

Sustainable funding models for Nature-Based Social Prescribing (NBSP): urban and rural environmental interventions for health creation in Lancashire and South Cumbria

Phase 2 Report (May 24 - March 25)

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Executive summary: key messages

Background

Since the inception of this work, the Social Prescribing Unit (University of Lancashire) has successfully coproduced and completed [phase 1 of "Sustainable models of Nature Based Social Prescribing \(NBSP\)"](#) funded by the Environment Agency, obtained phase 2 funding and recruited a PhD student to research the theoretical landscape of sustainable models which could benefit Lancashire and South Cumbria (LSC) Integrated Care System (ICS).

There is a greater understanding on what community organisations need to thrive, which includes more than just funding (Sheffield Hallam report, 2025). NASP published their "social prescribing fund" report supporting local solutions of non-traditional finance to those within all areas of social prescribing. The recognition of most of the funding historically being given to Primary Care Networks (PCN) to Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme (ARRS) fund social prescribing link workers, and the lack of devolved funding into the community is a major challenge for community organisations within the social prescribing sector in the UK. The number of people referred to community organisations, including those delivering on the NBSP agenda are not adequately compensated for their contributions. Resource is not following need (Marmot, 2020). This needs to change.

After starting phase 2, the Social Prescribing Unit, Environment Agency, Natural England and Lancashire Community Fund then began work on designing the [Lancashire Green Communities Fund](#) as a potential final phase of this work: the creation of a scalable model for sustainable funding of this sector. This rapidly evolved into contributing to the NASP test and learn pilot site for the Shared Investment Fund (SIF) in early 2025. The research team created the ["Infinity model"](#) to reflect the needs of community organisations specific to sustainable funding. Further research is required on the potential for sustainable funding via a SIF in LSC, applying the infinity model and recommendations within this report benefiting people and nature. At the end of this phase, our colleagues were invited to the LSC ICB/ICP Social Prescribing Action Group (working on LSC as an early adopter of the SIF) and are taking these learnings into strategic level changes.

Phase 1 recommendations & outcomes

A Phase 2 ethically approved 12-month pilot hosted at UCLan Social Prescribing Unit (SPU) continue to build on phase 1 and explore the realities, challenges, and potential solutions to sustainable NBSP by coproducing what phase 1 partners think should be the model in LSC for NBSP, alongside evaluating their NBSP in line with national reporting of NBSP. A fully funded PhD candidate (hosted by UCLan) continues to research this project (with connections and support from UCLan Doctoral Training Centre, UCLan Social Prescribing Unit and the Centre for Community Connectedness and Cooperation.

Phase 3 initiated through the PhD was advertised in early 2024 and recruited to (started Sept 2024). The students started with a literature review and write up alongside contributing the evidence base to our publication. The PhD is for 3 years full time. Kelly Reynolds stated:

*"The initial six months of the PhD research have been largely desk-based with a focus on understanding what is already known about sustainable models of social prescribing and how nature-based interventions are delivered. A scoping review is planned to systematically examine academic literature to understand how nature-based interventions fit within the social prescribing infrastructure. Following this review, primary research will be conducted, using participatory action methods, involving key stakeholders from across the social prescribing system in Lancashire and South Cumbria. Research is taking place in many areas of the world including England (Haywood et al., 2024) and other parts of Europe (Vert et al., 2024) to evaluate nature-based interventions answering the call for evidence on their efficacy (Bickerdike et al., 2017). However, **little attention is given to understanding how interventions can be sustainably delivered within the social prescribing infrastructure** (Sands et al., 2023). This PhD will address this critical research gap and explore how nature-based social prescribing can be sustainably delivered within Lancashire and South Cumbria."*

Kelly Reynolds, PhD student, University of Lancashire.

Phase 2: community organisations delivering nature & environmental interventions with people first

Phase 2 was successfully [funded by the Environment Agency](#) (September 2024 - March 2025). Formal ethical approval was obtained in December 2024 by the Social Prescribing Unit following successful signature of contracts (Appendix 1). This report illustrates the stages and outcomes of phase 2.

Objectives

- a) Undertake a variety of environmental interventions, to be decided based on Phase 1 options appraisal outputs, utilising Social Prescription as a delivery resource at 3 sites (Urban, Rural and Semi-Rural)
- b) Evaluate the delivery effectiveness using mixed methods and methodology, including qualitative and quantitative data.

Our coproduced phase 2 project used the following mixed methods and methodology to evaluate a 12-month funded delivery pilot of NBSP in these 3 sites:

Data collection

Data collection was completed between January and March 2025. The data included:

- *Qualitative data*

- [Quotes from participants](#)

- [Quotes from the project team](#)

- [Case studies](#) on what sustainable model of social prescribing each partner would like to see in the future to support their NBSP

- *Quantitative data*

- [SWEMWBS](#) - a standardized Social Prescribing outcome measure to be used with both participants and delivery partners

Theoretical underpinnings

Coproduction, Participatory inquiry, ABCD, Proportionate Universalism were used in phase 2 as outlined in phase 1 (Pywell, 2024). Through the process of coproduction across phases, a sustainable model(s) of NBSP in LSC was created, called the "infinity model". The "infinity model" is due for publication in 2025 and has potential to contribute to the theoretical underpinnings of sustainable NBSP at a national level.

Coproduction

Coproduction time was funding for the community organisations within this project including: attendance at all meetings and preparation of sessions/ meetings, coproduction time (building research capacity in the community, training, attending meetings & all roles outlined in phase 1 contract), and contribution to all aspects of phase 2 including delivery of NBSP to people facing barriers to health creation and health inequalities and data collection as community researchers.

Delivery costs

Delivery costs included half day NBSP session (6-12 weeks) for free with the local community. Sessions were delivered in line with the options appraisal unless agreed with the Environment Agency & UCLan Social Prescribing Unit.

