INTERIM REPORT YEAR 1

WILDLIFE TRUSTS
NATURALLY CONNECTED YOUNG PEOPLE

SEPTEMBER 2026

SALLY FORT & DR. STEPH HAWKE
MOOR IMPACT LTD.

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5 PATHFINDER HUBS ACROSS THE UK



MOOR IMPACT LTD. 2026

OUTPUTS & REACH

4200+ ATTENDANCES

800+ HOURS DELIVERY WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

491 YOUNG PEOPLE

400+ SESSIONS HELD

54% SCHOOLS, 24% SPECIAL SCHOOLS, 21% COMUNITY GROUPS

64 LOCATIONS.

74% URBAN, 19% RURAL, 7% ONLINE

WELLBEING

- YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCED “MEANINGFUL, IMPORTANT AND SIGNIFICANT” WELLBEING INCREASES, ACCORDING TO SWEMWBS GUIDANCE.
- 70% OF YOUNG PEOPLE MAINTAINED OR INCREASED WELLBEING
- YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HIGH LEVELS OF WELLBEING INCREASED 3-FOLD
- WELLBEING INCREASES IN RESILIENCE, CONFIDENCE, AND ALL OTHER WELLBEING OUTCOMES MEASURED

MOOR IMPACT LTD. 2026

NATURE CONNECTION

- NATURE CONNECTION MAKES YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE PROGRAMME HAPPIER.
- BECAUSE THEY ARE FEELING MORE AT ONE WITH NATURE
- AND FIND IT MORE BEAUTIFUL THAN BEFORE
- THEY FIND IT MORE AMAZING NOW - I.E. THEIR AWE, AND THEREFORE FEELING OF POSITIVITY, INCREASES
- ENJOYING MORE SOCIAL CONNECTION, AND FEELING CALMER, WERE OTHER COMMON BENEFITS ACCORDING TO YOUNG PEOPLE.

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INCLUSION

MINIMUM NUMBER OF SESSIONS DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPINGS WERE INCLUDED
(302 SESSIONS ANALYSED)





FURTHER DETAILS >>>

FOREWORD

Everyone has the right to be close to and learn in nature and to help build a healthier environment for wildlife, themselves and future generations. Supporting young people to build a connection with nature is at the heart of The Wildlife Trusts' health and education work.

Naturally Connected Young People (NCYP) is a programme of national projects led by The Wildlife Trusts and kindly funded by The Prudence Trust. These projects offer a series of progressive nature-connection sessions, aimed at fostering good mental health, confidence and feelings of safety in young people for them to access and use nature as part of their well-being toolkit.

NCYP supports underserved and underrepresented young people in their schools and local communities to build their own relationships with nature, supporting their ongoing mental health and well-being for the long-term.

Underserved young people often have the least access to nature, coupled with the highest levels of poor health and well-being outcomes. This programme seeks to address this. By bringing young people experiencing the greatest levels of hardship closer to the natural world, NCYP can provide both respite and the confidence to build a life-long relationship with nature that they can lean on time and again.

The Wildlife Trusts aim for the experiences young people gain through NCYP to have a lasting impact, both for them as individuals, and for future generations of young people to come. The evidence gathered throughout the programme will be used to build direct policy and advocacy asks relating to well-being and nature-based solutions in response to the growing youth mental health crisis.

Jen Davis

Education & Learning Manager, The Wildlife Trusts



METHODS & DATA FOR THIS INTERIM REPORT

CONTEXT

Brief: Evaluation of positive impact on a national level.

491 Young people total.

Approximately 440 sessions held.

QUANTITATIVE DATA

- 408 Observation sheets from 5 pathfinders: monitoring event information and collecting reflections / learning from each session.
    - Significance: Excellent for events in this programme: 99% confidence, 1.75% margin of error.
- 200 SWEMWEBS wellbeing scores
    - Significance: Very strong for participants in this programme: 93% confidence, 5% margin of error.
- 231 Nature Connection Index Score
    - Significance: Excellent for the participants in this programme: 96% confidence, 5% margin of error.

