

LIFE CHANGES TRUST  
GET OUTDOORS PROGRAMME

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# EVALUATION REPORT

2019/2020

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PRODUCED BY

outside the box 

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## Section 1: Introduction

This report presents an independent evaluation of the Get Outdoors projects on behalf of the Life Changes Trust. The Get Outdoors projects encourage people living with dementia to have new opportunities, and to enjoy the benefits of spending time outside.

The aim of the evaluation is to assess whether and how outdoor activities are creating better lives for people living with dementia and for their unpaid carers. It also assesses the projects in terms of the challenges and barriers they faced, their partnerships and sustainability and specific learning around the benefits of spending time outside.

The evaluation work was carried out from August 2019 until September 2020. Although we were able to spend time with most of the six projects in the first half of the evaluation year, Covid 19 restrictions began in March which disrupted planned visits with Dumfries and Galloway and The Ecology Centre in Fife.

This Report is set out as follows:

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|-----------|---|
| Section 1 | Outlines the Get Outdoors programme and summarises the six projects.  |
| Section 2 | Explains how the evaluation was approached and the evaluation methods used.   |
| Section 3 | Outlines the Scottish policy context and provides a review of current relevant literature with references.  |
| Section 4 | Is a comprehensive table with a selection of our ethnographic findings in the form of 'Magic Moments' which we gleaned from reports, observations, conversations, interviews and photographic evidence. The tables give evidence to support how outdoor activities create better lives for people with dementia and their unpaid carers.  |
| Section 5 | Discusses the findings to the evaluation questions around <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Outdoor activities creating better lives for people and unpaid carers</li><li>• The barriers and challenges which the projects have faced</li><li>• The provision of post-diagnostic support for people with dementia</li><li>• Partnership working</li><li>• The sustainability of initiatives</li></ul> |
| Section 6 | Gives an overall assessment of the programme and projects and the outcomes.   |
| Section 7 | Presents the learning we have gathered from the programme and initiatives, and ways to share it.  |

## About the Life Changes Trust

The Life Changes Trust was established in 2013 to drive real and meaningful improvement in the lives of young people with experience of being in care and people affected by dementia and unpaid carers of those with dementia. The Big Lottery Fund Scotland endowed the Trust with £50 million to be spent strategically over ten years to achieve transformational and sustainable change for its beneficiaries. The Life Changes Trust's dementia strategy states:

“Dementia causes difficulties...which can lead to people withdrawing from day-to-day activities and routines. Lack of independence can lead to isolation and loneliness for both the person who has dementia and those who care for them...Maintaining confidence and independence is vital to sustaining a good quality of life for people with dementia and their carers, and it is important that ways of sustaining and building their confidence and supporting their independence are explored and established early on in their dementia journey”.

## About the Get Outdoors programme

In April 2018 the Life Changes Trust funded six Get Outdoors projects for up to two years with the purpose of supporting projects and activities that encourage and support people living with dementia and their unpaid carers to spend more time outside.

## About the Get Outdoors projects

**Sporting Memories** is a charity that aims to unite older people, mainly men, who used to enjoy sport, to come together and share memories and photos. Their Get Outdoors project mainly centred around Wishaw South Bowls Club and Beveridge Park Bowls Club in Kirkcaldy. The sessions included some gentle sporting activity in the form of Lawn Bowls. In Wishaw and Kirkcaldy, the project was co-ordinated by Sporting Memories staff and volunteers with support from the bowling club. In total, they worked with 3 bowls clubs, 12 participants, 5 volunteers, one care home and its residents – offering a game of bowls and an important social time of tea, biscuits and a good chat.

**Instinctively Wild** is a Community Interest Company that delivers projects in outdoor learning, health and team building for a range of public and third sector organisations. For the Get Outdoors programme they ran blocks of eight week 'eco-therapy' sessions, using nature connection activities, indoors and outdoors. The sessions ran from May 2018 until Spring 2020 and were based in The Haining in Selkirk, Scottish Borders. People were referred to the sessions by the NHS Borders Mental Health Older Adults and Occupational

Therapy team. Around 9 people living with dementia participated in each session along with their unpaid carers, volunteers and NHS staff members.

**The Froglife Trust** (known as Froglife) is a national wildlife conservation charity with a specific focus on reptiles and amphibians and their habitats. The Green Pathways for life project adapted the aims and ethos of Froglife (amphibian conservation) to a care home setting, with the emphasis on creating nature-based activities which could take place indoors or outdoors. The sessions ran from May 2018 to November 2019 in a range of locations including two care homes, supporting sessions for people living with dementia run by Alzheimer Scotland and Glasgow's Golden Generation. The sessions were developed and run by Louise Smith, the Learning Officer for Froglife. They tended to be small sessions of around 4 or 5 people living with dementia and supported by staff from the care homes or support organisations.

**Evanton Wood** is a community owned woodland managed by the local community for the benefit of everyone. The community wood is 150 acres of mixed woodland with numerous paths and trails with the main ones being accessible for all abilities. Evanton Wood was designated by Paths for All in 2019 as the first 'Dementia Friendly' wood in Scotland. As part of the Get Outdoors programme they ran an outdoor-based project for around 10 people living with dementia and their unpaid carers, volunteers and care home staff. Participants spent time outside (or in the shelter when the weather was poor) and in the wood, engaging in different activities, including preparing and sharing food, music and crafts such as memory quilts.

**The Ecology Centre** is an environmental, community-based charity which sits on the edge of Kinghorn Loch in Fife. Their 'Wide Open Doors' project was designed to extend the dementia friendly activities on offer and "provide a safe and warm welcome for people living with dementia and their families." The project was based around activities in the Tool Shed such as refurbishing tools which were then circulated back into use by a range of project partners, or building raised beds where green-fingered shedders got to work planting fruit and vegetables. Each session finished with a social break time where shedders shared stories over a hot drink, home baking and a freshly made lunch.

**The Dumfries and Galloway** project was an NHS-led initiative in Dumfries and Galloway with three key elements. The first element supported a retired farmers' 'social' meetup club. The second two elements were based around people living with dementia in care homes, development of individual memory packs based around farming artefacts and photos and also around visits to local working farms.

## Section 2: About the Evaluation

The evaluation work was carried out from August 2019 until September 2020.

Although we were able to spend time with most of the six projects in the first half of the evaluation year, Covid 19 restrictions began in March which disrupted planned visits with Dumfries and Galloway and The Ecology Centre in Fife.

It is likely that the projects and initiatives supporting people living with dementia will continue to be disrupted by Covid restrictions for the foreseeable future.

The aim of the evaluation is to assess and explain:

- To what extent outdoor activities are creating better lives for people living with dementia and for their unpaid carers.
- The barriers and challenges that the projects have faced including what has not worked and why.
- To what extent the projects can provide short, medium and long-term post-diagnostic support for people with dementia.
- The degree of partnership working and any significant benefits this partnership working brings.
- The likelihood that these initiatives will be sustained in the long term.
- Contributions to deeper learning about the benefits of getting outdoors for people with dementia and how this learning can be shared more widely.

The approach we have taken to the evaluation is to:

- Undertake a brief literature review.
- Review and assess the materials and reports produced by all the six projects.
- Carry out informal interviews and conversations with project organisers and staff members, volunteers, partners and stakeholders, either in person, over the telephone or via email.
- Visit projects which included observing and participating in activities while talking informally with people living with dementia and their unpaid carers.

We had originally planned to carry out workshop sessions with people and carers attending activities with the Get Outdoors projects. However,

after the first visit to Sporting Memories at the Wishaw Bowling Club it became very clear that this approach would take people away from what they enjoyed doing and bring them indoors.

