NATURAL RESOURCES WALES

COME OUTSIDE!

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY– MARCH 2016

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Come Outside! programme ran from November 2012 to March 2016. The programme aimed to improve the health and wellbeing of people who are experiencing deprivation or disadvantage in Wales by encouraging community groups and support providers to use the outdoors as a means to increase levels of confidence, physical activity and wellbeing. A comprehensive literature review, stakeholder events and pilot projects carried out between 2005 and 2010 resulted in the development of the Come Outside! approach in 2010 and the design of the Come Outside! delivery model. The impetus for the programme was provided by research that suggested that only one-quarter of people in Wales were taking part in outdoor recreation often enough to be counted as 'frequent' participants. The programme was funded by the Big Lottery Fund, the Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales.

> "Regular use of natural environments such as forests and parks seemed to protect against mental ill-health, whilst use of non-natural environments like a gym, did not...making a decision to exercise in a natural environment just once a week could be enough to gain a benefit."

A considerable evidence base demonstrates the link between outdoor activity and improved health and wellbeing outcomes. Using this evidence, this evaluation has sought to demonstrate the extent to which Come Outside! has encouraged more people to participate more frequently in outdoor activities and, as a result, how many people are more physically active, how many have higher self-esteem and how many feel more confident about participating further. We took a formative evaluation approach using the following mixed methods:

- records of attendance and demographic profiles;
- self-completed participant surveys[1] ;
- interviews and e-surveys with participants, staff and stakeholders;
- feedback captured by the Come Outside! team; and
- visits to sessions to create case studies.

The evaluation focused on measuring impact, capturing learning and building understanding of what works well or less well when engaging people and organisations in outdoor activity.

The Come Outside! model used the principles of community development to facilitate collaboration amongst existing community groups, organisations and outdoor activity providers in order to support people from disadvantaged communities to take part in a range of memorable outdoor activities.

Come Outside! has demonstrated how Natural Resources Wales can fulfil its duties under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 by working with people, communities and other public bodies to provide long-term health and wellbeing benefits.

The key findings and learning from the programme are summarised in this final evaluation report.

[1] The response rate of 28% provides a confidence interval of ± 5%. Confidence level is 95%.

KEY FINDINGS

In three years the Come Outside! programme engaged around 260 separate public, voluntary and community organisations across Wales, working across a range of sectors, including:

- outdoor activities/natural environment;
- health and social care;
- children and young people;
- learning and education;
- mental and physical disabilities; and
- drug and alcohol misuse.

Of these organisations, 80 were outdoor activity providers. Through collaborative working, Come Outside! also engaged 100 community groups, with 82 of these taking part in a total of more than 1,000 outdoor activity sessions. In total the programme engaged 3,370 unique participants and provided over 30 different types of outdoor activity, such as walking, gardening, geocaching, bushcraft and cycling.

A programme of one-off events, which attracted 775 people in total, was designed to provide opportunities for organisations and individuals to find out more about Come Outside! and to enable them to try new outdoor activities. After attending these events, 90% of participants said they were interested in finding ways to be more active and 62% reported that they had become more active because of the event.

