

Art Oasis



Bringing People and Wildlife together through the Arts

March 2017—June 2019

A report to assess the impact of a 2 year project delivered by Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust staff, volunteers and partners



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Bettws Lifehouse students pleased with the projects they have created and the new skills they learnt whilst working with willow.

Introduction and background



In recent years several Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust sites had seen an increase in anti-social behaviour, resulting in vandalism to reserves structures, such as bird hides, benches, boardwalks and signage. This is very costly to the Trust's already stretched resources and affects the safety and usability of the sites for visitors. We knew there was a need to use creative interventions, in order to prevent further damage and renew connections with people of all ages and backgrounds, to bring a greater understanding of the natural world, whilst growing a lasting respect and sense of responsibility towards it.

The Art Oasis project was conceived and a funding search commenced. MWT was awarded a grant under the Welsh Government Scheme – Arwain. The project's remit was to reach out to people (primarily young people/harder to reach groups) in Welshpool and Newtown, connecting new audiences not traditionally involved in the work of the Trust. Using the medium of art, in its many forms, as a tool for engagement, a series of pilot projects, outreach events and activities set out to achieve the desired outcome - a reduction in anti-social behaviour, a greater affinity with the natural world, a realization of the importance of our green spaces and of course the wide range of wildlife that we share it with.



Project Aims

To bring people of all ages and abilities closer to nature through a wide variety of arts activities, events and projects



Project Objectives

To inspire greater awareness, connection and responsibility to our natural world.

Delivery model

Art Oasis project officers engaged young people, volunteers and mentors to take part in Art Action Days, MWT public events and one day outreach sessions, as well as longer term projects, taking several weeks to complete, with groups, clubs and at educational settings.

Local creative environmental practitioners were contracted for some projects and events adding a professional edge that supported high quality participant experiences, increasing creativity and producing meaningful art interventions. With these artists, participants explored examples of environmental artists works and world wide arts projects, that have transformed green spaces, often including a 'hands on' walking visit to their own local green spaces, to discuss themes, ideas and potential locations for installation.

The main objectives for sessions were :-

- To discuss/explore '**How we feel about Nature**'.
- To create/design art/craftwork that inspires people to reflect on/interpret the natural world and our relationship to it, identifying issues and of course, solutions.
- To install created environmental artworks/interpretation, adding value to nature reserves and a variety of public access green spaces in the Newtown and Welshpool area.

The varied art works created throughout the project have used sustainable, locally sourced and recycled materials, inventively and artfully interpreting the natural world to promote caring and socially responsible behaviours attitudes and values. Project objectives aim to **encourage and support a new generation to nurture their green spaces as a safe, educational and inspiring place to spend their leisure time.**

Project staff/artist facilitators introduced resources, enabling participants to explore examples of environmental artists and arts projects that have transformed green spaces. Follow on discussions visits/walks to their local green spaces presented themes, ideas and possible locations for installation, thus starting the process of ownership.

A wide variety of local businesses and partners were engaged, ranging from mental health service providers to metal fabricators, to printing and graphic design firms, adding great value to project outcomes, many donating professional services freely.



Project performance

Art Oasis / Outreach sessions delivered	105
Participants supported	2182
Pilot projects	14
Networks Established	1
Stakeholders engaged	27
Communities Benefitting	7
Businesses Benefitting	10

Stakeholders, Businesses, Partners

Ponthafren, Kaleidoscope, PCC Youth Intervention Services, North Montgomeryshire Volunteer Bureau, Credu—Powys Carers Service, Davies Oriel Gallery, Wildbanks Conservation, Newtown Town Council, Open Newtown, Friends Of Broneirion Girl Guiding Centre, Friends Of Severn Farm Pond, Crafty Pixies Art Studio, Drawn Together Project, County Times, NatSol, WPG (City Signs), Wrexham Borough Council (Keep Wales Tidy), Shropshire Galvanizers.

Local artists: Spike (the Blacksmith) Blackhurst, Linda James & Paul Butler/Brooks Art, Ivor Arbuckle, Caroline Lowe

Local schools: Bettws Lifehouse, Penygloddfa Primary, Welshpool High School, Llanfyllin High School, Cedewain School, NPTC Newtown Campus, Maesydre Church In Wales Primary, Leighton Primary.

