

CONFIDENCE BUILDING- a case study from Treherbert Actif Woods Wales

Coed Lleol, a Forestry Commission Wales funded Wales-wide initiative to reconnect people and woodlands in Wales are encouraging people who have a range of health issues to use woodlands in new and interesting ways to help improve their health and well being through the Actif Woods Wales project, which currently has pilot projects running in Aberystwyth and Treherbert.

In Treherbert, Rhonnda Cynon Taf, this has involved working with the National Exercise Referral Scheme (NERS), Valleys Kids, the Genesis project and BTCV. Local project officer Ceri also works for Valley's Kids and has given some of his thoughts as to how the project has affected one participant from this area, David.



Skillsharing near Penyreglyn woodland

David, 28, has been involved with the Actif Woods project since meeting Alex, who works for BTCV as their employment officer, at the job centre. David says he didn't have any concerns about coming along, but saw it as a way to keep himself busy as he enjoys being outdoors.

When he first started the group he came across as a very shy person, this gradually changed and project leaders have seen a vast difference in David's confidence particularly

his ability to deal with new people. Project leader Ceri says; *"I think that the fact we were in an environment where David feels comfortable really helped him to engage with the other group members. David thrives in the outdoor environment and has a range of bushcraft skills and is always willing to share his knowledge with others"*.

David himself says the thing he likes best about this project is bring in the outdoors, and that he hasn't really enjoyed doing the evaluation forms participants are asked to complete as part of the monitoring for the project- he'd rather just be getting on and doing something practical! David really enjoys getting "stuck in" and will often be the first to offer to



David helping others with his new skills

have a go at difficult tasks like the removal of tree's or big brambles. Before getting involved in the project he didn't think he'd have the chance to do things like cut small trees down, but the project has given him the chance to try out new skills and work towards a level two OCN in woodland management.

He has also volunteered on some Valleys Kid's projects and has engaged really well with people of all ages. David is physically fit but Ceri believes the group has really helped him with his confidence and his mental health and wellbeing.

It definitely hasn't just been a one way process though - Ceri says David is teaching him more about tree ID all the time! Confidence has been David's major outcome from this program, and he would like to continue working in Cwmsaerbren and do more woodland management work in the future.

Looking to the future David has now gained his OCN level two through the project and is currently on a 6 week placement using his new skills working as a groundsman in a local cemetery. He says; *"I met lots of new people and am more confident. I found the other people in the group friendly and easy to get on with, and am looking forward to more woodland management work in the future."*