

Argyll and Bute Hospital, Lochgilphead Monday 18th November 2013

“The benefits to aspects of physical, mental, emotional and social health of enjoyable outdoor activity are well evidenced and present opportunities to reduce many long term conditions (Great Outdoors: How Our Natural Health Service Uses Green Space to Improve Wellbeing - Faculty of Public Health). From a clinical perspective there is increasing interest as to complement existing medical treatment. From a health improvement viewpoint, the achievement of positive, sustainable health behaviour change is rooted in the motivation of individuals and communities, and should take account of their wider circumstances.”

Dan Jenkins, NHS Highland Health Promotion Specialist



Synopsis:

As part of the CWA Enterprising Woods project, CWA ran a Health in Woods seminar in partnership with CWA members, Blarbuie Woodland Enterprise and Abriachan Forest Trust and NHS Highland. The seminar included presentations from partners involved in delivering health-based activities within community woodlands plus workshops and discussions including how to set up activities, practical activity sessions and a site visit to Blarbuie Woods. The event was free to community groups and health based organisations.

Seminar Objective:

This seminar aimed to highlight the benefits of community woodland experiences for people with poor mental and/or physical health. This seminar was for people involved in community woodlands, working with or who wish to work with people with poor mental/physical health, health service providers and those working in education or using the outdoors. CWA aimed to bring people together from across the community woodlands and health sectors to share knowledge and experience to continue to develop and provide healthy opportunities for communities.

Blarbuie Woods form part of the sanctuary of Lochgilphead's Argyll and Bute Hospital. Restored in 2007 they feature all-abilities access, sculptures and artworks. The woods are open to all and feature a mix of native and exotic trees. Blarbuie Woodland Enterprise manage the woods and specialise in running activities for people with poor mental and physical health. More info can be found at www.blarbuiewoodland.org

Abriachan Forest Trust, near Inverness, delivers outdoor learning in many forms from accredited Forest School activities and Level 3 training, to John Muir Trust and youth achievement awards alongside Skills for Work SVQ courses and education focused continued professional development (CPD) training. Specialising in delivering woodland based activities which improve people's wellbeing both mental and physical, the Trust has a successful track record working with NHS clients from New Craigs hospital, community support groups such as Highland Birchwood, and APEX who work with substance misusers. More info can be found at www.abriachan.org.uk



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Location and Catering:

The event was held in the Lees Centre of the Argyll and Bute Hospital, Lochgilphead. Catering was provided by local vegan pop-up café Catch a Carrot.

2 short films of the day are available to view online at <http://youtu.be/VHOKucmDGGY> and http://youtu.be/ABlx_k_DYik

Photographs from the day are online at <http://flic.kr/s/aHsjNrgbgg>

Programme:

- 9.30am Tea and coffee on arrival*
- 10.00am Welcome – Diane Oliver, Community Woodlands Association
- 10.05am Setting the Scene – Dan Jenkins, NHS Highland
- 10.35am Using Woodlands for Working to Health – Hugh Fife, Blarbuie Woodlands Enterprise
- 11.15am Tea and coffee break*
- 11.30am Closing the Circle, from full time care to returning to the community – Suzann Barr, Abriachan Forest Trust
- 12.10pm Behind the Scenes, referring clients to other services from the NHS perspective - Dr Grace Fergusson, NHS Highland
- 12.40pm Woods for Health: including highlights from Branching Out, Green Exercise Partnership and Greenspace design for health and wellbeing programmes – Kevin Lafferty, Forestry Commission Scotland
- 1.00pm Lunch*
- 2.00pm Workshops
- 2.45pm Tea and coffee break*
- 3.00pm Workshops
- 3.45pm Summing Up

Workshops

There were 3 workshops offering the chance to meet others, hear first hand about experiences and make new links for the future. The workshops ran twice enabling delegates to attend 2 of them.

Workshop 1: Blarbuie Woods Guided Tour

Hugh Fife led a walk round Blarbuie Woods – participants gained the opportunity to see first hand the trails, different access zones, habitats and timber products as well as hear how these are used to improve health and support those with poor mental/ physical health.

Workshop 2: Forest School Experience

Roni Smith, Abriachan Forest Trust led a practical workshop looking at fun activities that work well with vulnerable groups.

Workshop 3: Linking with the NHS

Morevain Martin, Argyll Voluntary Action outlined how to make links with NHS structures both locally and across Scotland.