MWT wishes to thank all the support received by our partners, stakeholder groups and organisations !



The inspiring new design for the welcome board at the entrance to Severn Farm Pond Nature Reserve in Welshpool . Images were collected at the reserve with young people from a local school and a young carers groups. Local business, City Signs (WPG) gave free graphic design support to create this stunning 8ft high interpretation board.





Young people enjoyed the opportunities to get creative with support of staff and artists. They produced some wonderful creations and interpretation for the reserves. Participants here are from Credu - Young Carers, Bettws Lifehouse School and an MWT Autumn Art Family Event.



Good practice and key success factors



We found that it is vital to engage widely with local organisations and business partners explaining in person (to client groups as well) what the project is all about, how they can get involved and how it can help their service users or business profile. It is important to promote this involvement using all available media, particularly social media and the local press. Positive reciprocal partnerships engenders ongoing goodwill that will add great value to any project outcomes, providing important evidence of support and increasing the variety of activities and professional resources that can be incorporated.

It is important to work with partner organisations in the involvement of volunteers, recruiting widely from diverse backgrounds brings a wealth of expertise, knowledge and skills that again will add value to the breadth of activities, health and safety, heightening the participants (and the volunteers) experience and at the same time increasing confidence in trying new things and meeting new people.

It is also important to take plenty of high quality pictures of the participants at each session (with permission of course), to support reporting and publicity



Pupil from Bettws Lifehouse school learning photography techniques

Young man very pleased with the nature inspired bunting he created



Barriers

Art Oasis project staff found the biggest hurdle was the project paperwork. The participation sheets and feedback forms understandably provide vital evidence by which to track, monitor and evidence outcomes, but became problematic as time constraints, weather and unwillingness from participants to sign became apparent at most sessions. Regular explanations as to why and what the paperwork was for, were given to participants who were happy to sign, but reticent to fill in personal details, often stating that this element detracted from their spontaneous enjoyment of the opportunity of being creative.





Art Oasis outreach events have provided important opportunities for families to play and be creative together, learning new skills and making new friends





Severn Farm Pond Nature Reserve (above) provided the perfect setting for engaging families and groups. Sheltered and accessible spaces encouraged a relaxed atmosphere for all ages to enjoy being creative together.

Young volunteer (above right) helping out at the Welshpool Winter Fair. Brandon was very proud of the wreath he made for his mum.

The smile says it all ! Young participant (right) at the Art Oasis Celebration Event, learning some new skills.

Legacies

There are so many positive legacies that have been produced by the project bringing lasting benefits to people, wildlife and the wider living landscape.

- Physical - new Interpretation and Infrastructure
- Health and Wellbeing - new volunteer groups and friendships, Friends Of Severn Farm Pond
- Community/Environment - new contacts and networks, Eco Art Club



Friends Of Severn Farm Pond

Friends of Severn Farm Pond is a newly formed group of volunteers affiliated to the Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust. Formed in January 2017, the group aims to improve access and encourage greater use of **Severn Farm Pond Nature Reserve** in Welshpool.

The group meets each **Wednesday between 10am and 1pm** at the reserve. They undertake a range of simple reserve maintenance tasks and habitat creation. A sociable cuppa and a chat is a vital part of every session.

The group works very hard in collaboration with MWT staff to ensure the site is healthy and safe for visitors, recording and monitoring species on site, whilst creating an inspiring space that has great benefit to people and wildlife. The group has provided many hours of volunteer support throughout the Art Oasis project, both physically and creatively; with the creation of the new access route, installing new interpretation, turning their hand to designs for the banners and some wonderful new signage to inform visitors to the site.

This accessible 'Urban Oasis' is in the heart of an industrialized landscape whilst being at the edge of the busy market town of Welshpool. It plays an important part in the health and wellbeing of both local residents and workers alike. The group have formed a great affiliation to the reserve and have since helped the Trust gain Green Flag Community Award status for 2 years running for the site which recognizes it as a quality green space.