Research

A small-scale evaluation of participants perspectives (including SWEMWBS scores) who attended the NBSP/ environment intervention sessions at each of the 3 sites was explored. Each site chose environmental interventions from the options appraisal and delivered NBSP interventions over 6-12 weeks. They demonstrated social prescribing outcomes using The Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS) (CORC, 2025), a validated outcome and evaluation measure recognised in social prescribing. This research report illustrates the outcomes of research, limitations, recommendations and next steps. The research team at the Social Prescribing Unit were costed into this project, including project management costs. Student research volunteers were included, and hours recognised through UCLAN CVCL volunteer scheme.

Environment Agency targets (by Simon Bennett)

"The Environment Agency can meet their national and regional targets (LOP Outcomes) re: social value, social prescribing, wellbeing, work in area of high inequities and inequalities, address potential flood zone through this project. The EA may, due to phase 1 (2, and future phases) increase EDI connections and increased diversity within recruitment. By demonstrating this coproduction project with the local community, education and health provider(s) to improve individuals and community wellbeing, this may provide foundations for future environmentally beneficial intervention delivery."

Target audience

"From an EA perspective, the target audience of this work will be:

- *Local Environment Programme project delivery teams*
- *Local Flood Coastal Risk Management teams*
- *EA National Health & Wellbeing Leads*
- *National Internal Guidance*
- *Benefit to local communities*
- *Benefit to socially deprived communities*
- *Benefit to EDI reach"*

"From a UCLAN Social Prescribing Unit perspective (by Sam Pywell)

- *Increase profile of benefits of NBSP to key partners (ICB/ICS/ICP etc)*
- *Benefit to local communities*
- *Contribute to the evidence base through outputs*
- *Establish potential for future research in this area"*

UCLan Social Prescribing Unit targets

The UCLan Social Prescribing Unit intention was to demonstrate the potential for a knowledge exchange/transfer partnership. This phase meets the 2024 - 2025 annual objectives of the Social Prescribing Unit (including: coproduction in research, knowledge exchange, building research supporting outcomes of social prescribing and increasing place-based understandings of social prescribing.

Additional targets

The combination of these phases, and the PhD, have potential to:

- Explore previously unresearched models of sustainable funding for NBSP
- Contribute to better understandings on what works for people in LSC re: "health is wealth"
- Commence dialogue with the ICB & ICS partners on how to create sustainable funding for NBSP
- Evaluate NBSP interventions (which meet EA aims) as part of NBSP

Meetings (monthly)

Monthly meetings occurred between September 2024 - March 2025 chaired by Sam Pywell (Social Prescribing Unit) offered to the whole team to coproduce phases 2 to 4. Meetings included:

- Updates (project, funding, progress of charities in creating new community spaces & establishing their NBSP offer)
- Onsite visits
- Peer support visits
- Knowledge exchange (e.g. latest funding opportunities for delivery monies, outcome measures SWEMWBS, 5 ways to wellbeing, theory & evidence, criticality of connecting with the local CVS & social prescribing link workers etc.)
- Discussions on how to coproduce phases 2 and 3

Funding & support

All community organisations put their coproduction funding into the delivery of free sessions for people in need. All community organisations benefited from support during phase 2. One site had a significant staff change, another experienced serious health problems and caring responsibilities; another faced a challenge from the council regarding the community hub building. During phase 2 all community groups faced significant financial, health, employment and local council challenges which threatened the financial stability and viability of their charities yet still managed to continue to deliver their community offer.

Quotes from community organisation staff

Blackburn's farm and nurseries wildlife centre

"without funding, there is no sustainability"

"this has been really beneficial to the people we work with" (Volunteer lead)

"parents are happy for children to come if activities are in school time and its free"

Main challenges "lack of funding for delivery, council permissions for café as an income stream to deliver free sessions for the community). [Wrea Green wildlife centre 'could close' over planning row - BBC News](#)

Pennine Oaks

See Appendix

Whinney Hill Farm

"Sustainability for Whinney Hill Farm equates to security... Security for the land, security for the Charity, and to provide a secure and a safe place for those that may find peace and tranquillity when they visit the farm. For WHF to become this desired secure haven we require a dedicated development officer to create and establish a framework of products and services that would be of use to the local community, and those that may benefit for green social prescribing. Once we have a clear focus on what WHF could offer, then the development officer could begin to network and collaborate with different organisation and community groups who could trial the products / services and then provide vital feedback on how WHF could improve, develop and grow to become sustainable in the future."

All sites were aware to approach their local CVS/ social prescribing link workers to connect the work they are doing to their local social prescribing support infrastructures as in phase 1. All organisations (EA, NE, UCLAN) offered time in kind as needed.

Options appraisal

This options appraisal (coproduced in phase 1) was applied in phase 2 to support the organisations to choose which NBSP interventions they would deliver (see highlighted). The options appraisal was suggested by the Environment Agency to a. understand assets &

strengths, b. establish needs, c. plan phase 2 potential of what could be delivered on the land. Phase 2 choices by the community organisations are highlighted below:

Options appraisal for NBSP interventions	WHF CIC	Pennine Oaks/ 4 Acres CIO	BFNWC
Flood beneficial techniques (e.g. NFM techniques, habitat improvements/creation and water quality beneficial actions, planting trees)	x	x	x
Forest school	x	x	X
Vegetable growing & contribute to food bank	x	x	x
Nature connection & wellbeing walks	x	x	x
Seasonal workshops	x	x	x
Kids parties (see Wildwood Days (2023) funding model)	x	x	x
Adventure Based Social Prescribing (e.g. green camping/hill walking)	x	x	
Nature Based Yoga	x	x	x
John Muir activities	x	x	x
All ages	x	x	x

Each site established maps of where they could complete these activities on their land and discussed their preferences.