We also found evidence which recommended a different approach to research and evaluation when working with people with dementia. Participant observation is recommended as an approach, providing an opportunity to collect data in natural settings (Paterson et al 2003). This means it is also possible to engage people with different perspectives, which in this case included people with dementia, carers and staff.

Additionally, observation makes it easier to include the experiences of and outcomes for people with dementia, without the pressure that can be associated with formal research methods such as interviews (Algar et al 2014). Because researchers are participating alongside people, this makes it easier to develop trust and learn more about what goes on 'behind the scenes' (Paterson et al 2003, Brooker 2009).

We found that basing our approach on the recommendations in the literature allowed us to visit, observe and participate in the activities, see people's reactions and responses, and get to know people through conversation. Once we had built up a relationship with people, we were then able to have some longer conversations using unstructured interview techniques which we recorded using audio or video or taking notes.

In preparation for the conversations we developed key topic themes based on the Get Outdoors programme outcomes and the outcomes from the individual projects. We used this approach for people living with dementia, their unpaid carers, family members and volunteers.

To help us to store data and support analysis of findings as we progressed through the evaluation we also created a feedback template to record key stories, quotes and experiences and identify themes around the evaluation outcomes. Within this feedback template we included different types of qualitative data such as project report extracts, quotes and conversations and reflections by the evaluation team.

We were influenced by previous relevant research which identified the benefits of capturing 'magic moments,' which are moments or turning points in projects or services that show a small but often significant change. More information about 'magic moments' as an evaluation and analysis tool can be found here: [www.jrf.org.uk](http://www.jrf.org.uk). We have used 'magic moments' and quotes from the conversations throughout this report.

Near the beginning of the project we facilitated a shared learning event in Glasgow for the projects in September 2019 to meet and share their

successes, challenges and key learning. The short report from the event is here: [Glasgow learning event](#)

Between August 2019 and March 2020 we were able to visit with and meet people living with dementia, their unpaid carers, staff, volunteers and partners in:

- Wishaw Bowling Club for Sporting Memories
- The Haining for Instinctively Wild
- Erskine Care Home and the Bridgeton Alzheimer's Scotland Centre for Froglife
- Evanton Wood for Evanton Wood.

Due to the COVID 19 restrictions we were unable to complete our planned visits to Dumfries and Galloway and The Ecology Centre in Fife for March and April.

Representatives from the Ecology Centre participated in the shared learning event in September in 2019 where we had an extended conversation and we have since exchanged emails and phone calls with the new team at the Centre.

We also met with staff from the Dumfries and Galloway NHS team and one farm visit was called off due to illness and bad weather in March. Prior to this we had exchanged emails and phone calls with staff and stakeholders.

## References

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Paterson, B.L, Botorff, J.L. and Hewat, R. (2003) Blending observational methods: Possibilities, strategies, and challenges. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 2003, 2(1) 29-38.



## Section 3: Policy Context and Literature Review

### Scottish Policy Context

Dementia and unpaid caring are two areas of strategic policy priority in Scotland. The policy context is briefly described here, starting with dementia and caring policy before touching on the overarching national performance framework:

#### Dementia policy

As people are living longer, the number of people living with dementia is increasing too. This is accompanied by concerns to ensure that people with dementia are supported to live at home, with continued quality of life, as long as possible. Dementia was made a priority by the Scottish Government in 2007. An initial three-year strategy was published in [2010](#), making the case for 'transformational change across the health and care system'. This was to include roles for the third and independent sectors. The second strategy in [2013](#) focused on post-diagnostic support. Scotland's third [National Dementia Strategy 2017-2020](#) emphasises the integral need of a person-centred and flexible approach to providing support at each stage of the care journey.

#### Carer policy

As the population ages, and more people are living with dementia and other long-term conditions, so the number of unpaid carers is increasing too. There is continuing concern to ensure that carer health, wellbeing and quality of life is maintained. Scotland's carers' strategy for 2010-2015, [Caring Together](#) set out key actions to improve support to carers including improved identification of carers, carer health and well-being, carer support and partnership. [The Carers \(Scotland\) Act 2016](#) came into effect in 2018, aiming to ensure better, more consistent support for carers so that they can continue to care, if they so wish, in better health and to have a life alongside caring.

#### National Performance Framework

The [National Performance Framework](#) in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2018) initially came into being in 2007 and was relatively recently reviewed, as illustrated in this diagram. It is intended to reflect the values and aspirations

of the people of Scotland, and the outcomes are aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Tackling inequality and increasing wellbeing are core to the purpose of the framework, and kindness, dignity and compassion are central values.

Key outcomes amongst the 11 in the framework that work with the outcomes of the Get Outdoors programme include the following:

- We respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination.
- We value, enjoy, protect and enhance our environment.
- We are healthy and active.
- We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe.



## Literature Review

Here we briefly describe some of the key messages from existing research evidence on the importance of quality of life and benefits of social activities

for older people with dementia; the specific benefits of outdoor activities, and consideration of risk as a barrier.

Some of the most significant challenges for maintaining quality of life for older people with dementia stem from cognitive symptoms such as reduced ability to communicate, which can prevent people from participating in social activities (Leung et al 2014). People with dementia can also often experience losses related to identity, which can be associated with a lack of opportunities for expression rather than due to the progress of the disease itself (Leung et al 2014). Further barriers to participation and trying new things can present specifically from memory loss which can also make it increasingly difficult to remember recent events (Bailey et al 2013).

It has been identified that the most important thing for people with dementia living in the community is to be active and do as much as they can (Phinney et al 2007). It is further identified that engagement in social activities for older people living in the community can include greater well-being, reduced functional decline, and reduced mortality (Menec 2003).

In addition to considerations of activity and social interaction, some studies have focused on specific benefits of being outdoors for people with dementia. White et al (2018) evaluated changes in mood of people with mid- to late-stage dementia following exposure to a nature garden. They found that exposure to nature was associated with beneficial changes in mood, and that substantial benefits could be observed even with relatively low levels of exposure to nature. Another study captured residential care staff perspectives of the benefits of people with dementia spending time in gardens. Staff reported that garden visits had positive effects on mood, social interaction, depression, and agitation in people with dementia because of the multisensory, gentle stimuli of the natural environment. Freedom of movement in and out of the gardens seemed to be more beneficial than when movement was restricted (Liao et al 2018).

Accessing the outdoors for people with dementia may be viewed as entailing risks, and this may present barriers in our often risk averse culture. Bailey et al (2013) report on relevant literature on negotiating risk and resilience in the everyday lives of people living with dementia. They note that much has been written about risk but less about resilience. They report that while there is some recognition that resilience may be positively influenced by families and communities, the role of the environment in managing risk and resilience needs further attention. This evaluation provides an opportunity to explore this theme further.

