

REPORT OF LEARNING AND INCLUSION TEAM (ENGAGEMENT and INCLUSION)

SUBJECT: ROOTS TO RECOVERY AND PATHWAYS – PROJECT UPDATES AND REVIEW

Purpose of Report

To provide an update to Members on two projects which support diversity and inclusion across our communities, providing participants with opportunities to volunteer and discover the National Park, whilst providing health and wellbeing benefits to those taking part.

Introduction/Background

Pathways

The Pathways ‘supported volunteering project’ has been operational over a period of six years, starting in 2017. Over the lifetime of the project funding has been drawn from a variety of sources including Welsh Government and Charitable Trusts to an approximate value of £250k.

The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act was a major influence in project planning and design. Project activity focuses upon the health and wellbeing benefits offered by the outdoors, providing supported practical volunteering sessions for individuals whilst working with external groups and organisations to ensure referrals and self-referrals are drawn from the intended audience for the project where possible.

To date more than 3,500 volunteer days have been contributed by approximately 150 individual volunteers. During 2022/23 an average of 9 volunteers attended each session and more than 550 volunteer days were contributed.

Volunteers participated in practical conservation and access work at locations across the National Park and surrounding area, with tasks provided by NPA teams and partnerships with local conservation groups and organisations.

Volunteering sessions are generally led by the Pathways Volunteering Officer, sometimes alongside Rangers or partner organisation staff. Volunteers are supported by ‘volunteer activity leaders’, working in a supportive role alongside others to help participants complete tasks.

The project targets those who are new to volunteering and who may encounter barriers to engaging in regular activity outdoors – particularly younger and older people and those experiencing mental health issues. Individuals may volunteer themselves, be referred to the project or join from participating groups.

Training and learning opportunities are a key element of the project offer and Pathways programmes have included sessions for individual volunteers to develop their skills and motivation, and workshops covering a range of topics from wood carving and bushcraft

skills to bumble bee conservation. Additionally, sessions have been held to inspire and motivate participants in continuing their involvement with the project and exploration of the outdoors, these included trips to Castlemartin Range and community woodlands in Pembrokeshire.

There is a strong focus on evaluation to capture the impact that participation has on those taking part – through daily review and documenting of longer-term outcomes using a range of approaches including ‘Most Significant Change’ and group evaluation through a ‘community of enquiry’.

Roots to Recovery

Roots to Recovery was developed as a project by Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority and Mind Pembrokeshire, built on previous collaborative working between the two organisations and the recognition that ‘access to the outdoors’ and the National Park in particular, can contribute to improving the mental health and wellbeing of those involved.

The National Lottery Community Fund funded project started in September 2021 (for three years) and we are now more than two thirds through the funding period.

The project supports individuals who identify as having a mental health problem with supported volunteering opportunities and access to outdoor group activity in and around the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park.

At present the project delivery team includes a 4 day/week project officer role based at Mind Pembrokeshire together with a 3 day/week Project Officer and 2 day/week Volunteering Officer based with the National Park. The agreed funding package from the Big Lottery provided additional support (for a 5 day/week Volunteering Officer), however internal secondments (within PCNPA) have meant that the project has temporarily less staff time allocated to delivery than originally envisaged.

Roots to Recovery is overseen by an Operational Steering Group (OSG) made up of the delivery team, the Chief Executive Officer and Haverfordwest Centre Manager from Mind Pembrokeshire and the Learning and Inclusion Team Lead and Volunteer Development Officer from the National Park Authority. The OSG have regular meetings to review project progress and provide a project management input into the work. The project lead also meets regularly with the delivery team.

In addition to the above, the project also has a ‘peer to peer’ group that contributes to the development and management of the project’s activity *(more detail in the next section).

At the outset the project sought to set-up community hubs from which local/community activity could be delivered. The project team has established three of these, one in Tenby/Pembroke, a second in Haverfordwest and a third in Fishguard - although we have agreed to re-locate to Narberth in 2024 – a decision made based on the challenges the project team have encountered in sustaining regular activity in Fishguard.

The Operational Steering Group believe the hubs provide the best possible chance for individuals to access the services the project offers given the challenges of transport in

rural areas and the need to provide accessible spaces to meet and socialise as well as a 'pick-up / 'drop off' point for planned activities.

