Woodland Social Enterprises: **Supporting people 'in-need'**

Research report

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for **Making Local Woods Work**

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Executive Summary

Brief and methodology

1. A research project was commissioned by Making Local Woods Work (MLWW) to explore the relationships between woodland social enterprises (WSEs) and 'in-need' groups in the community. Three research contractors (Clarity CIC, Neroche Woodlanders and ARC CIC) collaborated to undertake this piece of work.

2. A mixed-methods approach was taken to the research, with quantitative and qualitative elements. 159 woodland-based organisations were identified. A questionnaire survey generated 65 full responses. These came from all parts of the UK, albeit with a majority from England. A Facebook group generated discussion with individuals from 14 WSEs. A subset of respondents took part in telephone interviews, and two focus groups were conducted, at Young Wood in Somerset and Foundry Wood in Warwickshire, involving eight WSEs.

Findings

3. The most common legal structure of the WSEs in the study is a community interest company, and the majority have an annual income below £100,000. Most rely on grants or local authority contracts to fund their work with those 'in-need'. A majority of their woodland settings are in a rural location, and the woodlands tend to be leased, or owned by a member of the group.

4. The definition of 'in-need' used by WSEs included practical, psychological, financial and educational need, and there is a large overlap between these categories. Overall the most common focus is on adults with mental health issues, children with additional needs, people on very low incomes and adults with a history of alcohol or substance misuse. WSEs are working in many cases with more than one kind of 'in-need' group.

5. There is no single overarching type of approach being used by WSEs for their engagement with 'in-need' groups, but work includes elements of ecotherapy, Forest School, environmental art, habitat conservation and nature connection – and at its heart, it is about being together, in a natural setting, around a fire, doing the practical things necessary for being in a group. Specific activities include woodland management, crafts, therapeutic interventions, play, cooking and eating together. Provision may be in short blocks of weekly sessions or longer-term programmes.

6. Barriers and challenges reported in pursuing this work revolve mainly around funding, capacity to maintain and develop businesses, practical issues in using outdoor settings, and potential burn-out amongst key staff.

Interpretation

7. The personal commitment of lead individuals is a key driver in WSEs, often despite poor remuneration, but this presents issues for sustainability and succession. Most staff are working as self-employed freelancers rather than being employed on payroll. The operation of a WSE as a business, together with work with 'in-need' groups, demands a wide range of skills and aptitudes. Opinions vary amongst WSEs about whether formal qualifications for working with 'in-need' groups are necessary. WSEs' work with 'in-need' groups is most commonly run by female staff, whereas a

high proportion of clients are male – WSEs are successfully supporting men in their work, which many wellbeing organisations struggle to do.

8. The special qualities of woodland (peacefulness, provision for productive work, wildness and informality) are all seen as important for the work being done. WSEs' work with 'in-need' groups can also offer a way for neglected woodlands to be enhanced for wildlife and amenity. The reliance of WSEs on affordable access to land is crucial to their work, yet the variety of formal, informal and 'nomadic' arrangements suggests an uncertain foundation in this respect.

9. Many of the WSEs are small and under-resourced for the work being carried out with people 'in-need', and dependency on volunteers and 'free time' from staff can mask financial frailty. Support to people 'in-need' is not likely to be sustainable in the long term, given short-term grant cycles. Few WSEs are funding their work through income generation from their social enterprise. Some newer groups are working almost entirely on a voluntary basis, while some longer-established groups are confident to charge more realistic rates for session delivery. Addressing these financial challenges requires a suite of approaches, including broadening business models to enable wider revenue-generating activity, together with improving access to grant sources.

10. WSEs highlighted their need to be able to influence and be understood by partner bodies in local authorities, the NHS and elsewhere, both at a local level and at a regional/national level. This looks like a young field of work that is seeking recognition and mechanisms to engage with those in positions of power.

11. WSEs are very enthusiastic about networking with peer groups. The sector appears to be naturally collaborative and happy to learn from each other. Any future support needs to incorporate the potential for collaboration and networking.

Recommendations

12. The majority of WSEs in this study would like to do more work with people 'in-need'. The main enabling factors for this were seen as funding and resources, improved networks and contacts, and training or skills development.

13. WSEs need to be able to access delivery and impact measurement tools to help them run activities in the way they want to, while also maintaining quality and effectiveness. A quality-defining body similar to the Forest Schools Association could potentially help WSEs develop their skills and ways of measuring social impact. Support needs to be flexible, targeted and practical.

14. As the MLWW project draws to a close, and discussion takes place about future strategic provision and support for WSEs, the authors would suggest that this research demonstrates that the following points should be given prominence:

- WSEs should be involved from the outset in how to adapt provision and design future schemes, and provision should be regionally-focused, to be accessible and responsive to local needs. When involved in this way, the time taken away from WSE's core work with 'in-need' groups should be recompensed, as these small organisations have little or no core funding.
- There is a strong demand for continuing opportunities for WSEs to network, gain peer support and learn from each other, at both a local and wider level.
- Investment could be made in already-established WSEs within each region, which have the infrastructure to provide central services for training, consultancy and peer-to-peer support.
- There is scope to develop training covering areas such as impact measurement, funding applications and web development, from which WSEs can pick elements that suit their needs.
- A dialogue is needed with grant funders, large woodland owning bodies, the NHS and other parties to improve their capacity to incubate and support existing and newly emerging WSEs.
- The options for an umbrella body to set standards, help define best practice and help WSEs measure and maintain the quality of their work, should be explored.
- Helping WSEs find a voice amongst bigger players is crucial for the sector to grow. To be able to sit alongside the larger NGOs etc., and speak in each locality with health and social care commissioners or budget holders, WSEs need help to gain capacity, confidence and ability.

1 Introduction

1.1. Making Local Woods Work

Making Local Woods Work (MLWW) is a three and a half year project, funded by the Big Lottery Fund, focused on supporting and developing woodland social enterprises (WSEs) across the UK. It is led by the Plunkett Foundation and involves a number of other partners (the Community Woodlands Association, Llais y Goedwig, Locality, the Woodland Trust, Shared Assets, Grown in Britain, Hill Holt Wood, the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Forestry Commission, and Forest Research). The overarching goal of the Making Local Woods Work project is to grow capacity and confidence within the WSE sector and, through research, assess how best to support future growth.

Social enterprises can bring new and innovative ideas and approaches to the forestry and woodland sector: introducing diverse methods to woodland management, generating new economic activity and employment, and creating new, strong connections between communities and their local woods.

For further information about how the MLWW project sees WSEs, see **https://www.makinglocalwoodswork.org/woodland-social-enterprise**.

1.2. Woodland Social Enterprises

Social enterprises trade to tackle social problems, and improve communities, people's life chances, or the environment. They gain their income from grants and also from selling goods and services in the open market, but they reinvest their profits back into the business or the local community. Woodland social enterprise is a term used to describe social enterprises which embed woodlands or woodland products into their core activity. It is an intentionally broad term that covers activities from the production of woodfuel and timber, through to woodlands being used for educational or health and wellbeing purposes.

1.3. The brief for this work

The aim of this research, as set out by MLWW, was to explore the practical relationships between woodland social enterprise and 'in-need' community groups, paying particular attention to the opportunities and constraints generated by woodland environments. Specifically, MLWW was interested in answering the following questions:

a. How is 'need' defined by woodland social enterprise practitioners, and how does this fit with broader definitions?

b. Which 'in-need' groups do woodland social enterprises most commonly work with?

c. What are the most important goals of this work, and vision for engagement with these community members?

d. Which approaches are most commonly used by woodland social enterprises to work with 'in-need' members of the community?

e. Which factors are most important for effective and successful engagement with 'in-need' groups by woodland social enterprises?

f. Can woodland social enterprises help mitigate specific or additional barriers that

some 'in-need' groups face when engaging with, and accessing woodlands?

1.4. Defining 'in-need'

It was agreed at the outset of this research that the researchers should not define too closely in advance what is meant by 'in-need': part of the aim of the research was to identify what WSEs feel 'in-need' means to them. In practice the researchers asked WSEs to describe the people they felt were 'in-need' but also offered some pre-determined headings for 'in-need' groups at other points in the research questioning, based on the researchers' knowledge of the wider social purpose sector. The approach used, and the definitions that emerged, are described in detail in section 3.3.1.

In our findings and implications, we also refer to the Big Lottery Fund's 'ways of defining need'[1]:

- Material need: to be adequately nourished, have somewhere to live, be warm, have a decent home, adequate transport, adequate income, employment, basic possessions and activities, basic skills and qualifications.
- Psychological need: mental health, self-esteem, competence, autonomy, good quality relationships, and security.

1.5. Research team and approach taken

Three research contractors collaborated to undertake this piece of work, combining social research capacity with practical experience of on-the-ground delivery:

- **Clarity CIC**, led by Sarah Taragon and Steve Woollett, is a community interest company working with social purpose organisations to help them become more effective, sustainable and well-run.
- **Neroche Woodlanders**, led by Jenny Archard and Gavin Saunders, is a woodland social enterprise based on Forestry Commission land in Somerset, which 'works with nature to fire spirits, kindle community and foster wellbeing'.
- **Achieving Results in Communities (ARC) CIC**, led by Kath Pasteur, provides project support and delivery for green space community projects which contribute to people's mental and physical health and wellbeing.

A mixed-methods approach was taken to the research, involving both quantitative and qualitative elements, with avenues of enquiry guided by the contractors' knowledge of the sector and those working within it.

1 https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20171011160851/
https://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/funding/funding-guidance/applying-for-funding/identifying-need/ways-of-defining-need

2 Methods and summary of response

2.1. Questionnaire survey

An online survey (using Survey Monkey) was sent to the organisations supported by MLWW, together with additional relevant organisations known to the researchers, and to organisations found through online searches for WSEs. The aim of this was to collect data on the numbers of WSEs working with 'in-need' groups, what this work looks like, the goals of this work, barriers being encountered, and good practice emerging. The survey was mainly based on tick-boxes, with some opportunity to give more qualitative textual feedback, and an invitation to take part in other more detailed elements of the research. See Appendix B for the full questionnaire.

