



Scottish Natural Heritage
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People and nature: learning through doing Action research programme

SAMH (Scottish Association for Mental Health)
Chrysalis Project, Dundee
Focus group report

August 2010



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.

The SAMH Chrysalis Project was not able to undertake a full action research project. A focus group was held instead, led by Scottish Community Development Centre and Scottish Natural Heritage.

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Prepared by

Kate McHendry (Scottish Community Development Centre) and Elaine Macintosh (Scottish Natural Heritage)

1. Context

SAMH (the Scottish Association for Mental Health) put themselves forward to be involved in **People and nature: learning through doing** in the early stages of the programme's development – April 2009. Initially, SAMH's Employment Manager envisaged that their involvement would centre around their work-based project with the Forestry Commission in Aberdeen. However, due to a several month gap in the 'People and nature' programme, due to a unsuccessful Lottery application, when re-approached, SAMH decided to involve Chrysalis, based in Dundee.

The Chrysalis Project is a horticulture training service that offers progression towards SVQ qualification in horticulture and the John Muir Award for people with a mental health issue. The project manager was keen to be involved in the 'People and nature: learning through doing' programme. The rationale was that, although the members of this group had chosen to pursue a career in the outdoors, they did not readily or easily engage with their natural heritage – how/why was this the case? It was felt that this group was in an ideal position to cast some light on these issues.

SCDC and Chrysalis explored how best to approach and involve the group. It was decided that the Chrysalis Manager would inform the group of the opportunity to get involved and then introduce the individuals to SCDC who would take things forward with the support of a sessional worker from Chrysalis. Initially two people volunteered – one female, one male. The female withdrew after realising that she would need to work with other people; the male left a little later as he did not feel well enough. Really, his interest was in developing a questionnaire and doing the data input and analysis, this was where his strengths lay. Developing a Research Plan was not his thing.

It was decided that rather than lose the knowledge we were already gathering and experiencing regarding the issues that hindered this group from engaging with the natural environment, it would make sense to build on this – by holding a focus group with them.

2. Focus group, 12 April 2010

The focus group was led by Kate McHendry (Scottish Community Development Centre) and Elaine Macintosh (Scottish Natural Heritage) on 12 April 2010 at the Chrysalis Project, Dundee.

The theme of the focus group was “**What helps and hinders people with a mental health issue engaging with the outdoors?**”

Focus group participants

Participants	Time with Chrysalis	Reason for choosing Chrysalis
Male	5 years (this is last year)	Came for something to do – a therapy – because I can’t find anything. Didn’t come as a trainee gardener, but have learned lots.
Male	Just under 1 year	Interacting with other people.
Male	Over 6 years (since Jan 04)	Was pushed into coming – but also doing it for something to do.
Female	Just over a year (since Feb 09) – <i>but maybe involved previously? (see reason)</i>	Came back to learn as much as I can about gardening – so I can be outside. Gardening, nature... gives me a buzz.
Female	Worked here part-time for just over a year	I’m a self-employed gardener and Chrysalis is good because of the company.

Methodology

To aid us in engaging and building a rapport with the participants over a short space of time, we felt that to do an activity that would help focus attention yet not bring too much attention on to individuals would be of optimum impact. So, we decided to focus on maps (1) of Dundee {detailed} and (2) of Dundee and beyond. We brought along 2 sets of maps, one set to represent “present engagement” and the second “hoped for future engagement”. We also capitalised on the good weather that day and had the focus group in the greenhouse so that we were very much on the gardeners “turf”.

We began by asking the gardeners to identify on the maps, all the places they currently engaged with and what type of activities they did there. We asked them to plot the area with a sticky dot and then write the activity on a post it. Below is what they shared with us.

Present engagement with the outdoors

Geographical area	Activity
Templeton woods	Walk parents' dog
Miley old railway track	Walk
Dundee Law	Allotment
Caird Park	Golf
Dighty Burn	Cleaning up (<i>past</i>)
Eastern Cemetery	Go for a walk and look at the gravestones
Port of Dundee	Go for a walk over the bridge occasionally
Dawson Park Demonstration Garden	Outing with Chrysalis
Broughty Ferry Beach	Outings with family x 2
Dunkeld Hermitage	Walk
Kinnoul Hill (Perth)	Hill walking
St Andrews	Walk along the beach

Motivators for doing the above were:

- Walking dog with Mum and Dad
- Enjoyment
- Exercise
- Feels better
- For learning/education
- Peace (*"beach/cove so peaceful"*)

When asked if there were any **barriers** that they may have had to overcome to have been able to do these in the past, the group did not respond. It was unclear if this was because there weren't any barriers, or they had forgotten them, or just that they were so insignificant in their lives of the present that they didn't wish to share them.

