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# Our Wild Coast Mid-Term Evaluation Review

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North Wales Wildlife Trust

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 OB3 Research was commissioned by the North Wales Wildlife Trust (NWWT) to provide external evaluation expertise and support to the organisation in its delivery of the ‘Our Wild Coast’ project.

### About Our Wild Coast

- 1.2 The project is a pioneering five-year scheme (2016-20) with the aim of improving the lives and prospects of over 1,440 young people in North Wales through participation in coastal conservation, community events and outdoor activities. The project has been developed with the specific objective of providing opportunities for participants to enhance their personal and social development and make them motivated to become stewards of their local environment and community. The activities undertaken as part of the project are intended to contribute to four main outcomes mainly:

- **Outcome 1:** Increased awareness of 1,440 young people in North Wales about the ‘special-ness’ of their coastal environment and how the vocational skills they have developed can continue to contribute to its conservation
- **Outcome 2:** Improvement in the environmental condition of 30 existing designated sites around the North Wales coast due to the intervention of young people
- **Outcome 3:** The creation or identification of 64 new sites of wildlife value as a result of projects led by young people in their local communities
- **Outcome 4:** Increased community cohesion as a result of wider involvement in the project’s activities.

- 1.3 The project is part of a wider portfolio of 31 projects, all of which are supporting young people to lead change in their local environment and communities, under a UK-wide social movement called ‘Our Bright Future’, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF). The project receives £935,324 over the five year period towards the total cost of £948,576. The funding covers the cost of a full-time project manager, three project officers (0.8 FTE each) and resources for delivery of the project.

- 1.4 The project’s main participants are deemed to be young people aged 11-19 and the intervention aims to benefit them by helping them to:

- improve school performance in targeted subjects

- learn new conservation-specific skills
- earn recognition from other programmes (e.g. Duke of Edinburgh or Millennium Volunteer awards)
- develop soft skills (e.g. teamwork, self-confidence)
- become more involved and integrated in their local community
- better understand the environmental issues facing the North Wales coast.

- 1.5 The project has been set up to work intensively with the same participants for up to a year to ensure embedded learning. Three project officers work across three regions of the North Wales coast (Anglesey, North West and North East). Activities are organised according to the needs of participants and the available settings but can include outdoor activities (such as coasteering, kayaking for wildlife or hiking the Wales Coastal Path); formal skills training; work placements; guided walks; wildlife workshops and environmental education sessions.
- 1.6 The project has also been designed so that participants have the skills and opportunities to become involved in ongoing local conservation. The project will also benefit the environment and wildlife as participants undertake projects which will improve the condition of designated sites of high wildlife value, enhance existing biodiversity rich green spaces; improve landscape connectivity of wildlife-rich sites and inform ongoing programmes of citizen science. Activities include practical conservation work; formal skills training; wildlife recording days; bio-blitzes<sup>1</sup> and ecological monitoring.
- 1.7 Finally the project also intends to play a role in supporting community cohesion through the active citizenship of participants. The project will benefit the wider community through projects, undertaken by participants that will improve and/or create access routes to wildlife-rich coastal sites; create safe community spaces for varied age groups to meet; improve interpretational infrastructure at wildlife sites and develop people's pride in their local environment. This will be achieved through such activities as: community wildlife events, management of community spaces and the promotion of the value of the area for wildlife.
- 1.8 In the initial project plan for Our Wild Coast it was intended that a project steering group would be established to review overall progress; advise the project team on new developments and potential partnerships and arrange an annual project-wide celebratory event.

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<sup>1</sup> Intensive species recording sessions

1.9 Each region would also establish a Local Action Forum (LAF) coordinated and administered by the project officer and chaired by a young person. Each LAF would be open to all interested young people in the area (whether project participants or not) together with representatives from wider community groups. It was also anticipated that the LAF would identify areas of need (for conservation action or community involvement) and contribute to a work plan.

