

# Creative Spaces in the community

EVALUATION REPORT

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**Sensory Trust**

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## Executive summary

Creative Spaces in the Community (CSiC) is a pioneering nature-based approach that is helping people with dementia maintain physically, socially and mentally active lives in their communities. It builds on the success of our earlier Creative Spaces work, adapting the principles we established in residential care and using them to benefit people living in their own homes in rural communities in Cornwall.

Over the last four years, Creative Spaces in the Community has benefited 705 people living with dementia, 833 unpaid carers and 427 community members, such as friends and relatives not providing regular care. In addition, 996 service providers (mainly health professionals like Primary Care Dementia Practitioners and paid carers), 156 young people aged 11 to 18 and 327 volunteers have also benefited from improved skills and knowledge about supporting people with dementia.

Benefits to people living with dementia relate to improvements in physical, mental and social wellbeing. The project has seen confidence and happiness grow in individuals; it has fostered long-lasting friendships and helped people develop coping strategies to deal with tough periods in their lives. It has motivated people to be more physically active, to develop new shared interests and to be more engaged in community activities. A key aim has been to give people the tools to help them improve their own day to day lives, which would enable them to remain independent for longer.

Impacts on professional practice have also been strong. It has helped dementia professionals breathe new life into the care they provide and to realise the value of adding these practices into their care programmes. It has given family carers new ways in which they can share meaningful times with their loved ones and provided access to informal support through meeting and sharing with others in similar situations.

Across the UK, and in Australia, USA and Canada, the approach has been enthusiastically welcomed by dementia care organisations. It has also provided a focus for collaborative research with the University of Exeter, and for being actively engaged in networks such as the Dementia Action Alliance in Cornwall.

Outcomes were delivered through the following actions:

- Outdoor activity clubs, providing opportunities to benefit from outside exercise, social interactions and access to nature
- Involving people with dementia in the development of a dementia-friendly auditing tool of outside spaces; giving them the confidence and skills to carry out their own audits
- Opportunities to participate in nature-based activities; through organising and participating in workshops and community events, helping to stimulate mental health and well-being.
- Involving young people through intergenerational activities; supporting them to increase their knowledge and communication skills
- Engaging carers and service providers in workshops and dementia awareness, designed to increase their knowledge and confidence in using nature-based approaches
- New resources and guidance materials; supporting the dementia-friendly communities model by enabling people with dementia to be more active in their communities and giving carers and service providers skills they need to support them to do so

We received £370,119 from the Big Lottery Fund over 4 years. This levered in an additional £118,734 from 17 different funders to support our overall programme of work with people with dementia. This included The Rayne Foundation, Cornwall Community Foundation, Duchy Health Trust, Arts Council England and the Haberdashers Company.

Since completing Creative Spaces in the Community in February 2018, we have been successful in securing funds to support further work. This will enable us to build on the success of the community activity groups, which have proved to be such an important form of support for people living with dementia, their families and carers. We are also building training and skills sharing for carers, in response to identifying this as a clear gap in service support.

## Where it all started

In 2006, Sensory Trust developed new community-based work supporting older people with disabilities to benefit from greater access to the outdoors. This included people living with dementia and dementia care practitioners. What we observed, and the feedback we received from the care staff, made us realise the value of nature as a tool to help people with dementia reconnect to people and places.

Our focus on dementia took off with the development of our Creative Spaces work in 2009, when we received Big Lottery funding to work with care homes in Cornwall. Coincidentally at around the same time the UK government identified dementia as a priority health issue.

Through this initial work residential care managers, staff, residents, families and community members in Cornwall were all involved in improving their outdoor spaces and creating activities that fitted their needs. This not only enhanced the quality of life for residents (improved sleeping patterns, reduced anxiety) but stimulated vibrant conversations with their families and eased the pressure on the daily routines of the staff.

We also ran several community dementia awareness events and met people living with dementia at home and their partners/family members. People talked about feeling isolated, bored and frustrated at home. Many enjoyed the benefits of attending local memory cafes but weren't experiencing quality time in-between the fortnightly sessions. The negative impact of losing social connections and personal transport alongside increasing anxiety and depression affected both the person with the diagnosis and their partner/carer. There was an obvious need for support in helping to maintain/regain physically, mentally and socially active lives; a low cost, "small action = big change" approach that would have little impact on already stretched finances and that required simple, recognisable activities that took place in safe and familiar environments.

And so ***Creative Spaces in the Community*** project began in March 2014 through the support of the Big Lottery's Reaching Communities Fund.

## Project aims

The aim of the project was to improve the physical and mental health of older people with dementia by using the outdoors and nature-based activities to become more active, build social networks and foster independence; enabling older people with dementia to lead independent, fulfilling lives for as long as possible.

It focused on people aged 65+ living with dementia at home in isolated and disadvantaged communities in Cornwall. Carers of older people with dementia, community members, service providers and young people also benefitted from involvement in activities, training and community events; gaining skills, confidence and knowledge in how to better support and engage with people living with dementia.

We also aimed to share our approach more widely beyond Cornwall – nationally and internationally - by through the delivery of training programmes, presenting at both dementia and nature-focused conferences, writing articles for dementia and health and social care publications and creating new resources made freely available for downloading via our website.

## Project Outcomes

We identified 4 key outcomes on the themes of physical health, mental health and wellbeing, fostering independence and improved community support. Indicators attached to each outcome helped us to monitor our level of achievement as the project progressed.

### 1. Older people with dementia will demonstrate better physical health through increased use and enjoyment of the outdoors.

#### Indicators

- ☉ Older people with dementia report more time spent outdoors, evidenced through surveys and diaries
- ☉ Older people with dementia report they are more active outdoors, evidenced through surveys, diaries and pedometers
- ☉ Older people with dementia report through surveys, visual diaries and interviews that they have improved physical health

### 2. Older people with dementia will demonstrate improved mental wellbeing through participation in dementia friendly nature-based activities.

#### Indicators

- ☉ Older people with dementia report fewer negative symptoms of dementia (e.g. levels of anxiety, frustration or aggression, improved sleeping patterns), evidenced through surveys completed by those with dementia and/or their carers
- ☉ Older people with dementia demonstrate increased confidence and self-esteem to participate in nature-based activities, evidenced through surveys and diaries
- ☉ Older people with dementia report improved mental wellbeing from involvement in the project through surveys and visual diaries

### 3. Older people with dementia will remain independent for longer through becoming more active in the community and reducing their social isolation.

