



Deliver a Nature Based Intervention: The Stepping into Nature Approach

Lessons learnt and best practice examples
2017 -2020



Foreword

Covid-19 has shown that the impact of nature on wellbeing and the way in which we value and access it has never been as important as now.

The pandemic has had a profound impact on communities, isolating people from their family and friends.

It has taken away many activities and networks that supported them, lowering their confidence and increasing anxiety.

Organisations have been encouraged to think outside the box to deliver health benefits which has put a greater value on nature-based interventions.

Inequalities to accessing nature have been brought into focus for

many organisations and shown the importance of working together to enable more people to access nature for increased wellbeing.

Stepping into Nature has been working with people to find solutions to increase opportunities for more people to access nature for their physical and mental wellbeing.

This guide has been produced in partnership with Public Health Dorset to help explain how we delivered the Stepping into Nature project and why we took this approach.

It is aimed at those thinking about how they can work with a consortium of different partners to deliver a shared aim.

Thanks,
The Stepping into Nature Team



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1. Introduction to Stepping into Nature

What is Stepping into Nature?

Stepping into Nature (SiN) is a project working to improve the health and wellbeing of older people, people living with dementia and their carers by enabling them to connect with Dorset's natural environment.

SiN is led by Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) partnership.

How and why did Stepping into Nature begin?

SiN began in 2015 through the delivery of an eighteen-month pilot delivered in the Dorset AONB.

The pilot investigated the provisions available for older people, people living with dementia or in a caring role to engage with nature for wellbeing.

It showed that information and opportunities for engaging with nature was fragmented and limited. In environmental organisations there was a lack of knowledge, skills and confidence in making activities dementia friendly and there was a lack of communication between environment and health organisations.

In 2017 SiN was awarded £328,544 from the National Lottery Community Fund for a 2017-2020 project which was delivered with the following structure:

Project Structure



"Being active... in relationship with others: beautiful places without people to share them with become meaningless"