The research team promoted the survey through their own networks and through relevant groups on social media, in order to reach a wide audience.

All respondents were required to answer the following four statements to show their eligibility:

- A significant proportion (or all) of your work is woodland based.
- You are a constituted organisation or group in your own right, not just a project of a larger organisation.
- At least some of your income is from trading, e.g. events, products, sales, commissions, contracts. This may only be one or two items per year.
- You have some social aims e.g. about creating improvements or providing opportunities for people, so are not 'just' a profit-making business.

65 WSEs met the criteria and completed a full response. Their geographical distribution is described in section 3.1.1.

23 responding projects (38%) were participating WSEs within the MLWW programme. This represents almost half of the total number of WSEs participating in MLWW. However the majority of respondents were not already part of the MLWW programme.

2.2. Facebook exchanges

A Facebook group was created for the research, with focused questions for discussion. Questions were posted to prompt discussion of issues being raised during the research, to test out findings and gain feedback from a wider range of individuals. All those who had expressed an interest in the research were invited to join the Facebook group, as were the MLWW participant groups and others through local networks. 14 individuals took part.

2.3. Interviews

A subset of responding organisations who expressed an interest in being further involved in the research were invited to take part in telephone interviews, selected partly to extend the geographical coverage of the research. 10 such interviews were undertaken.

2.4. Focus groups

Two focus groups were conducted, one at Young Wood (near Taunton, Somerset) and one at Foundry Wood (Leamington Spa, Warwickshire). Eight WSEs were represented

at these groups. Each had two facilitators, with a mix of MLWW participant groups and other WSEs. The aim of these sessions was to explore in-depth how WSEs are working with people 'in-need', the barriers they have experienced in this work and best practice in overcoming these barriers. In addition, the role and implications of the woodland setting was explored, to see how it contributes to the nature of the work

2.5. Desk research

Desk studies were undertaken to enable WSEs not currently engaged with MLWW to be identified, and to identify relevant recent research or evaluation within the WSE sector that could be used to inform the current research.

2.6. Representation of sources in analysis

In the analysis that follows, quantitative data from the questionnaire surveys is augmented with qualitative information from the focus groups, interviews and Facebook group, to provide a synthesis of findings.

3 Findings

3.1. Organisations

3.1.1. Overview of respondents

A total of 159 woodland organisations were initially identified and contacted. Of these a total of 65, from across the UK, proved eligible within the definition of WSEs used for this research, and took part across all methods (survey, interview, social media engagement and focus group).

49 of the organisations (82%) which responded are based in England, seven (12%) in Scotland, three (5%) in Wales and one (2%) in Northern Ireland. There was a particularly large number of respondents from the South West of England (23, or 38%), partly reflecting the fact that two of the researchers are based in the South West and therefore have better connections with organisations in this area. It proved particularly difficult to gain responses from Northern Ireland, though this reflects, in part, the limited links made by MLWW there (only two participating projects).

It is not possible to confirm what proportion this sample represents of the total number of active WSEs in the UK, but the evidence suggests that the sector is expanding. This report is not necessarily representative of all WSEs, but it covers a wide range of organisational types, sizes and approaches.

3.1.2. Organisational approach, structure and staffing

Respondents were asked about the legal structure of their organisation. The most frequent structure is a Community Interest Company (31 respondents). 12 respondents are registered charities. Other structures included partnerships and sole traders.

Respondents reported a variety of motivations for becoming social enterprises, including the flexibility of being a small independent organisation, and the freedom from being driven by government targets.

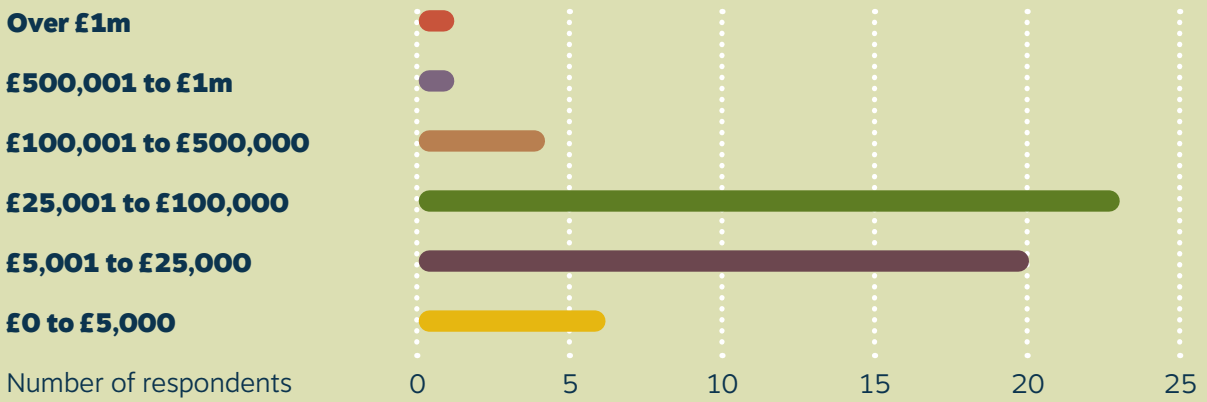
Organisations have a mix of paid workers and session staff, with volunteer involvement mentioned by some. Many of the WSEs are run by one or two people, and are heavily reliant on these individuals.

3.1.3. Business activities

Respondents were asked what proportion of their organisation's time is spent working with 'in-need' groups. The average was 51%, and ranged from 0 to 100%. 5 respondents said all their work is with 'in-need' groups.

Proportion of work that is with people 'in-need'	Number of respondents
0 to 10%	9
11 to 25%	9
26 to 50%	13
51 to 75%	13
76 to 100%	17

Turnover (2017-18)



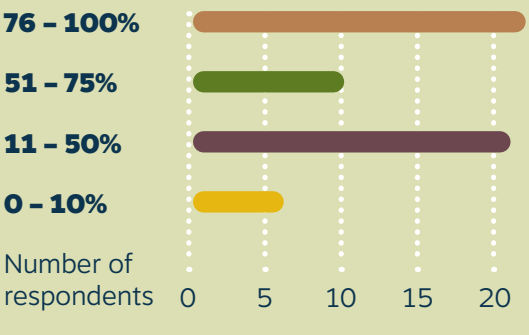
3.1.4. Turnover

55 respondents gave details of their annual turnover for 2017/18. The majority had an income of between £5,000 and £100,000. Six organisations had a turnover above £100,000 and another six were under £5,000.

3.1.5. Trading income

Respondents reported a range in the proportion of their income derived from trading. Six said the figure was 0-10%; 21 said 11-50%; ten said 51-75%; and 22 said over 75%. Trading includes contracts with schools, local authorities and health providers.

Income from trading as a percentage of total income



3.1.6. Funding of work with 'in-need' groups

Respondents were asked how their work with 'in-need' groups is funded. Respondents stated that as clients do not usually have the funds to pay for services themselves (unless they are in receipt of personal budgets), funding has to be sought from external sources.

Around half are funded from a single source, and around half from a mixture of sources.

How work with those 'in-need' is funded	Number of respondents
Contracts and grants	13
Grants only	12
Contracts only	6
Grants and paid-for services	5
Paid-for services only	4
Income from products etc only	3
Grants, paid-for services and donations	3
Any other combination	6
Not available / other	7

A mix of contracts and grants, or grants-only, was the most common response. Income from products from the woodland itself is not a very common method of funding work with 'in-need' groups. However, external funding secured for work with these groups does help to support the maintenance and management of the woodland.

One WSE described their mix of funding like this in the Facebook group:

"Mostly grants (90%) and the odd short term contract. Product sales only give us pocket money for a special treat like Xmas lunch or a wee trip somewhere".

One WSE described how working with funders who don't understand you can lead to difficulties for the project leaders because:

"You need them to understand the ups and downs that are the reality of the situation for people 'in-need'. Participating in projects does not lead to a constant upward trajectory. There are other influences on people's lives that are often not reflected in measurement tools."

3.2. Woodlands

3.2.1. Woodland focus

Respondents were asked what proportion of their work is woodland-based. Responses ranged from 10% to 100%. 44 organisations (73% of responses) said that over three quarters of their work is woodland-based. 18 (30%) said that their work is wholly woodland-based.

3.2.2. Size

Respondents manage between 0 and 1,000 acres (400 hectares) of woodland, although some respondents said they use a number of sites or are 'nomadic'. 32 organisations manage 25 acres (10 ha) or less, 15 manage 26 to 100 acres (40 ha) and seven manage more than 100 acres (40 ha).

3.2.3. Woodland location

Respondents were asked where their woodland base is located. 39 (67%) are rural, 11 (19%) are peri-urban, four (7%) are urban and four (7%) use more than one setting. Urban and rural locations are felt to present different challenges. Urban sites are generally more accessible, allowing clients to feel they can access the space outside of sessions, but also increasing the risk of vandalism. Rural locations can feel more 'wild', but have problems of access and transport.

3.2.4. Ownership and tenure

Respondents reported a mixed picture of land ownership. 19 organisations (33%) lease woodland; 15 (26%) own their land (or members of their organisation do); 11 (19%) have free use of their woodland; seven (12%) hire woodland for specific activities; and five gave other responses. It was striking in the focus groups and discussions how many of the WSEs had grown out of an individual owning a piece of woodland and developing their organisation from that point.

3.3. Working with 'in-need' groups

3.3.1. Definition of 'in-need' groups

As referred to in 1.4 above, WSEs were asked to describe for themselves what is meant by 'in-need', and working definitions were derived

from their responses. In the questionnaire survey WSEs were asked directly about the people they work with, both as an open question and as a closed list to choose from.

In the responses to the open question, WSE's definitions of 'in-need' vary, from the very specific to the very general. This variety of definitions may have ramifications, especially around impact measurement, which are discussed later in the report.

