



Scottish Natural Heritage
Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba

All of nature for all of Scotland
Nàdar air fad airson Alba air fad

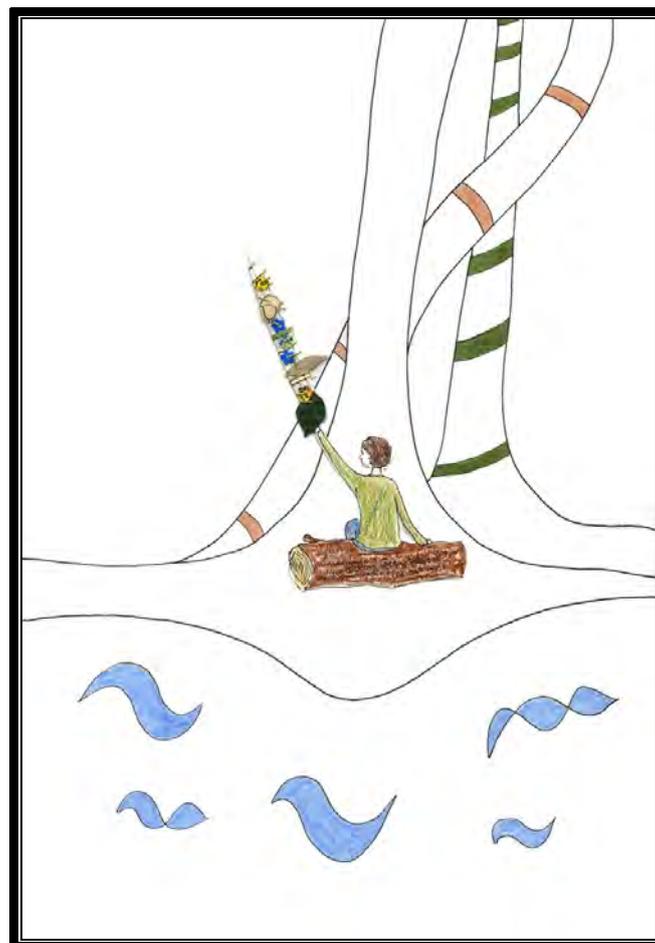
sedc

scottish
community
development
centre

People and nature: learning through doing Action research programme

Broughty Ferry Environmental Project and DightyConnect: A Summer of Stories

March 2011

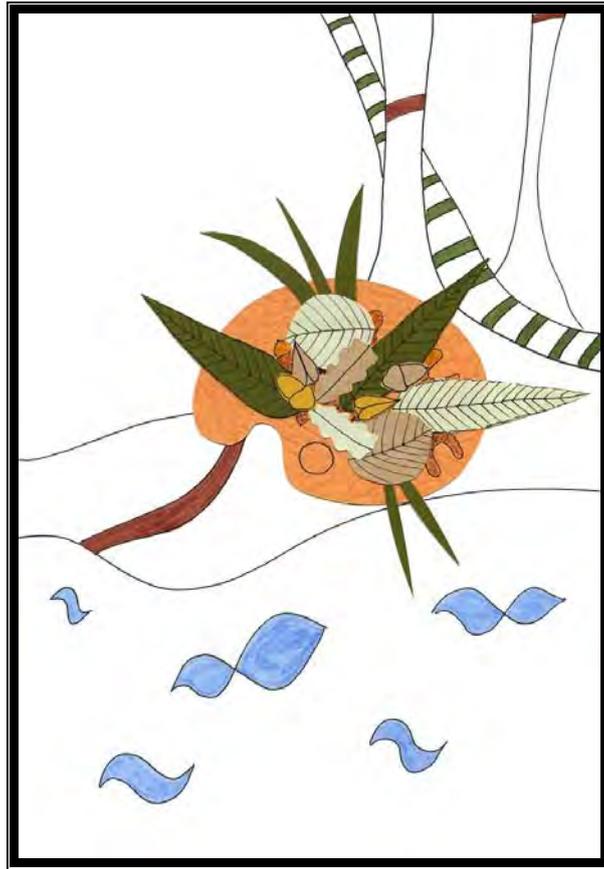


'The story stick and the storyteller'

People and nature: learning through doing was an action research programme which aimed to identify successful approaches to involving people from excluded and disadvantaged groups in enjoying, learning about and caring for nature. Action research is often defined as research done *of* and *by* a particular group of people, rather than *on* and *to* them – with the aim of increasing understanding and achieving change.

Six community and voluntary sector groups took part in the programme, each undertaking their own action research project to explore what could help people from a range of backgrounds and circumstances to get closer to nature – and the benefits they experienced when they did.

The programme was supported by Scottish Natural Heritage and Scottish Community Development Centre and ran from Autumn 2009 until Spring 2011.



'Nature as inspiration for community action'

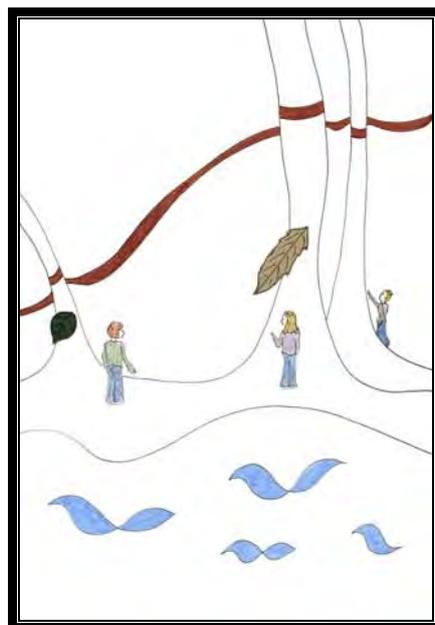
Index	Page
Introduction	4
BFEP and DightyConnect - a profile	5 - 6
Our research proposal	7
Our research process and methods	9 - 10
Results from the story dialogue sessions:	
(1) <i>DightyConnect Mosaic Group</i>	11 - 12
(2) <i>BFEP Management Group</i>	13 - 14
(3) <i>DightyConnect Conservation Volunteers</i>	15 - 16
(4) <i>Poetry Group</i>	17 - 18
(5) <i>Nature Nutters</i>	19 - 20
(6) <i>Spirit of the Dighty Group</i>	21 - 22
Our key findings	
(1) <i>The interpretation of the 'environment'</i>	23
(2) <i>The operation of BFEP and DightyConnect</i>	24 - 26
(3) <i>The use of the story dialogue technique</i>	26- 27
Conclusions: Where do we go from here?	28
Our project team and acknowledgements	29 - 30

1. Introduction

This is the report of an action research project undertaken by Broughty Ferry Environmental Project (BFEP) and DightyConnect during 2010 as part of the '*People and nature: learning through doing*' scheme. *People and nature* is a collaborative initiative involving Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) and five community groups from across Scotland. The overall scheme has two main goals: 'to improve understanding of what works in practice from the perspective of project officers and project participants and to help organisations such as SNH to better understand how they can support voluntary and community sector groups' (SNH/SCDC, 2010).

BFEP is a community-based initiative which supports local individuals and groups to plan, develop and implement human scale environmental projects. Established in 1999 and supported by SNH, the group has worked with large numbers of people of different backgrounds, ages and interests and has gained extensive experience of using a diverse range of often innovative approaches. '*DightyConnect: a confluence of people and nature*', is a two year project led by BFEP and funded by the Voluntary Action Fund, which covers all the communities along the 16 miles of the Dighty Burn within Dundee.

Participation in the '*People and nature: learning through doing*' scheme provided an opportunity for members of BFEP and DightyConnect to explore and evaluate the way in which the projects operate and to consider the importance of the environment in their success. Story dialogue was the evaluation method selected. This report details the story dialogue process and presents the groups' findings and conclusions.



