



Stepping into Nature Evaluation Report

Impact of Inclusive Nature Based Activities
2017-2020



CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	2
2. SIN PROGRAMME LOGIC.....	3
3. HOW HAS SIN ENABLED MORE PEOPLE TO ENGAGE WITH NATURE?	4
4. HOW HAS SIN INCREASED CONNECTION TO NATURE?.....	9
5. HOW HAS SIN ENCOURAGED SOCIAL CONNECTION?	11
6. HOW HAS SIN SUPPORTED THE WELLBEING OF ITS TARGET AUDIENCE?	12
7. METHODOLOGY: STEPPING INTO NATURE EVALUATION (2017-2020).....	16
REFERENCES	17
FURTHER RESOURCES	17

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 What is Stepping into Nature?

Stepping into Nature (SiN) is improving the health and wellbeing of participating older people, people living with dementia and their carers by enabling them to connect with Dorset's natural environment. There is substantial evidence of the health and wellbeing benefits contact with nature can deliver, and of the barriers, SiN's target population faces to accessing those benefits. SiN is led by Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (DAONB) with funding from the National Lottery Community Fund.

Nature, social connection & wellbeing

Brief contacts with natural environments can improve physical and mental well-being (Cole and Hall, 2010; Mayer et al., 2009; McMahan and Estes, 2015). Nature based experiences have been found to be therapeutic and to contribute to emotional, psychological and spiritual well-being of people with dementia (Chalfont, 2006).

Social connectedness is a powerful predictor of health outcomes for older people (Ashida, 2008; Berkman and Krishna, 2014; Santini et al., 2015). Social ties give meaning to a person's life by enabling them to participate in it fully and to feel attached to their community (Berkman and Krishna, 2014). Through participation in voluntary activities, life acquires a sense of coherence, meaningfulness and interdependence (Berkman and Krishna, 2014). A substantial body of research links social engagement and participation to improved cognitive function and a high level of well-being in older people (Glymour et al., 2008; Tun et al., 2013).

1.2 Who are the partners delivering & evaluating SiN?






















Evaluation has been built into SiN from the start, led by Public Health Dorset's intelligence team with external advice from Visual Insights. An evaluation framework summary is provided on page 11. For the full version go to the resource library on stepin2nature.org

The SiN evaluation partnership has aimed to:

- Build evaluation as a key activity from project initiation;
- Capture impacts beyond funder requirements and explore the unintended benefits;
- Build evaluation capacity and skills and relationships between sectors;
- Provide a framework that can be applied to other projects and areas