Those Involved:

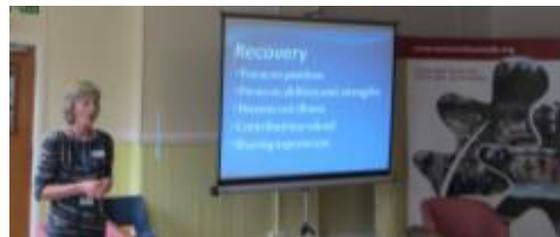
Speakers and Workshop Leaders

Hugh Fife	Blarbuie Woodland Enterprise
Dan Jenkins	NHS Highland
Dr Grace Fergusson	NHS Highland
Suzann Barr	Abriachan Forest Trust
Roni Smith	Abriachan Forest Trust
Kevin Lafferty	Forestry Commission Scotland
Morevain Martin	Argyll Voluntary Action
Diane Oliver	Community Woodlands Association



Delegates

Becs Barker	Community Contacts Project, Carr Gomm
Anna Hill	Dalmally Community Orchard
Anne Rae	Dalmally Community Orchard
Belinda Rowlands	The Seed Box
Blair Duncanson	Wild About Wood
Brenda Bratt	Blarbuie Woodland Enterprise
Colin Ferguson	Galgael Trust
Di Steele	C3
Fraser Macmillan	Healthy Options
Hilary Crawford	Blarbuie Woodland Enterprise
Jan Dunlop	Mull and Iona Ranger Service
Jane Goodwin	Dalmally Community Orchard
Janet Buchanan	Dalmally Community Orchard
Jess Grant	Blarbuie Woodland Enterprise
Kate Craig	Dalmally Community Orchard
Katie Galbraith	Healthy Options
Peter Creech	Blarbuie Woodland Enterprise
Tracy Chambers	Kintyre Link Club
David Douglas	Blarbuie Woodland Enterprise
Kevin Smith	Ardroy Outdoor Centre (Cormonachan Community Woods)
Willie Russell	Campbeltown Community Orchard and Garden



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Welcome – Diane Oliver, Community Woodlands Association

Diane welcomed everyone to the Seminar and the Lees Centre, Argyll & Bute Hospital. She outlined the day and encouraged everyone to network as much as possible.

Setting the Scene – Dan Jenkins, Health Promotion Specialist, NHS Highland

Dan introduced his presentation with a true story illustrating the benefits of being and working in the woods. He then focussed about what is meant by health - defined as physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing and highlighted that the day is about hearing about good examples, sharing experiences and coming up with new ideas.

Healthy activity is about gaining health benefits with it being recommended that everyone does 30 minutes of moderate activity 5 days a week (where moderate means getting the heart beating a bit faster, feeling a bit warmer, and breathing a bit harder; whilst still being able to hold a conversation with someone, but maybe not sing along to your favourite song). Health Gain rather than Weight Loss as the main goal is a positive view of getting healthier that may, as a by-product, include weight loss. It is important to have healthy relationships with ourselves, with food and with fun activities. Dan invited the group to answer questions about their own health, demonstrating that we don't all do the things we know are good for us all the time and this can be for a variety of reasons. Group discussions were held to describe health in 3 words and groups came up with:

- Self-perceived wellbeing
- Perception of self-worth
- Happy balanced lifestyle
- Happy with self
- Happiness positivity support
- Energy motivation happy

There are many different impacts and influences on health and Dan outlined some including:

- Individual lifestyle
- Social and community networks
- General socio-economic, cultural and environmental conditions - you can tell more about some people's health from their postcode than their BMI.

Delegates then closed their eyes, visualised themselves in a wood and thinking of the 3 health words considered how this wood can achieve these things. By pressing their little finger to their thumbs delegates then 'dialed in' this vision to hold on to for the day.





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Using Woodlands for Working to Health – Hugh Fife, Blarbuie Woodland Enterprise

This presentation is available to view online at: http://youtu.be/_y5yGZtcUSw

Hugh gave the background and history to Blarbuie Woodland which was planted as part of the hospital policies – they were never fenced and always open to the public. The woodland deteriorated as use of the hospital declined and Reforesting Scotland worked with the NHS to set up an initiative to renovate the woodlands in 2004. In 2012 Blarbuie Woodland Enterprise (BWE) became an organisation in it's own right and now manages the woods on behalf of the hospital. The 10acre woods are wildlife rich and consist of 2 areas – the lower which is easily accessible and the upper which is harder to get to and more open.

