



# Year 1: Impact Report



NOVEMBER 2016



**COMMUNITY  
FOREST TRUST**



**LOTTERY FUNDED**





## AN INITIATIVE FROM THE MERSEY FOREST

Nature4Health is a Community Forest Project within The Mersey Forest.

The Mersey Forest is a growing network of woodlands and green spaces spread across Cheshire and Merseyside, which has been creating 'woodlands on your doorstep' for more than 20 years.

The Forest is one of the leading environmental regeneration initiatives in the North of England. Through community and partnership working, we have planted 9 million trees - equivalent to five new trees for every person living within the Forest area.

The Forest helps our towns and cities adapt to climate change, creates woodlands that 20% of local people visit at least once a week, and by improving the image of our towns and cities sets the scene for growth within the region's £98 billion economy. We achieve all of this and more through our partnership of local authorities, landowners, the Forestry Commission, Natural England, the Environment Agency and businesses.



# Introduction

**Nature4Health uses the power of nature to help people give their minds and bodies a boost.**

It's a three year, £420,000 project funded by The Big Lottery's Reaching Communities Programme to tackle health inequalities in targeted communities across The Mersey Forest. The programme provides five different evidence-based activities, from group walking to mindfulness, all taking place in a green, therapeutic environment. Sessions are targeted at both adults and children and designed to be welcoming to complete beginners.

There are also opportunities for people to get involved in learning the skills needed to help out with managing the sessions, boosting their experience for the job market.

The Mersey Forest is managing Nature4Health, working with a range of partners to run the activities. There's a big focus on collecting the evidence with both the University of Liverpool and Liverpool John Moores University studying the programme to see how it impacts on people's health.

## OUR FIVE NATURE4HEALTH ACTIVITY PRODUCTS



### HEALTH WALKS

Walking is the easiest form of outdoor exercise supporting the widest age and ability range.



### HORTICULTURAL THERAPY

Improving mental and physical wellbeing through gardening and growing food.



### MINDFUL CONTACT WITH NATURE

Applying the principles of mindfulness to the outdoors brings a walk in the woods to a new level of intensity. It's all about submerging yourself in the sights, sounds and smells of the woods.



### FOREST SCHOOL

Forest School allows children to play, explore and learn about the natural environment and do activities like shelter-building, outdoor cooking, growing plants, using tools and bug-hunting. It's a hands-on approach to promote play in natural environments.



### PRACTICAL CONSERVATION

Conservation Workout sessions such as Green Gym™ involve getting stuck in to do practical tasks to improve the environment, boosting health at the same time.

We're working in partnership with local organisations who have strong community roots and connections. It's about a longer term 'co-production' approach between The Mersey Forest and local partners. They are:

- 
- A young boy with dark hair, wearing a navy blue school sweater over a white collared shirt and grey shorts, is kneeling on a grassy area. He is focused on planting a small, light-brown potato into a hole he has dug in the dark brown soil. His left hand holds another similar potato. To his left, a green plant stem with leaves is visible. In the background, a wooden picnic table is partially visible, with a blue tarp and a person's legs standing nearby. The scene is outdoors, likely in a school garden or park.



## TARGETING 'HARD TO REACH' PARTICIPANTS FROM AREAS IN NEED





## AFTER 12 WEEKS...

By the end of the project children and adults will:

- 🍃 have increased self-esteem and confidence
- 🍃 be more active
- 🍃 have developed better coping strategies and resilience

We developed the Nature4Health programme based on the learning outlined in the Big Lottery Fund National Well-being Evaluation which found that these factors were key:

- 🍃 identifying local need
- 🍃 taking a holistic approach
- 🍃 engaging the target group, understanding the barriers to participants involvement.
- 🍃 using safe, welcoming and easy to access venues

## ...AND BEYOND!

We have a focus on investing in the skills development of those who get involved, encouraging long term behaviour change. That includes:

- 🍃 peer mentoring
- 🍃 post-course volunteering programme
- 🍃 signposting to other local activities and organisations

- 🍃 project staff who are empathetic and enthusiastic
- 🍃 the use of volunteers in projects
- 🍃 imparting skills and knowledge to participants