The site is home to a wide variety of mainly native species of flora and fauna and includes features such as a wildlife demonstration garden, bird hide, bird feeding station, boardwalks and a variety of sheltered seating, as well as nature-based art works. A giant bug hotel, nicknamed 'Btingham Palace', was built with repurposed materials and collects water for the garden.

Membership is free to all who support its aims. Members continue to raise awareness of the site by hosting open days and supporting MWT events. Funds raised are used to support projects and to enhance habitats on the site.

New members are welcome to drop in for an informal chat and a cuppa and receive weekly updates via email from the group's Chair and Volunteer Reserve Warden.

The group has its own Facebook group: www.facebook.com/pg/SFP1

and a designated page on the MWT website: www.montwt.co.uk/local-groups/FoSFP





The Friends Of Severn Farm Pond meet weekly to undertake reserve maintenance keeping the site healthy, safe and interesting for visitors. Their ongoing activities and dedication have been rewarded by winning a Green Flag Award for the site for the past 2 years running and they are eagerly awaiting news for this year!



Interpretation & infrastructure



The new access route at Severn Farm Pond adds great value to the reserve, enabling safe, enhanced access for all areas, whatever the weather. Much appreciation has been expressed by many, including those who experience physical difficulties/need wheelchairs/buggies etc. The reserve is designed to receive excess water during heavy rain; the fluctuating water levels are beneficial to wildlife whilst reducing the flood risk to the many businesses on the industrial estate.



Just some of the interpretation that has been produced by the project participants over the last two years

Banners, Welcome Board, Giant Willow Dragonfly and Birthday Bunting to celebrate 30 years of Severn Farm Pond, adding value to the reserve.

The 'Worry Tree' installed at The Hub, Welshpool High School and Butterfly Board at Cae Bodfach in Llanfyllin.

The Spider sculpture created by Art & Design students from NPTC, Newtown, now installed at Oriel Davies Gallery, Newtown.



Eco Art Club

In light of the huge loss of services and local authority cuts, Linda James, one of the artist partners on the Art Oasis project, realised there was a deep need for young people to express themselves, understand more about the natural world and how we can all help. Linda volunteered her time and started 'Art-Eco Rangers'. The group of children and parents meet weekly during term in Welshpool library (under threat of closure) enjoying much support from the librarians.

Linda guides the group, growing ideas through discussion around a subject chosen by the participants and then using art as a tool for supporting deeper learning, positive actions and even developing behaviour change in both the parents, as well as the children.

They have adopted a whole corner in the library adorning it in colourful and inventive ways to communicate important messages to the wider public. Linda has since secured some start up funding for materials and equipment.

This is a lasting legacy that has, in part, developed from the Art Oasis project. **We wish the group all the best for the future.**



ART-ECO ART RANGERS

...every **Monday**, except school holidays, we meet in **Welshpool Library** to make art about the environment.

4pm until 6pm
come for as long as you like

All ages and abilities welcome.
Materials provided. **Free** donations welcome

We will also go on outdoor art adventures as agreed with the group

we do
drawing,
collage,
modelling,
playing with
light,
assemblage,
zine and
animation,
photography
and
printing.

Mums, dads and grandparents get to make art too



Learning for similar projects

- Gathering high quality evidence at each session and filing appropriately is vital to support monitoring and evaluation; i.e. paperwork, stats, pictures, videos are important to tell your story. Make sure permissions are provided in writing!
- Communication - timely and appropriate meetings, emails and face to face is vital to understanding roles and responsibilities and supports effective team working, making the best use of staff and volunteer time.
- Planning - it's important to plan ahead, communicating regularly and completing risk assessments for events and with contracted artists etc.
- Additional funding is very useful to help add value to a project growing the outcomes and widening benefits.
- Have **FUN!!** Be inspirational, inventive and take your lead from the participants where possible.
- **THANK ALL THOSE WHO SUPPORT YOU OFTEN AND WITHOUT EXCEPTION.** Growing goodwill is the key to success!



Thanks go to

All our funders, project partners, MWT staff and of course, all our fantastic and hard working volunteers, for their ongoing support throughout the duration of the project and beyond!

Report written by Mel Chandler - Art Oasis Project Officer - June 2019

