

Julie Hammon, Stepping into Nature, with Arts Development Company

JULIE HAMMON is based in West Dorset. Julie has worked for Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty for eight years and is passionate about connecting people to the landscape for wellbeing, having worked in conservation for the last 15 years. In 2015 Stepping into Nature was launched to improve health and wellbeing for older people, those living with dementia and care partners. With an ethos of working in partnership to develop and design projects to help bridge the gap between health and environment sectors, reduce the stigma of dementia and enabling people to experience what the natural world can offer.

‘Nature Buddies: Re-connecting to nature through activity.’

I am Julie Hammon, I work with Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Jo March, of the Arts Development Company, my Thriving Communities partner, couldn't be here today. I am Stepping into Nature. I am going to tell you about our Thriving Communities project, which we were successful getting funding for back in March. The project is called Nature Buddies - reconnecting to nature through creative activity. I am going to talk to you about the Thriving Communities fund, our partnership and how we worked it up, how we got here in the first place, what the aims and outputs are, and some elements that are within that project which we are going to be delivering over the next twelve months. Throughout all of this we have some key themes overseeing our vision and mission statement, that connecting and engaging with art should be accessible to everyone, connecting to nature should be accessible to everyone, and engaging in physical activity should be accessible for everyone.

The National Academy for Social Prescribing (NASP), launched by Matt Hancock in October 2019, was dedicated to the advancement of social prescribing, through promotion, collaboration and innovation. It is very much about creating partnerships across health, arts, sport, leisure, and the natural environment, alongside other aspects of our lives like finances, food, and healthy living. The Thriving Communities pot itself was funded by NASP, Arts Council England, Natural England and Historic England. It is dedicated to improving and increase the range and reach of available social prescribing across community activities. Our project - one of 37 nationally, seven in the south-west - will run for twelve months.

The partnership itself came together really quite quickly. We found out about the funding late last year, and we had two to three months to pull it together, over the Christmas and New Year period, which is not

fantastic for everyone. The bid had to be led by a culture organisation, which is how we linked in with the Arts Development Company, who volunteered to take the lead. We have all worked separately together, but not actually together as a group. The Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) pulled everyone together, we chucked a few ideas around the table, and an idea came out.

Our TC partners are The Arts Development Company, Stepping into Nature, Help & Care, Active Dorset, and Dorset CCG.

A little bit of background about each: The Arts Development Company is a Dorset-based social enterprise and community interest company, whose aim is to strengthen the arts and culture sector and develop collaborative and creative solutions to people's lives, places, and community through using the arts.

Our programme, Stepping into Nature, led by Dorset AONB and funded by the National Community Lottery since 2017, works collaboratively with organisations and providers to open up opportunities for people to connect to nature, especially for people who are aged over 50, or living with a long-term health conditions, such as dementia, or are in a carer's role.

Active Dorset work with partners through a system change approach, so increased numbers of people are supported to be more physically active. One of 43 of the Active Partnerships across England, they work collaboratively to create the conditions for an active nation, using the power of sport and physical activity to transform lives.

Help & Care is a registered charity that works with older people, carers and communities to live the life they choose. Back in 2019, they were awarded the non-clinical health coaching and social prescribing NHS contract by Dorset CCG, in partnership with Dorset Mental Health Forum, and Dorset Care. This means that they oversee quite a lot of the social prescribing link workers (SPLW). There are also SPLW within GP practices in Dorset's eighteen Primary Care Networks (PCNs). Dorset CCG is the commissioning organisation for the whole of Dorset. That explains the strengths and skills we are all bringing in.

For part of the bid, we needed to have different representation from various areas of the key elements that were in the bid itself. Our aims for the project as a whole are to increase knowledge and networking for LW, enabling more efficient communication about what is on offer, especially around the benefit of participating in creative activity.

We are looking to upskill communities to deliver creative activities promoting inclusiveness, and to develop new or enhance existing initiatives to widen reach and ability, but also to show them how they

can bring professional artists in to help deliver some of the work they are doing, or to get training from that to be able to then carry that out themselves. We are going to work with PCNs and social organisations to deliver a Nature Buddy volunteer network, a one-to-one volunteer support unit for people with anxiety about getting out again, or with low confidence, or who are not sure where to go. That initial one-to-one support that people can receive from a volunteer to help them take those first steps.

As a key theme, we also believe that being creative should be accessible for everyone. We had a previous project with The Arts Development Company around giving people taster sessions of different parts of creativity that they could take part in. That ran in a six-week process, and it is these past projects that have brought us to this point, through a strengthened relationship and understanding of how everybody's work is important holistically, and that we can all use each other to deliver something really good.

How did we get here? It was a crazy journey. It is a cross sector partnership; and we have been working on various projects, between ourselves over quite a period of time. We have invested a lot in forming those contacts, going to each other's meetings, finding out how the organisations works. The aim of all this was to look for opportunities for us to work together on projects, especially across the health sector, with health and wellbeing being one of our key areas of work. We have to understand the language used by the health sector. There are so many acronyms – CCG, PCN (Primary Care Network), ICS (Integrated Care System) – it can be confusing, so getting to understand the language used breaks down those barriers.

