Slide 1

Cardiff Metropolitan University | Prifysgol Metropolitan Caerdydd

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Centre for Health, Activity and Wellbeing Research   Canolfan Ymchwil ar gyfer Iechyd, Gweithgarwch a Lles

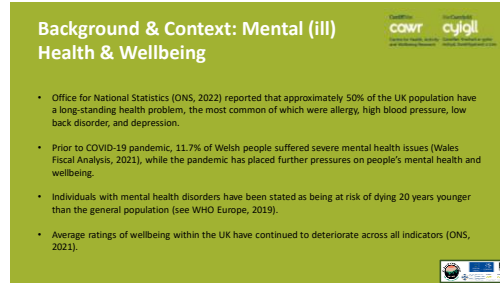**Wild Skills Wild Spaces: An evaluation of an ecotherapy programme**

Paul Sellars, Professor Diane Crone, Dr Jenny Mercer, & Dr Debbie Clayton

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Background & Context: Mental (ill) Health & Wellbeing

- Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2022) reported that approximately 50% of the UK population have a long-standing health problem, the most common of which were allergy, high blood pressure, low back disorder, and depression.

- Prior to COVID-19 pandemic, 11.7% of Welsh people suffered severe mental health issues (Wales Fiscal Analysis, 2021), while the pandemic has placed further pressures on people's mental health and wellbeing.

- Individuals with mental health disorders have been stated as being at risk of dying 20 years younger than the general population (see WHO Europe, 2019).

- Average ratings of wellbeing within the UK have continued to deteriorate across all indicators (ONS, 2021).
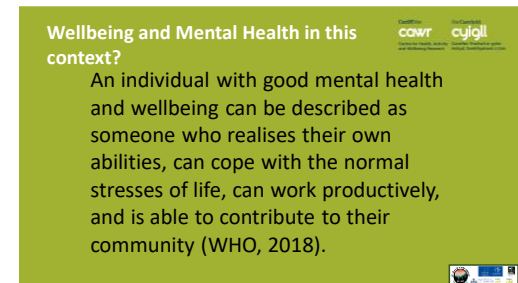
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Wellbeing

Slide 4

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Wellbeing

Slide 5

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Wellbeing

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Wellbeing and Mental Health in this context?

An individual with good mental health and wellbeing can be described as someone who realises their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to contribute to their community (WHO, 2018).

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Background & Context: Nature on Prescription

- Social prescription (also known as community referral) aims to support individuals to take greater control of their own health and is a means of enabling health and care professionals to refer people to a range of local, non-clinical services. Social prescription uses a holistic approach and perceives that people's health is determined by social, economic, and environmental factors (Gov, 2022).

- Nature on prescription involves socially prescribed activities that are focused upon exposure to nature. Programmes which use nature on prescription often use multiple nature based activities such as: conservation, wilderness focused (e.g., bushcraft), care farming, creative activities (e.g., green woodwork), and horticulture and gardening (see Fullam et al., 2021).

- Overall, exposure to nature is viewed to have positive benefits for health and wellbeing (Sumner et al., 2022).

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Project overview

- Wild Skills Wild Spaces (WSWS) project aim: to deliver and evaluate an ecotherapy programme to improve the health, skills, and wellbeing of local communities in Montgomeryshire.

- Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust deliver the programme

- Participants referred via NHS, other health and social care partners, and schools

- Evaluation by Cardiff Met

- Project length 24 months

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WSWS:
- Weekly sessions for 12 weeks

Ecotherapy activities
- Bushcraft skills
- Walks
- Growing vegetables
- Tree pruning
- Woodwork
- Cooking
- Plant identification

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Evaluation

12 weeks

Survey (Pre & Post)
- Connectedness to nature
- Wellbeing
- Physical activity

Focus groups & Interviews
- Participants
- Referrers
- Instructors

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WSWS participants

End of year 1
- Four 12-week programmes completed
- 2 adult groups, 2 young person groups
- 48 sessions and 120 hours of delivery time
- 31 adult referrals received, 18 completed programme – approx. 60%
- 24 young people referred, 22 completed programme approx. 85%

- **Currently**
  - Five programmes

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"Just being out here has been an amazing experience, and I would absolutely recommend it to anybody who has got mental health issues, absolutely."

"The people make you feel invited, welcomed, warm, you know there is no room for being anxious because it is just a very positive environment. So you can just put those anxieties and things to the side and just enjoy the time that you're here for."

"The last couple of years have been really difficult... This has just given me life back, it really has, I mean that."

"It's absolutely fantastic, I love it. The leaders are so welcoming and warm and passionate and enthusiastic. They are really patient and understanding because I have had a bit of trouble getting out, being depressed and anxious, and the pandemic has been really really hard."

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Where are we?

- **2021**
  - Data collection quantitative and qualitative (participants)
  - Meetings and updates
- **Early 2022**
  - Qualitative interviews (participants, referrers, and deliverers)
  - Quantitative data collection
  - Initial data analysis and results

  - **April 2022: Evaluation Report, Year 1 written**

- **2022 to conclusion April 2023**
  - Continued data collection and analysis
  - Results write up and dissemination
  - Recommendations for policy and practice – Welsh Gov

April 2021

April 2023

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Challenges conducting evaluation

- **Time constraints**
  - Project timeline; Project; Data collection

- **Trust**
  - Deliverers and participants

- **Programme participation vs data collection**

- **Unforeseen challenges**

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