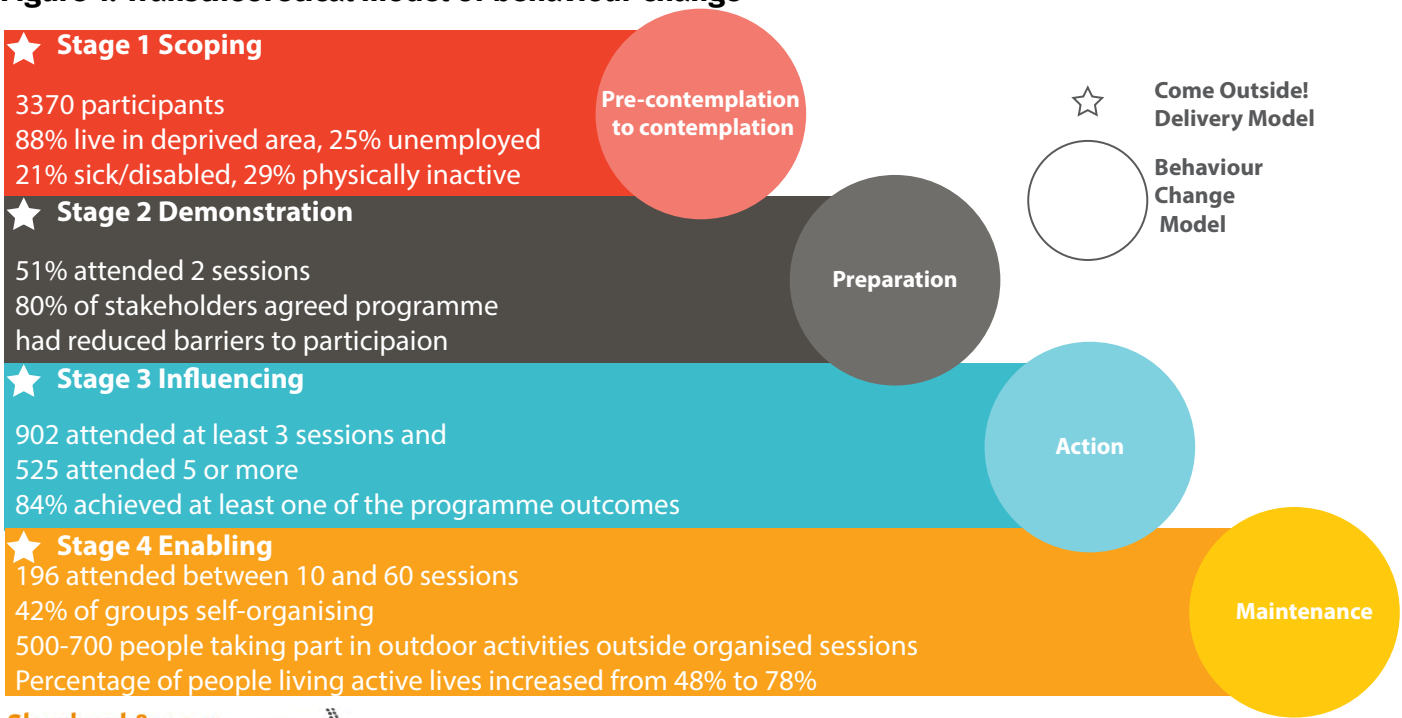
Throughout the life of the programme, satisfaction rates were extremely high: 95% of participants were satisfied with the sessions they attended and 87% said that the sessions met their expectations. In addition, 83% of participants reported that because of Come Outside! they had learnt something new about wildlife and nature and were spending more time outdoors than they had before.

KEY LEARNING 1: THE COME OUTSIDE! DELIVERY MODEL IS EFFECTIVE AND REPLICABLE

The Come Outside! delivery model is closely aligned with the transtheoretical model of behaviour change as shown in Figure 1.

The behaviour-change model posits that people move through four stages of change. Therefore, the theory of change for Come Outside! suggests that intermediate outcomes, such as improved confidence and better attitudes towards physical activity, need to be in place before sustained behaviour change in the form of increased physical activity can be achieved. Analysis of the survey data backs this up: the more sessions participants attended, the higher the numbers of people who achieved the outcomes; and the highest level of change was reported by those who attended 10 sessions or more.

Figure 1. Transtheoretical model of behaviour change



The Come Outside! delivery model is different from many other approaches aimed at changing health behaviours. Come Outside! targeted existing groups (supporting people who were not physically active) because the group members already had a sense of belonging, familiarity and structure. The approach put the group, rather than the activity, at the centre, introducing them to activities that reflected and addressed their interests, aspirations and concerns. Taking a 'health by stealth' approach, the activities that were offered focused on behaviours that were motivating for the group so that the behaviour change (an increase in physical activity, for example) became a 'side effect' of the activity.

"Well - I have got muscles I didn't know existed after my first experience of Nordic walking earlier. Looking forward to Monday already. Thanks for introducing me to my new keep-fit regime and for your patience with me. Thoroughly enjoyed it."

"Most of our service users are very isolated and live sedentary lives – this gets them out the house – most would be inactive, at home if the project didn't exist."

"I feel like life is worth living again"

The way in which the activities were designed and delivered was also different from that of other interventions. The focus was on creating opportunities for memorable experiences that participants would be motivated and inspired to repeat. In addition, the Come Outside! team targeted organisations that had support workers who could lead groups of service providers in outdoor activities. The team then developed buy-in from the support workers to the Come Outside! way of working.