Most organisations questioned are trying to target their 'offer' to those whom they perceive to be 'in-need' in their local area. One participant in a focus group talked of:

"...finding the people who can benefit the most – no point having people who aren't interested and therefore won't engage..."

The following quotes show the range of how WSEs define those 'in-need' with whom they work:

More specific definition >	***"Children who are at risk of mainstream educational exclusion. People with mental health issues. People who are socially isolated"***
	"We work with volunteers and emerging artists from a range of backgrounds to breakdown the economic, social and cultural barriers to accessing arts in nature"
	"As a CIC we are committed to provide aspirational opportunities to people who may well have obstacles and institutional barriers to meaningful and purposeful engagement"
	"We offer discounted rate for venue hire to those helping people 'in-need'. Not directly but our users cover many of these groups"
< Less specific definition	***"Everyone is 'in-need' of spending time outdoors as a preventative measure for mental ill-health. Thus school groups and general visitors to our woodland and other outdoor sites could be classed as 'in-need'"***
	"Our aim is to be able to invite anyone from any background to take part in reconnecting with nature"
	"People from all walks of life, needing time to just be"
	"This is a weird question as nearly everybody is 'in-need'? I suggest you revise and suggest a clearer term – some are in dire need of mental health support others 'in-need' of a break in a wood!"

WSEs work with, or provide a setting for, a range of 'in-need' groups. These range from pre-school, to school age (with needs), NEETS (young people not in education, employment or training), young women, adults needing a break/respite, and adults with mental health and other needs. The chart below shows the spread of responses to the closed (list) question in the questionnaire (more than one response was allowed):

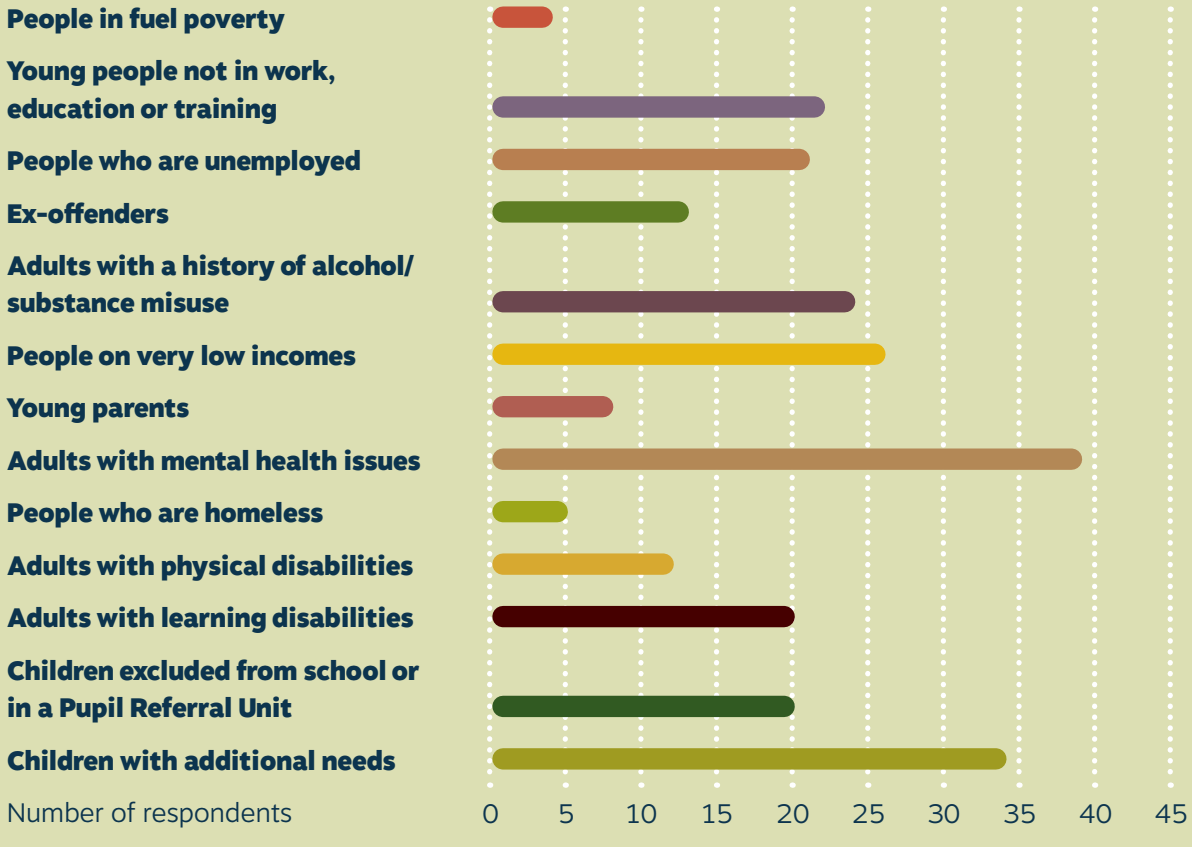
Alongside this, an analysis of the responses to the open question on this subject showed that people still used terms similar to those above, to define those 'in-need'. Overall the focus was on adults with mental health issues, children with additional needs, people on very low incomes and adults with a history of alcohol / substance misuse.

Responses from organisations to questions about the challenges and barriers faced by people in visiting the woods, also threw light on some of the needs which underlie or exacerbate these barriers:

- People being anxious about woodlands / being outdoors
- Not having right clothing
- Transport and physical access
- Cultural differences
- Not being well enough to participate
- Not engaging on a regular basis
- Challenging (behaviour) groups

In summary therefore, 'need' may be practical, psychological, financial or educational, and there is a large overlap between these categories. WSEs seem to have defined the specific or broader kinds of 'in-need' people they are able to work with,

Groups with whom you carry out focused work or that you target for your work



and generated the capacity to do that work.

At the same time, respondents describe that woodland ***"acts as a magnet for those who need it"*** and that work in woodlands can be preventative, helping people before 'needs' emerge.

3.3.2. Reasons for working with 'in-need' groups

From the feedback in focus groups, there appear to be three main ways in which work with 'in-need' groups is initiated:

- Responding to a perceived need in the locality – i.e. the WSE develops a focus on 'in-need' groups because that is what it finds in the local area.
- Starting with professional interest – i.e. members of the group begin with a wish to do work with 'in-need' groups, and hence seek it out.
- Being motivated by lived experience – i.e. a member or volunteer in the group has personal experience of need, and this motivates the group to develop work to serve others with those needs.

Motivations may come directly from those leading on work, or volunteers or other contacts in the local community. Some said that a need (expected or unexpected) emerged as they did the work:

"Worked with NEETS first due to personal interest then realised that many young people have mental health issues."

Some respondents suggested that the influence of local agencies and funders can skew who can be worked with, in ways that can perceived by WSEs as negative. For example, a participant in a focus group spoke of:

"...a Children's Centre who didn't want 'white, middle class' parents attending sessions (due to their targets) – though the project worker felt they were 'in-need'."

3.3.3. Breadth of need

From the focus group data a picture emerged of the breadth of client need that each WSE is working with. All work with at least three and sometimes up to six kinds of 'needs'. These three examples, from attendees at the focus groups, illustrate the point:

- Organisation 1: Young people (16-25 yrs) NEETS, young people with mental health needs, SEN schools, local communities.
- Organisation 2: Parents and toddlers, home educated (5 to 11 yrs), extra provision (6-16yrs), Families for Children (adoption), wellbeing in nature (19+ yrs).
- Organisation 3: Young women, teens, local youngsters, adults with mental health needs, homeless, addicts, those experiencing isolation.

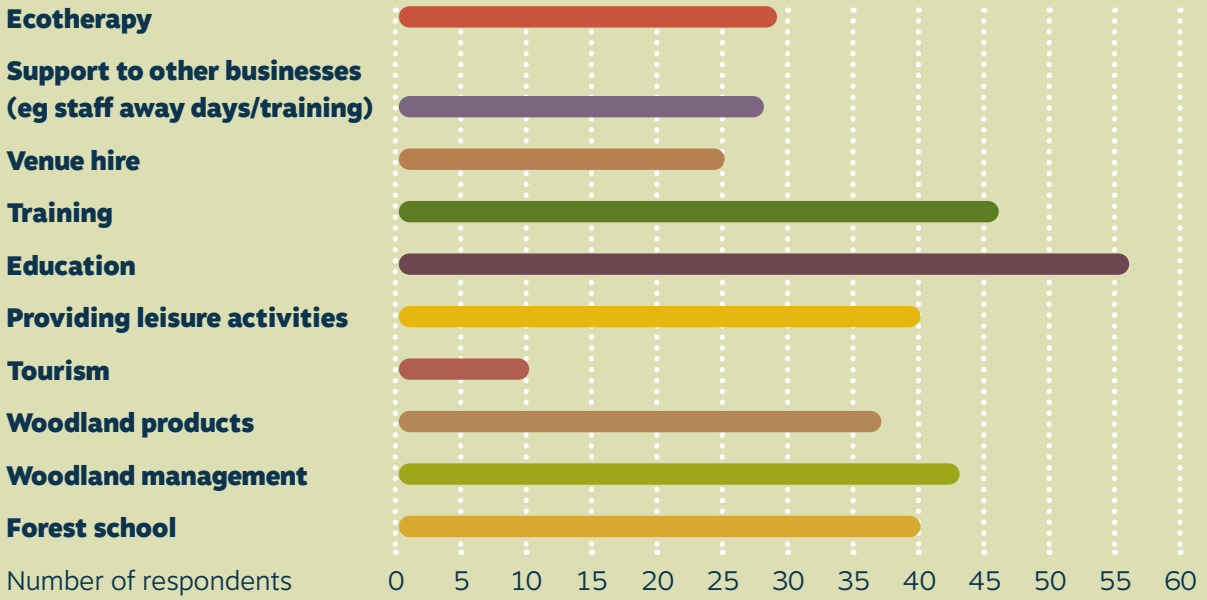
These examples show that for a number of WSEs, 'in-need' is a broad, inclusive concept which covers a range of groups in their local communities who broadly can be regarded as disadvantaged, whether socially, financially, educationally, or due to their mental health, or for other reasons.