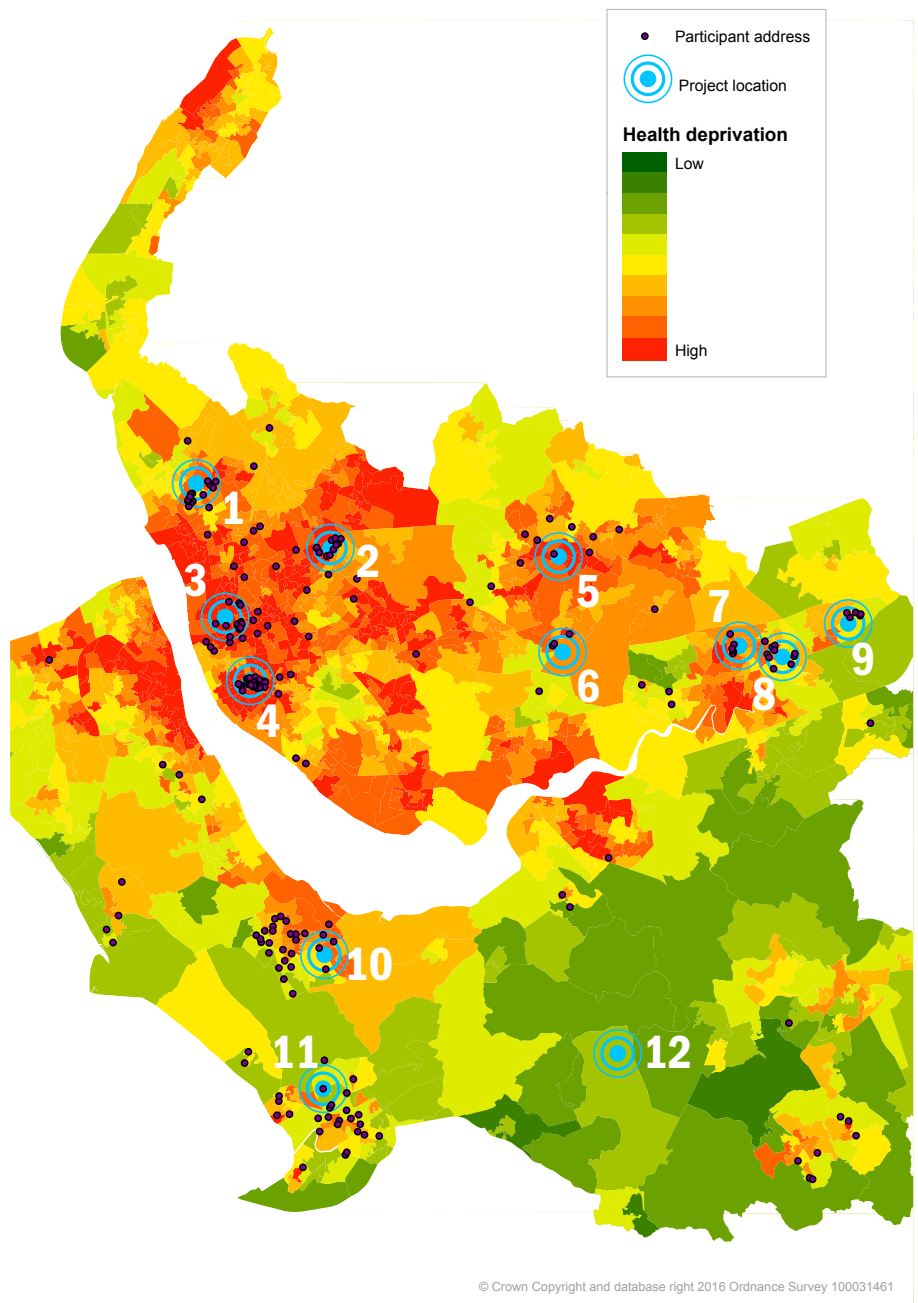
# Our participants

**We've worked with 13 local partners across six local authorities to support 286 participants in year one of Nature4Health.**

We've positioned our projects in locations of high health deprivation and sought to attract participants from the area. The map above shows where our participants live and the project locations.

## KEY TO PROJECT LOCATIONS

1. Rimrose Valley
2. Croxteth, Liverpool
3. Everton Park, Liverpool
3. Everton Nature Park, Liverpool
4. Kingsley School, Liverpool
5. St.Helens Greenspace
6. Dream, Sutton, St.Helens
7. St Stephens School, Warrington
8. Christ Church School, Warrington
9. Risley Moss, Warrington
10. Whitby Park, Ellesmere Park
11. Countess of Chester Country Park
12. Delamere Forest







## PARTICIPANT GROUPS

Our participants have included:

- 🍃 families including those with high BMI and sedentary lifestyles
- 🍃 children who are not reaching milestones in primary school
- 🍃 Older people becoming more active – aiding fall prevention and providing dementia support
- 🍃 adults in recovery (substance misuse)
- 🍃 younger parents
- 🍃 young people with learning difficulties
- 🍃 adults with disabilities
- 🍃 veterans
- 🍃 adults with enduring mental health difficulties
- 🍃 men aged 50+
- 🍃 mixed, open groups within areas disadvantage

**“I THOUGHT I’D BE OUT OF MY DEPTH... BUT GLADLY I WAS WRONG”.**

**– WALKING RUGBY PARTICIPANT**

**“THIS EXERCISE IS KEEPING ME OUT OF THE HOSPITAL. BETTER THAN THERAPY!”**

**– GREEN GYM PARTICIPANT**

**“THE GROUP IS GOOD AND I CAN NOW TAKE ON THE WORLD - BRING IT ON!”**

**– THERAPEUTIC GARDENING PARTICIPANT**

# The results so far

**We asked all participants to complete questionnaires which assessed both mental wellbeing and levels of physical activity.**

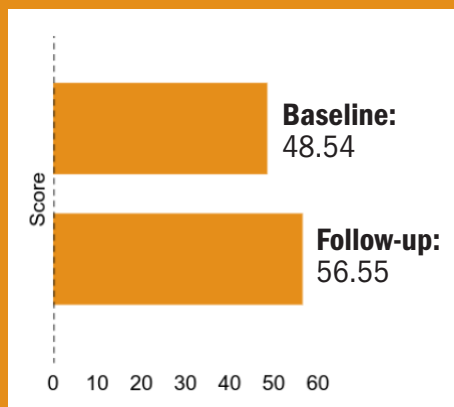
We used WEMWBS\* forms to measure mental wellbeing. This set of 14 questions gives a wellbeing score of between 14 and 70. The IPAQ\*\* questionnaire was used to calculate the amount and intensity level of physical activity. Participants completed baseline questionnaires and this was followed up with a second questionnaire after the 12 week course of activities was complete.

