

Shropshire Wild Teams

A Journey into the Hills – A Journey into Recovery

November 2017

The Shropshire Wild Teams are groups of conservation volunteers who are using mental health services, primarily secondary services, as well people with learning disabilities.

- Teams are picked up from Shrewsbury, Oswestry, Craven Arms/ Ludlow and Bridgnorth
- 50 people were involved in 2016/17
- The teams are supported by the Wild Teams Officer and a full time assistant
- The cost of the Wild Teams initiatives is £60,000/ an
- Cost/ person/ day is £25.11, based on 14 people on 4 sessions per week for 45 weeks
- Return on Investment approx. 1:6
- Possible cost of not supporting £350k

Support needs include:

Schizophrenia Depression Bi-Polar Self Harm
 ADHD Autism Suicidal Ideation Isolation
 Anxiety Drug & Alcohol Misuse

Film

A film showing the Wild Teams, with feedback form mental health professionals can be found here: [Wild Teams Film](#)



Each of the teams each go out once a week into Shropshire's outstanding natural landscapes and volunteer in meaningful and essential conservation and management work. Work which directly benefits national and globally significant habitats, the local communities within them, and visitors drawn to the County via tourism and leisure.

The Shropshire Wild Teams was originally set up with Public Health funding to engage with people leading sedentary and/ or isolated lives as a longer term preventative strategy to minimise future deteriorating health and the resulting increase in costs for further health care interventions.

Many of these are the most marginalised and disadvantaged within our communities. The Wild Team initiative quickly evolved to focus on those using mental health services, primarily secondary services, as well people with learning disabilities. The public cost of caring and supporting individuals using these services can be expensive, regularly resource intensive and nearly always long term.

Serious and chronic mental illness commonly manifests in the two main criteria referred to above, inactivity and isolation. Along with the added chaotic lifestyle many experience during periods of relapse or crisis, the longer term prognosis for many can be poor, resulting in deteriorating health issues and further complex interventions.

The Wild Team's approach to supporting people meeting the funding criteria has on the surface been relatively simple. Its foundations have been built on the growing evidence base that confirms the physiological and psychological benefits all of us experience from spending time within natural environments, from reducing heart rates and blood pressure to the release of serotonin and feelings of general well-being. A term that is commonly referred to as 'Eco-therapy'.

Simply by encouraging people to engage each week the Wild Team project immediately met its goal of increasing weekly activity levels. However, the overwhelmingly positive feedback from volunteer participants and supporting professionals goes far beyond just getting enough exercise.

Other benefits include:

- The opportunity to get out to meet others when previously they would stay at home throughout the week, maybe only leaving to shop for essential items.
- Feelings of belonging to part of a new unexpected social group, some for the first time in years.
- Gaining genuine new skills that have enabled an awakened confidence and realisation that personal agency and the ability to move on is a possibility open to them.
- Finding work is a goal may previously have been one kept private from others due to a lack of self-belief often from earlier “failures.” However talk of the possibility of work in the future is one that is now heard within all of the Teams.



Results and feedback from Mental Health Professionals on the impact of involvement in the Wild Teams

Mental health professionals and supporting agencies report that the Wild Teams are making a significant difference to Service Users. They agree that the initiative is helping reduce costs involved in the prevention of relapses, hospital admissions, multiple weekly home visits and increased medication.

- Two Service Users have been discharged entirely from the Community Mental Health Team service [1].
- At least six volunteers moved into work. [2] [3] [4] [5].
- Some have been assessed to be ready to be referred onto employment agencies such as Enable.
- Reduced weekly staff visits.
- Service Users engage in the Wild Teams for a longer period than any other group previously tried.
- One Service User used drinking as a daily coping strategy but now abstains the day before and on the day he goes out to volunteer.
- Some have decided to try to give up smoking or begin a healthier diet.
- Withdrawn individuals become more relaxed in the Wild Teams, engaging in conversation again. They have generally “come out of their shells,” as one Mental Health worker describes it. The volunteers meet up with their new circle of friends outside of the Wild Team days.