#### Indicators

- ☉ Older people with dementia demonstrate they are making more independent choices in relation to their use of the outdoors, evidenced through feedback and interviews
- ☉ Older people with dementia report that they feel less isolated and/or lonely, evidenced through surveys and visual diaries
- ☉ Older people with dementia report that they have maintained their independence for longer, evidenced through surveys and interviews

### 4. Older people with dementia are better supported in their community by carers, families and local service providers gaining more knowledge and awareness of their needs and improving their services.

#### Indicators

- ☉ Young people demonstrate greater awareness and support for older people with dementia, evidenced by participation in dementia-friendly activities and community groups

- ☉ Carers and family members confirm they are delivering improved support for older people with dementia as a result of increased skills and knowledge in dementia-friendly techniques, demonstrated through feedback at training workshops, conferences or accessing guidance materials
- ☉ Service providers demonstrate improved services supporting older people with dementia in their community through increased skills and knowledge of dementia-friendly techniques, evidenced by feedback at training workshops and dementia-friendly activities and accessing guidance materials

## Our approach

Our work is based on the proven benefits that come from engaging with the natural world. For people living with dementia this has been shown to include improved mental health, better sleeping patterns, reduced anxiety and improved appetite. The underlying principle was to develop interests and activities that would become part of people's day to day lives, not as occasional or exceptional occurrences. This was crucial to ensure that people would continue to harness the benefits in the longer term.

A wide range of nature-based activities were used to engage beneficiaries and deliver the outcomes. Short and longer-term nature-based programmes offered opportunities to enhance skills and knowledge and improve health and wellbeing. Training events, conferences, community events, memory cafes, presentations and guidance materials engaged the wider audience of carers, health professionals, young people and service providers.

### ☉ Creating peer support through outdoor activity clubs

The most significant of the project's activities was the establishment of dementia-friendly outdoor activity clubs which offered regular and ongoing support and access to outdoor activity. These were set up in 5 areas around Cornwall: Bude, Bodmin, St. Austell, Falmouth and St. Ives. There were 3 walking groups, 1 walking and pottery group and 1 nature and gardening group. The aim of the clubs was to provide opportunities for beneficiaries to maintain/re-establish physically, mentally and socially active lives. Each club met weekly or fortnightly, with between 12 and 20 members and supported by 2-4 Sensory Trust volunteers. Our longest running group is the Happy Wanderers who walk around the St Austell/Clay area. Since January 2015 they have done 145 walks, benefiting 73 people in total. We talk more about the development and impact of these clubs in the '*Successes*' section of this report.

A sixth group was initially set up in Saltash which was aimed at creating intergenerational activities; however, this group did not become established and we discuss this more in the '*Lessons Learnt*' section.

The establishment of these clubs has already encouraged others to set up a dementia-friendly walking group in Truro which at this time has been meeting regularly for several months.

### ☉ Providing opportunities to gain new skills

We tested other approaches through shorter, time limited programmes that offered opportunities for between 4 – 8 participants to retain their independence in addition to the increased social and mental health benefits.

- Woodland Crafts was an 8-week programme co-managed between Sensory Trust and Remembering our Roots CIC. Participants learnt outdoor crafts such as fire-lighting, foraging, animal tracking, wild cooking and whittling. It provided an opportunity for people to spend more time outdoors but also highlighted that enabling people with dementia to learn new skills also helped them to maintain independence; making their own choices and sharing their knowledge with others
- Clay Animation was a programme of 4 sessions that engaged a small group of people in learning how to create their own 2-minute animated film. Working with a professional film maker they produced a quirky film that reflected their relationships with nature, dementia and their communities as well as their personalities and sense of humour
- Nature-based Cognitive Stimulation Therapy (N-CST) was a trial 14-week programme based on CST with the additional thread of nature running through each theme. CST is the only NICE recommended non-pharmacological treatment for dementia and our partners were Memory Matters South West who have an established successful CST programme. It allowed us to test the impact of nature within a structured CST programme by threading nature through each themed session, e.g. in Categorising Objects, plant materials and natural objects had to be matched with the correct landscape. The outcome of this programme has had an impact on how we are now shaping new and future approaches (see 'Summary')

## 🌀 Engaging beneficiaries in developing new resources

Providing nature-based sessions to memory cafes enabled us to reach a wider audience within the county and provide opportunities to engage people who may not be aware of our outdoor clubs or who, for whatever reason, are limited in their time outdoors. We also look at these sessions as training opportunities for the café volunteers. They work alongside the café members and often look for inspiration or the confidence to run their own activities. We carried out 41 sessions providing 17 different nature-based activities to 18 memory café groups in Cornwall, such as Launceston, St. Ives and Saltash. Activities included Birds' Nests', Painting by Nature and Story Stones; all free-to-download resources from our website.

## 🌀 Strengthening partnerships with dementia and community organisations

These presented opportunities to showcase our work and promote our activities, increasing public awareness of using nature within dementia care as well as reaching those not attending more formal support such as memory cafes. Examples of events include:

- Age UK – Exploding the Myth – a community event, showcasing organisations providing support to people with dementia. We provided 2 nature-based activities for participants: Weaving and Nature Scrap-booking
- Falmouth ZestiFal – a community event themed around getting people more active. Families got involved in Nature Palettes, making nature crowns and a guessing game that allowed time for conversations around dementia in communities and the role of nature in social support

- Alzheimer's Society event – Wadebridge – participants were involved in a variety of activities, e.g. Match the Tracks, Nature Palettes and Name the Flower

## 🌀 Training health professionals and service providers in nature-based approaches

*What's in our Nature?* is a training package that we have developed to support dementia carers. Within the project it has helped us to work with volunteers and professionals, educating them on the benefits of nature in dementia care and how to use nature-based activities to enhance quality of life. Here are some examples of training that has been carried out over the past 4 years:

- Training sessions for Age UK Cornwall's Maintaining Cognitive Stimulation Therapy (MCST) session workers
- Training workshops for health/dementia care professionals, including the Complex Care and Dementia Team, NHS Kernow and NHS staff completing a degree module in dementia care
- A workshop for East Cornwall pilot project which is encouraging NHS staff to signpost recently diagnosed patients to psychosocial support available in their communities.
- 1 training workshop adapted from the 'What's in Our Nature?' training package for London Wildlife Trust; participants included LWT volunteers and care home workers using the site for resident visits

