



SmallWoods



Comisiwn Coedwigaeth Cymru
Forestry Commission Wales



Wales National Exercise
Referral Scheme (NERS)
Cynllun Atgyfeirio Cleifion
i Wneud Ymarfer Corff Cymru



Actif Woods Wales

Phase 3 Participant feedback and data

September 2011 to March 2012

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Methodology

Qualitative data

Participant feedback was gathered at the end of the programmes during individual and group feedback sessions as well as written feedback on the 'review' section of the 'registration form'.

Limitations: The quality of the data gathered depended on individual willingness to participate, the environment that the feedback was carried out and how much time the participants had with the researcher.

Quantitative data

Two questionnaires were designed in partnership with Forestry Commission Wales and the Advisory Group. The 'Baseline Questionnaire' was given to participants on the first day of the programme (or first session attended) and 'progress questionnaire' completed roughly every 3 months. Please see Appendix 1 for scoring system.

In phase three Aberystwyth, 47 participants were involved (calculated from registration forms from each group), of those people 28% (13) completed a questionnaire at the start and end of this period.

In phase three Treherbert, 65 participants were involved (calculated from registration forms from each group), of those people 25% (16) completed a questionnaire at the start and end of this period.

In this sample of participants the average age was 56 of which 77% are female and 23% male in Aberystwyth and, in Treherbert, the average age was 33 of which 69% female and 31% male.

Limitations: In this phase the number of completed forms has limited the analysis of the results. It is suggested that the following results are indicative only and that these results are reanalysed in conjunction with the accumulated results from phase 1 and 2.

The groups

During phase three of the project there were three groups running in each of the pilot areas.

Group	Area	Participants	Type of activity
A1	Aberystwyth	This group was for people with chronic health conditions. Some of the participants come through the National Exercise Referral Programme	Nordic Walking, nature awareness, woodland skills
A2	Aberystwyth	This group was for people with chronic health conditions. Some of the participants come through the National Exercise Referral Programme	Woodland walks, conservation activities, bushcraft
A3	Aberystwyth	Run in partnership Mind Aberystwyth for people with mental health issues.	Woodcraft skills, nature survey, bushcraft
T1	Treherbert	This group was for people with chronic health conditions.	Outdoor gym, walks
T2	Treherbert	This group was run in partnership with Genesis.	Outdoor gym, walks
T3	Treherbert	This group was run by BTCV and open to people with chronic health conditions.	Environmental conservation activities

Participant feedback

The feedback from participants has been generally positive. Participants have enjoyed the programmes and benefited in the following ways: socially, improvements in health and wellbeing, increased environmental understanding, and improved awareness of local woodlands and access to woodlands. Key themes are investigated below.

Reasons for joining a group

There are a variety of ways that participants find out about and join the groups.



Graph 1: Analysis of the reasons that participants give before starting an Actif Woods programme. This is qualitative data (written feedback on registration forms) analysed for number of times subjects come up.

Key reasons given for wanting to join a group included improving personal health and fitness and to meet people. Learning new things from tree ID and woodworking to discovering new places to go came up frequently. Practical skills and training came up strongly in Treherbert through the conservation group. Generally people were keen on being part of a group that motivated them to do something regularly each week and that got them out of the house.

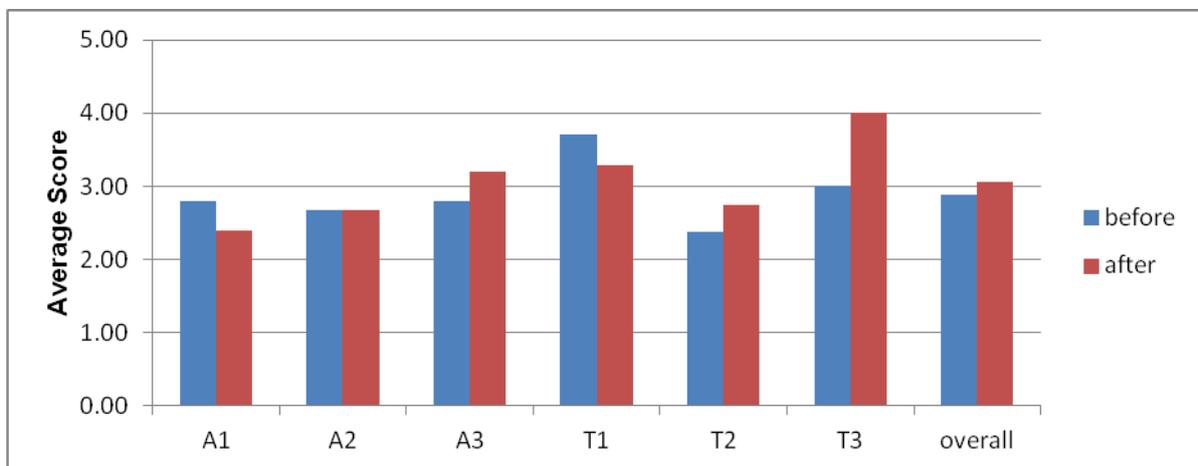
Coed Lleol staff and activity leaders worked towards meeting the diverse needs of their particular group. This meant that each group has developed a pattern and structure that is unique.