A supporting mental health agency gives an example of one of their Service Users working through the slow therapeutic process of returning home after a serious mental health related criminal offence. They say the lack of engagement between them and the Service User markedly changed after he joined the Wild Teams. He now returns to his current residential base at the end of his Wild Team day to enthusiastically talk to staff about what he has done. He now believes he can do new things. He is now getting ready to return home and has already started extended leave. [6]

Every week there will be seemingly small scenes and incidents that the Wild Team Co-ordinators will notice, be it an unexpected conversation, a joke and a laugh or a task completed independently with new skills and know how. These positive experiences, when given the added perspective from the health professionals who may have worked with an individual for a number of years, makes it apparent that bigger, important steps are happening. Long term health costs are no longer inevitable. The Wild Teams has become a place to begin Journeys of Recovery. [7] [8].

Quotes from professionals and volunteers

[1] As a support worker within a CMHT I regularly support service users to attend. I have seen many good outcomes of increased confidence, sense of pride through achievement, and increase in self-worth. This has led to several attendees being able to be discharged from CMHT support due to the benefits attending has brought. One attendee in our group was able to secure paid employment as a direct result of attending. The Wild Team is a great resource that mental health services can benefit from.

Bob Milton. Support, Time & Recovery Worker. South West Shropshire CMHT.

[2] A number of my patients with serious chronic mental illnesses have been attending and have received help which complements the more medical side of their treatment. The group addresses a need which is not met elsewhere in the service for people who often do not have a great deal in their lives due to their illness. I have seen people benefit greatly in the following ways:

Increased self-esteem - sense of achievement - - physical exercise - opportunity to socialise with their peers, having previously been socially isolated - - a safe place to learn to be around people again for those anxious about this – friendship - - enjoyment - getting into a routine - - a reason to get up and get out of the house - - the first step towards future employment.

In my view there has been a need for such an intervention for a long time. Thank you very much for offering this group to patients and I would wholeheartedly support its continuing in the future.

Dr Louise Cooper - Consultant Psychiatrist - South-East Shropshire Community Mental Health Team

[3] The role of the Wild Teams for the community mental health team has been important in the recovery of the service users accessing this group. The group has been provided to a rural team that has limited resources for group work especially for those under retirement age. The group has been accessed by service user with a range of diagnosis under both the psychosis pathway and non-psychosis pathway. The group has helped the service users to develop confidence to leave their home, develop friendships and increase confidence to interact with others. The group provides a safe place for the service users to develop skills at a pace that suits their level of need. The sessions have helped service user to develop a routine and help with confidence to access transport. The group also has helped to improve physical health of the service user. The group has also helped service user set goals for the future and be able to link in with other services to help with long term goal for achieving employment / pre-employment training. In terms of the outcome from a mental health service provision the availability of the group has assisted in the reduction of visits from mental health staff. The feedback from the service user also expresses their level of enjoyment of the group and value and meaning it has for them during their current episode of mental health illness.

Abigail Payne Occupational Therapist SE Shropshire CMHT

[4] It has been wonderful watching each group member grow in confidence each week whilst attending and getting a sense of achievement in what they do individually... I personally have been looking out for something like this for some time, but due to cut backs it has been extremely hard in trying to organise anything that even comes close to this... Majority of our clients, have historically disengaged with services, find it hard to socialise, lacking self-motivation/self-confidence, long enduring mental health. This scheme has given them a sense of purpose, a lot of the group also socialise on an individual basis which did not happen before. The interest that has been shown by other colleagues of mine at Bridgnorth CMHT, enquiring if there are more spaces available for the group has been very consistent. I cannot thank you enough for allowing us to be a part of this.