## 🌀 Sharing our methods and progress with a wider audience

We shared our approaches to a national and international audience through conference presentations and articles for online and hard copy publications such as the Journal of Dementia Care, Nursing and Residential Care, The Guardian Social Network, Cultivate NSW (Australian horticulture network) and the Canadian Dementia Knowledge Transfer Network. This has enabled us to contribute to the growing body of evidence on the use of nature-based interventions within dementia care. We also:

- Partnered Alzheimer's Society, Age UK, Memory Matters South West, Kernow Carers Service and United Response in planning and hosting a conference on 'Supporting Dementia in Primary Care - Psychosocial Approaches.'; attended by 100 health and social care professionals including GP's, Primary Care Dementia Practitioners, Memory Assessment nurses and psychiatrists. Speakers included Dr. Jennifer Bute and Norman McNamara
- Culture, health and wellbeing (Bristol) – 2017 promoting films made by artists based on the experiences of people with dementia engaging with nature. Attended by 50 arts professionals
- UK Dementia Congress 2015 and 2017– presented with Memory Matters on the use of nature in Cognitive Stimulation Therapy (2015) and Exeter University on 'My Nature – a training toolkit for residential care' (2017). Organised by the Journal of Dementia Care, in partnership with the University of Bradford and with support from the Alzheimer's Society the UK Dementia Congress is attended by over 700 people from around the world. Each presentation was attended by 40 people; a mixture of health professionals and service providers
- Nature Connections (Derby) – 2017 – we presented to 32 attendees on the project aims and outcomes. One attendee later commented that this was

“greatly inspiring and creative” (<http://www.gogreenex.org/reflections-nature-connect-2017-conference-derby-nara/>)

🌀 Developing free online guidance & resources

Over the past 4 years we have developed 7 new creative activities, testing each one with dementia groups such as memory cafes (Cornwall), Sydenham Community Gardens dementia group and Age Exchange Blackheath (London). We have produced 5 short films demonstrating the value of nature in supporting people living with dementia and enabled beneficiaries to create their own short animated film. Several ‘How To’ films of our new activities have also been made. These latest resources and guidance materials can be found via our website: [www.sensorytrust.org.uk](http://www.sensorytrust.org.uk) or our YouTube page: <https://www.youtube.com/user/SensoryTrust>

## Targets Achieved

The total number of beneficiaries for each outcome are shown in the table below alongside the initial target numbers.

Outcome	Target	Achieved
1. Older people with dementia report will demonstrate better physical health through increased use and enjoyment of the outdoors	410 people with dementia	334 people with dementia
2. Older people with dementia will demonstrate improved mental wellbeing through participation in dementia friendly nature-based activities	520 people with dementia	705 people with dementia
3. Older people with dementia will remain independent for longer through becoming more active in the community and reducing their social isolation	465 people with dementia	512 people with dementia
4. Older people with dementia are better supported in their community by carers, families and local service providers gaining more knowledge and awareness of their needs and improving their services	150 young people 2210 carers 1120 service providers	156 young people 1260 carers & community members directly engaged + an additional 6577 carers downloaded resources 1323 service providers & volunteers directly engaged

## Evaluation methods

A balance of qualitative and quantitative methods was used to monitor and evaluate the wide range of activities employed throughout the project. It is challenging to engage people in evaluation who have deteriorating cognitive abilities. This affects their levels of confidence, dexterity, comprehension and communication. This was taken into consideration when involving beneficiaries and led to us testing with small representational groups. The methods listed below enabled more beneficiaries to participate than if we had solely used questionnaires or other 'written' methods.

- ☉ Surveys were carried out at 3-month intervals by Sensory Trust volunteers over a period of 1 year on a one-to-one basis. They included a section based on the Yale Physical Activity Survey (De Pietro et al; 1993) and monitored the impact of physical, mental and social activity on selected individuals from the outdoor activity clubs (see Appendix 1)
- ☉ Mobile phone activity tracker apps were used to monitor the walk lengths and number of steps taken. These were used by a carer in each of the walking groups and used to provide an approximation of steps counted
- ☉ Maps were used by our volunteers to record walk routes. Walk lengths were then worked out using the '[www.walkjogrun.net](http://www.walkjogrun.net)' website. This proved to be a successful method for logging the lengths of walks and identifying increases in time spent outside and physical activity
- ☉ Pedometers were trialled but proved unsuccessful; failing to record all the steps taken. They were replaced by the phone activity tracker apps
- ☉ A Diary app was chosen by one beneficiary as the simplest way for him to record the walks and their impact on his tablet. The app allowed him to take photos and then send them to us with text about the walk. This form of evaluation has provided the most detailed qualitative monitoring of impact on an individual
- ☉ Written diaries were hard copy diaries designed by Sensory Trust to allow beneficiaries to record a 2-week period of activities; whether project-related or not. This was to monitor any differences in people's sense of well-being between any outdoor activity and days when there was little or no outdoor activity
- ☉ Group interviews were used in situ with the woodland skills group, one walking group and one nature/gardening activity group to evaluate impact whilst the activity was still fresh in their minds
- ☉ Focus groups were held with all the outdoor activity clubs. Years 1 – 3 were carried out by Sensory Trust staff, however in Year 4 an external consultant was brought in to evaluate the whole project using focus groups and interviews
- ☉ Online analysis: Google Analytics was used to identify unique visits to the project's main, activities and resources pages. Later in the project we created a Google Form that provided a snapshot over 19 months of who was downloading the resources and for what purpose (see Appendix 2)
- ☉ Observations by staff and volunteers were equally important in monitoring impact on our beneficiaries. They recorded quotes and improvements such as gait, mood and social interaction. These observations also helped us identify any potential issues for individuals within the groups, e.g. becoming more confused; requiring additional support and we would be able to refer these to the relevant Primary Care Dementia Practitioner

- ☉ Creative techniques were employed at community events when it is often difficult to gain feedback through questionnaires or other forms. We used approaches such as putting pebbles in buckets and using paper butterflies on number scales to record responses
- ☉ To evaluate the formal training sessions, we used feedback forms and invited attendees to email additional thoughts (see Appendix 3)

## Impact

### ☉ Physical health

Our regular activity clubs have had the most significant impact on participants physical health, through encouraging people to maintain more time being active outdoors. 40 people currently regularly attend our activity clubs (at least once a fortnight) and 114 people have benefited overall. We have purposely focused on providing an ongoing engagement for beneficiaries rather than one-off activities. By attending more regularly they are gaining more meaningful interaction with nature and longer lasting benefits than one-off activity such as occasional days out.