To be eligible for the Thriving Communities application, our project had to have three core partner organisations from arts, culture, sport and leisure, finance, wellbeing, environment and nature, and a non-statutory healthcare organisation. They were looking for organisations working with SPLW, so we had to have one partner within that. Timing was really tight, but the strength was the positioning of those involved. We were ready to bring together and run with existing initiatives; and we had ideas with similar ethos, ideas and outcomes. We were all on the same page and wanted to deliver the same thing. We are about amplifying our voices rather than competing. We were all working together; and it is a real equal partnership with everybody contributing for different sections of the bid to bring it all together within the deadline. The Arts Development Company, who are leading, were actually doing the final edit, so it came across as one voice completely.

It is good to say here that by having everything as an equal part, we don't just want to deliver arts activities, nature activities or physical

activities, we want to bring all the elements together, to deliver a creative activity out in nature, getting people to be physically active. It is about looking at it from that holistic point of view.

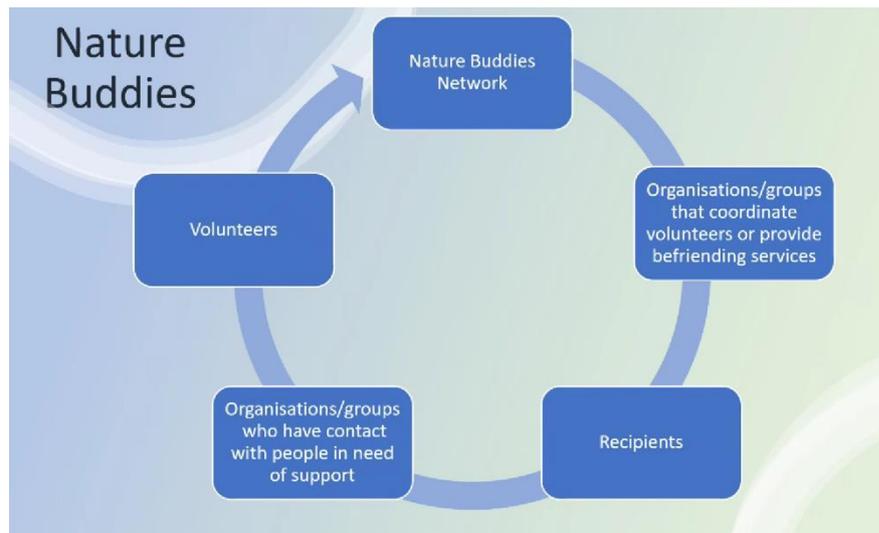
Support was crucial to show funders that we had support from the CCG in our area. We worked really hard to secure equal amounts of match funding from all four partners and the CCG, as well as letters of support. One of the biggest things is that we all had belief. As a partnership we vowed we would try seeking alternative funding and make the idea happen, even if our Thriving Communities bid did not succeed.

There were key alignments, and key things within the partnership that we all openly agreed to, and that was that we would align to meeting market needs, we were not going to produce something that wasn't usable or what people actually wanted. We wanted to add value and promote collaboration wherever possible, bringing in community organisations as we go along. For instance, we are working with Dorset Race Equality Council to deliver some of the training elements, so we are bringing those on board. Rather than actually doing it ourselves, we're seeking organisations that have those strengths in those areas. We wanted to deliver something that was sustainable, effective, and inclusive. Sustainability within project delivery is massively important, so we are not actually repeating ourselves, we are creating something that changes the system; and then we can move on to the next bit and change the next bit of the system.

As this is cross sector partnership, some of the most important elements are being open, honest and transparent. With funding bids, by working together we are a lot stronger; and by having a shared vision, we are all delivering the same thing along the same lines, but each keeping our own identity. That is massively important. It is about working together rather than competing; and making sure you understand the remit of the organisations you're working with.

These are a quick overview of our outputs for the project itself. There will be 30 trained Nature Buddies through the Nature Buddy Network, and they will be positioned within existing care organisations. We want to broker links for socially engaged artists with community groups, to make sure that community groups realise the benefit of actually having

artists engaging with their audience, rather than them trying to do everything themselves.



We will have taster sessions for community groups, both nature-inspired and art-inspired, around what kind of thing they can do, and the differences they can make by bringing art and creative activity within their delivery. There will be a training programme for SPLW and community groups, around participation, mental health awareness and equality. Anything that comes up, we can look at linking in and giving training around that.

Of course, we are evaluating everything to make sure that it is delivering what it said it would, having an impact; and looking at anything we can do better the next time around. That should enable us to create a toolkit to enable similar initiatives, maybe in other regions. It is definitely something that we want to showcase and share our learning from. We feel that is the way people can grow, and we can learn from other organisations and other initiatives as well.

A bit of an overview of the taster sessions and training, it is about working with the community groups to offer that suite of activity, enabling self-sufficiency and increasing inclusivity. We will help support communities to co-design and deliver new initiatives for wellbeing, using a landscape theme that encompasses nature, arts, culture, food, heritage, and physical activity. Giving them that taster session means that both they and SPLW can actually experience them, so when SPLW are recommending an activity, they can really talk about how it has affected and uplifted them. We will also develop and deliver Nature Buddies volunteer training to increase confidence and cohesive universal message of nature-based wellbeing activity.

This is how the Nature Buddy network will work: it will not necessarily be nature based. It could mean that somebody wants support to go to the museum or to a gallery. Nature Buddies is very

much driven by the recipients of the buddies, to enable them to do the things that they actually want to do. There will be organisations who will have contact with people in need of support, and organisations that have volunteers, all linking in together through this network. A Nature Buddy supports people on their journey to living happier and healthier lives. That could be sitting out in the garden feeding the birds, it could be going on a three-mile hike, or it could be going down to the local museum or for a history walk. It really is down to the recipient around what they want to achieve.

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