

REPORT OF DISCOVERY TEAM

SUBJECT: PATHWAYS PROJECT – REVIEW AFTER 2 YEARS DELIVERY

Purpose of Report

To provide an update to Members on the Pathways Project

Introduction/Background

The Pathways project is two years into a three and half year period of funding provided by Welsh Government. The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act was a major influence in project planning and design. Project activity focuses upon the health, wellbeing and developmental benefits offered by the outdoors, and is divided into two work areas; providing supported practical volunteering sessions for individuals, and developing the capacity of other organisations to access the benefits regular use of the outdoors offers their clients (continuing the work of PCNPA's 'Your Park' project 2012-16).

To date more than 800 people have taken in Pathways project activity as part of approximately 180 sessions. Individual volunteering have contributed more than 800 work days, participating in practical conservation and access work at locations across the National Park and surrounding area. Volunteers are supported by 'volunteer activity leaders', working in a supportive role alongside others to help them complete tasks. Over 75 individuals have taken part in Pathways volunteering sessions since the project began.

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.

Practical tasks have taken place both at venues in the National Park and sites closer to urban areas, being sourced from Warden Teams as well as partner organisations. Work is generally led by the Pathways project officer, sometimes alongside Rangers or partner organisation staff.

In supporting organisations to make more use of the National Park as a location, the Pathways team have worked with 12 local groups and their staff, volunteers and clients. The project has worked with Clynffw Care Farm, Cyfle Cymru, Elliots Hill day care, Mind and VC Gallery amongst others. More regular and diverse activities led by staff and volunteers in the outdoors have been reported by 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 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 Skomer Island.

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 emerging ‘Most Significant Change’ methodology now adopted county-wide and incorporating work with Swansea University under the banner of ‘community of enquiry’. The interim evaluation report on the Pathways project is summarised here, its highlight evidence drawn from monitoring and evaluation to date in considering the continued development of the project’s work.

Overall, challenges remain in recruitment of volunteers from our target communities and in developing provision for the diverse needs of participating individuals and organisations, particularly around recruiting sufficient ‘volunteer activity leaders’ to support other volunteers on each session. Meeting challenges presented by our rurality is as ever a challenge, as well as working effectively with other organisations in a time of limited resources.

Comparisons

Many examples of ‘traditional’ volunteering schemes (including other PCNPA, National Trust, Friends of the PCNPA etc) exist. ‘The (British) Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV / TCV) has run an inclusive volunteering scheme for some 50 years, though not in West Wales. The Princes Trust TEAM programme is in some ways a comparable volunteering scheme run for Young People. However none really offer the breadth and scope of practical volunteering seen in Pathways.

Financial considerations

Current cost to the Authority is zero as covered by £250k WG funding until March 2021, before when consideration of alternative funding by the Authority may be desirable.

Risk considerations

No significant risks associated with the project, compliant with standard PCNPA Health and Safety and makes a positive contribution to the reputation of the organisation.

Compliance

The project supports the NPA’s duty to ‘foster the social and economic well-being of local communities’. Pathways is a strong demonstration of the Authorities work towards WG directives, WFGA, SSA etc

Human Rights/Equality issues

Pathways supports PCNPA Equality plan, and is a strong demonstration of the Authorities commitment to Equality and Diversity etc.

Biodiversity implications/Sustainability appraisal

Pathways volunteers make a significant contribution to the conservation and access work of the National Park and is run as sustainably as possible. Provides extra capacity in supporting biodiversity – e.g. hedge-laying increasing connectivity etc.

Welsh Language statement

Currently Welsh provision not demanded by participants although this is in Project Plan as future development of the project.

Conclusion

The Pathways project is more than half way through its funded period and has a solid base on which to build through subsequent years. In addition to ensuring the project continues to deliver against the identified outcomes (in the original business plan), there are opportunities to secure funding for Pathways 'Phase II'. Decisions around future funding need to take account of learning drawn from the delivery of the existing project.

Recommendation

Receive the interim project report and note for future consideration.

Author: Graham Peake (Discovery Team Leader)