In Year 2 we surveyed 8 beneficiaries who were representational of those attending the walking clubs on a regular basis. In the time since joining the club 50% of those surveyed had doubled their activity outdoors, whilst 50% had quadrupled activity outdoors since joining the group. 75% of respondents to the questionnaire reported that they felt better physically.

The act of increased walking has had a positive impact on many individuals. The walking clubs have steadily increased the lengths of their walks. For example, *The Happy Wanderers* (St. Austell area) were walking around 1.30 kilometres in 2015 which increased to around 3 kilometres by 2017.

"The walks have got longer, yes, definitely they have"

"If I didn't do the walks I wouldn't be getting out of the house"

"It's good for you. I can't do a lot of walking, but I never did any before"

"An hour walk - we enjoyed winter sunshine, it's the longest time I've spent outside, feeling healthier, nervous this morning, feel calmer now"

We also observed individual achievements. For example, one lady improved her gait from shuffling to stepping. Walking regularly over a few months, her gait improved until she was seen to take steps and could cope with small obstacles such stepping over puddles rather than shuffling around them. This was also commented on by her husband:

"C benefits; people have noticed her improvement in walking. She benefits physically, normally she wouldn't do it. This group makes her do it"

In December 2017 the *Bude Walking Group* (see Case Study 1) decided to increase its walks from monthly to fortnightly; increasing time spent outdoors, time spent being physically active and distance walked. They too have increased their walk lengths; from

1.65 kilometres to 2.60 kilometres. An achievement for a group that has fewer choices in local accessible walks than the other clubs.

Recording improvements in physical health was an issue for participants who experienced deteriorating health as their dementia condition progressed. For example, some participants went from walking to using walking aids and eventually powered mobility vehicles. However, it is worth mentioning that there is an 'unseen' impact on physical health that occurs in the body when engaged in physical activity like walking, or even just 'being' outdoors. Spending time outdoors has been shown to benefit physical health by reducing blood pressure, improving blood circulation, building strength in muscles and gains from vitamin D exposure.

## Mental well-being

Impact on people's mental health was especially evident. Increased levels of confidence were a clear indication of an improved sense of well-being. During the focus groups, beneficiaries spoke of how involvement in the activity group had helped them to get out of the house, giving their self-confidence a boost and providing opportunities to help them reduce negative symptoms such as anxiety and depression and also helping them to use their creativity and skills to engage with nature; for some this meant the chance to gain new skills and knowledge. This is well represented by Stephen, a walking club member who kept a diary of his weekly walks over three years (see case study 2).

Surveys were undertaken with small representational groups. For example, a survey in Year 1 reported that 5 out of 6 participants felt more cheerful after the activity than before. A focus group in Year 2 used the Shortened Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale and showed improvements to wellbeing since starting our activities.

A further survey in year 2 100% of respondents reported the activity was helpful or very helpful to their anxiety & depression. 100% of respondents also reported positive improvements to their confidence, self-esteem and happiness through attending activities: 29% of these reported 'a lot' of improvement, 66% report 'quite a bit'.

100% of participants in the nature-based CST programme reported increased cognitive abilities and wellbeing through independent NHS recognised assessment. This was carried out by Memory Matters South West using ACE (Addenbrooke's Cognitive Examination)

Some beneficiaries completed handwritten diaries, reporting their individual perspectives on improvements to their wellbeing, as well as recording changes over time as to how they felt about participating:

"...it helps me control my depression"

"helping me to come to terms with my anxiety attacks"

"I was feeling very anxious but when we came back I was feeling more relaxed"

"This afternoon has increased my sense of wellbeing, made me feel well instead of ill"

Focus groups of the activity clubs demonstrated what people especially valued about contributing to the groups:

"it's the emotional peace of being there, we want more of those"

"we're all here because our memories are disappearing, but we are making memories because we are doing, we are engaged"

"they help us make it and then we take it home and it's really nice because there's a sense of achievement and a memento. I've got mine here"

"even people with memory loss can learn new things"

An interview with a Primary Care Dementia Practitioner reported her interpretation of the impact of participating in one of our activity clubs for a gentleman with dementia:

"The group has had a significant positive impact on one member who was very depressed and at risk of self-harm a few months ago; since joining the group he has enjoyed reminiscing and sharing his knowledge of sea fishing, his wife reports that his mood is much improved. The group has given him something to look forward to and he is rediscovering an activity he enjoyed earlier in life and had thought he would never participate in again." (PCDP)

## Social impact

Through the project evaluation we discovered that all the beneficiaries discovered increased social connections; forming strong bonds of friendship with others in the group and maintaining those connections outside of the group sessions. In addition, family carers also found vital social links through the groups. They were able, like their loved ones, to walk or participate in activities and chat with others who understood their situations. Both people with dementia and carers discovered and created peer support within their group. Carers who initially came with their loved one who sadly died during the lifetime of the project, returned to the groups because the support they received from their peers was important to them.

88% respondents to a survey in year 2 reported our activities were helpful or very helpful to alleviate loneliness. Comments included:

"We instantly make friends, last time was the first time we [N and R] met but we instantly bonded, didn't we?"

"Yes, yes"

Focus group comments have highlighted the improvements in social connections, and the importance individuals place on this:

"You feel like a bit of a family you know, we're all together, got to know one another and we feel like a family, well, I feel like that anyhow"

"We've turned into such a lovely group, a lovely family, even though different people came and went at different times, we were always a wonderful unit"

"There's no criticism, there's no brushing over of problems, we're all patient with each other"

"It brings you in, makes you sociable, all mixed up together. Really welcoming, it's the best thing I've ever done"

During one informal conversation with the Project Manager, a male member of the Happy Wanderers group highlighted his individual journey to making new social connections:

"A asked if I remembered when we first met and how cautious he was around people, that he was not eager to trust people. I remembered this. I remember him being very cautious about signing any consent form and he would always question information that was given him. Information about what the project was about, who the Sensory Trust were, what people would be involved, how exactly would they benefit from joining in etc.

He went on to say that he had been on a long learning journey since then; that because of the people in the group he was a different person. He still felt there were people in the world that wanted to take advantage of you but that he had learnt to trust most people again, although it had taken him some time and it was being part of the group that had helped him to learn that." (Creative Spaces Project Manager)

Approaches such as the nature-based Cognitive Stimulation Therapy sessions and community events were also highlighted during evaluation as important group activities that stimulated social connections.

"It's company and talking about things; other people's problems"

"Made me laugh, I felt a sense of companionship with my next door neighbour."