### **Evaluation aim and objectives**

1.10 The Our Wild Coast project evaluation is being undertaken in five stages:

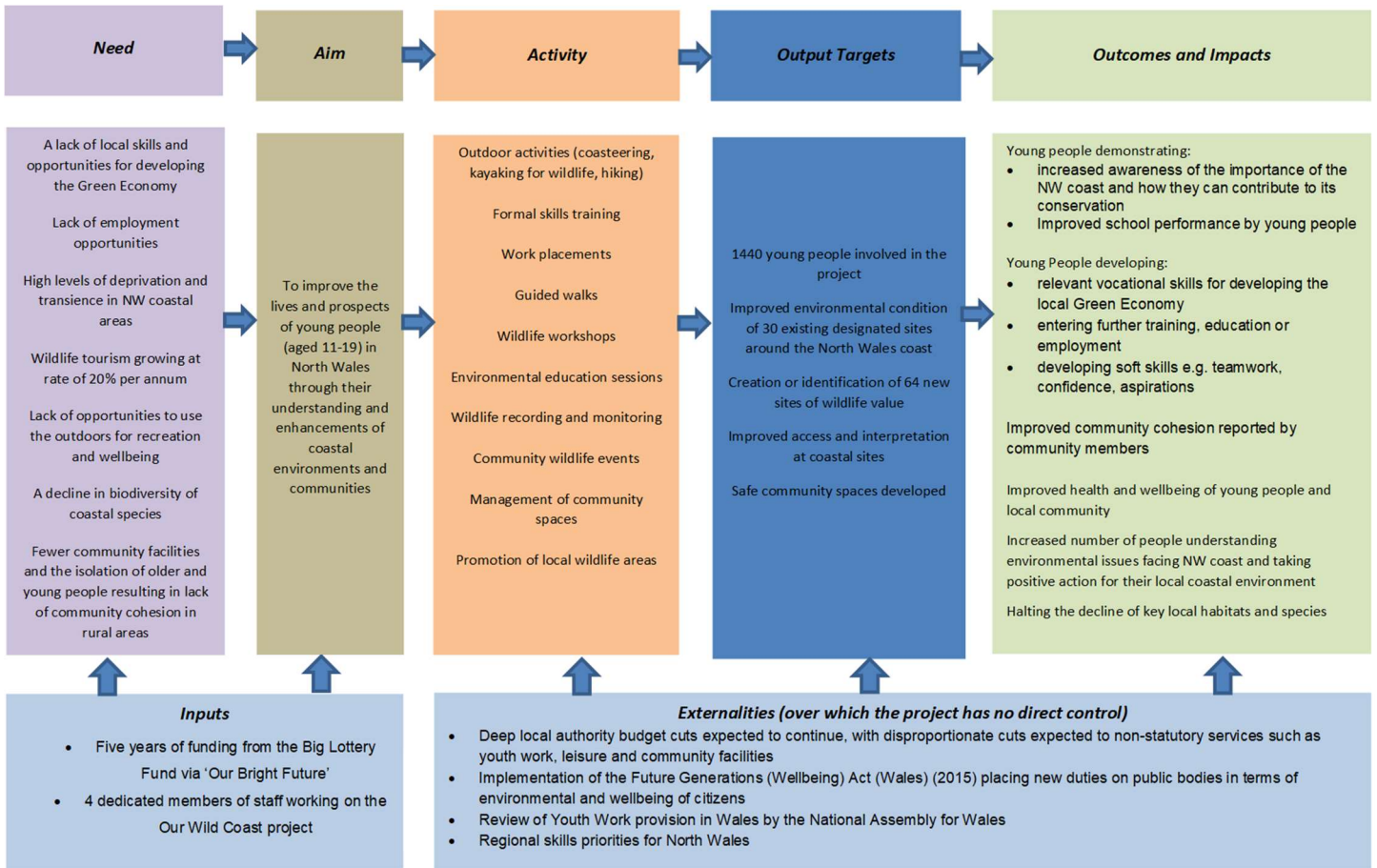
- An inception stage – focussed on setting up the logic model, key indicators and self-evaluation approach<sup>2</sup>
- Two short interim evaluation stages (at the end of 2017<sup>3</sup> and 2019) based on a desk-based analysis of evidence
- This mid-term evaluation covering up to end December 2018.
- A final impact evaluation – to be presented by December 2020.

1.11 This mid-term evaluation includes a desk-based review focussed on the analysis of monitoring data and project outcome evidence collated so far by the project team, feedback from participants of the project to date, and interviews with project staff. It aims to consider how the project has developed against its logic model (set out below):

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<sup>2</sup> This stage has been completed, with a final evaluation plan issued in March 2017.

<sup>3</sup> The first interim evaluation report was issued in December 2017.



1.12 The mid-term evaluation aims to review project activities up to the mid-point, test the initial findings, provide a synopsis of progress to date and highlight examples of good practice and significant achievements. It is also tasked with making recommendations in relation to possible improvements to project delivery for its remaining term.

**Findings from the interim evaluation report (December 2017)**

1.13 A short desk-based interim evaluation report was prepared in 2017-18 which looked at the early project outcomes during the project’s first full year of implementation and also included a light-touch policy and evidence review of any new strategic developments of relevance to the project’s overarching aims and objectives.

1.14 The interim evaluation concluded that the Our Wild Coast project has developed and delivered activities with a number of groups across the coastal region of North Wales in line with the original aim and objectives of the project and had successfully managed to engage with a large number of young people, delivering meaningful conservation activity.

- 1.15 Some early issues with the delivery approach were raised, particularly in terms of the high numbers of groups with relatively small number of participants in each, and suggested that the approach should be adapted during Year 2 so that groups could be of sufficient size as to ensure regular activities could take place.
- 1.16 The interim evaluation report applauded the Our Wild Coast project for the considerable in-roads that had been made during Year 1 and suggested that consideration should be given to:
- i) Setting up Local Action Forums in the two remaining regions of North West and North East Wales
  - ii) Ensuring that the project manager and officers engage with existing regional partnerships relevant to the project rather than setting up a specific Our Wild Coast steering group with no clear rationale for its remit
  - iii) Developing a simple Memorandum of Understanding to be signed by partners whose young people are involved in the Our Wild Coast groups, so that there would be clarity of the expectations from both sides. The MoU should outline the ‘minimum offer’ that any group should expect, the aim of the group and the expectations in terms of partner involvement and support.

**Structure of this report:**

- 1.17 This mid-term evaluation report is structured as follows:
- Chapter one: this introduction to the report and to the Our Wild Coast project
  - Chapter two: an outline of the evaluation methodology adopted for the mid-term evaluation and the profile of those who contributed to the fieldwork
  - Chapter three: discusses the rationale, design and implementation of the Our Wild Coast project
  - Chapter four: considers the progress and achievements of the Our Wild Coast project to date
  - Chapter five: looks at the emerging evidence of the difference being made by the project
  - Chapter six: looks to the future and identifies the key lessons to date
  - Chapter seven: offers our conclusions and a set of recommendations.