3.3.4. Approaches to engagement

WSEs consulted in this study are carrying out a wide range of work, from (for example), logs-for-labour type approaches, to long-term support for adults with mild to moderate mental health issues, alternative schools provision for children who are challenged by the school system, short-term courses teaching new skills, and residential space for respite. The approach taken depends on the background of those involved in the organisation: their skills, experiences, available land, and local connections. In many cases, it also reflects the needs of local communities around the WSE.

The focus groups were asked the questions, 'What do you do?' 'What approach do you use?' 'How do you use your setting?' and 'How

What elements does your work involve?



long do people come for?' These questions are used as subheadings in the following sections.

What do you do?

People described a mix of activities that were categorised as:

- Woodland management & conservation, e.g. coppicing, felling, hedgelaying, woodfuel group, promoting forestry to girls
- Nature and crafts, e.g. carpentry – making planters
- Therapeutic interventions, e.g. wellbeing meetings
- Mentoring and training, e.g. mentoring programme
- Animal care, e.g. animal 'jobs' (no detail given)
- Play, e.g. opportunity to exercise/explore/enjoy
- Interpersonal and life skills, e.g. skills for employment
- Cooking and eating together
- Nature connection activities
- Being productive, e.g. building steps together

A participant in the Facebook discussion said:

"It works well to combine woodland maintenance jobs and having options to do more gentle things or lie in a hammock ... because the feeling of contributing is also so valuable to those struggling with mental health issues. And if no one turns up the time isn't wasted, productive things are still achieved."

What approach do you use?

It is clear that there is no single, overarching definition or title for the types of intervention and activity used in WSEs' engagement with 'in-need' groups. In practice, the approach borrows from a number of recognised categories, described as:

- Ecotherapy, i.e. deeper connection to nature with therapeutic aims

- Forest School, i.e. learner-centred, in a non-judgmental learning setting (NB this approach is being used with adults, as well as with children and young people)
- Creative approaches e.g. environmental arts projects leading to performances
- Five Ways to Wellbeing[2] (connect, be active, take notice, keep learning, give) as a structure for working towards good mental health
- Accepting, empowering, giving responsibility
- Teaching transferable skills via woodland tasks, e.g. from fire-lighting they learn patience, team work, perseverance, etc.
- John Muir Award as a structure (the four challenges of Discover, Explore, Conserve and Share)[3].

In essence, however, the common features of these approaches are quite simple and visceral:

"One of the biggest comments that our participants make about coming to our group is about feeling part of a "community" or "I feel like I have found my tribe". It taps into something primal about sitting around a fire with others, but also having a purpose (doing the things needed to keep fire going, prepare food, manage the wood). A really simple session can meet these needs."

How long do people come for?

WSEs described a varied picture of how often and for how long people come to the woods, from short courses of one or two days per week for five weeks, to very long-term (three years or more, or as long as people wanted to come). Most talked of weekly sessions within the more structured approaches. Some are formal 'courses' and some are less formal 'drop-ins'. Some talk about people (young people and adults) being able to progress, over time, in some way – as mentors, or to become volunteers. When mentioned, group size was in the region of 12-25 people, though work with schools can entail larger groups.

How do you use your setting?

We asked direct questions about how people use their woods. During the focus groups, two people differentiated between the camp area, and the wider (and wilder) woodland:

"Camps & clearings – shelter, somewhere to sit, projects, social, fire, things to make/repair, somewhere to work." "Wild woodland – exploration, resources, peace, tranquillity, inspiration, getting away, woodland maintenance."

Another described the woodland as:

"[The] inspiration – all work is site specific and linked to either woodland management and/or ecology. Need the trees to fell them!"

One participant who does not own or lease woods described how they have to set up each time:

"[I] used to set up before the group arrives but now set up is part of the session so they take ownership and can be challenged if they say it's 'rubbish'."

People discussed the balance of using the woodland versus its ecological sustainability, recognising that over-use can have a detrimental effect:

"Managing the resource needs to be fully integrated into the sessions being delivered so people understand the link between recreation or enjoyment and ecological management."

The woodlands' special qualities of peacefulness, the ability to be productive, to be both homely and wild, to be flexible and not formal were all said to be important for the work being done. In interviews, one

2 Five Ways to Wellbeing from NEF https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/d80eba95560c09605d_uzm6b1n6a.pdf

3 John Muir Trust: https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/john-muir-award

respondent described how there was a great synergy between woodland management and social goals.

In the focus groups participants were also asked how they 'reach' their target groups. They cited a range of methods – word of mouth, using social media, links to mental health teams, promotional events, contacting schools or referrers directly, outreach, self-referral, using posters and fliers, and building partnerships with other agencies, schools or organisations.

3.3.5. Gauging impact

A small number of WSEs talked about how they are measuring impact. Methods being used included WEMWBS (Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale)[4] and Five Ways to Wellbeing. Others talked about the challenges they find in trying to measure their effectiveness. Measuring results and looking at outcomes and impacts can be difficult in practice for WSEs, partly because of the outdoor setting, and also because the measurement that does take place is often dictated by funders and may feel ill-suited. One respondent said:

"All I want to say in the report is that people say they feel better. That's enough! We now have 3 outcome questions around a) practicing the 5 ways to wellbeing, b) making new friends and c) having a say in how sessions are run (the latter two are dictated by our funder). ...funders expect people's mental health to have improved as an immediate and direct result of attending sessions when that is unrealistic."

There is considerable academic evidence now available that suggests the positive impact of being outside (and specifically in woodland) on people's wellbeing. However, individual WSEs are struggling to show this impact at the specific level of their own WSE.

Respondents expressed some interest in finding ways to successfully measure impact, and in sharing good practice from those who have found methods that work. The importance of keeping impact measurement at a suitable scale, and it not having a negative impact on delivery, was mentioned, along with the simple practical difficulty of completing forms in an outdoor environment.

3.3.6. Barriers and challenges

We asked what challenges respondents encountered in their work with 'in-need' groups. We organized these under themes which can be seen in the Table below. NB respondents often identified more than one barrier or challenge.

Challenges identified (58 responses)	Number of respondents
Funding/resources	24
Client's needs	18
Practical issues – eg transport	10
Reaching clients	9
Working in partnership	9
Other	8

Amongst the challenges highlighted were:

- Funding and resources – over-complicated grant schemes; short term funding programmes; hoops that need jumping through.

"...Other organisations look for 'quick fixes' and don't appreciate the long term nature of working with vulnerable people."

"Making services sustainable by charging a reasonable price."

Lack of staff or facilities to deliver as much as WSEs would like to do. This includes finding

4 See https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/

staff with the wide range of skills needed, providing adequate support or supervision for staff or volunteers who are dealing with sensitive issues, and working with volunteers who may have their own needs.

"Finding staff who have the necessary skills and want to work with these target groups. Other people's perception of risk for these groups in woodland environments and accessibility of local woods for wheelchair users."

- Practical issues such as transport, clothing/ footwear, access to shelter, access to running water, ticks and Lyme disease (a growing issue with climate change, related to the prevalence of tick vectors – roe deer, other mammals).

"[Clients are] not experienced in being in a woodlands environment, so anxious about it. Not got the right clothing or because they come from needy backgrounds it takes longer to get them settled or engaged."

- Understanding the challenge for clients in taking the first step to 'turn up', and therefore having capacity for outreach, to chase up referrals and improve the chances of the first visit happening. Also challenges of getting clients to engage long-term and get the most out of their time and to meet their individual needs.

"Main one is building trust and confidence. Once that is established then generally pretty good response. Outside influences such as home life or peer pressure can put this back at start of sessions."

- Difficulties in working with statutory agencies or others, to build successful referral systems and ensure that clients needing support are reached. Problems of finding the 'right' person to talk to, and working as equal partners.

"Communication with other stakeholders (such as schools, parents etc) particularly those who have different values/ approaches

to working with people (some people particularly find the non-judgmental style of working with groups difficult to understand)."

- Burn-out is a considerable risk as the work in many of the WSEs rests on the shoulders of a few. This was discussed with real passion in the Facebook group and focus groups. As one respondent put it:

"Now I have learned that I need to 'do the work to do the work'– i.e. I need to make sure that I am resourced: physically, financially, emotionally."

3.3.7. Ambitions for future work with 'in-need' groups

52 respondents to the survey said they would definitely like to do more work with people 'in-need'. Nine said they might do.

- 40 respondents said they need more funding/resources to enable the work.
- 7 respondents said they need to improve their networks/contacts
- 6 respondents said they need training or skills development
- 5 respondents need volunteers or members
- 3 said they would like to improve how they demonstrate their impact

Discussions in the focus groups and on Facebook identified specific barriers to moving forwards. These reiterated the points above but also particularly highlighted the capacity of those running the organisations to further develop what they do.

3.3.8. Advice for others working with in-need groups

Respondents were asked for their 'top tips' for others wanting to work with 'in-need' groups. From the wide range of responses the most frequent were around:

- Building relationships (with partners, referrers and clients)
- Understanding local needs and your clients' needs
- Being patient
- Making sure you have the relevant capacity and skills before you start
- Trust

A small number of the responses given in the survey are shown below.

"Commitment, need to be committed. If you take on working with certain groups, don't let them down by giving up because it is hard work. Know why you are embarking on your plans – if it is for financial gain, try something else! If you don't have a passion and belief, you will fall at the first hurdle. If you can stay the course it is life-affirming and worth all the effort. Make sure you get a good Board/Trustees who do stuff."