Physical Health

Qualitative data indicates that some participants did notice an increase in their general physical health and increased level of fitness. Anecdotal evidence from group leaders' observations indicate that participants are able to undertake more vigorous exercise at the end of the programme than at the start.

"I have lost weight, I do feel fitter and healthier and have been encouraged to do more activity outside of the programme. I feel happier being outside and my energy levels have improved tremendously" Group T1

When participants were asked to rate their general health before and after the programme. Three groups showed an overall increase in score, one group remained the same and two groups showed a small decrease.



Graph 2: Data by area and programme based on average scores of all questionnaires received. Participants were asked to rate their 'general health' with 5=excellent, 4=very good, 3=good, 2=fair and 1=poor.

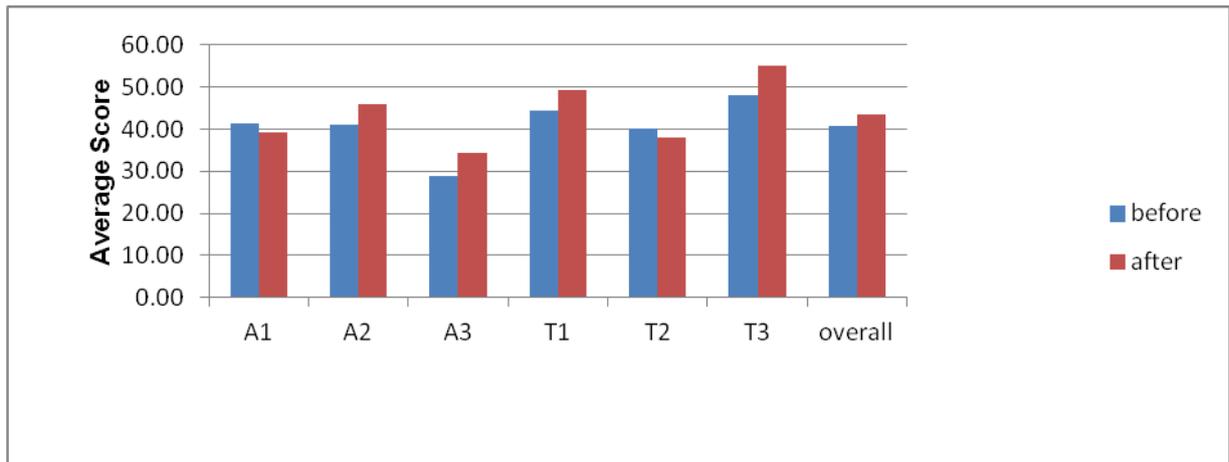
Wellbeing

Qualitative data strongly suggests that the programme has had a positive effect on participant mental wellbeing. Participants have reported a reduction in stress levels, feeling happier after sessions, a sense of achievement, being part of a group / community and an augmented interest in life.

"Going to the woodland sessions has become the high point in my week. It is a space in the week just for me, an oasis away from the stress of the noise and dirt of town living." Group A3

"I have suffered from Body Dysmorphic Disorder and eating disorders. Now, as then, being outside in nature is the only time that I am able to forget what I look like and be free of my body image obsession." A3

“When you suffer from anxiety and depression, the simplest task can seem overwhelming. The effort of taking yourself out for a walk can just be too hard. But the Woodland Project takes all that pressure away. Transport is provided so all we have to do is turn up and get on it. Tea and refreshments are provided. You don’t even need to worry about toilets as you can always go behind a tree!” A3



