

West of England Practitioner Network for Nature and Health

14.00 – 16.30, 8 September 2020, online

Practitioners met online for the ninth meeting of the Practitioner Network for Nature and Health.

Michéal Connors (Natural Academy) and Emily Malik (EcoWild) welcomed attendees to the meeting and invited everyone to participate in a brief grounding exercise, taking time to notice the environment surrounding them at home. Participants were then asked to briefly introduce themselves.

Michéal provided a brief overview of the purpose and work of the Network, 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 Manager) provided an update to members on the work of the West of England Nature Partnership (WENP):

- The next meeting of the WENP Nature and Health Strategy Group will be held on 14 October. Following on from May's meeting of the Group, a conservation was held with social prescribing link workers in the region, which highlighted the need to better communicate existing nature and health services in the West of England to commissioners, GPs etc. It was therefore suggested to produce a 'Nature and Health Guide' for the West of England, similar to the existing [Blue Care Guide](#).
- A West of England Nature and Health webinar was held on 11th June 2020. The notes and recordings from the webinar can be viewed [here](#).
- Stuart and Selena Gray, the WENP Chair, will be presenting to the [Bristol Health Partners](#) (BHP) Executive Group meeting on 17th September. BHP is a strategic collaboration between Bristol city region's universities, major health and care providers and commissioners, covering the Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire area. It has been designated as an Academic Health Science Centre.
- The Consortium Bid, which was developed as a means to establish what 'commissioning-ready' looks like for a selected range of service providers and to facilitate the mainstreaming of nature-based health services in the West of England, was unsuccessful in its applications to the King's Fund and Health Foundation Common Ambition Fund. Funding sources continue to be sought.
- WENP is developing a 'prospectus' of investible projects for the Nature Recovery Network, to which public and private investment in nature-based solutions could be targeted.
- A Tree and Woodland Strategy for the West of England is being produced through WENP. An Executive Summary of this is planned to be released this Autumn.
- The [WENP Conference 2020](#) will be held on the afternoon of the 8th October 2020, with the theme of accelerating nature's recovery in the West of England. Free tickets are available [here](#).

PRACTITIONER NETWORK ORGANISATION

Michéal explained that a Community Interest Company ('Nature and Health Practitioners') had been set up as part of the move to set up the Practitioner Network as a membership organisation. Michéal, Emily Malik and Alan Kellas have been made Officers of the CIC for the moment, but this will be open to adjustment as the organisation is formalised (see below).

The website for the Practitioner Network has also been set up: <https://www.natureandhealthpractitioners.com/>.

The intention is for membership of the Network to be open to all, not just 'hands-on' practitioners, with an annual subscription of £25 planned. This would be used to fund website management and administration of the

Network, although separate fundraising (as is done at the moment through WENP) would likely still be required. Not being a member would not prevent anyone from attending the Practitioner Network meetings.

An accreditation process for members will be explored in the future, but for moment membership would enable practitioners to have a 'single voice' and support the continued running of the network.

It was explained that it may take up to 12 weeks to open a bank account to which subscriptions could be paid. However, membership could be opened now with the agreement to pay the fee when the bank account is open. It was agreed that this would be an appropriate course of action.

Any further comments on the website or proposed approach should be emailed to info@natureandhealthpractitioners.com.

People can be more closely involved in the Network through taking on an officer role or an advocate role:

- Officers will be closely involved in running the Network
- Advocates will advocate for the Network in other groups, in the formation of strategy, etc.

Michéal, Emily Malik and Alan Kellas have been made officers of the CIC for the moment, but anyone with an interest in becoming an officer should email info@natureandhealthpractitioners.com.

DIVERSITY IN NATURE AND HEALTH

The subject of diversity in nature and health was raised at the previous meeting of the Network, recognising the inequalities in access to green space and nature connection (and in those working in nature and health).

The following statement was suggested to frame the Network's work on diversity, which could also be added to the website:

We know that everyone benefits when a range of voices and experiences are present, so representation by all parts of our society is important to us as Nature and Health Practitioners. It is not enough for us to welcome all practitioners and participants; we will also act as allies and challenge inequality in health benefits from nature connection.

Any comments on this draft statement should be sent to info@natureandhealthpractitioners.com by 18th September, after which it will be added to the website. It was also suggested to add links to organisations promoting nature activities for Visible Ethnic Minority (VME) and other poorly engaged communities on the website.

It was proposed that a subgroup on this topic could be created, with a meeting held ahead of the next full meeting of the Practitioner Network. It was added that an effort should be made to (re)involve black2nature, and Green and Black ambassadors with this work, with the understanding that it is not sufficient to rely on these organisations – everyone needs to take active steps to improve diversity in the sector.

The importance of talking to people within and working with communities, including community leaders, was raised, which will help to ensure that the barriers to access to nature are properly understood, rather than guessing them from the outside.

UPDATES

Jane Wright (Natural England) provided an update on the Somer Valley Rediscovered programme:

- The programme aims to connect people to local heritage; support health and wellbeing through contact and connection with nature and the landscape; improve biodiversity and tackle climate change; and improve green spaces.
- There is a social prescribing element to the programme, with Wessex Water interested in how social prescribing, including through nature, can reduce the prevalence of pharmaceuticals in the drinking water. A social prescribing link worker is attached to GP surgeries in the region, and will be working with people interested in coming off antidepressants and spending time outdoors.

- The learning from the LGA Obesity Trailblazer work that took place in early 2019 has been built into the planning and design of the Somer Valley Rediscovered project. This project is a key part of the wider B&NES whole systems approach to obesity work.

There is a need to actively educate GPs, social prescribing link workers etc. so that the value of nature and health is understood, including the benefits of nature connection over and above people just spending time outdoors. There is potentially a role for the Practitioner Network here, which will be communicated to the Programme Manager.

Sarah Witts provided an update on the Nature Connection work in Cornwall. A CIC has been set up for Nature Connection, which will offer nature-based programmes in the region and is now seeking funding through a [crowdfunding campaign](#).

Sarah also explained that George Eustice was her local MP and that she had a meeting arranged with him on 18 September. The Network was asked what the most important messages were to communicate at that meeting. Attendees replied that it would be useful to:

- Ensure an understanding of different areas of nature and health work;
- Convey the reciprocity between nature and health (i.e. that nature connection creates pro-environmental behaviours);
- Communicate the need for funding for people to be able to access opportunities for nature connection; and
- Raise the [five pathways to nature connection](#) model.

Any further thoughts on points to raise at the meeting should be communicated to natureconnectscic@gmail.com.

GREEN PRESCRIBING

SGa provided an update on the £4 million Green Prescribing fund announced by government, explaining that the NHS will send out invitations for expressions of interest to ten candidate areas, from which four will be chosen for funding. Natural England and the NHS are the delivery partners for the fund, which will be designed and delivered over two years in four representative sites, effectively testing and refining all parts of the Social Prescribing model and the provision of 'nature-based services'.

Jane Wright added that there is planned to be a much larger round of funding for individual projects from March next year. Natural England also has seconded a member of staff to the National Academy for Social Prescribing, which is asking for Natural England to point out barriers to rolling out green prescribing. The results of the recent questionnaire on the capacity of and barriers to nature and health services in the West of England could potentially be fed into this conversation.

NEXT MEETINGS

The next Forum meeting is planned to be held on the 12th November. The meeting will likely again be held online due to the continuing impact of Covid-19.