QUALITATIVE DATA

- Qualitative feedback from 135 young people across all five delivery areas. This includes 66 mid and end point reflective and 'Most Significant Change' comments on forms from young people, 32 end point 'Most Significant Change' in-depth conversations, and 50 ad hoc comments. 256 individual comments were analysed.
    - Limitations: Participants self-select into the qualitative data collection process on basis of either or both: literacy, language, learning and communications abilities and / or trust levels between young person and staff member. So, the qualitative data shows what young people in the programme experience when they engage well. Inevitably those who are less engaged are less represented, so we know less about their involvement. Overall, the volume and reliability of quantitative data, and the brief to focus on positive impact makes this an acceptable limitation which we include for transparency purposes.

HEADLINES: WELLBEING

General wellbeing. According to SWEMWBS, wellbeing has increased to an important and meaningful degree, and more young people are now experiencing high wellbeing than at the start of the programme.

- 70% of young people **maintained or increased their wellbeing** during NCYP.
- Young people experiencing **high wellbeing, increased three-fold** (from 6% to 18%).
- Young people experiencing **low wellbeing reduced by a third** (from 46% to 30%).
- **An 'important and meaningful' increase** in SWEMWBS scoring is an overall change of 1-3 points (out of a maximum 35 points). Young people across NCYP increased in their wellbeing by an average 2.76 points.
- Increases occurred across every wellbeing outcome measured through SWEWMBS .

Nature Connection Index was also used with young people, which contains two 'feeling good' wellbeing indicators amongst its six criteria.

- '**Feeling happy'** was the indicator that showed the highest increase, increasing by 18%.
- **'Being amazed'**, the other wellbeing element (linked to positive feelings of awe) also increased though to a lesser extent (increased by 9%)

Resilience increased strongly throughout the programme.

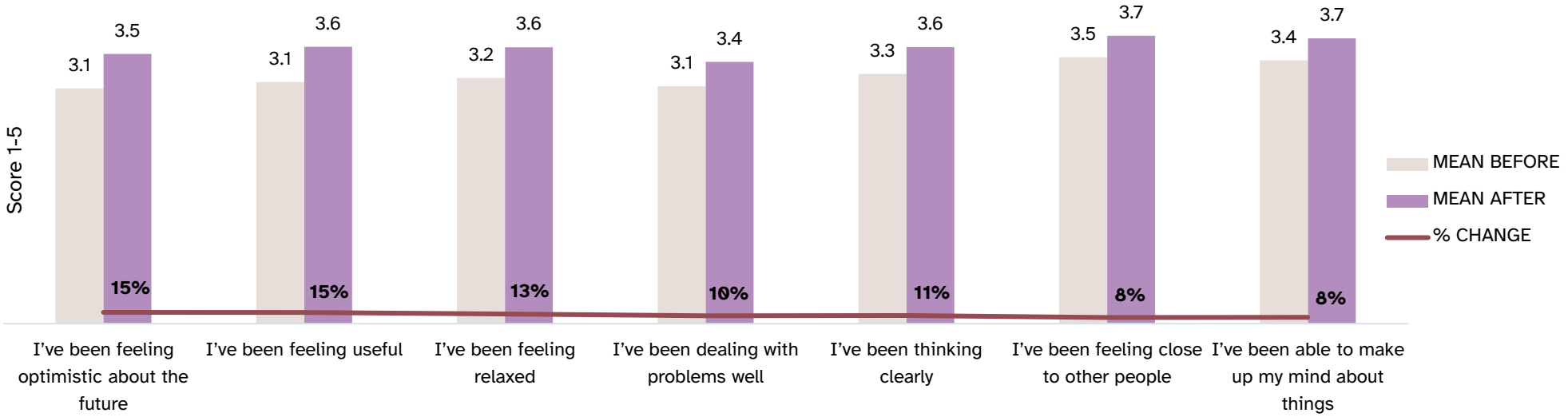
- The SWEMWEBS outcome 'I've been feeling optimistic' was used to reflect resilience. This outcome showed the second highest level of increase throughout the programme, out of the 7 SWEMWBS outcomes available. (increased by 15%)

Confidence also increased, though there is more to do to match the success of resilience increases.