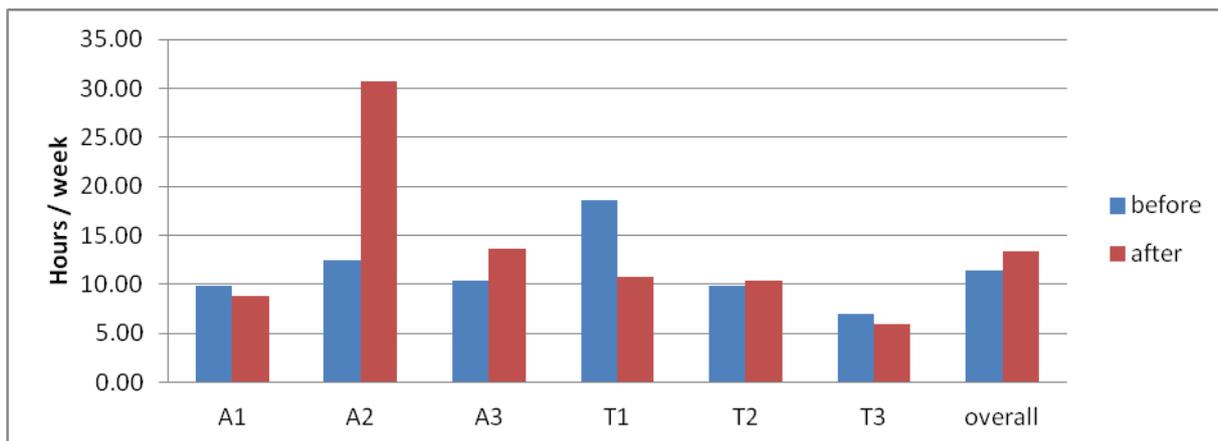
Graph 3: Overall wellbeing. An analysis (before and after) of the average scores given on questions two of the questionnaire. 1 = none of the time, 2=rarely, 3=some of the time, 4=often and 5=all of the time. Maximum wellbeing score 60.

The data analysis supports the positive response documented in the qualitative data. Four out of six groups showed a positive change in score. Two groups showed a small decrease in average score. Groups A3 and T2 both work with participants with mental health problems and this is reflected in their overall score.

Level of exercise

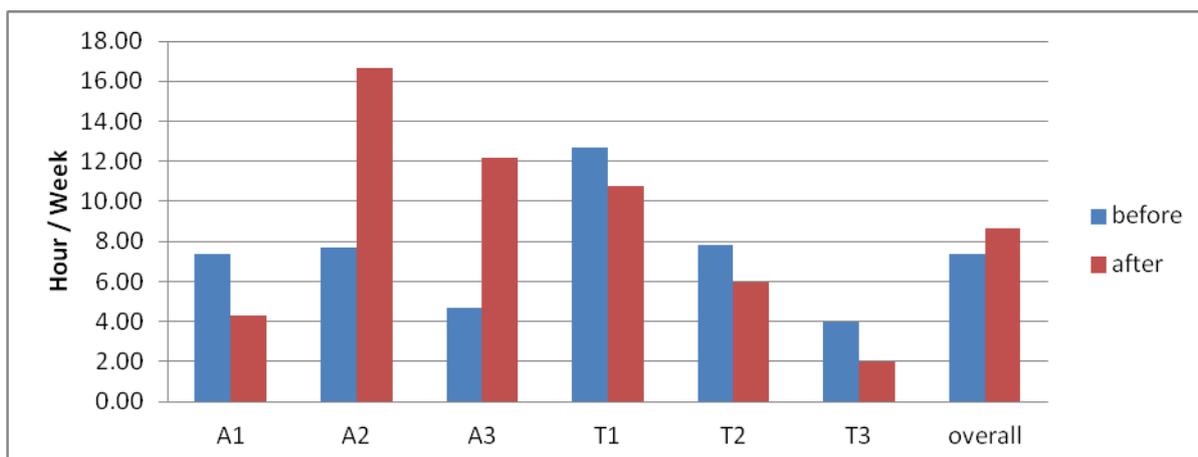
Participant feedback suggests that taking part in the Actif Woods programmes has had a positive impact on exercise and activity levels. Participants have mentioned an increased motivation to exercise, going for more walks independently and showing family and friends local woodlands.

“I’ve really enjoyed taking part in this project, walking outdoors really makes you feel good, my fitness has improved a lot as I’ve been walking a lot instead of taking the car.” T1



Graph 4: Participants were asked to rate the number of hours spent undertaking light exercise each week.

