



Summary of Actif Woods Wales mid-term evaluation

In late 2014 Coed Lleol commissioned a mid-term evaluation of the Actif Woods Wales project, to review the project's progress to date and make recommendations for the project going forward. The evaluation was carried out by Sue Pritchard of SULEiS (sue@suleis.com).

The following is a summary of the key points in the evaluation: if you would like to read the full report please send a request to katehamilton@smallwoods.org.uk.

Achievements

- The project is making good progress towards its aims, and is achieving a great deal with relatively limited resources;
- It has built good relationships with participants, partners, and other stakeholders in the five project locations and nationally;
- It is taking a robust, credible and proportionate approach to evidencing its impacts through monitoring and research activities.

Challenges

- The ongoing pressure to raise funds is very time-consuming and absorbs time and energy that could be better spent on other aspects of the project; this is a challenge that is shared by many other voluntary sector projects;
- The project has positive impacts on participants' health but this cannot be evidenced in the ways that are accepted as 'clinical proof' by professionals and decision-makers in the health sector - e.g. randomised control trials. Again, this is a problem that is shared by many similar projects, and reflects an unavoidable mis-match between norms in health research and the realities of social projects.
- Although there is a lot of high-level interest in the links between health, nature and the environment the relevant institutional structures are compartmentalised, which is not conducive to joined-up action across these themes.

Recommendations

- Continue with the project, as planned;
- Revise the framework of outcomes and indicators to reflect what has been learned from the project so far (e.g. broader and more appropriate indicators of health impact; more ambitious targets for capacity building and awareness-raising);
- Engage stakeholders and networks at every level more actively in sharing what the project is doing and reaching out to potential allies who can carry forward the agenda of using woodlands for wellbeing;
- Engage peer organisations, related projects, health sector bodies and research institutions in a shared process of collaborative enquiry around using woodlands for wellbeing, to build a robust and coherent evidence base from which to move forward.