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# MAGIC MOMENTS

Creating Better Lives for people living with dementia

Improved confidence and wellbeing

PROJECT	PERSON	MAGIC MOMENT	THEME
Instinctively Wild	Unpaid Carer	T becomes her dad's 'hands' to make butterfly pictures. He gave directions and T did the work creating the picture he envisaged. They talked about it whilst out walking, with dad in wheelchair, gloves and 'bad' hands.	Having a purpose
Instinctively Wild	Person with dementia	R is in his nineties and has a sister of a similar age who lives in Canada, who he hasn't seen for many years. At the end of the session, R smiled as his daughter stuck the photos in the log book and said 'my sister will enjoy these ones'. They plan to send the book to her in Canada when they finish.	Having a purpose Prompting Memories
Sporting Memories	Person with dementia	W, hadn't wanted to come – he thought he was no longer able to play bowls but as he became impatient watching the younger folk have a go, his urge to show them how it was done took over and soon he was teaching others. At the second session he was teaching everyone else, showing them exactly where to stand, how to hold the bowl, technique etc...	Improved confidence and wellbeing Having a purpose
Sporting Memories	Person with dementia	P, age 92 arrived in wheelchair from the local care home who had just discovered he used to bowl. P got out of wheelchair, spat on hand and bowled with concentration. The care worker was scared he would 'topple' but he was so focused on the bowling. He didn't have strength but still had technique. P doesn't talk but grunted to show his displeasure at a bad shot. We found his old bowls still in his locker and his name on the hall of fame board as former champion.	Improved confidence and wellbeing Having a purpose
Ecology Centre	Worker	"Our inclusive philosophy is that everyone has the right to offer meaningful contributions to their community and that it is our responsibility to create the conditions which enable this. Service users are called volunteers in recognition of them giving their time to be part of making The Ecology Centre what it is. As such, people living with dementia who attend the dementia friendly outdoor sessions are called volunteers, as are their partners."	Improved confidence and wellbeing

# MAGIC MOMENTS

Creating Better Lives for people living with dementia

Improved confidence and wellbeing

PROJECT	PERSON	MAGIC MOMENT	THEME
Ecology Centre	Worker	"The Ecology Centre continues to develop a dementia friendly culture, such as making low stimulation a factor in on-site service design. This benefits our other user groups such as people on the autistic spectrum. An example of this is the need to keep the building tidy and clean so that visual stimulation is low."	Improved confidence and wellbeing
Evanton	Unpaid Carer	Y said "At first she didn't want to come and didn't want to be 'labelled' as having dementia, because her diagnosis was recent. This project let her spend time with others without stigma or labels attached."	Having a purpose Prompting Memories
Evanton	Person with dementia	The group discovered D's talent for percussion and drumming when they met with another group of people. They now always keep spoons handy for him to use.	Having a purpose
Froglife	Worker	People feel useful and part of things by making bird feeders and mini ponds for wildlife. It's been good to see people learning new skills and refreshing old ones.	Improved confidence and wellbeing
Froglife	Worker	P just smiles when he steps outside into the garden - you can see him filling up with fresh air and a sense of peace.	Improved confidence and wellbeing
D&G	Worker	It's made us think differently about how we work because we have now seen the benefits of getting outdoors for all of us - both people and carers. We have also learnt how to minimise risk in new outdoor settings and that feels good too."	Improved confidence Managing risk
D&G	Worker	The dynamics of each visit meant that by the end, there was just a group of people in a farming environment without the 'labels' they arrived with. Body language and behaviour indicates that all those involved relaxed during the visits.	Improved confidence and wellbeing

# MAGIC MOMENTS

## Increased physical activity and improved wellbeing

PROJECT	PERSON	MAGIC MOMENT	THEME
Evanton Wood	Person with dementia	A, prompted by photo display – told me about the bird boxes they'd made. There were photos of them using power tools 'I've learned to do things I didn't know I could do with my hands!'	Physical Activity
Evanton Wood	Person with dementia	Everyone made their own way up to woods. It was about ½ mile away, up an uneven uphill track. Some people drove a bit closer and then walked. G and her son arrived slightly late having walked the whole way - despite the fact she had a walking aid! G was very determined and although slow she climbed up uneven slope to join us at the children's play area. She was well equipped with decent shoes and gloves.	Enjoying being outside Physical ability Being equipped for being outdoors
Ecology Centre	Worker	We have noticed that people enjoy being able to work with tools and sometimes it feels that they are being trusted to do something that had maybe been taken from them.	Physical Ability
Froglife	Worker	"The suggested activities were to feed birds regularly, grow fruit and vegetables to be prepared and eaten during sessions and to prepare and make board games in-house from recycled materials...As a result volunteers now fill bird feeders each week if needed, are growing onions, cabbage, peas and beans in our dementia friendly raised beds and have completed one set of dominoes and one set of draughts (with board).	Physical ability Increased confidence and wellbeing
Instinctively Wild	Person with dementia	'Aye I can touch a nettle – watch this! It doesn't sting me! You've got to touch it like this, so you don't touch the edge of the leaves – that's the stingy bit!'	Managing risk
Froglife	Worker	"We got an average 7000 step count from visiting community gardens and wandering around looking at the flowers and plants!"	Increased Physical Activity
Froglife	Person with dementia	"It's benefitted me personally, I'm walking a bit more now...it's quite interesting."	Increased Physical Activity

# MAGIC MOMENTS

## Increased physical activity and improved wellbeing

PROJECT	PERSON	MAGIC MOMENT	THEME
Sporting Memories	Person with dementia	We persuaded T to have a shot at bowling. He had never played before but used to be a weightlifter. He loved it and he played till the end of the session and really enjoyed it, the others all encouraged him and he was smiling by the end.	Improved physical activity Friendships and social connections
Sporting Memories	Person with dementia	A also forgot his walking stick but he didn't need it on the bowling green - even though he usually needs it to walk along the street because the paving stones are uneven/tricky. His daughter told me her mum now sends him to the shops on his own, whereas she didn't before.	Improved physical activity Improved confidences
D&G	Worker	"We have seen the actual benefits of people getting outside with things like improved balance and hand eye co-ordination".	Improved physical activity
D&G	Worker	"Helping people get people physically active again, sometimes without realising it, because it's a key part of the activity and the fun".	Improved physical activity
Instinctively Wild	Carer	"The walks are good: we just take our time, some people are a lot faster but that's OK. We have a good look round and talk about what we can see - you can't do that at home, you quickly run out of things."	Improved physical activity Enjoying being outside

## Friendships, social connections and enjoying being outside

Froglife	Worker	"We like going to the allotments, seeing what's growing and meeting different groups and people who are there. We will be doing even more of it next year".	Enjoying being outside
Instinctively Wild	Person with dementia	"The 'two H's' have formed a bond with same sense of humour. They banter back and forth and with noticeable energy when they come back inside after walk. Commenting on weather and scenery 'it's nice and bright', and 'it's lovely and dry and bright'.	Friendships and Social connections Conversations



# MAGIC MOMENTS

## Friendships, social connections and enjoying being outside

PROJECT	PERSON	MAGIC MOMENT	THEME
Sporting Memories	Volunteer	T was a bit worried at first about having a group of people living with dementia use the bowling green and the impact on the lawn. But has seen how much fun they have and thinks it's good for the club to be used in this way.	Friendships and social connections
The Ecology Centre	Worker	"Two volunteers from the outdoor afternoon sessions have also struck up a strong relationship and attend social events and dementia friendly activities outwith the Ecology Centre."	Friendships and social connections
The Ecology Centre	Worker	"The shared lunch is based on seasonal produce from our community garden, much of which has been grown with tools refurbished by the shedders and tended by our volunteers which includes the dementia friendly volunteers."	Friendships and social connections
Evanton	Person with dementia	Magnetic draw of the cooking area – everyone naturally gravitated over to the cooking area and gathered round it to share stories of the things they had cooked and food they had shared. It was obvious how important this element was for them. They showed us the sturdy tables/chairs etc – they obviously felt safe and at home there.	Friendships and social connections Conversations Having a 'safe space'
Evanton	Person with dementia	G had been a sheep farmer who loved the outdoors. It was his natural habitat. The memory quilt had sheep dogs on it and helped him with memories of being outside and with conversations	Improved physical activity Enjoying being outside
Evanton	Worker	L had fairly advanced dementia but was able to speak lucidly at times 'one does what one can' when asked about his activities and being outside.	Enjoying being outside
Evanton	Person with dementia	D used to be drummer in pipe band. D and H have regular conversations about the old days living in the Borders, music and rugby: 'Did you play rugby in the Borders...aye, I played with that team, we beat your team all the time!'	Friendships and Social connections