'People and nature'

2. Broughty Ferry Environmental Project and DightlyConnect - a profile

BFEP has two main aims:

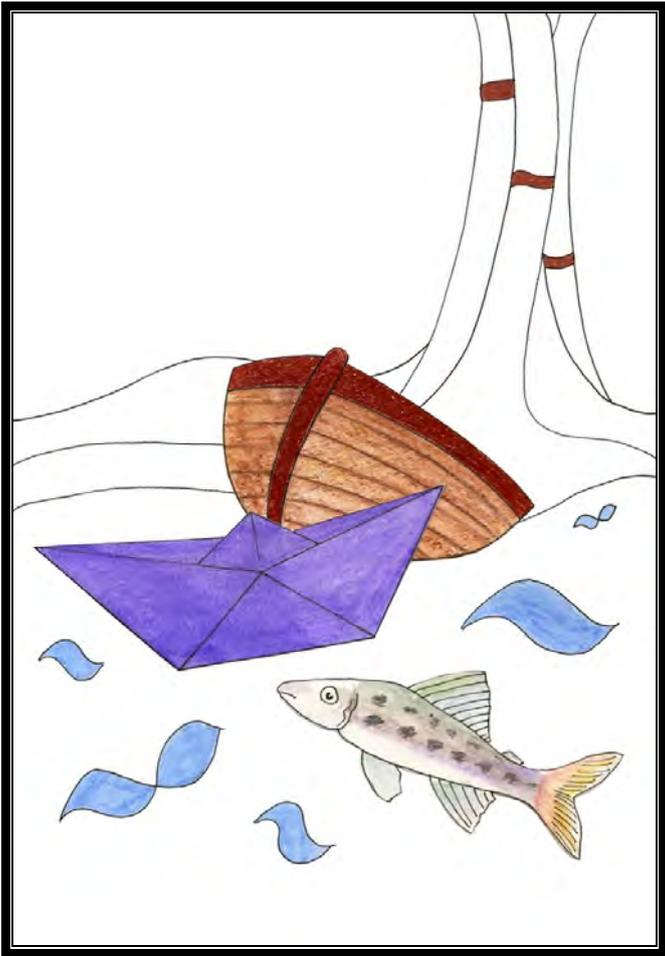
- to promote and encourage the conservation and protection of wildlife and the environment in and around Broughty Ferry for the benefit of the public; and
- to advance the education of the general public about environmental issues, through the provision of education, information and publicity programmes.

BFEP is an unincorporated group with charitable status which is led by an elected Local Management Group and supported by a part-time project worker. The number of residents and volunteers active in BFEP activities varies but is typically between 40 and 80. Over the past decade the group has delivered a large number of projects in pursuit of the group's objectives. The following are a selection of those projects:

- Supporting three local men to design and build two artificial nesting banks, and associated habitats for sand martins in response to natural nesting sites being eroded by the waves.
- Enabling a group using wheelchairs to establish an accessible path through a Local Nature Reserve.
- Setting up and running a volunteer led young people's out of school nature conservation and environmental education activity group called the Nature Nutters.
- Providing local children with hands-on opportunities to learn some of the traditional crafts and skills that were practiced in the past by people living and working close to the River Tay Estuary.
- Creating a range of amphibian habitats for hibernation and improving the biodiversity in local ponds in locations in Broughty Ferry, Douglas and Whitfield.
- Collaboration with the inclusive arts project Art Angel, Sense (Scotland) which supported groups not normally engaged with the natural environment in exploring their local greenspace under the theme of acoustic ecology. The outcomes included an artistic DVD, a Soundtrail Event, workshops, sowing several wild flower meadows and putting up nesting boxes for birds and bats.
- The development of a mobile estuarine and marine environmental education, interpretation unit, Changing Space, inspired by the mobile bathing machines that use to 'inhabit' Broughty Ferry beach.

Initially BFEP focused its activity within Broughty Ferry but in 2003 a successful bid was made to Communities Scotland to secure SCARF funding to engage local people in an exploration of their natural environment in the communities in the east of Dundee linked by the Dighty Burn, including Whitfield, Douglas and Broughty Ferry. The project, entitled 'Zoom – taking a closer look at nature', enabled local people from the three areas to get involved in a range of environmental activities, from making wild flower seed paper to building bird nesting boxes, and to carry out environmental surveys in the area. In total, around 400 people actively took part in the activity sessions, and over 200 Zoom packs were distributed.

Zoom was the forerunner of the current DightyConnect initiative. DightyConnect has allowed the employment of two additional part-time workers, based in Douglas Community Centre, to support volunteers taking forward projects involving both practical environmental tasks along the burn and cultural activities associated with it. A linked project promoting cycling and walking along the Dighty (STRIDE) has also received funding from the Climate Challenge Fund.



'A confluence of people and nature'

3. Our research proposal

Since its inception in 1999, BFEP has been very active in pursuing its original objectives and the group has managed to establish itself and expand some of its activities into new areas, including along the Dighty. While originally most of the work focused on the natural environment, over time the group has chosen to widen its interpretation of 'the environment', and projects now involve cultural, historic and artistic responses as well as practical ones. The choice of activities comes from the volunteers themselves.

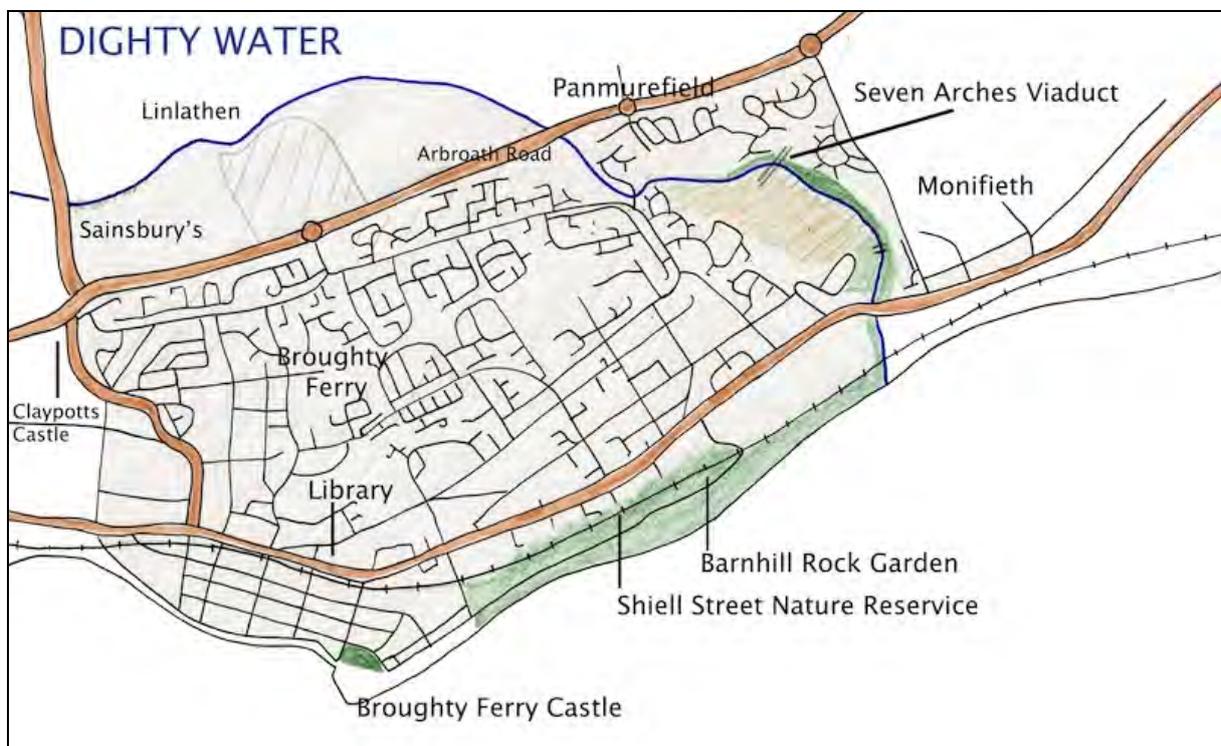
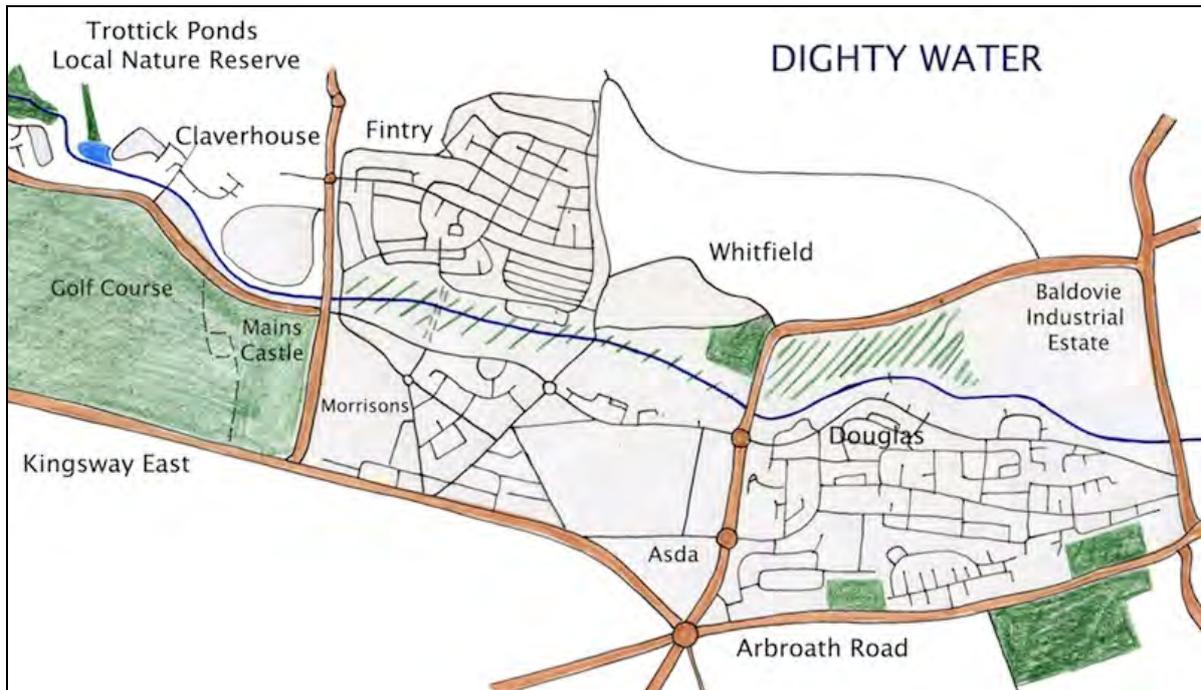
During this time individual projects have been evaluated but there has been no opportunity to explore the wider perceptions and experiences of volunteers across the project, something that is vital if the group is to sustain itself into the future. The '*People and nature*' scheme offered the group a chance to carry out such an exercise.