## Improved Services & Support

We have made significant advancement in our working relationships with health professionals supporting people living with dementia in Cornwall. Primary Care Dementia Practitioners (PCDPs), Memory Assessment Nurses, Occupational Therapists and the Complex Care and Dementia team NHS Kernow, to name a few, now regularly engage with and promote our programme of activities.

PCPDs now refer clients to our activity clubs and in some cases actively participate in them; using the sessions as an opportunity to catch up with their clients. For example, the PCDP in Bude found that walking outdoors provided a more suitable environment and atmosphere for conversations with either the person diagnosed or their carer. People felt safe, comfortable and relaxed which allowed often sensitive issues to be discussed. Another PCDP commented:

"The positive feedback I have from families about the Sensory Trust activities has been overwhelming as their loved one returns home after a weekly walk refreshed and energised and happy. The clay making sessions at the Leach Pottery brought back memories to some folk of a skill they had enjoyed in the past and for others the ability to try something new. Some of my patients have started to remember new faces, to ask their family when they are going again and to look forward to it. The groups support

their dementia symptoms on a very individual basis, with adjustments made as needed. Patient participation is my goal, but the knock-on effect of the possibility of provided transport and volunteer support means for some couples, the 'carer' is able to have a few hours respite knowing their partner or maybe their parent will return home feeling fulfilled after experiencing a quality activity." (PCDP, Penzance area)

Other service providers have benefitted from having more regular contact with the activity clubs. At a recent meeting with the Potager Peas club, the manager of Potager Garden where the group meets, was invited to talk about the impact of the group for him:

"I've loved working with the Potager Peas and seeing how they engage with the garden and enjoy spending time here. Seeing the garden through their eyes has changed my whole focus for the project, inspiring me to open up access to Potager to more groups who might benefit from being here."

Dementia-focused organisations we have worked with over the past 4 years have been able to incorporate more use of outside spaces into their own activity sessions. We were approached by Memory Matters South West (MMSW) in September 2016 to work with their volunteers and members of their activity groups on making better use of their outside space. This also provided an opportunity to train the activity club members in dementia-friendly auditing of the garden. MMSW volunteers were able to observe and listen to their beneficiaries as they assessed the garden for its sensory experience and the level at which it met the needs of the group. This later helped MMSW to improve its garden area and enable the group to finally have lunches outside and to enjoy the wildlife and other sensory elements.

"There's a real difference in the way people talked, they were really seeing things, connecting to the seasons and noticing more". (Director, Memory Matters South West)

Service providers, carers and family members have also been able to access free downloadable resources from our website. We have created 6 new activities for this project; including Birds' Nests, Painting by Nature and Story Stones. From March 2014 to February 2018 we have had 3747 visits to the Creative Spaces project page. The activities page and links to our resources page were established online in Year 3 of the project and since then we have been able to use Google Analytics and have developed an online form to establish the number of visits to our dementia resources and by whom. In addition, there were 1315 visits to the Creative Spaces activities page to find out more about our outdoor clubs and 494 people then went from there to download resources suitable to supporting people living with dementia.

A more general search, using Google Analytics, highlighted that dementia-friendly activity sheets were downloaded. For example, the Memory Postcards activity sheet was downloaded 720 times since March 2014 and Planting Memories 347 times. A more recently developed activity, Myths and Legends, was downloaded 222 times since it was installed on our website in February 2017.

## CASE STUDIES

### Case study 1

#### **Outcome 1: Older people with dementia will demonstrate better physical health through increased use and enjoyment of the outdoors.**

The Bude Walking group began in December 2015, initially as a dementia friendly fishing club before changing to a walking group in June 2016 after the fishing activity subsided. The main area of interest is around the Bude Canal which provides easy access walks and enables people with wheelchairs to join the group.

Initially the group would walk a short 'there and back again' route along the canal tow path; approximately 1.18kms. This walk was eventually increased to include a circular route through a nature area; approximately 1.6 kms in length.

After 3 months they expanded their walks to include 2 new longer walks, each over 2.5km with one along the coastal footpath, increasing heart rate due to its rising and declining gradients along the cliff tops and the other further along the canal, around 2.18kms.

In December 2017 the group decided to meet fortnightly instead of monthly; to increase the number of walks and to expand the walking programme to include 2 new walks. It currently has a membership of 8 people and 3 volunteers have recently joined to provide support.



*Easy access is a crucial factor, ensuring people feel safe and able to join in with the walks*



*Cliff-top walks chosen by the group show their motivation to explore new areas and challenge themselves*



*Walks have increased in length and regularity, so people are walking further and for longer*



*Fitting the walks in-between the memory café has doubled outside engagement for many members*

## Case study 2:

### **Outcome 2: Older people with dementia will demonstrate improved mental wellbeing through participation in dementia friendly nature-based activities**

Stephen (The Happy Wanderers walking group)

Stephen joined the walking group in January 2015 and has been recording the impact of the walks on his mental health using a diary app. Initially his entries focused on negative aspects of his dementia - depression, anxiety and related physical issues such as balance and mobility. His entries now reflect positive feelings about nature and the people he shares the walks with.

Diary quotes:

**September 2015:** "Every day I wake up I feel nervous and a bit sick the walks do me the world of good...I love the nature side of the walks it keeps my memory and depression down"

**November 2015:** "This morning I woke up feeling very stiff and had a hard time getting out of bed so when we went out on our walk this morning to Carluden clay trail I was feeling a bit better it was windy but dry and cold . Nature walk are so good for us we walk in any weather ."

**May 2016:** "The views around the woods was absolutely amazing the green trees and hedges were I thing there was red campion flowers we also walked along side the river I couldn't find any fish but the river was very thearaputick big word the sights and sounds were brilliant."

**June 2017:** "it was so good to get out and about with my freinds talking and laughing. U just can't put a price on that it's so wonderful to see so much nature trees and shrubs and clay"

Since joining the walking group, Stephen's level of confidence has increased. He has delivered his first ever speech about his walking experiences to a conference audience of 100 health professionals. He has joined the local Alzheimer's Society's Leadership Group; a group of people living with dementia in Cornwall that advise on accessibility, quality of service provision and dementia support, for example recently helping to make Newquay Airport more dementia-friendly. In 2016 he took on the zipwire challenge at the Eden Project, raising money for volunteer drivers and helping other isolated people with dementia to join in our activity clubs around Cornwall.