# MAGIC MOMENTS

## Memories and cognitive improvement

PROJECT	PERSON	MAGIC MOMENT	THEME
D&G	Worker	The benefits of getting outdoors went beyond reminiscence opportunities and included: balance; hand eye coordination; singing (environment triggered memories of old songs). The sense of enjoying being outside appeared to be more important than the act of reminiscence.	Enjoying being outside Physical ability Cognitive improvement
Instinctively Wild	Person with dementia	P had been to the Haining (the grand house where the project is based) before and told us about the history of the place.	Prompting memories
Evanton	Unpaid carer	"I think long term, taking part in these activities, being positive and being in the fresh air helps to slow down the progress of dementia."	Cognitive improvement
Evanton	Person with dementia	The walk up to the wood prompted chat with L about the history of the place names and that the wood was planted on the proceeds of slave trade. It is named after plantations in the Caribbean. L was a farming specialist in these areas and talked of places he had worked in abroad.	Conversations and memories
Sporting memories	Person with dementia	I sat at the side in a wheelchair throughout but enjoyed watching the game, chatting to people and commenting on the bowling 'Yes, I love it! It's lovely!'	Enjoying being outside Friendships and social connections
Instinctively Wild	Volunteer	We talked about the importance of living in the moment and that this can be difficult for people with dementia to have 'meaningful' chat with people. But through observing nature it can help towards 'living in the moment' because it's easier to appreciate and discuss what you can see, hear and smell...don't need to rely on memory for this...a way of sharing and communicating.	Enjoying being outside Conversations Friendships and social connections
Sporting Memories	Person with dementia	D, used to be a bowling club member but had stopped. When this programme started he said he'd come along and watch. But he felt compelled to join in and show people how to do it – 'he loved it!'. He wouldn't have tried again if it wasn't for this group. He goes to two Sporting Memories groups in the week, this is 'the high point' of his week. He loves the SM meet-ups.	Friendships and social connections Enjoying being outside

## Section 5: Findings

The evidence gathered and analysed in this evaluation shows that the Get Outdoors projects have a positive impact on the lives of people living with dementia and their unpaid carers and are effective in achieving positive outcomes in people's lives.

This section explores:

- How outdoor activities contribute to creating better lives for people living with dementia.
- The impact on the lives of unpaid carers.
- The challenges and barriers the projects faced.
- How partnerships contributed to the projects.
- The sustainability of the projects.

### Outdoor activities create better lives for people living with dementia

Through our evaluation of these projects we have seen clear evidence of improvements in the lives of people living with dementia. These include confidence and wellbeing, physical ability, friendships and social connections, memories and cognitive wellbeing, communication and reducing stigma.

#### Improved physical ability and wellbeing

This was an essential part of all the initiatives and was universally enjoyed by people living with dementia who participated. The physical activities encouraged by the initiatives were varied and included walking around woods or to community gardens and allotments, playing bowls, using equipment and materials to build bird boxes and planters, and refurbishing tools and equipment.

The physical activities helped to improve confidence and self-esteem, giving opportunities to make decisions and be part of a group.

They also provided an opportunity for participants to assess risks for themselves, whether negotiating uneven ground at Evanton Wood or going down a slope to collect some berries whilst with Instinctively Wild.

*“The walks are good we just take our time, some people are a lot faster but that’s OK. We have a good look round and talk about what we can see - you can’t do that at home, you quickly run out of things.”* Instinctively Wild

*"It's benefitted me personally, I'm walking a bit more now...it's quite interesting."* Froglife

*"We saw an improvement in his confidence after week one after he was able to play a few ends"* Sporting Memories

B told us he walks for 30 minutes every day! He doesn't go out with his wife because she is too slow! He feels that he won't get lost in the woods, all the paths are circular and lead back round to the main area. Evanton

*"We got an average 7000 step count from visiting community gardens and B wandering around looking at the flowers and plants."* Froglife

People had the opportunity to use tools and equipment they had never used before, for example power tools with the Ecology Centre, Froglife and Evanton in an environment where the risks had been assessed and it was 'safe enough'. Some people gained more independence having attended the sessions.

*"One man had never played and played for the first time today, loved it!"* Sporting Memories

*"Everyone loved planting up the planters with flowers. D got really engaged with planting the flowers. She talked about her garden and the plants she used to tend to. These days she doesn't engage with many activities – just sits quietly and watches. But she got stuck into this."* Froglife

*"He arrived ten minutes early – as his support staff said he was so keen on attending the session, as he was waiting on them to come as soon as possible. Again this week he was very keen (with support) to light and feed the fire."* Instinctively Wild

A, prompted by photo display – told me about the bird boxes they'd made – photos of them using power tools "I've learned to do things I didnae know I could do with my hands!" Evanton

*"We have seen the actual benefits of people getting outside with things like improved balance and hand eye co-ordination"* Dumfries and Galloway

For some, there was the chance to relearn an old skill or hobby such as cycling, drumming, making art with butterflies or bowling. We saw people living with dementia becoming the teacher, the leader or the admired performer. We observed how focused people would become where there was something they were genuinely interested in – this might be cattle (Dumfries and Galloway) or bowling (Sporting Memories).

The care home had just discovered he used to bowl. He left his wheelchair and walked onto the green and at once was in his element, he spat on his

hand and bowled. He was unable to speak but he let it be known when he wasn't happy with his shot! He then tried to teach the younger ones and played for over an hour! The carer worried he would 'topple' but he was so focused and steady when taking a shot. He had his name on the champions board in 1959 and 1974. Sporting Memories

A also forgot his walking stick – didn't need it on the bowling green...though he needs it to walk along the street (paving stones etc. uneven/'tricky') - daughter told me her mum now sends him to the shops, didn't before. Sporting Memories

### **Memories and cognitive wellbeing**

From people spending time in nature and the outdoors we observed a lift in mood for all who took part in the projects and this was verified by what volunteers, staff and partners told us too.

*"We saw that the benefits of getting outdoors went beyond reminiscence opportunities. The sense of enjoying being outside appeared to be more important than the act of reminiscence."* Dumfries and Galloway

When we came back inside to the fire from our walk in the woods, there was a tangible buzz and energy in the room that hadn't been there before. People were more animated, talking, smiling or observing the changing weather outside. Instinctively Wild

The sessions provided a chance sometimes to rekindle old memories (notably the farm visits at Dumfries and Galloway), but also to make new memories.

At the display of work at Evanton, some of the people talked to us about the things they had made. They showed us photos and actual birdboxes – they obviously took great pride in these creations and remembered how they had made them. The 'memory quilts' they had made provided a way of sharing stories about their past lives and work. Evanton

D attends the sessions with her husband. When they were out on the walk, a rose bush sparked a memory of a poem that she used to recite. Talking about it around the fire later, her husband was able to get her to recite it again by prompting the first word. The previous week D was unable to remember the name of her own daughter. Instinctively Wild

*"Jimmy was quite isolated prior to Sporting Memories but as a result of attending his weekly club in Kirkcaldy and then the eight bowls sessions at Beveridge Park he claimed to feel much more confident and felt part of the bowls club 'like he was a member'. He was disappointed when the season had to end as he was really keen to keep playing."* Sporting Memories

## **Making and Sharing Food**

All projects had an element of shared food or at least tea and biscuits. This was always an important time for people to get together and socialise. Some of the projects such as Evanton also gave everyone the chance to join in as much as they wanted to with preparing and serving food or washing dishes. Instinctively Wild had regular cups of tea which was always available in the warm room by the fire, providing a homely comfort when people had come in from the cold.