- SWEMWEBS outcome 'I've been able to make up my mind about things' was used to reflect confidence. This also grew, though not as strongly, and not as much as most other SWEMWBS outcomes (increased by 8%)

GENERAL WELLBEING

CHANGE IN SWEMWBS WELLBEING OUTCOMES



According to SWEMWBS:

- Wellbeing increased to an important and meaningful degree (i.e. +1-3 points). Total average score increased from 22.6-25.2 (+2.76 points)
- 70% of young people maintained or increased their wellbeing during NCYP.
- Young people experiencing high wellbeing increased three-fold (from 6% to 18%).
- Young people experiencing low wellbeing reduced by a third (from 46% to 30%).
- Increases occurred across every wellbeing outcome measured through SWEWMBS.

Nature Connection Index was also used with young people, and this contains two 'feeling good' wellbeing indicators in its outcome criteria:

- '**Feeling happy'** was the indicator that showed the highest increase, increasing by 18%.
- **'Being amazed'**, the other wellbeing element (linked to positive feelings of awe) also increased though to a lesser extent (by 9%)

Comments young people gave in their feedback also showed social connection and belonging, emotional self-regulation, open-mindedness and a sense of freedom, and feeling more relaxed and calm.

FEELING HAPPIER: Some young people explained how the programme helped them feel generally happier: "I felt better doing this programme"; "Just feel happier and relaxed"; "Made me happy"; "Having a good time." Others described feeling calm and relaxed: "Peace, fun, nature"; "I feel more comfortable"; "It made me relaxed and happy. Spending time outside and feeling happier and making new connections"; "I've been more relaxed."

"I FEEL MORE CONFIDENT BEING OUTSIDE NOW. I REALLY LOVED BEING IN THE WATER TOO. I DON'T HAVE MY SWIM AWARDS SO DON'T REALLY KNOW WHAT TO DO NEAR WATER, BUT SPENDING SOME TIME NEAR THE FLOWING WATER WAS CALMING AND I LOVED IT."

"I LIKE BEING OUT IN NATURE BECAUSE IT'S CALMING AND IT'S BETTER THAN BEING IN LESSONS AND GIVES ME A BREAK AND IT'S HELPING ME NOT SKIVE THAT MUCH ANYMORE."

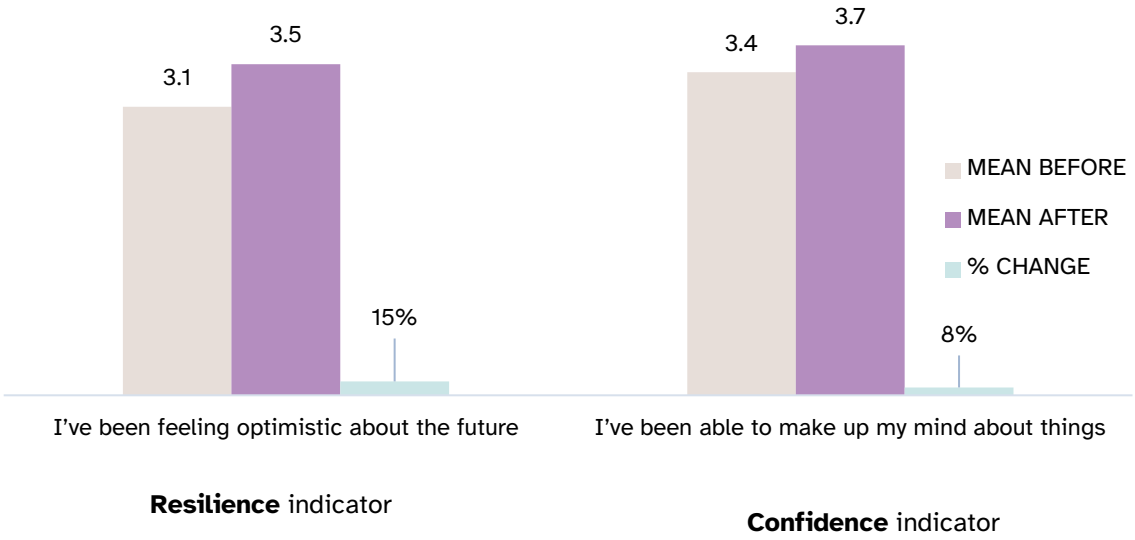
RELATIONSHIPS WITH SCHOOL AND LEARNING:
Some young people described nature and the outdoors helping them feel calmer, and how this helped their self-regulation and feelings about school or learning. Activities became a respite from the mainstream classroom, or renewed motivation to attend school and try academically: "it's fun and a break from school"; "Getting out of a lesson"; "I haven't skived these last few days. Being here has calmed me down"; "It's gotten me to want to come in (to school) and it helps coming back in and not being in the classroom"; "I am trying to do my work much more." Others recognised the impact nature and the outdoors have on their ability to think and learn differently. "Got to enjoy a lesson other than English"; "I loved learning outdoors" "Good change. Good to learn things here. It's a better way of learning things and I feel better because I know more things and feel like I can learn."

