

## **Achieving successful partnerships between Environment and Wellbeing**

**Facilitators:** Heather Elgar, West of England Nature Partnership Manager, Kelly Bray Avon Wildlife Trust Wellbeing through Nature Project Manager, Alex Hodgson Well Aware Team Manager.

“Spending time in the natural environment – as a resident or a visitor – improves our mental health and feelings of wellbeing...”

It can reduce stress, fatigue, anxiety and depression. It can help boost immune systems, encourage physical activity and may reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as asthma. It can combat loneliness and bind communities together.” Source: 25 Year Environment plan.

This workshop explored how nature can benefit our health and wellbeing; raised awareness of the projects running in the Avon area and made space to share ideas around collaboration between services and the positive impact of nature in our communities.



**Venue Young Carers Garden: Carers Support Centre**

Heather Elgar gave an introduction of the link between health nature including policy drivers and Public Health England’s Wider Determinants of Health and the links between green spaces and health inequalities.

The West of England Nature Partnership works to assist this integration: designing-in health through spatial planning; supporting self-care and a strategy to mainstream green care. In protecting the environment and ensuring green spaces thrive, people then gain the physical and mental health benefits from this.

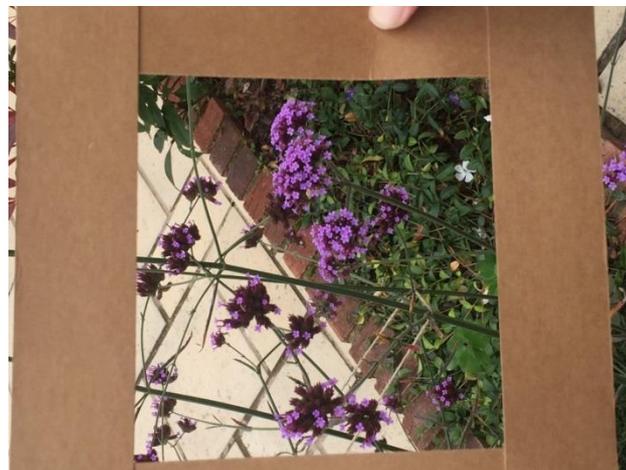
There are different levels of nature-based health: self-care; primary care; secondary care; Avon Wildlife Trust for example have worked with The Natural Academy to design courses and staff have mental health training. The Well Aware website has the wide range of offerings from small resident led gardening groups to structured training with qualified workers running sessions.

Kelly Bray led the workshop delegates through three mindfulness nature activities and described the 6 week Wellbeing through Nature courses that are delivered in Bristol and Bath by the Avon Wildlife Trust. Courses are delivered to people with long term health conditions and those experiencing low mood, anxiety and stress.

Initially we grounded ourselves in the garden, listening out for bird calls and sounds of nature around us and then divided into groups to participate in the exercises which all focused and connected us with the nature around us.



We shared our thoughts, reflections and memories that the sights and smells and touch of leaves, flowers, colours and insects had ignited.



These exercises are used in combination with practical gardening and growing skills to benefit people with depression, anxiety, loneliness and vast improvements can be achieved, helping people to overcome barriers and improve their wellbeing. These can also benefit people with dementia and we discussed other scenarios they could be beneficial for such as exercises in care homes, helping children and young people cope with the stress of exams and how nature is universal to everyone although it could be tailored to different people in the way that fits in with their lives.



**Alex Hodgson, Well Aware Team Manager, The Care Forum Annual Conference**

**12 September 2018**

**Read more:**

Public Health England:

<https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/wider-determinants/supporting-information/built-and-natural-environment>

Avon Wildlife Trust - Wellbeing Through Nature courses:

<http://www.avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/wellbeingthroughnature>

West of England Nature Partnership: <http://www.wenp.org.uk/>

Well Aware - Improve my wellbeing through nature:

<https://www.wellaware.org.uk/info-resources/nature/>