*“As much as the participants and volunteers enjoyed their time on the green, they also thoroughly enjoyed the clubhouse activity, emphasising that sitting down over a cuppa and having a chat is just as important to them.”* Sporting Memories

## **Music**

This was an important element in the Evanton and Instinctively Wild projects. With Instinctively Wild the music was played by the leaders and listened to and enjoyed by the participants who sang along sometimes; it was a regular part of the beginning and end of each session. At Evanton, people living with dementia were actively encouraged to take part in playing music. We could see from videos how A's eyes lit up when he played his improvised 'drumkit'. It was also obvious that while people had memory issues, they could often still remember the words of old songs when they heard the tunes.

Music is one of the things that some groups have managed to continue sharing during Lockdown, with virtual sessions and even a socially-distanced 'ceilidh' delivered at Evanton.

## **Friendships and social connections**

The different projects also offered obvious benefits in terms of friendships new and old, meeting different people with things in common and providing a relaxing space for people to reconnect with their families.

The 'two H's' have formed a bond with the same sense of humour. They banter back and forth and with noticeable energy when they come back inside after the walk. Commenting on weather and scenery 'it's nice and bright', and 'it's lovely and dry and bright'. Instinctively Wild

J talked about what a difference it has made for her husband. It has given him something to do regularly, and he really benefits from it. He just feels so much better and has things to talk about. Instinctively Wild

*“He mentions people from the group then sometimes might introduce me to them – but he has a new set of friends I don't know about – like in the old days – it has given him back some independence, the fact that I don't know all his friends!”* Sporting Memories

Two participants have been chatting to a third one telling them about a dementia friendly football session they attend every month. The conversations have resulted in phone numbers being exchanged and lifts being organised, cementing friendships and further activities independently of the centre. Ecology Centre

We heard of and observed people communicating not just through conversation, but also through the mediums of music, food, art and activities such as bowling. Even where one man at Wishaw no longer had much speech ability, he was still perfectly able to communicate about his own impression of his bowling ability!

The group discovered D's talent for percussion and drumming when they met with another group of people (recovering addicts). This provided an unexpected ice-breaker and common ground between the two groups. They now always keep spoons handy for him to use. Evanton

T became her dad's 'hands' to make butterfly pictures. He gave directions and T did the work creating the picture he envisaged. They talked about it whilst out walking, with dad in wheelchair, gloves and 'bad' hands. Instinctively Wild

We had heard that W did not communicate very well; this has not been the case in the shed and he has displayed a good sense of humour, interacting with all the members of the team. After his first week with us W's carer said it was the first time she had seen him smile for a long time. On his second week he arrived early showing us some of his projects. Ecology Centre

Through all the projects, people living with dementia were discovered to have valuable memories of life and skills and knowledge acquired long ago:

*“It has been fabulous to hear people's stories and to learn about the things they are interested in and the lives they used to live. Without this project we wouldn't have heard these things.”* Sporting Memories

## **Challenging assumptions and stigma**

The projects all contributed to some degree of challenging assumptions and losing labels and stigmas around dementia. Staff and volunteers were given a new understanding of the nature of dementia or would see an individual in a new light.

*“At first she didn't want to come and didn't want to be 'labelled' as having dementia, because her diagnosis was recent. This project let her spend time with others without stigma or labels attached.”* Evanton

*“I didn't know much about dementia before and I was nervous about talking and working with people.”* Instinctively Wild

*“He loved being a coach and passing on his experience to the newbies. His physical frailty meant he couldn't take part in each session but he liked to coach from the side lines and lend support to his peers.”* Sporting Memories

We found that people during the sessions were 'losing their labels', with everyone being treated as an equal. This was especially noticeable in environments such as the bowling green or the farm visits, when old 'masters' in the subject came to the fore.

The dynamics of each visit meant that by the end, there was just a group of people in a farming environment without the 'labels' they arrived with. Body language and behaviour indicates that all those involved relaxed during the visits. Dumfries and Galloway

Shedders living with dementia are supported to develop ideas for ways to transform waste wood so that they become useful and beautiful eco-friendly items. People are seen as creators, contributors and producers. Some of these are commissions for local people or organisations, some are displayed at The Ecology Centre's site so visitors can buy them, and some are sold at local makers markets. Ecology Centre





*"I look forward to coming here. We always do interesting activities. My family like me coming here - they know I have a good time and have things to tell them when I get home."* Froglife

The elements that have gone towards creating this positive impact are:

### **Friendships and social connections**

The family members that participated in outdoor activities talked about how important it was to be able to make friends, be part of a group and to have the chance to relax. Included in this has also been the chance to spend quality time with their loved one, as a partner or child without feeling they are the 'carer'.

*"We enjoy coming to the woods for the companionship. We always look forward to it every Friday and meet very interesting people."* Evanton

People have formed new friendships...people living with dementia but especially family carers...some of them keep in touch outside sessions now. Instinctively Wild

*"Thursday is the best day of the week."* Ecology Centre

*"Two volunteers from the outdoor afternoon sessions have also struck up a strong relationship and attend social events and dementia friendly activities outwith The Ecology Centre."* Ecology Centre

### **Peer support**

In addition to friendships and social connections the sessions gave people a safe, unjudgmental space in which they could share their concerns and issues with other family carers, sharing experiences and comparing notes or sometimes offering one another tips and solutions.

For some of the projects, there was also the chance to discuss informally more medical or clinical issues with staff such as the occupational therapist at Instinctively Wild sessions.

*"It's good to talk and share experiences with other carers in the group."* Evanton

*"Meeting and talking with other people like me, looking after someone with dementia, is really helpful. We share news, how things have been and other things we are doing. It's good to have a chat and see other people and get outside. I always feel better afterwards."* Instinctively Wild

*"This is a safe place to offload a little and share experiences, frustrations and achievements – it makes a difference."* Ecology Centre

*“It’s a great bunch of people who go there on a Friday and given that there is no-one else in my family other than my mother and me, it is good to share a little of the load of what I need to do for her and to be able to let off steam, gently, with other carers.”* Evanton

### **Reducing stigma**

One of the outcomes from the friendships and peer support was the way in which the groups also helped to reduce the stigma of living with dementia.

*“This is the only place I’ve seen where people don’t hide from their condition. It’s so much better this way.”* Ecology Centre

After participating in the project, one couple living with dementia, who had been hiding the diagnosis because they were ashamed of it, agreed to be part of the publicity material for the Wide Open Doors project for people living with dementia. Ecology Centre

*“For some people it is a welcome relief to talk openly about living with dementia and not be afraid to use the word.”* Ecology Centre

### **Enjoying new and old interests**

All the projects gave the partners of people with dementia the chance to partake in different activities which they would not normally get the chance to do. Many people told us they can’t do things so much now because they are always ‘caring’ for their partner. People also had the chance to do enjoyable things with their partners, and to reminisce about things they used to enjoy doing together. This also gave them the chance to see their partner as someone who can ‘do’ things, not someone who needs everything done for them all the time.