Research

This research was ethically approved by UCLAN (Appendix 1). The research reports were separated by site and are illustrated in the appendices (Appendix 2).

A journal article was submitted for publication based on this research project highlighting the potential use of an "infinity model" to separate out all the elements required for successful sustainable funding of NBSP. This is due for publication in 2026. A second journal article has commenced on the research data from community organisations. This will be submitted for publication by December 2025.

Discussion of results

All sites demonstrated improvements in individual wellbeing using SWEMWBS of environmental interventions delivered on their land. These included participants who were new to the organisations and had not experienced the opportunity to take part in environmental interventions for positive wellbeing. This is not surprising given the wealth of literature supporting these interventions. Although the overall participant size of this phase 2 research is small compared with the population footprint of LSC, there are many more community organisations who either deliver or have potential to deliver this across LSC. Scalability of intervention has been demonstrated with the Government funding test and learn sites; however, sustainable models of funding and delivery were not solved. Future research could involve more (or all) sites across LSC, with population health and social prescribing data, to fully understand where the populations are who could benefit from these interventions for future targeted delivery of NBSP using the infinity model.

Some sites had to search in more depth for participants to attend their location. As some sites were not easily accessible on a bus route, other transport options were needed including free minibus transport for participants (either costed into the intervention or delivered by the charity who supported participants to attend. Transport and location of the intervention are well evidenced leading barriers to NBSP. Solutions to sustainable transport (and eco-transport) to the community organisations could be explored in a carbon footprint and who funds the transport for participants from various communities.

One site remained in the process of creating a CIC from their primary community organisation, delayed due to the aforementioned challenges. This did not impact the delivery of the environmental interventions as they were well known in the communities they reach and provided wide-ranging support. This community group was already embedded geographically and from a community organizing perspective within the population they were supporting access to NBSP. The NBSP site was also near this community, whereas the other two community organisations had significant transport challenges for participants trying to access their sites.

Surprisingly, none of the community organisations found it difficult to adapt to implement environmental interventions from the options appraisal which aligned with the Environment Agency organisational goals. There is potential other organisations could map their

organisational goals in an options appraisal for community groups to deliver, providing appropriate funding is invested in the delivery (and research) of said initiatives. A larger, combined resource for community organisations, as proposed in the Lancashire Green Communities Fund, could provide stability for community organisations delivering on NBSP agendas, support organisations deliver on targets (specific to people, nature, inequalities, SDG, health, health creation, mental health) and communicate evidence and research specific to this sector for future commissioning and recommissioning.

Interestingly, all sites understood the need for and importance of collecting outcomes data, using social prescribing outcome and evaluation tools, to demonstrate their impact, yet all groups voiced challenges with resources, time and ability to analyse the results in a meaningful way for commissioners. All community organisations were focused on their purpose – delivering discounted and free sessions to the community. **Future research support is required to support community organisations like these in LSC ICS to demonstrate outcomes and impact specific to the narrative of commissioning and recommissioning.**

Limitations

The limitations of this research project were:

- Time of year - the winter period was more challenging to recruit participants through social prescribing. Feedback included participants needing better weather for a variety of health reasons. Data collection was delayed due to groups needing to run later than expected. Most groups' offerings occur across spring and summer with some offers planned in autumn. Community organisations highlighted seasonality as an important factor in considering the data.
- Comparability. Each community organisation was unique, with a different delivery model and working in different areas in LSC. No two community organisations were the same,
- Resources. The community organisations who had no allocated volunteer coordinator or fundraiser roles faced more barriers to delivery. Time available of existing staff was a barrier faced by all groups. None of the groups had time or resource or expertise for data analysis impacting severely impacting their future potential of communicating impact of NBSP.
- Unexpected events for community organisations resulting in delayed data collection
- Small scale - future research projects could work to including all community organisations delivering on NBSP & GSP in LSC ICS
- Lack of consistent pre and post data made it difficult to demonstrate improvement for all participants across all sites in this phase of research.
- One outcome measure was used (SWEMWBS). Many outcome measures are available to social prescribing researchers and practitioners. Aligning research outcomes and impact with commissioners and ICS needs may produce larger scale digital for analysis (and appropriate targeting of resources as seen with population health teams). At present each NBSP/GSP group across LSC ICS can collect outcomes using different systems (EMIS, social prescribing software, paper), different outcome and evaluation measures (SWEMWBS, ONS4, Wellbeing star etc.), clinical measures (HADS, DAS etc.), Likert scale, qualitative (quotes from participants) or not at all. The lack of

standardization in LSC ICS results in a smorgasbord of data for researchers and increased difficulty in creating evaluation data representative of the ICS.

- [Lack of coastal communities](#) - future research projects could include additional research sites
- [Lack of access to social prescribing software used by SPLW](#) - if community groups had access, they could demonstrate the outcomes of the referrals they receive. Analytics could be pulled with ease, and researchers could focus on analysis rather than data collection hoops. This could increase the potential of real-time data on the impact of NBSP delivered by community organisations. This could positively impact funding and commissioning of community organisation of NBSP.

Conclusion of phase 2

In the final meeting of phase 2, all partners echoed the [benefits of continuing contact](#) from knowledge exchange, research, education, teaching, coproduction of future work and the potential of making more steps toward sustainable provision of NBSP in LSC. We discussed the potential to have an open group, connected to LancsCAN (Edge Hill University) specific to NBSP provision, and to connect more partners across LSC ICS. The research team will explore potential future funding. [The Social Prescribing Unit will host LancsCAN from September 2025](#), an existing network connecting community organisations with stakeholders in nature, sustainability (both environment and financial), coproduced with (and for) all.

Phase 3: PhD

Phase 3 commenced and was originally described as the PhD proposed from phase 1. In Sept 2025 the student will commence year 2. Future research and outputs are anticipated as a result of this PhD.