## 2. Methodological approach

2.1 This mid-term evaluation review is based on a work programme undertaken between November 2018 and May 2019 which involved:

- Undertaking a thorough desk-based literature review of monitoring data, self-evaluation evidence and project update reports and documentation collated and provided by NWWT and analysing progress to-date against the specified project outcomes
- Preparing a series of research instruments to conduct independent, external qualitative research to test the findings of the desk-based review to include:
  - a discussion guide for use with project staff
  - a focus group topic guide for use with project participants
- Undertaking a series of individual face-to-face interviews with the four members of the core project staff (manager and three project officers)
- Undertaking a series of six focus groups with a range of groups that have been involved with the project to date. Feedback was received from 27 participants, six parents and two key workers. Projects included a school, a home education group, a community group, a scouts group, an FE college group and a youth club group
- Drafting this mid-term evaluation report highlighting performance and progress to-date against project outcomes and making recommendations for any changes required for the remainder of the project in order to improve delivery and achieve the desired set of outcomes.

### 3. Project rationale, design and implementation

3.1 The chapter looks at whether the rationale and design of the project is clearly understood and articulated and whether it remains fit for purpose or whether any changes have or need to be made for the second half of the project's duration. It also looks at the way the project has been designed and delivered and how implementation of key activities has been approached.

#### **Project Rationale**

3.2 All Our Wild Coast staff were clear about the project's rationale in bringing young people in North Wales closer to the environment that is on their doorstep, via education, conservation and outdoor activities in order to achieve environmental, health and well-being benefits and develop young people.

3.3 There was some suggestion during discussion with project staff that there had been a slight shift in focus. Whilst the original focus of the project was on supporting young people to better understand their local environment and develop useful transferable skills in the process, there was now a much stronger focus on improving mental health and well-being. This was deemed to be complementary to the original aims and intentions, which were still being realised, but that these were now powerful reasons for getting participants involved in the project.

3.4 Our Wild Coast project staff also noted how the project is involved in the identification of new areas for environmental protection and that it has an aim to ensure participants feel more closely connected to their community. However these tended to be described as more secondary level objectives or as objectives that needed more focus in future.

3.5 Our Wild Coast project participants were asked about their reasons for getting involved with the project. Most of the groups described how the aims and objectives of the project were originally somewhat vague but they thought it might be an opportunity to 'learn new skills' and 'to get outside more', 'get out the house and have some fun' and 'to socialise with others'. One group suggested that their involvement in the project was so that they could gain more knowledge of their local coastal environment too, and particularly to undertake some conservation work which was something new to them.

#### **Project Design and Delivery**

3.6 Whilst project staff are striving to achieve all the objectives outlined in the original project plan, they have found that they have been working with a much wider variety of participants than had originally been anticipated. The project officers have developed strong links with groups of

young people in more formalised settings (such as schools) but have also worked with community groups, youth clubs and harder to reach young people (including groups with special needs and home educated children). In addition, they have worked with English speaking groups and with groups where participants are first language Welsh speakers.

- 3.7 Groups have developed differently across the three regions, in part as a result of the different approaches, strengths and interests of the project officers responsible: 'it's so free reign in its approach, it's such a brilliantly designed project. Different groups have different needs and we can be so flexible so that they can all benefit in a way that suits their needs'. Whilst this wide variance in group structure, approach and type is seen as a key strength of the project it has meant that project officers have spent more time than anticipated on the initial engagement aspects, in order to develop strong relationships with participants. As such, there has been less focus on the wider community outreach aspects than originally planned. Having said that, the team are confident that their participant groups are now well-established and that more community engagement work will be possible over the remaining period of the project.
- 3.8 Feedback from focus groups with project participants suggested that groups became involved with the Our Wild Coast project in a number of different ways. Some groups had heard about the project through word of mouth and actively contacted NWWT to ask if they could take part or already had links with the NWWT via other projects. One group had seen an advert placed by NWWT on Facebook and parents had coordinated a response. In order to gather interest, NWWT had used a range of methods to drum up interest including talks at schools or youth club sessions, Facebook posts, posters and letters to send out to parents.
- 3.9 The age range of the Our Wild Coast project has been younger than originally expected with many of the groups working with the 11-14 age range in the main. Our Wild Coast staff felt that this was an important group to be working with, particularly considering the rural nature of their area. Two main reasons were given for this – firstly, that it was an age range that tended to be somewhat un-provided for and secondly, that it was an ideal age to be supporting young people to make sense of life, particularly those who were beginning to feel disassociated with school and more mainstream provision. It was argued that Our Wild Coast was able to provide participants with interaction with the real world and interesting opportunities through which they had space to think about their strengths and interests and to consider their options for the future.
- 3.10 The Our Wild Coast project has also engaged with some hard-to-reach groups during the last year including home educated children, young people with mild or moderate learning

difficulties and young disabled people. The latter example has meant that there was some restriction in what they could do but the Our Wild Coast project officers have been creative and determined in providing adapted outdoor opportunities that were challenging to arrange but have nonetheless provided new opportunities for this group of participants.

- 3.11 It was also suggested that community engagement work has been embedded into the project in a different way over the last year. Project staff have noticed that many of the young people within their groups this year were particularly disconnected from their coastal areas and that the Our Wild Coast project was tasked with developing a culture amongst young people of engaging again with the wildlife and the outdoor opportunities on their doorstep. This work has happened in collaboration with many of the local clubs and organisations themselves from which participants have been recruited. As such, the Our Wild Coast project has also inadvertently embedded the idea of using the outdoors locally for activities into the organisations – and developed a new ethos: ‘we’ve helped them restructure what they would do’. This continuation, year on year, with the same clubs and organisations was not originally envisaged as an approach, but the benefits for embedding activities is such that it is likely to continue until the project funding ends. This approach should also help sustain the approaches developed as part of Our Wild Coast into the work of other organisations, clubs and groups in the North Wales area.
- 3.12 Now that the Our Wild Coast project is well established there are plans afoot to develop more opportunities to link and to bring groups together for cross-region activities which project staff and participants alike were keen to see: ‘There will be a sense of a bigger movement’.
- 3.13 The Our Wild Coast project also continues to fit well with the objectives of Our Bright Future (OBF) the wider Lottery ‘parent’ programme across the UK. Linkages with the wider OBF programme (and the 31 projects that form part of the programme) are now being established, with participants from the Our Wild Coast attending national level steering group meetings. However, many if not most of the OBF projects tend to cover the 16-24 age group whilst the Our Wild Coast’s focus is much more on 11-16 year olds. When OBF projects have come together to date they have tended to include young people who are studying at sixth form or on apprenticeships and this can prove challenging for the younger aged young people to engage in the activities. However, this year a member of the Anglesey Youth Forum represented the Our Wild Coast project ‘confidently and eloquently’ at one of the Our Bright Future events and is now disseminating the learning to other participants locally.