*“The other players told us about the positive impact that bowling had – not just during play, but also in the anticipation of the weekly activity and reliving it afterwards.”* Sporting Memories

*“Never knew bowls could be so much fun to play.”* Sporting Memories

*“I’m going to get my paintbrushes out again.”* Evanton

*“It’s been good to see people learning new skills and refreshing old ones.”* Ecology Centre

### **Being active and outside**

Part of the attraction and benefit of the groups for unpaid carers was the opportunity to be outside and be active in ways that were easy to participate in, safe and fun, giving them a chance to relax and enjoy.

*"The woods are good. It's nice to meet other people and getting to know them. And it's nice to get out into the fresh air."* Evanton

*"The bowling's great exercise...better than doing yoga! You feel it in your legs the next day! I go to the gym but it's hard work...this is much more fun...and cheaper!"* Sporting Memories

*"It's been years since we were on a bike together!"* Evanton

### **Making and sharing food**

Stopping for a tea break or lunch was a feature of all the projects. Sometimes making and preparing food for others was included in the sessions. The informality of having a tea break was a good opportunity for people to mingle and chat, reinforcing friendships and the peer support of sharing of experiences, frustrations and solutions.

At Evanton as well as at the Ecology Centre, lunches were an opportunity for cross-group interactions and the chance to chat with different people too.

*"For us, cooking food with the group is a great opportunity to chat and discuss what is going on in our lives. It really helps us to know that there are others going through what we are going through and that we are not alone. We have tried new things including stilton and nettle soup."* Evanton

*"Afternoon volunteers at the Shed and in our outdoor activities have started sharing tea and cakes which has promoted cross-group conversation, humour and friendships."* Ecology Centre

### **Challenges and barriers**

This section outlines the barriers and challenges that the project faced in delivering outdoor activities. We have also included what has not worked and why because the approaches taken by the projects were very solution focussed, seeking to address areas that didn't work and alternatives when they could.

The key challenges and barriers are set out below.

### **Working with Care at Home services**

Froglife and Dumfries and Galloway wanted to offer their initiatives to people who received care at home support but were unable to make connections. As an alternative both initiatives focussed on seeking care home partners and Froglife also developed positive relationships with dementia support organisations such as Alzheimer Scotland and Glasgow's Golden Generation.

### **Working with care homes**

Finding care homes who wanted to participate raised challenges for the projects which worked with them.

All the care homes participating faced issues around staffing ratios and logistics and transport for people to go outside. For the projects this meant that the number of people attending sessions each time fluctuated and they didn't always know how many people would be attending. Sporting Memories had a flexible programme that allowed for different numbers each week. The Ecology Centre also adapted the way they delivered the activities to take account of it.

Froglife worked with the people who were available and willing on the day; this was slightly easier because they went into the care homes. They also found that it was difficult at times to make contact with care homes and activity co-ordinators mostly due to workloads, and staff initially not understanding the purpose of the project.

The Ecology Centre also faced misunderstanding about what they were offering when they talked about 'supported volunteering', rather than day care or respite care. Care homes also found it difficult to confirm attendance due to staff ratios, transport etc. The fluctuations in numbers could have negatively impacted the activity for others. This was mitigated by adapting the delivery model.

Dumfries and Galloway found that once they had worked through the practicalities of risk assessments around taking people outdoors, care homes were more willing to participate.

### **Recruiting participants and volunteers**

Recruitment of participants presented some problems, at least initially, for all projects. The two key issues for projects was around reaching and promoting their initiative to people living with dementia and their carers and then also explaining what the project entailed. This was an issue for Froglife, Dumfries and Galloway and The Ecology Centre.

Instinctively Wild had the benefit of referrals from existing (NHS) partners. They also had regular volunteers who, although they may have had initial

apprehension about 'dementia', soon learned to understand it and see through it to the individuals.

Evanton had a mix of self-referred local people and a few people from a care home – maybe this makes it more sustainable in some ways. The volunteers were a mix of people from the local community. The fact of it being physically embedded in the local community probably had a lot to do with its success and sustainability.

For Sporting Memories, there was an initial difficulty around finding volunteers who were confident to deliver 'fun and inclusive' bowls activities, as many club members preferred to play a traditional game. This mindset changed, however, when people realised how enjoyable and sociable the activities could still be. There was also the added surprise for some of being taught by the old 'champions' who were living with dementia.

*"It's been great for my kids too – their grandparents are abroad so they don't get to meet many 'old people'. Being involved in the project has let them realise old people can be just the same as them – but older!"* Evanton

### **Different stages of dementia and different abilities**

Managing groups of people with a range of physical abilities, different stages of dementia and offering individual choice requires skilful management. Most projects managed well by sticking to small groups supported by staff and volunteers; Instinctively Wild was by far the biggest group but high ratios of support to participants helped here.

At Evanton the group managed very well to accommodate people through having a very flexible programme, with built-in choice, and different activities within organised activities which people could take or leave according to their interest and ability.

With Instinctively Wild, the walks went at the pace of the slowest, and there was relatively easy physical access inside and outside.

At Froglife, some participants found it hard to take part in some of the activities due to poor eye sight, hand strength and mobility, for example creating materials for insect hotels requires the use of secateurs. People were encouraged to take breaks, and the secateurs were shared round several people and other activities were offered so everyone had something they could do.

The Ecology Centre reviewed how they worked and made changes throughout the project based upon their learning. They gave clear messages about the suitability of activities and created informal assessment to ensure a good match of activities for everyone involved.

Two extremes in the 'dementia journey' caused issues: one where recent diagnosis meant the individual or their family were in denial...in only one case did we hear of someone having opted out for this reason. In general, people at this stage found acceptance and inclusion made life easier for them to begin to live with the diagnosis.

## **Weather**

The weather was a challenge for all the projects. Some of the projects managed to plan and carry out activities so that they took place in the summer months. Most of them also had some form of shelter or 'Plan B' where they could be indoors if needed. Having a degree of flexibility built into the programme plans was key and also 'let's just do it' mentality making the most of good weather and less good weather.

Having a collection of cold and wet weather clothing and fleecy blankets for people to use worked well for Evanton and the Ecology Centre. Instinctively Wild kept the indoor space heated by a welcoming fire and all the initiatives offered tea and refreshments to get warm.

The Sporting Memories projects, as well as having the option of using the clubhouse for socialising on rainy days, had already set up arrangements to continue to meet during the daytime in a local pub over the winter months. The bowling season is naturally short but this meant they could extend their social activities.

Froglife took some of their activities inside, especially as many of their participants were vulnerable and living in care homes. They still enjoyed nature connection activities, 'bringing the outside in'.

## **Transport**

Some of the projects had factored in transport costs and ended up not needing them when people used cars (Instinctively Wild), others such as the Ecology Centre accessed additional funding to ensure people were not excluded. For Evanton, several couples set up informal car sharing arrangements to get to the woods. It was also within walking distance for some. Care homes had to come from further away and sometimes transport was problematic for them.

For Dumfries and Galloway, transport was crucial to access remote farm visits, but this proved of benefit to a local community transport enterprise.

## **Changes in staff**

Dumfries and Galloway encountered the most severe issues around changes in staff: the change in project lead meant delays to the project at different stages and a refocus of plans.

The Ecology Centre also had staff changes, both internally and at Alzheimer's Scotland (one of the partners), however although causing delays overall they found strength in key relationships within the project, including reliable volunteers and workers.

## **Vandalism**

Evanton and Instinctively Wild both experienced vandalism of their sites. Evanton temporarily joined the community lunch group resulting in the unexpected bonus of integrating with other community members.