Originally the majority of people working in and using the woods as part of BWE were hospital patients but in recent years this has widened to include ex patients, older people groups, Mid Argyll hospital users, schools, disabled groups, people with addition issues, people with sensory impairment, people with learning difficulties, scouts/ cubs, general members of the public and new links with .

There are usually around 10 people working in the woods undertaking a range of activities including:

- building and maintaining the path networks including the all abilities access
- creation of new trails and picnic areas in the upper area to open it up further
- gathering seed, growing and transplanting in the plant nursery for use in the woods or sale
- making compost from leaves, grass cuttings, shredded non confidential hospital waste, cardboard and twigs
- after the storms - milling, horselogging and construction of a new shed

BWE employs local skilled staff/ support to demonstrate and teach and also pays a notional amount to workers (which does not affect benefits). As a social enterprise, BWE take on external contracts including strimming paths in Kilmartin Glen and fixing boardwalks at Tarbert.

Other activities in the woodland and hospital include:

- Paths for all health walks which are accompanied by a physiotherapist and are weather dependant due to the vulnerable nature of the groups
- Woodcraft workshops utilizing the hospital occupational therapy workshop to make musical instruments, furniture etc
- Music
- Photography

Volunteers and participants gain skills, confidence, routine and enjoy the work – with people finding an activity that suits their skills - some folk prefer fiddly jobs and some prefer manual labour. BWE ensures that activities are flexible enough so that the routines/jobs are tailored to the individual's needs, not prescriptive across the board and this works well for NHS referrals.



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Closing the Circle – Suzann Barr, Abriachan Forest Trust

This presentation is available to view online at: <http://youtu.be/AlblZNYRF8>

Abriachan Forest Trust purchased 1,200 acres of woodland and open hill 15 years ago. The local population is scattered and numbers c.120. Key aims for the community owned woodland include access, biodiversity, employment, outdoor education and recreation.

Work in the woods has expanded over the years and AFT now work in partnership with a range of organisations including: Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage (AFT has 60 year management agreement), Woodland Trust Scotland (own neighbouring woods), APEX (project working with Criminal Justice Services), NHS including Birchwood Highland recover centre (work with adults with poor mental health and/or moving out from New Craigs Hospital), Highlife Highland (trading arm of the Highland Council), Moniack Writers Centre and schools. Partners are now seeking funding to keep working with their group at AFT and each partner match funds the other.

AFT use a range of activities – often built on those used in forest schools to encourage confidence, team building, literacy and numeracy, communication, nutrition and physical activity. Practical activities include walking, path building and maintenance, greenwood and wood craft, fishing, cooking, geochaching, cycling and bike maintenance, poetry and writing. Often participants will work towards awards such as the John Muir Trust Award or a Rural Skills qualification.

The participants come through a referral process from the partnership agency ie NHS/ Criminal Justice Services/ education services/ social work services and AFT work with the groups to ensure the programme of activities is designed to meet their needs. Groups attend in all weathers and AFT has an on site classroom with woodburning stove with the all abilities access trails nearby.

Suzann outlined how different people responded to different activities and learned techniques to manage their health issues with many initially reluctant participants discovering they enjoyed the activities and look forward to coming out each week. In terms of ‘closing the circle’ examples include:

- Young people excluded from school, gaining skills and moving into employment – with one young person in particular referred by social work, returned to school, then took up an activity agreement placement with AFT and is now in college and happy to speak about his journey.
- Breaking the revolving door cycle for patients with enduring/ severe poor mental health





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Behind the Scenes – Dr Grace Fergusson, Consultant Psychiatrist / Clinical Director, Argyll & Bute Hospital, NHS Highland

This presentation is available to view online at: <http://youtu.be/LjFDcEWgudg>

At the Argyll & Bute Hospital here in Lochgilphead there are now only 29 of the original 600 patient beds left. In years gone by work squads from the hospitals used to go and work on farms picking crops etc, this cheap labour was in time frowned upon and the practice stopped, however with this began the withdrawal from everyday outdoor activities.

Now things are coming round to working outside again this time with a different emphasis – health. The NHS welcomes the flexibility that Blarbuie Woodlands Enterprise offers as when a patient is not well enough to participate in activities they do not have to go and the organisation is not penalised for a ‘non outcome’. They use a physical health questionnaire which is completed prior to undertaking the first walk and then let leaders know if there are any changes in their health.