Two main aims were agreed for the BFEP/DightyConnect action research. There were:

- to explore the significance of BFEP's focus on the 'environment' to the development of the group and the extent to which the adoption of a very wide interpretation of the 'environment' has helped us engage with a range of stakeholders including the public.
- to explore how and to what extent the group's method of working meets the needs of individuals who get involved and to gain an understanding of what keeps them involved,

The community that the inquiry focused on consisted of volunteers and stakeholders who are involved with BFEP and DightyConnect. A significant proportion of the volunteers come from disadvantaged groups including; unemployed and people on low incomes; people with physical and mental illness; carers; young people; and older people. We tried to include a range of individuals who have been involved for varying lengths of time, have worked on a variety of different project elements and come from different communities in the east of Dundee (see maps below). While in theory these individuals share a common concern for the environment, in practice they bring a very wide range of interests and skills and we have tried to capitalise upon these when developing and delivering projects.

Maps of some of the communities living alongside the Dighty Water

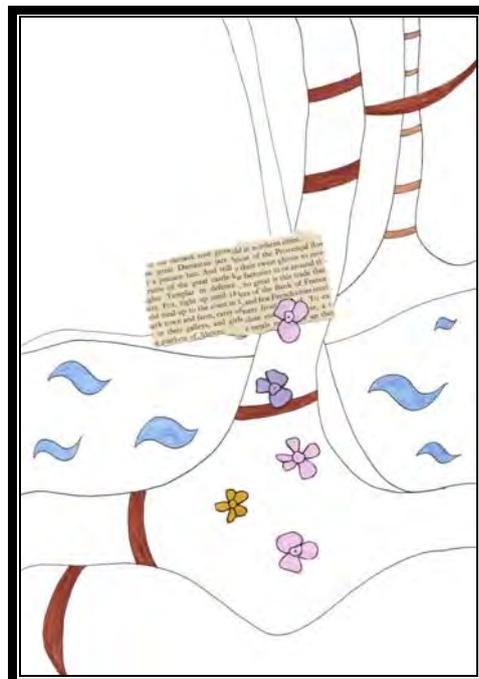


4. Our research process and methods

The research method used is called 'story dialogue'. The approach uses individuals' stories to stimulate and facilitate reflection from those listening and offers an opportunity to draw group conclusions. We saw this methodology as a flexible and inclusive way of evaluating our approach. Story dialogue also enabled people who are involved in different aspects of our work to contribute their views. The approach could be used outdoors as well as indoors depending on the weather.

We held 6 story dialogue sessions between August and November 2010, facilitated by members of the BFEP Management Group. In total 32 volunteers participated. A volunteer was asked to start each session with their story, reflecting on their involvement with BFEP and/or DightlyConnect. This was followed by a structured discussion around four questions:

- What? (What made you get involved? What have you done? What skills have you developed?)
- Why? (Has the group worked well and if so why? What factors have helped in the process? Did you need support or training? Have any problems been encountered?)
- So What? (What lessons have you/we learned? How easy was it to resolve problems? How easy would it be for new volunteers to join the group?)
- What Next? (What happens next? Are there ideas for new activities? How important is the role of a support worker and funding?).

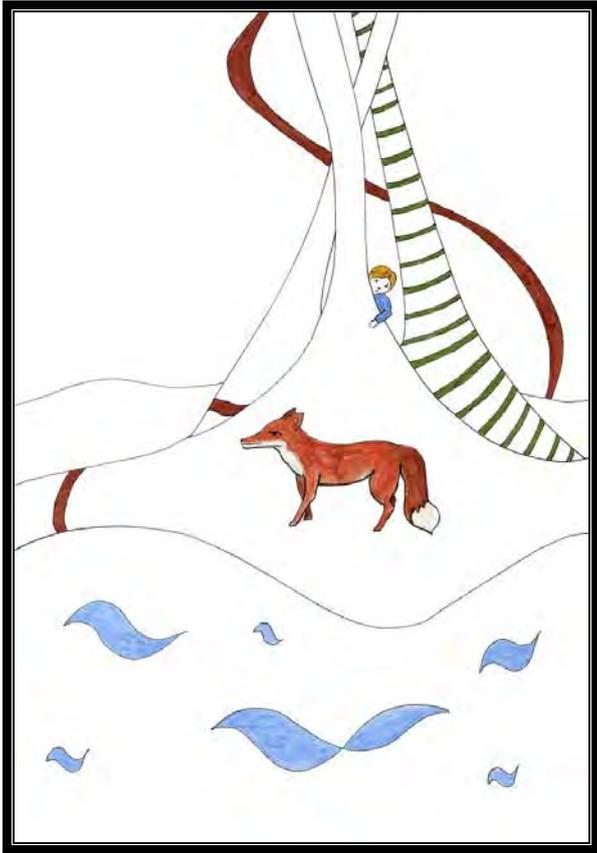


'Words inspired by nature'

The main points raised were summarised back to the participants in each session allowing the group to discuss them and identify priorities. The outcomes from all the groups were discussed at an evening Local Management Group meeting in February 2011, where representatives from all the sessions were present, and from this the conclusions presented in this report were drawn.

