



West of England Practitioner Forum for Nature, Health and Wellbeing

12.30 – 16.30, 16 January 2020 at Community Farm, Chew Magna

Practitioners met at the Community Farm for the sixth meeting of the Practitioner Forum for Nature, Health and Wellbeing.

Michéal Connors (Natural Academy) welcomed attendees to the meeting and invited everyone to introduce themselves and briefly explain why they were attending the meeting. Emily Malik (EcoWild) conducted a grounding exercise to connect attendees with the setting of the meeting. Michéal provided a brief overview of the purpose and work of the Forum, which provides an opportunity for Practitioners in nature, health and wellbeing to provide a unified voice, to connect and to share learnings.

UPDATES

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

- WENP's focus in the field of nature and health is on mainstreaming nature-based health services in the West of England, which is being led by the WENP Nature and Health Strategy Working Group and directed by the agreed [Plan for Nature and Health in the West of England](#). Michéal Connors will be leading the development of a consortium bid to establish what 'commissioning-ready' looks like for a selected range of service providers.
- [Hyvr](#) is still being used as the online social media platform to host the 'Nature, Health and Wellbeing Hive'. A survey was recently sent to Hyvr members to provide feedback on the use of Hyvr and the Practitioner Forum more widely. A dedicated website for practitioners is also being created by Michéal, (see later discussions).
- WENP is working to deliver its vision for a [Nature Recovery Network \(NRN\) for the West of England](#) by engaging stakeholders in the region and embedding the NRN in regional and local policy and plans. The development of a Tree and Woodland Strategy is also ongoing, which aims to provide principles and a strategic spatial vision to focus tree planting efforts in the region.
- WENP is involved in the development of a Green Infrastructure Strategy and Biodiversity Net Gain Policy Guidance for the West of England, both of which are being led by WECA on behalf of the four Local Authorities.

Stuart also provided an update on national developments in environmental policy and legislation, focussing on relevant measures in the reintroduced [Agriculture Bill](#) and the [Environment Bill](#), which is expected to be reintroduced to Parliament imminently. Attendees agreed that regional and local action would remain important even in the face of new national policies and legislation, as well as the need for practitioners in nature and health to more effectively communicate the work they do.

Ped Asgarian (Community Farm) noted that it was important to engage with people from all sectors of society with nature, especially those from BAME backgrounds, who are often underrepresented in the environment sector. Participants agreed that this is vital, and Emily added that there was an increasing shift towards basing work on the needs and agenda of the local community.

WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT AND STANDARDS

Michéal provided an overview of the discussions at the previous meeting of the Forum, the notes from which can be accessed [here](#). It was explained that the objective was to move towards a sustainable funding model for practitioners in nature, health and wellbeing; to achieve this, commissioners need to be persuaded of the value of the services that practitioners provide. Currently, the nature and health sector is not integrated within the NHS system. It was added that the arts is a good example of a sector that is well integrated within the NHS (arts-based health services are commissioned and therefore have a continuous and sustainable source of funding) and that the nature and health sector should learn from this success.

The meeting also noted the possibility of commissioning through the social care system, which is funded by local authorities, and that 'personalised budgets', which are currently being trialled within the NHS, can be used for nature and health.

Michéal explained that he was in the process of delivering a website specifically for practitioners in nature, health and wellbeing. The website would be based on the structure of the 'map' contained in Appendix I of these notes, and practitioners would be able to voluntarily 'join' the website and sign up to an agreed set of standards (which have been developed through previous meetings of the Practitioners Forum). Signing up to these standards would effectively act as a 'promise' to follow the standards in one's work, which would provide commissioners and other parties with some assurance on the quality of the services being provided. A potential next step could be accreditation of practitioners, although this would require some form of 'policing'. Accreditation would provide stronger quality assurance and thereby facilitate commissioning, but it would need to be ensured that any accreditation wasn't overly restrictive on practitioners. Accreditation would also be voluntary, so those practitioners who felt it would negatively affect their practice could opt out. Morwhenna agreed to look at the [Arts and Health South West website](#), which could provide lessons for the development of the site.

VALUING

Emily asked participants to consider and discuss how they feel valued by those they engage with and how they represent their work to others. Attendees observed that:

- Practitioners need to value themselves and have confidence in their skills and experience; 'caring' roles have traditionally been undervalued.
- There is a perceived need to make websites and social media look professional and authentic, and a concern that this is valued above the experience and skills of practitioners. Practitioners could look to use media to communicate stories around how they have connected to nature and their personal experiences, which move people. There is a need to utilise these stories and experiences to complement quantitative evidence on the health and wellbeing benefits of nature and green spaces.
- The website for practitioners should bring together existing evidence (both quantitative and qualitative) on the benefits of nature for health and wellbeing. It was agreed that members of the forum would send any evidence to Stuart (stuartgardner@wepn.org.uk) for collation.

Angela (Community Farm) shared the history and purpose of the Community Farm with the meeting, and emphasised the importance of food and farming in nature and health.

NEXT MEETINGS

The next Forum meeting will be held on **Tuesday 24th March**, with a venue to be confirmed. The **2nd June or 11th June** have been identified as provisional dates for a forum on Nature and Health.

APPENDIX I: NATURE AND HEALTH NETWORK WEST OF ENGLAND

HYVR Development: West of England Nature and Health Practitioners Network