Activity Participant

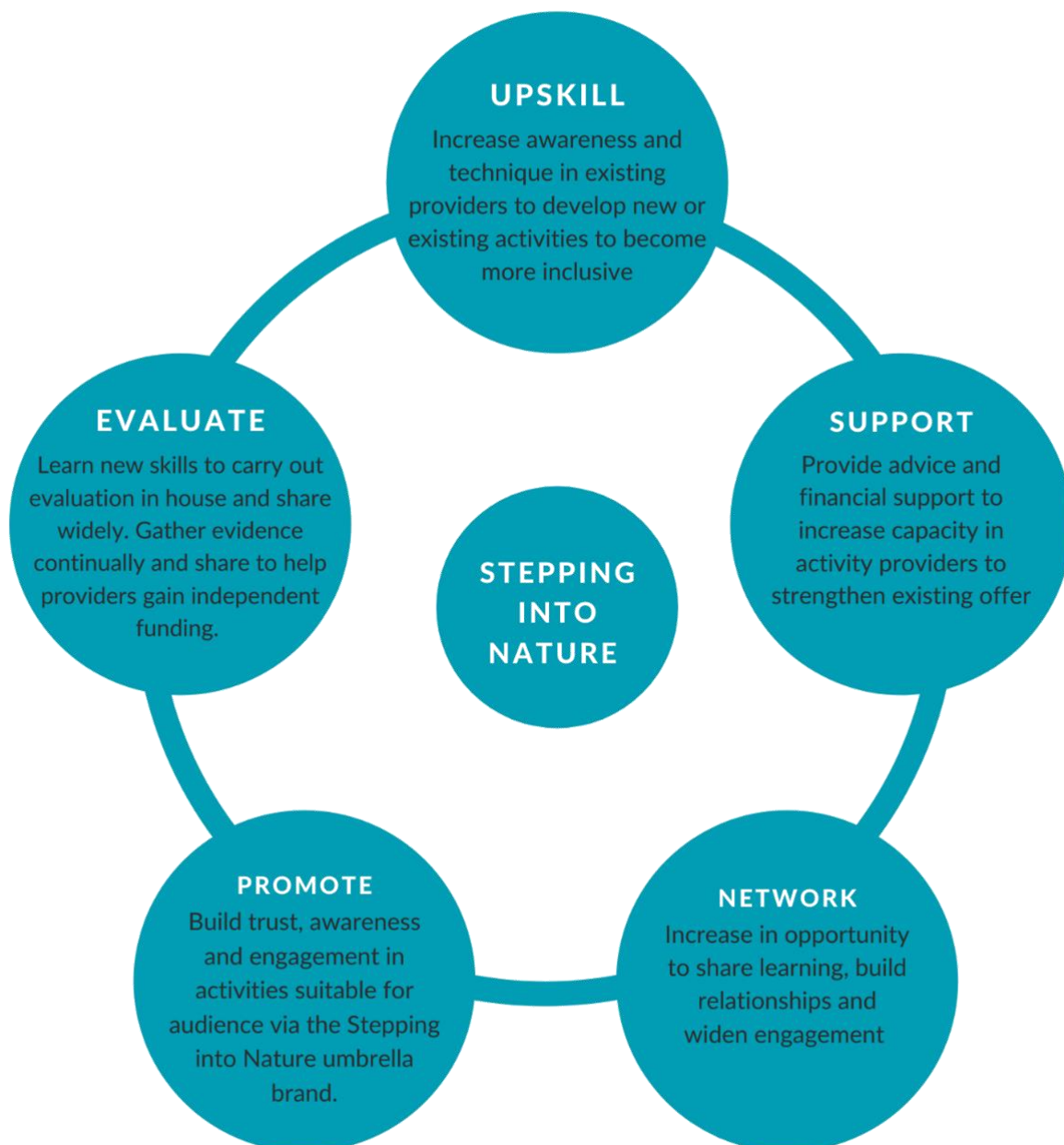
2. Delivery of Stepping into Nature

How was Stepping into Nature delivered to enable system change?

The diagram below summarises the core elements of SiN delivery.

There were 3 key approaches which underpinned the success of these elements to ensure long-term provision for the target audience; **inclusivity**, **collaboration** and **sustainability**.

The following chapters explain each of these elements in detail and use case studies to explain how inclusivity, collaboration and sustainability was incorporated.



UPSKILL

“We now have a wider remit to our visitors centre taking in considerations for those living with dementia when planning things such as infrastructure, signage and event delivery” Activity Provider

What

Staff and volunteers, particularly those within environmental organisations, received support to become dementia friendly through dementia awareness sessions linked to the natural environment.

Training also covered other aspects of activity delivery including using social media, how to create a Theory of Change and undertaking evaluation.

Why

By increasing understanding of dementia and appreciation of needs, providers could adapt their activities and settings to become more inclusive and were better equipped to cater for varying abilities or unexpected situations.

By working together skills could be identified and shared within other organisations.

Results

In total SiN delivered dementia awareness sessions to 214 front line staff and volunteers across several environment organisations.

It was important for the creditability and consistency of the nature-based activities that all project activity providers were dementia aware.

The training also helped to embed a dementia friendly approach in organisations outside of project delivery.

Through other training, organisations were able to inclusively promote their activities and develop further projects.



“Really useful session covering all aspects including practical walk at the end ”

Training Attendee

3. CASE STUDY – Sharing Skills

‘Gardening for Wellbeing’ is an activity led by Dorset Wildlife Trust (DWT) at Greengage in Swanage, Dorset.

Inclusivity

DWT staff and volunteers attended a dementia awareness session to better understand the symptoms of dementia and how to support people living with dementia in nature.

Promotion of this activity changed over time, removing references to ‘therapy’ in the title to avoid any formal medical connotations and removing the need to split mental health day and dementia carers days.

By merging the groups there was greater social interaction and inclusivity.

Collaboration

DWT accessed the SiN Community Fund to make the infrastructure more suitable for SiN’s target audience.

Improvements included making the greenhouse floor trip free and level, building raised beds and planting benches suitable for wheelchair users, purchasing adapted tools to enable those with less mobility to take part and making the toilet block more accessible.

Sustainability

The activity now has a regular group of participants attending who began through a range of reasons; meeting new people, fulfil an interest in gardening or just to keep busy!

DWT are in the process of letting the group run themselves which will transition to a self-sustaining group.

Crucial to the success of this activity has been the commitment and motivation of the activity leader to keep improving and promoting the activity. Trust and relationships were developed with participants, building confidence and relationships within the group through facilitating and gentle guidance.



© Katie Wilkinson

“The learning from SiN team has be good. It has taken the fear out of doing something new and challenging. The SiN team have been very supportive and has given the confidence to continue the work. Dementia training also helped.”