Each of the sessions was recorded, five onto DVD and one onto an audio CD. This was carried out with the prior agreement of the participants in each session. The full recordings were used as a record of the points raised and in addition edited clips have been combined to produce a summary Story dialogue DVD.

Before each of the story dialogue sessions we individually briefed each of the 'story tellers' and supported them to put their story across in a relaxed and open manner. In all cases the story teller knew all the other members of the group and we attempted in all cases to choose a time and venue convenient to all participants and conducive to listening and sharing.



'A dialogue with nature'

5. Results from the story dialogue sessions

(1) DightyConnect Mosaic Group (5 August 2010)

This group have been working on mosaic projects in and around Douglas Community Centre for a couple of years. Their members have only recently become associated with DightyConnect and through this they have begun to take on mosaic projects, such as seating, along the Dighty burn. They have also used the natural environment to inspire their designs. This story dialogue session was held outside beside the Dighty burn at their recently completed mosaic seat.

What?

- We have done mosaics in the past and wanted to do more, this time in the natural environment.
- We have learnt more mosaic skills using different materials and approaches, we have been involved in developing the design and actually positioning the mosaic.
- We have created a fantastic piece of public art, which local people who use the area are pleased with.

Why?

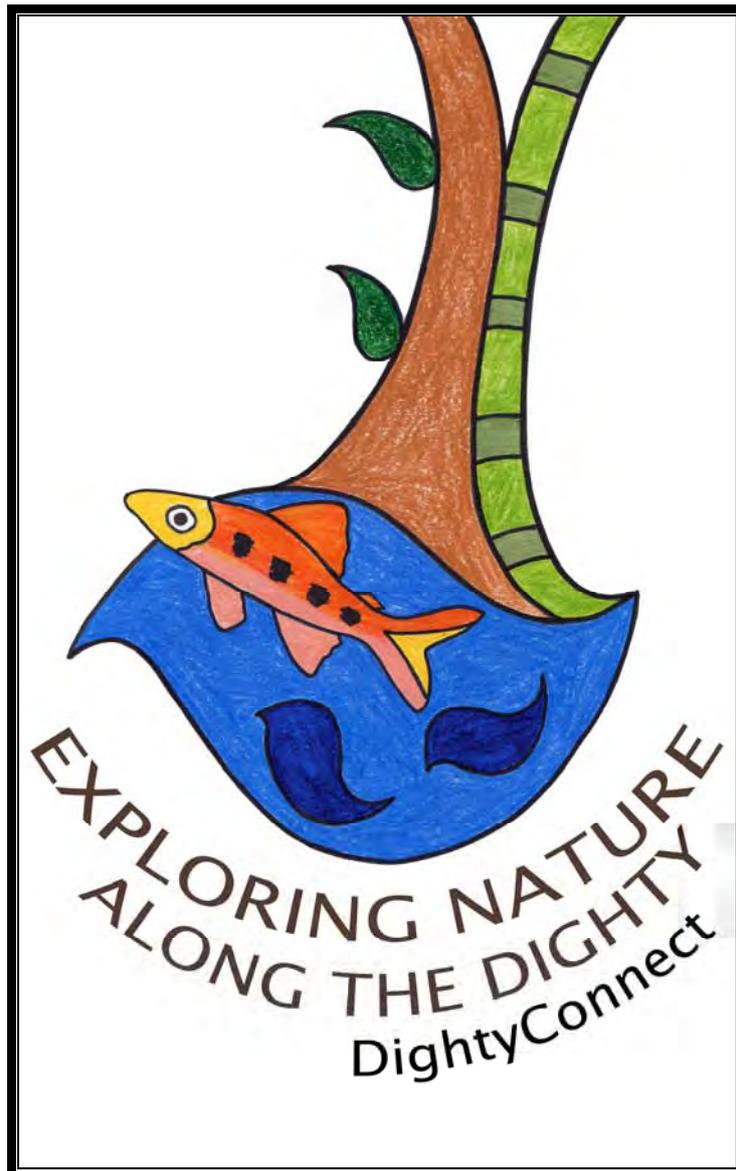
- Wonderful, very enjoyable and special
- No trouble with planning or red tape etc
- Involvement in community project that is creative and excellent quality
- Learnt more skills and developed old skills
- Meet people and have time to talk and be silent
- Everyone played a part in the development of the project, collective decision making

So what?

- We would need to be creative in the way in which we involve more people
- It is important that the whole experience is enjoyable and fun and also quite hard work
- It was important that the project is in an area that needed something artistic. We have learnt how to deal with vandalism but not become disillusioned by it.
- We would like to be able to share our skills with others
- The publicity and opening event was important aspect of the project and the fact that it is in a public space is very rewarding since local people give feedback.

Now what?

- Advertise for new members by word of mouth, local community workers and notice on mosaic
- Share skills with new members
- Undertake project to develop and design small plaques to be located along the burn, this will allow others to join in process and it will also enable us to explore the local area, before developing another major project.



(2) BFEP Management Group (24 August 2010)

This story dialogue session was attended by both long established members of this group who have been working on BFEP's projects for over a decade, as well as active members who have joined more recently. We held the session in Broughty Ferry Library one summer evening.

What?

- People have been drawn into the project in lots of different ways: going along to a poetry reading session in the nature reserve; complaining to the local councillor about litter; seeing the fun a group of children were having at the library; helping create the community mosaic at the library etc
- Newcomers to the area noticed some of the work that had been done, such as the sand martin nesting banks and the willow weaving and wondered who was behind it
- Members of the management group typically got involved in a practical project and then wanted to be more involved in the group.

Why?

- When you come along you are made to feel relaxed and at home.
- Involves people with different amounts of knowledge about the environment but no-one dominates or pushes their own agenda
- The variety of ways to engage with the environment in all senses of the term – natural, cultural, emotional
- The nature of the people involved – 'brings sunshine into your life'
- An inclusive approach with something for everyone; you get involved in a small way and think 'I can do that'
- Flexibility of approach – people can dip in and out; you can start something, move away someone else will then take it forward.
- Using a creative approach to engage with more people with the environment e.g. mosaic and creative writing
- Opportunities exist for people of different ages
- Project is developing into other areas e.g. DightyConnect - working in a wider variety of locations and with wider range of people.
- People are motivated to learn and discover more about their environment

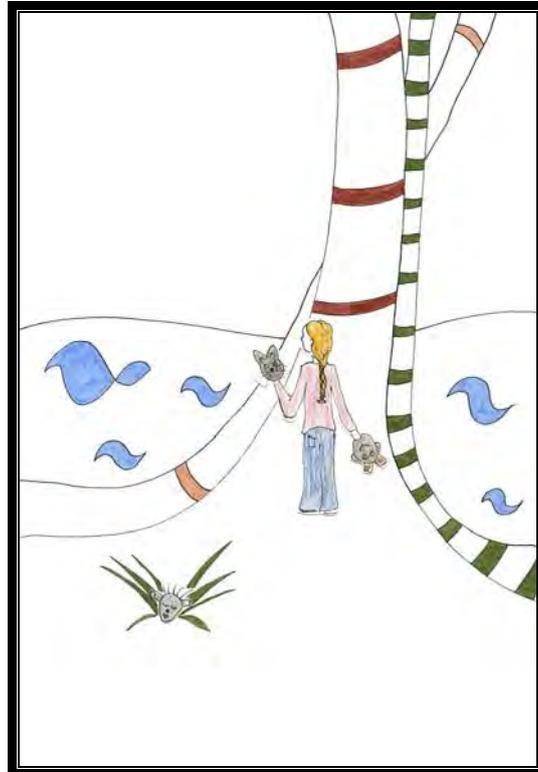
So what?