The Argyll & Bute Hospital directly links with the Scottish Recovery Network (SRN) (www.scottishrecovery.net) and the emphasis now focuses on what people can do rather than what they can't and look at the person rather than the illness. The SRN is Scotland wide and NHS Highland is ahead in terms of introducing SRN indicators.

“Recovery is being able to live a meaningful and satisfying life, as defined by each person, in the presence or absence of symptoms. It is about having control over and input into your own life. Each individual's recovery, like his or her experience of the mental health problems or illness, is a unique and deeply personal process.”

In terms of creating wellness, the NHS is now focusing on awareness and mindfulness as a treatment. Patients now complete a WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Plan) and more information is available on the SRN website at www.scottishrecovery.net/WRAP/wellness-recovery-actions-planning.html . NHS Highland now has WRAP facilitators.

It is recognised that even a short time in hospital leads to a level of institutionalisation and that after only a few weeks in hospital people need support to rehabilitate back into ‘normal’ life. The hospital now always sets and estimated discharge date, which works well with patients. Here at this hospital the woodlands provide great opportunities to meet rehabilitation aims by increasing confidence and self-awareness and providing real training.



Q and A included starting the process of working in partnership with the NHS/ working with vulnerable clients; third sector involvement and the roll out of social prescribing by GPs.





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Woods for Health – Kevin Lafferty, Access, Health and Recreation Advisor, Forestry Commission Scotland

This presentation is available to view online at: <http://youtu.be/vQIFxbDreTE>

Kevin focussed on Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS)/ NHS partnerships including Greening the NHS Estate and Green Exercise Partnerships, acknowledging that working in partnership with large agencies can be challenging particularly from the voluntary sector. Kevin has worked for both the NHS and now for FCS and recognises the many links and benefits.

With health inequalities across Scotland increasing and more affluent communities more likely to have access to quality environments than the less affluent, the environment is high on the public health agenda. Scotland faces many challenges in terms of its aging, obese and workless population. With the emerging self-directed care funding, more patients will have control of their own budget and options for their own health needs.

The FCS Woods for Health Strategy is now backed up with a Woods for Health Action Plan – both are available to download from the FCS website www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-6ZFMZB and includes activities such as:

- Branching Out
- Green gyms
- Greening the NHS estate

Branching Out is a specially created programme of activities promoting equality, health and life expectancy and more information can be found on the website www.forestry.gov.uk/branchingout along with copies of the evaluation. To date Branching Out has only operated across the central belt and borders - there is now work ongoing to look at rolling this out in Highland. Branching Out provides leader training including mental health first aid.

The Green Exercise Partnership is a national task force involving NHS, FCS and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) set up to improve partnership work between the environment Kevin has information packs. A key workstream are the NHS Greenspace projects and examples include Forth Valley and Gartnavel Hospitals. The aim is to adopt a landscape masterplan approach to connect built and natural environments.

With regards to monitoring and evaluation – there is enough evidence to prove that there are health benefits and to act upon this. In terms of documenting benefits SROIs (Social Return on Investment reports) can demonstrate value for money and financial equivalents for activities (more info on SROI at www.thesroinetwork.org). Further evaluations need to cover new ground and be based on medically quantifiable criteria.



Workshops

Workshop 1: Blarbuie Woods Guided Tour

Hugh gave a guided walk round Blarbuie Woods highlighting the different aspects of the woods and group activities. He explained the plans for the new hospital to replace what is left of the existing one. The tour began with passing the upper wood and returned through the lower more accessible lower wood. Plans for the open area between the woodlands include ploughing for growing heritage tatties – partly to build on the history of the land which was originally used for growing crops for the hospital. The interpretation in the woods often carries the creativity of people's individual designs. Hugh highlighted the areas previously damaged in winter storms – many of the paths required repairing and BWE are now milling timber from the windfall and have a new saw mill shed.

Workshop 2: Forest School Experience

Roni led folks on a typical trail exercise with everyone helping to carry kit out to site. Once there they made a camp with tarpaulins on ground (and created a shelter as it was raining). Roni explained that she always takes a safety bag with first aid kit, bothy bag and spare clothes (containing group sizes range from 2 to 8).



The group spent time learning to prepare 5 minute fires on trays using a selection of orange peel, bark, baked cotton cloth (especially good for sparks), Vaseline on It is also good to have Kelly Kettles to make cups of tea. The group then made willow stars with found sticks, elastic bands, decorative strings etc.