Activity Provider



“Funding from SiN has ensured the financial security of our events and allowed us to begin to build a reputation within the community as a provider of Dementia Friendly activities.”

Activity Provider

What

SiN provided grants to organisations to deliver activities or improve inclusivity of greenspaces via a Community Fund.

SiN also provided advice and support on delivery and promotion in an open and flexible way to resolve issues and plan activities collaboratively.

Why

Grants helped create capacity in organisations to improve their offer rather than deliver the same, giving organisations a chance to test new activities.

SiN’s approach to work in collaboration with both activity and health service

organisations ensured activities were highlighted for signposting.

Advice offered a good sounding board to continue to build provider confidence with a single point of contact.

Results

In total SiN engaged with 14 activity providers delivering 437 activities to over 1000 individuals across Dorset, with 19 projects via the Community Fund.

The funding security alongside support and advice from the team was valued by activity providers was important to build confidence and sustain activities.

78% Applied Learning

to other aspects to their work

89% More Confident

to engage new audiences

100% Increased Capacity

to delivery activities

78% Inclusive Activities

to continue post funding

4. CASE STUDY - Community Pot

Inclusivity

Funding needed to be easily accessible, flexible and inclusive. There were few forms to fill in and support was available in person. Enabling people in the community who may not have the skills to apply for funding and be successful.

Support included site visits, advice before work commences and help with ideas or approaches to increase confidence.

By working with people across the project area, opportunities were found to link where mutual benefit can be gained. Key to this approach was building relationships and utilising people's strengths and assets.

Collaboration

Ownership of funded activities stayed with the community, but promotion and evaluation were delivered in collaboration.

The core team supported activity delivery at arm's reach but evaluation was analysed in real time so any changes could be implemented throughout delivery.

Sustainability

Each project had outline plans for aftercare and sustainability at time of application.

The core team offered support at all stages, including providing evidence of impact to secure further funding.



"I particularly like the ability to take risks which is a novelty with these kinds of projects. Starting something that was so different was a risk, but the SiN team were keen to try it out and take risks which has helped to start Sing & Stroll" *Grant Recipient*

Network

"In developing other projects and activities we have been able to draw on our experiences with SiN to add value, and to make useful connections, particularly with regard to social prescribing"

Activity Provider

What

SiN acted as a platform to connect activity providers to the target audience and health service organisations.

Working groups for activity providers, national conferences and Picnic in the Park events were held to provide informal advice, networking opportunities and signposting between organisations.

Why

SiN built sustainability and inclusivity into the system through building and strengthening connections between providers with similar aims for future work.

Results

Engaging activity providers and health sector under the 'SiN umbrella' helped to connect and increase visibility of groups and organisations within and between the environment sector.

The national conference reached around 100 people across the health and environment sector which helped to raise the profile of nature for wellbeing.

The 8 Picnic in the Park events delivered in partnership, connected activity providers and raised awareness of their offer to the public.

Providers said the connections they built helped to change how they deliver activities, develop interest, start new ventures and expand projects between SiN activity providers.



"I have gained more knowledge on how nature really does benefit us. Good ideas for my daycentre".

Conference Attendee

5. CASE STUDY – Collaborative Events

Picnic in the Park events were established to showcase opportunities for people to connect with nature and to live well.

Inclusivity

Linking health & wellbeing to nature in a non-clinical way, the events were focused on being inspiring, fun and relaxing for all but informative, offering taster sessions to encourage people try something new.

Event were held in a non-threatening environment, were collaborative and engaged the whole population.

"There is a lot of trust amongst the partnership and a refreshing lack of competition about who takes credit for its success" Picnic in the Parks Partner

Collaboration

Events were delivered in partnership with organisations that shared aims and objectives, who could work together and pool resources.

Each organisations strength was utilised which distributed workload. Everyone had an equal part of the event, creating sense of co-design and shared ownership.

Sustainability

Working differently in each location and with local organisations is crucial to ensure local engagement.

Now established, the Picnic in the Park brand can continue to deliver even if the delivery partners come and go.



"We're trying to encourage and inspire people to get out there and be more active. This is more important than our individual organisations"

Partner Organisation

Promote

“From nothing to something! Although as an organisation we naturally attract people over 55 to our volunteering and events - to actively advertise these opportunities to this population was a new way of doing things”

Activity Provider

What

SiN developed a trusted high-quality brand that could be co-ordinated across activities fostering an inclusive approach to promoting nature-based activities for wellbeing.