KEY LEARNING 2: TO ACHIEVE CHANGE, COME OUTSIDE! COORDINATORS NEED TO BE SKILLED AT DELIVERING ACROSS THE COMMUNITY, HEALTH AND OUTDOOR SECTORS

Using community development principles to create a bespoke, flexible, user-led programme of activities enabled groups to engage in activities that they would not have done otherwise. Having a team that was skilled in community development practices and knew the benefits of outdoor activity was critical to the programme's success. The dedicated and highly motivated team was able to identify and facilitate collaboration amongst community groups, support organisations and activity providers in order to engage people, and influence existing service providers to work in a different way, rather than creating new services.

"We do more outdoor activities together and have even joined the geocache hunt."

The programme demonstrated that groups and service providers need a greater proportion of the programme's resources to be focused on skilled staff who can motivate and support them to move through the stages of behaviour change, in preference to providing them with lots of outdoor equipment etc.

Because of its engagement with support organisations and the team's community-development skills, Come Outside! was successful in reaching the most vulnerable or 'hard to reach' people. Of the participants involved:

- 88% lived in deprived communities;
- 25% were unemployed;
- 10% were from black and minority ethnic groups; and
- 21% were sick or disabled.

Of the groups involved, 21% supported young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) and 12% supported people with mental-health issues.

> "I was feeling really low this morning. I feel better now. I might go dance round a tree, haha!"

Several factors lead to people living less healthy lifestyles; however, those who experience deprivation, have long-term life-limiting illnesses or have chaotic lifestyles are more likely to lead sedentary lives. They are also the hardest people to engage and need more support to take part.

Although the programme was extremely successful in terms of reaching the most vulnerable people who are most likely to be inactive or in poor health, this resulted in drop-out rates that were higher than anticipated and created considerable challenges in encouraging people to participate in multiple sessions. However, as the programme involved a large number of people (almost 1,500 more than originally planned), even though 49% of participants attended only one outdoor activity session, 902 people attended three or more and 196 people attended between 10 and 60 sessions. On average, participants attended 3.5 sessions. However, people from particular disadvantaged groups attended more sessions: people who were sick or disabled attended an average of 6.9 sessions and unemployed people attended an average of 5.5 sessions. This indicates that the programme was particularly successful at engaging disadvantaged groups who often have the most to gain from taking part in outdoor activities.

> "In some ways it feels like we have only just got started; I've been approached by a number of organisations recently who want to work with us, but we are now winding down."

Despite the challenges involved in encouraging repeat attendance, the programme improved participants' confidence, attitude and behaviour around health and wellbeing. Of those who participated, 84% reported a positive improvement against at least one of the programme outcomes.

- Beneficiaries reporting high confidence in taking part in sessions increased from 45% to 91%.
- Beneficiaries reporting high self-esteem increased from 43% to 79%.
- Beneficiaries reporting that the programme influenced them to be more active increased from 43% to 80%.

KEY LEARNING 3: IT TAKES TIME AND RESOURCES TO ENABLE PEOPLE TO OVERCOME MULTIPLE BARRIERS, BUT THE IMPACT CAN BE SIGNIFICANT

Come Outside! helped to break down a number of barriers to engaging in outdoor activity: the most common barriers being lack of knowledge, lack of confidence and lack of experience. Over 80% of stakeholders who completed our survey agreed that Come Outside! has reduced these barriers to engagement, helping people from disadvantaged communities – and the organisations that support them – to better understand what the outdoors has to offer.

> "When you've been an addict for so long, it's like you're seeing the trees and the sky for the first time. I remember finding myself again at the beach."

The programme's success in engaging the people who are the most excluded from outdoor activities has also resulted in one of its biggest challenges. The chaotic lifestyles that many vulnerable people have contributed to drop-out rates being higher than anticipated, with fewer people taking part in repeat sessions than expected. Motivating people to make substantial changes to their habits and lifestyles took much longer than was originally anticipated, and required considerable support and resource. However, as demonstrated above, the positive impact on those who remained involved was significant.

