

## OPEN Project Case Study

### Seminar: Pathways to Social and Job Inclusion for People with Disabilities

#### Case Study Title: Shropshire Outdoors

#### Organisation

Shropshire Outdoors is funded by the BIG Lottery 'Living Well in the West Midlands' portfolio. Shropshire Outdoors was developed through the Shropshire Big Lottery Wellbeing Partnership. Led by Shropshire County Primary Care Trust, members include Shropshire Council and Shropshire Wildlife Trust.

Participating organisations include:

- Mental health - Mind, Community Mental Health Teams
- Adults with Learning Disability (ALD) - Mencap, Shropshire Council ALD services in North, Central and South localities
- Physical Disability - Shropshire Enablement Team, Headway
- Countryside - Shropshire Council, Shropshire Wildlife Trust, Natural England, National Trust, Severn Trent, Severn Gorge Countryside Trust
- Community - Craven Arms Volunteer for the Environment (CAVE), Friends of Ifton Meadows
- Parish Paths Partnerships
- Walking for Health

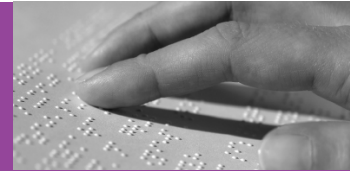
#### Summary

The outdoor environment is widely recognised as a major contributor to health and wellbeing. However, it is also recognised that 'sedentary groups', including some people with disabilities, are infrequent visitors to the countryside - many do not have the opportunity to access the countryside on their doorstep.

Shropshire Outdoors began in December 2007 and is funded for three years. The project targets those with learning disabilities, physical disabilities and mental health problems and increases physical activity levels by providing 'green exercise' opportunities. The project also addresses barriers to countryside access.

#### The objectives

Shropshire Outdoors was developed to improve health and wellbeing; and to address health inequalities experienced by disabled people. The main aims and objectives of the project are to:



- consult with project users and develop activities based on their interests
- promote positive mental health and increase physical activity levels in the countryside
- increase the capacity of organisations and staff to deliver countryside activities for users
- create a sustainable legacy that enables users to progress to mainstream countryside activities
- provide material and resources to increase skills, understanding and enjoyment of the countryside
- develop opportunities for users to gain recognition of their achievements
- monitor and evaluate physical activity and its impact on health and well-being

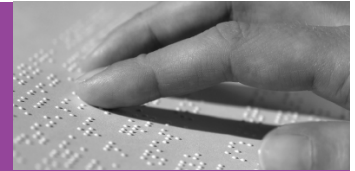
## The challenges

- A key challenge was to recruit and equip staff to meet the specific project aims. However, the benefits that countryside activities offer are well recognised within the health and social care sector, particularly in terms of social inclusion and health and wellbeing. This has generated interest amongst centre managers, service users, carers, occupational therapists and community support workers alike.
- Engaging project beneficiaries in regular physical activity requires ongoing support to ensure confidence is maintained and other barriers and concerns are addressed
- Providing green physical activities that meet the needs, interests and abilities of target groups. The level and intensity of countryside activities needs to be pitched at the right level and tasks needed to be both site and task specific.
- Monitoring levels of participation and the increase in physical activity levels is relatively straightforward. Less easy is the impact on beneficiaries' mental health and wellbeing. This requires an understanding of 'softer' outcomes, such as improved confidence and identifying new learning skills.

## The solutions

The project:

- has met the challenge of building staff capacity by providing training to countryside staff in disability awareness. Training delivered includes 'Working with Vulnerable Adults' and 'Understanding Barriers to the Countryside' delivered by Shropshire Council Joint Training and Disabled Holiday Information.
- has embedded physical activity within service provision by providing partners with materials and resources such as educational resources, outdoor clothing and mobility aids. Beneficiaries have received mobility aids, waterproof clothing and learning resources and tools.