Phase 4: Lancashire Green Communities Fund

To create the Lancashire Green Communities Fund as a sustainable fund for those delivering on the NBSP in LSC, the team collaborated with Community Foundation Lancashire and in December 2024 proposed a Knowledge Transfer Partnership to further solidify the potential of the fund through research. The LGCF was proposed due to phase 1 & 2. The purpose of exploring if the LGCF is possible was to identify unrestricted (IVAR, 2025) or **restricted** funding for community organisations delivering on the NBSP agenda. As NASP commenced the Test and Learn site in LSC in 2025 for the shared investment fund, this work is ongoing with the Integrated Care Board & Social Prescribing Action Group (SPAG). This may align with regional plans including: devolution, social value agenda, [The Lancashire Growth Plan 2025 to 2035](#), and growth of the LSC ICS.

Phase 5: The Creative Forest

In the original Phase 1 proposal, multiple scenarios were discussed for sustainable funding including the potential of an arts and creative offer in nature (as seen in [Wildwood Days CIC](#) and [Burscough Community Farm CIC](#)) using natural resources completed in nature. None of the three community organisations had an arts or creative offer during phase 1 and 2 of this project but remained significantly interested in the potential. This is where "The Creative Forest" was conceptualised. In 2025 **the Social Prescribing Unit obtained research funding from ARC NWC (NIHR)** to start to explore if this is possible with LSCFT through the emancipation of art from forensic and inpatient settings in mental health services. This position will be complemented with a 10-week URIP research intern and two graduate arts interns in summer 2025, and potentially additional student (and staff) research volunteers from the university. **LCSFT already host a sustainable offer for NBSP which includes creativity which future community organisations may benefit from knowing more about in developing their own offer.** The 12-month knowledge mobilisation internship will result in recommendations for research and next steps. Social Prescribing does now exist in hospital, for severe mental illness (SMI) and bridging primary and secondary care, however, more research is needed (Edwards-Smith et al. 2025). This may align with several organisations social value funding models and could become a significant step toward sustainable NBSP. This aligns with NHS net zero, sustainability, SDG and Natural England/ local council agenda of devolution of power (and funding) into communities for community health creation.

Conclusion

Community organisations in the UK delivering on the national Green Social Prescribing (GSP) agenda need funding, system changes, research, knowledge exchange and brokering, evidence, organisational support to deliver sustainable provision. Without funding, the community organisation provision may close, yet funding, particularly short term or small grants, is not the only solution when considering sustainable NBSP. System changes at ICS level, where policy, referral pathways and procedures include GSP and the criticality of community organisations, will positively impact access to funding. Access to recording outcomes in ICS held social prescribing software would support community organisations to demonstrate the outcomes of referrals from within the ICS. Creation of sustainable, accessible funds for community organisations has resulted in positive, long-term changes to individuals and communities in other areas. In Lancashire and South Cumbria, the 3 community organisations who took part in phase 2 demonstrated positive improvements to individuals' wellbeing through delivering GSP and environmental interventions aligning with the Environment Agency targets around health, wellbeing, inequalities and the Sustainable Development Goals. Environmental interventions included tree planting for flood management, nature connection, nature exposure and increasing biodiversity through planting. **Future organisations hosting social value funding and funding for health inequalities, environmental interventions, nature for health and GSP could work with researchers to demonstrate the potential for mapping of organisational targets to community organisations delivering on positive change to people, place, nature, neighbourhoods and communities under the GSP and NBSP narrative.**

Further research is needed into the long-term impact of these green environmental community interventions, stakeholder involvement, policy and system changes and the proposed **shared investment fund pilot with NASP in LSC**. Green social interventions where the focus is on people and wellbeing first, is needed to contribute to the wider agendas of behaviour change for health creation in nature, nature connection, net zero, SDG. The "infinity model" was proposed in this phase to illustrate the components of sustainable models of NBSP. Future research can explore if further components are needed from more stakeholders' perspectives.

Recommendations

- **Research** (e.g. Knowledge Transfer Partnership) on the creation, impact and sustainability of the **NASP Test & Learn shared investment fund for NBSP/GSP**
- **All community organisations delivering on NBSP/GSP in LSC ICS to continue to collect pre and post intervention data using a social prescribing outcome & evaluation measure** e.g. SWEMWBS for future research and evaluation of impact
- Community organisations **given access to software** to demonstrate additional outcomes and their role in community referral e.g. Elemental
- Community organisations **supported by researchers** to demonstrate SROI and cost benefit calculations of NBSP/GSP interventions in LSC ICS
- Exploration of **how community organisations can access basic research, evaluation and demonstrating outcomes support for NBSP/GSP** in LSC ICS
- **Disseminate "The Creative Forest"** outcomes through NIHR ARCNWC funded internship (March 2025 - January 2026) working in partnership with URIP research intern (summer 2025) and student (and staff) research volunteers at UCLAN.
- **September 2025** Social Prescribing Unit lead LancsCAN & continue to work with existing partners on coproduction. Further exploration and Knowledge Exchange through this network of new and emerging models of sustainable NBSP.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethical approval, University of Central Lancashire



University of Central Lancashire
Preston PR1 2HE
01772 201201
uclan.ac.uk

20 December 2024

Sam Pywell
School of Health, Social Work and Sport
University of Central Lancashire

Dear Sam

Re: Health Ethics Review Panel Application
Unique Reference Number: HEALTH 01175

The Health Ethics Review Panel has granted approval WITH CONDITION(S) for your proposal application 'Evaluation of Nature Based social prescribing'. Approval is granted up to the end of project date.*

The CONDITION attached to the approval is:
Ensure all gatekeeper permissions and any pending contracts are complete before the research commences. Please provide a copy to the Ethics, Integrity and Governance Unit to be placed on file.