## Project Implementation

- 3.14 It was generally felt by staff and participants, that the Our Wild Coast project had an appropriate implementation model in place. A five year delivery timescale was deemed to be suitable by all interviewed, and provided sufficient time to develop, modify and embed activities. All team members were new to the NWWT when the Our Wild Coast project was established (and one project officer has since come on board during 2018). It was felt that the five year delivery period was adequate to enable them as a team to embed within the organisation too: ‘the project fits with the culture here. We feel settled and we link well with other NWWT projects and staff. The youth work is embedded now across the work of the trust and has filled a hole in the Trust’s engagement work with young people’.
- 3.15 Over the past year the Our Wild Coast project has worked with fewer, larger groups as a result of lessons learnt from the first year of delivery. During Year 2 of delivery, groups were required to have a minimum of 10 members (ideally more than 12). This has enabled the team to spend more time planning sessions, and has also meant that ‘at least half’ of any given group can usually attend an activity, which also makes the experience more rewarding for all involved.
- 3.16 Another key implementation lesson from the earlier stage of the project is that outdoor conservation activities on designated sites are now planned for the autumn and winter months, and project officers work to set up groups early in the autumn in order to take advantage of these activities whilst the weather is still relatively warm and settled. More community engagement with the public and other outdoor activities are then factored in to the spring and summer months. There are also more ‘indoor’ activities across the regions with a focus on developing softer skills and on building trust and relationships between group members and the Our Wild Coast project officer.
- 3.17 Project staff also described how working with participants who demonstrate challenging and disruptive behaviour has been a learning curve for them, and whilst it had been ‘hard work’ to get some of the groups to engage, they have also learnt that providing opportunities for participants to ‘just be feral and be allowed to run around outside sometimes’ or to allow them to play and be free in the outdoors has also been an important part of the process of engaging, particularly when working with disaffected young people who are up against so many boundaries and restrictions in other aspects of life.
- 3.18 Generally, project staff felt that although the project was flexible in terms of the type of groups they could work with, there seemed, almost inadvertently, to now be a tighter emphasis on the 11-14 age group. Project staff felt that stronger outcomes could be achieved with this

particular age group and that it was also an age group that had less options open to them via other schemes and had sufficient time to provide to the project. There was also more focus on working with participants from either disadvantaged, hard-to-reach background or those dealing with mental health or well-being issues in the Gwynedd and North Coast areas. This had meant that the types of activities had changed somewhat and the outcomes were also much more about improving mental health and well-being and increasing achievement and performance at school. In the Anglesey area this has not been the case so much, with active groups from more affluent backgrounds and those who are more academically driven (via school-based groups and the Guides) a more prominent part of the mix.

3.19 Several Our Wild Coast project officers also mentioned a ‘better balance now between indoor and outdoor activities’, with facilitated sessions indoors often yielding positive responses and results from the participants involved. Project staff described how they had initially felt intimidated with ‘a classroom setting approach’ to activities, but the different backgrounds and strengths of the team had helped them learn and develop new skills and techniques for engaging with participants in facilitated activities.

3.20 During the focus groups, participants were asked about the various activities they had undertaken as part of the Our Wild Coast project. A wide range of activities were mentioned including:

- Nature walks, coastal walks and visiting nature reserves
- Clearing paths, gorse cutting, nettle cutting and brecon bashing
- Gardening
- Making bird boxes, bug hotels, monitoring animal activity and bird-watching
- Beach cleans, river cleans, litter picking and plastic picking
- Beach combing and rock pooling
- Coasteering
- Outward-bound weekend
- Bushcraft and camping.

3.21 Discussions during the focus groups showed that different groups were arranged in various ways. One group described how they were involved in a total of eight sessions – with a mixture of short mid-week activities alongside day-long sessions on some weekends or during school holidays. Another group described how they tended to meet regularly every 2-3 weeks for a half day activity. In another example, the group would undertake 2 hour after-school sessions and full day activities on weekend sessions. Participants noted that arrangements

were always well-planned and that transport and food was all arranged and paid-for by NWWT. One group noted that there was no initial programme presented for the year but that this was a good thing as it meant that the activities could be arranged depending on the interests of the group members and could also be adapted to suit the time of year and the weather. However another group noted that the programme did change a little as they went along and that sessions were sometimes ‘a little irregular’. They would have appreciated more frequent activities to keep momentum and interest going and that a programme in place for the year would be appreciated to know what to expect.