Hoped for future engagement with the outdoors

Geographical area	Activity
Camperdown Country Park	Visit more often with family (maybe 4 or 5 times more per year)
Invergowrie	Visit more often (just next door to Dundee)
Lochee swimming and leisure centre	Go swimming more
Botanic Gardens	Have a proper look around
Riverside playing fields	Like to go and watch/find out the activities it has to offer
Dundee Law	Visit and see best view of Dundee
Dudhope Castle and Park	Visit – very old good for history
Across Dundee	Play football

Across Dundee	Play golf
Demonstration Garden	Visit – very interesting for gardeners
Glamis Castle	Visit
Tentsmuir coast	To see seals
Perth	Explore area

We then asked the gardeners **“What currently hinders you doing these activities?”**

- Feel silly going for a walk on my own – without dog (what is the purpose of it then?)
- Someone to go with (been before but wouldn't go on my own)
- Would go further afield if I were a driver (out of Dundee) – public transport infrequent – really need to plan
- Money / cost – lots of places you need to pay in
- Visiting new places - need to decide to be a tourist in your own area
- Know it's there but you never go, there's always tomorrow
- You need to get something out of it
- Hardly anyone walks across the bridge to Fife

And then **“What would help you do these activities?”**

- Kick up the bum!
- Company, someone to go with (*3 responses*)
- Groups – eg hill walking – but not everyone likes a group thing
- Bus runs / day trips – still run by council – leaflets - but don't advertise well, need to know how to get info
- You need to be a certain type of character
- Or be motivated
- Or be brought up enjoying the outdoors to be able to do it – conditioning
- When you haven't had something how do you know you are missing it
- Appreciate it more when you are older, more open to it the more you mature

3. Feedback session, 10 May 2010

We returned to Chrysalis on 10 May to feed back our findings to the focus group participants and check that we had captured their input accurately. We were also joined (with the permission of the original participants) by an additional 5 gardeners.

The participants totalled 9: 4 from the original focus group, plus 5 new participants (1 of whom was a worker). Age range 33-55 years, 2 car owners, all live in Dundee.

The session was again led by Kate McHendry (SCDC) and Elaine Macintosh (SNH).

The original findings were confirmed and agreed by the participants, with only a few additions noted below.

Present engagement with the outdoors (2)

Geographical area	Activity
Camperdown Park	
Dighty Environmental Group	Volunteering (<i>past</i>) - one of the new participants
Moors around Scarborough	Just back from week of walking (with brother)

Hoped for future engagement with the outdoors (2)

Geographical area	Activity
Riverside playing fields	Also to go for walking dog
Claypotts demonstration garden	(went before with Chrysalis)
Killin	

“What hinders / helps you engaging with the outdoors, volunteering etc?”

The list of barriers and enablers recorded in the first focus group (see Section 2) was reviewed with the group. The group were in agreement with these findings, and were particularly responsive on the issues outlined below in Section 4.

We then asked the group “**Is there anything Chrysalis could do through their activities etc to overcome some of the barriers?**”

- John Muir Award opens practically everyone (at Chrysalis) up to enjoying natural spaces and the history of John Muir.

Finally we asked the group **“Have you done any of the things you talked about wanting to do at the last session?”**

- Kept on going out with parents walking dogs
- Went to Camperdown Park (as part of a stopping-smoking group event)

After end of formal session

Two gardeners, separately, both in their final year at Chrysalis talked about how they will have to find something *to “fill the gap”* after Chrysalis – one, so I can still be outside all day long; the other, so I can find some way of using the skills I’ve learned here. Discussed volunteering opportunities in area from prepared list (*).

* An information sheet was left with the group on natural heritage volunteering / outdoor opportunities and nature reserves in the Dundee area (prepared by SNH), plus leaflets from Dighty Environmental Group.

4. Main issues from the focus group and feedback session

The following issues had the most energetic response in the focus group discussions – the hot spots – and include physical, intellectual/mental, social and emotional factors.

- 4.1. Someone to go with.** Not having someone to accompany them on trips outdoors seemed to be a major barrier and one that resonated throughout the group, both in the initial session and in the feedback/follow up sessions. To share your experience with someone was important – *“it’s better to go with someone – good to have someone to talk to about a place”*. It also seemed to make the gardeners feel less self conscious – *“feel silly going out for a walk without the dog”*. Yet, there appeared to be little evidence of socialising between the gardeners; this was confirmed by workers, who said that if someone does put out an invitation then it is unlikely that anyone will take them up on it. Also, the group were quite specific that this did not mean that they wanted “big group” activities. *“Not everyone likes going about in a big group”*.
- 4.2. Conditioning.** There was recognition from the group of how, if you haven’t experienced the outdoors as a child, for example been taken on a hill walk then it can be difficult to do this when you get older as you have no reference points for it, and you don’t know the rules (social mores). This can lead to a lack of confidence in taking up a new activity. (However, it should be noted that the DAMH hill walking group is very popular with two of the gardeners participating and a third planning to join.) Also that you are more likely to revisit places you’ve been to as a child – or to take your own children there. *“I’ve never taken my kids up the hills, or to Braemar, as I’ve never done it. I was never a rambler. You’d think of a rambler as a snob. Middle-class people, not people from inner city areas”*. The group discussed the impact of conditioning in a matter of fact way, we did not pick up any hint of “poor me or blame” in it.
- 4.3. You don’t miss what you’ve never had.** Linked to the above was the notion of *“how do you know you are missing something if you have never experienced it?”*. If you don’t know that an internal need you have (for space, for quiet) will be met by a visit to the outdoors, how do you know to pursue it to have that need met.
- 4.4. Being a tourist in your own city.** Participants noted that you have to make a conscious decision to visit the outdoors in your own area. They said how complacency can settle in when *“there is always tomorrow to visit...”*. *“Maybe it’s just our make up (human nature) to look elsewhere for things...”* (referring to why we don’t appreciate and enjoy what’s on our doorstep – more interested in what’s available elsewhere).