2. SIN PROGRAMME LOGIC

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short term (ST) outcomes	Medium term (MT) outcomes	Long term (LT) outcomes
ORGANISATIONAL MANDATE TO PARTICIPATE	DELIVERY OF NATURE RELATED ACTIVITIES	NUMBER OF ACTIVITIES	INCREASED ACCESS TO ACTIVITIES 	SUSTAINED ENGAGEMENT IN ACTIVITIES 	IMPROVED QUALITY OF LIFE FOR PWD, CARERS AND OLDER PEOPLE 
	PROMOTION OF ACTIVITIES	NUMBER OF PEOPLE REFERRED TO ACTIVITIES	PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA, CARERS AND OLDER PEOPLE ARE ENGAGED IN ACTIVITIES  	INCREASED SOCIAL CONNECTION 	INCREASED SOCIAL SUPPORT 
FUNDING FOR - Activities - Evaluation	ENGAGEMENT WITH ACTIVITY PROVIDERS	NUMBER OF PEOPLE PARTICIPATING IN ACTIVITIES	INCREASED SOCIAL INTERACTION  	REDUCED ISOLATION AND LONELINESS 	SUSTAINABLE AND SCALABLE ACTIVITIES
	ENGAGING WITH REFERRERS	NUMBER OF PROVIDERS ENGAGED	PARTICIPANTS ENJOY TAKING PART  	IMPROVED CONNECTION WITH NATURE 	INCREASE IN DEMENTIA FRIENDLY ACTIVITIES
EXISTING NATURE ACTIVITIES AND EXISTING ACTIVITY PROVIDERS	ENGAGING WITH CARERS AND FAMILIES	NUMBER OF DEMENTIA FRIENDLY TRAINING EVENTS	INCREASED KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS  	IMPROVED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PWD AND CARER 	PEOPLE ARE MORE INCLUSIVE OF PWD
	CAPACITY BUILDING OF ACTIVITY PROVIDERS - Training	NUMBER OF PEOPLE PARTICIPATING IN TRAINING EVENTS	INCREASED CONFIDENCE AND MOTIVATION 	PEOPLE HAVE IMPROVED UNDERSTANDING AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS DEMENTIA 	IMPROVED GREEN SPACES (E.G. PRESERVATION)
PARTICIPANTS - Older people, carers, PWD - Volunteers/Providers	DEMENTIA FRIENDLY AWARENESS EVENTS/SESSIONS	NUMBER OF DEMENTIA AWARENESS EVENTS	RESPIRE AND RELAXATION FOR CARER 	INCREASE IN DEMENTIA FRIENDLY GREEN SPACES 	SUSTAINED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OF PWD
			INCREASED DEMENTIA AWARENESS OF PROVIDERS 	MORE PEOPLE DOING OUTDOOR ACTIVITY INDEPENDENTLY	Contribution to Major Health and Care Outcomes
DECREASED STRESS	INCREASED PHYSICAL ACTIVITY	REDUCED PRIMARY CARE COSTS			
INCREASED DEMENTIA AWARENESS OF PUBLIC	INCREASED COMMUNITY CONNECTION	INCREASED INDEPENDENT LIVING			
GREEN SPACES			MORE PEOPLE DOING OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES	INCREASED INDEPENDENT CONNECTION WITH GREEN SPACES BY PWD CARERS AND OLDER PEOPLE	REDUCTION OF STIGMA
				PEOPLE OVERCOME BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATE	



Quantitative evidence from participants and providers of outcomes achieved



Qualitative evidence from participant interviews and providers of outcomes achieved



“Providing these things is like providing seeds which can grow in the soil of people's lives and help something grow and blossom that perhaps wouldn't have been there otherwise”