Although the target audience were older people, people living with dementia or in a carer's role, all activities were open for everyone.

The language used was designed to engage with the target audience but was written to promote an easily accessible way into taking those first steps into nature.

The main emphasis was on encouraging people to find their own way to connect in nature through a wide variety of activities.

Why

Promoting inclusively and under one brand ensured there was enough engagement to sustain the programme, reduced fragmentation of information, created a consistent message and increased capacity of activity providers.

Results

The approach of promoting in partnership with activity providers under the SiN umbrella helped build connections, increase capacity and trust.

SiN was promoted through local events (63) reaching approximately 9000 people and presented to over 1500 people within the health and social care sectors.

Creating a trusted brand and supporting promotion through local events proved important to successful engagement.

Almost ¾ of participants heard about the activities through local means - word of mouth, newspapers and signposted through local service providers.

Providers also valued the support, trust and credibility that being part of a high-quality valued brand gave their activity.

Communication Method	% of registered participants
Word of mouth	37%
Newspaper	21%
Through a service provider	15%
Internet search or webpage	9%
Social Media	7%

6. CASE STUDY – Communication and Promotion

Finding the right method and style of communication and promotion has been crucial to reach the desired audience.

Inclusivity

Words matter. Consider and reconsider how to communicate with an audience.

For example, titling an event with the words 'Dementia Friendly' failed to attract an audience. Instead it helped to use key phrases that appealed to the target audience, for example 'gentle walk' and 'introductory level'.

The phrase 'dementia friendly' can still be used but not in the title of the event as people assume the event is only for people living with dementia.

Collaboration

Don't neglect existing communication platforms. Vary the platforms used to target the audience and link into existing networks. For example, leaflets, email

newsletters, local newspapers, local radio, carers packs and face to face presenting at meetings and events.

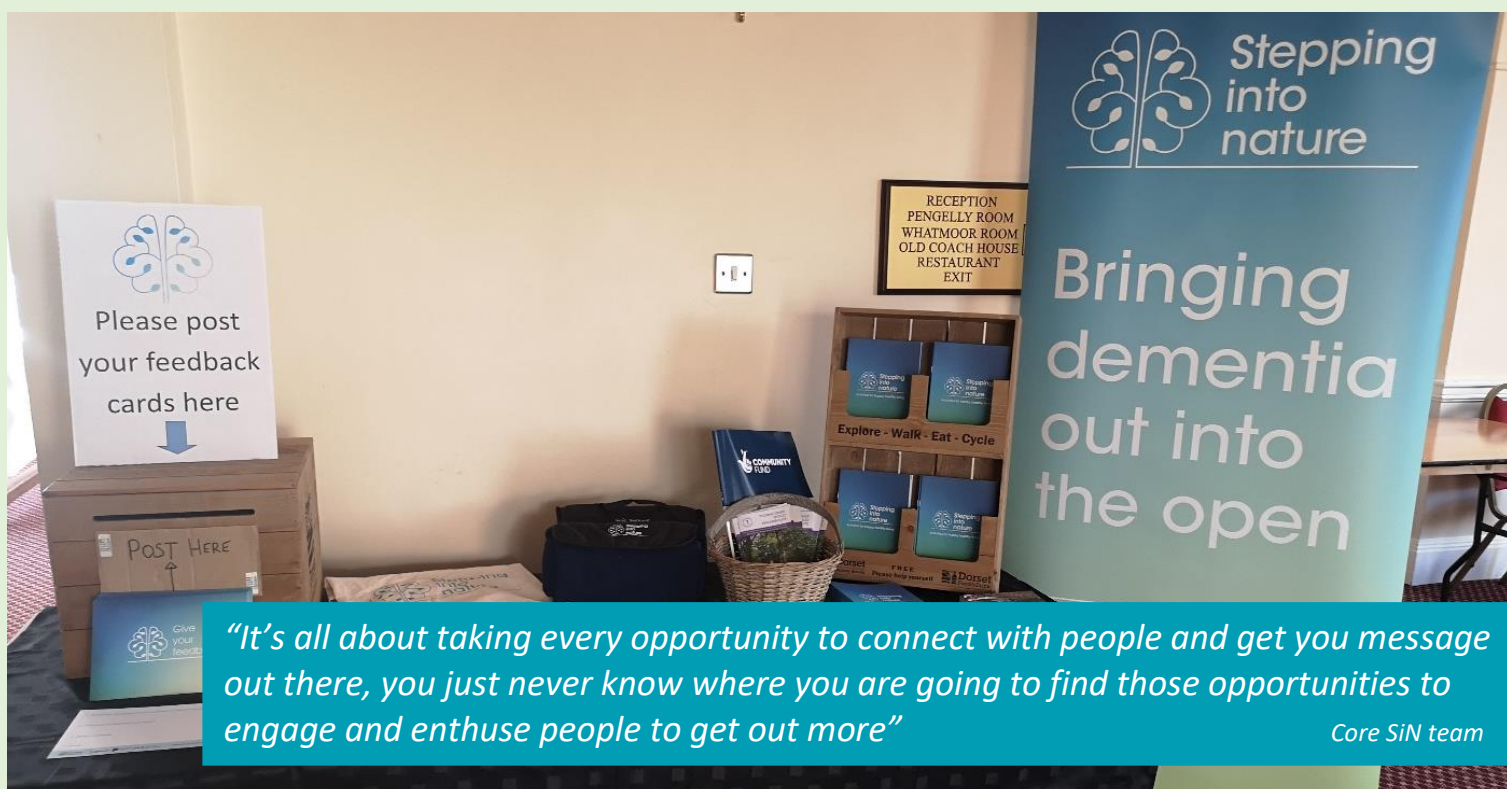
Make the activity or brand visible across the community. Reach out to the target audience in 'unexpected' places and get to know them.

