

BUILDING SOCIAL LINKS- 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 facilitates the programmes in Treherbert and also works for Valley's Kids. He has given some of his thoughts as to how the project has affected Martin, a participant.

Martin, 47, met Alex, who works for BTCV as their employment officer, at the job centre whilst searching for jobs. It was Alex who introduced Martin to the Actif Woods Wales programmes as something that could be of interest to him.

Martin saw his health as average but thought the activities would be something to do and a way to get out of the house. Looking back over his involvement he says; *"It got me out of the house and meeting new people. It gives me a weekly routine, and will hopefully help me to get back into work in the future"*.

He had some issues fitting in to the group at first, and it took him some time for him to settle in, but he soon became more involved. He really enjoyed working as part of a team although he found this difficult at first. However says he mostly found the other people easy going and friendly. In the end he says how well they worked together as a team was the thing that surprised him the most. And



Taking a break on our new bench- Martin is on the left

the people were one of the things he enjoyed best about activities as well as the chance to get outdoors and cleaning the stream – giving ownership over a part of his local area. Project officer Ceri says; *"Martin was quite a socially isolated person and the group gave him a good opportunity to meet like minded people who enjoy the outdoors."*

During the course of his involvement with the group Martin has been able to complete his OCN level 2 in woodland management, and says it also helped with his ECDL course as he was using a computer a lot. During the OCN he really enjoyed helping other people

with their work; he is a keen photographer and took many photos for his own and other peoples files.

Martin use to work as a factory machinist and, since being part of the Coed Lleol programme, has applied for many jobs but unfortunately has had little success so far. He now says he is considering changing the types of jobs he applies for to maybe work outdoors, using his more recently developed woodland skills, acquired during his time with Actif Woods Wales. Ceri adds; *"I think the group has given him the confidence to look outside of his main previous job area and think about new possibilities such as working outdoors"*.



Martin taking part in activities with a wider group

The weekly routine is very important to Martin as, besides job club activities he does not have many other activities during his week. Since being involved, as well as feeling fitter and always having someone to talk to he says the group has got him out of the house and meeting new people, which he appreciates. He says the plans to continue with the group as long as it is running as it gives him a weekly routine and is something he looks forward to each week- a real

structure and focus to help him both socially, physically and mentally.