It is your responsibility to ensure that:

- the project is carried out in line with the information provided in the forms you have submitted
- you regularly re-consider the ethical issues that may be raised in generating and analysing your data
- any proposed amendments/changes to the project are raised with, and approved by, the Ethics Review Panel
- you notify EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk if the end date changes or the project does not start
- serious adverse events that occur from the project are reported to the Ethics Review Panel
- a closure report is submitted to complete the ethics governance procedures (existing paperwork can be used for this purpose e.g. funder's end of grant report; abstract for student award or NRES final report. If none of these are available, use the e-Ethics Closure Report pro forma).

Yours sincerely

Dr Michael Farrell
Chair
Health Ethics Review Panel

* for research degree students this will be the final lapse date

NB - Ethical approval is contingent on any health and safety checklists having been completed and necessary approvals gained as a result.

Appendix 2: Community organisation reports

Pennine Oaks

[Pennine Oaks](#) is an organisation who uses their profits to provide charitable nature-based activities for people who face significant barriers to health creation. These include refugees, people who are homeless, children and young people who are on a pathway with the Police and families who need support. Pennine Oaks delivers corporate events to fund charitable work. During this project, they received 4 acres of land (and began to create the charity 4 Acres CIO), and a community centre needing renovation with land. Pennine Oaks uses nature connection, nature adventure and ecotherapy to work with people to achieve health creation. Pennine Oaks works across rural and urban sites. The Pennine Oaks report and case studies were written by their volunteers.

Phase Two Report – Social Prescribing and Nature Connection at Brownside, Burnley

Participants

In Phase Two of our green social prescribing initiative at Brownside, Burnley, we engaged with a total of **194 participants** from a rich and diverse demographic background. This included:

- **Pakistani – 58 Participants**
- **Bengali – 39 participants**
- **Pashtun – 19 participants**
- **Asylum Seekers – 29 participants**
- **Indigenous White British Communities – 47 participants**

Our participants represented a wide age range:

- **Under 16:** 12 participants
- **Ages 16–24:** 60 participants
- **Ages 25–40:** 73 participants
- **Ages 40+:** 49 participants

This inclusive approach allowed people from a variety of ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds to engage in meaningful experiences with nature, many of them for the first time in such a setting. By bringing these communities together in an open, natural space, we created opportunities for cross-cultural learning, empathy, and shared healing.

Activities and Their Benefits

A wide range of nature-based and therapeutic activities were delivered, each carefully designed to enhance mental and physical well-being while also strengthening community bonds and environmental awareness. These included:

- **Tree Planting** - Encouraged environmental stewardship and long-term investment in the site. The groups have planted over 400 trees and helped to remove the dead trees.
- **Foraging** - Taught participants about local plants, natural ecosystems, and food sustainability. We then used this knowledge to do some outdoor cooking on the site.
- **Archery** - Fostered focus, coordination, and provided a positive physical outlet. Participants with anxiety explained that the archery was having positive impact on their mental health, and it would be an activity they would regularly engage in if available.
- **Axe and Knife Throwing** - this activity helped with building self-confidence and reduced stress through skill-based release.
- **Eco-Printing** - Unleashed creativity using natural resources like leaves and flowers. We used our surrounding to create rustic pencils, keyrings, confetti and collages.
- **Art Therapy** - Offered safe and expressive outlets for internal emotions and trauma. We targeted this towards groups who were suffering anxiety and were looking for a non-clinical outlet. We had 18 participants of all ethnicities, male and female creating art that meant something to them. We found that this activity was extremely therapeutic.
- **Outdoor Cooking** - We did use the foraged nettles, wild garlic, however we also cooked different foods that had not been foraged over the fire and this brought people together to share and learn recipes from different cultures. We would like to create an area that will permanently be accessible by the public for outdoor cooking and BBQ's
- **Eco Therapy** - Promoted mindfulness, emotional awareness, and connection to nature. All participants were taught about nature and how we should connect and treat nature. It was insightful to hear the different interpretations of nature from the participants.

These activities didn't just provide fun and recreation—they opened doors to recovery, relationship-building, and rediscovery of personal strengths and potential. It helped forge new friendships and brought the area alive.

Impact of Being Outdoors

The outdoor setting of the Brownside site proved to be a key factor in the success of the project. Nature provided a neutral, calming environment that helped participants feel grounded, safe, and welcome. Being outdoors had tangible benefits:

- **Improved mental health** - especially among asylum seekers and young adults who had limited access to green spaces. It was something that has been requested a lot. Accessible safe green environments.
- **Increased physical activity** - through walking, moving in nature, and participating in outdoor games. We engaged the older participants sports day activities, such as egg and spoon race and sack racing. Participants experienced things they would never do and gained new skills.
- **Greater social cohesion** - individuals from communities that rarely crossed paths began to share stories, laughter, and understanding. It was amazing to see people connect when they could not speak the language. The gestures and human kindness were phenomenal. The groups have asked that we request a large polytunnel be built to allow the community to go its own food.

Several **walking groups have now formed independently**, using the site regularly for exercise, connection, and mental respite. The bonds formed during the project have led to stronger informal networks of support across cultural boundaries.

Green Social Prescribing: Its Impact

Green social prescribing—the use of nature-based activities as an intervention for mental and physical health—has made a measurable difference in the lives of our participants.

- Individuals struggling with **low mood, isolation, anxiety, and PTSD** reported feeling calmer, more in control, and more hopeful after engaging with nature.
- Older adults gained **mobility, purpose**, and a sense of inclusion.
- Refugees and asylum seekers found a **non-judgmental space** to begin rebuilding emotional resilience.

Crucially, this approach allowed **non-clinical interventions** to reduce the strain on traditional healthcare services. By bringing people closer to nature, we reconnected them with themselves. You could see the positive change in participants as we

Blue Social Prescribing: The Benefits

Where water-based environments were accessible—such as small streams and damp woodland within the Brownside site—participants reported unique therapeutic effects.