*Strong bonds formed on the walks have given Stephen the support and confidence to be himself and to become a more proactive advocate for people with dementia*



*Tackling the zipwire was a major personal challenge and shows how much some individuals developed through the course of the project*

## Case study 3

### **Outcome 3: Older people with dementia will remain independent for longer through becoming more active in the community and reducing their social isolation**

Jennifer (Potager Peas club)

Jennifer has been with the club since its inception in April 2016. It has enabled her to resume her interest in art and combine it with her love of nature. She lives alone and has very little opportunity to get out and about at home; the Potager Peas club has given her the chance to use her creativity and has enhanced her social connections which she has expressed through interviews, questionnaires and writing down her own thoughts.

Quote from interview June 2016:

"I would love to have a studio in one of these greenhouses and be an artist here for ever! That's what I would like. Because it's about the energy, the aliveness and the togetherness of it all, it's not just this growing and that growing everything is growing up together. I think it's absolutely beautiful. And very nourishing to be in isn't it"

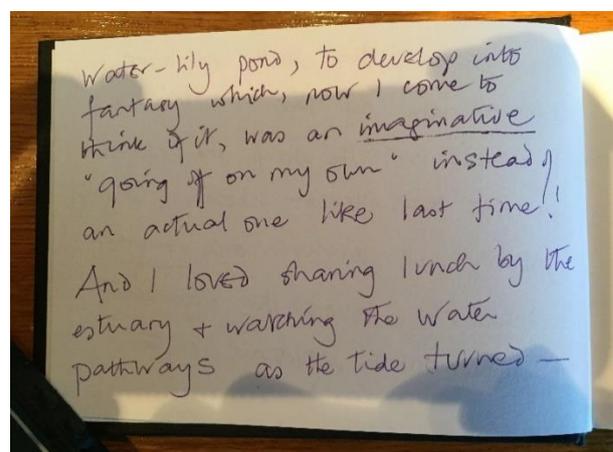
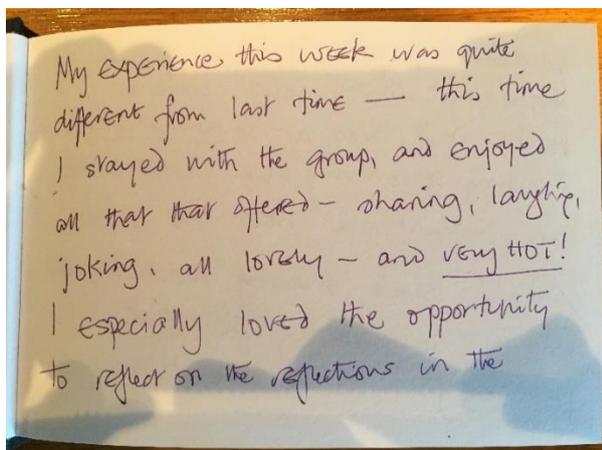
Jennifer completed questionnaires throughout 2017, recording the activities' impact on her physical, mental wellbeing and social isolation (see attached example). She consistently recorded feeling relaxed, happy and valued as a member of the group and attending the club helped reduce her anxiety and depression

"Yes it was fun. I like fun. Also I love being in the garden and that makes me happy. And being part of a group makes me happy" (October 2017).

Jennifer also participated briefly in the St. Ives group (Wednesday Wanderers) and wrote positively and expressively about her experiences of connecting with nature on the walks:

"but also my hands have had intimate knowledge of the reeds because of the way they've been my tools, both on clay tiles and on paper. I am planning more!!" (see image for fuller description)

'Potager is my medicine, I live for it!'



Excerpts from Jennifer's musings on her experiences of the walks and the group

## Case study 4

Outcome 4: Older people with dementia are better supported in their community by carers, families and local service providers gaining more knowledge and awareness of their needs and improving their services

Val – wife and carer; member of Happy Wanderers & Bodmin walking groups

Val and George moved down to Cornwall not long before he was diagnosed with dementia. They hadn't had the chance to make any social connections until they joined the Happy Wanderers walking group. It was important for Val that George walked with others in the group "He misses the company of other men and even though he might not be making conversation, he is listening and engaging with them in his own way"

The walking groups have shown Val that both she and George can be supported in ways that are relevant to them both as individuals.

"The walking group has expanded our horizons, on our own we would walk on warm sunny days but the group walks throughout the year, we repeat walks in different seasons and weather conditions this has made us more connected to nature and the different feelings that a place can offer.

When George needed more help I stopped work and we found ourselves together every day. The walking group has been a tremendous help to me, not only getting out for a walk but meeting people in a similar situation who understand. It is good to chat and find out about peoples lives, we also exchange practical information. For me the most important aspect is the support that I receive from the group and the volunteers along with the offer of a hug if it is needed."

Val has spoken to other dementia support groups, sharing her new knowledge and experience with others and demonstrating how support for dementia carers doesn't necessarily have to be in the form of a carer-specific group but can be amongst new-found friends sharing an activity in a sensory-rich environment.



*Val talks about her experiences to a carers group – these have been important opportunities for people to give and receive informal support*



*The groups enable Val to feel like herself and not labelled as a carer.*

## Key successes

Various new methods of engagement were trialled during the project. The most significant being the approach to creating sustainable outdoor activity clubs by enabling them to be self-managed whilst still having support from Sensory Trust if required.

### 🌀 Creating peer support through empowerment

Our approach to developing these groups was that they would become 'self-sufficient' in the sense that members took ownership, making decisions for themselves, encouraging others to join and addressing issues together e.g. transport sharing. Our role changed as the group progressed, from initially leading the activities to a more supportive position. Staff would gauge the levels of confidence within the members, encouraging and supporting them to become more involved in decision-making. Once group members showed confidence in making suggestions for walks/activities volunteers were assigned to the group to support them and to maintain a connection between them and Sensory Trust. Elements such as giving themselves a name, deciding on locations for walks or types of activities all helped. This eventually led to friendships and social engagements outside of the clubs.

### 🌀 Enabling each group to develop at its own pace

The progress of development was different for each group. Individual's personalities, confidence levels, personal circumstances, type and degree of dementia and availability of volunteers all had an impact on the progress of each club's development. It was important to enable each group to develop steadily; ensuring that people were supported to feel safe and comfortable with each other and their environment, to rebuild their confidence in their own social skills and to regain their sense of self-value. At that point they would take on more decision-making. For example, in the walking groups, this meant that they would initially decide the walk locations and in which order.