Instinctively Wild had to reorganise and move to a new site. The new venue at the Haining proved to be very successful, as it had a warm indoor room as well as wide accessible paths. It does take time to adjust activities and get used to a new place.

## **Providing short, medium and long-term post-diagnostic support**

The evidence gathered shows that the all the projects provided post diagnostic support for people living with dementia and unpaid carers.

The support offered by the projects was generally informal and peer to peer, with people, unpaid carers and volunteers sharing their experiences and knowledge with each other. The project leaders, staff and volunteers also developed a good knowledge of local dementia support systems.

The supports provided by the projects also included the regular activities, giving structure to the week, the benefits of being part of a supportive group and an opportunity and reason to be outside with a chance to experience new things.

*"It's good to talk and share experiences with other carers in the group. It's nice to have a regular activity to go to and I have enjoyed making different crafts. The volunteers are excellent and it feels like a family. I think long term, taking part in these activities, being positive and being in the fresh air helps to slow down the progress of dementia."* Evanton

Some of the projects also provided opportunities for informal support with professionals outside of clinic settings.

The projects worked with people experiencing different stages of dementia and diagnosis.



Instinctively Wild - people were mainly referred from NHS Borders Mental Health Older Adults and Occupational Therapy team as part of their post diagnostic support.

Dumfries and Galloway worked with people living in care homes.

Froglife worked with people living in care homes and also offered activities to people receiving dementia support services from organisations such as Alzheimer Scotland.

Sporting Memories invited local care homes to participate but the majority of people came because they heard about the project or were already participating in Sporting Memories' network of activities. The activities were open to anyone to attend.

The Ecology Centre had a mixture of referrals from dementia support services and people hearing about it and coming along. It was open to anyone to attend if they chose it.

Evanton Wood was open to anyone to attend with care homes invited to participate too.

### **Partnership working**

The evidence shows that all the projects worked with a range of partners and that the partnerships were essential for the projects to operate and deliver their outdoor activities.

The key stages where partnerships occurred were:

- Referrals and promoting outdoor initiatives to people living with dementia.
- Delivering and participating in activities.
- Giving feedback on sessions and developing ideas.
- Providing services like transport, activities like craft and music, refreshments and venues.

All partnerships bring challenges and new ways of working but there were significant benefits to the projects to work in this way.

Challenging assumptions and reducing stigma by involving the local community in delivering or participating in activities. For example, Sporting Memories working with Wishaw Bowling club and their volunteers, and in Dumfries and Galloway local farmers were involved in the farm visits.

Boosting the local economy by using community transport and taxis, local musicians and artists, and community shops and cafes. Sporting memories also talked about using pubs as a way to continue their activities in winter.

Staff from partners gaining experience and benefits. Staff from Dumfries and Galloway and NHS Borders reported an increase in their skills, a wider understanding around dementia and an increase in their job satisfaction. Students on placements with NHS Borders were also very keen to participate in Instinctively Wild's sessions. Staff from Alzheimer Scotland since working with Froglife are extending the range of activities and places they visit with people.

*"We think about going on trips and doing outdoor activities more since working with Froglife. We like going to the allotments, seeing what's growing and meeting different groups and people who are there. We will be doing even more of it next year." Froglife*

## Section 6: Overall assessment

The evaluation has increased our understanding of the benefits of outdoor activities for people and unpaid carers. It has also given a greater understanding of the elements and supports needed for projects to offer outdoor activities for people living with dementia and their unpaid carers.

### Outdoor activities create better lives for people with dementia

The Get Outdoors programme and the six projects participating in the programme created and delivered outdoor activities that created better lives for people living with dementia.

The outdoor activities offered a range of benefits that supported people living with dementia to have better, more active and purposeful lives. The benefits included:

- Improved confidence and wellbeing.
- Improved physical abilities and confidence.
- Opportunities to move more and be physically active.
- Opportunities to enjoy being outside and to have fun.
- Increased friendships and social connections.
- Improved memories and cognitive wellbeing.
- Creating purpose and structure in people's lives.
- Reducing stigma around living with dementia.

### Outdoor activities create better lives for unpaid carers

The unpaid carers and family members who participated in the outdoor activities also gained the same benefits as people living with dementia. They also gained additional benefits, such as:

- Peer support – sharing experiences, frustrations and information around dementia.
- Space and time not to be a carer.
- Space and time to spend with their partner, parent or family member without being the carer.

The carers who didn't participate in activities also benefitted, by taking a break from their carer roles. They also enjoyed hearing the stories about the activities and having new conversations with their loved ones when they came back from the activities.

## Challenging assumptions and stigma

The projects' approach to challenging assumptions and reducing stigma for people living with dementia was also a key benefit. Assumptions were challenged but in gentle and everyday ways such as:

- Everyone taking part in the activities as equal participants, irrespective of whether they are staff members, volunteers, people living with dementia, carers or family members.
- The sessions were informal and for visitors to the projects it was not immediately clear what roles people had – it was just a group of people enjoying being outside.
- Friendships and social connections within the activities and outside the sessions were supported and encouraged.
- Peer support – sharing information and experiences especially for unpaid carers and family members but also being part of a purposeful group.
- Names and labels given to people participating – using terms such as volunteer, supported volunteer, shedders and people.
- Assessing and taking moderate risks – project leaders carried out overall risk assessments for the sites and activities and within this framework individual people made their own choices, such as walking down steep slopes, walking up to the wood or using tools and equipment.
- Offering participants choices and decision making around the type of activities and when and how they wished to participate.

## The Projects

The planning, development and delivery of the Get Outdoors projects resulted in an understanding of the elements that are needed to successfully support projects of this nature.

The projects do provide an element of post diagnostic support for people living with dementia and their unpaid carers. The support is offered informally, often peer to peer sharing experiences or via conversations with staff with expertise and knowledge.

All the projects faced a range of challenges and barriers at different stages but were flexible, adapting and revising plans and the activities they could do. The main challenges they faced were:

- Working with care homes – presented difficulties due to different priorities, staffing logistics and understanding of the projects.
- Managing groups of people experiencing different stages of dementia.
- Managing groups of people with different abilities.
- Changes in project staff and staff in partner organisations.
- Vandalism to the site and buildings.
- Weather.

Partnerships were essential for the development and delivery of all the projects. All the projects worked with a range of partner organisations that included:

- Local and community-based people, businesses, and organisations
- care homes.
- Health and social care partners – such as NHS Borders and social work.

The Outdoor initiatives have the potential to be sustained in the long term. There is clearly demand for them from people living with dementia and their unpaid carers. There is also a desire to continue offering the activities by project staff and volunteers. For long term sustainability, factors around funding, commissioning services and working with partners will need to be considered further.

## **National Performance Framework**

The projects and their activities also support outcomes in the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework 2018. We identified four key outcomes:

### **We respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination**

These projects all saw people with dementia being treated as able individuals, having a role and a purpose and not a label. People were encouraged and supported to try new (and old) activities, assessing and taking their own risks. They also provided a safe place for family members to be open and honest with others without judgment.

### **We value, enjoy, protect and enhance our environment**

Instead of being confined within four walls, people were encouraged to be outside, enjoying and being a part of nature. Many of the projects involved specific nature connection or conservation activities. This gave people the chance to learn experientially, 'with heart and hand'.

### **We are healthy and active**

People with dementia and their family carers all took more physical exercise during (and after) these projects, as well as developing physical dexterity during specific activities. The benefits for mental and cognitive wellbeing were also apparent.