SOCIAL ANXIETY, CONNECTION AND BELONGING. Many of the young people who gave feedback described feeling less socially anxious, more connected to others and having achieved a sense of belonging: "I did things with the group. I don't normally do things with groups and feel quite uncomfortable doing that stuff"; "Teamwork"; "I don't normally like trying new stuff with new people"; "I made new friends"; "I trusted being in a group with other carers. I feel a bit more comfortable now being in groups and being outside"; "it's nice to have new friends and know I can do things I couldn't do before."

"IT KIND OF HELPED ME MAKE A LOT OF NEW FRIENDS. I DIDN'T TALK TO R THAT MUCH BUT EVER SINCE THE TRIP, I'VE SEEN THE OTHER GROUP A LOT AND WANT TO TALK TO THEM."

WELLBEING: RESILIENCE & CONFIDENCE

SWEMWBS RESILIENCE & CONFIDENCE INDICATORS



Resilience indicator

Confidence indicator

"BEFORE, I DIDN'T REALLY BELIEVE IN MYSELF, I DIDN'T KNOW IF I HAD THE RIGHT ANSWER OR NOT. BUT NOW I FEEL LIKE I'M ABLE TO TRUST MY OWN OPINIONS AND MY OWN THOUGHTS"

"I DIDN'T THINK I COULD DO ANYTHING, AND NOW I KNOW THAT I CAN DO THINGS. I AM GOOD WITH TOOLS AND CAN BUILD NEW THINGS AND IT HELPS ME CONCENTRATE."

Resilience increased strongly throughout the programme.

- SWEMWEBS outcome 'I've been feeling optimistic about the future' was used to reflect resilience. Of the seven SWEMWBS outcomes measured, this showed the second highest level of change, increasing by 15% by the end of the programme.
- Young people who placed resilience in their top three areas of Most Significant Change ('You learned how to keep going or try again if something didn't work') and gave a score of average 9.10 out of 10 for how strongly that change was due to this programme.
- In young people's feedback resilience appeared as a growth mindset, a willingness to get things wrong, or step outside their comfort zone. They said, "I found things I could do and it was OK to try new things."; "not worried about giving new things a try and I know that I can't get it wrong"; "pushing myself out of my comfort zone and doing things I would never have done"; "If you don't keep trying, you'd give up and waste your time."

Confidence is also starting to increase.

- SWEMWBS outcome 'I've been able to make up my mind about things' was used to reflect confidence, with scores increasing by 8%.
- The confidence indicator in the Most Significant Change options young people were asked about (i.e. you have more belief in yourself') was the second most frequently selected choice. Young people gave a score of 8.8 out of 10 for how much this programme was specifically responsible for those changes.
- Young people explained "I feel more confident and like I can do stuff" and this was closely related to wellbeing with confidence as counter to feelings of worry and anxiety (particularly social anxiety): "Less worried. Learning I could do stuff and have fun outside"; "I used to feel scared to talk to new people and now I'm not."
- One school staff member reported, ""They can be quiet and often seek reassurance from others in the group, but while taking part in the programme it was really amazing to see them grow in confidence to make choices on their own and really enjoy what they are doing and see a sense of achievement."

HEADLINES: NATURE CONNECTION

Nature connection has successfully helped young people's wellbeing improve in year 1 of Naturally Connected Young People.