- 3.22 The management of the Our Wild Coast project was lauded, with feedback that officers were well-supported by their manager. The team continue to be busy, and even though much of the early set-up phase activity has tapered away, they feel that the project would benefit from project officer roles being full time so that more time could be given to planning, undertaking activities and dealing with the paperwork associated with the project. In addition, project staff have found that participants need more support than had been initially been anticipated and some additional time with groups could generate even better outcomes.
- 3.23 Only one of the three regions (Anglesey) has a local action forum in place. It meets monthly and its participants have developed and run events, as well as accessed additional funding (such as £4k of Growing Wild funding). The forum has also developed a logo and a plan of action for campaigns in the area with some great ideas coming from young people themselves. The project officer for the area has experience of facilitating such forums and is keen to see similar forums elsewhere with the ultimate aim of establishing a Wales-wide environmental youth forum.
- 3.24 The Our Wild Coast is increasingly complementing and collaborating with other programmes and initiatives across the region. For example in the Gwynedd area, local authority funding for youth work has seen severely diminished budgets over recent years. Our Wild Coast has managed to continue to support some groups, such as Y Dref Werdd in Blaenau Ffestiniog, and helped ensure some of their funding from the local authority continues. Our Wild Coast has also been working with Adtrac and are hoping to work with young offenders from the Caernarfon area in the coming year. A new group has also been established in partnership with the Urdd (from Ysgol Glan-y-Môr, Pwllheli) with a focus on supporting young people who are not currently thriving within the school system. Our Wild Coast will provide 1 day a week of extra-curricular activity for this cohort.

3.25 One of the only aspects of the original project plan not implemented was the establishment of a steering group for Our Wild Coast. Although many organisations were approached during the planning stage, they were more reticent to sign up to a steering group once the funding had been secured for Our Wild Coast. It was suggested that there was no real clarity for ‘what they would get out of it’ at that stage, and a feeling that a steering group would have been very one-sided, with the NWWT simply reporting on progress. It was suggested that a steering group might have been beneficial had there been a number of organisations leading on the project, but with the NWWT as a sole lead delivery organisation, there was no real need identified for such a group.



## 4. Progress and achievements to date

4.1 This section provides an assessment of progress to date against the proposed ‘logic model’ developed for the Our Wild Coast project and whether the activities, outputs and outcomes (and associated indicators) have been broadly in line with what was originally proposed.

### Outputs

4.2 Our Wild Coast was developed with the aim of improving ‘the lives and prospects of young people (aged 11-19) in North Wales, through their understanding and enhancements of coastal environments and communities’<sup>4</sup>. Table 4.1 shows project achievements as at December 2018.

Table 4.1 Cumulative data on participants of the Our Wild Coast project (as at December 2018)

<b>Age</b>	
11-14	192
15-19	140
20-24	37
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	172
Female	197
<b>Occupation</b>	
Full-time employment	-
Part-time employment	58
Full-time student (school/FE/HE)	302
Part-time student (school/FE/HE)	67
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>369</b>

Source: Annual Report Form, 2018

4.3 The results above demonstrate the increasing focus of the project on the 11-14 age group. The project is also achieving a good gender balance in its groups. As part of the reporting structure to the Our Bright Future programme, Our Wild Coast is required to report on the diversity of the participants in their groups. Whilst some of the other OBF projects are based in city centres with larger minority communities, this is not the case across the North Wales area

<sup>4</sup> Our Wild Coast Business Plan

of Our Wild Coast. As a result it is proving challenging to meet this output requirement and no available data is currently recorded.

### Progress against key outcomes

- 4.4 The Our Wild Coast project is required to provide quarterly reports to the Our Bright Future programme. Cumulative data is not easy to obtain from the monthly reports but our analysis of the monthly and quarterly reports suggest that by the end of 2018 the following outputs had been achieved against the four project outcomes:

<p><b>Outcome 1:</b> Increased awareness of 1,440 young people in North Wales about the ‘specialness’ of their coastal environment and how the vocational skills they develop can continue to contribute to its conservation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The cumulative total number of participants engaged with the Our Wild Coast to date is <b>892</b> (figure based on October 2018 data) with 369 participants (December 2018 data) reported as having achieved long-term engagement (more than three months)</li> </ul>
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- 4.5 The annual report (December 2018) suggest that 220 participants have been heavily involved in the project to date and have completed their one year placement. 61 participants have been unable to complete the project although they have completed a number of sessions and activities. The long-term engagement figures have increased in Year 2 due to new groups signing up for the project who continue year on year.
- 4.6 To date 77 participants have gained a John Muir Discover Award and a further 6 have been awarded the John Muir Explore award<sup>5</sup>. These awards are attained solely as a result of the logged activity that has been undertaken within the Our Wild Coast project.
- 4.7 The quantitative data therefore suggests that the project is comfortably on track to achieve Outcome 1 in terms of engagement with participants, given that it has two years remaining. Furthermore, it will also be able to demonstrate a significant number of participants who have achieved long-term engagement with the project.

<p><b>Outcome 2:</b> Improvement in the environmental condition of 30 designated</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Activities to improve existing sites have taken place across <b>29</b> different sites</li> </ul>
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<sup>5</sup> For more information see here: <https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/john-muir-award/schools-and-colleges>

<p>sites around North Wales coast thanks to intervention of young people</p>	<p>according to the annual report, with participants responsible for improving 35.5 acres of land during 2018 alone.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activities have included footpath construction, grass planting, habitat restoration for reptiles and removal of invasive plants.</li> </ul>
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4.8 The quarterly report for October 2018 provides examples of improvements in the environmental condition across 29 different types of sites, but it is clear from the reporting to date that Outcome 2 is on track to be achieved by project end, with an increase in interventions expected over the coming months.

