



Nature in Mind

Nature-based well-being groups at Walthamstow Wetlands

Nature in Mind

- A collaboration between the London Wildlife Trust and Newham CAMHS.
- Referrals through the New-MAC Panel or directly from CAMHS.
- 2 Groups running on alternate weeks
 - 5-11 Year olds
 - 11-17 Year olds
- 2.5 hours long
- Part forest school - part therapeutic group



Nature in Mind: Why?

- Growing evidence of the importance of nature connection to wellbeing and mental health.
 - Attention restoration
 - Stress reduction
 - Authenticity, self esteem, autonomy, life satisfaction
 - Wellbeing, social inclusion, and healthy lifestyle
 - General mental health
 - Cooperation and environmentally sustainable behaviour

Kaplan. S,. (1995) The Restorative Benefits of Nature : *The Journal of Environmental Psychology*
Ulrich R, et al., (1991) Stress Recovery during exposure to natural environments: *The Journal of Environmental Psychology*
Yang, Y. S. (2024). Nature nurtures authenticity:. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*
Bragg, R., et al (2013) Ecominds effects on mental wellbeing: *An Evaluation for MIND*
Lomax. T, et al (2024) Effect of Nature on Mental Health... : *British Journal of Psychiatry*
Zelenski et al (2015) Cooperation is in our nature.... *Journal of Environmental Psychology*



Nature in Mind: Why?

- Lack of Green space in Newham:
Newham as area of multiple deprivations including lack of green space, and serious overcrowding due to housing crisis.
- Long waiting lists for CAMHS services:
Idea of waiting well.



Team



Head of Learning and engagement – Abi March



NIM Co-ordinator – Chantelle Lindsay (Of Cbeebies, Teeny Tiny Creatures fame)



CAMHS Clinician – David Berrie



Acting Head of Learning and engagement – Jane Lilley



Engagement Officer: Layla Mapemba-Taylor

- Plus two volunteers: Zak and Amal.

Participants

5-11 Year olds

- Mostly neurodivergent
- Diagnosed or waiting for diagnosis of ASC and/or ADHD.
- Mild to moderate difficulties
- Mainly attention, hyperactivity, emotional distress, and social difficulties.
- Mostly boys



11-17 Year olds

- Mostly neurodivergent
- Mostly recently diagnosed or waiting for diagnosis of ASC.
- Mostly history of bullying
- Mild to moderate difficulties
- Mainly anxiety and social difficulties.
- Mostly girls

5 Ways to Wellbeing

- Connect
- Give
- Take Notice
- Keep learning
- Stay Active



Activities

- Nature Walks
- Pond dipping
- Mindful sit spots
- Plant Identification
- Bird Watching
- Conservation activities
- Games
- Bat walk
- Art making
- Fire lighting
- Open fire cooking
- Wild teas
- Crafting
- Foraging
- Making bird feeders
- Fungi walks and ID
- Obstacle course



Wildlife Seen



Cormorants
Herons
Egrets
Peregrine falcon (well its
feather)
Kingfishers
Great Crested Grebes
Newts
Greater and lesser Diving
beetles
Water boatman
Toads
Foxes
Grass snake
Stag beetles

Butterflies
Bees
Dragonflies
Caddisflies
Tufted ducks
Terns
Water Hoglice
Bats
Worms
Slugs
Wrens
Woodpeckers

And many more

Art in the group



George-Spikey-Pooeybum ^^^^

Ant Garden >>>>>



Some other art based activities

- Tree of life
- Observation paintings
- Squiggle game
- Story cubes
- Hibernation homes
- Animal top trumps
- Decorating Bird Boxes
- Hapa Zome

And others

Case Study – Ali*

*pseudonym

7 year old boy, Turkish background

Difficulties

- Spent most of his time in doors on devices
- Often very distressed
- Very concerned about cleanliness – hand washing
- Struggled with social interactions, playing with others and turn taking.
- Difficulties understanding danger –road safety

Context

- ASC
- Language and developmental delay
- Parents separated but co-parenting well and supportive/nurturing
- Not always encouraged to develop his strengths and independence skills



First Sessions

- Initially weary of touching things, requesting to wash his hands a lot.
- Would search for parents, separation anxiety.
- Unsteady on his feet and needing support with activities
- Difficulties focusing.

