Awards 2012 for 'Unsung Hero' in recognition of their work and the outcomes of the project.



Wildways Project Officers Rowena and Sally have helped the council improve the health and wellbeing and boost the confidence of some of our most vulnerable residents. They encourage others to care about, learn more and protect the natural environment of South Gloucestershire. Their commitment and expertise is clear to see. Many thousands of residents have attended educational events and activities they have helped to co-ordinate as part of the Wildways project that connects communities with nature and the great outdoors.'

Director of Environment and Community Services, South Gloucestershire Council

'Thank you to everyone who has been involved in Wildways. The success of the project has been possible thanks to the hard work, enthusiasm and commitment of the many volunteers, participants and partners the project has worked with over the last 3 years. We are delighted that so many aspects of the project have left an enduring legacy and that the Wild4life project will carry forward natural engagement development work in South Gloucestershire into the future.'

Rowena and Sally

**Rowena Kenny and Sally Pattison
Wildways Project Officers**



Forest School at Conham River Park