The results show a marked improvement in WEMWBS scores of over 8 points. Between 3 and 8 points improvement is usually considered to be meaningful. The IPAQ results show an overall increase in 'MET-minutes' per week of 47% (from 3016 to 4457 minutes) – in the chart below we've broken that down into types of activity to make the results clearer.

## MENTAL WELLBEING RESULTS

**WEMWBS  
AVERAGE SCORES**

**↑ 8 points**



**WEMWBS  
BEST PROJECT**

**↑ 19.5 points**

(Health Walks, Croxteth Park, Cass Foundation)

## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY RESULTS



**WALKING  
ACTIVITY**

**↑ 48%**

**Before:**  
39.0 mins per day

**After:**  
57.6 mins per day



**MODERATE  
ACTIVITY**

**↑ 164%**

**Before:**  
19.8 mins per day

**After:**  
52.2 mins per day



**VIGOROUS  
ACTIVITY**

**↑ 7%**

**Before:**  
26.8 mins per day

**After:**  
28.8 mins per day

\* Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale

\*\* International Physical Activity Questionnaire





## MARGOT'S STORY

*"On 19 January 2016, just two days into my retirement and not quite sure what the future held, I read an article in the local paper about the Green Gym at the Countess of Chester Hospital Country Park. I thought it sounded interesting and decided to go and check it out for myself as the country park is very near where I live. So, within 25 minutes of reading about the Green Gym I was meeting the Leader, Neil McMahon, who was very friendly and introduced me to the other members."*

*"Looking back, I feel so lucky I read that article back in January and instinctively acting on it. Getting involved with practical conservation activities such as hedge laying and tree planting has helped me in so many ways. I've learnt new skills, improving my fitness levels while at the same time breathing in the fresh air, enjoying working outdoors having spent the past 30 years office bound, meeting new people, enjoying their company as we work and then chat over a cuppa."*

# What we've learned



**A big part of Nature4Health is our focus on evaluation and learning. This will help us to create a service that can be easily commissioned by health bodies and prescribed by GPs.**

## OUR IMPACT SO FAR

According to our ongoing monitoring and evaluation of Nature4Health, we've made the following achievements:

- 🍃 health inequalities effectively targeted
- 🍃 improved health outcomes for participants
- 🍃 we can show value for money
- 🍃 increased community capacity to improve health outcomes
- 🍃 increased capacity for self care amongst participants
- 🍃 strong social and community benefits
- 🍃 we're gaining the ability to provide clear evidence about effectiveness of this type of project to inform future commissioning decisions by the health sector.

## LESSONS FROM NATURE4HEALTH

As the project has got underway, we've learned a number of lessons about how to run an effective course. These include:

- 🍃 the need to tailor activities to fit in with the local culture eg. in St.Helens walking rugby sessions with Saints RFL have been particularly successful in attracting hard to reach groups
- 🍃 that these sorts of projects cannot simply have a physical health focus – social interaction is critical to success
- 🍃 effective monitoring and evaluation is vital so we continue to make our evaluation tools accessible, scientific and robust
- 🍃 the need to be both proactive and flexible in delivery – we have learnt to listen and adapt as we develop





## THE PATH AHEAD: YEAR TWO

We're now heading into Year Two of Nature4Health, building on the lessons learned so far. In November 2016 we will be holding a Partnership Event to regroup with all our local partners and discuss what we can do differently in the year ahead.

The ongoing learning from the programme can inform improved commissioning models for better health outcomes. We are beginning a new Big Lottery funded project to make Nature4Health activity products ready for GPs to prescribe to people who they think will benefit. That means market analysis, engagement with commissioners and a new online presence.

For our participants, we're aiming to do more to help them sustain behaviour change through developing more volunteer routes and signposting opportunities.

## CONTACT US

For more information on Nature4Health, please contact:

Suzanne Londra  
The Mersey Forest  
Risley Moss  
Ordnance Avenue  
Birchwood  
Warrington  
WA3 6QX

Tel: 01925 816217

### Nature4Health

✉ [suzanne.londra@merseyforest.org.uk](mailto:suzanne.londra@merseyforest.org.uk)

🏠 [www.nature4health.org.uk](http://www.nature4health.org.uk)

📘 [facebook.com/Nature4HealthTMF](https://facebook.com/Nature4HealthTMF)

### The Mersey Forest

✉ [mail@merseyforest.org.uk](mailto:mail@merseyforest.org.uk)

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