

TITLE: Being Outdoors is Good for You- Outdoor Partnerships Health Initiatives

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1.0 Summary

The Outdoor Partnerships Team are the part of the Council that look after the third largest Rights of Way network in the county (5,600km; from Shrewsbury to New York!) and 24 Country Parks and Heritage Sites across the county.

We work with 1,200 volunteers, who are involved with a number of active volunteering opportunities:

- Parish Paths Partnerships- ROW maintenance
- Volunteer Rangers- Parks and Sites
- Walking for Health- Volunteer-led walking groups
- Shropshire Wild Teams- Conservation volunteering

All these schemes are currently funded by Public Health in recognition of the improvements they bring to participant's physical and mental health but the removal of the ring-fence for Public Health funding means that this will not be available in the future. The £200k this year will reduce to £100k in 2018/19 and the withdrawn entirely in 2019/20 unless the funding situation changes.

Parish Paths Partnerships and Volunteer Rangers contribute 35,000 hours/a year; saving Outdoor Partnerships around £270k in labour. Whilst the health benefits are still considerable, support for these volunteers needs to be secured within the Outdoor Partnerships budget, as these volunteers are helping deliver our statutory duty as well as other improvements (see Social Impact Assessment, appendix 1).

Wild Teams and Walking for Health are achieving more direct health benefits, however, and funding to support these initiatives needs to be found outside our Service. The aim of the presentation to the Shropshire's Great Outdoors Strategy Board is to enable a discussion about the future of active volunteering and Walking for Health and the priorities for health and wellbeing in the upcoming Shropshire's Great Outdoors Strategy 2018-28.

2.0 Walking for Health

Walking for Health is a national scheme that offers weekly, volunteer-led walking. 47% of participants have one or more long term conditions:

- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- Diabetes

- Asthma
- Dementia
- Cancer

2.1 Achievements in 2016/17

- 56 active groups across Shropshire
- 1,818 participants
- 710 people walking every week
- 338 volunteer walks leaders

86% of participants were over 55 years old and 20% were over 75 years old.

2.2 Health outcomes

Walking for Health contributes to:

- The prevention or delay of long-term health issues, supporting people to live independently for longer
- Reducing loneliness and social isolation
- Recovery after illness
- Active Aging
- Addressing long term health conditions including dementia

2.3 Social Impact Assessment

The scheme in Shropshire is supported by 2 x 4 days per week Walking Co-ordinators and costs around £45,000/ an. This means the scheme costs £24.56 pp/ year or £1.41 pp/ walk.

The Return on Investment is approx. 1:5 (appendix 1)

If just 1% of participants started using a weekly Day Centre service instead of going for a walk it would cost the Council £82,500, more than double the cost of supporting Walking for Health.

This compares favourably to the National data, which demonstrated that the schemes cost and average of £76 pp/ year. At this level the schemes cost £3,775 per QALY gained, compared to £30,000 cost per QALY benchmark value recommended by NICE.

The National Return on Investment was calculated as 1:3.36 and at this level discontinuing Walking for Health support could cost health services around £151k/ an.

3.0 Shropshire Wild Teams

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 by the Wild Teams Officer and a full time assistant. Simon Brown, the Wild Teams Officer, is an ex Occupational Therapist with 16 years' experience of working with people with acute mental health issues. It is his experience that sets this initiative apart from voluntary and community sector initiatives such as Men in Sheds.

50 adults were involved in 2016/17.

Support needs include:

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

3.1 Achievements 2016/17

Mental health professionals and supporting agencies reporting that the Wild Teams are making a difference to the bigger picture of the 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
- At least six volunteers moved into work
- 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 MH worker describes it. The volunteers meet up with their new circle of friends outside of the Wild Team days.

A report showing feedback from participants and health professionals can be found in appendix 2. The benefits of the Wild Teams are summarised in this 5 min film:

•[Wild Teams Film](#)

3.2 Health Outcomes

The Shropshire Wild Teams are contributing to:

- Prevention and rehabilitation of physical and mental health conditions
- Supporting people in crisis, addressing a range of mental health issues
- Early intervention
- Admission avoidance
- Helping people with learning difficulties

3.3 Social Impact Assessment

The Wild Teams cost around £65,000/ an, which means the costs of supporting participants is approx. £25 pp/ day compared to £165/ visit for health professional.

The Return on Investment is calculated at approx. 1:6, which means that discontinuing Shropshire Wild Teams could result in costs to the Council, NHS and DWP of around £350k/an.

4.0 Future funding options

The Outdoor Partnerships Team have assessed a number of options for future funding for Walking for Health and the Wild Teams. Appendix 3 summarises current and planned activity.

Appendix 4 is the Service Level Agreement for schools for the Healthy Outdoors for Schools offer.

5.0 Shropshire's Great Outdoors Strategy 2018-2028 and Health

Vision: By the end of 2028, people will be happier, healthier and more prosperous by being better connected to Shropshire's Great Outdoors through a safe and cherished publically accessible outdoor network.

Objective: Healthy- Benefit the health of residents and visitors through increased physical activity and improved mental wellbeing.

Suggested priorities:

- Joined up approach to active volunteering across natural and cultural heritage partners
- Inclusion of these initiatives in Social Prescribing across the county
- Identify funding to continue to support the Wild Teams and Walking for Health
- Develop a joint approach with the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Mental Health Partnership to help prevent and treat chronic health conditions, including working more closely with Adult Social Care, Public Health and other organisations to reach those who need support most.
- Ensure everyone has access to local greenspace and recreation and can benefit from the physical and mental health benefits it provides. Specific targets should be set, for example, one hectare of local nature reserve per 1000 people, two hectares of natural greenspace within 300 metres of where they live, and a 20 hectare site within two kilometres.
- If a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan is developed, the Outdoor Partnerships Service will seek to be actively involved, ensuring that walking and cycling for local journeys and for visitors is a priority.
- Develop new programmes for young people, including the roll out of Healthy Outdoors for Schools and developing 'Daily Miles' on sites.
- Develop and maintain easy access and all-ability trails and better promotion of fully-gated routes on the Shropshire's Great Outdoors website.
- Programme of events and activities that encourage use of the parks, sites and Rights of Way.
- Supporting other outdoor activities e.g. fell running, orienteering, canoeing

6.0 Recommendations

The Shropshire's Great Outdoors Strategy Board is asked to discuss the continued support for Walking for Health and the Wild Teams and comment on the approach taken so far.

The Board is also asked to comment on the priorities for the new Strategy as listed above and make recommendations for key activity going forward.

7.0 Appendices

Appendix 1- Social Impact Estimates

Appendix 2- Shropshire Wild Team report

Appendix 3- Walking for Health and Wild Teams Funding Options

Appendix 4- Healthy Outdoors for Schools