Each hub is based at a recognisable community meeting space in a town with reasonable transport links (transport for potential beneficiaries is an ongoing challenge in a County with poor public transport links). The hub in Pembroke/Tenby is located in rooms at the Town Hall at the centre of the town and also at the Mind Resource in Pembroke Dock. In Haverfordwest, Roots to Recovery is based at the Mind Pembrokeshire Resource Centre (<https://www.mindpembrokeshire.org.uk/find-help/resource-centre>).

In Fishguard, the project was located at the Gateway Hub close to the centre of the town, in Narberth we are looking to make use of the Bloomfield Centre as a recognised community hub.

The project team deliver a range of activities from volunteering opportunities in and around Pembrokeshire Coast National Park to walks (short and long depending on those attending) and 'discovery sessions' that can range from beach art through to bushcraft activities in local woods. Increasingly, some of the activity is delivered on the 'doorstep' of the hub sites, making use of local footpaths and supporting community gardening and conservation management programmes.

In the first 2 years of the project (From September 2021) the Roots to Recovery team have delivered just under 240 activity sessions (a mix of half-day and full-day) with an average attendance of 8 per session. In total the project now has over 100 registered participants together with 13 project (Mentor) volunteers. The programmes of activity are produced in advance so that those involved can select activity to suit their needs.

Comparisons

Many examples of 'traditional' outdoor volunteering schemes (including other opportunities provided PCNPA, National Trust, Wildlife Trust, Friends of the PCNPA etc) exist. However, whilst other supported employment and volunteering schemes exist in West Wales, none offer the range of accessible (and supported) practical outdoor volunteering offered by Pathways.

There are a range of services targeted at people with poor mental health, with some seeking to make use of outdoor settings – for example the MENCAP Walled Garden at Stackpole. Roots to Recovery offers a wider range of opportunities (in multiple locations across the National Park) available through referral and self-referral.

Financial considerations

Current cost to the Authority in terms of core budget is very low as both Roots to Recovery and Pathways are funded externally.

Pathway has been in receipt of more than £250k of external funding since its launch 2017. Further funding is required from April 2024 onwards and with that in mind, several applications for support are under consideration at present.

The National Lottery Community Fund provided £340k of support for the three year project (which started in September 2021). A projected underspend will mean that the project is fully funded (Subject to NLCF approval) until the end of 2024.

Risk considerations

No significant risks associated with the Roots to Recovery and Pathways projects, both are compliant with PCNPA Health and Safety and other policies whilst making a positive contribution to the reputation of the organisation.

Compliance

The projects support the NPA's duty to 'foster the social and economic well-being of local communities'. Both Pathways and Roots to Recovery support the National Park Authority's Corporate Wellbeing Objectives relating to Connection, Communities and Conservation (much of the focus of practical volunteering is around conservation and nature recovery projects)

The projects also supports PCNPA commitments with regard to the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.

Human Rights/Equality issues

Pathways and Roots to Recovery support PCNPA's Equality plan, and represent a strong demonstration of the Authorities commitment to Equality and Diversity etc.

Biodiversity implications/Sustainability appraisal

Pathways and Roots to Recovery volunteers make a significant contribution to the conservation and access work of the National Park.

Welsh Language statement

Whilst some of the Pathways sessions in the north of the County can be delivered bilingually, the project teams are not able to deliver this service consistently. Expanding opportunities to deliver supported volunteering activity bilingually should be a consideration in terms of the future development of this work.

Conclusion

Pathways and Roots to Recovery provide support to individuals (and groups in some cases) who might otherwise not get the opportunity to explore the National Park.

Along with the young people who are part of PCNPA Next Generation, volunteers involved with Pathways and/or Routes to Recovery make up around 25% of the active 'volunteering family', whom contribute significantly to the management of the National Park and work of the Authority. The supported nature of this volunteering, which includes help with transport and other associated costs together with mentoring and 'peer to peer' support, mean that people who might otherwise face significant barriers to their participation are better able to get involved.

In general terms, both projects contribute to the diversity of the audience engaged and involved with the National Park and offer the opportunity to further develop the inclusivity of our work as an Authority.

Recommendation

Receive the interim project reports for Pathways and Roots to Recovery and note for future consideration.

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