- The importance of providing a wide range of opportunities for people to become involved, all ages, backgrounds and interests.
- Developing intergenerational activities helps share skills and strengthen community ties
- The importance of the environment and nature to people's health
- Moving beyond the local boundaries along the Dighty has drawn in lots more people and generated new ideas and projects

- The importance of 'word of mouth' for attracting people into the activities of the project.
- The crucial role played by the project worker, in supporting individuals, giving inspiration, channelling ideas into practical projects, and as if by magic finding sources of funding
- The strong collaborative relationship between the project worker and the management group, each supporting the other.

Now what?

- A host of exciting opportunities are being thrown up by DightyConnect and STRIDE such as tackling invasive species; extending habitat management; developing the heritage aspect and exploring what the area means to people; building on the Spirit of the Dighty 'happening'
- Build on success of DightyConnect to strengthen community links.
- Work to secure new funding to support the post of the project worker and allow new ideas to be put in place
- As projects are implemented, encourage individuals and groups to take more responsibility for maintaining and developing them
- Continue to work with the Nature Nutters; past members are keen to come back as helpers
- Recognise the importance of practical projects such as habitat improvements and footpath creation as well as involvement in educational and cultural activities



'Use the environment to strengthen intercommunity links'

(3) DightyConnect Conservation Volunteers (7 September 2010)

This group have been working on practical conservation and gardening projects along the Dighty Burn for nearly a couple of years. They have undertaken projects such as woodland maintenance, wet wildflower meadow creation, mammal surveying and the creation of a wildflower propagation garden at Douglas Community Centre. This story dialogue session was held inside Douglas Community Centre.

What?

- Looking to develop my environmental management studies and put the theory into practice
- Dealing with real conservation issues – surveying, planning for habitats, managing habitats
- Finding out about what is growing along the Dighty
- The development of the garden has been satisfying as changes happen fairly quickly
- I took part in the mid-summer walk and got sponsored to help my granddaughter
- I enjoy gardening and being outside and so I have been involved in plant identification
- Good links to local school pupils involving them in wetland planting and plant control

Why?

- Opportunities for both individuals and for working together in groups
- There are opportunities to take responsibility for projects if you want to
- It doesn't have to involve a big commitment – you can dip in and out
- We work at a very human scale
- There are so many areas we could tackle if we had more time, more people and more help, for example tackling the alien species
- The ethos of the group is to follow what people are interested in so no-one's ideas are ever wrong - this can create a management challenge
- Aware of other groups but don't know a lot about what else is going on

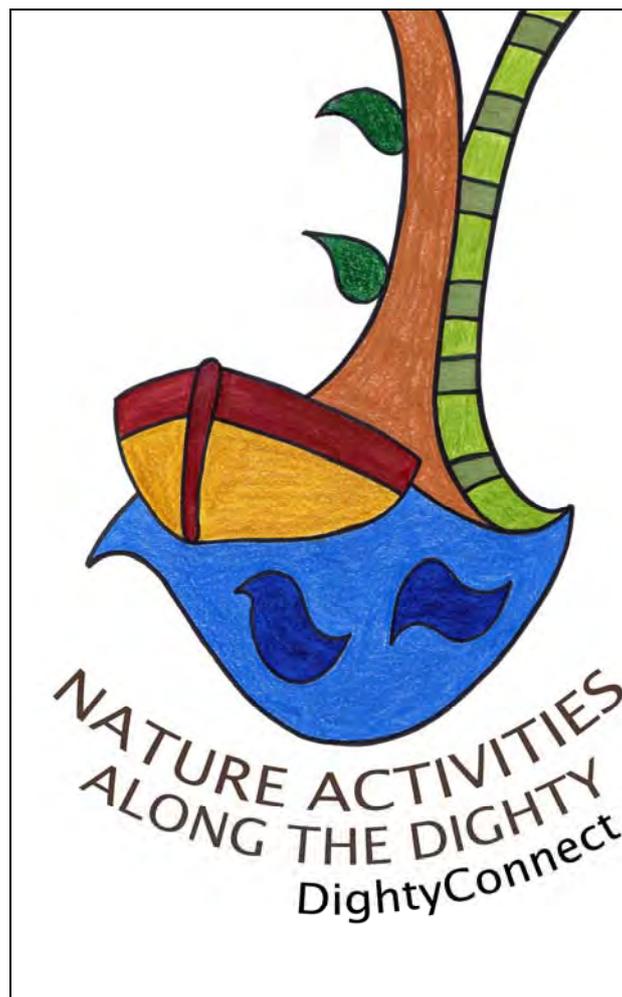
So what?

- The importance of adopting a flexible approach which responds to individual needs rather than being designed and you have to fit in
- You have some autonomy but help and support is available
- Involves people with different interests and backgrounds (young, retired, unemployed) so not a single issue group of volunteers
- Inclusive and intergenerational

- Involvement can be educational both about the environment and the development of personal learning
- Importance of communication between those involved. Debbie organises a Google group site to share information about events, what's been seen along the Dighty etc. We need to think if there are better ways of doing this.

Now what?

- Huge potential for doing things along the Dighty, both in terms of environmental and cultural activities.
- By giving volunteers autonomy it means they are not totally dependent on workers to keep activities going
- Recognise the importance of getting new people on board
- We could link into national surveys to ensure work continues to be meaningful if funding stops
- At a time of economic uncertainty for government organisations it is important that organisations like ours take responsibility and safeguard the environment for future generations



(4) Poetry Group (7 September 2010)

This group have been meeting and writing together for several years. They originally met at outdoor venues in and around Broughty Ferry, but during the past couple of years they have also met at sites along the Dighty Burn. In all cases they use the natural environment to inspire their work. They have put together published collections of their work. This story dialogue session was held in a café close to one of their popular venues due to inclement weather.

What?

- Group of about 12 people who have been meeting regularly, about once a month, for over 4 years
- We meet in a variety of places, such as the Nature Reserve, Grassy Beach, Broughty Ferry Castle, along the Dighty Burn, Reres Hill, and outdoors when the weather permits
- The poetry is inspired by places and the environment as well as people's own feelings and ideas
- We have been involved in a number of visits which have stimulated ideas – e.g. Gardenstown and Ian Hamilton Findlay's Little Sparta garden.
- Members of the group have published their poetry both individually and as a group – e.g. 'Inspired by Nature' collection.

Why?

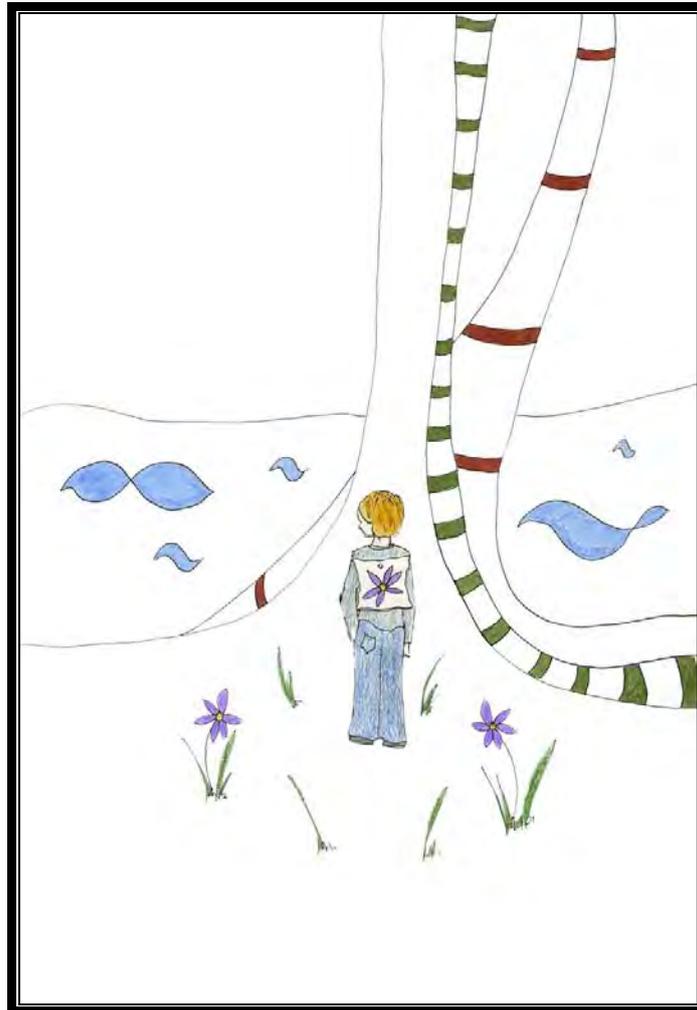
- Meeting in the outdoors, which is part of the ethos of the group, is unusual, very powerful and gives the group a purpose; e.g. 'On one occasion we were sitting under a Eucalyptus tree and what looked like leaves started to fall but then we realised they were butterflies. It was very stimulating'.
- The group provides a very supportive environment; you are helped by others who give encouragement and feedback
- We have tried different forms of poetry
- Its has been good for our well being; some individuals have come with mental and physical health problems and it has been a healing experience

So what?