KEY LEARNING 4: PROGRAMMES NEED TO BE LONG ENOUGH TO ENABLE SEDENTARY PARTICIPANTS TO BUILD UP TO REGULAR ACTIVITY, WHEN THEY GAIN THE MOST BENEFITS

There is also evidence that engagement in outdoor activity is being sustained without the support of the Come Outside! team. At the time of writing this report, of the participating groups, 45% are now entirely self-organising or need minimum support from the team, and a further one-third have an independent leader. This means that around 54% of regular participants (those who have attended at least three sessions) are now taking part in outdoor activities with minimal input from the Come Outside! team.

Survey data and anecdotal feedback from groups also suggests that a significant number of participants are taking part in outdoor activities outside the group. We estimate that between 500 and 700 regular participants are likely to be taking part in other regular outdoor activities in addition to the organised sessions.

It takes time to influence changes in service provision and encourage organisations to take part. The programme built up momentum over its three years of operation: 52% of all sessions were delivered, and 43% of all participants were engaged, between April and December 2015. The final three months of delivery at full capacity (July–September 2015) saw the highest number of participants engaged. This indicates that time is needed to gain momentum in a programme of this nature, as the staff available to establish the groups and run sessions have broadly remained the same over the life of the programme. Analysis of the survey data indicates the more sessions people attended, the more people achieved the outcomes and the stronger the impact. It is reasonable to conclude that the impact of this programme on people's health and wellbeing will continue to increase for as long as the self-organising groups continue to be active.

"We are giving people who wouldn't normally use the outdoors 'permission' to do so, showing them that it's for everyone."

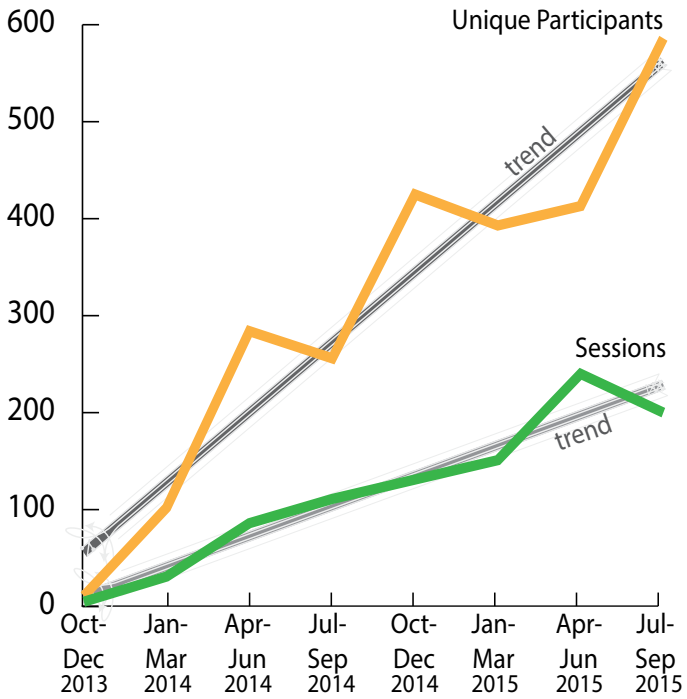


Figure 2. Numbers of participants and sessions, Oct 2013 – Sep 2015

KEY LEARNING 5: THOSE WHO HAVE THE MOST TO GAIN FROM OUTDOOR ACTIVITY CAN BE REACHED THROUGH THE COMMUNITY, HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE SECTORS

In the final nine months of delivery the team increased the proportion of beneficiaries engaged through service providers, because experience showed that this was a more effective way of engaging the target audience. By the end of the programme, 60% of the active groups were groups of service users with a range of service providers. Two-thirds of beneficiaries from service-provider groups attended five or more sessions, compared to one-third of beneficiaries engaged through community groups.

KEY LEARNING 6: OUTDOOR ACTIVITY CAN BE EMBEDDED INTO SERVICE PROVISION IF THE BENEFITS TO SERVICE USERS ARE DEMONSTRATED

The programme increased knowledge and appreciation of the outdoors amongst the public and voluntary sectors in Wales. Of the organisations involved in the programme, 78% agreed that as a result of working with the Come Outside! team they have a better understanding of how the outdoors can benefit health and wellbeing, and 89% said they are now more aware of opportunities to involve groups in outdoor activities.