Workshop 3: Linking with the NHS

Morevain led a discussion about linking with the NHS and focussed on accessing funding streams including reshaping care for older people (more info here:

www.jitscotland.org.uk/action-areas/reshaping-care-for-older-people), national themed programmes eg break cancer awareness week, mental health month and local funding through the Argyll & Bute health and wellbeing network <http://healthyargyllandbute.co.uk/>. This local funding stream has a £71k annual budget through 7 networks across the area. It is a good idea to contact your local health and wellbeing coordinator and quite often the network will ask the group to go along and present their ideas at a meeting.

Preparation is key and planning a year ahead to fit with themes or funders' timescales can help groups assess what they are willing to get involved with and how they can help contribute to these health issues. Activities can be diverse and other groups have carried out path maintenance, John Muir Trust awards and outdoor theatre.



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Feedback:

The majority of delegates completing feedback forms said that they felt the event in terms of organisation, venue, catering, speakers and workshops was 'good' or 'very good' with a few marking the venue, catering and workshops as 'fair'.

Most felt that the event met their expectations and 3 people felt it partly met their expectations mainly because they were not sure workshop told us about making links to the NHS/ there was not enough emphasis on links to NHS. One delegate commented that the event more than met expectations and it was great to view things from varying perspectives.

People wanted to take part in the seminar because:

- Different activities to do with people who have poor mental health
- To network and discover more about the mental health benefits
- To network and spread the word about reasons to refer to community organisations
- Opportunities to network, acquire information and good practice
- Find out what's going on, make contacts
- I work with people with mental health issues in the community garden
- To learn more about community woodlands
- To get ideas for our community orchard/ woodland
- Networking x 2
- To gain an insight into helping people with medical issues
- To connect to projects on the ground, make contacts, consider transferrable practice
- Strong belief that woodlands are a very healing environment
- To think outside the box – delivering my new project creatively. I'm involved in self directed support so as much creativity to meet support needs is fab
- Wanted to know how to better engage with GPs over improving health and well being
- To learn about what is happening and how I can take part
- As support with Third Sector

The benefits they felt they gained included:

- New contacts
- Connections
- Better knowledge and networking
- Knowledge and networking x 2
- To think outside the box and to light a fire
- Insight into to existing system, contacts and a good feed
- Networking and slight woodland envy! :o)
- Workshops had quite a wide remit. Lots of possibilities
- Funding application tricks, forest school information and the knowledge that I am not alone in trying to do what I do!
- Wider knowledge of other organisations
- Interesting to hear how many involved in woodland projects, diversity
- Learnt about funding and activities that could be used
- Networking x 2
- New ideas and contacts





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With the skills gained, participants will go on to:

- Disseminate to other members of organisation
- Apply the experience to all aspects of the organisation
- Disseminate information on 'recovery network' and be available to share this and include reference to health activities in care plans
- Follow up new contacts
- Talk to a lot of people I hadn't previously considered
- Take our community garden forward with events etc
- Implement in our community orchard/ woodland
- Bring the skills and ideas into my work life
- Feed into current project plans and disseminate practice examples among colleagues
- Follow up contacts and get involved
- More networking

Delegates would like CWA to do next:

- Co-ordinate
- Support us!
- Support development of local schemes such as we heard of today
- Continue with a broad spread of speakers, ideas and practical workshops
- We will contact CWA if we need more info
- Maintain the network, help share practice – emerging as well as current
- Provisional plan for people wishing to get involved

All delegates would recommend others to take part and reasons include:

- Great opportunities to share and learn and inspire
- Today's climate is all about networking and cooperating
- Good for networking and information
- To gain information on what is available
- Excellent networking
- Huge benefit to people
- Networking opportunities

Other comments included:

- Good atmosphere
- Morning session – too much sitting and listening
- I felt the day could've been broken up more – ie a speaker then a workshop and so on. People were getting fidgety after 3 hours sitting down
- Maybe hold one or more set of workshops in the morning to allow a break between speakers
- Possibly have one workshop mid morning and the other mid afternoon (sitting still and listening for 3 hours is a lot)
- A bit short notice to maximise attendance
- Further discussion required to help woodlands get directly involved with helping people with mental illnesses in the woodland environment
- Good presentations
- Really lovely to see so much vegan food – thank you