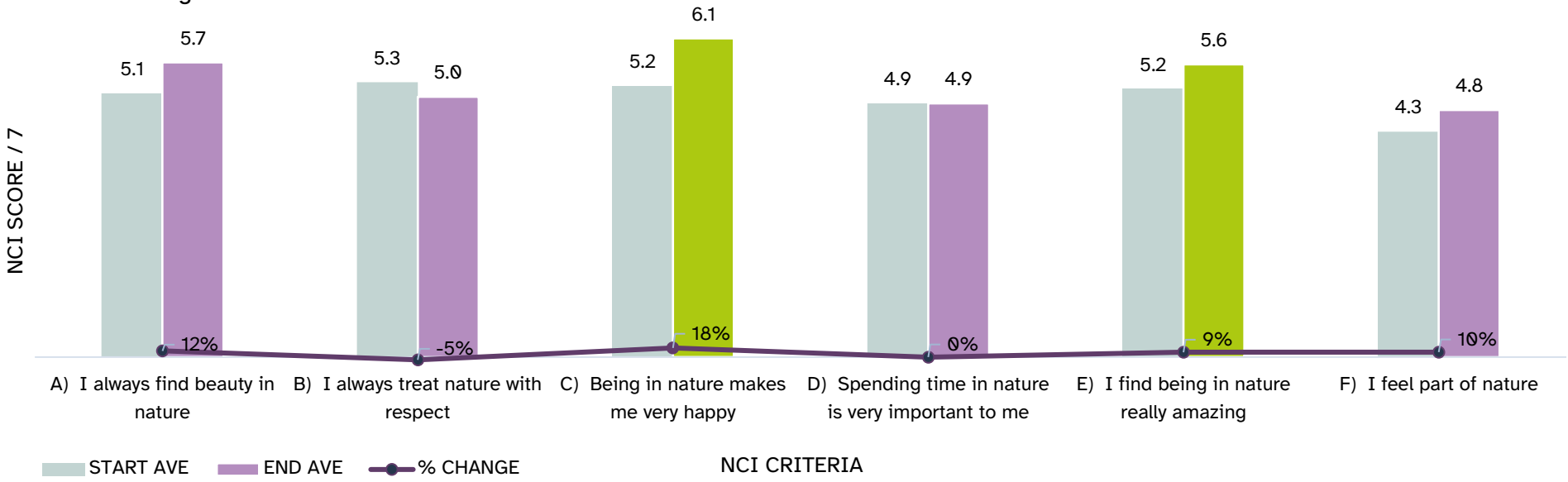
- According to Nature Connection Index score, being in nature...
    - Makes young people more happy than was the case before this programme (increased by 18%)
    - And makes young people find being in nature more amazing than before the programme (increased by 9%)
    - Helps them find more beauty in nature than before (increased by 12%)
    - Makes them feel more part of nature (increased by 10%)
- 'Feeling differently about being outdoors' was the most frequently selected 'Most Significant Change' option young people selected when asked about the difference the activities had on them.
- There's more work to do – young people don't yet feel more respectful of nature, so seeing those scores change in Years 2 and 3 would be a wonderful indicator of the power of nature connection on young people's resilience – if they see enough of a correlation between their actions towards nature and their own future.

NATURE CONNECTION

NATURE CONNECTION INDEX RESULTS.

Nature making people happy is the criteria with the largest increase.

Green = wellbeing indicators.



- Both wellbeing measures (C and E above) embedded in the NCI scale increased.
- Nature making people happy shows the largest increase of all the NCI outcomes.
- The importance of spending time in nature is no different to people than at the start – but the impact it has on them is more positive. They find more beauty there, feel happier, find nature more amazing, and feel more at one with nature.
- And yet they don't necessarily treat it more respectfully. We don't know why. Perhaps as they continue to feel more part of nature and understand how their own and nature's futures are fundamentally connected, this will become more positive too.

NATURE CONNECTION: Young people were asked for up to three 'Most Significant Changes' experienced through the programme. '*Feeling differently about being outdoors'* ranked highest of all their options. Echoed by the young people who described how they've chosen to independently continue connections with nature in their own time: "Climbing trees"; "I've been looking for bugs and snails, I like looking for spiders in their webs"; "Started my own garden"; "I will look at the different birds at my house"; "Putting food out for the birds"; "I enjoyed being out in nature because I love all the wildlife"; "I enjoyed learning about things I could apply to my own life like identifying trees."