"Go for it! Keep it simple and be clear of your aims – i.e. we are clear that it is nature doing the therapy not the staff. Build capacity of volunteers from your client group as they will have good understanding of others' mental health challenges. Work in partnership / communication with other mental health agencies in the area. Persist with outreach even if uptake is slow. Don't get too hung up on proving impacts."

"Try and integrate people 'in-need' with all other activities rather than having segregated space and time. Nature does this really well – doesn't separate all the different types of plants in a woodland, so why should we separate out different types of people! The main aim is to provide for everyone's needs."

"See people as people, we all have challenges and great strengths no matter who we are. Be careful to empower who you work with, look after yourself in the process, and be confident."

"Have a good understanding of what support you can and cannot provide. Strike a balance between providing meaningful activity and pushing people to deliver products."

4 Interpretation

4.1. Diversity of approach

Woodland social enterprises by definition combine 'people' and 'environment' purposes in their objectives, and vary widely in the emphasis they place on the two. Some start with the woodland, being primarily focused on the sustainable management of their woodland and increasing biodiversity. For these, catering for 'in-need' groups can be a means to achieve their woodland ends, albeit while recognising the added benefits which accrue to individuals from 'in-need' groups in the process. At the other end of this spectrum, some WSEs begin with a social purpose, and simply use the woodland as a setting that works particularly well for pursuing their objectives with 'in-need' groups. Most WSEs occupy a mid-point on this spectrum, desiring to combine woodland and social purposes. During the focus groups people said how important it is to be able to combine benefit for people, with benefit for the woodland.

Within the purview of work with 'in-need' groups there are many types of engagement being pursued, from skills development (e.g. for those without work), to reducing isolation, to semi-therapeutic support for those with mental health issues, to education work, notably for those who struggle in classroom settings. It is apparent from the responses that there is not yet a common language for describing this emerging field, as currently-understood headings like 'Forest School' and 'Ecotherapy' cover some but not all of the elements of engagement with 'in-need' groups in woodland settings.

4.2. Personal commitment as a key driver

The people doing this work are exceptionally passionate and committed. In many cases they are the founders of the WSEs, having established the organisation to pursue their passion. Evidence from focus group discussions illustrated that during the early days of establishing an organisation, huge efforts are invested with little financial return, leading to fragility and high likelihood of burn-out. When asked whether founders and employees of WSEs were able to make a living from the enterprise, many had alternative forms of household income, or accepted the need to work for less, or do some of the work unpaid, in order to pursue their passion. To quote a participant in a focus group:

"Everyone who works in our organisation has other sources of income. It would not have been a feasible area of work when I was younger. I am able to do this because I had a 'proper job' for many years and had already got on the housing ladder, established some savings etc. I can't imagine how I could have started out in this line of work running a social enterprise and been able to live!".

A key challenge is to ensure that these passionate people do not suffer from burn-out. A future challenge for these organisations will be finding successors once founders need to step aside, either by finding similarly-impassioned successors, or finding proper means to remunerate them – or both.

There are pros and cons for a sector led by passionate individuals – they will put a huge amount into what they are doing, but there is little sustainability in terms of organisation or infrastructure. There is also less chance to build and develop good practice and structure for the sector, as those individuals move on or cannot sustain their input.

4.3. Staffing, multi-skilling and training needs

Feedback highlighted that the development and operation of a WSE demands an unusually wide range of skills and aptitudes, from small business skills, to chainsaw use, to woodland ecology, to volunteer management, to fundraising, to risk management and ensuring safe working practices. When working with 'in-need' groups is added to this mix, the breadth of skills required becomes even wider and deeper, demanding aptitude in social engagement, safeguarding, management of challenging behaviour, therapy, counselling or teaching, and engagement with mental health and other local authority social, health and education services.

When individuals with the right skills sets to cover these needs come together, the result can be powerful and potentially life-changing for 'in-need' groups, as well as beneficial for the woodland and the wider community. However achieving the right skills mix is very demanding, both in finding the right people, getting the right training, and maintaining and refining skills over time.

WSEs taking part in the focus groups in this study took differing views on whether those working with particular clients, e.g. children with specific needs or adults with mental health issues, need to have an in-depth understanding of these needs and to have formal experience and/or qualifications in therapy or counselling. In reality different organisations are working in different ways and at different levels with individuals, based on their own skills and experiences. It was noted that it is important to clearly communicate what is, or is not, being offered by a service, e.g. in terms of one-to-one support or therapy.

Some of the Facebook comments which explore this are given below:

"When I first heard about 'ecotherapy' years ago I remember asking a chap from MIND what qualifications he had and was stunned when he said he didn't [have any]. It really is about providing the safe space and a friendly supportive atmosphere- nature does the rest..."

"I think we have to emphasise that we simply provide the safe space in nature rather than anything else. We need to be careful that people don't ever think that they need to become experts in the field because it is definitely a case that a little knowledge is sometimes not good! My feeling is that a bespoke course would be really useful."

"I think lived experience is more important than 'on paper' qualifications. Don't get me wrong, these are important too (I'm currently an undergraduate and enrolled to start counselling qualifications next year), but after working in our group, I think they are an added bonus..."

Feeling confident to set up a service or run sessions or get training or support of the right kind was mentioned repeatedly. One focus group participant described bringing in an experienced ecotherapy practitioner to run some training, and that making connections with others through MLWW had been helpful for building confidence.

Some respondents said that what is most needed is simple compassion, but that belies all the background work that is needed – legal compliances, woodland understanding, people skills and enterprise ability.

Discussions in the Facebook group suggested that a package of training could be developed by and for WSEs, to include the range of skills

needed. This could include elements such as first aid, mental health first aid, Forest School training, woodland management, natural history, risk management, together perhaps with business skills, fundraising and other topics.

4.4. The significance, and realities, of woodland as a setting

There is extensive evidence around the benefits of natural spaces for improving wellbeing. Many focus group participants cited anecdotal evidence of how a woodland setting benefited their client group. Interview and Facebook respondents said:

"Woodland is a place of shelter – it is enclosed and people feel held. It is a different space to any other, and it changes with the seasons. It can provide a real connection to nature. Anyone can access the woods but facilitators help people enjoy the magic..."

"It is so different to conventional/indoor space for groups/therapy sessions etc. Sitting in a group outside gives a lot more freedom and possibly reduced anxiety around movement (ie needing to get up and stand instead of sit, or keeping hands busy via some kind of activity e.g. managing the fire, picking up leaves, watching a bird etc). These might sound like small things but they may not be deemed 'acceptable' in an indoor setting."

"I think being outdoors rather than inside is beneficial. However I think woodland in particular is unique."

"Woodland allows for both communal and quiet 'alone' space more easily. Also you can very quickly find activities to develop a sense of purpose via woodland maintenance etc. I am not sure these things would come as easily in an open space such as the beach or open field...."

Practical woodland activities allow people to easily see what they've achieved, get a sense of purpose, and feel safe and yet also 'wild'. People can work alone or as part of a group, allowing the individual learning or the therapeutic effects of nature to take effect.

With the benefits come practical challenges around weather, physical safety, individual reaction to 'wildness', remoteness, transport challenges, access to facilities like running water, shelter, sanitation and communication. A WSE needs to develop its capacity and the infrastructure to deal with the practical challenges first, in order for the benefits to be felt and for participants to feel safe, and partner organisations to be confident about the welfare of participants. Ability to access or invest in physical facilities necessary to run groups has presented a considerable challenge to some WSEs, both in financial cost and in terms of the time lag in establishing these resources.

4.5. Business size and focus

Many of the WSEs consulted in this study are very small – much smaller than the high-profile WSEs like Hill Holt Wood, and the Wildlife Trusts and other larger charities which may be undertaking work with 'in-need' groups as an adjunct to their wider activities. Because of this, WSEs face a range of issues common to other small enterprises, including risk of burn-out for founders/leaders and staff; lack of capacity to work on the business of running the organisation (as opposed to delivering the frontline work); and lack of capacity to take up offers of support, due to not having the time to be able to put the benefits of that support in place.

"It's about managing growth, I think. You start off at grass roots level doing what you love and as you do more and more badly-needed projects, it becomes increasingly hard to keep all the plates spinning. Then a big leap in finances is needed to get the right business organisation, and people to do that, in place – something that is, quite frankly, scary."

An emerging challenge is competition for funds. With ever-greater scarcity of funding, smaller WSEs are increasingly in direct competition with larger charities which may have the capacity to invest in fundraising and may more easily be able to gain the ear of statutory agencies and local politicians. One interview respondent said:

"[We] have worked with the Wildlife Trust and Woodland Trust – good relationship – but we are different."

Networking between WSEs can offer a valuable, cost-effective way of dealing with some of the disadvantages of their small size, providing externally some of the services which larger organisations can provide internally: peer support and peer review, training and mentoring.

4.6. Land tenure issues

Access to land, and a stable, sustainable basis for that access, is fundamental to the ability of WSEs to develop their businesses and their provision for 'in-need' groups. Buying land is beyond the capacity of most small enterprises, and opportunities for long leases are uncommon. Some WSEs occupy woodland on informal agreements which offer poor security for developing a business long-term. Where an organisation contains an individual who owns woodland, the tenure may be secure, but depends on the continuing relationship with that individual. Some WSEs may shift between woodland sites for years, waiting for an opportunity to establish a permanent base. Moving sites and being peripatetic takes a good deal of physical energy, as described earlier.

The role of larger woodland landowners, such as the Forestry Commission, Woodland Trust and National Trust, could potentially be significant in enabling WSEs to establish and develop. One interviewee said:

"The bigger owners, Forestry Commission, NT and Wildlife Trusts, should be making it easier for small social and private woodland enterprises, by for example offering leases and otherwise supporting start-ups in the sector."

Historically these bodies may have felt the activities of WSEs and similar groups were incompatible with woodland conservation or forestry operations, but that view appears to be changing, and some of them appear to be increasingly acknowledging the role of WSEs and similar groups in opening up access to woodlands, and enabling otherwise-uneconomic management to take place. The research suggests that only one WSE in England currently occupies public (Forestry Commission) land, though there are more examples of FC land being used by WSEs in Scotland, where there is a longer history of community involvement with publicly-owned forest.