Activity Participant

3. HOW HAS SiN ENABLED MORE PEOPLE TO ENGAGE WITH NATURE?

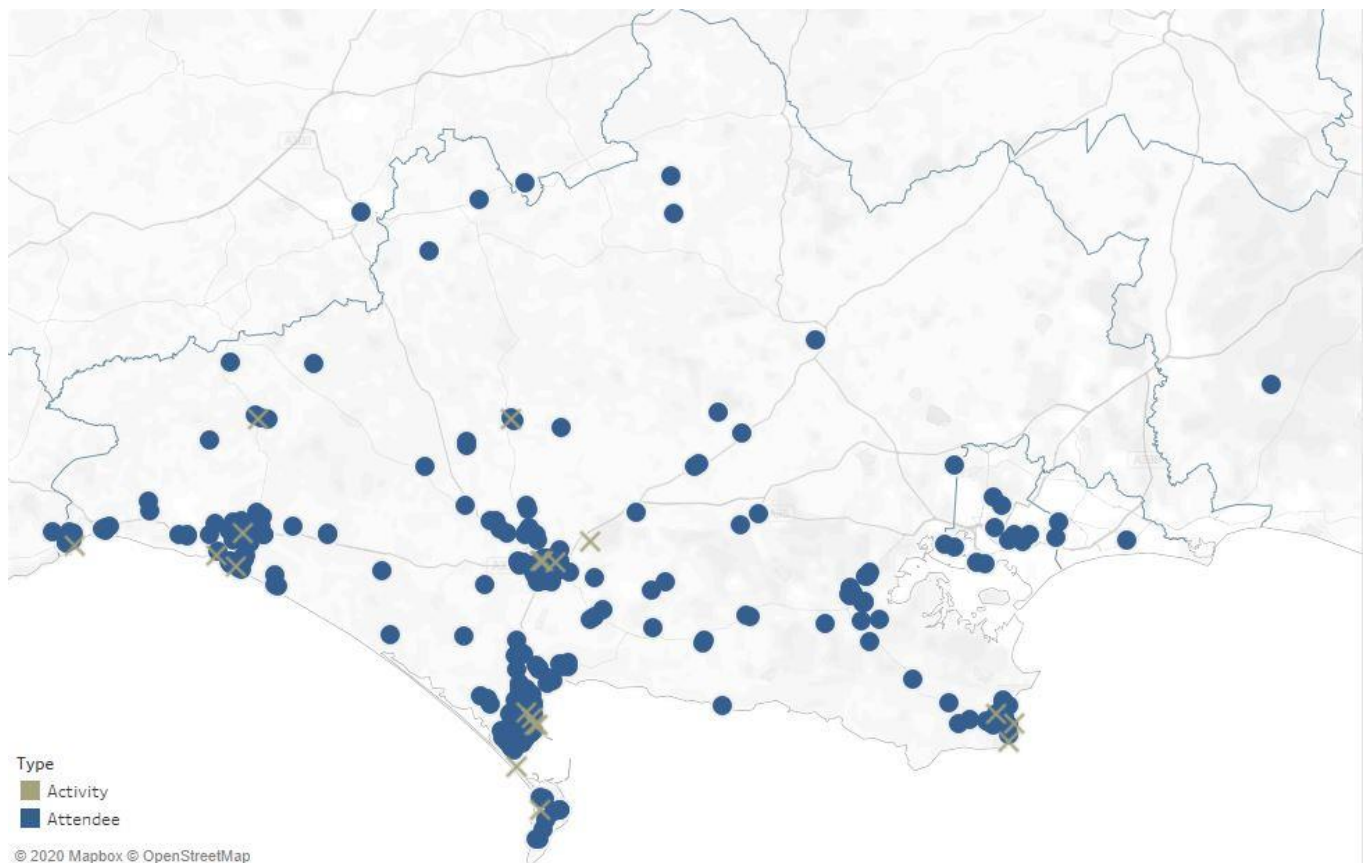
3.1 SiN has provided different types of activity in different types of location to maximise its appeal to the target audience.

SiN activities have been designed to maximise opportunities for connection with nature by offering a wide range of types of activity (appealing to different interests) across a broad geographical area, including both rural and urban locations.

These activities can be grouped by the approach they take to facilitating contact with nature: through physical-based, skills-based and social. Importantly, while each activity can be characterised as providing primarily physical, skills or social benefits they all deliver one or more secondary benefits e.g. activities focussed on physical activity also provide opportunities to connect and socialise with other people.

SiN has successfully reached residents of the target localities¹, but has also appealed to some residents in the North and East of the Dorset conurbation.

Figure 1: SiN attendee and activity locations



¹ West Dorset, Mid Dorset, Weymouth and Portland, Purbeck

3.2 SiN has successfully engaged its target audience

In total 772 people were engaged during years 2 and 3 of the project. SiN was successful in reaching its target population with 83% of participants aged 60 or older. Attendees were predominantly females (72%). Thirty-seven percent of participants had a long-term limiting illness or disability.

Table 1: SiN participant age per year

Age	Year 2 – percentage of total people (367)	Year 3 – percentage of total people (455)	Percentage of total participants (722 people)
59yrs or younger	20%	23%	23%
60 -74yrs	41%	49%	46%
75yrs and older	43%	32%	36%

MOSAIC demographic information also suggests that SiN activities have successfully reached a mix of older people in Dorset – including those who may be reliant on support to meet their needs, who may live alone or in more rural locations.

MOSAIC group & description	% of registered attendees	% in Dorset population
Country living - <i>Well-off owners in rural locations enjoying the benefits of country life</i>	29%	19%
Rural Reality - <i>Householders living in inexpensive homes in village communities</i>	15%	14%
Senior Security - <i>Elderly people with assets who are enjoying a comfortable retirement</i>	12%	16%
Vintage Value - <i>Elderly people reliant on support to meet financial or practical needs</i>	11%	6%
Suburban Stability - <i>Mature suburban owners living settled lives in mid-range housing</i>	7%	7%

3.3 SiN provided opportunities for people to take part in nature-based activities

Although overall the majority of participants attended a single activity session, regular attendance started to increase as the project progressed. Thirty-seven percent attended more than one session and 27% of participants from year 2 returned to attend a session in year 3.