<p><b>Outcome 3:</b> Creation or identification of 64 new sites of wildlife value as a result of projects led by young people in their local communities</p>	<p>There has been limited success in achieving this outcome to date.</p> <p>Nothing reported.</p>
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4.9 Whilst there is very little data recorded on this outcome to date, discussions with the project team has raised the issue that this outcome has possibly been too rigidly interpreted. The project team feel that the original outcome was too ambitious and also question its importance compared to some of the other outcomes (not necessarily originally expected) that will ultimately be achieved with the participants. However, it can also be said that ‘Our Wild Coast’ activities have frequently created new sites of wildlife value and during conversations with staff it was suggested that there are 32 sites where wildlife protection activity has taken place (e.g. new gardens, improved allotment areas, placing of bug hotels and bird boxes) and there is a case for them to be recorded under this outcome. Whilst the reporting of these achievements would not bring the target on track, it would nonetheless contribute towards it. Adapting the approach and recording these achievement as outputs as well as an effort to concentrate on this outcome during Year 3 and 4 would mean that the opportunity remains to achieve this target before project end.

<p><b>Outcome 4:</b> Increased community cohesion as a result of wider involvement in the projects activities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>October 2018 Quarterly Report –reports engagement with 50 members of the wider community in the Menai Bridge area through the ‘Tyfu Môn’ project.</li> </ul>
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- 4.10 This is another outcome that has proved to be more challenging for the project, simply because the focus of the project to date has been on providing the participants involved with training, skills and personal development opportunities. With the project reaching maturity, and with the increase in established groups, the project intends to contribute more towards this outcome, particularly during the Summer of 2019 where there are plans to arrange community events and activities. Planned information dissemination events across North Wales e.g. at Llandudno promenade will also provide participants engaged with Our Wild Coast to share their learning and raise awareness of coastal environmental issues with the wider population.
- 4.11 Staff expressed their intention to explore this outcome in a wider context over the remaining duration of the project, particularly in light of the change in policy priorities in Wales and the obvious linkages between community cohesion and the well-being of communities. Our Wild Coast staff felt that by working with young people and making them connect with their local environment and take ownership of their social and physical environment would help break down the silos within communities whilst also improving their health and well-being.

## 5. Emerging evidence of impact

- 5.1 This section looks at the emerging impacts of the project, particularly for participants themselves. It considers soft and hard outcomes and looks at how these can be maximised during the remaining two years of the project.
- 5.2 Our Wild Coast project staff succinctly describe the perceived benefits of the project as three-fold:
- benefits to the environment (e.g. through improved understanding and appreciation locally and specific activities which make improvements)
  - development of young people (developing soft and hard skills through engaging with their local environment)
  - benefits to health and well-being.
- 5.3 The Our Wild Coast project records participants' connectedness with the environment and the personal development gains that are being achieved. However, Our Wild Coast officers reported that they are also identifying significant health and well-being benefits amongst their participants, particularly amongst Home Educated and Special Needs groups (and with other 'under the radar' young people within groups). However, current data capturing mechanisms do not allow staff to capture some of these 'unintended' benefits such as:
- going out and spending time outdoors more often
  - spending less time on their computers
  - developing stronger friendship groups
  - choosing to undertake more outdoor activities.
- 5.4 It was suggested that the longer-term approach now being adopted to working with groups was important as it was generating better outcomes for the participants. Some of the participants have been in the groups for 2-3 years and only now are beginning to trust the Our Wild Coast officers and a positive change being seen. This was thought to be especially pertinent when working with 11-14 year olds who were dealing with mental health issues. It was also thought that the rurality of some of the areas where Our Wild Coast operated meant that there were less activities available to young people in the vicinity and therefore there was a stronger dependency on Our Wild Coast to bring about change in attitudes and in softer outcomes such as self-confidence and self-worth in individuals. It was also suggested that

‘seeing a young person for a week is one thing, but you can really inspire over time...this is ace – to be able to see that change happen over time’.

- 5.5 Project officers described how groups who had initially been unwilling to engage with the outdoors much, or lacked experience of outdoor activity were now asking to go on camping trips and were listening and engaging during conservation work and how it was ‘rewarding to see them get to that point’. As one member of staff put it: ‘ultimately, getting young people to realise that being outside is a good thing, and to realise what is on their doorstep and that it is accessible whilst teaching them new things – skill and knowledge’.
- 5.6 Responses from the focus groups with participants suggest that those who have taken part in Our Wild Coast activities to date are very satisfied with the experience:
- ‘I’m very happy – I’ve really enjoyed it’
  - ‘The activities were all very useful and fun, and gave me an opportunity to do something I wouldn’t get to do otherwise’
  - ‘It’s great! It’s a shame I had to finish after one year’
  - ‘I loved it, I couldn’t ask for more’.
- 5.7 Participants described a whole range of benefits from taking part in Our Wild Coast group activities. Several participants described how taking part had raised their confidence and social skills:
- ‘It’s really helped increase my confidence. I was a bit shy and lacked self-esteem’
  - ‘I was able to give a presentation in front of other pupils as part of Skills Week – this has helped me with my presentation skills’
  - ‘I was really nervous about going away from my parents but I really enjoyed the outward-bound weekend away’.
- 5.8 One Our Wild Coast group in particular which included young people diagnosed with ASD or similar meant that they experienced communication issues, difficulties in interaction and demonstrated challenging behaviour. Their school teacher noted how they had seen ‘a significant difference in all of the pupils’ as a result of their involvement with Our Wild Coast and applauded the team on their hard work in getting the participants involved in regular offsite sessions whilst linking the activities of the project with the rest of the school curriculum. The teacher felt that the pupils had been able to ‘gain a tremendous amount of personal, social and

emotional skills as a result: ‘I believe that Our Wild Coast has had a tremendous impact’.

Some of the improvements included pupils being more attentive, showing respect, improving spatial skills (such as walking on variable terrains), reducing anxiety and improving interaction with peers.