4.7. Gender

Woodland wellbeing programmes appear to be particularly successful at attracting male clients (often a challenge for more traditional wellbeing work). However, respondents noted that those running the programmes are predominantly female, and if uptake for men is to be continued there is a need for more men to become involved in delivering sessions.

One of the focus groups particularly highlighted how working with 'in-need' groups in woodland is succeeding in bringing women into forestry/woodland management and enabling them to take part in what has traditionally been a male-dominated sector. Two relevant Facebook quotes:

"There are lots of women in the profession. However, the majority of our adult participants are male (unless we run specific groups for girls/women). We try hard to recruit male leaders and volunteers but do struggle to find them."

"I agree and in the three years that I've been involved in the Forest School world as men we are definitely in the minority. I think it's hugely important in these types of sessions to have staff of both genders to enable the attendees to be comfortable."

4.8. The need for networks and support structures

Building relationships with others is key for WSEs, both within the sector and with local communities and potential partner bodies such as commissioners, referral agencies and local authority community teams. From this piece of work it is very clear that WSEs are very enthusiastic about networking with other WSEs. The sector appears to be naturally collaborative and happy to learn from each other. Any future support needs to incorporate the potential for collaboration and networking. The following quotes were from the Facebook discussion group about specific support that would help WSEs:

"I think it would be someone to shadow what we're doing, help us unpick what we do that works and what needs improving, and then give us some unrestricted finance to put it into place, and help us monitor that. In the longer run, a good system for monitoring impacts, short and long term; good connections to commissioners and funders."

"I think support to sort stuff out, like systems, website, all the time-consuming things that we lack expertise in. Although we do attend free training (e.g. on tendering, social impact measurement etc) we do that in our free time and then there is no follow up, so sometimes (often) that training goes to waste. I think support needs to be tailored to organisations' needs and delivered over an agreed and manageable period of time."

"I would like to see the benefits of our work reach many more people and one possible mechanism [could be] a coordinating body/ organisation through which a contract for green care is administered, and which would do a lot of the website, marketing, admin, financial work and also offer CPD support. I would like to see councils and NHS partners enable and encourage people

to go along to any of the WSE projects available in their area and registered with this body. I would not want to see uniformity enforced by this approach ... rather that the diversity of bespoke approaches that exists now be sustained."

There is a growing understanding amongst these bodies that "Green Care", i.e. programmes that take place in natural surroundings and recognise the connection between nature and health, can play an important role in prevention of, and recovery from, a range of mental and physical health challenges amongst all age groups.

A move towards Social Prescribing, i.e. GPs signposting people to local services and activities that could help their health or wellbeing, would appear to open a door for more collaboration between the NHS and WSEs, particularly around mental health service provision. However, there is rarely any finance available for the social projects being prescribed.

4.9. Financial challenges

Woodland activity, including forestry and work with 'in-need' groups, is not lucrative. WSEs are generally small, and generally under-resourced for the work being carried out with people 'in-need'. Though the principle of social enterprise is that surpluses should be reinvested in the business, in practice the nature of the work may mean very little surplus is generated, and feedback suggests that income for the work with those 'in-need' may be subsidising woodland management in some cases.

Dependency on volunteers and 'free time' invested by staff can mask the financial frailty of the organisation. Support to people 'in-need' is not likely to be sustainable in the long term in organisations which are struggling with short-term grants cycles. Very few are funding their work with people 'in-need' through income generation from their social enterprise, though there are exceptions.

Paying staff a reasonable day rate is hard for most WSEs, and most staff were working as self-employed freelancers rather than being employed on payroll.

A wide variation in charging models was apparent from the focus group discussions, with some recently-established groups working almost entirely on a voluntary basis, while much longer-established groups were confident to charge more realistic rates to funders for session delivery. This is also reflected in group staffing: one WSEs could only afford one paid staff member to manage a session of up to 20 participants, while another engaged three staff to deliver a similar session for those struggling with their mental health. As respondents put it in the Facebook group:

"Here's the real issue, as I see it. Funding is very rarely long term. Funders, as far as my knowledge of them goes, like to give for 3 years (maybe 5, if you're lucky) and then either want to give their money to someone else (fair enough) or want us to do something different (new). Funded projects are very often a sticking plaster on the wounds caused by a disastrous reduction in statutory services. So, communities have people come in and DO for them and then move on. When this happens repeatedly (and this has been happening for decades) one effect is to disempower the very people whom we're trying to support. Creating a truly sustainable project, embedded in a community with long term disadvantage, takes years."

"I understand that funders cannot plug the ever widening hole in statutory services, but perhaps they could work with councils and government to ensure that there is a requirement to involve LOCAL third sector organisations in provision of services. Get the good news stories out there. Help us to demonstrate the very real impacts that we, as people embedded in the community, can and do achieve."

Addressing these financial challenges requires a suite of approaches, including broadening of business models to allow revenue-generating activity to take place alongside cost-only work with 'in-need' groups, improving access to grant sources (including seeking full cost recovery), reducing overheads, or seeking investment through membership, shareholding or crowd-funded donations. Sharing of experiences, funding sources and funding proposals between WSEs was also suggested, so that those starting out could see other potential delivery and funding models that they could work towards.

There may be scope for learning from those who have created sustainable businesses in this sector, for example those who have established contracts with local authorities for schools-based work, or delivering training. There may also be opportunities to use core skills to diversify income, for example by running holiday sessions aimed at families who can pay well, which then subsidise work with those who cannot afford them. However, feedback from the small WSEs in this study seemed to suggest that for some, there is a lack of capacity or interest in this approach.

4.10. Consistency – maintaining services to 'in-need' groups

Financial or other business uncertainty has an implication not just for the business, but also for those 'in-need' groups for which the WSE has cultivated a (formal or moral) responsibility. If funding ceases, the 'promise' – inferred or explicit – to 'in-need' groups that the provision will continue to be available, may be broken.

Experiences offered to 'in-need' groups in woodland settings may provide a valuable, powerful 'lift' in their wellbeing and self-confidence. However, if WSEs do not enjoy good links with other service providers supporting 'in-need' groups, there is a risk that the benefits of woodland activity may not be held on to, once individuals move on. As one respondent in the Facebook group said:

"I would love to see a comprehensive package rolled out across the country for wellbeing groups – linked into NHS prevention – green prescriptions. The main thing is the provision needs to be there all the time. Wellbeing participants are 'unreliable' and might need to dip in and out and finally feel ready to attend more regularly only to discover the 6 week block of sessions has finished, which is devastating."

4.11. Finding a voice and a common language

One consequence of the diversity of approaches, emphases and organisational structures amongst WSEs working with 'in-need' groups, is that they may find it difficult

to find a natural home within any one sector. Viewed from the perspective of conventional social, educational and health services, WSEs may appear too unusual to be included in professional networks. Similarly, viewed from the perspective of the forestry sector, they may appear too small-scale to be noticed, or not relevant if they are not strictly 'doing forestry'. Even from the perspective of the nature conservation sector, WSEs may not appear to be significant players. As with all organisations which occupy 'the edge', WSEs may therefore struggle to be heard. With the wide range of approaches and 'in-need' groups, there may be a need for a common language to develop, for WSE voices to really be taken seriously.

"I think the more we connect with each other and push the boundaries as a group the easier it will be to find strength, viability and durability."

The ability to influence and to be understood, both at a local level and at a regional/national level, was mentioned in discussions.

"What we need is someone who has influence at a strategic level to advocate for us – to the NHS and others where we could actually save money for them in the long run with our offerings and interventions. Then someone whose role is to link us all up with those that need us – and with funders!"

4.12. Relevance to woodland conservation and management

It is widely acknowledged that many small woodlands across the UK suffer from a lack of management, both to generate wood products and to enhance wildlife habitats. Often the reason for lack of management is lack of labour, as small woodlands are often uneconomic and landowners cannot justify paying for contractors to undertake management. In this respect, WSEs can fill the labour gap by bringing volunteers and client groups in to undertake small-scale manual work which would not otherwise happen. Many WSEs talked of a reciprocal benefit for both woodlands and people. The need for outdoor activity with 'in-need' groups to be regular, structured and practical lends itself to seasonal, annual woodland management jobs like coppicing and ride cutting.

Conservation bodies may be concerned that too much human presence in woodlands may cause damage to wildlife, through disturbance, compaction, loss of deadwood habitat, and other impacts. The significance of such impacts will depend on the particular habitat and species sensitivities in a given woodland, and it is important that WSEs draw up a management plan based on good ecological advice, to inform and direct the type, locations and timing/seasonality of their activities.

5 Recommendations for future work

5.1. Defining, measuring and maintaining quality of provision of services to 'in-need' groups by woodland social enterprises

WSEs need to be able to access a suite of different training, delivery, measurement and oversight tools to help them to run activities in the way they want to, whilst also maintaining quality and effectiveness. Availability of these types of resources, free or paid-for, has tended to be ad hoc and not consistently available across the country. The Forest School sector, though it has evolved organically in the UK without a central fixed definition, has benefited from the availability of good training qualifications in some parts of the UK, and now is represented by a central body, the Forest Schools Association. An equivalent body of this kind could help set and maintain standards for WSE provision to 'in-need' groups, and could help WSEs develop effective, practicable methods for measuring their social impact. However, such a body would need also to support and celebrate the diversity of the WSE field.

5.2. The need for devolved, region-level support structures

WSEs were generally very keen to engage with this research, and also very enthusiastic about networking with other WSEs. Future support needs to incorporate the potential for collaboration and networking. They really want help in order to grow.

