Fields Creative Walks Case Study

Encouraging active travel, connecting women and discovering nature for wellbeing

Background:

In December 2024, S2R met with Environmental Projects in Kirklees (EPIKS) and a group of community partners at the Fields Community Space in Batley. They came together to look at improving the uptake of active travel in Batley. During these conversations, S2R connected with the Fields and offered a series of nature-based wellbeing activities for parents and children as part of The Fields community mission. EPIKS thought this was a great way to encourage people to get out more and to start to engage with active travel, and the sessions were included in their Walk Wheel Ride Hub.

Aims:

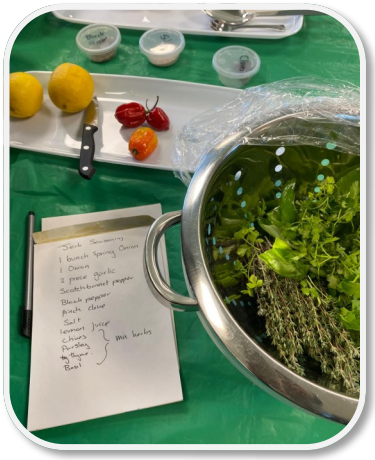
The 3 partners came with three complementary priorities. EPIKS wanted to encourage active travel, The Fields wanted to provide learning and connection in their community and S2R wanted to promote positive mental health through connection with nature.

What We Did:

The project introduced participants to the natural environment around them, highlighting aspects they may not have previously noticed. This was achieved through slow, mindful walks and a variety of nature-based art and craft activities designed to promote wellbeing and connection with nature. During the walks, participants engaged their senses by listening to birdsong and observing trees, berries, and wild plants. They collected leaves and other natural materials, which were later used to create nature journals and explore creative projects. Activities also included foraging, gardening, and preparing and sharing drinks and seasonings, allowing participants to appreciate the fruits of their efforts. Throughout these experiences, participants shared laughter, developed new skills, learned to slow down and notice their surroundings and strengthened their connections with both each other and the natural world. Led by a local Muslim woman, there was also a strong emphasis on culture, religion and its connections with nature.

What Happened Next:

Participants initially arrived unsure of what to expect, but as sessions progressed, they began to relax and actively engage. A group of regular attendees was formed, and a WhatsApp group was established to continue conversations, share photos and videos, and discuss topics explored during sessions. The atmosphere remained relaxed and welcoming, with no pressure to participate, yet everyone chose to engage and support one another. Participants invited friends to join and expressed appreciation for the inclusive, informal approach, the opportunity to learn, to connect socially and to develop a deeper connection with nature.



What We Achieved:
Active travel - are people walking more?

Participants told us they had discovered new places, noticed new things and enjoyed walking in a group. They appreciated that the walks were achievable for them:

"Walking in a group is fun, we meet people and have interesting conversation."

"It's a small walk, it's something I can manage."

"I was a bit sceptical in the beginning, but I am enjoying the walks and the activities that go with them!"

"We are discovering paths and green spaces we didn't know about."

Are people connecting and learning new things?

Participants told us that they enjoy meeting people and having interesting conversations on the walks. Together they learned about nature around them and engaged with various apps to help them identify plants, trees and birds. A WhatsApp community now links them outside of the sessions and the group feel a sense of unity:

"I enjoy meeting people and having conversations."

"It brings unity, builds community and brings people together."

Are people connecting with nature for their wellbeing?

Participants told us that the sessions give them a purpose to get out of the house and helped build their confidence. They tell us that they are learning about nature, connecting with one another, working on a community garden together, being more active and noticing what is around them more. These are the 5 ways to wellbeing and along with creativity and connecting with nature we know that these things are indicators of improved wellbeing.

"Coming to this group gives me purpose and to get out of the house."

"I want to get back to work. Coming here gives me that confidence."

"I am slowing down and noticing what is around me, not just walking from A to B."

What Next?

This group has been successful in engaging women that are normally thought of as hard to reach. S2R will continue to support this project and expand it to reach other schools. Researchers from Street Scape visited our project and shared their findings as an example of good practice that will inform the West Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy and encourage others to adopt similar approaches across the region. For more information, please see page 34 of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy online. Visit: www.yourvoice.westyorks-ca.gov.uk/wynature and open the document called *Report - What matters to us (community reflections) (6.56 MB) (pdf)* under the Recent Engagement heading on the right-hand side of the page.