- Writing poetry can be a solitary activity but sharing with others can be very productive
- The importance of communicating the poetry to others, whether through publications or at events such as the BFEP AGM or at the Edinburgh Festival
- The group is open and is very welcoming although the lack of structure might not suit everyone
- The healing power of the group and the landscape
- The poetry group has provided opportunities to get involved in a wider range of community activities

Now what?

- The next big event is the drama event along the Dighty in November. This event grew out of the poetry group meeting and writing at locations along the burn and then with the help of one of the members who is trained in drama the pieces have been put together into a 'happening'. Many of the writers will take part, performing their own stories.
- No specific plans for the future; the group evolves organically in response to the ideas that arise
- The value of putting the work together and sharing it with the wider community is recognised; perhaps we could think about using film or YouTube



'Writing inspired by nature'

(5) Nature Nutters (7 September 2010)

The Nature Nutters are a group of up to a dozen eight to twelve year old young people who meet to undertake practical conservation tasks in and around Broughty Ferry and along the Dighty Burn. They are supported by adult and older young people helpers. This story dialogue session was held inside the youth area of Broughty Ferry Library one afternoon straight after school.

What?

- With Nature Nutters we have planted trees at Reres Hill, cleared out the ponds at the library and been on lots of trip for example to Montrose Basin
- In the BF nature reserve we cleared out the pond and made bird boxes
- Also made bird feeders with seeds
- In Orchar Park we planted apple trees, created and buried time capsules and tied poems to the hedge
- The group designed their own sweat shirts with a drawing front and back and the logo '99% nature: 100% nutters'

Why?

- Nature Nutters makes you feel closer to nature
- It's about doing things not just finding out
- It's good fun finding out about animals
- It's more fun than school work – you can mix lots of ideas together
- It's great being outside doing things

What?

- We've learnt lots of skills such as square lashing and planting trees. You can use these skills other places such as at school
- You can identify plants – I like to know what they are
- It's not just about nature but can involve other activities such as stories and making candles
- It would be great if more people could come along as it's so good to be involved
- I wish it could be more often than once a month
- A group of 5 Nature Nutters performed a play about invasive species at an event in Douglas – raising awareness about the issue

Now what?

- There are lots of things that the group would like to do
- They want to work on a piece of graffiti art – perhaps about the decline in butterfly numbers or pollution
- Carry out more work in the nature reserve for example repairing recent damage caused by a fire
- The older ones want to stay involved in Nature Nutters – perhaps as helpers – but feel they would continue to learn



'The Nature Nutters – hands-on environmental action'

(6) Spirit of the Dighty Group (7 November 2010)

At the time of this story dialogue session the members had just completed two weekends of outdoor drama performances called the Spirit of the Dighty at a location close to Mains Castle on the Dighty Burn. We held the story dialogue session after the last performance in a local restaurant with no other people present.

What?

- Initially a group came together to write stories and poetry inspired by the water of the Dighty
- Others got involved through the Nature Nutters
- The group started to pull together and it grew organically
- There was then the idea and interest in making a piece of theatre
- The group gave 4 performances of 'Spirit of the Dighty' in early November: they took place within the outdoor space around Mains Castle, the cemetery and the burn
- There was an audience for around 25-30 for each performance
- Others were drawn in to help with the costumes, music, etc
- Lots of skills have been developed

Why?

- A fantastic project; great fun
- The best thing I've done
- These people – mad as a box of frogs! I'm going to miss the rubber chicken!
- Many involved were a bit sceptical of an outdoor piece of theatre but they had faith in the director
- Everyone loved the mix of people coming from different backgrounds and crossing generations; it was enlightening and reassuring
- The outdoors provided a great place to write
- People didn't know each other but we now get on well

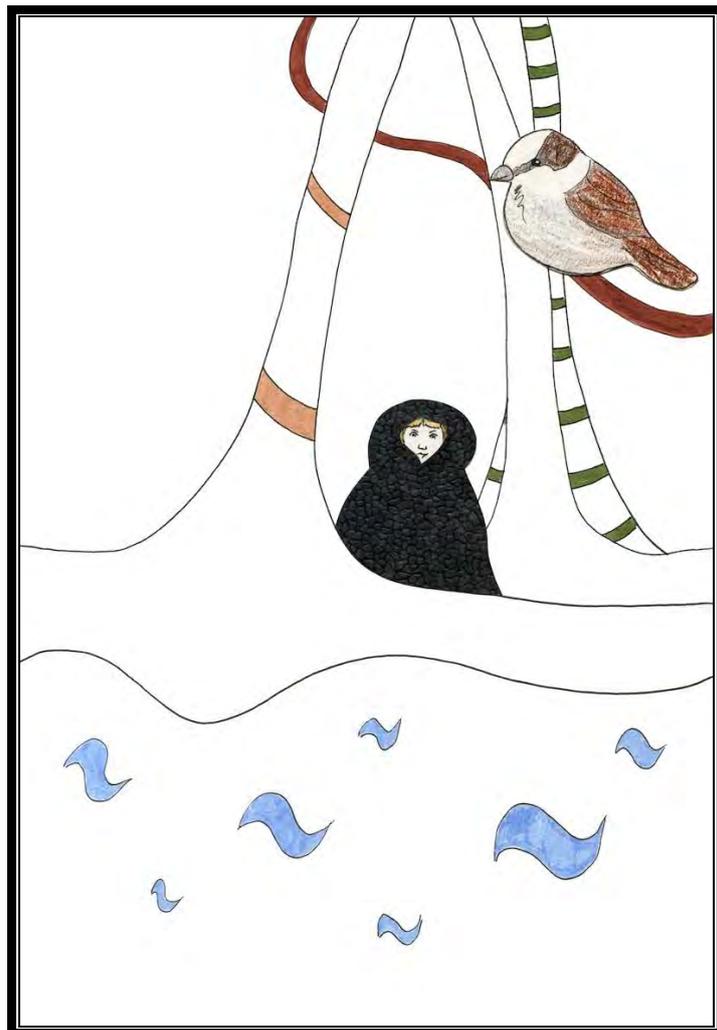
So what?

- Learned about myself and gave me a different kind of confidence
- At some points I was a bit resentful of the time commitment but I learned a discipline
- Learned how to talk to people, to use my voice
- Important that others had confidence that I could perform
- Realise that the activities and exercises we did at Gardenstown helped us work as a team
- Skills and effort put in by Ann was vital: she gave you confidence, organised things and made you feel good
- The importance of holding to the vision – knowing that the idea would work

- This type of activity can help overcome other problems
- Working with a different generation brought the young person out of me.

Now what?

- I'd love to do it again
- Let's do it in spring or summer next time – when the weather's better!
- Lots of work involved behind the scenes so support is needed



'Sensing the spirit of the Dighty'

6. Our key findings

The BFEP/DightlyConnect action research project adopted the story dialogue technique in order to achieve two main aims: to explore the significance of BFEP's focus on the 'environment' to the development of the group; and to consider how and to what extent the group's method of working meets the needs of individuals who get involved and helps to keep them involved.