- 4.5. Motivation.** Participants reflected that you really need to be motivated to get involved in the outdoors, to make up your mind that you are going to do it and get organised so that you can. Most nodded when it was said (by a participant) that you need a *“kick up the bum”* to go and do it.
- 4.6. Transport.** Few participants were car owners and getting to places by public transport was seen as a barrier, due to infrequent services and the need to plan. Bus runs (organised by Council) were thought to be *“more for older people – you don’t see young people doing that”*, as well as issues around how to find out about them. Chrysalis organises bus trips – eg to Gardening Scotland – and these were liked.
- 4.7. Cost.** Cost was mentioned as a barrier, but mostly in terms of whether a trip/place seems *“worth the money”*. Costs related to the cost of getting to a place, and also entry fees (although it was noted that most natural heritage sites, parks and the wider countryside, are free).

5. Discussion with Chrysalis staff, 10 May 2010

After the feedback meeting with the trainee gardeners, SCDC and SNH staff met with Chrysalis staff to share and explore learning further.

Asked whether Chrysalis had the resources to arrange trips?

If Chrysalis organised trips, some people would definitely go and others wouldn't.

We have limited resources for trips – no transport – the only minibus driver we can access through the college is only available on Wednesday mornings and the driver is currently on long-term sick leave.

Past trips organised by Chrysalis included:

- Redhall Walled Garden
- Scotia Seeds
- Edinburgh Botanic Garden
- Dundee Botanic Garden
- Gardening Scotland
- The Miley

Asked whether SAMH has a buddying scheme?

(In context of participants saying that someone to go with would be a big help)

Staff didn't think so. Some of the gardeners have SAMH befrienders who take them out but it's mainly local places – cinema, pub etc.

The gardeners don't socialise at all outside of Chrysalis – even when people have joined the group and made suggestions/invitations.

When trips are organised, they are usually poorly attended – again perhaps the dislike of group activities.

For John Muir Award level 3, the trainees have to go out and discover a place for themselves. They tend to do this on their own, rather than asking if others want to do it in groups.

Staff brought up issues around **'entry costs' – especially for support workers.** Places like National Trust charge for entry – it would be helpful if support workers got in free, like they do at cinema/football/etc (as either they have to claim back via expenses, or their client has to pay for them to get in).

Asked whether SAMH works with young people (In context of conditioning as a factor in whether adults engage with outdoors)

SAMH work tends to be with over 18s; currently developing some projects with young people. The Evergreen Project has links with local schools – also Chrysalis – planning to offer John Muir Discovery Award to all Dundee primary schools. This may help for developing reference points to the outdoors to pull on when older.

Asked about signposting from Chrysalis to other opportunities

During their last 6 months at Chrysalis, gardeners are signposted to information on: employment, education, volunteering and even finding an allotment. Since the format for this changed, people do now take up these opportunities.

To suggestion of signposting to conservation volunteering opportunities throughout the Chrysalis programme, staff answered that there will always be people who won't engage... even those people who have the skills and confidence to do.

Asked whether there is anything SNH could do to get people involved?

The best way of engaging people is for SNH site staff (and other natural heritage sites / volunteering projects) to go out and meet service users at mental health projects such as Chrysalis – talk to them about what's available – or organise trips so they can come and try – **people need to 'learn by doing'** (ie for service users to engage with the outdoors – and for natural heritage staff to engage with people with mental health issues).

SAMH website (training section) has info on training they provide to organisations on how to work with people with mental health issues (in the workplace and in dealing with the public – eg training for the Police). 1 in 4 people has a mental health issue.

There is such diversity in mental health issues – and beneath the symptoms there is also the variability of people – so it is very hard to draw findings on how to engage that can be generalised.

However, research shows that people who are excluded / stigmatised relate more strongly than others to conservation / environmental issues, as they feel akin to a planet/nature that is isolated and under threat (*Mind, England; Sainsbury Centre*).

Comments about the research process

Chrysalis staff commented that the group really enjoyed being involved in the research / engaging with it. Perhaps there could have been potential for further work – eg a modified version of the action research approach that was led by SCDC/SNH with the gardeners brought in to deliver key parts of the research. '*Knowing what is expected of me*' – the unknown – is a big factor in getting people involved.