Table 2: Frequency of participation in SiN activities

Number of sessions attended	Percentage of year 2 participants (403)	Percentage of year 3 participants (477)	Percentage of total participants (772 people)
1	58%	53%	63%
2 -3	22%	27%	22%
4 or more	21%	20%	15%

Barriers to repeat participation were investigated during year two through telephone interviews with participants who only attended one activity. Analysis of these interviews did not identify any issues that fell within the SiN project’s sphere of influence. Participants felt that activity quality was good and the decision not to participate more regularly was driven by several factors such as changes to participants’ health, adverse weather and seasonality, wanting someone to attend with and competing priorities for people’s time.

3.4 SiN is enabling people to increase the amount of time they spend in nature.

A key audience SiN has sought to engage is people who did not usually have contact with nature. SiN has provided outdoor and nature-based indoor activities for some people who, before registration, said they had little or no contact with nature (143 people).

Table 3 shows that, of the group who previously had little contact with nature, almost half attended at least 2 sessions. This group said they joined the activity because;

- they had an interest in or enjoyed the activity being offered e.g. wildlife, gardening or poetry
- they wanted to meet people or have some company
- they wanted to get out in the fresh air or get some exercise
-

Table 3: Activity participation frequency by participants who did not usually have contact with nature

Number of sessions participated in	Percentage of ‘low nature contact’ participants (143 people)
1	53%
2 -3	33%
4 or more	14%

“Thank you for such a heart-warming afternoon to lift the spirits and hold onto, it has been difficult”

Activity Participant



Memory Cafe Storytelling and Poetry

SiN connected a poet, a storyteller and the Alzheimer's Society Memory Cafe leads to deliver engaging sessions in Memory Cafes. Sessions were enjoyed and participants felt achievement and some reconnected to past loves of poetry and storytelling.

Playing in the wind and waves,
Smelling the salty seas,
Such memories come flooding back –
Well, I was only three!

By the Weymouth Memory Cafe Poets

4. HOW HAS SiN INCREASED CONNECTION TO NATURE?

4.1 SiN activities provide an opportunity to connect with nature.

SiN participants reported that activities they took part in provided good opportunities to connect with nature and the majority expressed that they intended to spend more time outdoors after taking part. Physical activity focused sessions had the largest rating for opportunity to connect to nature at 94%.

Table 4: Participant views on SiN's benefit for nature connection

After activities participants said:	Percentage of participants who agreed with the statement
They intend to return & take part in SiN activities	91%
Activities allowed them good opportunities to connect to nature	80%
They intend to spend more time outdoors	79%

Interviews with participants and observation of activities identified several ways that participants connection to nature was stimulated, through:

a) Nurturing an appreciation and enjoyment of nature


- Allowing people freedom to engage and experience the enjoyment and relaxation of being in nature
- Encouraging people to see nature from new perspectives

b) Discovering places and skills

- Reconnecting participants to past interests and places
- Expanding skills and knowledge e.g. conservation, local history, gardening skills
- Finding new places to return to and enjoy

c) Increasing confidence and motivation to engage in nature

- Increasing people's confidence in their ability to engage e.g. showing spaces are accessible, walking ability
- Being motivated to engage more through having new places to explore, new social connections and experiencing the wellbeing benefits of nature

A group of people are working in a greenhouse. In the foreground, a woman in a light blue jacket is focused on a task in a black tray. Behind her, several other people, including a man in a grey jacket and a woman in a purple hoodie, are engaged in various activities. A man in a black shirt and glasses is looking towards the camera. The greenhouse has a glass roof and metal frame, with various plants and gardening tools visible. A teal text box is overlaid at the top of the image.

“He was a good gardener, so he loves this. He doesn't do the heavy work, but he'll go out there and hoe and weed and do some work inside, and he feels as though he's achieving something.”

Activity participant and carer

Gardening for Wellbeing

The Greengage project, run by Dorset Wildlife Trust, leads gardening and craft activities. Participants had a previous interest in gardening or were looking to meet local people.