Enabling existing WSEs to grow to the level to which they aspire, (which may be small in some cases, and larger in others), and providing support for new WSEs, will require a range of support measures. Some aspects of the challenges faced by WSEs in their work with 'in-need' groups lend themselves to joined-up, overarching support structures, and economies of scale. Consistent access to funding, non-bureaucratic grant schemes, common approaches to measuring impact, access to good-value insurance and legal and land tenure advice, are amongst the issues which could be addressed through an umbrella approach.

Much of the support WSEs indicated they need relates to the issues they face as very small organisations, for example around legal compliance, marketing, or building relationships with commissioners and partners. To be useful, support needs to be flexible, targeted and very practical. Training 'courses' are unlikely to make a difference and any support needs to actually get things done, not just advise people how to do them.

The majority of WSEs in this study would like to do more work with people 'in-need'. The main enabling factors for this were seen as being funding and resources, improved networks and contacts, and training or skills development. Organisations also want to be able to attract more volunteers or members and to better demonstrate the difference they make.

5.3. The need to join up WSE approaches with wider health and social support

There are many benefits for 'in-need' groups coming to WSEs, but evidence of consistent and strong links with the social care, health

and education sectors has not been apparent in this research. At a time when preventative and joined-up solutions are being sought to help people access the services that will help them, some more strategic thinking is required. Finding ways to make the links between services stronger, in ways that work for a small, underfunded and emerging field, is a challenge, especially if the small WSEs are to get their voices heard. Social prescribing seems like the most likely route, and yet very few WSEs report being currently able to contract with Clinical Commissioning Groups or other health and social care bodies.

5.4. Suggested priorities in this field for future support initiatives

As the MLWW project draws to a close, and discussion takes place about future strategic provision and support for WSEs by the Plunkett Foundation or its partners in this work, the authors would suggest that this research demonstrates that the following points should be given prominence:

- WSEs themselves should be involved from the outset in discussions on how to adapt provision and design future schemes. When WSEs are involved in this way, the time taken away from their core work with 'in-need' groups should be recompensed, as these small organisations have little or no core funding.
- Future provision should generally be regionally-focused, so that support is accessible and responsive to local needs. There is a strong demand for continuing opportunities for WSEs to network, gain peer support and learn from each other, both at a local level (to be logistically practical and cost effective), but also at a higher level to provide a wider range of examples and learning.
- Investment could be made, where possible, in already-established WSEs within each region, which have the infrastructure to provide central services for training, gatherings, consultancy, CPD and peer-to-peer support.
- Through further consultation with WSEs there is scope to develop training, covering areas such as impact measurement, assistance with funding applications, website development, bookkeeping and accounting, from which WSEs can pick elements that suit the stage of development they have reached. Such training should be available locally or online, to be accessible to already-stretched organisations.
- There is a need for dialogue with grant funders, insurers, large woodland-owning bodies, the NHS and other influential parties to improve their capacity to incubate and support existing and newly emerging WSEs.
- The options for an umbrella body to set standards, help define best practice, and help WSEs measure and maintain the quality of their work, should be explored.
- Helping WSEs to find a voice amongst bigger players is going to be crucial for this sector to grow: there is a need effectively for an advocacy role on their behalf. To be able to sit alongside the larger NGOs etc., and speak in each locality with health and social care commissioners or budget holders, WSEs need help to gain capacity, confidence and ability.

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- Central Somerset Outdoor Learning Partnership
- Children of the Forest
- Courage Copse Creatives
- Craft Wood CIC
- Dipple Farm & Dairy
- Down the Woods CIC
- Ecowild CIC
- Eden-Rose Coppice Trust
- Evanton Wood Community Company
- FOBCIC
- Get Out More CIC
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- Heartwood Community Woodfuel Group
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- LiveWild
- Lucyslittleforestschool
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- The Deer Wood Trust
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- Warren Woods Ltd
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- Welig Heritage Crafts
- Whistlewood Common Limited
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- Wild Elements
- Wild Rumpus
- Wilderness Wood
- Wildly Wise
- Windsor Hill Wood
- Woodside Lodge Outdoor Learning Centre
- Woody (Hyndburn) CIC
- Working Woodlands Cornwall CIC
- Wyre Community Land Trust

Appendices

A: Case studies

The following organisational outlines provide a deeper picture of a selection of WSEs and how they work with people 'in-need'.

Beechbrae, West Lothian
beechbrae.co.uk

Beechbrae was born out of a dream to live more sustainably and tread lightly on the resources we have. They are a young social enterprise and charity based in a woodland in Blackridge, West Lothian. They use this as a base to teach, learn & engage with the natural environment and for the local community to gain skills and knowledge in practical sustainability

Beechbrae have an orchard, community garden, large mixed woodland with walking paths and a wild pond. They use these places to help connect people with nature as a way of remedying many issues around us today. They work with people of all ages but primarily work with young people. Currently Beechbrae work with two primary schools and one high school in the local area. This is funded by the Climate Challenge Fund for environmental based education. They help schools with their Curriculum for Excellence – using the woods as a tool for teaching curriculum subjects (seeds, plants, soil, trees) and cooking sessions from foraged foods. They also work to support mental health – providing bushcraft, mindfulness, conservation, fire cooking etc.

Their work is driven by what the local community needs and aims to address social isolation, mental health struggles, and issues that arise in an ex-coal mining area. They have three staff, a full-time manager, a community worker and a gardener; all of which live within the local area. They have a few steady volunteers and a volunteer board, but don't rely heavily on volunteers. Their aims are both social and environmental at the core and are met through a holistic woodland management programme combining the needs of people and the environment.

Plas Derw, Flintshire
plasderwforestschool.co.uk

Plas Derw Trust was set up in 2005 to provide Outdoor and Environmental Education and mainly do this through the provision of Forest School and environmental education for local schools. The Forest Schools ethos underpins holiday clubs, after school clubs, parties in the forest, school trips and team building days. The organisation grew from work run by Clwydd Council on outdoor education, which then moved out of the local authority. There are four members of staff. Plas Derw work with between 500 and 1000 individuals in a year (though there may be eg 60 on one day through a school trip). There are around 100 regular/repeat service users.

The Trust has exclusive use of two privately owned woodlands (at a peppercorn rent) and use of woodland at two other sites. The Trust is a Company with Charitable status and also has a trading company subsidiary, which provides training for staff/workers from other organisations – mainly teachers. It is the only provider of Forest School training in North Wales.

The Trust is passionate about the benefits of outdoor learning to all children but particularly feels this is needed for those children with SEN or in Pupil Referral Units. Plas Derw aim to improve personal skills, confidence, self-esteem, and this is further developed through work experience opportunities. Plas Derw is also currently running activities aimed at enabling families to re-connect, and to connect to nature.

ARC CIC, Warwickshire
www.arccic.co.uk

ARC (Achieving Results in Communities) CIC manages a 2 acre urban woodland in Leamington Spa and has access to a further 6 acre private woodland around 2 miles from the town. They run two types of session for people struggling with their mental health, social isolation or in addiction recovery. Ecotherapy@FoundryWood is a weekly drop in that operates throughout the year and supports participants to practice the Five Ways to Wellbeing through woodland maintenance, craft activities, mindfulness, socializing and cooking and eating together. It is an informal but very welcoming and sociable group.

Tallis Wood Wellbeing operates through courses of 10 weeks, where participants are asked to commit to the whole course and engage more fully in the activities on offer. Alongside similar activities to Ecotherapy, practical tools for managing and improving mental health are shared, participants set personal goals to work towards in between sessions, and the group members support one another through positive feedback and encouragement.

ARC also run a number of gardening projects with the aim of improving neglected areas of the town whilst also engaging local people for health and social benefits. Most projects are grant funded, some unrestricted income is earned through regular pizza making sessions for the general public, educational sessions and private parties.

Working Woodlands Cornwall
workingwoodlandscornwall.com

This fairly new CIC is managing a 40 acre overstood oak coppice woodland owned by Cornwall Wildlife Trust. It aims to be a viable business, combining good woodland management (mainly through coppicing) with selling firewood. The secondary aim of the CIC is to provide opportunities for people to learn and develop skills – entry level employment and training, providing opportunities for people to enter the sector.

They are have been talking to the local college and university, and expect to start taking work placement students next year. Currently people coming to them 'in-need', are those who need the training opportunities, those who want to improve physical or mental wellbeing, or meet people in the local area.

They have not specifically targeted their work at those 'in-need', but know that some of their volunteers do have mental health needs (eg encouraged to participate through MIND). Volunteering is a key element of the work.

Courage Copse Creatives, North Devon
www.local-devon-biochar-charcoal.co.uk

Courage Copse Creatives is a small woodland enterprise based in North Devon run by its owner/managers who live on site. They specialise in producing woodland products that are both sustainable and ethical, in particular top quality barbecue charcoal and Pure bioChar.

The majority of their products are made from, or grown in, their own ancient woodland, Courage Copse. They use low impact management methods including timber extraction with horses.

As well as being producers of various products they also run and host courses and workshops for children and adults. They primarily consider themselves 'craftworkers'. Whether that is being engaged in the heritage craft of charcoal making, or crafting a piece of furniture from harvested timber or crafting an educational workshop. Through the workshops they aim for participants to learn new skills and to learn about the importance of woodland heritage sites and their relevance today. They work in partnership with a number of outside organisation to deliver workshops and projects.

Courage Copse Creatives run Forest School activities (eg for a school in a deprived Ward of the local town), groups and specific projects. One project was a heritage project looking at 'timber girls' during WW1. Through this they encouraged local girls to explore women's role in the practical management of the countryside in the past and to consider the opportunities for land-based employment today.

Neroche Woodlanders Ltd, Somerset

www.youngwood.org.uk

Neroche Woodlanders Ltd is a Community Benefit Society registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965, and established in 2012. It has a small board of unpaid directors and a shareholding membership, and a small number of part-time paid staff on freelance contracts. It has occupied Young Wood, a 100-acre block of mixed woodland forming part of the Forestry Commission's larger Neroche forest on the Blackdown Hills, since 2011. Early activity was supported by a Lottery-funded landscape partnership scheme across the wider area. Neroche Woodlanders gained a 10-year lease of Young Wood in 2015, plus a long-term management agreement to work the forest stands within the site. It pays a rent to the Forestry Commission.