By facilitating links between outdoor activity providers and support organisations, Come Outside! has helped to make outdoor activity part of mainstream service provision within the public and voluntary sectors. Of the organisations involved, 68% reported that they have changed the way in which they work. This was achieved by:

- building the knowledge, skills and confidence of support workers;
- providing training, new ideas and equipment; and
- demonstrating the positive benefits of outdoor activity.

Organisations have committed officer time, training and budgets to delivering outdoor activities for their service users. However, although organisations are committed to continuing the delivery of outdoor activities where possible, they recognise that the end of the programme will result in the loss of the expertise, knowledge and support that they have benefited from: 93% of stakeholders want the programme to continue.

KEY LEARNING 7: PROVISION OF OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES CAN BE ADAPTED TO DELIVER GREATER BENEFITS

Of the outdoor activity providers involved in the programme, 75% reported that they are now designing their services to meet the needs of service users and community groups, delivering the benefits they want. In addition, as a result of Come Outside! 71% of providers are now working with a greater diversity of participants.

KEY LEARNING 8: SUSTAINED ACTIVITY IS POSSIBLE IF CERTAIN FACTORS ARE IN PLACE

Learning captured through the Come Outside! programme identified the following factors that influence the potential for sustained activity.

Individual factors: Come Outside! incorporated memorable experiences to build motivation and confidence; however, it found that it takes time to develop habits around outdoor and physical activity. Incentives, such as certificates, awards, qualifications and participation in future challenges, helped to motivate people to engage. For a group to be self-organising it was necessary to identify one individual who had the commitment, passion and drive to lead the group once the Come Outside! coordinator moved on.

Group factors: The Come Outside! model focused on working with existing groups; this encouraged people to participate, as they already had a sense of belonging and familiarity. The coordinators found that working within existing group timetables and making it easy for groups to take part in outdoor activities (by providing equipment and appropriate clothing and by staying local) helped to sustain attendance. Providing site-specific activities; for example, in community gardens, helped to build a sense of ownership that is likely to continue now that the support from Come Outside! has ended.

Organisational factors: Learning from the programme showed that when organisations were willing to commit resources (be it support workers or financial support), this helped to sustain activity once support from Come Outside! came to an end. However, the team found that it often takes time to achieve this level of commitment and organisations often needed to have the benefits clearly demonstrated to them before they were willing to commit resources. The coordinators found that it was important to identify individuals within organisations who had the passion and commitment needed to support groups.

Strategic context: Changing strategic priorities, loss of funding and uncertainty in the public and voluntary sectors created considerable challenges for the Come Outside! programme. The facilitation and assets-based approach was dependent on support from other organisations; as such, changes in the external environment had an impact on the programme's ability to deliver in some areas. Although the flexible model meant that the approach could be adapted to suit local circumstances, the focus on hitting the original funding targets often led to quantity being prioritised over quality.

KEY LEARNING 9: THE COME OUTSIDE! APPROACH OFFERS VALUE FOR MONEY

Using social value methodology, we estimate that for every £1 spent, Come Outside! has generated between £5 and £18 of social value in terms of the improved confidence, increased physical activity and increased wellbeing achieved by participants.

LEGACY AND THE FUTURE

The programme has left a considerable legacy in terms of tangible assets (such as community gardens, geocaching routes, equipment and clothing) and intangible assets (such as improved knowledge, skills and confidence in using the outdoors). It has also helped organisations to embed their use of outdoor activities into their way of working as a tool for improving their service users' health and wellbeing. There is evidence that a considerable number of groups and individuals will continue to participate in outdoor activities now that the programme has ended.

The programme has also left a considerable legacy of learning around how to engage community groups in outdoor activities and how to influence support organisations to use the natural environment as part of their service delivery. Although three years has only been enough time to start to build the momentum needed to engage more people and organisations in outdoor activities, the learning from the programme should be invaluable in helping to inform future health and wellbeing programmes.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, Come Outside! has successfully achieved its original objectives. However, it is recognised that this sort of behavioural change takes time to achieve and that using an asset-based facilitation model resulted in momentum increasing over time. A significant proportion of participants were engaged in sessions run in the final six months of the programme and, even towards the end of the programme delivery, levels of demand amongst new groups and organisations was increasing. Given more time, the programme could see even higher levels of impact and build on the momentum it has achieved over the last 3 years.