Participants enjoyed learning in a 'gentle' and 'guided' way and have learnt skills in gardening and conservation. They took pleasure in watching the plants grow, eating the produce and sharing with the community. They developed appreciation for wildlife and applied this beyond Greengage. By tending to the projects garden, participants felt they were contributing to a team and part of a community.

5. HOW HAS SiN ENCOURAGED SOCIAL CONNECTION?

5.1 SiN is enabling participants to make social connections

Table 5: Participant views on SiN’s benefit for social connection

After activities participants said:	Percentage of participants who agreed
They had had a good chance to meet new people	89%
They had felt included	98%
They had met new people they intend to meet again	68%
They had had good opportunities to socialise	92%

The inclusive nature of SiN activities enabled participants to meet new people within a “no pressure” environment. During activities people talk together, sharing stories, experiences and knowledge with each other. Having a task or activity to focus on was something that helped people to connect socially.

Feeling included and integrated with others on the activities fostered increased sense of belonging. Sharing common interests allowed some participants to develop friendship groups that started to meet outside of the SiN led activity. For others, just the experience of listening, talking and sharing experiences with others supported a sense of connection.

The key ways in which SiN activities enabled people to make meaningful connections were:

a) Inclusive activities allow people to engage, contribute and feel part of a group

- People feel free to participate, in a gentle ‘no pressure’ environment
- Being able to contribute starts to foster a sense of belonging and purpose

b) Providing opportunity to connect with people who have similar interests or who live nearby

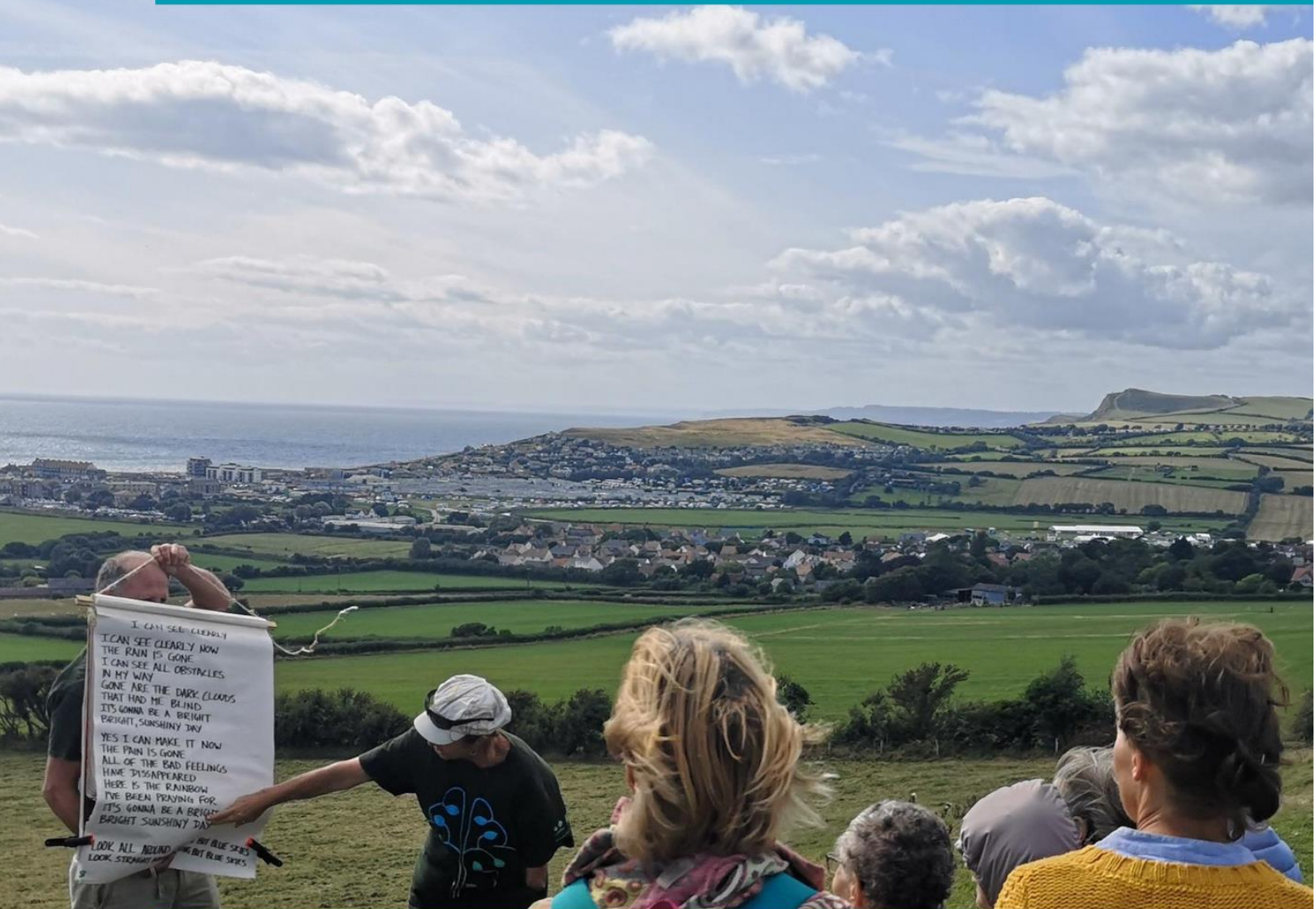
- Activities facilitate ‘crossing paths’ with like-minded individuals
- Participating regularly allowed people to get to know each other and form friendships
- Camaraderie and friendships encouraged people to engage more, and in some cases, socialise outside the activities