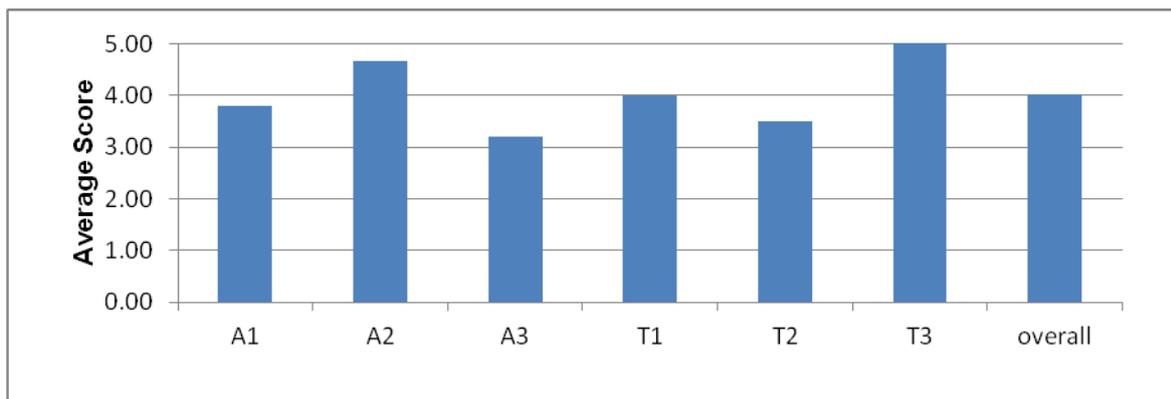
Overall the level of light exercise increased by an average of two hours per participant. However, it is worth noting that the results are based on such a small sample size that the results are easily skewed. For example one participant in group A2 reported that their light exercise level had increased by over thirty hours per week. This is more likely to be an error in filling in the form but it does alter the results.



Graph 5: Participants were asked to rate the number of hours spent undertaking moderate to vigorous exercise each week.

Overall the level of moderate to vigorous exercise increased by an average of 1.5 hours per week. However several groups show a decrease in vigorous activity levels. This could be explained by several participants leaving blank spaces (or a score of zero hours per week) in the progress questionnaire.

The exercise and activity levels question has caused some participants some difficulty in filling in. It is therefore difficult to know if it is an accurate gauge of weekly activity levels. It is recommended that this question is reviewed in the next phase of the project. It is worth noting that when participants were asked if the programme had led them to take more regular exercise there was a high level of agreement (see graph 6).



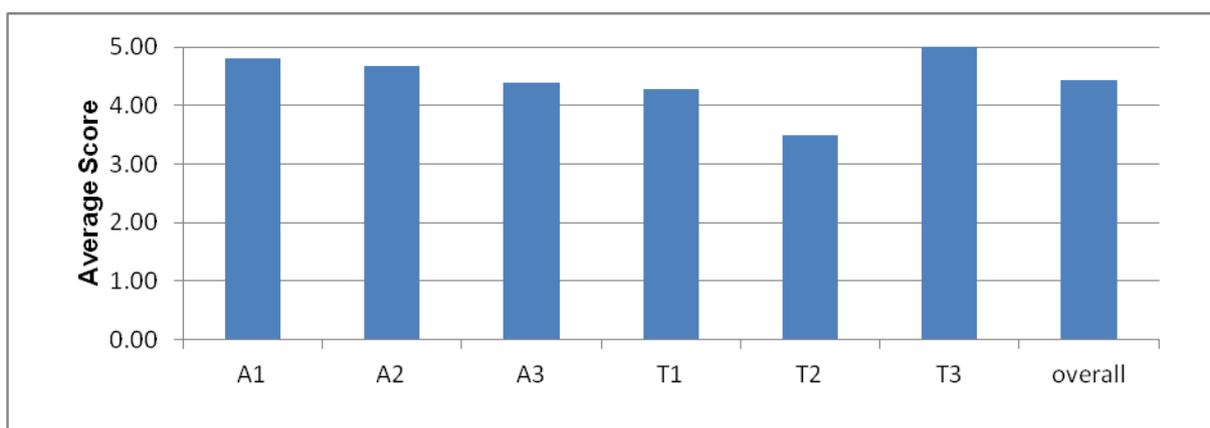
Graph 6: Participants were asked if taking part in the project has led them to take more regular exercise. 5=definitely true, 4=mostly true, 3=don't know, 2=mostly false and 1=definitely false.

Relationship to the environment and woodlands

Feedback from participants and leaders indicate that the project has been very successful in increasing participants understanding and connection with their local woodlands. In Treherbert there is an ongoing improvement to the appearance of the woodland with less litter, better maintained paths and a seating area being created by participants. Participants in Aberystwyth have shown and increased understanding of the natural environment and are using their local woodlands much more. A new area of woodland has been discovered with the potential to become more involved in the management of that woodland.

