

LIFE CHANGES TRUST
GET OUTDOORS PROGRAMME
EVALUATION

EVANTON WOOD EVALUATION SUMMARY

2019/2020

PRODUCED BY



INTRODUCTION

The Get Outdoors Projects, funded by the Life Changes Trust, encourage people living with dementia to enjoy the benefits of spending time outside. Outside the Box was appointed to carry out an independent evaluation of the programme. This is a summary of the Evanton Wood Get Outdoors project. The full evaluation report is [here](#).

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 run an outdoor-based project for around 10 people living with dementia and their unpaid carers, volunteers and care home staff. Participants spend time outside (or in the shelter when the weather is poor) and in the wood, engaging in different activities, including preparing and sharing food, music and crafts such as memory quilts.

WHAT WE DID

To assess the projects we carried out the following activities:

- Participating in, and observing activities.
- Holding conversations with people living with dementia, unpaid carers, and volunteers.
- Talking with staff, partners and stakeholders.
- Assessing materials and reports produced by the projects.

MAGIC MOMENTS

From these activities we gathered 'Magic Moments' that showed the differences and impacts in lives. These moments are small but significant.

We were looking to see the extent to which the outdoor activities were creating better lives for people living with dementia and for their unpaid carers. We also wanted to contribute and share the learning around benefits of getting outdoors for people with dementia. We found that the project had a very positive impact on the lives of people living with dementia and unpaid carers. These are some of the Magic Moments.

A, prompted by the photo display - told me about the bird boxes they'd made - photos of them using power tools 'I've learned to do things I didn't know I could do with my hands!'

Everyone was expected to make their own way to the wood. Some shared a lift but most people walked there. It was a good half mile, uphill on uneven ground. They were not chaperoned or fussed over, just made their own way there in their own time. During this walk up, people had the chance to observe nature and reminisce about previous events in their lives and talk with friends.

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 the uneven slope to join us at the children's play area.

H's husband had been in hospital for a while, and has not been able to attend the group. But H is very enthusiastic about how much she has loved the group, she will keep coming along, she has loved the chance to do her own thing, get creative with art activities and also loved the outdoor cooking and social element.

KEY THEMES: SUPPORTING BETTER LIVES FOR PEOPLE

BEING PART OF A GROUP

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

“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”

The group discovered D’s talent for percussion and drumming when they met with another group of people. They now always now always keep spoons handy for him to use.

IMPACT FOR CARERS

“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.”

“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.”

KEY THEMES: SUPPORTING BETTER LIVES FOR PEOPLE

IMPROVED CONFIDENCE AND WELLBEING

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.

"The woods are good. It's nice to meet other people and getting to know them. I look forward to going and doing different things. I like making things I have never done before and it's nice to take home what I've made. I enjoy the lunches which we sometimes make. And it's nice to get out into the fresh air."



CHALLENGING ASSUMPTIONS

"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!"



CHALLENGES

All the projects faced different challenges and worked out different solutions. These are the main challenges the Evanton Wood faced:

Weather

Activities were split between indoors and outdoors and instead of having a fixed programme - people got outside when they could and when needed they would return inside the shelter. They had also gained extra funding to buy some cosy, waterproof blankets which meant that people could sit outside on the veranda and watch the weather.

Vandalism

When the project shelter was vandalised the local community lunch group offered a shared community lunch to finish the morning session. Vandalism to remote sites is not unusual and is hard to eradicate. Some community woodlands use an informal 'friends' system where regular visitors can report any issues.

Different stages of dementia

Managing and developing activities for people with a range of physical abilities and different stages of dementia requires skilful management and a flexible approach. At Evanton we think the balance was just right, offering choice for individuals and carers around activities and how and when to join in.

KEY LEARNING

These are some of the things we learnt from Evanton Wood that support people living with dementia and their carers to enjoy the benefits of getting outside more:

- Hold the sessions outside but have shelter.
- Have a range of activities ready so people can go outside when the weather is good and come back inside when it's not so good.
- Encourage as much independence, exercise and activity as possible such as walking to or around the wood and using tools and equipment.
- Practical things that help people enjoy being outside include fleeces and wet and cold weather clothes and boots, shelter and sturdy furniture.
- Flexible sessions and activities offering choice tend to support friendships and informal conversations around sharing experiences - especially important for unpaid carers.

OVERALL

The Evanton Wood project used the woodland setting to successfully engage people living with dementia, and their unpaid carers, with meaningful opportunities to be outdoors, connecting with nature. The project has contributed greatly to creating better lives for people living with dementia and their unpaid carers.