c) Listening and sharing with others provides meaningful connection and informal support

- A sense of wellbeing generated from listening and sharing with others, connecting through experiences
- Informal support developed through meeting others with similar issues or situations e.g. dementia

When you're at work, you're meeting different people all the time but since retiring, I kind of miss that but this group has helped me with that because I have met different people and it's been comfortable"

Activity Participant



Sing and Stroll

This activity combined group singing with accessible walks in nature. People were made to feel comfortable and weekly walks quickly became routine for many.

Group members started to meet beyond the activity for more walks and trips. Group members are now transitioning from having a funded group leader, to leading walks themselves.

6. HOW HAS SiN SUPPORTED THE WELLBEING OF ITS TARGET AUDIENCE?

6.1 Participation in SiN activities has supported a sense of wellbeing

Almost all participants reported that they enjoyed the activity. Post activity, participants reported immediate feelings of fun, happiness and pleasure. They found the activities interesting, enjoying doing something different or learning a new skill.

Some also reported relaxation or feeling calm. Participant observation noted people visibly relaxing as an activity progressed – shoulders rested, opened up body language and sounding more confident.

Table 6: Participant views on the SiN activities

After activities participants said:	Percentage of participants who agreed
The activity overall was good	97%
They had enjoyed the activity	99%

SiN's impact on participant's wellbeing was explored through interviewing. Participating in activities helped to support wellbeing through:

a) Positive feelings experiences during and after the activity

- Enjoyment and happiness during activities helped to lift mood
- Experience feelings of calm and relaxation

b) Developing personal interests and skills helps 'broaden horizons' in life

- Reconnecting to past interests, developing new ones, or seeing familiar things in new ways raises awareness and interest in surroundings
- Experiencing a sense of achievement or contribution to something

c) Confidence and independence to engage in activity and connect with others

- Inclusive activities supported people to engage in physical activity, socialising and learning.

6.2 Participation in SiN activities has supported carers' wellbeing

The 'dementia friendly' format of the activities has also been beneficial to participating carers, and their partners. Interviews exploring the impacts for carers found that the activities:

a) Provided opportunities for people to engage, including organisations delivering older people services

