

LIFE CHANGES TRUST  
GET OUTDOORS PROGRAMME  
EVALUATION

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# INSTINCTIVELY WILD EVALUATION SUMMARY

2019/2020

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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 Instinctively Wild Get Outdoors project. The full evaluation report is [here](#).

Instinctively Wild is a Community Interest Company that delivers projects in outdoor learning, health and team building for a range of public and 3rd sector organisations. For the Get Outdoors programme they ran blocks of 8 week 'eco-therapy' sessions, using nature connection activities, indoors and outdoors. The sessions ran from May 2018 until Spring 2020 and were based mainly in The Haining in Selkirk, Scottish Borders. People were referred to the sessions by the NHS Borders Mental Health and 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. As well as natural craft activities, and refreshments, music also played an important role.

## 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.



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.

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.

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.

# KEY THEMES: SUPPORTING BETTER LIVES FOR PEOPLE

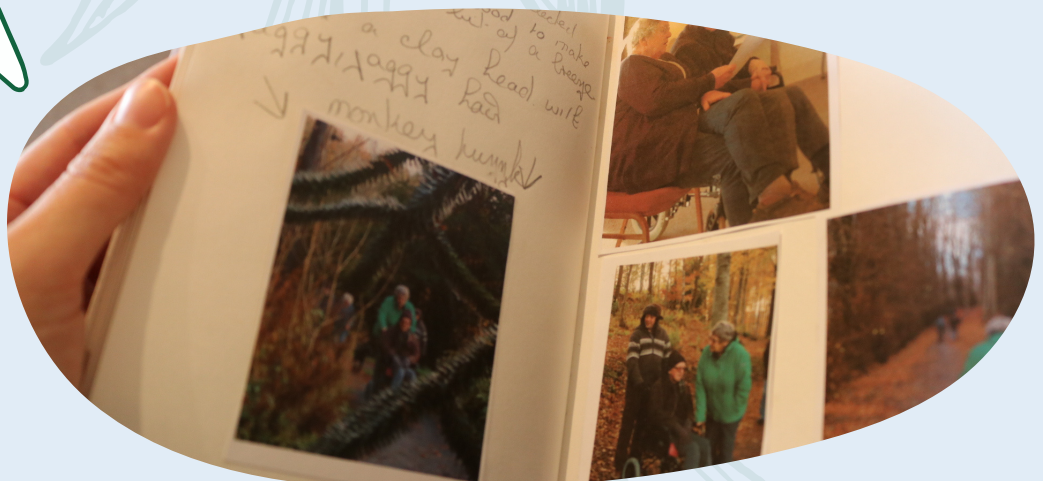
## INCREASED CONFIDENCE AND PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY

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 and better and has things to talk about.

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 a walk. Commenting on weather and scenery 'it's nice and bright', and 'it's lovely and dry and bright'

P had been to The Haining - the grand house where the project is based - before and told us about the history of the place.

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.



## KEY THEMES: SUPPORTING BETTER LIVES FOR PEOPLE

### IMPROVED PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

“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.”

“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.”



### IMPACT FOR CARERS

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

“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. Its good to have a chat and see other people and get outside. I always feel better afterwards.”

## CHALLENGES

All the projects faced different challenges and worked out different solutions. These are main challenges Instinctively Wild faced:

### **Vandalism**

The original base at Wooplaw Community Woods was vandalised, with the cabin and compost toilet burnt down. An alternative site at The Haining in Selkirk has been used instead but this needed organising along with planning and adjusting activities to the new site.

### **Accessibility**

Transporting people and staff and volunteers to The Haining was a particular issue for the project. Accessibility into the building and around the grounds of the estate also need to be managed. Volunteers and staff needed to check the accessibility of pathways and routes for the group for wheelchair users and people with limited mobility.

### **Cold weather**

The Haining is in an exposed and cold location. People and volunteers were given details of appropriate clothes to wear to keep warm. The activity programme also offered tea for when people returned inside and volunteers and staff were mindful of some people feeling the cold more than others.

### **Working with partners**

In the early stages of the project it wasn't always clear how many participants would be coming to the sessions, making the planning and delivery of sessions difficult. The sessions were also popular with (NHS) students on placement.

## KEY LEARNING

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

- Holding a simple mood checking and review session at the beginning and end of the session using stones and feelings pictures is a simple and effective way of understanding how people feel and seeing impacts.
- Including space and time for chatting and conversation, food and music into the sessions works very well for people and carers.
- Developing relationships with partners such as NHS Borders Mental Health Older Adults and Occupational Therapy teams takes time and work. Gaining feedback from partners on how sessions worked for people and carers is really helpful. NHS staff also reported on beneficial impacts they found from attending some of the sessions too.

## OVERALL

Instinctively Wild were able to develop a very successful model that enabled people living with dementia and their carers, to experience the outdoors in ways that were imaginatively and sensitively thought out. The project has contributed towards better lives for people living with dementia and their unpaid carers.