- provides green physical activities that meet the needs, interests and abilities of target groups by involving supporting staff and project beneficiaries in site visit and taster sessions and providing participants with the opportunity to contribute to the design of the programme.
- has engaged project beneficiaries in regular physical activity by consulting with, and enlisting the support of, partner organisations that were able to actively involve project beneficiaries. This included, for example, the production of 'easy-read' leaflets and consultation on how best to undertake evaluation.
- has promoted involvement in the John Muir Trust Award which encourages individuals to keep a record of their achievements by building up a portfolio, in order to monitor and evaluate the "soft" outcomes of the project. In Year 3, the project will also undertake a series of "video diaries" as a means of capturing the benefits that the project is having on health, wellbeing, social inclusion and the environment.

To date, Shropshire Outdoors has worked in partnership with 15 health and social care organisations from the statutory and voluntary sector.

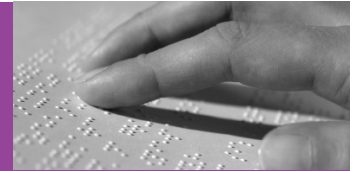
£17,343 capital has been used to deliver upgrades at sites in Market Drayton, Craven Arms, Whitchurch and Shrewsbury. In Year 3, capital funding will be allocated to sites at St. Martins, Oswestry, Ludlow and Ellesmere.

## The results

Project monitoring demonstrates that the project is making a significant contribution towards Shropshire Council Key Performance Indicators and is meeting project outputs contained within the project bid.

The project has delivered 670 physical activity event hours





152 beneficiaries and 17 health and social care staff are engaged in the project

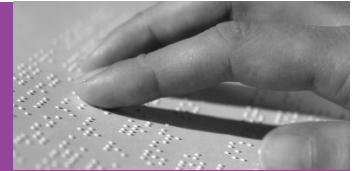
35 beneficiaries progressed into countryside volunteering and services delivering self-guided outdoor physical activities for beneficiaries



37 countryside staff have attended training from Shropshire Council, Shropshire Wildlife Trust, Natural England, The Greenwood Trust and Severn Valley Gorge Countryside Trust

94% of respondents agree that they "feel better" after Shropshire Outdoor activities





76% agree to physical health benefits

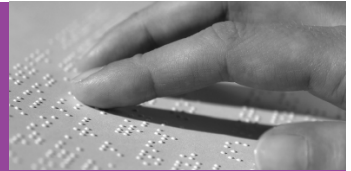
70% have responded that they would like to get involved with other activities in the community



In some cases, participants have gained the skills and confidence to progress into mainstream volunteering

Living Well has shortlisted the Shropshire Outdoors Project as one of four projects out of the 30 Living Well projects. It has been put forward for the category of "Best Health project" category





## Learning points

The Project has helped to raise awareness about disability by facilitating lasting partnerships between countryside and health and social care organisations.

Consultation with *Taking Part* has shown that the key ingredients to sustaining green physical activity are to provide:

- **Information** - on accessible countryside sites and progression opportunities in countryside volunteering
- **On-going consultation, training and support** - on achievable and accessible countryside activities
- **Communication** - maintaining links between delivery partners and participating organisations
- **Access to transport, materials and resources** - which help to sustain the involvement of participating organisations
- **Strengthening of staff capacity** - some project beneficiaries may require 1:1 support; this can lead to improved understaffing at Day Services

## Comment

This project is included for its strong project design, which leads to tangible outputs and outcomes. The process equips providers in a very practical way to successfully enable people with disabilities to access new opportunities - learning is ongoing and leaves a strong (sustainable) legacy. Using social activities as a first vital step, people with disabilities can gain the skills and confidence to begin mainstream voluntary work.

## Contact

For more information please go to the [Shropshire Outdoors](http://Shropshire Outdoors) website or email [countryside.access@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:countryside.access@shropshire.gov.uk). Alternatively you can call 01743 255061.