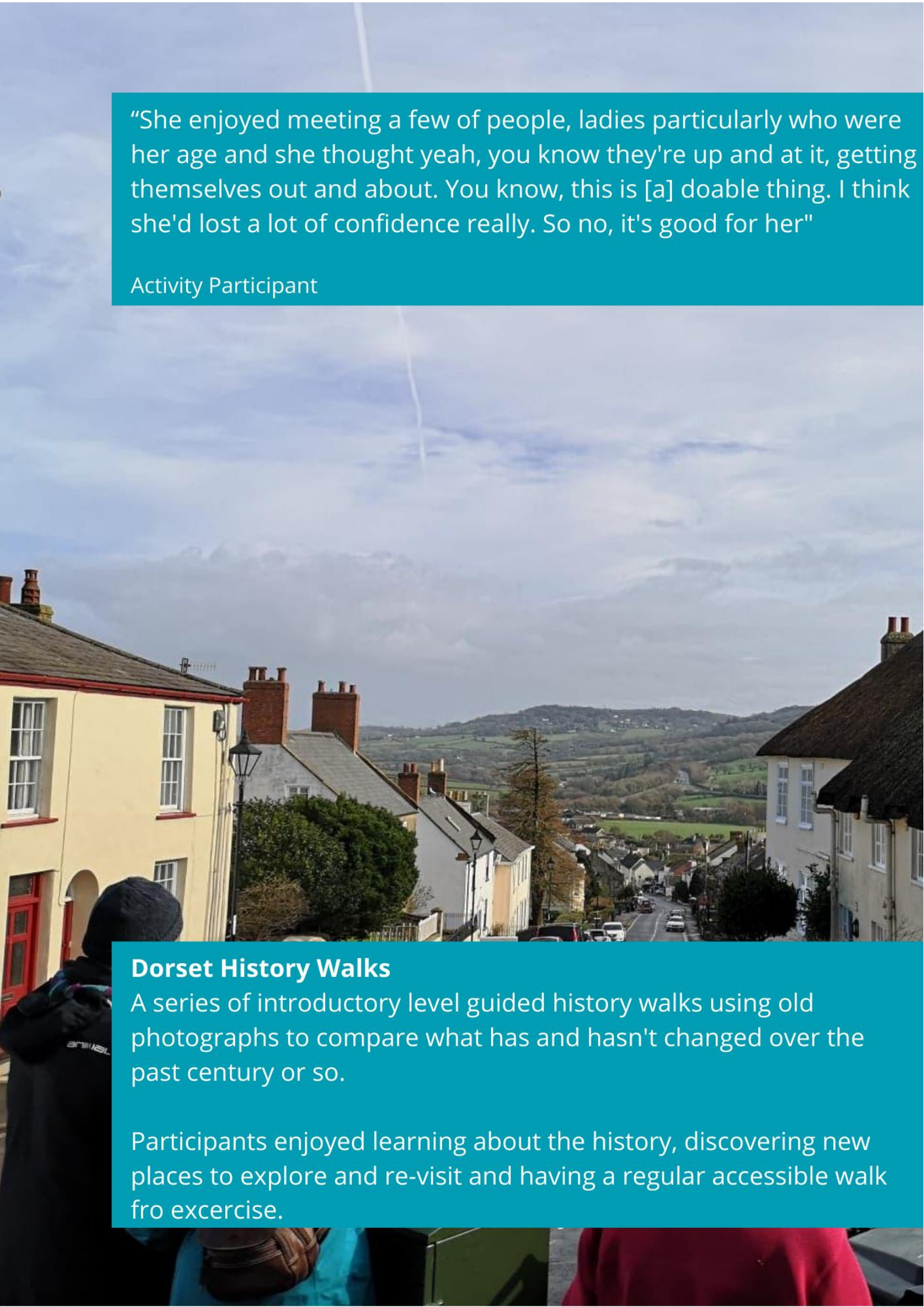
- The inclusive nature of activities offered an opportunity for groups to engage with new activities or locations.

b) Helped to support wellbeing through relaxation and enjoyment of the activity

- Activities provided carers with freedom, relaxation and space
- Carers experienced pleasure and reassurance from seeing their partner relaxed and enjoying themselves

c) Supported connection with others

- Provides opportunities for informal support and connections with people on a 'similar journey'
- Participating in activities together becomes a conversation starter and helps increase connection between carer and partner



"She enjoyed meeting a few of people, ladies particularly who were her age and she thought yeah, you know they're up and at it, getting themselves out and about. You know, this is [a] doable thing. I think she'd lost a lot of confidence really. So no, it's good for her"

Activity Participant

Dorset History Walks

A series of introductory level guided history walks using old photographs to compare what has and hasn't changed over the past century or so.