“Enjoyed the walks and gained a lot more knowledge of the area in which we live in. It wasn't hard work it was sheer pleasure. Thanks to the organisers.” Group A1

“To me, the woods will always be a place of healing and magic, a place of home coming, a place where I am free to be me. Dyfi Woodlands has brought that back into my life and for that I thank you sincerely” Group A3

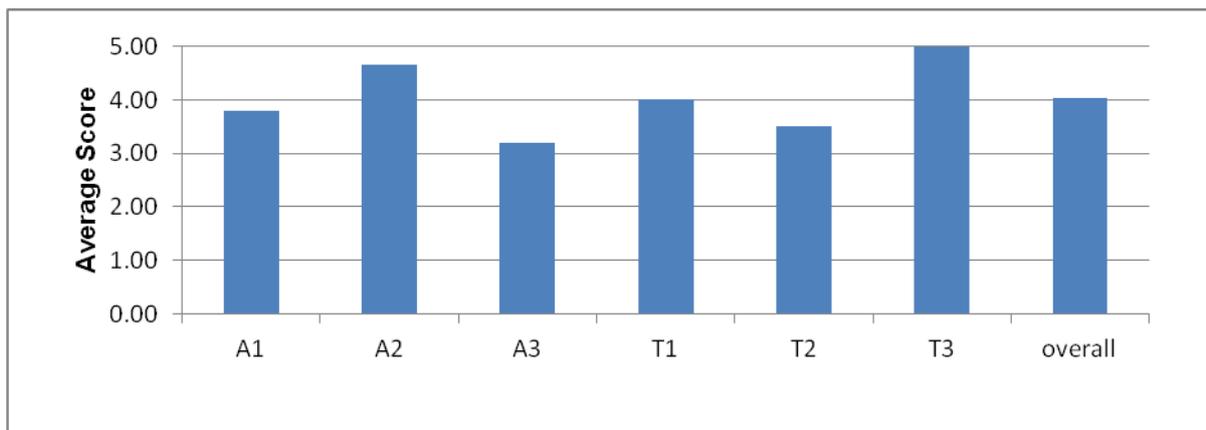


Graph7: Participants were asked if taking part in the project had given them a better understanding of their local environment. 5=definitely true, 4=mostly true, 3=don't know, 2=mostly false and 1=definitely false.

Data from the questionnaires supports the qualitative data with a high level of agreement with the statement 'The project has given me a better understanding of our local environment'. The group showing least agreement with this statement was the Genesis group T2 and the highest level of agreement was from the conservation group T3.

Relationship with the community

There is some indication that the programme had some impact on participants' wider relationship with community as well as the relationship of the wider community with the woodlands. This is particularly true in Treherbert where the project has done considerable work with the local community, youth groups and local agencies to tackle problems such as vandalism and arson.



Graph 8: level of agreement with the statement 'Taking part in the project has increased my level of trust in my community' in question 7 of the questionnaire. 5=definitely true, 4=mostly true, 3=don't know, 2=mostly false and 1=definitely false.

Questionnaire feedback indicates that there is a moderate agreement with this statement from most groups but a high agreement from the Aberystwyth group A2 and Treherbert group T3. Interestingly, these two groups are those that have been most involved in conservation activities within the woodlands. It would be interesting to investigate further and find out if getting involved in this type of activity also increases the link and therefore trust in the local community.

Appendix 1 – questionnaire scoring system

	Excellent	Very Good	Fair	Poor	
1) In general would you say your health is	4	3	2	1	

	None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Often	All of the time
2) Please tick the box that best describes your experience of each over the last 2 weeks	1	2	3	4	5
Total possible (12 questions)					60

3 & 5) If you undertake light activity or exercise, how often and for how long do you do this?	On most days (7)	Around five times a week (5)	Once or twice a week (2)	Once or twice a month (0.5)	Less than once a month (0)
a) Under 30 mins (30)	210	150	60	15	0
b) 30mins – 1 hour (60)	420	300	120	30	0
c) 1 to 2 hours (120)	840	600	240	60	0
d) More than 2 hours (180)	1260	900	360	90	0

	Work up a sweat, breathing hard, increased heart rate	Increased heart rate, moderate breathing	Not out of breath, warmed up but not sweating	Normal breathing, heart rate normal	
4 & 6) How does light exercise make you feel?	4	3	2	1	

	Definitely true	Mostly true	Don't know	Mostly False	Definitely false
7) How TRUE or FALSE is each of the following statements for you?	5	4	3	2	1

	Improved considerably	Improved a little	Hasn't changed	Got worse	
8) Since becoming involved with the project would you say that:	4	3	2	1	