Neroche Woodlanders is creating a practical, working wood which celebrates wildness, the natural world, harvesting natural materials, and making and doing things by hand. Its main focus is the development of woodland-based learning activities and volunteering. The core wellbeing programme, Wild Learning, began in 2012, to build the confidence and soft skills of a targeted group of adults, using the Forest School approach. The project is aimed at residents in deprived areas of nearby Taunton, and includes residents from homeless hostels. The project uses the John Muir Award as a structure for learning. Wild Learning is now in its seventh year, having received funding each year from Somerset Skills & Learning, with match funding from Taunton Association for the Homeless and other sources. A 'Families in the Forest" strand of activity runs alongside Wild Learning, focused on parents and children.

Neroche Woodlanders has a modest range of activities yielding an earned income, including team-building days for local organisations, school summer camps, craft courses and site hire. Off-site events and consultancy is also provided to extend reach and broaden income. Sales of wood products from the forest have been small to date, focused on charcoal making, sold direct and through local shops. Volunteering is central to Neroche Woodlanders' activity. A conservation volunteer group is maintained to carry out woodland management and do work on nearby nature reserves, and volunteers also support staff running wellbeing sessions.

B: Questionnaire

Making Local Woods Work is a three and a half year pilot project working to help support and grow woodland social enterprises across the UK. The project is funded by the National Lottery through the Big Lottery Fund, is led by the Plunkett Foundation and involves a range of other partners. The goal of the project is to grow capacity and confidence within the Woodland Social Enterprise sector and, through research, assess how best to support future growth. The project is working with over 60 Woodland Social Enterprises – offering support in relation to areas such as business planning & development, woodland management, governance and securing access to land. The project also includes training and networking events, open to any WSE.

The aim of this research is to further explore whether, and how, WSEs are working with those most 'in-need' in their communities and the barriers to this work, which can be further enhanced when working in a woodland setting.

This survey is aimed at Woodland Social Enterprises, and asks a number of questions to check eligibility. If your organisation is not eligible but you would like to input in to the research, please contact Sarah Taragon of **Clarity CIC** (who are running this consultation) at **sarah@claritycic.org** or on 01363 860151. You can contact Sarah with other queries about the research too.

The survey is likely to take around 15 minutes to complete. Please note, all those completing the survey will have the option to be entered in to a Prize Draw (for £50 Muddy Faces tokens or 2 days free support from a woodland expert).

Thank you for your interest.

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Supporting people 'in-need'

1 A significant proportion (or all) of your work is woodland based.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

2 You are a constituted organisation or group in your own right, not just a project of a larger organisation.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Woodland Social Enterprises
Supporting people 'in-need'

3 **At least some of your income is from trading e.g. events, products, sales, commissions, contracts. This may only be one or two items per year.**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

4 **You have some social aims e.g. about creating improvements or providing opportunities for people, so are not 'just' a profit making business.**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

5 **Please tell us the name of your organisation.**

6 **Please give a brief description of your organisation and its work.**

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Supporting people 'in-need'

7 Does your work involve any of the following? Tick as many as apply:

- ☐ Forest School
- ☐ Woodland management
- ☐ Woodland products
- ☐ Tourism
- ☐ Providing leisure activities
- ☐ Education
- ☐ Training
- ☐ Venue hire
- ☐ Support to other businesses (e.g. staff away days / training)
- ☐ Ecotherapy

Other (please specify)

8 Does your organisation work with people who are 'in-need'?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

9 Tell us about the people you work with who you would describe as 'in-need'.

Woodland Social Enterprises
Supporting people 'in-need'

10 Do you carry out focused work with any of the following 'in-need' groups?

Please note, we are interested in groups you specifically target or want to focus your work on. Please don't tick a box here if you happen to have one or two people attending activities who fit the description.

- ☐ Children with additional needs
- ☐ Children excluded from school or in a Pupil Referral Unit
- ☐ Adults with learning disabilities
- ☐ Adults with physical disabilities
- ☐ People who are homeless
- ☐ Adults with mental health issues
- ☐ Young parents
- ☐ People on very low income
- ☐ Adults with a history of alcohol/substance misuse
- ☐ Ex-offenders
- ☐ People who are unemployed
- ☐ Young people not in work, education or training
- ☐ People in fuel poverty

Other (please specify)

11 What are your main aims for your work with people 'in-need'? Tick as many as apply:

- ☐ To add capacity to your organisation
- ☐ Building participants' capacity for volunteering or employment
- ☐ Developing or refreshing people's practical skills
- ☐ Increasing people's confidence /self esteem

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- ☐ Reducing isolation
- ☐ Improving social skills
- ☐ Improving well-being
- ☐ Improving physical health
- ☐ Improving mental health
- ☐ Improving people's ability to cope /be more resilient
- ☐ Helping more people connect to nature
- ☐ Providing a safe and non-judgemental space

Other (please specify)

12 Roughly what proportion of your organisation's time is with people who are 'in-need'?

0 ..... 100 %

13 Roughly what proportion of your organisation's income is used to fund work with people who are 'in-need'?

0 ..... 100 %

14 In general, how is your work with 'in-need' groups funded? (e.g. grants, contracts, paid for services)

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15 What challenges have you come across in your work with people 'in-need'?

16 What would be your top tips for wanting to work with the 'in-need' group(s) you work with?

17 Would you like to do more work with people 'in-need'?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

Please tell us more:

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18 **If yes, what would enable you to do this?**

19 **Any other comments:**

The remainder of the questions are to give us more background on your organisation. We'd be very grateful if you could complete these too as they will help us understand more about how WSEs are supporting people 'in-need'. You will also have the chance to enter the Prize Draw.

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We are asking more about your organisation, so we can understand more about what type of organisations are working with different 'in-need' groups, and we can identify any patterns or trends. You do not have to provide this information but it will mean we can explore this in much more depth if you can.

20 Please tell us more about your organisation's structure. Tick all that apply:

- ☐ Community Interest Company
- ☐ Workers Co-operative
- ☐ Charitable Trust
- ☐ Charitable Incorporated Organisation
- ☐ Community Benefit / Industrial Provident Society
- ☐ Company Limited by Guarantee
- ☐ Unincorporated organisation
- ☐ Registered as a Charity
- ☐ Have an assets lock
- ☐ Don't know

Other / or tell us more:

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21 What was your turnover in 2017/18?

- ☐ £0 to £5,000
- ☐ £5,001 to £25,000
- ☐ £25,001 to £100,000
- ☐ £100,001 to £500,000
- ☐ £500,001 to £1m
- ☐ over £1m
- ☐ Don't know

Other / or tell us more:

22 Is your woodland:

- ☐ Owned by your organisation
- ☐ Leased – over 5 years on the lease
- ☐ Leased – less than 5 years on the lease
- ☐ Rented for specific events or activities

Other (please specify)

23 Is the woodland you own/use:

- ☐ Urban
- ☐ Peri-urban
- ☐ Rural

Other (please specify)

24 How many acres of woodland do you manage/use?

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25 Is the woodland you use situated in:

- ☐ England
- ☐ Wales
- ☐ Northern Ireland
- ☐ Scotland

26 Which County(ies) is the woodland based in?

27 How many years has your organisation been running?

- ☐ Less than 1 year
- ☐ 1 to 3 years
- ☐ Over 3 years
- ☐ Don't know

28 Please provide a link to your website /facebook page

29 Would you be interested in taking part in further research? Tick any that apply:

- ☐ Attending a discussion group in Somerset or Leamington
- ☐ Taking part in an on-line discussion group
- ☐ Taking part in a 1:1 telephone interview

Other (please specify)

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Supporting people 'in-need'

30 If yes, please give us your name, e-mail address and phone number:

Name .....

Email .....

Address .....

.....

Phone number .....

31 If you are interested in taking part in further research, please let us know what days / times would suit you
Tick any would suit you:

- ☐ Weekends
- ☐ Weekdays
- ☐ During working day
- ☐ Evenings

Other (please specify)

32 If you would like to be entered into the Prize Draw, then please tick the box below and provide your name and contact details. Prizes are a £50 token for Muddy Faces (x2) or 2 days support from a woodland expert.

☐ Please enter me into the Prize Draw (I am over 18 years of age)

Name .....

Email .....

Phone number .....

Making Local Woods Work is a pilot project working to help support and grow woodland social enterprises across the UK. The project is funded by the National Lottery Community Fund (Big Lottery Fund) and led by Plunkett Foundation in partnership with: Community Woodlands Association, Locality, Llais y Goedwig, Woodland Trust, Shared Assets, Grown in Britain, Hill Holt Wood, National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Forestry Commission and Forest Research. The project has created a vast array of case studies, tool kits, research papers, films and resources, all accessible via the Making Local Woods Work website.

- **Email: woodlands@plunkett.co.uk**
- **Website: www.makinglocalwoodswork.org**
- **Twitter: @localwoodswork**
- **Facebook: www.facebook.com/makinglocalwoodswork/**

Plunkett Foundation helps rural communities UK-wide to tackle the issues they face, through promoting and supporting community business. Community businesses are enterprises that are owned and run democratically by members of the community and others, on behalf of the community. They come in many forms, including shops, pubs, woodlands and anything which lends itself to community ownership. In addition to developing and safeguarding valuable assets and services, community businesses address a range of issues including isolation, loneliness, wellbeing, work and training.

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Clarity CIC helps rural communities UK-wide to tackle the issues they face, through promoting and supporting community business. Community businesses are enterprises that are owned and run democratically by members of the community and others, on behalf of the community. They come in many forms, including shops, pubs, woodlands and anything which lends itself to community ownership. In addition to developing and safeguarding valuable assets and services, community businesses address a range of issues including isolation, loneliness, wellbeing, work and training.

- **Website: www.claritycic.org**
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