- The **sound of water** and **touch of natural elements** induced calm and reflection.
- **Trauma survivors**, especially among the asylum seekers, spoke of the symbolism and peace they associated with flowing water.
- Blue spaces enhanced the **overall sensory richness** of the experience and contributed to improved emotional regulation.

Blue prescribing, even in small doses, magnified the healing potential of the natural setting.

Risks and Barriers

Despite the program's success, two major risks stand in the way of continuing and expanding its impact:

1. Lack of Safe Space

- The site needs basic infrastructure—pathways, lighting, shelter, seating, and accessible toilets—to make it safe for all, especially women, children, and those with disabilities.

2. Lack of Funding

- This phase relied on time-limited funding. Without ongoing investment, we risk losing momentum and the progress individuals have made in their mental and physical recovery.

Conclusion

The use of the Brownside site for phase two of our green and blue social prescribing project has proven that “**access to nature is not a luxury—it's a necessity**”. We've seen isolated individuals become community leaders, anxious youth become confident explorers, and strangers become friends.

Now, with the right support and resources, we can keep this momentum alive and ensure that everyone, no matter their background, has the chance to heal, grow, and connect through nature.







Case Study 1: Reclaiming Hope – A 65-Year-Old Pakistani Man

Background:

At 65, *Mr. A*, a Pakistani grandfather and community elder, was devastated by the loss of his daughter in a car accident 12 months ago. Just weeks later, his wife was diagnosed with advanced cancer. In the space of a few months, his world turned upside down. He spiralled into deep depression and grief, struggling with suicidal thoughts. Once active in his community, he began isolating himself and felt he had lost all purpose in life.

Experience at Brownside:

Mr. A joined the 16-week nature connection project with hesitation. Initially reserved and withdrawn, he would sit silently at the edge of group activities. However, the calmness of the natural surroundings and the gentle encouragement from staff helped him to slowly open up. Activities like **tree planting** became moments of reflection and symbolism—planting new life as he mourned the one lost. **Outdoor cooking** reconnected him to his cultural roots, and **eco-therapy sessions** gave him space to speak his pain.

Transformation:

Over the course of the program, Mr. A began to smile again. He formed unlikely friendships with younger participants, especially a group of 20-something men who began calling him “Uncle.” This sense of belonging helped shift his mindset. By week 12, he was initiating conversations and even sharing jokes. He now walks the Brownside site weekly with a group he helped form and says, ***“I’ve realised that life is still happening around me—I just needed to lift my head and see it.”***

Impact:

- Regained emotional stability
- Built a new social network
- Reduced suicidal thoughts
- Re-engaged with community life and leadership

Case Study 2: Finding Safety Again – A White British Woman and Domestic Violence Survivor

Background:

Ms. B, a woman in her 30s from the white British community, had fled a long-term abusive relationship. Living in a refuge over 100 miles away from her hometown, she was completely isolated from her family and friends. Suffering from PTSD and chronic anxiety, she found it hard to trust others and was wary of any public or group setting.

Experience at Brownside:

Encouraged by a support worker, Ms. B reluctantly attended her first session. The openness of the natural site immediately felt less threatening than an indoor setting. She joined in with **eco-printing** and **foraging**, both of which allowed her to engage without the pressure of speaking. As the weeks went on, she participated in **art therapy**, where she used visual storytelling to express her past without needing to recount it in words.

The group's non-judgmental atmosphere gave her a rare sense of peace. For the first time in years, she felt genuinely safe. One powerful moment came when she shared a meal prepared during the **outdoor cooking** session and said, ***"I haven't eaten with anyone in a long time. This feels like a family I chose."***

Transformation:

Ms. B's confidence steadily grew. She began volunteering to help set up activities and even started journaling about her experiences at Brownside. By the final session, she was laughing freely and had built friendships with women of all backgrounds.

Impact:

- Regained a sense of physical and emotional safety
- Reduced PTSD symptoms
- Rebuilt confidence and interpersonal trust
- Formed a local support network

Case Study 3: A Window to Freedom – A Young Pashtun Woman and Her Father

Background:

Miss C, a woman in her early 20s from the Pashtun community, faced cultural limitations on where and how she could spend time outside the home. Her movements were often restricted, and outings needed male accompaniment. This left her feeling isolated, bored, and emotionally stifled. She was also struggling to assert her independence while maintaining family respect.

Experience at Browside:

Miss C was allowed to attend the project only if her father could accompany her. Hesitant at first, her father agreed—and both found themselves surprised by how welcoming and diverse the group was. The site's open space and inclusive environment allowed Miss C to participate freely in **archery, eco-printing, and foraging**. She enjoyed the **art therapy** sessions, which gave her space to express herself in a way she never had before. This was an activity that her father allowed her to attend alone. (he was on site).

Her father also began engaging more, speaking with other men from different backgrounds. Over time, he became more relaxed and trusting of the group dynamic. Mr B stated “**witnessing my daughter's happiness and the respect others have shown her makes me very happy**”

Transformation:

By the end of the 16 weeks, Miss C's confidence had grown significantly. She initiated conversations, offered to help staff, and even led a short walk for younger participants. Her father now encourages her involvement and has agreed that she can attend certain events without a male escort—something that would have been unthinkable just months ago.

Impact:

- Gained independence within cultural boundaries
- Developed emotional expression and leadership skills
- Improved father-daughter relation
- Friendship
- Created new friendships and cultural understanding

Many thanks to the volunteers of Pennine Oaks for completing this case study.

Blackburns Farm nurseries and wildlife centre

[Blackburns Farm](#) (CIC) was established in 2023 by Andy Bradshaw & family. The “Remembrance Wood” was set up by the Bradshaw family in 2020 during the Covid19 lockdown. It began with an idea Andrew Bradshaw had over dinner, which was then executed by the entire family led by his daughter Ashley. There are over 1000 trees now planted at the remembrance woods, and it has become a sanctuary to many, a place to come to remember cherished memories of those who have trees in their memory. The farm is a rural site on the outskirts of more urban areas.

