



Montgomeryshire
Wildlife Trust



Media Release
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PIONEERING POWYS ECOTHERAPY PROGRAMME WINS NATIONAL AWARD

Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust's trailblazing health and wellbeing project, Wild Skills Wild Spaces (WSWS), has attracted national acclaim with a prestigious NHS Forest 2021 Award for Engaging People with Nature.

The ecotherapy programme is a partnership between Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust (MWT), Powys Teaching Health Board (PTHB) and Cardiff Metropolitan University, and is designed to improve people's mental health and wellbeing through reconnecting them with nature and their environment.

Wild Skills Wild Spaces incorporates a range of outdoor activities, from wildlife walks and food growing to bushcraft such as fire lighting and green woodworking. The free, inclusive ecotherapy sessions are delivered by a dedicated, trained team at various MWT nature reserves and other local wildlife-rich sites. As well as helping boost participants' wellbeing, the project aims to enable them to make a positive change for wildlife in their communities.

The innovative nature for wellbeing programme caught the attention of NHS Forest, a project researching links between health and the environment, because it empowers young people and adults who wouldn't typically engage with prescribed therapeutic interventions or outdoor activities.

Wild Skills Wild Spaces was devised by MWT Head of Health and Wellbeing Carla Kenyon, who took inspiration from Lancashire Wildlife Trust's 'Myplace'; the scheme used '5 ways to wellbeing', which are connecting with nature, being active, taking notice, learning and giving back, to boost mental health. Findings from that 2019 project showed 100 percent of case studies felt happier, more confident and less angry; some even found employment as a result of their new skills and increased confidence.

Funded by the Welsh Government, WSWS launched in June 2021 and already has around 50 people aged 12 to 75 involved with it each week. Participants are referred from primary and secondary healthcare providers, such as GPs and mental health services, and programme attendance is at 80 percent. The project is currently funded up to 2023 and, if it's as successful as hoped, it could pave the way for similar schemes to be rolled out across Wales.

Funding acknowledgement:

The Sustainable Management Scheme (SMS) is delivered by the Welsh Government Rural Communities - Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, which is funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Welsh Government.

Mae'r Cynllun Rheoli Cynaliadwy (SMS) yn cael ei gyflwyno gan Cymunedau Gwledig Llywodraeth Cymru – Rhaglen Datblygu Gwledig 2014–2020, sy'n cael ei hariannu gan Gronfa Amaethyddiaeth Ewrop ar gyfer Datblygu Gwledig a Llywodraeth Cymru.

Frances Louise, WSWs Project Manager at Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust, said:

“My team and I are delighted the programme has received recognition for the work it’s doing to bridge the gap between wellbeing and exposure to the natural world. Getting out in nature and embracing our ever-changing seasons, whatever the weather, is vital for our bodies and minds and reminds us how to live in the present moment. Regular exposure to nature and wildlife is particularly important for those who suffer with poor mental health, helping to ease anxiety and combat depression.”

Carla Kenyon, Head of Health & Wellbeing at Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust, said:

“I am really pleased the Wild Skills Wild Spaces project has been nationally recognised as an innovative way of interacting with both the NHS and its local community in natural green spaces, which we are fortunate to have as a Wildlife Trust. It has been a lot of hard work but, with a great team now delivering on the ground, I am really proud of what we have collectively achieved. The hope is that WSWs can become a blueprint for other health boards and third sector organisations to easily adopt and roll out across Wales.”

Miriam Dobson, Green Space for Health Outreach Officer at the Centre for Sustainable Healthcare, which co-ordinates the NHS Forest project, said:

“We were particularly impressed with Wild Skills Wild Spaces due to its focus on inclusivity, and efforts to reach people who may not normally engage with nature and outdoor activities. The number of partners involved in this project has made it wide-ranging – giving it access to nature reserves, involving mental health staff, opening it up to clinical and non-clinical participants and offering practical sessions in an exciting variety of activities, from bushcraft to cooking. Finally, the ‘friends of’ groups ensure the sustainability of the project in the long term, keeping former participants engaged and supported. It really is an outstanding project.”

Ends

For more information and images, please contact Charlotte Clayton: charlotte@montwt.co.uk

Photos:

1. WSWs Community Reserves Officer Eurig Joniver teaching participants about plants at the MWT Cors Dyfi Nature Reserve
2. WSWs Youth Engagement Officer Mark Harding demonstrates whittling to a young participant

Notes for editors

1. For more information about Wild Skills Wild Spaces, visit www.montwt.co.uk/WSWS
2. The NHS Forest is a project coordinated by the Centre for Sustainable Healthcare (CSH) that works with healthcare organisations and professionals to make green spaces available for health purposes, as well as carrying out practical work relating to the links between health and the environment. Set up 10 years ago, the NHS Forest Awards aim to raise awareness of the incredible green space initiatives taking place on healthcare sites around the UK, and to inspire others to expand their own green spaces and come up with creative ways to boost engagement with them. www.nhsforest.org/what-we-do

Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust – Who We Are

Since 1982, the Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust has been the leading voluntary organisation promoting wildlife conservation in Montgomeryshire, managing and caring for 18 nature reserves within the county, totalling some 530ha in area.

Our Vision:

An environment rich in wildlife for everyone

Our Mission:

To rebuild biodiversity and engage people with their environment

Our Objectives:

- 1) To stand up for wildlife and the environment
- 2) To create and enhance wildlife havens
- 3) To inspire people about the natural world
- 4) To foster sustainable living

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