- 5.9 Some of the parents interviewed described how they had seen a difference in their children’s confidence, social skills, independence and willingness to take on responsibility. Two parents mentioned how being part of the project had helped their children feel less isolated due to the rural location of their homes. Some of the participants also commented that they felt a part of their community now, were more involved in their local community, had made them interested in volunteering and had increased their respect for their local environment.
- 5.10 Other participants described how they were now more knowledgeable about nature, wildlife and conservation and more aware of environmental issues. Some also stated that involvement in the project had made them appreciate their local area more.
- 5.11 Several participants also described how they had developed valuable skills during team activities including presenting in front of others. One participant described how the valuable skills learned had led to improved school performance.
- 5.12 In two of the focus groups, the fact that the work undertaken via Our Wild Coast contributed towards their John Muir awards was also considered a positive benefit of taking part. However, one group felt that it was a shame that the project has been unable to support them until the end of the award because of capacity issues despite them being close to finishing. In one group, participants cited a sense of pride and feelings that they achieved something worthwhile.
- 5.13 One possible additional impact of the Our Wild Coast project identified over the course of the fieldwork was that the engagement of teachers and group leaders in the sessions organised by NWWT meant that they were developing new skills or considering new opportunities to engage with their participants in ways that they had not previously done and that this could be one of the unintended consequences of the project: ‘we’re enabling teachers and group leaders to take young people outdoors, and to continue with this aspect’. One of the group leaders during a focus group also noted how involvement in the Our Wild Coast project had ‘left a legacy which is good – some of the work that they established has been continued here such as the wildlife friendly garden and our work with Swifts. We’ve delivered promotional

leaflets to 2,000 homes in the area and we offer walks to the local community'. This had further increased the group's confidence and knowledge.

- 5.14 Looking to the future, participants were asked during focus groups about the likelihood that positive changes experienced as a result of their involvement in Our Wild Coast lasted in the longer term. Generally, groups felt that the skills that they had learnt were valuable and that the experience was something that they could now put on their CV which would make them more attractive to employers. Participants from three different focus groups noted that their newly found interest in wildlife and conservation had opened up possible career choices in environmental and conservation work which they had not previously considered.
- 5.15 Three of the groups also mentioned how they had continued to volunteer or had arranged local beach cleans since their involvement with Our Wild Coast had come to an end and that participation had made them much more interested, involved and aware of the need to look after their local environment.



## 6. Looking to the future

- 6.1 This chapter considers the lessons learned from activity to date as part of the Our Wild Coast project and explores some of the suggestions made by staff and participants on improvements and priorities for the remaining two years of deliver. The chapter also considers some of the options identified for the sustainability of Our Wild Coast activity post funding.
- 6.2 Several lessons for the remaining duration have been identified for the Our Wild Coast project. The first major lesson was described as the ‘realisation of just how disengaged young people were here with the environment’ and therefore the value of initial engagement activities to simply introduce them to the outdoors. The impact of taking young people to the beach, foraging or to sit around a camp-fire have all been able to ‘open up a world they didn’t know was there’.
- 6.3 The second major lesson cited by project officers related to the mental health issues facing young people within their group and how this was not an aspect that had been foreseen prior to the establishment of the project. Officers reported being ‘astonished’ by how beneficial some of the environmental activities seemed to be to the health and well-being of participants.
- 6.4 As a result of these two lessons the approach to group activities has been modified over time with more focus on undertaking art, mindfulness and resilience activities in addition to ‘just taking you outdoors’. This had resulted in ‘powerful experiences’ and a key strength of the project was deemed to be the flexibility of working and interacting with project participants in many different ways, utilising the outdoors to open up a wealth of different experiences for them.
- 6.5 Some Our Wild Coast staff members felt that there was an opportunity over the next couple of years to adopt a more regional approach to activities, and offer opportunities for groups to come together and network. This would provide interesting and new learning activities and could be linked to community-based activities.
- 6.6 Our Wild Coast project officers were also keen to develop new links with other groups or associations and build on initial plans such as those to develop a farming community group and to work with new partners such as the Urdd.
- 6.7 Participants themselves also offered some ideas for the future, particularly in terms of sustaining some of the positive impact and change that had occurred as a result of their

involvement in the Our Wild Coast project. In particular they suggested that Our Wild Coast could provide information on volunteering opportunities with similar projects or with the NWWT itself after the project comes to an end as this would be useful and they could continue their involvement with local environmental work. One group also suggested that they could be used as local 'champions' to other pupils or young people in their area, in order to encourage more young people to 'do their part for the environment'.

- 6.8 Looking to the future, and the sustainability of Our Wild Coast activities, there were early indications that some of the organisations involved with the project were open to collaborate on future bids or to support the NWWT on future bids as partners or supporters. Project officers remained hopeful that public funding could be secured to sustain the work that had started under the Our Wild Coast project to the future, as it was felt that they had developed a very powerful and beneficial way of working with young people in the difficult-to-crack 11-16 year old age group. The innovation and experimentation that had been achieved under Our Wild Coast also meant that continuation of the provision could be undertaken at a lower cost in future, with the learning captured and the necessary infrastructure and investment resources ensuring that NWWT could provide such services easily.
- 6.9 One suggestion offered was that there was a commercialisation opportunity here where the services could be offered to organisations and schools in future. This was something that was being actively explored as part of the wider OBF legacy approach at the moment. However, Our Wild Coast staff did have some concerns as to how feasible this approach would be in reality, particularly with public funds for youth work already low and other projects locally such as TRAC<sup>6</sup>, where external alternative curriculum providers are engaged to deliver similar provision for school aged children.
- 6.10 It was also suggested that the development of local youth forums was something to be prioritised over the remaining two years of the project as a way of embedding activity in the community and helping to sustain the work that had been started by Our Wild Coast for the future. It was also suggested that that the forums themselves could be utilised to leverage funding for similar activity to Our Wild Coast in future.
- 6.11 It was also reported that other funding streams, such as the Welsh Government's Sustainable Maangement Scheme<sup>7</sup>, were being considered, and the ability evidence the benefits of Our

<sup>6</sup> <https://democracy.cyngor.gwynedd.gov.uk/documents/s500000519/TRAC%20Scheme.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> [https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-09/sustainable-management-scheme-guidance\\_0.pdf](https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-09/sustainable-management-scheme-guidance_0.pdf)

Wild Coast activity against the Well-being of Future Generations Act was raised as an important issue here so that the outcomes from the project could be framed in a way that could increase its future sustainability.