Bernard Pendleton (chair of NW in Bloom) & Kirsty Cropper support along with many volunteers to help create this open access land. *“Blackburn’s Farm, located at the heart of the Fylde, is possibly one of the community’s best kept secrets. With some careful interventions and the continued support of organisations such as The Wildlife Trust, Royal Horticultural Society and Natural England, it has become a vital and unique haven where local wildlife can thrive. Blackburn’s Farm enables a more biodiverse future, through bringing local people closer to nature. The education centre, cafe, together with nature trails, bird hides and information boards around parts of the farm, allow the local community and visitors to The Fylde, and Lancashire as a whole, the ability to learn about, and see for themselves, wildlife on the farm and how land management can be changed to benefit wildlife, raise awareness of nature, and help people’s health and well-being.”*

Commando Mentoring Programme

Commandos mentoring programme was grown to support children with attachment and trauma. The PowerPoint presentation was created by the school to illustrate the positive impact of Commandos in 23/24. In 2025 this project came to Blackburn’s Farm and included tree planting from the options appraisal. This outdoor commando mentoring therefore included nature connection, tree planting, nature exposure, activities led by an instructor outdoors to increase confidence, teamwork and improve behaviour.



The slide is titled "Impact" and features a list of seven bullet points on the left side. To the right of the text is a photograph of a child in a blue jacket and hat standing in a shallow pond, surrounded by trees. The background of the slide is light green with a stylized plant graphic on the left.

- Decrease in behaviours incidents when back at school
- Children all spoke more positively about themselves in the post interviews
- All made a positive movement in regards to the impact of trauma (Boxhall profile) on their behaviours.
- Depending on level of trauma some children would require longer in order to have a larger positive change.
- Staff noticed a difference in behaviours and attitudes
- Built up positive attachments with strong role models

More details can be seen in [this presentation](#) on request:



Whinney Hill Farm

Whinney Hill Farm goals (British Thoroughbred Racing Charity)

[Whinney Hill Farm | Lancaster | Facebook](#) was established in 2023 by the [The British Thoroughbred Retraining Centre \(BTRC\) – Ensuring a life for horses after racing \(thebtrc.co.uk\)](#) following support from UCLan to diversify into NBSP. Situated in the Lune Valley, Lancashire and located on the edge of the Forest of Bowland Area National Landscape, the site has over 180 acres of green space including 20 acres of natural woodlands. It is home to a sustainable, eco-friendly camp site and has space for a huge variety of outdoor activities. Their aim is to make nature accessible for all supporting projects for the community, education and positive wellbeing of humans, equines, and the environment.

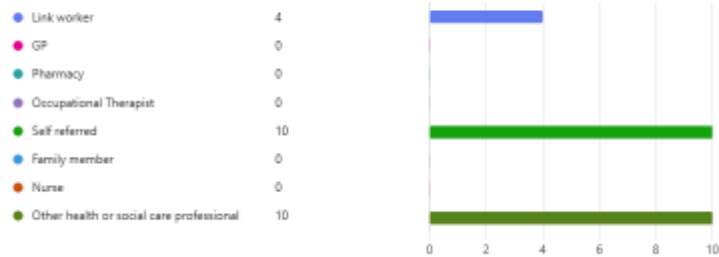
WHF chose to subcontract to an external who provided Forest bathing, nature connection and tree planting. Sessions were advertised to participants locally, and participants from different groups in each session. This reflects the CESP model where community organisations can connect or signpost to another community organisation based on what those individual needs. Participants gave positive feedback on the forest bathing sessions.



The majority self-referred to the community organisation who then connected them with the Forest Bathing opportunities. This reflects the Community Enhanced Model of Social Prescribing (Morris et al., 2020).

6. Who were you referred by? (0 point)

[More details](#)



WHINNEY HILL FARM

Forest Bathing

With Abi Bealey


Forest Bathing - Walk and Talk
Refreshments - Campfire

Reconnect with nature and immerse yourself in the tranquillity of the forest


Boost your mood and reduce stress

Connect with others in a peaceful setting

Share stories while enjoying the warmth of a fire, enjoy light refreshments and create lasting memories

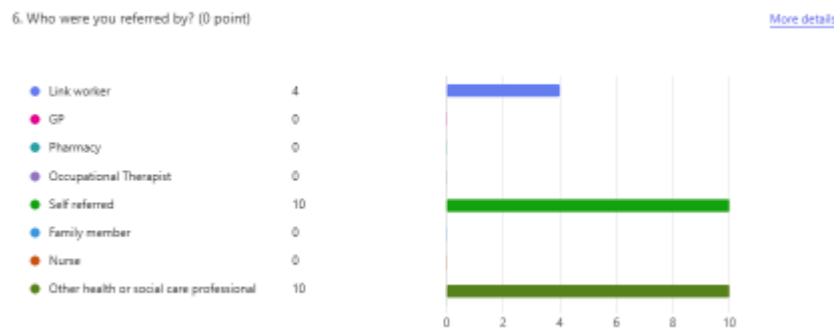


Whinney Hill Farm
Aughton Road
Halton, Lancaster
LA2 6PQ



Email: office@whinneyhillfarm.org

Session 1: Aesiria domestic abuse support. Forest bathing led by Abi Bealey. Session with n=8 participants.



SWEMWBS

Statistics

- 100% enjoyed their time outdoors (n=4 responded)
- 100% thought WHF couldn't do any more (n=4 responded)

Quotes

All participants' quotes were positive and highlighted the connection with people and nature for their health and wellbeing.