Case Study – Ali*

*pseudonym

- Attended in all weathers, rain, ice, wind and sun
- Enjoyed pond dipping
- Played with mud kitchen making 'soups'
- Held worms, slugs, newts and woodlice
- No longer requesting to clean his hands
- Splashing in puddles
- Significant improvement in co-ordination and concentration
- Developed independence skills
- Developed strong relationships with adults and peers in the group
- Could communicate feelings more
- Less reliant on screens for transitions
- Started visiting the park

Went on a rope swing (a big step in itself). Was having fun but fell off and cut his head, requiring first aid. But he didn't give up and the next week he went straight back to the rope swing and tried again.

Invented and initiated games that other children would enjoy such as 'Spicy Meat'.

Transformational for Ali. Has enabled him to grow emotionally, socially, and physically. Parents have praised the group repeatedly and said how much he has "blossomed" and "come out of his shell". His school too have noticed big changes in his confidence, communication and abilities



Case Study: Jessica*

*pseudonym

15 Y/o Girl – White British

Difficulties:

Social Anxiety

Eating disorder

Had not been in school for almost a year.

Had not left the house in months.

Previous OD and SH

Context:

Waiting for Autism assessment

Bullying

Housing difficulties

Had struggled to engage with CAMHS but liked animals so was recommended the group.



Managed to attend the group once with support from CAMHS Care-co-ordinator and mum.

Enjoyed and kept attending.

This began a series of changes in her life. She started going out more. Went to gigs with her mum.

After a few months went back to school.

Even ate some pizza and foraged blackberries

Has agreed to start psychotherapy

Quotes from parents and participants

'When I am here my brain is calmer and I feel happy. When there was a break and I wasn't coming because I had exams, I was really stressed. But now I am coming again I feel happy and love being here'

'Before he was more reserved, but has begun opening up when he is more comfortable'.

'She can stand up for herself more which she never used to be able to do. Before she would have cried, but now she is able to assert herself'.

'It can be therapeutic, being outside in nature. It's quiet and peaceful'

A great alternative to traditional 1-1 therapy in a room. As a complementary therapy. It's a safe and measured way of getting them outdoors and trying new things. Getting kids out of their comfort zone a bit.

She has loved every session. Found it really relaxing

'I'm more comfortable around people. I never used to talk to people in school, now I do'

'He had so much anger before, but now he knows how to handle this anger. He is more responsible. He can wait for things now, which he couldn't do before'.

'He has blossomed, come out of his shell. He can just be free, but still safe.'

'We have seen a big improvement. Her teacher says she puts her hand up in class now'

'If you've got a child who doesn't like loud noises, they can be out there [in the wetlands] learning the skills, meeting new kids'.

RC PSYCH Awards



- Nominated for Royal Society of Psychiatry – Psychiatric team of the year award for: Commitment to Sustainability and Green Care.
- We didn't win though

Evaluation findings:

Qualitative Data

- 24 participants of group
- Semi structured interviews
- Parents and young people very pleased with group and appreciative
- Reducing stress and anxiety
- Increasing confidence
- More comfortable with social interactions
- Better 'Emotional regulation'
- Increase in connection with nature

Quantitative Data

- SDQs, ORS/CORS and Nature Connection index.
- Difficult to gather for the group.
- Incomplete

What Next?

Challenges:

- Maintaining numbers for adolescent group
- Co-ordination effort
- Getting young people from Newham to the Wetlands.
- CAMHS role only half a day a week
- Collecting quantitative data
- Funding



We are funded until March and then the future is uncertain.