- 6.12 Views from staff also suggested that the work currently being conducted via Our Wild Coast could and should be engrained and embedded into core NWWT activity. Whilst their primary school engagement was viewed as being currently very strong, it was suggested that there is an opportunity to embed more youth-work with older age groups in the work of the organisation – not only as an educational focussed project but as a new approach to working with communities in the region.
- 6.13 Our Wild Coast staff felt that earlier policy priorities, outlined in the original project plan around community cohesion are less visible as priorities at a local and national level in Wales now. The project however seems to align closely with many aspects of the Well-being of future Generations Act. As the policy focus in Wales has shifted clearly to the Well-being agenda (as demonstrated in Chapter 3), there is an issue, again when considering the sustainability of the project, of being able to demonstrate these impacts clearly and to show how the Our Wild Coast model can hit health and well-being objectives. This could also open opportunities for possible future public funding for the project. In addition, there are many interesting developments at a local level such as a surge in Green Prescribing, which also provide opportunities to further develop the Our Wild Coast project over the coming years – particularly if a more explicit health and well-being focus can be explored.

## 7. Conclusions and recommendations

- 7.1 The Our Wild Coast project has demonstrated strong performance during its second year and has built steadily on the foundations set during its foundation year, and adapted well to the lessons learned during the early stages. As such, the implementation model of working more intensely with less groups (but with larger membership) is one that should continue.
- 7.2 The flexibility of the project is also a key strength and this has been shown in the way that it has adapted the approach to fit the requirements of different groups and participants. As a result, the project is now realising that focussing on a younger age demographic, and working with more challenging groups (either as a result of being hard-to-reach, disadvantaged or disaffected) is a good fit with their activities and the types of outcomes (both intended and unintended) being achieved.
- 7.3 The interim evaluation report suggested that a simple Memorandum of Understanding be signed between NWWT and the groups in order to ensure greater clarity at the beginning of each group's involvement of what could be expected both in terms of activities and in terms of contribution and behaviour. To date, this recommendation has not been implemented.

**Recommendation 1:** As there continues to be some suggestion that groups are not clear of what the project sets out to achieve, we recommend that this initial recommendation be implemented, with a draft programme developed in partnership with participants and embedded into the MoU.

- 7.4 In the interim evaluation report we also suggested that the project needed to look to replicate the successful local action forum in Anglesey in the other regions of North Wales.

**Recommendation 2:** We continue to recommend that local action forums be established, particularly in light of the need to ensure the continuation and sustainability of the activities developed as part of Our Wild Coast post lottery funding.

- 7.5 The interim report also raised the issue of increasing cross-regional activity as part of the Our Wild Coast project. Findings from the mid-term evaluation suggests that this would now be much more realistic to achieve given the strong relationships established with many of the networks and community groups involved in Our Wild Coast. It could also generate outcomes for participants in terms of providing new social interaction opportunities in less familiar environments.

**Recommendation 3:** The Our Wild Coast project should look to organise some cross-regional environmental and outdoor activity during the remaining cycles of activity.

- 7.6 Project officers are dedicated and hard-working and strongly believe in the project but feel under time and resource pressure to sustain the level of activity and to record their outcomes. It is also clear that the project is being well-managed and is firmly rooted within the wider NWWT organisation.

**Recommendation 4:** With more available time to deliver on-the ground, more could be achieved and more robust evidence could be collated to support the project as it seeks sustainable options for delivering in the future. As the project is now entering its final stages, the NWWT should consider whether resources could be re-allocated from project management to on-the-ground delivery. Increasing officer roles to full time should be explored in this context.

- 7.7 The project continues to achieve strong outcomes and is on track to hit its targets in terms of numbers of participants involved in its activities. The project also has strong self-evaluation processes in place and should continue to ensure that it captures participant level outcome data and evidence in particular. However, to date, the project has struggled to monitor and record its wildlife protection activity in relation to Outcome 3:

**Recommendation 5:** It is recommended that the project trawls back through historical evidence and records all activity as part of the various Our Wild Coast groups that has resulted in new wildlife protection sites. Projects should adopt a wider definition of what can be reported against Outcome 3 and guidance on this shared amongst project staff. The project should also discuss this with the OBF programme to seek approval for this change.

- 7.8 Whilst the project is undertaking more work with the wider community now, in an attempt to deliver on Outcome 4, there remains a concern that the outcome is no longer fit for purpose. The project plan for Our Wild Coast intended to make linkages with the priorities of the Community Cohesion strategy as set out by Welsh Government. However the strategic focus of the Welsh Government has since moved, as a result in part of the enactment of the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015). Increasingly, local and central government priority and funding is centred around the key indicators of the Act.

**Recommendation 6:** Early evidence suggests that health and well-being outcomes for participants is a key unintended benefit being achieved by the project. Due to the strategic

importance and policy priority given to such outcomes as a result of the Future Generations Act in Wales, we recommend that Our Wild Coast considers ways of capturing these health and well-being outcomes and any lessons learned during the final stages of the project so that such findings can be highlighted in the final evaluation report. NWWT should work with OB3 as the external evaluators to revise the current self-evaluation tools to achieve this.