- *Spending time in the outdoors “allowed me to focus on myself and reflect. I feel able to reconnect with my mind and body when spending time outdoors”.*
- *“I reconnected with group”*
- *“lots of walks and information about local plants, **I loved making the fire and reflecting on our lives and healing routes**”*
- *“opportunity to open up and talk”*
- *“walk and talk. Made a fire. Recognised gratitude. **Made nature art** 😊 reflected on life. Evaluated and respective our/my progress and decisions”.*
- *“wonderful views, great chat, lovely thoughts. Thank you, very empathetic group leader”*

Session 2: *The Well, community group (20/3/2025) n=8, pre & post completed*

SWEMWBS:

Statistics:

	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100	101	102	103	104	105	106	107	108	109	110	111	112	113	114	115	116	117	118	119	120	121	122	123	124	125	126	127	128	129	130	131	132	133	134	135	136	137	138	139	140	141	142	143	144	145	146	147	148	149	150	151	152	153	154	155	156	157	158	159	160	161	162	163	164	165	166	167	168	169	170	171	172	173	174	175	176	177	178	179	180	181	182	183	184	185	186	187	188	189	190	191	192	193	194	195	196	197	198	199	200	201	202	203	204	205	206	207	208	209	210	211	212	213	214	215	216	217	218	219	220	221	222	223	224	225	226	227	228	229	230	231	232	233	234	235	236	237	238	239	240	241	242	243	244	245	246	247	248	249	250	251	252	253	254	255	256	257	258	259	260	261	262	263	264	265	266	267	268	269	270	271	272	273	274	275	276	277	278	279	280	281	282	283	284	285	286	287	288	289	290	291	292	293	294	295	296	297	298	299	300	301	302	303	304	305	306	307	308	309	310	311	312	313	314	315	316	317	318	319	320	321	322	323	324	325	326	327	328	329	330	331	332	333	334	335	336	337	338	339	340	341	342	343	344	345	346	347	348	349	350	351	352	353	354	355	356	357	358	359	360	361	362	363	364	365	366	367	368	369	370	371	372	373	374	375	376	377	378	379	380	381	382	383	384	385	386	387	388	389	390	391	392	393	394	395	396	397	398	399	400	401	402	403	404	405	406	407	408	409	410	411	412	413	414	415	416	417	418	419	420	421	422	423	424	425	426	427	428	429	430	431	432	433	434	435	436	437	438	439	440	441	442	443	444	445	446	447	448	449	450	451	452	453	454	455	456	457	458	459	460	461	462	463	464	465	466	467	468	469	470	471	472	473	474	475	476	477	478	479	480	481	482	483	484	485	486	487	488	489	490	491	492	493	494	495	496	497	498	499	500	501	502	503	504	505	506	507	508	509	510	511	512	513	514	515	516	517	518	519	520	521	522	523	524	525	526	527	528	529	530	531	532	533	534	535	536	537	538	539	540	541	542	543	544	545	546	547	548	549	550	551	552	553	554	555	556	557	558	559	560	561	562	563	564	565	566	567	568	569	570	571	572	573	574	575	576	577	578	579	580	581	582	583	584	585	586	587	588	589	590	591	592	593	594	595	596	597	598	599	600	601	602	603	604	605	606	607	608	609	610	611	612	613	614	615	616	617	618	619	620	621	622	623	624	625	626	627	628	629	630	631	632	633	634	635	636	637	638	639	640	641	642	643	644	645	646	647	648	649	650	651	652	653	654	655	656	657	658	659	660	661	662	663	664	665	666	667	668	669	670	671	672	673	674	675	676	677	678	679	680	681	682	683	684	685	686	687	688	689	690	691	692	693	694	695	696	697	698	699	700	701	702	703	704	705	706	707	708	709	710	711	712	713	714	715	716	717	718	719	720	721	722	723	724	725	726	727	728	729	730	731	732	733	734	735	736	737	738	739	740	741	742	743	744	745	746	747	748	749	750	751	752	753	754	755	756	757	758	759	760	761	762	763	764	765	766	767	768	769	770	771	772	773	774	775	776	777	778	779	780	781	782	783	784	785	786	787	788	789	790	791	792	793	794	795	796	797	798	799	800	801	802	803	804	805	806	807	808	809	810	811	812	813	814	815	816	817	818	819	820	821	822	823	824	825	826	827	828	829	830	831	832	833	834	835	836	837	838	839	840	841	842	843	844	845	846	847	848	849	850	851	852	853	854	855	856	857	858	859	860	861	862	863	864	865	866	867	868	869	870	871	872	873	874	875	876	877	878	879	880	881	882	883	884	885	886	887	888	889	890	891	892	893	894	895	896	897	898	899	900	901	902	903	904	905	906	907	908	909	910	911	912	913	914	915	916	917	918	919	920	921	922	923	924	925	926	927	928	929	930	931	932	933	934	935	936	937	938	939	940	941	942	943	944	945	946	947	948	949	950	951	952	953	954	955	956	957	958	959	960	961	962	963	964	965	966	967	968	969	970	971	972	973	974	975	976	977	978	979	980	981	982	983	984	985	986	987	988	989	990	991	992	993	994	995	996	997	998	999	1000
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Participant quotes:

"A free walk and transport"

"A nature walk and transport"

"Went on a walk around a farm in Lancaster, got to see some horses up close for the first time"

"walk, talk and explore the land, spoke about native plants that could be found along the way"

"a walk and talk in nature, the weather wasn't on our side. Talk about groups in the future"

"took us on a walk in nature, then had a brew and shared what we were grateful for. then chatted about future groups"

"took us on a walk, talk and practiced gratitude with a brew"

"i am used to the outdoors"

"outdoor life is the way"

*"yes massively, its where i feel most confident and at peace. **its something i don't do as often as i should anymore**"*

*"**it took me back to my childhood and it was brilliant, really good all round**"*

*"yes **i feel better connected to nature**"*

"yes cleared my mind"