Ges Fleetwood – Bridgnorth Community Mental Health Team

[5] Thank you, this year has been one of the most difficult I have had to face and your support and positive outlook has made a huge difference. I don't often get lost for words but the days I have spent out with you and the team have made a real difference and I don't quite know how to say thank you... I have started to reduce my meds and touch wood I seem to be returning to my old self bit by bit. I genuinely would have been lost without wild teams this year and I hope that it continues to be a success. The new job will hopefully get me back in the loop and leave me time to pursue what I really want to do. I feel like I often left the house on a Monday morning feeling utterly lost and hopeless only to return after a day with you with more than a flicker of hope!!

Volunteer GF Tigers

[6] The service user I key work has grown rather fond of the time he has spent with the wild team, bearing in mind this is a man that likes to keep himself to himself, and has not gone out in a long time due to working on his family farm before he became ill. The wild team have helped him grow with confidence and also shown him that he can still go to groups like yours, and be able to do work other than working on the farm, he always comes back telling the staff here at the elms of his day with the wild team and he is always smiling even when there are jobs he is not much into. So again please can you thank everyone who have made this possible truly are a great service for the people with mental health problems so that they get the feel of going back to work.

Kimberley Maguire Support Worker - The Elms House Rehab and Rehabilitation Service

[7] I have several clients who are attending the Shropshire Wild Team project, in Oswestry and Shrewsbury. All of them have their own individual problems, from behaviour problems, mental health issues, communication difficulties and learning difficulties. I work for Enable and our main goal is to get people (back) into work. Your project is for some of them a first step back into a 'work' routine; getting up at a set time, to be on time at the project's meeting point, working together with others, listen to and follow up requests, learning skills they can use elsewhere and for some even training like the brush cutter awareness course and basic first aid. For my clients the project has proven to be very important, it has got them out of their house, they have learned new

things and gained in self-confidence and social interaction. And at least one of them is ready to look for paid employment, which is great. I sincerely believe that the project has many reasons to continue. We are talking about the wholesome wellbeing of people that are difficult to reach and for whom working has many positive effects. Plus you are working together with other supporting organisations like Enable, this co-operation enlarges the wellbeing of the people on the project and will lower the cost of health service interventions as well as benefits like job seekers allowance and ESA. Thank you very much for the good work and the clear communication. Keep it up!

Mireille, Learning Disability Employment Officer – Enable Shropshire Council

[8] I am writing to express my gratitude for the positive impact I feel that the Shropshire Wild Teams have had/are having, on the young people I have referred through to you. I am currently running a West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner funded project for Energize Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin using sport and volunteering activities to try and reduce offending/potential offending behaviour in 16-24yrs old across the county. Many of the young people I come across are classed as 'hard to reach' with a range of physical and mental health issues. Confidence and aspirations are often low with many existent and perceived barriers. Feedback from the young people I am working with who have participated in the Shropshire Wild Teams clearly indicates to me that the project is having a positive impact on addressing some of these issues. In addition to this, the success of my project is very dependent on the strength of the partnerships that I build, and as such I have the utmost confidence in the relationship I have already established with you. I look forward to continuing our work together and once again thank you for the support your project provides for the young people I am working with.

Nick Herbert More than Sport Officer Energize Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin

[9] I am a team member I have a mental health problem it is not nice for me and I am glad that I am able to be a part of the wild teams. It has and continues to help me concentrate on something positive in my life. Thank you to all concerned. Thank you.

Volunteer MM Alpacas.

[10] Hi I am a volunteer with The Bridgnorth Zombies which is part of Shropshire Wild Teams. I joined this group in September 2016. The group is sometimes the only time I get to socialise so it is very important to me. I now look forward to Thursdays as it gives me a purpose. I have learned so many new skills and made a lot of new friends. I find the group very useful as it builds confidence and social skills. Way back in September I was a bit dubious about it but soon forgot most of my fears that I had. I am really enjoying the work we are doing and when get to work with groups like the National Trust. I find it so rewarding. Many thanks.

Volunteer GB Zombies



Shropshire's
**GREAT
OUTDOORS**

Contact: **Simon Brown**, Shropshire Wild Team Officer

simon.brown@shropshire.gov.uk

Tel: 01743 255055

Mobile: 07990 086384