Events open to all were a great place to be seen by the local community. Use a range of types of events to be seen to talk to different 'types' of people.

Sustainability

Social Media can reach more places and can amplify your message.

Maintaining a social media presence increases awareness and trust in the project among service users and individuals or organisations who may refer.



Evaluate

“Using [the SiN approach] as a model to hopefully gain funding to do similar activities for Adult Social Care/ mental health projects. Good to have Dorset evaluation to use as evidence.” Activity Provider

What

SiN evaluated whether engagement with the natural environment led to:

- Improved physical and emotional wellbeing.
- Reduced social isolation and feelings of loneliness.
- Increased motivation and independence.
- Increased confidence and life skills.

The evaluation framework was developed ‘in house’ in partnership with Public Health Dorset (PHD) and external guidance from Visual Insights.

To upskill the teams involved, the project commissioned Visual Insights to deliver 8 evaluation methods workshops, training 37 people across health and environment sectors.

Why

Monitoring and evaluation was required to answer the following questions:

1. Are we doing what we said we would?
2. Are we making a difference?
3. Can we do it better?

To improve both the evidence and narrative for using the natural

environment to improve the health and wellbeing of residents.

Programme evaluation is a strategic tool required in the evidencing of new approaches to the management of population health, providing clear narratives on how programmes can be of value within an integrated effort at health improvement.

Results

An evaluation framework was developed alongside an impact report of delivering a nature-based intervention.

In addition to building advanced evaluation capability within PHD, increasing the ability to collect and analyse qualitative data.

Increasing the level of understanding, around the Dorset Integrated Care System, of the value of programme evaluation and how PHD’s Intelligence Function can assist them.

This approach provided a credible evaluation that increased the ability to attract future funding and enhanced evaluation capability adding value and shared understanding across the system, contributing to the functioning of the system.

“Using it as a model to hopefully gain funding to do similar activities for Adult Social Care/ mental health projects. Good to have PHD evaluation to use as evidence”.

Workshop Attendee

7. CASE STUDY – Evaluation in Partnership

SiN and PHD worked together as a project team, supported by Visual Insights, to develop a utilisation focused evaluation framework.

The framework focused on maximising the intended use of the results by stakeholders.

Inclusivity

Evaluating in partnership has proved hugely beneficial and the project has facilitated interdisciplinary understanding of the benefits of engaging with the natural environment for older people, particularly those living with dementia.

It has also provided an opportunity to develop and share evaluation skills and knowledge across sectors.

Collaboration

Collaborative workshops were held to develop the initial framework, and the team has worked together throughout the

project to analyse and learn from the data in ‘real-time’.

This allowed us to develop a shared understanding of the public health and environment perspectives, built connections and increased capability and capacity across both sectors.

Sustainability

The project allowed both teams to learn skills that are now being utilised across other projects and share learning with others, as well as producing an evaluation framework that others across both sectors can pick up and use for their projects.