Participants enjoyed learning about the history, discovering new places to explore and re-visit and having a regular accessible walk for exercise.

7. METHODOLOGY: STEPPING INTO NATURE EVALUATION (2017-2020)

The evaluation was guided by a framework that included a Theory of Change and Program Logic developed in partnership by Dorset AONB and Public Health Dorset. A mixed-methods (qualitative and quantitative) approach was used for data collection from the beginning of the project in 2017. The focus of the evaluation was on project effectiveness, evidencing the difference SiN was making to the lives of participants and the capacity of activity providers and other stakeholders.

Evaluation data collection included:

1. Routine quantitative data collection on project participation, participant demographics and other project outputs;
2. Quantitative evaluation tools for measuring project effectiveness including: participant and provider satisfaction, participant benefits (such as increased social connections and increased wellbeing) and provider benefits (such as increased knowledge of working with people with dementia and their carers, and increased capacity to provide appropriate and effective activities).
3. Qualitative evaluation using in-depth interviews and participant-observation for eliciting benefits of activities in the lives of participants and investigating processes and good practice with providers.

Training was provided in survey administration, data entry and management and qualitative interviewing by Visual Insights People (VIP) in December 2017 and December 2018.

Data type	Notes	Number
In-depth interviews with participants	Including participants from woodland craft, walking group, poetry and archive based activity	21
Participant-observation	Undertaken by project team at walks and archive based activities.	14
Participant Post activity survey	Completed anonymously to gauge activity quality & participant enjoyment	1016
Participant engagement survey	Phone interviews with participants who did not return to an activity.	10
In-depth interviews with providers	Completed with providers of arts, woodland craft and walking activities.	4
Annual Provider Survey	Survey administered November 2018 & 2019	22
Activity Provider post activity survey	Provider feedback submitted post activity sessions	138
Activity Registration Forms	Registration form completed by participants	527
Activity sign on sheets	Register sheets completed at activity sessions	276

REFERENCES

- Ashida, S. Differential associations of social support and social connectedness with structural features of social networks and the health status of older adults. *Journal of Aging and Health*, 2008; 20(7):872-893.
- Berkman, L.F and Krishna, A. Social network epidemiology. In *Social Epidemiology*. Eds. Berkman, L.F., Kawachi, I, Glymour, M.M., Oxford University Press, New York, 2014, pp.234-289.
- Chalfont, G. Connection to nature at the building edge: Towards a therapeutic architecture for dementia care environments. PhD thesis. Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 2006.
- Cole, D.N. and Hall, T.E. Experiencing the restorative components of wilderness environments: Does congestion interfere and does length of exposure matter? *Environment and Behavior*, 2010; 42(6): 803-823
- Glymour, M.M., Weuve, J., Fay, M.E., Glass, T. Berkman, L.F. Social ties and cognitive recovery after stroke: Does social integration promote cognitive resilience? *Neuroepidemiology*, 2008; 31 (1): 10-20.
- Mayer, F., Frantz, C., Bruehlman-Senecal, E., and Dolliver, K. Why is nature beneficial? The role of connectedness to nature. *Environment and Behaviour*, 2009; 41(5): 607-643.
- McMahan, E.A. and Estes, D. The effect of contact with natural environments on positive and negative affect: A meta-analysis. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 2015; 10(6).
- Santini, Z.I, Koyanagi, A., Tyrovolas, S., Mason, C., Haro, J.M., The association between social relationships and depression: A systematic review. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 2015; 175(1): 53-65.
- Tun, P.A., Miller-Martinez, D., Lachman, M.E., Seeman, T. Social strain and executive function across the lifespan: the dark (and light) sides of social engagement. *Aging Neuropsychology C.*, 2013; 20(3): 320-338.

FURTHER RESOURCES

You can find further resources related to the Stepping into Nature project, including the evaluation guide and further evaluation reports, on the website: www.stepin2nature.org



Image © Paul Mitchell