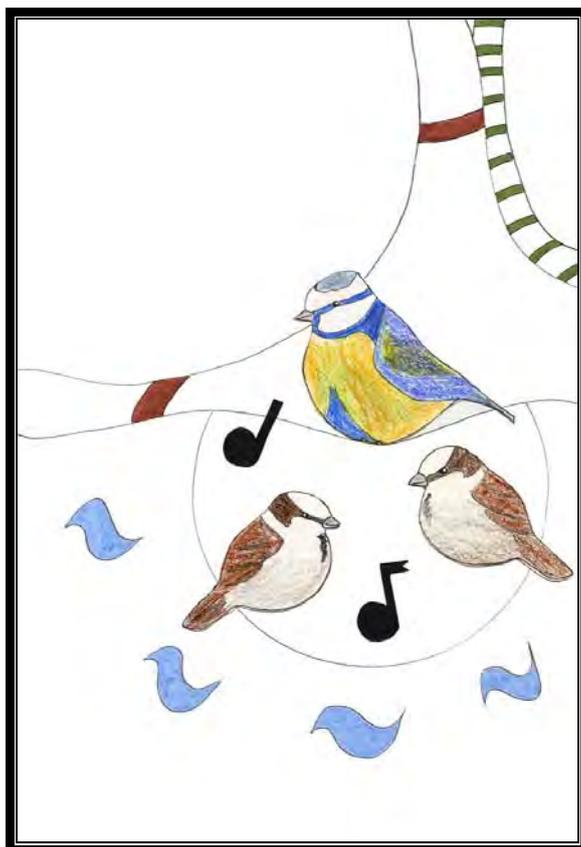
Although this was the first time that story dialogue had been used within the project, most of the volunteers were keen to try the approach and were very positive about the experience. We were slightly concerned that filming the sessions might inhibit discussion but in fact this proved not to be the case. People were very open in their comments and took advantage of the opportunity to reflect on their own engagement with BFEP and DightlyConnect and to think and plan for the future.

While volunteers in each story dialogue group had their own ideas and perspectives on BFEP and DightlyConnect, some common themes were evident in relation to these two main research aims.

(1) The interpretation of the 'environment'

It is clear from the research that a very wide interpretation of the 'environment' has been adopted within the BFEP project covering social and cultural dimensions of the environment as well as physical ones. This is evident from the diverse range of initiatives being carried out by the volunteers, with activities ranging from species surveying to drama, and habitat creation to poetry writing. Significantly, the broad way in which the environment is understood seems to have helped to attract people with differing interests to become involved. Once individuals have taken part in one activity, many of them go on to make connections with others doing different things and as a result interact with the environment in multiple ways.

Despite adopting a wide definition of the 'environment', there was a general agreement that the project's focus on the environment was important. Volunteers gained great satisfaction from making a practical difference to the natural environment, both by delivering improvements locally and by tackling wider, global challenges. For some working out of doors provided the inspiration for their activities, while for others being in the natural environment had a positive impact on their health and well being.



'People and nature working together'

(2) The operation of BFEP and DightyConnect

The second aim of the research was to reflect on the way in which BFEP/DightyConnect operates and to learn from this for the future. A number of features of the approach taken within BFEP and DightyConnect were highlighted as being particularly positive.

Open and inclusive

There was general agreement that the group was open and inclusive in the way it operates and maintaining this was seen as vital in allowing anyone with an interest in the environment to join in and feel welcome. The focus on the environment was felt to be a key factor in making the project inclusive and by stressing the environment we find that we are approached by individuals who do not wish to be involved with particular named disadvantaged or excluded groups. Significantly, our records show that over 70% of our volunteers fall into excluded groups.

Intergenerational working

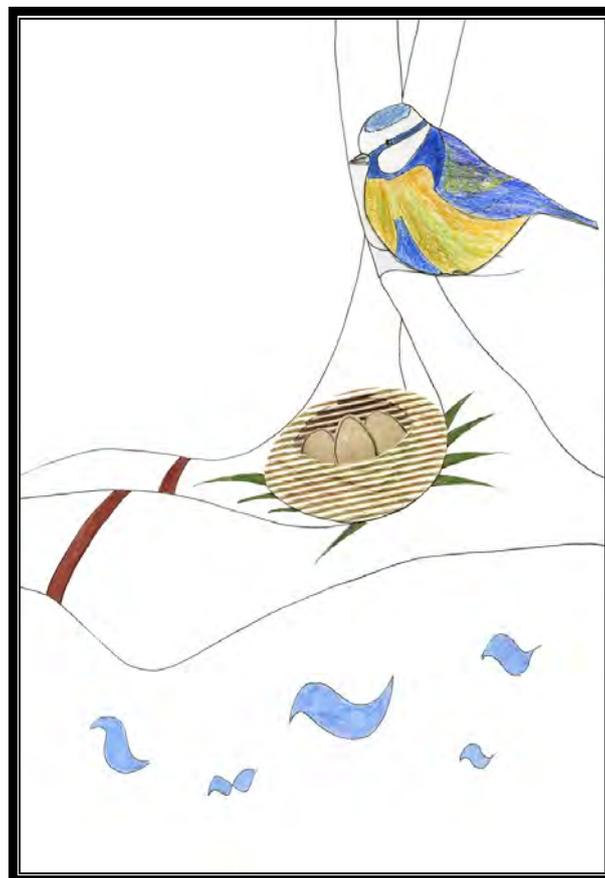
The intergenerational nature of many of the activities was refreshing, with opportunities to share ideas and skills. Volunteers from all age groups enjoyed working with people of different ages and felt this was something to be encouraged in the future.

Start with volunteers ideas

Volunteers appreciated the way in which projects start from the ideas and topics that they are passionate about. Sometimes these ideas do not have an obvious connection to the natural environment, but they are helped to make that connection and given support and encouragement.

Make things happen

Participants recognised the project's commitment to enabling people to 'make things happen on the ground' which benefit the natural heritage as well as local communities within their local area. The fact that BFEP encourages and supports 'doers' rather than 'talkers' and was one of the reasons why people are attracted to the project and are motivated to stay involved. We do not 'end gain', but rather gradually move groups and individuals towards project outcomes, by providing training, removing 'red tape', securing funding, resources, etc to deliver quality human scale projects, within a human time scale in local green spaces.



'Make things happen on the ground'

Project worker post

It was stated by all the groups that the employment of a project worker with a wide range of skills and knowledge and a commitment to make things happen on the ground was crucial to the ongoing success of the Project.

Value local knowledge and skills

Participants recognised that workers within BFEP and DightyConnect truly value the communities' skills and knowledge about the local area and capitalize on these to deliver the project. It is clear that certain individuals realised that they had more knowledge than the professionals, especially if they are supported to present their information in a variety of ways.

Based within a variety of communities

Individuals commented that it was beneficial to be able to work in a variety of communities, including those which feature within the Scottish Index of Multiple Disadvantage. We have also found that this has been beneficial when it comes to accessing funding. In particular SNH as well as other funders such as Voluntary Action Fund would have been unlikely to have continued to fund our work had we not been working in communities such as Douglas, Whitfield, Kirkton etc.