Training workshops were also held throughout the project with activity providers and partners to develop evaluation skills and share learning across the health, local authority and environment sectors.

These workshops aimed to build skill capacity and evaluation approach across the system.



“Finding out how to evaluate appropriately, it will help other aspects of the business”

Workshop Attendees

8. How Stepping into Nature Enabled System Change

SiN worked towards changing the system by delivering interventions at a variety of levels.

Individual capacity of activity providers was improved by building skills in environment sector to adapt and deliver to new audiences.

Resources provided, such as advice and financial support, was effective in helping individuals to trial new approaches and evaluate these.

Real time evaluation created effective feedback loops which helped to improve the offer throughout delivery.

The partnership of environmental organisations built through SiN grew in strength as the project progressed.

Organisations were able to share best practise, work together towards shared aims and have equal visibility to the health sector through SiN promotion.

To continue to innovate and encourage others to transform their thinking and language, SiN was transparent and actively shared learning widely through reports, conferences and conversations to a variety of people in the health and environment sectors.

SiN continues to lobby for change to help nature get the recognition and value it deserves for its impact on health and wellbeing and to increase opportunities to access these benefits for all.

SiN has provided learning and evidence on a wider scale through the following National reports & events.

- The National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty – Bowland Award winners 2016
- Presented @ Wessex Public Health Conference - 'Making the case for Investment in Prevention' 2018
- UK Evaluation Society Annual Evaluation Conference 2019
- Presented @ National Alzheimer's Conference 2019
- Case Study - Public Health England: An evidence summary of health inequalities in older populations in coastal and rural areas (2019)
- Case Study - Public Health England: Improving access to greenspace - A new review for 2020

9. Conclusion

In Summary

The Dorset AONB has been successful in delivering the outcomes of the SiN project through a strong partnership with local environmental and health organisations.

This report shows, with explanation, an effective model for delivery for nature-based collaboration projects.

By working collaboratively, SiN was able to upskill and support organisations to

provide inclusive activities. Networking and promoting in an inclusive way helped build the engagement needed to sustain the programme.

Sharing learning and promoting the value of evaluation help raise the importance of nature-based activity provision and help to secure funding beyond the end of the project.

Recommendations

- a) Similar projects should be implemented in other locations and potentially for other audiences, this report can be used as a model example for collaborative, inclusive and sustainable delivery.
- b) Evaluation should be considered essential and should be invested in within the early stages of project delivery. Funding bodies should recognise this and value investment in effective evaluation. Read the “Evaluation Guide” to discover the tools used.
- c) Read the ‘Stepping into Nature Evaluation Report: Impact of Inclusive Nature Based Activities 2017-2020’ for detail on the benefits to participants.

Limitations

Within any initiative there are limitations and SiN is no exception, this is one project in one location with a particular audience in mind.

Our model is not perfect but is intended to be built on and few have found that at this time it's the best approach for this audience.

The approach SiN took worked in general, but not without its barriers, it was a slow

start and took much learning to get our offer right.

Things that did not work were changed or removed but with the onset of Covid 19, new barriers need to be overcome. SiN continues to grow and adapt.

The main priority continues to enable people to connect with nature in a way that improves their wellbeing in any way that is achievable and fun for them.

Further Resources

You can find further resources related to the Stepping into Nature project including reports mentioned above on: www.stepin2nature.org

With Special Thanks to:

- National Lottery Community Fund
- Dorset AONB
- Dorset Council
- Public Health Dorset
- Dorset Wildlife Trust
- Dorset Forest Schools
- Dorset History Centre
- Arts Development Company
- Thorncombe Wood Local Nature Reserve
- Durlston Country Park
- RSPB
- National Trust
- Sarah Acton – Blackven
- Martin Maudsley - Storyteller
- Peter Grech & Tina Bridgman
- Steve Wallis
- Alzheimer’s Society

“I cannot thank SiN enough for a transformative two years, as a human being and in my professional development as a creative facilitator.

The opportunities have been open and generous to deliver workshops using a combination of poetry and nature, which has proved to be powerful/ gentle/ healing and surprising - outdoors the effects have been very fast.

Something can happen in just a short space of time, something that has a lasting and profound effect on people's everyday lives, and seeing/being part of SiN makes me realise how urgent and necessary SiN's work is to provide nature-based activity in Dorset, and beyond”.

Freelance Delivery Partner

