

West of England Practitioner Network for Nature and Health

10.00 – 12.30, 11 June 2020, online

Practitioners met online for the eight meeting of the Practitioner Network for Nature and Health.

Michéal Connors (Natural Academy) and Emily Malik (EcoWild) welcomed attendees to the meeting and invited everyone to participate in a brief grounding exercise, taking time to notice the environment surrounding them at home. Michéal provided a brief overview of the purpose and work of the Network, which provides an opportunity for Practitioners in nature, health and wellbeing to provide a unified voice, to connect and to share learnings, and explained that the meeting would pick up previous threads and explore new topics.

Participants were then split into 'Breakout Rooms' to connect, discuss their experiences of lockdown and how nature connection had helped them. Returning to the main meeting, participants were asked to briefly explain why they were interested in the meeting.

UPDATES

Stuart Gardner (WENP) provided an update to members on the work of the West of England Nature Partnership (WENP):

- A West of England Nature and Health webinar would be held in the afternoon of 11th June, after this meeting. The webinar would be dedicated to sharing the work on nature and health over the last two years in the West of England and more widely across the South West, and to discussing how we can work together to make improvements in people's health and wellbeing become an intrinsic part of the recovery of the natural environment. The recording of the event will be made available to those who were not able to attend.
- Following on from the meeting of the WENP Nature and Health Strategy Group on 27th May, a meeting has been set up with social prescribing coordinators to discuss improving the nature and health offer to Primary Care Networks, which bring GP practices within a clinical commissioning group (CCG) boundary to work together at scale.
- Through WENP, the importance of a 'green' Covid recovery has been discussed with local government. Selena Gray and Alan Kellas have written a blog on this subject for the British Medical Journal, which will be shared when the link becomes available.
- WENP is exploring a 'prospectus' of strategic projects for the Nature Recovery Network, and a Tree and Woodland Strategy for the West of England is being produced by the Forest of Avon Trust, overseen by WENP.

Alan Kellas noted that nature-based opportunities were starting to be raised within social prescribing, but that there was still progress to be made in social prescribing become a vehicle for nature-based interventions. However, social prescribing has been especially important during Covid and primary care networks (PCNs) are becoming increasingly important. Sarah Witts noted that a social prescribing enablement fund had been set up in Cornwall.

It was noted that those with personalised care needs might be being funded through personalised assistants and support packages, which could potentially incorporate nature-based interventions. Resources within the care and education sectors could be utilised for nature-based interventions, but that may require working in a more agile way alongside other provisions that are already being funded.

Fiona Castle noted that she was involved in an adverse childhood experiences steering group and acted as an advocate for VOSCA, and suggested raising nature-based interventions at the adverse child experiences steering group. Fiona suggested it might be useful putting something together for when people are part of these conversations, to help raise nature and health as something that can be commissioned, and mapping places of influence.

WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT

Michéal provided an update on the development of a draft website for the Nature and Health Practitioners Network. It was explained that the idea of membership would be partly to help resource management of the website. It was suggested that there may be an opportunity to set up a cooperative process for handling funds for the Network, which could be a community benefit society run by members for members.

One of key areas for the website is the professional practice outline. This provides emerging standards that practitioners could use as best practice; this would be a voluntary process and not an accreditation. However, there is a question regarding what would happen if someone said they were working to these standards and did meet them.

Before making the website 'live', the organisational process will need to be agreed.

Alan Kellas noted that it was important to have a unified outward-facing aspect for, for example, social prescribers and PCNs to refer to, and suggested it could be useful to break down 'nature and health' providers into sub-categories to facilitate this.

Any further comments on the website should be emailed to info@natureandhealthpractitioners.com.

DIVERSITY IN NATURE AND HEALTH

Emily raised the subject of diversity in nature and health, and asked, as a body of people working in an area that is not very diverse, what efforts can practitioners make to change that status quo? There is a need to listen to and understand the realities of others and discuss things that may seem uncomfortable.

This subject will be addressed in more depth at the next meeting of the Network, but if there are any resources or ways to address the lack of diversity in the area that could be shared before then, people are encouraged to do so.

THE IMPACT OF AND RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Participants were asked to discuss the response to Covid-19 and how practitioners could return to providing a service in breakout rooms.

Michaela Slade shared that she had created a risk assessment form to this purpose, which was sent to practitioners with these notes. This has been important in allowing face to face work to resume, which is crucial for many providers of nature-based interventions.

Alan stated that it would be good to have some guidance for ways of working with nature remotely, if any was available.

It was also noted that it needs to be recognised that the process of returning to in-person work may also be difficult for practitioners. There needs to be trust between the practitioner and participants.

NEXT MEETINGS

The next Forum meeting is planned be held on the 8th September. The meeting will be held in person (outdoors) if it is deemed safe to do so, and will otherwise be held online.