BEING OUTDOORS: Several young people explained more about what being outdoors meant to them now as a result of this project: "I never used to go out"; "I don't normally go outside so much but it has been really good and I have enjoyed it." When asked to expand, they confirmed "I feel more comfortable and being outside with friends"; "Feeling differently about being outside. Being outside has made my mood feel better."

SENSORY, CREATIVE AND EXPLORATORY LEARNING. Some described connection to nature in sensory terms: "I like the sound of nature"; "I liked the sensory stuff"; "Touching things..." Others mentioned new knowledge: "I didn't know as much about nature and people and now I do"; "Loved seeing and learning about animals I didn't know"; "Learning more about the environment". One described the satisfaction of their new discoveries:



NATURE STEWARDSHIP. For a few, what made a difference to them can be described as nature-stewardship: "Learning about the difficulties nature faces and actively spending more time surrounded by it"; "I've made more birdfeeders and put them around my garden again." This, along with the social gains, might explain the high increased in the SWEMWBS outcome 'I've been feeling useful'.

INCLUSION

DEMOGRAPHIC	COUNT OF SESSIONS DEMOGRAPHIC WAS DOCUMENTED / 302 SESSIONS
SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS / DISABILITIES	221
NEURODIVERGENT OR SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL & MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS	124
PUPIL PREMIUM	61
SCHOOL AVOIDERS	55
LOW ACCESS TO NATURE / WILD SPACES	49
FREE SCHOOL MEALS	47
HIGH MULTIPLE DEPRIVATION	41
ETHNIC MINORITY	39
YOUNG CARER	38
LOW ACADEMIC ACHIEVMENT	36
YOUNG PEOPLE IN / FROM CARE	24
TRAVELLER COMMUNITY	11
ENGLISH AS ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE	4

Trusts worked with schools and communities to offer activities to those most excluded from nature or nature connection, and those most disadvantaged in society.

- 54% of sessions were held with schools.
- 24% in special schools, though 73% of *all* sessions included young people with SEND needs.
- 21% with community groups and partners.
- 74% in urban areas, where access to nature is more limited.
- 19% were in rural areas.
- 7% held online to overcome barriers for young people who find it harder to meet up in person.

School and community leaders provided generic information about who was included in the group. Individual demographic detail was not collected due to the complexity of safeguarding, data protection, barriers to consent, and ethical factors that would involve.

The details school and group leaders provided has been categorised according to the different wording *they* identified. These figures are therefore the *minimum* number of sessions in which the different types of young people were represented.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YEARS 2 AND 3 OF THE PROGRAMME?

- Year 1 Pathfinders have done incredibly positive work. Even more so given this is a new area of programming with lots of learning taking place along the way. This gives a lot of hope for the potential of what Year 2 (and eventually Year 3) Trusts can also achieve.
- We have fantastic levels of data that enable us to be extremely confident about the reliability of these results. We want to keep that level of data collection going as more Trusts come on board, so we can be just as confident about future results.
- We want to see the 70% of young people maintaining or increasing their wellbeing continue, or even increase. We'd also be delighted to see the percentage of young people moving from 'low' or 'moderate' wellbeing to 'high' wellbeing grow even more.
- We'd love to see the programme demonstrate increasing confidence (i.e. SWEMWBS 'being able to make up my mind about things') as strongly as it shows increasing resilience and other areas of wellbeing.
- We want a better understanding of how much credit this programme can take for the results. Early indications look very positive, with young people scoring an average 9 out of 10 on this question. However, we need much higher quantities of feedback on this question to be more certain. This means embedding the question into routine data collection, to get as many results as we have for the SWEMWBS and NCI figures. We expect to see the score drop lower than 9 when measured on a larger scale but would feel more confident in the validity of the result. Any score that shows this programme can truly take credit would be welcome. Anything above 6 (i.e. this programme takes more than 60% of the credit) would be a great result and enable us to be certain the programme takes the majority of the credit (allowing for a margin of error of up to 9% depending on the volume of responses).
- Though not a core aim of the programme, we'd all love to see young people report they feel more respectful of nature in years 2 and 3.
- We are keen to look at more qualitative data and look forward to a larger set of data in Year 2 due to having many more Trusts involved and gathering young people's feedback through the shared key questions provided in the toolkits provided.

Thank You

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