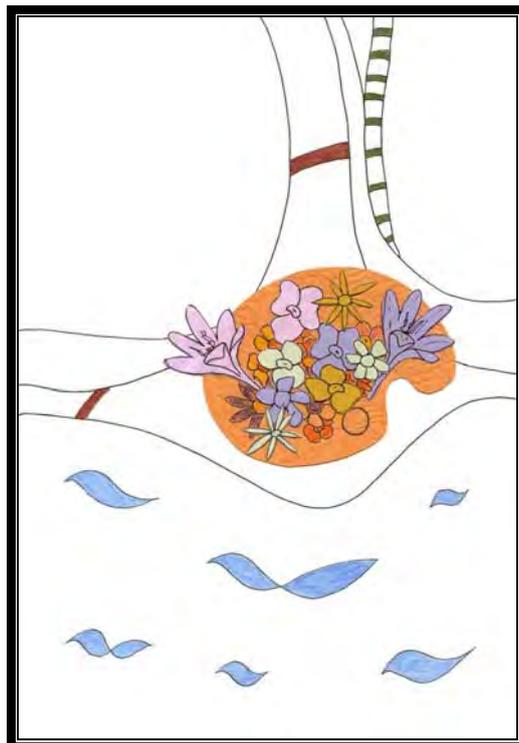
Regular conservation activities in green spaces

Key for everyone was the delivery of practical action in local green spaces. People are keen to be able to work in places close to where they lived. The importance of working in as wide a range of public green spaces as possible could not be underestimated. We currently work in formal parks, along cycle routes, in Local Nature Reserves, SSSI's, in newly planted and mature woodland, in sand dunes, community centre gardens, local peoples gardens, etc. We have found that this has been an important dimension in developing and securing bids to future funding bodies.

(3) The use of the story dialogue technique

This was the first time that any in the group had used the story dialogue approach. However, both the project worker and an experienced researcher were able to successfully and enjoyably facilitate the sessions using the story dialogue approach. Importantly it provided a clear structure that could be explained in an open and straightforward way to those taking part. In the past there has been reluctance amongst volunteers to play an active role in evaluation processes. However, the story dialogue technique provided an opportunity to listen and value people's stories and therefore make this part of a more inclusive action research process.

In order to enable as many people as possible to take part in the action research, we decided to run a number of small groups in a wide variety of locations rather than hold a single event. This resulted in a large number of volunteers' stories and views being included in the research. In all cases we ensured that volunteer's expenses were paid and that child care was provided for those who took part. Feedback from the groups about their involvement in the process has been very positive and in all cases the sessions went on for the allocated time with few embarrassing silences. It appears that for both participators and facilitators alike the experience was enjoyable and was something that everyone would undertake again.



'Producing visual outcomes of our work'

We took care to mention at the beginning to all those who took part that the sessions were being recorded by DVD and audio. Fortunately the film maker was known to many of the participants and we believe that this, as well as her 'low key' way of filming, meant that it was not seen as a barrier to the discussions. It was also helpful that the groups knew each other and at least one of the facilitators. We found the DVD and audio footage invaluable for both reflection on the process and to catch those really meaningful statements which often are difficult to recall. The video also acted to enable accurate documentation of the stories and views, which when summarised in written form often lose their meaning and significance. On reflection we felt that the use of live recording of the sessions was of great benefit to both BFEP and those who took part in the process.

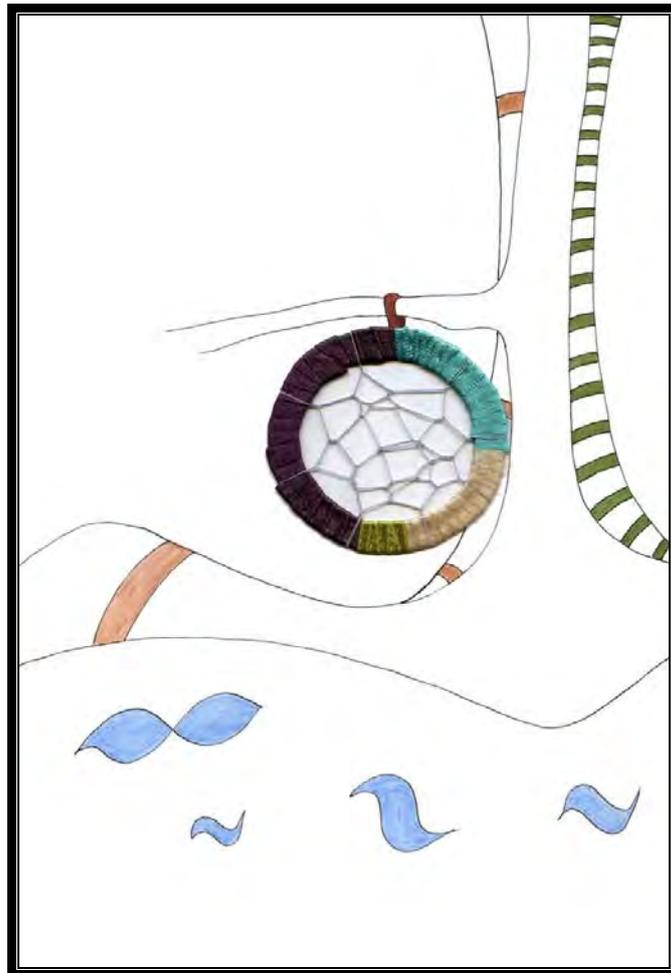
7. Conclusions: Where do we go from here?

We were pleased to be offered the opportunity by SNH and SCDC to be part of this action research project and the input from SCDC staff was very helpful to enable us to draw up our research plan and go on to identify the Story dialogue technique as an appropriate evaluation tool. We found the technique to be flexible and that it enabled us to adapt its main process to meet the needs of the wide variety of individuals and groups that we work with.

The findings from the research confirmed the importance of the natural environment to the volunteers, both in terms of their interest in making a difference to their local area and in relation to their health and wellbeing. There also seems to be significant value in taking a wide interpretation of the environment, both in attracting volunteers and securing funding. Looking to the future, we recognise the importance of continuing to develop projects which combine natural heritage dimensions with cultural and artistic ones, reflecting the reality of people's everyday lives.

BFEP and DightyConnect have adopted a flexible and responsive way of working, where the agenda evolves through the commitment of the volunteers rather than being imposed or directed by the Local Management Group. While this approach can be difficult to manage and may mean that not every initiative is taken forward, it was found to be central to the on-going success of the groups. We felt that story dialogue was able to reflect and evaluate our flexible way of working. It was also meaningful, since it was able to be adapted and then conducted by volunteers as part of an ongoing development process of BFEP and DightyConnect.

We also appreciate that many funders are increasingly requiring us to measure the difference that their funding makes, not just to document the outputs that have been delivered. The use of story dialogue enabled us to do this as it helps show the change in individuals and groups over time, which can be related to funding priorities. We also appreciated the opportunity to make a short DVD to go alongside this report, since it will be a versatile output to provide to current and future funders. Often DVD's 'reach parts that reports don't reach' and importantly, they are more likely to be watched by volunteers and other groups. This means that the research has been shared by a wider range of people and groups, than would have been reached had we produced a report alone.



'Enabling people to follow their dreams'

Our project team and acknowledgements

Many thanks must go in the first instance to the story tellers, Alex, Forbes, Sophia, Elaine, Noreen and Niall who led each of the groups, as well as all other participants who were active and engaged in the process. Namely:

Mosaic group

Noreen -story teller
Ellen
Lynn
Frances

Eco poetry group

Niall - story teller
Jarn
Forbes
Lydia

Spirit of the Dighty group

Elaine - story teller

Jarn

Niall

Marie

Irene

Niamh

Aedan

Caitlin

Teresa

Forbes

BFEP Local Management Group

Forbes- story teller

Kevin

Georgia

Mary

Gail

Noreen

Naill

Fiona

Derek

DightyConnect

Alex- story teller

Anne

Lorna

Debbie

Nature Nutters

Sophia- story teller

Isabell

Niamh

Antonia

Katie

Thanks also to Barbara and Ann who put together the action research plan, facilitated the story dialogue sessions, wrote the report and guided the DVD editing.

To Tracey who coped with the many different locations to record the story dialogue sessions and edit the footage into an excellent DVD.

Most importantly to Elaine from Scottish Natural Heritage and Kate from Scottish Community Development Centre who have encouraged, guided and supported us to make sure that we keep to the timetable and complete good pieces of action research.

Finally, for the funding from Scottish Natural Heritage to enable this project to be undertaken.