### 🌀 Providing volunteer supporters not leaders

Volunteers have proven critical to the growth and sustainability of the groups. As our team focused more on the less developed groups, building confidence and encouraging decision-making, volunteers could take a more active role supporting the existing groups. The volunteer role itself also differed to more traditional volunteer roles with other activity clubs. Not in the role of walk leaders, the volunteers' role here was to enable and support the group to run their own walks. Volunteers were trained in First Aid, dementia awareness and moving and handling of persons. Their role included ensuring that everyone in the group was included in conversations, that no-one was left behind on a walk and to encourage the group to make decisions together concerning the walks. They also support by carrying refreshments and portable chairs, if required, along the walks.

"I've given a little of my time to the Sensory Trust but I've gained so much friendship, I feel my time has been repaid 100 fold."

"It's been a rewarding few years since I became a volunteer with the Sensory Trust. I'm always aware of the responsibility I share with the other volunteers...it has opened our eyes to how important the sense of community"

## ☺ Supporting people living with dementia to be leaders

We encouraged people with dementia to take on new roles and responsibilities as their confidence grew. This enabled them to become ambassadors for Creative Spaces – for example as evaluation leaders testing new evaluation methodology such as tablet-based diaries, focus group questions and paper questionnaires. They have shared their own evaluation with their peers. Participants have also been trained in undertaking dementia-friendly audits of outdoor spaces and use this to identify and suggest new walks to the groups.

This has enabled participants to increase their self-worth, and in some cases has led to them taking on new commitments and contributions within their local community beyond our project. For example, one lady has gone from being both physically and socially isolated to volunteering in a local community café and increasing her social connections since joining The Happy Wanderers walking club; she now has social engagements several times a week.

## ☺ Recognising the positive impact value for carers

In addition to the benefits and gains enjoyed by the project beneficiaries we feel it is important to highlight the impact on those caring for someone with dementia; particularly within the activity clubs. The health and wellbeing of the carers has also benefited from spending more time outdoors and increased social connections. Many dementia symptoms such as anxiety, depression and isolation also affect carers. It is sad but perhaps not unexpected, that a few beneficiaries have passed away during the project. However, it has not been uncommon for their partners to return to the groups after a short period of time. In some instances, stating this has been easier to do than having to deal with the good will of friends and neighbours. The peer support between the carers is as important as that between the beneficiaries, as indicated by Val's statement in Case study 4.

## ☺ Levering Other Funding

Funding provided by the Big Lottery's Reaching Communities Fund has enabled us to lever in additional funding from 17 different funders to support our overall programme of work with people with dementia. This included The Rayne Foundation, Cornwall Community Foundation, Duchy Health Trust, Arts Council England and the Haberdashers Company.

## Lessons Learnt

### ☺ It takes time to build strong foundations

It can take time and patience to establish new activity clubs; particularly if your target audience is scattered around rural and/or isolated communities and there is no clear

signposting system for an individual finding their way along the post-diagnosis journey. We had initially planned to have 2 outdoor activity groups set up in the first year of the project but underestimated the length of time it can take to reach people living in isolated rural areas; even with links to other organisations such as Alzheimer's Society, Age UK Cornwall and Memory Matters South West. We found that information was 'lost in translation' as third parties helped to pass details on to their members. However, by using every means possible (free coffee mornings, drop-ins, leaflets, posters, local media, websites, Twitter, presentations etc) to disseminate information about the clubs, we were able to start our first group by the end of Year 1.

### 🌀 Not everything planted will grow

We also discovered that although not all clubs initially created will flourish and continue, there is value in the early conversations and partnerships formed whilst working to establish those groups. For example, in Year 3 we partnered with a youth group in Saltash to create an intergenerational group that would work together to make books about their personal connections with local outdoor places. Whether the issue was a lack of interest in the topic, or dates/times were not suitable we are unsure, but it drew little interest from people living with dementia in the area. It ran for 6 months with one couple and one young person coming together regularly, visiting local places, recording their stories and forming friendships. Eventually personal commitments led to them being unable to attend. However, we formed a good working relationship with the youth club and developed strong connections with dementia health professionals in the East of Cornwall which will be beneficial for future projects. Not to mention, that at least one young person involved gained valuable knowledge and understanding of what it is like to live with dementia.

### 🌀 Don't be afraid to make changes

Bude FAN club began as a fishing and nature club. It developed out of a request from the Primary Care Dementia Practitioner in the area who was looking for a club that would engage men. With the Bude canal and angling club being quite prominent in the town we decided to start a club that focused on that location and activity. However, as the club grew the fishing side faded. Fishing enthusiasts left, and new participants were keen to focus more on walking. Rather than continuing to offer an activity that was less popular we adapted it to fit the need. The group now meets fortnightly and explores various landscapes along the canal, extending their walking area out to places such as Stratton and Marhamchurch.

### 🌀 Reducing the cost of volunteer training

One of the main issues we had with setting up the volunteer programme was the time it took to organise training for new volunteers. It is difficult to bring together volunteers living across Cornwall; a county where travelling from one end to the other can be a 2-hour journey by car and much longer by public transport. Organising training for *First Aid Outdoors*, *Dementia Awareness* and *Moving and Handling of Persons* was no easy task. We are now developing our own 'in-house' training for our volunteers in dementia awareness and will be attending 'train the trainer' courses in Manual Handling and Moving of Persons so that we can develop training more suitable to the needs of our staff, volunteers and beneficiaries.

## 🌀 Not all evaluation methods proved successful

We included the shortened Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale in our evaluation diaries to provide evidence using a recognised method. However, we discovered that many of our beneficiaries chose not to complete them. They felt the questions were either not applicable to them or they did not see themselves as anything other than being positive about their situation. Despite being a recognisable and popular measure for evaluating wellbeing, the SWEMBS didn't fit the needs of our beneficiaries and we continue to explore other methods.

## What's next?

Since we first began our dementia support work in 2009 our team has gained a great deal of experience, understanding and knowledge around dementia and its impact on those who live with it daily. We have observed how nature not only provides environments that support people to connect with each other but that it can be a powerful mechanism that helps people to cope with negative symptoms of dementia such as anxiety and depression. We will continue to build on this experience and use it to provide support to those gathering evidence and experiences of nature-based interventions within dementia care.

The outdoor activity groups will continue to grow, with our support, into self-managed, peer support groups. We will use the model we have developed to create more dementia-friendly outdoor clubs in Cornwall over the next 3 years.