### **We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe**

All of these projects sought to be inclusive not only in themselves, but through their links with the wider community served to spread a message of inclusion and acceptance. Thus staff, volunteers and others who had little or no experience or understanding of dementia gained practical learning which led naturally to understanding and acceptance. As a knock-on effect this led to more connections and resilience within the community.

## Section 7: Future learning

The Get Outdoors programme and the individual initiatives have contributed to deeper learning about the benefits of getting outdoors for people with dementia. This section sets out the learning we have gathered from projects and outlines the ways in which the learning can be shared.

The COVID 19 restrictions and social distancing are likely to continue to varying degrees for the foreseeable future. We have included some learning from the initiatives about getting outside during this time.

### People with dementia and unpaid carers

A diagnosis of dementia should not mean a curtailment of previous activities, especially those which the person and their partner have always enjoyed.

The projects show that people enjoy getting outside and everyone benefits from being outside. The ever-changing and unexpected nature of the outdoors – observing weather, trees or animals – made every outing a new and exciting one. There were added benefits of improved confidence and wellbeing that support memories and conversations.

Practical things that support and encourage people to be active outside and take more opportunities to be outside include:

- Having appropriate clothing and footwear for the weather and the conditions, such as sun hats and cream for the warmer months, and for the colder and wetter months, waterproofs and warm layers.
- Start with small walks or activities near home and then build up from there.
- If you are going further from home – knowing where facilities such as toilets and cafes are makes things easier. It's also helpful to check out parking and bus routes too.
- Go with other people – joining a group may sound scary but there are lots of benefits to being with other people.

## Practitioners

Practitioners include a wide range of people including people working in care homes, support organisations for older people and people with dementia, and health and wellbeing staff working for Health and Social Care Partnerships.

The evidence from the evaluation shows that practitioners learned by participating in outdoor activities and supporting people. They learned more about dementia and about the people they were supporting. They saw how being in the outdoors, and revisiting past experiences rekindled memories for people who were able to tell stories or demonstrate a previously hidden physical skill.

Practitioners reported greater job satisfaction from participating in the sessions, giving them a greater understanding of dementia, and also the opportunity to enjoy being outside themselves. For health professionals who took part, it was a way in which they could have informal conversation with family or people with dementia, who felt more comfortable in the natural setting about broaching issues of concern.

There are practical elements for practitioners who support people living with dementia to be more active outside more and these include:

- Developing and guiding staff through risk assessments around the practical aspects of taking people to outdoor venues and using outdoor spaces like gardens builds up staff confidence.
- Checking out and reviewing regularly activities, sites and venues, with people and carers on how much they are enjoyed, helped to make everyone feel involved and contributed to the success of projects.
- Developing and nurturing good partnerships with organisations that can facilitate outdoor activities and venues is an effective approach.
- Development and planning time are a crucial part of developing activities and often take much longer than anticipated especially when projects develop and change over time.
- There is a need for flexibility, both in the longer-term planning, and in the day-to-day fluctuations of weather and other unexpected factors.
- Small groups of around 4 or 5 people with dementia work well for outdoor activities supported by care workers, volunteers and family members. People with advanced dementia may need one to one support.
- Have a collection of cold and wet weather clothing, footwear and equipment for ready use on poorer weather days.



## Projects

The Get Outdoors initiatives have demonstrated the benefits of supporting and encouraging people with dementia and their carers to be active outside. In developing and delivering the projects many key aspects of learning have been developed around the benefits.

The projects had or developed practical measures which could serve as learning for other outdoor initiatives, practitioners, and people with dementia and their carers.

Practical elements for success included:

- Have ways of keeping warm (extra clothing, blankets or a fire), ways of having shelter (outdoors or indoors) and providing sturdy furniture and handrails, and spacious, even areas.
- Have a range of activities ready and go outside when the weather is good and come back inside when it's not so good.
- Have alternative indoor activities and competitions for the days when you simply can't get outside.
- Have a social time to share tea, biscuits or even lunch – this was more than just a 'tea break' – it was a very important chance for friendships and peer support, both for people with dementia but even more so for their family carers.
- Activities that have a range of people in different roles, like paid carer, family member, volunteer and paid staff to support them, work well for people living with dementia.
- Small groups of people work well, especially when they are supported by a mixture of workers, volunteers and unpaid carers. People want to help out and contribute and having a role and tasks really helps increasing confidence and wellbeing.
- Develop relationships that are respectful, trusting and nurturing between everyone – staff, volunteers, people living with dementia and their unpaid carers.

About the activities

- It helped to have visual aids such as photo cards to show how bird boxes or flowers might be used – rather than abstract talk about birds or bees.
- Holding a simple mood checking and review session at the beginning and end of sessions using stones and feelings pictures is a simple and effective way of understanding how people feel and seeing impacts.
- Carry out informal capacity assessments over a few sessions so you gain an understanding of an individual's experience of dementia and continue to review it.

- Regularly review the sessions with staff, volunteers and partners to check what works well and so you can respond to emerging issues and circumstances.
- Holding sessions regularly – especially for people with more advanced dementia – helps to build relationships with participants and also amongst participants.

### Working with partners

- Using and developing local partnerships around sites and locations and ways to transport people works well and has the additional benefit of supporting the local economy.
- Developing relationships with health and social care partnerships takes time and work.
- Gaining feedback and holding separate feedback sessions for partners on how the sessions worked for people, carers and practitioners helps develop useful and meaningful sessions for everyone.

## Context of Covid-19

The restrictions in place during the spring and summer of 2020 (and likely for the foreseeable future) have had some impact on the projects and the activities, people and unpaid carers and partners. In addition, many other projects which previously met indoors are now looking at ways of meeting safely and this could involve holding meetings outside. Many of them could learn from elements of the Get Outdoors projects. What we are learning during this pandemic is that:

- Meeting with small numbers of people is generally safer than large numbers of people. The projects found that it was more effective for them to work with smaller numbers of people.
- There is also some safety from being outside or being under shelter outside. People feel safer meeting in an outdoor space but it is always reassuring to know there is a way of taking shelter; in the outdoors this could be a simple roof leaving open sides for ventilation and social distancing.
- There are also ways of staying warm against the elements in the outdoors, and safe ways to have snacks and hot drinks in an outdoor space.
- All the projects supported and encouraged people to be outside more and enjoy the simple pleasures in life. They proved that we do not need expensive day trips to take part in cultural activities in busy places. This is important learning for these times.

- We understand that people (including some from the project) are continuing to walk in Evanton Wood. And Evanton Wood have managed to have a socially-distanced 'ceilidh' with people sitting comfortably apart in the woods.

## Sharing the learning

The purpose of sharing the learning from the Get Outdoors projects is to reach as many people and organisations as possible to show the benefits and the practical steps that support more outside activity. It is also to support and influence practitioners, policy makers and funders to support changes in values and approaches, and practices to encourage more outside activity for people living with dementia in their own home or residential care.

The next steps are to produce and share materials, working with Life Changes Trust and partners to identify key networks, people, support organisations, practitioners and policy makers.

We will produce and share a summary of the evaluation report for policy makers and funders. We will also explore the possibility of holding an event with support organisations and practitioners to highlight the key learning aspects.

We will produce and share hints and tips for:

- People around the benefits and practical steps for getting outdoors.
- Practitioners in health and social care settings around the benefits and practical steps to get people outdoors.
- People and projects who are thinking about setting up outdoor initiatives, including six short summary reports from each project.

Now, more than ever, people should be able to benefit from getting outdoors. These six projects were developed before we had any idea of what was to come in 2020, but the learning from them could make profound differences for people living with dementia and their families in these times.