We have identified a need for psychosocial support for family carers who have recently transitioned into that role after a dementia diagnosis. At a time when they are dealing with the impact on their loved one and getting to grips with both medical and financial support, there is little focus on their own health and information about tools and techniques to support themselves. Our Creative Spaces for Carers project will provide a programme of support; embedding nature into the background of daily life and provide much-needed support in discreet and unobtrusive ways. We continue to nurture the outdoor activity clubs and will be developing new ones around Cornwall and into Devon.

*Creative Spaces* has now become a title banner for our dementia programme of work. We continue to build on the successes and lessons learnt since 2009 and look forward to enhancing and increasing our own knowledge and skills as we gain even more insight from our current and future beneficiaries.

Finally, we would like to thank all those who have been involved in the past 4 years; from beneficiaries and family members to organisations and individuals who have actively helped/supported us along the way:

The Happy Wanderers	Potager Garden
Bodmin Walking Group	Remembering Our Roots CIC
Bude Walking Group	Jayne Howard, Director, Arts-Well CIC
Wednesday Wanderers	Sydenham Community Gardens
Potager Peas	Age Exchange Blackheath
Cornwall's Memory Cafes	Complex Care and Dementia Community Team, NHS Kernow
Primary Care Dementia Practitioners, NHS Kernow	Cornwall Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
Memory Assessment Nurses (East Locality Memory Service, Trevillis House)	Kernow Carers Service, Cornwall Rural Community Charity
Occupational Therapists, Trengweath	
Laura Walker & Kate Smith, Directors, Memory Matters South West	Trustees of Sensory Trust; in particular Kate Mitchell, Programme Lead Long Term Conditions, NHS Kernow
Alzheimer's Society (Cornwall & Isles of Scilly)	The Big Lottery
Age UK Cornwall & Isles of Scilly	
European Centre for Environment & Human Health, Exeter University Medical School	
Leach Pottery, St. Ives	

Wendy Brewin

Creative Spaces Project Manager

# Appendix 1 – sample survey of physical, mental & social wellbeing

February 2017

## Creative Spaces In the community

### Survey of outdoor activity clubs (by interview)

This survey is important in the evaluation of our Creative Spaces in the Community project. The interviewer will ask you questions about your levels of social interaction, physical activity and mental health based on activities linked to the project that you have done over the past month.

Name of activity club: Harpis Wanderers

When did you join? (month & year) Sept 2015

**PHYSICAL**  
The following questions are based on and modified from the Yale Physical Activity Survey (Paffenbarger et al: 1993)

How many times during the month did you participate in **vigorous** activities that lasted at least **10 minutes** and caused large increases in breathing, heart rate, leg fatigue or caused you to perspire?

Not at all (0)  1-3 times per month (1)  1-2 times per week (2)  don't know (8)

3-4 times per week (3)  5+ times per week (4)  refused (7)

Frequency score = 1

About how long do you do this vigorous activity/ies each time?

N/A (0)  10-30 mins (1)  31-60 mins (2)  60+ mins (3)  refused (7)

don't know (8)

Duration score = 3

Weight = 5

**Vigorous activity index score:**  
Frequency score 1 X Duration score 3 X weight 5 = 15  
(responses 7 or 8 are scored as missing)

How many times per month did you walk for at least 10 minutes or more without stopping which was not strenuous enough to cause large increases in breathing, heart rate, leg fatigue or cause you to perspire?

Not at all (0)  1-3 times per month (1)  1-2 times per week (2)

3-4 times per week (3)  5+ times per week (4)  refused (7)  don't know (8)

Frequency score = 4

When you did this walking, for how many minutes did you do it?

N/A (0)  10-30 mins (1)  31-60 mins (2)  60+ mins (3)  refused (7)

don't know (8)

Duration score = 0

**leisurely walking index score:**  
Frequency score 4 X Duration score 0 X weight 4 = 0  
(responses 7 or 8 are scored as missing)

summary index of specified activities = 21

**SOCIAL INTERACTION**

How does social interaction at the club help you cope with negative symptoms of dementia? Please answer those questions that are relevant to you:

When you're at the club, is your anxiety:

worse  better  the same

Is that a bit better/worse? Or a lot? a bit

When you're at the club, is your level of depression:

worse  better  the same

Is that a bit better/worse? Or a lot? like better

When you're at the club are your feelings of isolation:

worse  better  the same

Is that a bit better/worse? Or a lot? like better

**MB: A separate sheet of questions is used for the mental wellbeing survey**

Sensory Trust

Supported by  
The National Lottery

### The Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEWMB)

Below are some statements about feelings and thoughts. Please tick the box that best describes your experience of each over the last 2 weeks

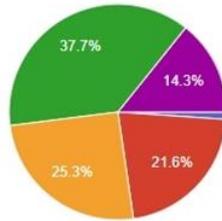
STATEMENTS	None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Often	All of the time
I've been feeling optimistic about the future				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
I've been feeling useful			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
I've been feeling relaxed			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
I've been dealing with problems well			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
I've been thinking clearly			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
I've been feeling close to other people			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
I've been able to make up my own mind about things			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

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Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEWMB), at rights reserved.

## Appendix 2 – Google Form stats, July 2016 – Feb 2018

### Are you a?

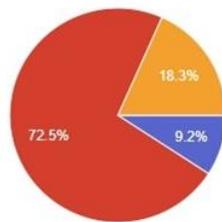
273 responses



- Person diagnosed with dementia
- Family member caring for/supporting someone diagnosed with dementia
- Paid carer working in a residential or community setting
- Service provider offering non-clinical support
- NHS professional with a focus on dementia

### Where do you work or live?

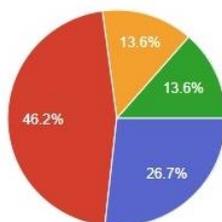
273 responses



- Cornwall
- United Kingdom
- Outside the UK

### Why are you searching for resources today?

273 responses



- For ideas on activities to use with a family member or another individual
- For ideas on activities to use with a support group
- To pass on information and ideas to family members and carers
- To include practical activities in dementia training

# Appendix 3 – example of training feedback

Festival of Social Sciences 2017



## My visit to Exeter! - Little Stories of Nature and Wellbeing

What is your age?  Are you a: Male  Female  Prefer not to say

Please tick:

Yes No Don't know

1. Did you enjoy today's event?

2. Did you learn something new today?

3. Please tell us something you learnt that you didn't know before today:

Reinforced the importance  
of nature for all and  
in my work <sup>with</sup> for people  
with dementia

4. What amazed you most today?

Activities that can easily  
be completed in 10 mins  
and how you can get  
'lost' in what you are doing

Thank you!